

El Morro

The Stone Autograph

Album

by GEORGE P. GODFREY, P.M.

An accidental meeting between two groups of men, in the spring of 1536, was the prelude to an amazing chain of events. This meeting was all the more unusual when one realizes that only a small segment of today's population in the Southwest have heard of the meeting or know any of the details of the incident.

A party of slave hunters under the command of Diego de Alcaraz had been operating from a ship in the Gulf of California. They had been searching through Indian villages in the area, seizing women and young men to be taken back to Mexico to be sold. On a trail between two villages, they came upon a party of 15 men. Four were naked, bearded, and so haggard they were hardly distinguishable from Indians.

These four—Cabeza de Vaca, Andres Dorantes, Alonzo de Maldonado, and Estivancio, a Moor slave of Dorantes—were survivors of an ill-fated expedition from Spain that had landed in Florida eight years earlier. De Vaca and the others were sent under escort to the town of San Miguel, reaching there April 1st. Another group of soldiers escorted them to Mexico City, reaching there Sunday, July 25th.

These four tattered figures made a strange sight in a city accustomed to strange sights. For this was the Mexico of early Spanish conquest, and it was less than a score of years since Hernando Cortez had sunk his ships in the Gulf of Mexico and entered the old Aztec city. While the Spaniards of Mexico City were captivated by the strange story told by the Castilian-born Cabeza de Vaca, their interest was aroused by what the men had seen, a land thick with trees, a land where crops were planted three times a year, beautiful rivers, and a variety of ore with clear traces of gold and silver. In addition, de Vaca told them of Indians they had met on their trek. The Indians had told of a land to the north abounding in gold and silver, with cities whose houses were many stories high, whose streets were lined with silversmith shops, and whose doors were inlaid with turquoise. Around Mexico City these tales flew and grew, and the populace concluded that de Vaca's stories proved the legends of old, that somewhere in the north and west were seven Golden Cities.

New Spain's well loved Spanish viceroy, Don Antonio de Mendoza, set about organizing an expedition to a land far richer than either Mexico or Peru. Fortune seekers from Spain had flocked to New Spain. As a result, many were without jobs or money, or prospects of either. If the lands to the north were as wealthy as prophesied, the viceroy concluded, it would absorb the overflow population. Another consideration weighed heavily in the viceroy's thoughts. Spain had recently become the champion of Catholicism in Europe. To Emperor Charles V, the glory of acquiring the new territory and bringing the Indian nations to the knowledge of God was more important than rich treasurers. Mendoza decided that this was an opportunity to gain new territory and fulfill his duty to the Mother Church.

Before equipping a large-scale expedition to search for the Seven Cities, the viceroy decided to send a small expedition to verify their existence and started to look for a

leader. The Spanish wanderers, with thoughts of their hardships still vivid in their minds, declined the job. De Vaca soon left for Spain to report to King Charles. A footnote here: At the King's request, de Vaca wrote an account of his travels in the New Land. His manuscript was published in 1542 and reprinted in 1555. A copy of the 1542 book is in the New York Public Library. A translation of it is included in the "Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology."

After many delays, Father Marcos de Niza, a Franciscan Friar, was picked to lead the expedition. With the slave Estivancio, whom the viceroy had purchased from Dorantes, and some Mexican Indians, he set off in the spring of 1539 for the mysterious north country. The search for the Seven Cities had begun.

Less than a year later, Friar Marcos was back in Mexico City with reports that not only corroborated, but outstripped, those told by de Vaca. He had actually seen the Seven Cities. What the people of Mexico City failed to grasp, and likely cared little about, although the Friar had seen the town, he had not seen its riches. The good Friar had seen the Zuni pueblo of Hawikuh. Perhaps the sun shining on the pueblos made them glitter like gold; perhaps the heat waves from the desert magnified the size of the town. Whatever the cause, he received an incredibly distorted impression, an idea that was enhanced by the stories told him by the Indians with whom he had conversed only in sign language.

