

BOOK OF THE WEEK

Telling their story

'Crosses of Iron' digs deeper into Dawson and the mines that built it

BY DAVID STEINBERG
FOR THE JOURNAL

These days, there's little to see of Dawson, a ghost town off an unpaved road in northeast New Mexico. A locked gate blocks trespassers from entering what is now a private ranch.

Nearby, though, is something noteworthy and open to the public — the Dawson Cemetery, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The cemetery is filled with crosses, some with names, some not. They were miners who died in accidents when Dawson was a thriving coal town in the first half of the 20th century.

Two were major mining accidents, and they form the centerpiece of a new book — "Crosses of Iron: The Tragic Story of Dawson, New Mexico and Its Twin Mining Disasters" by Nick Pappas.

The first disaster was on Oct. 22, 1913, when 261 miners and two rescuers died in a mine explosion.

The second disaster, on Feb. 8, 1923, took the lives of 120 miners. Some of them were related to those who had died 10 years earlier.

The book describes in compelling detail the rescue efforts, the rescuers, the victims, the families of victims and the investigations into the cause of the explosions.

One week before the 1913 explosion, the book explains, the state mining inspector visited Dawson for a routine examination of its mines.

He found the ventilation system, the equipment and the shot-firing system (used to dislodge coal inside mines) all modern and first-rate. The inspector, however, flagged the presence of flammable coal dust, which is caused by crushing or grinding coal.

Pappas takes the reader well beyond the drama of the book's title and into a broad range of connected subjects and interminable characters. These are some of the subjects:

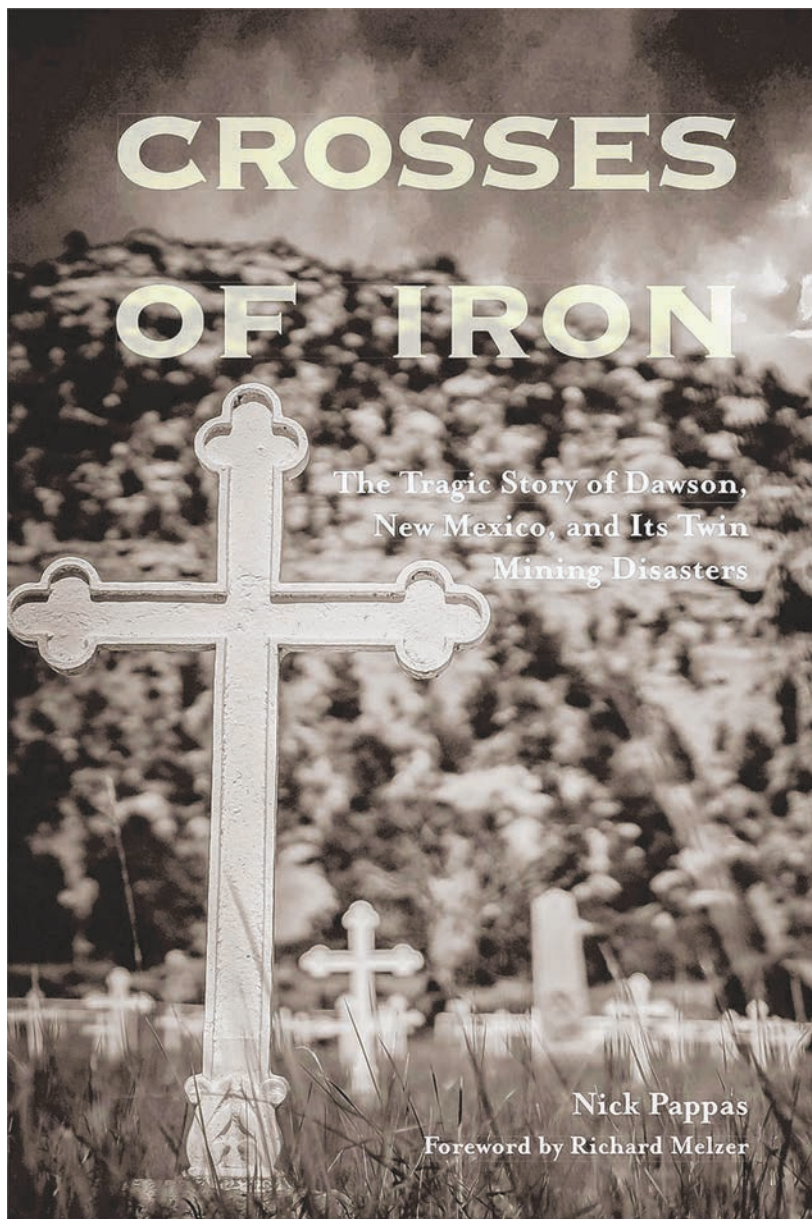
- The history of Phelps Dodge & Company, its top executives, its ownership of mines in Dawson and elsewhere, and the company's decision to quickly shutter the Dawson mines.

- The company's creation of Dawson as a model company town. There was a 1,000-seat, multipurpose opera house, a mercantile store that held fashion shows and sold furs, a 32-bed, two-ward hospital and dispensary, an outdoor swimming pool, a golf course and a bank that could handle money to transfer to immigrant workers' family in their home countries.

