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Fort Sumner: A Look Back

Daniel B. Flores

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The mention of Fort Sumner immediately brings the name of Billy the Kid to mind. Billy the Kid, arguably the most infamous and best known of the Wild West outlaws, was killed on July 14, 1881 in Fort Sumner by Sheriff Pat Garrett. Though not as well known as the outlaw, the Navajo and Apache reservation of Bosque Redondo was also located in the Fort Sumner area. It is virtually impossible to tell the story about Fort Sumner without including Billy the Kid and Bosque Redondo. Fort Sumner: A Look Back is about other events from Fort Sumner's past and only briefly includes both. The outlaw, Billy the Kid, and the infamous Indian reservation, Bosque Redondo, are both worthy of their own stories and many books have been written about both of them. There is certainly much more to Fort Sumner than Billy the Kid and Bosque Redondo. Fort Sumner: A Look Back uses old newspaper articles and other sources to tell the story of the other Fort Sumner. There are also many period photos used to help tell that story. Included are men such as Lovelace, Beaubien, Clancey, Parsons, De Graftenried, and Hunter and others who have very significantly contributed to the history of the area. There was once even an American vice-president who paid the area a visit. The old newspaper articles are quite interesting because they are written in a folksy style that was very popular when they were composed. Journalism and writing styles have certainly evolved over the years. The old articles also give the writers' perception of the events during that period of time. Fort Sumner: A Look Back is being written to help tell the story of the rich and colorful past of the former Guadalupe county community. In 1917, that community, Fort Sumner, achieved its goal of being the county seat of a new county. Reluctantly the citizens of Fort Summer accepted the name of De Baca for their new county. They had strived since statehood for the creation of their own county under the name of Sumner. The creation of De Baca county also meant that Fort Sumner could have its own high school. Fort Sumner high school opened for the 1917-18 school year and in May saw its first graduating senior class. A member of that class would eventually play an important role in bringing about an end to World War II.

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