



STORY BY GUSSIE FAUNTLEROY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC SWANSON

Reclaiming HISTORY

six local visionaries focused squarely on the past

We gathered some of our most beloved preservationists—from the director of Cornerstones' rebuilding projects to the founder of Santa Fe's Living Treasures program—for a few lessons in local history »

From left: Nora Naranjo-Morse, John Berkenfield, Mary Lou Cook, Nancy Meem Wirth, and John Hare. Not pictured: Nasario Garcia. Photographed inside the Miguel Vega y Coca house (built about 1710), El Rancho de las Golondrinas's oldest building, which now serves as a chapel



» We need more Native writers, scholars, historians, filmmakers, and artists who will articulate Native history for us and for our children.

—NORA NARANJO-MORSE

NORA NARANJO-MORSE, ARTIST, AUTHOR

Nora Naranjo-Morse (Santa Clara Pueblo) is an internationally acclaimed ceramic artist, author, and filmmaker whose work offers thoughtful—and thought-provoking—social commentary, especially as it looks at the continuing social changes within Pueblo culture. Her sculpture has been exhibited at the White House, and she was winner of the National Museum of the

American Indian's 2007 outdoor-sculpture design competition. Her videos have been screened at the Native American Film and Video Festival and elsewhere. On the occasion of Albuquerque's 400th anniversary, Naranjo-Morse was commissioned by the Albuquerque Museum to create *Numbe Whageh*, a conceptual, environmental artwork responding to *La Jornada*, a memorial sculpture depicting Don Juan de Oñate's arrival in what is now New Mexico.

What was the message you wanted to convey through *Numbe Whageh (Our Center Place)*, and why did you feel it was necessary?

When I was in grade school, history textbooks focused on Oñate as a hero on a horse claiming uncharted territory for the king of Spain. There was no mention of the horrific violence during colonization toward the original inhabitants of New Mexico; no mention of slavery or religious oppression; no history telling from the Native perspective. The message of *Numbe Whageh* is far too important and vital to the history of New Mexico to become a one-paragraph sound bite for a magazine—which is exactly the reason why this kind of historical information should be incorporated into the public's consciousness on a more realistic and relative basis, and it should begin in grade school.

What could be done better to preserve and make people aware of the Native perspective in our history?

There needs to be a revival of oral history. Older people from the pueblos should be available for storytelling and sharing of historical information to younger generations. We need more Native writers, scholars, historians, filmmakers, and artists who will articulate Native history for us and for our children. Our children need to be armed with a sense of cultural pride and historical knowledge, which of course is crucial to our survival and beyond.

What single element of Pueblo history do you think is most often overlooked or underappreciated?

The relationship between the culture of the past and the culture as it is now needs to be reevaluated. When we start connecting the past to the present and using these valuable lessons for our empowerment, then we can expect a cultural and personal renaissance.



» Every society has an obligation to give people insight into what came before.

—JOHN BERKENFIELD

JOHN BERKENFIELD, DIRECTOR, EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS

During a 30-year career in international business with IBM, John Berkenfield worked in 67 countries, an experience he says greatly enhanced his appreciation for "cultures that are not my own." That appreciation has deepened further, especially since 1989, when he and his wife, poet Barbara Berkenfield, settled in Santa Fe and John became director of planning at El Rancho de Las Golondrinas, the living history museum in La Cienega. A strong proponent of preserving this area's diversity of cultures, Berkenfield has served on the boards of the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (hosts of Santa Fe's annual Indian Market) and the Spanish Colonial Arts Society, among other organizations. In 2003 he was given the Mayor's

Recognition Award for Excellence in the Arts.
Info: golondrinas.org

What do you consider Las Golondrinas' most important contribution to preserving Santa Fe's history, and why is this kind of presentation critical?

We are a museum of living history. It's a site of 34 buildings on 200 acres that in its totality embraces the sweep of life as it was lived in the Colonial, Mexican, and Territorial eras up to statehood in 1912. Las Golondrinas offers a window into the past to show how people lived, did things, made things, how they worked, played, and behaved in an earlier era. I think every society has an obligation to give people insight into what came before. If we don't know where we've been, as a society, how can we know where we're going?

What is an important part of our history that is often overlooked or underappreciated?

Barbara and I came out here as active, consistent visitors for five or six years before we moved here, and in that period we were struck by the richness of the Indian culture. What I didn't know about was the depth and richness of the Hispanic culture. The Hispanic culture is more blended into the dominant culture, and I think there's always the risk that it becomes integrated too thoroughly into the mainstream.

What makes history come alive?

