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WILLIAM PENHALLOW HENDERSON:

artist, builder, furniture-maker

by Paul Weideman



William Penhallow Henderson House, Fireplace in Kiva Room. © Photo by Steve Northup.

William Penhallow Henderson was a polymath, a renaissance man. His creative genius reverberates in the walls of his old house at 555 Camino del Monte Sol in Santa Fe.

Henderson's expansive milieu may be glimpsed in the collection of his papers—more than 10 linear feet—at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Included are photographs he took of Auguste Rodin's house in Paris; his

certificate of marriage to poet Alice Corbin; personal letters from artist Gustave Baumann, architect John Gaw Meem, poet Carl Sandburg, and actor Tyrone Power; architectural drawings; art sketchbooks; and design drawings for furniture and the architectural elements such as hand-carved spindles and radiator grilles that he custom made for clients in Santa Fe and beyond.

William P. Henderson was born in Medford, Mass., on June 4, 1877. He was the son of William Oliver, last of a line of sea captains based in Maine.

When Willie was two the family began a six-year cattle-ranching venture at Turkey Creek near Uvalde, Texas. It was while living in Texas that the boy first saw Santa Fe, taking a wagon trip to the town in northern New Mexico with his mother, Sallie Augusta LeGalle.

In high school back in Massachusetts, Henderson studied civil engineering and comparative religion, as well as art, and left school records for the long jump and pole vault. The work in a sketchbook of his dating to 1891

demonstrates that the boy had mastered the fundamentals of drawing. His favorite subjects were houses, barns, silos, lighthouses, and other buildings.

At Boston Museum School Henderson studied with Impressionist painter Edmund Tarbell. The student artist won painting prizes and the Paige Traveling Scholarship, with



Henderson House floor plan sketch with changes made to the house after 1938 indicated in bold face text. Drawing by Catherine Colby.

which he traveled in Europe from 1901 to 1903, taking in the continent's art collections at his own speed.

In the summer of 1904 Henderson painted 30 works on a summer trip to Arizona and Mexico, then began teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Chicago, where he remained for 12 years.

Emma M. Church (who would soon found the progressive School of Applied and Normal Art in Chicago) wrote in a 1905 pamphlet that Henderson was “*keen of intellect, sturdy of character and nicely attuned to all that is lovely in Nature and human nature.*”

While at the Academy the painter met Alice Corbin. Six years his junior, she was born in St. Louis, Mo., on April 16, 1881. She published her first book of poetry, “The Linnet Songs,” in Chicago in 1898. By 1904 she had a studio at the Academy, where she met Henderson. A romance bloomed and the two were married on October 14, 1905.

At that time Corbin was earning a living writing reviews for the Chicago Tribune and Evening Post, while Henderson was painting portraits on commission. In 1907 the Art Institute of Chicago showed his paintings and pastels, the first of four exhibitions of Henderson’s work between that year and 1921.

The couple collaborated on “Andersen's Best Fairy Tales,” Corbin translating the text and Henderson illustrating. The volume, published in 1908,

funded a 1910-11 trip to Europe by the family, which now included their daughter, Alice Oliver Henderson.

In 1912 Corbin became assistant editor at Poetry magazine. The following year Henderson completed their house at Lake Bluff, Illinois.

“*Henderson designed it in a manner at once suggestive of the Prairie School and of European modernism, and then applied his engineering and manual skills to its construction with the assistance of engineer friends and local labor,*” writes David Bell in “William Penhallow Henderson: Master Colorist of Santa Fe,” the catalog for a 1984 exhibition of Henderson paintings at the Phoenix Art Museum.

Corbin was diagnosed as having tuberculosis in 1916. Her doctor recommended recovery at the Sunmount Sanatorium in Santa Fe and the family moved here later that year.

In 1917 Henderson's work was displayed at the Roullier Galleries in Chicago, and at the brand-new Museum of Fine Art in Santa Fe. The following year in San Francisco the artist did his part for the American effort in World War I, painting camouflage patterns on the hulls of ships for the U.S. Shipping Board Emergency Fleet.

Numerous exhibitions and other artistic involvements serve as testimony to Henderson's industry. Less than six months after the move to Santa Fe he created scenery and costumes for a production of “*The Children of Heaven*” at the Scottish Rite Temple.

"For all the small-scale cosmopolitanism of Santa Fe, it was not an easy place for an artist to make a living," according to Bell. "Henderson did, of course, have his gallery contacts in the East and Midwest, and continued to show there. But he was not inclined to cater to salesroom taste in art..."