Mexico City was electrified by the news, and as the stories spread, they grew: the houses were of solid gold, the women wore strings of turquoise and gold beads, and the men girdles of gold.

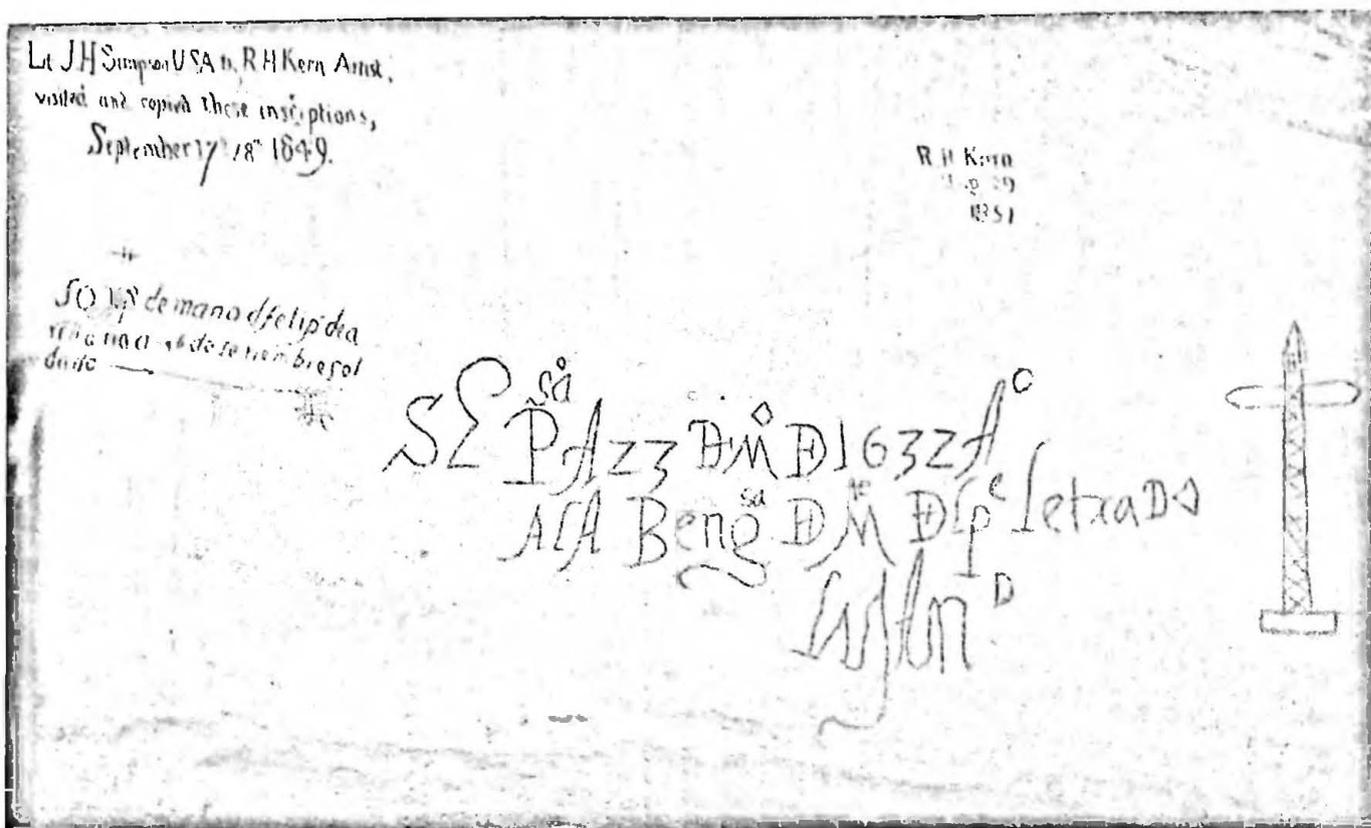
A number of contenders for the position of leader soon appeared. De Soto, who later was to discover the Mississippi River, and Cortez petitioned King Charles for the right to organize the expedition. Viceroy Mendoza, however, gave preference to a close personal friend and mem-

ber of the Mexico City town council, Francisco Vazquez de Coronado. The expedition was the largest ever attempted by the Spaniards in the New World, and on Saturday, February 21, 1540, preparations were finalized for the official review. On Sunday, after a solemn high mass, the army began to march by the viceroy and the court. With usual Spanish passion for detail, and in compliance with a royal decree, a record was made of every man, each piece of equipment, and every animal. Each man was given an advance of 30 pesos, and all were promised land grants in the new addition to the empire.