There's a genuineness in what we do at Las Golondrinas that I find enthralling. For example, we could put asphalt emulsion into the coating for buildings, but we don't; we just use mud. And when we rebuilt the water wheel, no power tools were used. We used lumber from a steam-powered sawmill in Arkansas, and over a period of two years, three guys built it using only hand tools. Also, visitors can try things themselves, like making rope in the context of explaining why people in the old days had to make it. Nothing to me is as satisfying as seeing a kid at Las Golondrinas and having a light go off and the kid says, "Oh, that's why Grandma does that!" Or, "That's why our houses have flat roofs and vigas!"

MARY LOU COOK, FOUNDER, LIVING TREASURES

For most of us, learning about history in school meant memorizing names of dead men in books. Thanks to Mary Lou Cook and others who founded Northern New Mexico Living Treasures in 1984, it can mean

learning about people in our midst who are a living part of history. Twice a year, Living Treasures honors three community members (70 or older) who have played an important role in the community, either in the public sphere or behind the scenes.

Mary Lou Cook, of course, is one such treasure herself. Cook, who turns 90 in April, grew up in El Paso and Kansas City and has taught calligraphy around the United States. Her first calligraphy client in Santa Fe, shortly after she moved here 40 years ago, was architect John Gaw Meem, who asked her to create a certificate honoring early-20th-century philanthropist Amelia White. Cook also presides as a minister and bishop over non-denominational weddings, memorials, and blessings of everything from babies to offices. Info: sflivingtreasures.org

Why is Living Treasures an important part of preserving Santa Fe's history?

Because it brings alive the warmth and humanness of names on a page. One of the interesting things I've learned about these elders is that they continue to work, to serve. Retirement is not in their vocabulary. By getting to know these remarkable people, with their inner strength, courage, determination, humor, and wisdom, we learn the real meaning of the word *hero*. How can we get young people interested in history?

On Living Treasures' 10th anniversary, we came up with a one-page list of questions for interviewing people. Since then, Bob Story and I have been working within the schools, teaching kids (sixth grade and up) how to interview family members, grandparents, and neighbors. I think this is a very basic thing to stress, that kids can become their families' historians. It also helps with consciousness, because in learning about others they learn to get outside themselves.

How do you gauge the success of Living Treasures?

The program has gotten national attention. I've been interviewed by Tom Brokaw. We've received requests from at least 350 communities around the country for the free booklet we put together on how to establish a Living Treasures program. But also, at the Living Treasures ceremonies everyone realizes how history does come alive. The ceremonies are always a six-Kleenex event. It's so sweet.



» By getting to know these remarkable people, with their inner strength, courage, determination, humor, and wisdom, we learn the real meaning of the word *hero*.

—MARY LOU COOK

**NANCY MEEM WIRTH,
HISTORIC ADVOCATE**

Preserving a sense of community, along with Santa Fe's historic architectural beauty, has long been the focus of Nancy Meem Wirth's time and energy—not surprising for the daughter of John Gaw Meem, whose name is synonymous with Southwestern architecture. Raised in Santa Fe, Wirth lived for a number of years in California, where her husband, John, taught Latin American history at Stanford University. After returning to Santa Fe in 1991, she became founding president of Cornerstones Community Partnerships and was involved with the Spanish Colonial Arts Society, the Santa Fe Conservation Trust, and other local organizations. Among other awards, she was honored with the 2004 City of Santa Fe Heritage Preservation Award, and last year was included in the New Mexico Community Foundation's Luminarias and Legacies program. Wirth currently sits on the state's Cultural Properties Review Committee.

How did growing up as the daughter of such an esteemed architect shape your sense of historic Santa Fe and the value of preserving that history? I learned from my father to care deeply about my community. He was always involved

in historic preservation in Santa Fe. In his architecture, he strove for beautifully proportioned simplicity and finely crafted details. He believed in using contemporary materials, but refining them to evoke the architectural history he saw around him. He demanded quality, but often simplified it to create affordable spaces. He worked hard to make Santa Fe a beautiful place for Santa Feans.

What could we do better to preserve Santa Fe's history? Perhaps the best way would be to clarify for us all how the system of historic zones works—a graduated series of restrictions radiating out from the Plaza. Real estate brokers could ensure that newcomers understand they are buying into a location where the local citizens have great respect for their history and are willing, through the Historic Design Review Board, to enforce the aesthetic look of the area. I would like

to see those restrictions extend to government buildings as well.

Where do you stand in the sometimes-contentious divide between preserving a historic look for Santa Fe and welcoming more contemporary elements?

I think the tension between the historic and the contemporary is not an unhealthy thing. That conversation focuses our attention on the uniqueness of our city and hopefully keeps us dedicated to keeping it that way. Long-established historic zones should be respected and honored. An example of a good compromise is happening in our new and wonderful Railyard zone.