Daphne Anderson Deeds, the other essayist in the 1984 catalog, writes that Henderson's absorption of the ideas of European artists, especially Cézanne and Gauguin, was evident in his treatment of the Indian dance motif. In the well-known Hopi Snake Dance he *"assigns only general facial characteristics, preferring to let the color patterns and the rhythm of the forms determine the psychology of the painting."*

Henderson's intense colors and his stylized composition relate to the canvases Gauguin famously painted in the South Pacific.

The philosophical interests of Henderson, Deeds says, included an allegiance to the principles elucidated by the Canadian writer Jay Hambridge in "The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry," and an interest in the system of thought espoused by the Armenian mystic philosopher G.I. Gurdjieff.

Henderson, known for his wide-brimmed hat and his storytelling ability, was a central figure in the art colony that took shape in Santa Fe in the 1920s and 1930s. The creative ferment was increased by other Chicago artists who came to New Mexico at his invitation. They included Gustave Baumann, B.J.O.

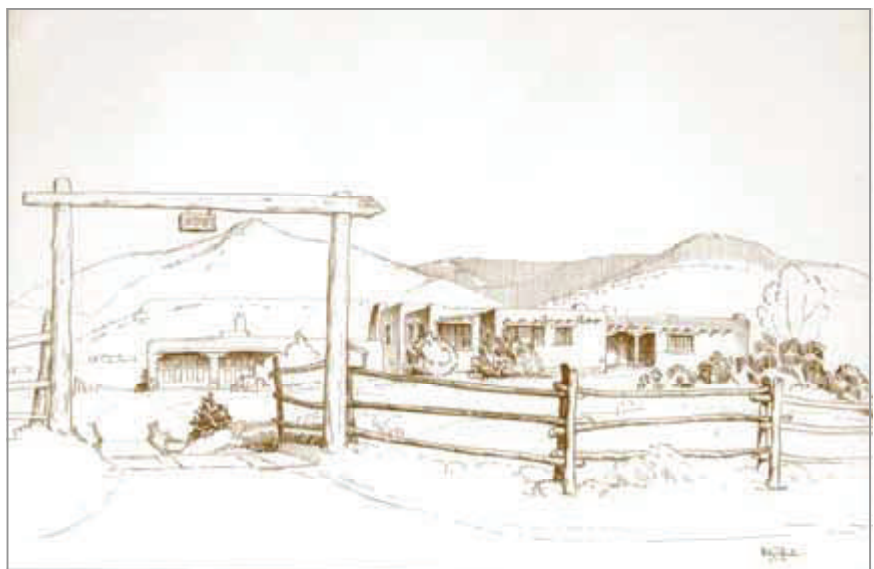
Nordfeldt, and Albert Schmidt.

Corbin likewise stimulated the local writing community, helping to found the Poets' Round-Up and bringing poets Carl Sandburg and Witter Bynner to Santa Fe, according to Oliver La Farge in "Santa Fe: The Autobiography of a Southwestern Town."

In the early 1920s the Hendersons became active in American Indian civil-rights issues. William exercised respect whenever he visited pueblo communities. Rather than using a camera to record dances, which would have violated visitor rules, he observed keenly so he could make sketches back in his studio.

"His appreciation of the dances was perhaps enhanced by his interest in Eastern philosophy, an inclination that was expressed also in the regular practice of yoga," Bell writes. *"Critics in Chicago and San Francisco found much to praise in Henderson's Indian subjects, citing a 'Japanese' sense of values, a 'masculine' use of pastel, and boldness and vigor of line."*

1939 sketch of Henderson House by Will Shuster.





Living Room Doors.
Photo © Steve Northup.

His portrait subjects also included local Hispanic people.

In 1925 Henderson completed construction of a residence and studio on Camino del Monte Sol. This and the home of painter Gerald Cassidy on Canyon Road were among the first dwellings built in what would become Santa Fe's art district, according to the book "Frank Applegate of Santa Fe."

In a 2003 history and architectural report for the Historic Santa Fe Foundation, Catherine Colby quoted from Beatrice Chauvenet's 1983 book "Hewett and Friends, a Biography of Santa Fe's Vibrant Era": "*The Hendersons chose a delightful spot for their home on the southeastern edge of town facing the old road that, as a branch of the Santa Fe Trail, had led to the corrals on Canyon road and was thus known to trail pioneers as the Corral Road. When the telephone line into town followed it the name was changed to Telephone Road.*"

The Hendersons, the first to settle there, wanted a more poetic name so Corbin reportedly persuaded the city council to name it El Camino del Monte Sol.