There was a military force of approximately 1100 men, in addition to the personal servants, bearers, grooms, and herders. Some 600 saddle and pack horses and mules were on the march; in addition, thousands of cattle, sheep, and swine were transported on the hoof for food.

On Monday, February 23rd, the long trek to Cibola began. Viceroy Mendoza, fired with adventurous spirit, accompanied the army for two days. Progress was slow: straying cattle, heavily laden pack animals, and the condition of the Spanish aristocrats and their sleek, fat mounts, did much to slow progress, for almost all the riders were unaccustomed to the rigors of a pioneering expedition. After a month and a half, the army had traveled the short distance of 350 miles. On April 22nd Coronado, with 75 horsemen, 25 foot soldiers, and some Indians, plus animals for food, set out as an advance force, leaving the rest of the party to follow. This small force was guided by Friar Marcos over the route he had used twice before, to and from Cibola.

On July 7th, 1540, the small party reached their goal—Cibola, the town that Friar Marcos had described so glowingly. The Spaniards were amazed and enraged to see No Golden Walls, No Silversmith Shops, No Turquoise Doors. Instead, their startled eyes gazed on a small rocky pueblo. One of the soldiers remarked, "The curses that were hurled at Friar Marcos were such that God forbid that they may



"Lt. J. H. Simpson USA &
 R. H. Kern, Artist, visited
 and copied these inscriptions
 September 17 & 18, 1849."

"They passed on the 23rd of March, 1632 to the
 avenging of the death of the Father Letrado Lujan."

"R. H. Kern
 Aug. 29 1851."

Photography by George P. Godfrey

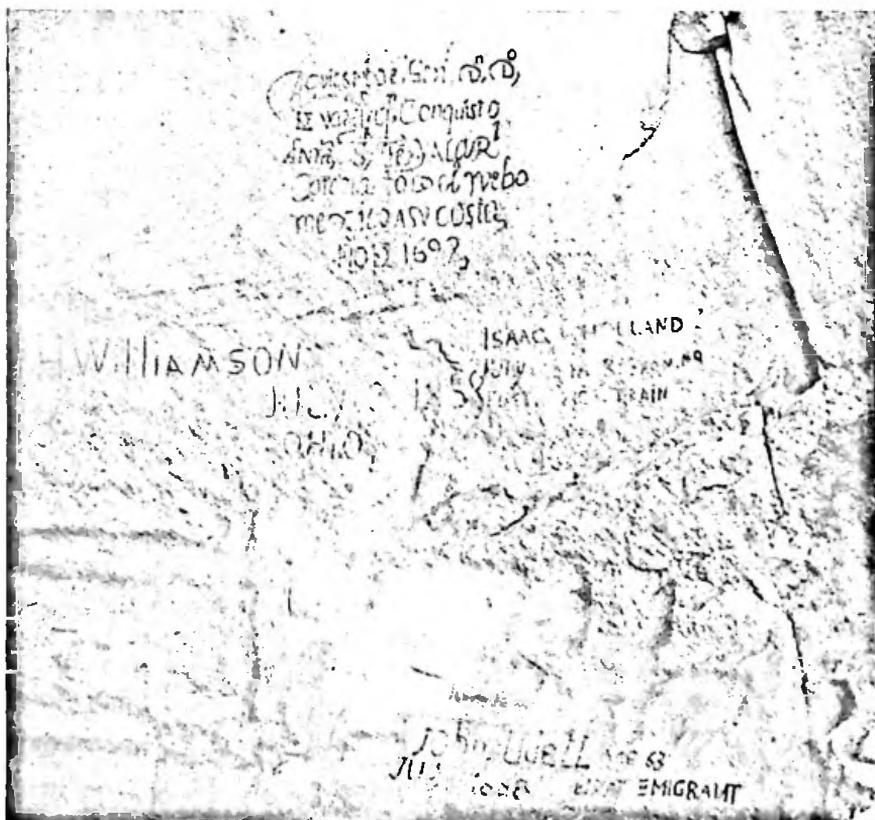
fall on him." To the other Friars who accompanied the party, the lack of riches made little difference, because their ambition was to convert the heathen.