Dawson's miners and their families did not live in huts or tented coal camps. Phelps Dodge provided 600 comfortable rental homes, as well as rooms to rent in boarding and lodging houses.

And as it grew, the town opened four schools, established two churches, and opened a bakery, a barber shop, a hotel, a photo studio, restaurants and other businesses.

- An early chapter is devoted to a



concise biography of John Barkley Dawson, for whom the town was named. Born in Kentucky, Dawson was a cattle driver, a farmer, a pioneer, rancher and Texas ranger, though never a mine owner.

- Profiles of a few of the many Italian and Greek immigrants — some from the same families — who worked the Dawson mines. They were part of a wider immigration wave to the United States from Europe in the early 20th century.

"Mining firms found them a good source of labor," Pappas said in a phone interview. As well, Mexicans and New Mexicans were hired to work in Dawson's underground mines.

- The sometimes contentious relationship between Phelps Dodge and organized labor. Labor unions sought better working conditions and higher pay for miners, sometimes striking if demands weren't met.

- The subject that brings the ghost town to life — literally and figuratively — is the vibrant Dawson New Mexico Association. It still holds reunions on Labor Day weekend every other year to celebrate the family members who lived — and died — in Dawson and to exchange stories and photographs of those past times.

The nonprofit association accepts private and corporate tax-deductible donations that help run the reunions and maintain the historic Dawson Cemetery. Donations may be mailed to the association, 528 N. First St., Raton, N.M. 87740.

"I want to acknowledge the support from the Dawson community," Pappas said. "It was essential to my

IF YOU GO

Nick Pappas discusses and signs "Crosses of Iron: The Tragic Story of Dawson, New Mexico and Its Twin Mining Disasters" at 3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 7, and at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 8, at the Albuquerque Grecian Festival, next to St. George Greek Orthodox Church, 308 High St. SE, Albuquerque; at 6:30 p.m. Oct. 13, at the Raton Museum, 108 S. Second St., Raton; noon-3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 14, at Barnes & Noble, Coronado Shopping Center; at 1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. Nov. 11, at Treasure House Books & Gifts, 2012 South Plaza St. NW, Old Town; and 10:30-noon on Nov. 18, at the Albuquerque Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE.

entire enterprise. I couldn't have done it without them."

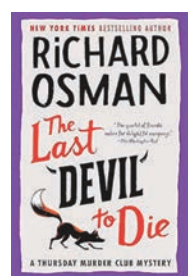
An Albuquerque resident, the 68-year-old Pappas has been a journalist since 1976, including six years at the Albuquerque Journal.

Here's an interesting sidebar. A woman born in Dawson in 1930 gained national fame as a civil rights activist and cofounder of the National Farm Workers Association with César Chávez. Her name? Dolores Huerta. Huerta's uncle, Marcial Chavez, died in the 1913 disaster, the book reports.

On April 28, 1950, the last carload of coal was dumped. Later that night Dawson residents jammed the opera house to hear a musical performance by guitarist and fellow Dawson miner Augustine Hernandez. In the performance was a special song he composed for the occasion, "¡Adiós Dawson!"

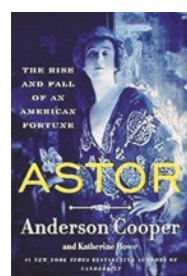
BESTSELLERS

FICTION



1. "Holly" Stephen King. Scribner
2. "Fourth Wing" Rebecca Yarros. Red Tower
3. "The Last Devil to Die" Richard Osman. Viking/Dorman
4. "Tom Lake" Ann Patchett. Harper
5. "Vince Flynn: Code Red" Kyle Mills. Atria
6. "Demon Copperhead" Barbara Kingsolver. Harper
7. "The Covenant of Water" Abraham Verghese. Grove Press
8. "Wellness" Nathan Hill. Knopf
9. "Payback in Death" J.D. Robb. St. Martin's
10. "Tom Clancy: Weapons Grade" Don Bentley. Putnam

NONFICTION



1. "The Democrat Party Hates America" Mark R. Levin. Threshold
2. "Elon Musk" Walter Isaacson. Simon & Schuster
3. "Skinnytaste Simple" Homolka/Jones. Clarkson Potter
4. "Build the Life You Want" Brooks/Winfrey. Portfolio
5. "Astor" Cooper/Howe. Harper
6. "All Hope Is Found" Sarah Jakes Roberts. Thomas Nelson
7. "Social Justice Fallacies" Thomas Sowell. Basic
8. "Counting the Cost" Jill Duggar. Gallery
9. "The Garden Within" Anita Phillips. Thomas Nelson
10. "The Art of Home" Shea McGee. Harper Horizon

BOOK NOTES

BOOKS ON THE BOSQUE

Author-poet-teacher Steven P. Schneider will read from and discuss his bilingual book "The Magic of Mariachi / La Magia del Mariachi" from 2-4 p.m. Friday, Oct. 6, at Books on the Bosque.

