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## Three N.M. women honored with new historic markers

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Bekah Kuhl walks her dog, Gatsby, past the official scenic historical marker for Dorothy Scarritt McKibbin on Alameda Street. McKibbin, Myra Ellen Jenkins and Doña Teresa de Aguilera y Roche were honored with them on Monday.

Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

Dorothy McKibbin was a positive person. And there were times when it wasn't always easy.

"I rarely remember her saying anything negative," McKibbin's friend Mary Brennan recalled.

McKibbin, known as the “gatekeeper to Los Alamos” for her work in Santa Fe during the Manhattan Project, is one of three women to be commemorated by the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program.

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The International Women’s Forum of New Mexico and the city of Santa Fe held a ribbon-cutting Monday morning for markers honoring McKibbin, Myra Ellen Jenkins and Doña Teresa de Aguilera y Roche.

Approved by the City Council in April and installed last week, the markers join existing markers on East Alameda Street that recognize Mother Magdalen Hayden and the Sisters of Loretto.



Cyndi Conn, with the International Women's Forum, New Mexico chapter, walks past the marker for Mother Magdalen Hayden and the Sisters of Loretto on Alameda Street.

Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

Mayor Alan Webber praised the work of the International Women's Forum during the event, which began at the state Supreme Court's Law Library.

"History is only useful if you study and learn from it," he said, noting the city's own recent efforts to find locations for statues of Pueblo runners and Don Diego de Vargas.

McKibbin, who died in 1985, was in charge of the Manhattan Project's Santa Fe office at 109 East Palace Avenue, where she was responsible for welcoming incoming scientists before they made their way to the secret city where the world's first atomic bomb was being devised during World War II. She continued in that role until her retirement in 1963.

"She was a role model to all of us," Brennan said.

Aguilera y Roche was the wife of Bernardo López de Mendizábal, who became governor of New Mexico in 1659 when it was a territory of the Spanish crown.





Consuelo Archuleta, administrative assistant for the Law Library at the New Mexico Supreme Court, works on hanging a photo exhibit for the dedication of the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program.

Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

Early colonial New Mexico was “by design, a man’s world,” said Matt Saionz, a historian in the state Department of Cultural Affairs’ Historic Preservation Division.

López de Mendizábal clashed with the powerful Franciscan priests over their use of unpaid Native American labor, which was an inciting point of the Pueblo Revolt several decades later. In 1662, both husband and wife were summoned before the Inquisition and taken to Mexico City. One of the main charges against Aguilera y Roche alleged that she practiced Judaism. Saionz said her accusers pointed to her reading books in foreign languages as evidence.

“An educated women who could read was an easy target” for her husband’s enemies, Saionz said.

Aguilera y Roche’s husband died in prison but she defended herself forcefully before the Inquisition and in 1664 the charges against her were suspended due to a lack of evidence. Her husband was later exonerated posthumously.

Jenkins was the state's first historian and helped develop New Mexico's modern historic preservation movement. She began her work as an archivist, and among the documents she helped preserve were the journals of Don Diego de Vargas, which had been water-damaged after being improperly stored at the Palace of the Governors.

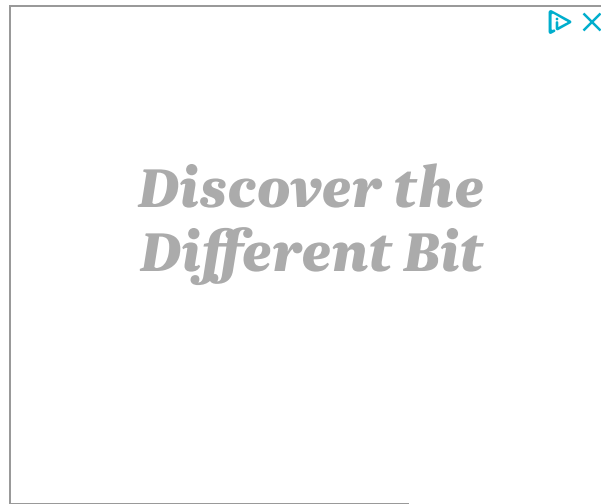


Consuelo Archuleta, left, administrative assistant for the Supreme Court Law Library, and Stephanie Wilson, state law librarian, work on hanging a photo exhibit for the dedication of the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program.

Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

Audra Bellmore, a history professor at the University of New Mexico and secretary at the Cultural Properties Review Committee, said Jenkins' work is still widely used by historians, including by herself.

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“I come across them all the time,” Bellmore said of Jenkins’ publications.

Jenkins also served as a public historian and was often called upon to serve as an expert witness in pueblo land and water disputes, Bellmore said. She said Jenkins, who died in 1993, would be honored to be recognized in this way.

“That would be her cup of tea, I think, to be on a marker,” Bellmore said. “Because that is public history.”

The historic marker program was created in 2006 to correct what a group of women saw as an imbalance in New Mexico’s public history. It is overseen by the state Department of Cultural Affairs and the governor-appointed Cultural Properties Review Committee.

There are more than 100 markers statewide, including 18 in Santa Fe County with the installation of the latest three. A marker also was installed earlier this year in front of the Bataan Memorial Building honoring Soledad Chávez Chacón.

Elected Secretary of State in 1922, not long after women obtained the right to vote, Chávez Chacón became the nation’s first Hispanic woman to hold statewide office. She briefly served as acting governor in 1925 when Gov. James Hinkle was attending the Democratic National Convention in New York following the unexpected death of his lieutenant governor.

The next marker is slated to go up in September at Expo New Mexico in Albuquerque and will honor Debbie “La Chicanita” Martinez, an acclaimed singer who went back to school and became an immigrants rights lawyer after losing her hearing at a young age. Martinez, who died in 2007 from complications due to cancer, is the sister of current state historian Rob Martinez.



Along with getting markers installed, program manager Kris Pettersen said the International Women's Forum has created a curriculum about the women, which the group hopes to expand into more schools. It also gives talks to a variety of community organizations and collaborated with the state library to create a lending library of posters about the women.

Though focused on key women in the state's long history, Pettersen said the goal of the program is forward-facing as well.

"We celebrate women past, present and future," she said. "The goal is to get people really understanding what these amazing women did, and get inspired and make their own legacy."



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