The Zunis were not friendly, and after a fight and the storming of their pueblo, they fled to their sacred mountain. In the empty pueblo, Coronado and his men found a large quantity of food: maize, beans, piñon nuts, and fowl—and for the first time in weeks were comfortable and not hungry.

After a rest, Coronado sent two of his party as messengers to tell the rest of the party to join him here at Cibola. The messengers were to continue on to Mexico City with a letter to the viceroy, telling him the results of the trip. Friar Marcos was sent back with the messengers in disgrace. In his letter, Coronado said in disgust, "Friar Marcos has not told the truth in a single thing he has said except maybe the name of the cities and large stone houses. God knows that I wish I had better news to write your Lordship. Be assured that if all the riches and treasurers of the world had been here, I could not have done more than what I have done; among us there is not one pound of raisins, nor sugar, nor oil, nor wine except barely half a quart. Our Lord God protect and keep your most illustrious Lordship. From the province of Cibola, 3rd August 1540."

Charles F. Lummis, in his book, "Mesa, Cañon, and Pueblo," claims that Coronado did not pass El Morro. And yet Pedro de Castaneda, in his official narrative of Coronado's expedition, has this to say: "The army continued its march to the east, and as the season had advanced into December, it did not fail to snow almost every day. The road could not be seen, but the guides managed to find it, as they knew the country. There were junipers and pines all over the country, which they used to make large fires after they had cleared a large amount of snow where they wanted to make camp. It was a dry snow, for although it fell on the baggage and covered it to half a man's

height, it did not damage it. It fell at night, covering the baggage, the soldiers in their beds, piling it up in the air. If anyone had come upon the camp, nothing would have been seen but mounds of snow and the horses standing half buried in it. The army passed by the Great Rock. Many of the gentlemen went up on top and they had great difficulty in going up the steps because they were not used to them. The natives go up and down such steps so easily that they carry loads and the women carry water and do not seem to even touch their hands to the rock. From here we went on to Acamo."