The Henderson house is a splendid, early (1925 or before) example of Spanish-Pueblo Revival style, also known as Santa Fe Style, architecture.

The style had its inception in the exhibit New-Old Santa Fe, which showed at the Palace of the Governors beginning in late 1912. That show was based on a survey (conducted by the Museum of New Mexico's Sylvanus Morley and Jesse Nusbaum) of early examples of residential adobe architecture in Santa Fe.

Their research led to the city's embrace of the synthetic Spanish-Pueblo Revival Style typified by a flat roof; mud-plastered, earth-tone exterior walls with rounded corners; and roof-support vigas poking through the front façade.

Many of the people in Santa Fe's art colony supported the revival style, in part because its antecedents were an important reason they came to the area in the first place. Besides the Hendersons they included Carlos Vierra, Gerald Cassidy, Mary Austin, Frank Applegate, and Sheldon Parsons, as well as the Cinco Pintores (Fremont Ellis, Josef Bakos, Walter Mruk, Willard Nash, and Will Shuster) who built their own homes on the

other side of Camino del Monte Sol from the Hendersons.

Henderson remodeled the house at 553 Canyon Road—just east of El Zaguán — for his daughter Alice and her husband John Evans. The house was purchased by Edwin Brooks in 1928 and by Fremont Ellis in 1963.

Henderson designed and built the Albert Schmidt house in Tesuque. On Garcia Street in Santa Fe he designed a compound, including a terraced garden and



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The front door of the Henderson House is hand-adzed with custom hand-made hardware. Photo © Steve Northup.



Above, Henderson's trademark floral rosettes details on the house's garage doors. This detail is also found on the interior column at Packards.

pool, for Elizabeth and Martha White. The property later became the School of American Research now School of Advanced Research.

In 1925 Henderson designed the Cheyenne Mountain House at Colorado Springs. In 1926-27 he remodeled the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe ticket office (now Packards on the Plaza) and in 1929 performed remodel work in Sena Plaza.

In July 1926 the Hendersons were inaugural members of the Old Santa Fe Association. Theirs were among the 58 names on a letter to the Santa Fe City Council protesting the plans by a group of Texas women to build a cultural colony, a Chautauqua, in the foothills.

The Hendersons' devotion to the culture of New Mexico also shows up in published works including "Red Earth, Poems of New Mexico" (1920) and "The

Turquoise Trail, an Anthology of New Mexico Poetry" (1928).

William P. Henderson gained exposure as an architect and furniture designer and builder through the business he developed with his son-in-law, John Evans (the only son of Mabel Dodge Luhan). Evans, Edwin Brooks, and Henderson began the Pueblo-Spanish Building Company in 1925.

Henderson soon began to design and produce handmade furniture, reportedly in response to his wife's request for a new dining-room set. All his pieces were of hand-adzed ponderosa pine, and Henderson himself often did the carving.

A wonderful example is the eight-foot table on display at Owings-Dewey Fine Art in Santa Fe. The table is of the trestle-type with heavy connecting pieces, the lower one thickly rope-carved. Two tall-backed captain's chairs



Carved beams and posts in the Kiva. Opposite, radiator covers with carved spindles. Photos© Steve Northup.





Dining Room. Photo © Steve Northup.

and eight side chairs bear carved decorations—Henderson's characteristic floral rosettes as well as zigzags, and triangles—arranged in a modernist style.

"His work is kind of unique in the furniture world and there's comparatively little of it because it was all done by him; he just had one assistant," said the gallery's Nat Owings.

Owings' family's association with the Hendersons goes back to 1921, when his mother, Emily Otis Barnes, first met Alice Oliver Henderson. He has represented the Henderson estate since 1986 and has sold hundreds of

furniture pieces by Henderson.

He called the table and chairs *"a classic example of his work right after Frank Lloyd Wright. He was obsessed with Wright's stuff."*

Henderson painted murals (demolished in 1929) for Wright's 1914 Midway Gardens project in Chicago.

The table and chairs, like all Henderson's furniture, are richly colored and shining. *"He had a formula that he used to seal it and give it that distinctive brown color,"* Owings said. *"The reason I know about the formula is that Alice gave it to me."*

In the late 1920s the Pueblo-Spanish Building Company thrived, supplying furniture and cabinetwork to clients in Boston, New York, Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, and Colorado.