The book combines Schneider's poetry and his wife Reefka Schneider's artwork. The 24 poems were written in response to the 24 paintings and drawings that she created. Reefka Schneider's original artwork was in pastel, watercolor and charcoal. Schneider's poems are in different forms, including haiku, dramatic monologue, triolet, villanelle, free verse and prose poems. Former Texas Poet Laureate Carmen Tafolla wrote a review of the book that said in part, "... the poems and artwork capture the sights, sounds and emotions of this magical musical experience. This book is a valuable documentation of Mexican and Mexican-American culture along la frontera ..." Edna Ochoa did the Spanish translation of the poems.

Steven Schneider said that although the book is used in elementary and middle school classes, it is aimed at readers of all ages. He is a professor in the Creative Writing Department of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Books on the Bosque is located at 6261 Riverside Plaza Lane NW.

TREASURE HOUSE BOOKS & GIFTS

Albuquerque's Sue Houser is the author of a new book for middle-grade readers titled "Walter Steps Up to the Plate." The story opens with 12-year-old Walter waiting for his dad and the tickets he's bringing for them to attend the 1927 season home opener of the Chicago Cubs baseball team. Before dad appears, Walter spots a familiar face of a burly man getting out of a sleek car; that of gangster Al Capone. Capone becomes a key character in this novel, which is about Walter accompanying his mother to stay with family in Albuquerque after she is diagnosed with tuberculosis. To help her with expenses, Walter gets a newspaper route. But care for his mom could get expensive after she's admitted to a sanatorium and is told she needs surgery.

Houser will sign copies of the book from 1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 1, at Treasure House Books & Gifts, 2012 South Plaza St. NW, Old Town.

BOOKWORKS

Brittany Means will be at Bookworks, 4022 Rio Grande Blvd. NW, at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 3, for the launch of her new book, "Hell If We Don't Change Our Ways: A Memoir." Means, a Chicana writer and editor living in Albuquerque, will read from and autograph copies of the book. The bookstore provided promotional material about the book that states, in part, "Spending her childhood riding shotgun as her mother struggled to escape abusive relationships, Brittany's life was a blur of highways and traumas that collapsed any effort to track time. With no money and only burned bridges behind her, Brittany took care of her younger brother, managed the instability of her home life, and attempted to make sense of the troublesome world around her."

NEW FOR YOUNG READERS

Albuquerque's Laurel Goodluck is author of the new book for young readers "Deb Haaland," inspired by the popular picture book series "She Persisted," which includes a volume on Haaland, who is currently the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and previously represented New Mexico's First Congressional District. The book will publish Oct. 3.

— Compiled by David Steinberg for the Journal

'THE POLITZER SAGA'

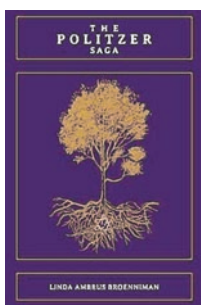
Family secrets found in photos, letters

BY JIM MALKON
BOOKTRIP.COM

"When I was 27, I accidentally discovered that my father was Jewish. And that much of what I knew about him and his family was a lie."

Most of us are familiar with a few generations of our relatives. We have met some of them. We know their stories; we have heard tales about their parents and their parents' parents. But as generations diminish — physically or mentally — so too do our glimpses into history.

That is not the nature of Linda Broenniman's journey. "The Politzer Saga" by Linda Ambrus Broenniman is hardly the first account of someone obsessed with tracing the roots of her family. Yet that has no bearing on how fascinating and



downright incredible her telling of this account happens to be.

While a young 27-year-old was not about to drop everything and scour records for the truth about her family, some 33 years later she could "no longer ignore the yearning to know the truth that lay buried."

The findings are remarkable — riveting, heart-wrenching and inspiring at the same time. The author has pieced together a family tree dating back to 18th century Hungary, eight generations with 77 boxes. Each box is a story, a life, more than a square in a big diagram — real people who lived, who struggled, suffered, thought, made decisions to affect people in the adjacent squares.

The book reads like a fictional family saga. The characters come to life in beautiful clarity, making readers easily forget that they were actually thoroughly researched and not the figments of someone's vivid imagination.

Beyond the personal stories,

the book is a wonderful history lesson of a place and a people. Family members were highly accomplished and respected — artists, doctors, business owners, freedom fighters, art collectors, musicians, successful in their personal endeavors but frequently broken by war, uprisings, political beliefs, religion, unthinkable, irrational treatment and tortures and a need to scratch and claw merely to live another day. Some of them served royalty. Some of them were destroyed by the Nazis.

Much of the material that started the research came from a box rescued from a fire at the home of Broenniman's parents, which included hidden letters, photographs and documents.

At the start of each chapter, the author conveniently shows the appropriate section of the family tree that is being discussed, with one relative the focus of each chapter.

Even with that guidance, things can get complicated.

JUMBLE

Answer:

RUDDER INTACT UPHELD
EFFECT BOUGHT EXHALT
THE TWINS ACHT SO DIFFERENTLY THAT IT WAS SOMETIMES HARD FOR THEM TO —

RELATE TO EACH OTHER