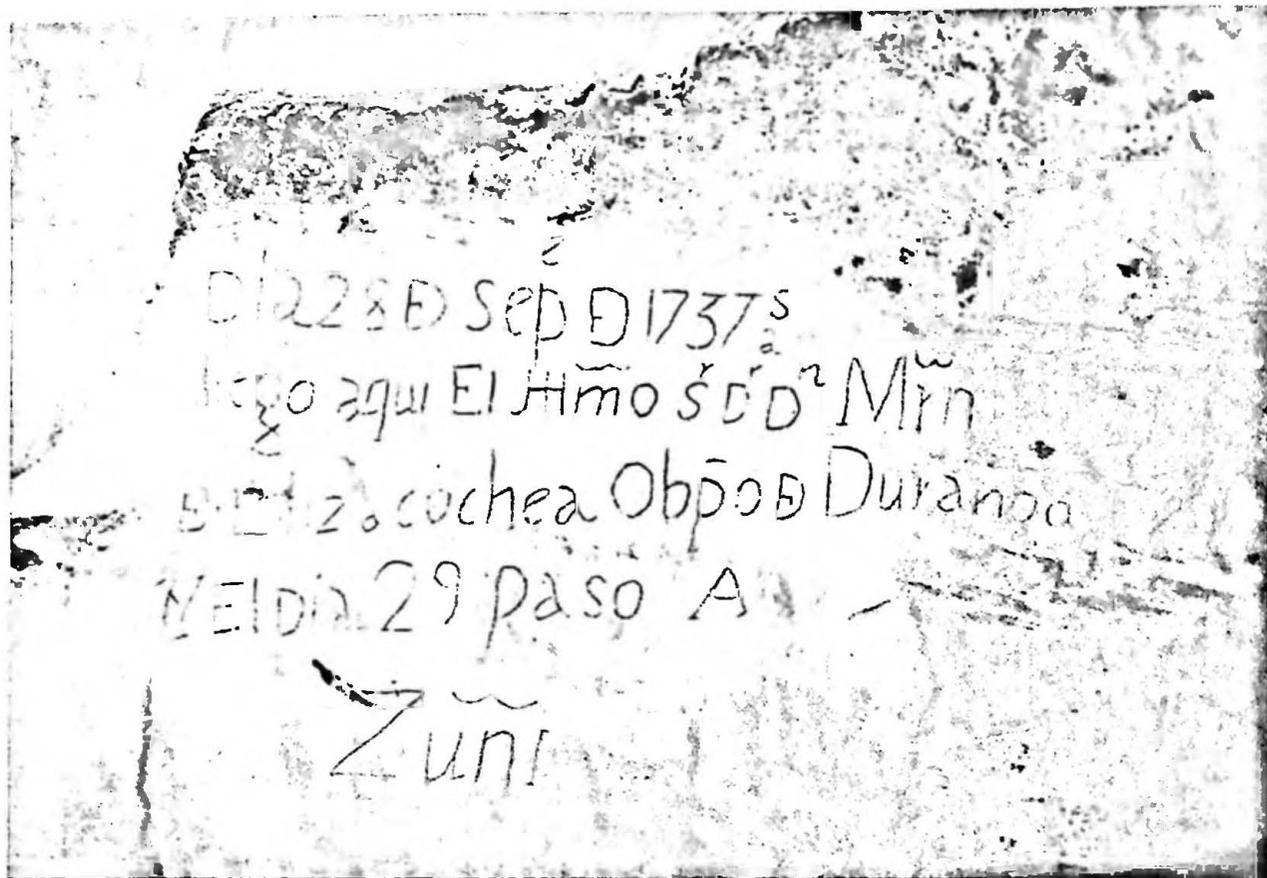
"Here was the General Don Diego de Vargas, who conquered for our Holy Faith, and for the Royal Crown, all the New Mexico, at his expense, year of 1692."

Photography by George P. Godfrey

There is a lack of information from the time of Coronado's visit to the record of the visit of the first Governor of New Mexico, Juan de Oñate. He founded San Gabriel de los Espanoles in 1598 and Sante Fe in 1605. Before he founded Sante Fe, he marched with a party of 30 men to the Gulf of California. On his return trip, he camped at El Morro and inscribed: "Passed by here the Commander Don Juan de Oñate from the discovery of the sea of the south on the 16th of April year 1605."

I became interested in El Morro following a visit in 1937. This visit was a real adventure due to the condition of the road—it was actually little more than an ill-kept logging road. Shortly before reaching El Morro, the road seemed to end at a combination bunk house and cook shack. After wading through at least a dozen dogs to reach the door, I was greeted with, "How the hell did you get from your car to the door without being bit?" The cook showed me the faint road between two large trees, and within a half an hour we reached The Castle. We spent almost half a day looking at the inscriptions and taking pictures, using the Kodachrome of that day. I now wish that I had taken more pictures, because in visiting the area eight times since 1937, the inscriptions are getting progressively fainter.

El Morro's first official contact with the new American nation came about through the curiosity of a young Lieutenant, member of Colonel John Washington's expedition "to subdue the trouble-some Navahos." Lieutenant (later General) James H. Simpson of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, had been in charge of a troop of soldiers guarding a party of emigrants traveling from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Sante Fe. On reaching Sante Fe, he joined Colonel Washington's staff. Lieutenant Simpson had an exceptionally keen and active mind, and took a great interest in anything of an unusual nature along the trail, although he wrote, "he loathed the dismal country and was



"On the 28th day of September of the year 1737 there arrived here the very illustrious Senor Doctor Don Martin de Elizacochea, Bishop of Durango, and on the 29th went on to Zuni."