Then came the stock-market crash of 1929. Evans, who lost most of his personal investments in the crash, declared bankruptcy. That, together with diminishing orders because people could not afford custom-made furnishings, closed the Pueblo-Spanish Building Company.

The Henderson house and studio on the Camino boast a wealth of hand-crafted details. The house's lintels and other wood features have a rustic, hand-worked quality and the living-room ceiling is the original shiny, adzed beams and boards. The wood garage doors at the house are highly decorative, bearing the builder's trademark floral motif at the center of each of the six, hand-finished panel doors.

The carved window and radiator grilles of spindles with carved rosettes are architectural details in evidence here, as they are at Casa Sena, the Edwin Brooks house, and other buildings built or remodeled by Henderson.

Colby's architectural report notes that the house exhibits a strongly horizontal composition. Henderson accentuated the feeling with horizontal groupings of casement windows, lintels that extended beyond the window openings, and a row of projecting viga-ends all along the front elevation.

The Northup family, which protected the house by means of a

historic-preservation easement with the Historic Santa Fe Foundation in October 2005, took good care of the building during their long 50-year ownership.

The new owner, Christopher Hill, is now doing restoration work. Among the items to be addressed are: re-roofing, bringing the electrical and plumbing up to code, repairing rotted wood on some exterior features, and restoring Henderson's flooring, entry flagstone, tile bathrooms, and garage.

A side sunroom added by the Northups will be replaced with a sitting room. Hill will invigorate the house's legacy by hanging paintings by Henderson, and he has found Corbin's bed and a red-leather couch with Henderson-carved rosettes on wood aprons at the front and sides.

It is certain that the Hendersons were living in the house at least between 1925 and 1938, according to the Colby report. After that time their address was listed at 557 Camino del Monte Sol, the studio just south of the main house, which once was the headquarters of the Henderson construction company. There he employed local masons, plasterers, woodcarvers and carpenters.

The old, adobe studio is home to Andy Mauldin, the Henderson's great-grandchild.

"*This is a really, really unique building and it has survived because it has been in my family and no one's been able to 'improve' it,*" said Mauldin, son of the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist Bill Mauldin and Natalie Evans, daughter of Alice Oliver Henderson and John Evans.



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The Henderson house and studio on the Camino boast a wealth of hand-crafted details. The house's lintels and other wood features have a rustic, hand-worked quality and the living-room ceiling is the original shiny, adzed beams and boards. Right, Henderson House Living Room. Far right, east portal. Photos © Steve Northup.



The carved window and radiator grilles of spindles with carved rosettes are architectural details in evidence here, as they are at Casa Sena, the Edwin Brooks house, and other buildings built or remodeled by Henderson.

In the studio, Mauldin pointed out that the kitchen was Henderson's drafting room and once had drafting tables under the south-facing windows. Mauldin's bedroom is the old workshop. The main room in the building was the studio.

"Some work was done to make it a livable compound—for example the fireplace in the workshop, which is useless because it doesn't get enough draft," he said.

"The William Penhallow Henderson fireplace in the studio, by contrast, is a great fireplace," Mauldin continued. "He had built a real nice house in Illinois. He didn't just come in here and start doing this [willy nilly]. I also wonder how much work he did and how many local people he used and probably on something like a fireplace he used someone with lots of experience."

The studio has a great, 16-foot-long storage cabinet extending all along the north side under a line of windows. Near one corner is a curious little door, quite high but only five inches wide. That was added later to provide an exit for the Works Project Administration landscapes Henderson painted for Santa Fe's Federal Court House, where they were installed in 1938.

Against one wall of the studio is a Taos bed, a combination bed-sofa Mauldin said was originated by Henderson. Carved on the backboard of the piece are five floral motifs. As in all Henderson's furnishings, the bed is solid and of pleasing proportions.

"He had a really great eye," Mauldin said.

During the last phase of his career, writes Daphne Anderson Deeds, Henderson in many ways had become *"the quintessential*



modernist, living, painting, and studying a Zen-like reality which unites all realities in a vision of empathy and personal meaning."

His art and that of B.J.O. Nordfeldt, Andrew Dasburg, Ernest Blumenschein and a few other New Mexico painters was informed by European modernism at a time when it was not particularly popular.

"*American scene painting dominated the art world,*" according to Deeds. Still in the 1930s a post-World War I attitude of isolationism "*called for the imagery of Americana and imposed the old fear of imported modernism.*"

In the mid-1930s Henderson collaborated with Mary Cabot Wheelwright and Navajo medicine man Hosteen Klah on the design of the House of Navajo Religion in Santa Fe. The hogan-inspired structure, which

opened in 1937, brought Henderson honorable mention from the Architectural League of New York the following year. It is now known as the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian.