» We overlook the fact that our predecessors managed to create a durable architectural environment by making use of the materials they had at hand.

—JAMES HARE

**JAMES HARE, DIRECTOR,
CORNERSTONES**

James Hare is executive director of Cornerstones Community Partnerships, a Santa Fe-based, nationally acclaimed nonprofit organization that restores historic structures by enlisting community partnerships and focusing on traditional building practices. A 51-year-old Denver native, Hare holds a master's degree in historic preservation from Baltimore's Goucher College, where he received the school's McCollough Scholarship for Outstanding Thesis. His study of historic preservation in Santa Fe and Charleston, S.C., will be included as a chapter in the forthcoming book *Challenges in Compatibility: Design in Historic Preservation*, (University of Delaware Press). *Info: cstones.org*

What's the most significant project Cornerstones has done right here in Santa Fe, and why is that structure an important part of our history?

Cornerstones' most significant work has been in the rural villages of New Mexico and the Southwest. However, Santa Feans have provided much of the volunteer labor to carry out our preservation efforts. In Santa Fe, we are just now gearing up to begin the preservation of the historic San Miguel Chapel, known affectionately as the "Oldest Church." The project will finally bring our 22-year-old program to the heart of the city that gave Cornerstones its start. What could we do better to preserve Santa Fe's history? Santa Fe's design review board should stop pretending the practice of building frame houses that imitate adobe respects the region's tradition of historic earthen architecture. We need to revitalize the use of sustainable natural materials in our construction practices so that "Santa Fe style" actually means something significant.

What is an aspect of our history that is often overlooked or underappreciated?

We overlook the fact that our predecessors managed to create a durable architectural environment by making use of the materials they had at hand. Their system worked very well until we started to think we could do it better with modern construction materials. How does Cornerstones go beyond the architectural/structural in preserving our history?

By emphasizing and strengthening the human component in the preservation process. We strive to focus as much, if not more, on the people involved in the preservation process, as we do on historic buildings. Involving community members of all ages in the preservation process has been the key to our success. Also, making connections for young people between traditional building skills and career opportunities in contemporary construction trades and professions reinforces their connection to their traditions and history.

NASARIO GARCIA, AUTHOR, SCHOLAR

Folklorist, author, scholar, and storyteller Nasario Garcia has spent the past 30 years gathering and sharing the tales of New Mexico's *viejitos* (Hispanic old-timers) as a way of preserving the language and culture of his native state. Born in Bernalillo, Garcia grew up in the Rio Puerco Valley, southeast of Chaco Canyon, where his earliest education was in a one-room schoolhouse.

With degrees in Spanish and Portuguese and a Ph.D. in Spanish literature from the University of Pittsburgh, he enjoyed a long career as a university professor in several

states. He has spoken internationally and served as president of the New Mexico Folklore Society. Garcia's innumerable oral history interviews, conducted in Spanish, have resulted in 19 books, 11 of them bilingual works of folk tales, poetry, and a historical tribute to Albuquerque. His latest is *Brujerías: Stories of Witchcraft and the Supernatural in the American Southwest and Beyond* (Texas Tech University Press). *Info: nasariogarcia.com*

What do you consider your most important contribution to preserving New Mexico's history?

The gracious old folks I've interviewed truly represent the last vestiges of our cultural and linguistic legacy as we have known it for centuries. The breadth and scope of information they provided is phenomenal. It ranges from religious functions, popular festivities, foods, politics, music, and folklore (e.g., witchcraft and the supernatural) to eking out an existence in rural New Mexico the old-fashioned way—by working their tails off! My books, taped and transcribed interviews, and black-and-white photos (old as well as recent portraits) constitute a modest but integral portion of archival holdings for current and future generations.

What could we do better to preserve our history?

First and foremost we must teach our children early on that, absent a knowledge of history, one's society is humdrum, lifeless, and apt to engender ignorance. Secondly, we need to inculcate in young people a sense of respect for other cultures. Xenophobic tendencies like those espoused by Theodore Roosevelt—who proclaimed a hundred years ago that "a tangle of squabbling nationalities" was destined to bring this country to ruin—must be rejected outright.

What is an important part of our history that is often overlooked?

More comprehensive research is needed showing the role and contributions of the Hispanic woman in rural New Mexico during the first half of the 20th century. Also, the history of the Penitentes across Northern New Mexico villages is still murky at best. ❧



» We must teach our children that absent a knowledge of history, one's society is humdrum, lifeless, and apt to engender ignorance.

—NASARIO GARCIA

» I learned from my father to care deeply about my community... He worked hard to make Santa Fe a beautiful place for Santa Feans.

—NANCY MEEM WIRTH