Photography by George P. Godfrey

nauseated by the native food." He became quite excited when a guide named Lewis mentioned a rock he had seen some years before, on which were "acres of writings carved on the surface of the rock." After obtaining permission from Colonel Washington, Lieutenant Simpson, Richard H. Kern, an artist, and Lewis left to visit the inscription area. On reaching the site, Lewis made camp and Lieutenant Simpson and Kern set about the task of copying the inscriptions. The next morning, September 18, 1849, Lieutenant Simpson says, "The dawn of the day at 3 o'clock appearing, we finished our labors on the inscriptions, and set off to rejoin the troop."

Last September 16th, my wife and I arrived at El Morro, 123 years later at 7 o'clock. There was just enough light to see to pour coffee from a Thermos. In fact, we had to wait till about 8:30 for light for photographs. Perhaps in Lieutenant Simpson's time, it grew lighter earlier, or maybe his watch was in error.

Reaching El Morro now is an easy trip from Sante Fe. In Lieutenant Simpson's time, it was a 12 to 15 day journey. By U.S. 66, it is about 130 miles from Sante Fe to Grant, New Mexico. Then by way of State #53, or the Zuni Wagon Road, you can soon reach the lava flow mentioned by Castenada. West of the flow, is seen a cream-colored, wedge-shaped mesa jutting out into the valley. Because the mesa resembles a gigantic castle, the Spaniards named it "el Morro." From a distance it looks almost unclimbable, and yet only a few hundred yards from the point, worn foot holes in the rock lead to the top of the mesa near the old pueblo ruins.

A few paces away from the steps, the main reason most parties camped at the site is visible. Water fed by run-off from snow, and the spring rains, collect in a large pool about 12 feet deep. This pool, holding about 200,000 gallons of water, was at that time the only source of water between Zuni and the river. On the walls above the pool are the many mud nests of the cliff swallows that come



"The 28th day of September of the year 1737 there arrived here the Bachelor (of Law) Don Juan Ignacio de Arrasain."

here each year to nest and raise their young.

As we move around the cliff, hundreds of inscriptions are visible. I will describe a number of them. The oldest and one of the most famous I have mentioned previously, that of Oñate. Another famous Governor left his mark: "Here was the General Don Diego de Vargas, who conquered for our Holy Faith, and for the Royal Crown, all of New Mexico at his own expense. Year 1692." Twelve years earlier, the Pueblo Indian revolt had taken place. De Vargas had returned and restored order. He later was appointed Governor and died in Bernalillo in 1704.

Many who visited New Mexico enlisted and outfitted expeditions, hoping to make fortunes or receive political honors. Old records in Sante Fe do not list all these expeditions. El Morro fills in the gaps; for example: "There passed by here the Lieutenant Don Joseph de Payba Basconzelos, the year that he brought the council of the realm at his own expense on 18th February 1726."

Mixed in with the Spanish writings are numerous later English records. Lieutenant Simpson mentioned in his journal that when he and Richard Kern visited the site in 1849, there was not a single English inscription to be found. Lieutenant Simpson left two records, one on the south face and one on the north, while Kern visited the area in 1849 and 1851.

Lieutenant Edward Beale camped here, on August 23, 1857, with his camel caravan, and was content to inscribe merely, "Lt. Beale." Two of his party left elaborate autographs: E. Pen Long of Baltimore and Mr. P. (Peachy) Gilmore Breckenridge, the man in charge of the camels.

At the point of the rock, there are numerous names, carved by a group of men who ran a survey for the Union Pacific Railroad. The development of the Sante Fe Railroad 25 miles to the north ended the Union Pacific's plans, and also ended the use of El Morro as a stopping place.