In 1937 Henderson made black-and-white plates for Corbin's last published book, the classic "Brothers of Light: The Penitentes of the Southwest." "*Countless other projects kept him continuously active and given to working late at night,*" Bell writes. "*He is nevertheless remembered as always having time for friends and community, even for stray animals.*"

Henderson died in 1943 and Corbin in 1949.

Henderson's excellent reputation as a builder and artist is unquestioned. One notable tribute came in June 1967, when Jean Seth opened her seminal art



Photo by Will Connell. Wheelwright Museum of University of NM

Photograph of Alice Corbin Henderson on back portal in 1932.



Top, the Henderson house before construction of the apartment at the lower level. Detail of Photograph Courtesy Museum of New Mexico (Neg. No. 13343.) In the recent photo below, the protruding viga ends on the south end have been cut. Photo © Steve Northup.



gallery on Canyon Road and featured Henderson's paintings in the opening show.

"Henderson was just a very complex, very interesting guy who loved the Southwest and was able to take designs that came from elsewhere and integrate them into the Southwest and have them work," Owings said.

"His work was distinctive primarily because he brought two talents to the stage: he was

trained as an architect and he also was a painter. He also availed himself of the opportunity to study with Tarbell and to work with Frank Lloyd Wright so he brings to painting and furniture-making and design a rather broad breadth of knowledge and experience and training. To me you combine that with fundamental talent and a wonderful eye and you get the incredibly varied work by Henderson."



*Kiva Entrance.
Photo © Steve Northup.*

SOURCES

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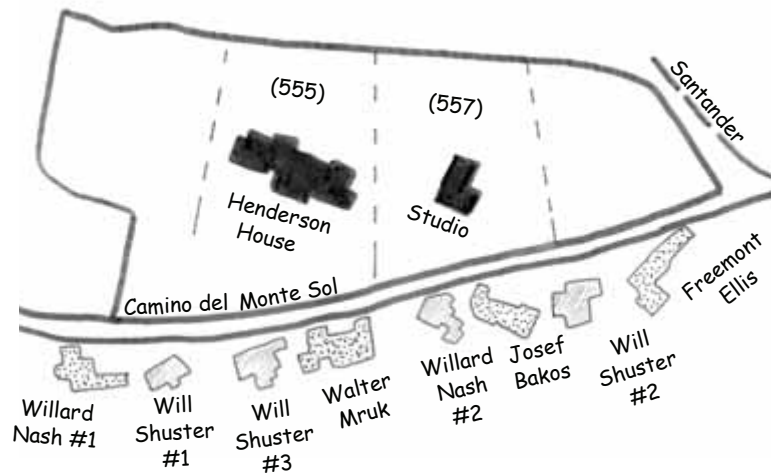


Diagram of Henderson property in relation to houses of the “Cinco Pintores” on Camino del Monte Sol. Note that Nash lived in two separate houses, and Shuster lived in three. Diagram based on Colby drawing © HSFF.

NORTHUP DONATED FOUNDATION'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE EASEMENT



The historic-preservation easement assures that "*the architectural, historic, and cultural features of the building will be retained and maintained forever substantially in their current condition,*" according to the deed.

In October 2005 the Historic Santa Fe Foundation administered its most comprehensive historic-preservation easement.

Steve Northup donated the easement on his Camino del Monte Sol property, a home built in the 1920s by artist William Penhallow Henderson and his wife, poet Alice Corbin Henderson.

The property at 555 Camino del Monte Sol was purchased in 1953 by Steve's parents Duane and Helen Northup and the family lived there for half a century before its recent sale to Christopher Hill.

During their stewardship the Northups preserved the major attributes of the building and property. Some of the roof vigas designed by Henderson to project through the façade were cut off and covered; this was likely prompted by deterioration of the wood after several decades.

Another change to the exterior was the addition of a sunroom in

1988. The sunroom, a John Midyette design, is one exception in the easement deed's restriction on alterations to the property's existing buildings. The current owner plans to remove its glass walls and convert the space into a sitting room more in architectural harmony with the rest of the house.

The only other exception is an allowance for a master-suite addition at the rear of the property.

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The easement preserves character-defining features in three categories: setting, exterior, and interior. They include maintaining the absence of buildings between house and street; and preserving ceiling beams, windows and doors, wood radiator covers, and decorative hardware.