On the north face of the cliff are several famous Spanish autographs. "On the 28th day of September of the year

Y cap, gen, de las pro^{as} del nuebome^x, Por el Reyno, S^o Pasopozuqui^o de los pue
 blos de Zuni. A los 29 de Julio del año de 1620 los pus^o en paz como pedim^{os} p^{er}
 Diendole su favor como a los desuma^g y denuebo dirzo en la obediencia a todo lo q^{ue}
 hizo con el agasax es el o y prudencia como a nche ishanisimo ~~Stampoznicu~~
 La y gallardo soldado de inacabable y lo adamemo
 Bellido
 SADAIA Bulo lon marianis

"I am the Captain General of the province of New Mexico for the King our Lord passed by here
 on the return from the pueblo of Zuni on the 29th of July 1620 and put them at peace at their
 humble petition, they asking favor as vassels of his Majesty, and promising anew their obedience all
 of which I did with clemency, zeal and prudence, as a most christian like gentleman extraordinary
 and gallant soldier of enduring and praised memory. Governor Eulate."

Photography by George P. Godfrey

1737 there arrived here the very illustrious Señor Doctor Don Martin de Elizacochea, Bishop of Durango, and on the 29th went on to Zuni." A member of the Bishop's party also wrote: "The 28th day of September 1737, there arrived here the Bachelor (of law) Don Juan Ignacio de Arrasain."

Lieutenant Simpson and Richard Kern carved their names and the dates September 17th and 18th, 1849, just above another famous inscription: "We passed on the 23rd of March, 1632, to the avenging of the death of the Father Letrado Lujan." Father Letrado had founded the mission near Mountainair, New Mexico, in 1629. In February, 1632, he was transferred to Zuni and was killed by the natives a week later. Lujan was sent from Sante Fe, in charge of a punitive force.

The future of El Morro is much in doubt. The rock is disintegrating at such a rapid rate that in a few decades, some of the fainter markings may be eliminated. As the rains fall, the small bits of rock dislodged by the drops run down the wall with an abrasive action that tends to erase the markings. Time alone can tell how much of this ancient Autograph Album will survive for the enjoyment by future generations.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Godfrey was born in Upland, Nebraska and attended grade and high school in Boulder, Colorado. He majored in business administration at Denver University.

He worked in two New York Stock Exchange houses, Otis & Co. and Sargant Malo & Co. for 15 years.

Following this he was employed by the U.S. Mint and retired from there two years ago after 31 years of service.

He is presently working as a Volunteer in the Geology Department of the

Denver Museum of Natural History.

His interests are old books, Indian artifacts, petroglyphs, ghost towns and early railroads.

He is a long time member of the Wm. H. Jackson Camera Club, the Colorado Archeological Society and the Colorado Mineral Society.

His latest honor was that of Posse membership in the Denver Westerners. George presented his paper on El Morro National Monument at the February meeting of the Denver Westerners.

New Hands on the Denver Range

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Gerry became interested in the Denver Westerners through Dr. Bob Mutchler. She is a Registered Dental Hygienist. Among her many hobbies are silver smithing and rockhounding. Welcome to the Westerners, Gerry.

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Mr. Henn is a Posse member in the Chicago corral. His latest publication is "Lies, Lore and Legend of the Silvery San Juan," published in the Chicago Westerners Brand Book. Roger owns a year-round home in Ouray, Colorado and is a graduate of Denver University.

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Don heard of the Westerners through Louisa Arps, Jim Davis and his brother, Dr. Ray Brandes. Don has written a book entitled *Military Posts of Colorado* to be published in March, 1973. He is currently working on a second book.

John R. Adams
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John was recommended to us by Posseman Robert L. Brown. He is interested in hiking and jeeping. He has managed the Central City Opera House and was also Supervisor of the Western Athletic Conference Officials.

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Rex's interests are Ghost Towns, Western art and bronze sculptures, coin collecting and back packing. He heard of the Westerners through Jim Turner of Fairplay.