PROPERTIES UNDER HSFF EASEMENTS

Juan José Prada House, 519 Canyon Road

The Original Trading Post, 201 West San Francisco

Irene von Horvath House, 728 Canyon Road

Sara Melton House, 601½ Paseo de Peralta

Shuster Mian House, 580 Camino del Monte Sol

William Penhallow Henderson House, 555 Camino del Monte Sol

The HSFF easement program is an effective strategy for safeguarding Santa Fe's historic buildings and by extension the cultural fabric of the city. The Foundation is doing its part to protect historic downtown Santa Fe, which recently was named one of the state's most endangered places by the New Mexico Heritage Preservation Alliance.

PRESERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM EXPANDS THE FOUNDATION'S SCOPE OF PROTECTION

The Historic Santa Fe Foundation works to preserve significant buildings in the city. The 46-year-old organization owns eight properties and protects others via a mechanism known as the historic-preservation easement.

Both strategies are akin to those employed by The Nature Conservancy, a national group that purchases properties and is a pioneer in the use of the conservation easement.

In New Mexico the State Legislature approved the Cultural Properties Preservation Easement Act in 1995. The law allows a private landowner to give the historic aspect of real estate or other property to a nonprofit organization to hold and maintain, while still keeping the right to use the other aspects of the property, including the right of sale.

The preservation easements administered by the Historic Santa Fe Foundation usually specify that no actions will be taken by current or future owners of an historic property that will harm or destroy that property's significant historic, architectural or open-space features.

How did the HSFF program come about? *"I wasn't here yet but I'm sure it's because we're limited in how many properties we can purchase,"* said the Foundation's executive director, Elaine Bergman. *"It's a palatable way to spread our scope of protection without the*

liability of ownership. It gives us the right to protect a property, which is our mission."

The Foundation has preservation easements on six buildings. Interestingly, the last is the first.

"I was going through the file on the Juan José Prada house next door and there was a deed restriction that was effective in 1962 and it's essentially an easement," Bergman explained. *"So that house is now listed with our preservation easements because it grants us the same rights as our other easements. In the case of the Prada house that means design compatibility with the existing structure, restricted signage, and restricted use. It doesn't cover anything on the interior."*

The flexibility of the historic-preservation easement program is a plus. Easements can be tailored to meet the financial and management needs of the property owner as well as the preservation goals of the Historic Santa Fe Foundation.

Bergman gave as an example the Shuster Mian house, on which the HSFF easement relates only to three doors and the streetscape.

"The owner thought those doors were worthy of protection," she said. *"We've all seen components of buildings end up on EBay: a Tiffany feature or a Frank Lloyd Wright fixture. There are some really fine paintings by Will Shuster—one a baby Buddha and the other a madonna—on two of*

those doors. Other than those doors the owner felt that there wasn't a lot that could happen that would compromise the house."

"On the Henderson house (the Foundation's most recent easement) there are all kinds of things: radiator covers, cabinetry, the adzed beams, and that signature flower carving on the woodwork."

Once enacted, the enforcement and annual monitoring of an easement is the responsibility of the Foundation. Easement donors are typically asked to contribute to an Easement Stewardship Fund to cover monitoring and enforcement expenses.

Regarding possible tax credits for homeowners donating easements, Bergman says that's between the homeowner, the IRS, and the state. *"There are definitely some state and federal incentives for doing the right thing,"* she said.

On any registered historic property regardless of easement status the New Mexico's tax-credit program gives a 50 percent credit on qualified expenditures, up to \$25,000 credit cap per project, according to Robyn Powell of the Tax Programs office of the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division.

Powell said the federal program is a 20 percent credit, but only income-producing portions of the property would qualify, and then expenditures would need to meet a "substantial rehabilitation" clause.



The mission of the Historic Santa Fe Foundation is to own, preserve and protect historic properties and resources of Santa Fe and environs and to provide historic preservation education.

The key goal of our mission is to protect Santa Fe's historic resources. We've identified a number of ways to "protect" what we all love about historic Santa Fe. We are stewards to the eight properties that we own and our preservation easement program has proven to be another very effective tool. We currently hold six preservation easements which has substantially allowed us to expand our scope of protection. These are properties that we certainly couldn't afford to acquire.

We hope this issue of the Bulletin will enlighten you to the resourceful ways we are fulfilling our mission. Inside, you will become acquainted with the Henderson House on Camino del Monte Sol and how we have been entrusted to preserve it for future generations through a historic preservation easement.

BULLETIN

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