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February 13th, 2021

1:00 - 3:00 P.M.

Virtual 2nd Saturday:

The Unique Legacy of Abraham Lincoln in New Mexico

**Event Order**

**Event:** Virtual 2nd Saturday **Event Type:** Virtual2nd Saturday

**Date:** Saturday, 2/13/2021 **Time:** 1:00 - 3:00 P.M.

**Contacts:** Christopher Schurtz, Dwight Pitcaithley **Email:** [cschurtz@zianet.com](mailto:cschurtz@zianet.com), [dwightp@nmsu.edu](mailto:dwightp@nmsu.edu)

**Site Manager:** Aaron Gardner                        **Guests:** Public

**Phone / Email:** [agardner@cabq.gov](mailto:agardner@cabq.gov)               **Rental:** No

**Zoom Link:** [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81701563702](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81701563702&sa=D&source=calendar&usd=2&usg=AOvVaw3SuJdcdVfQ2_FNKyj2uwnq)



**Event Summary**

Abraham Lincoln spoke very little about the far western territory of New Mexico. Yet during his presidency, two different wars were fought here and the territory’s landmass was divided in half. Lincoln signed into law legislation that would eventually aid in the settlement and development of New Mexico. New Mexico has a county, town, range of mountains and national forest named in his honor.

Join us Saturday February 13th, as New Mexico Historian Christopher Schurtz, and NMSU Professor Dr. Dwight Pitcaithley describe Lincoln’s connection to the New Mexico Territory.

**Schedule**

1:00 Sign on

1:05 Christopher Schurtz - Lincoln and New Mexico

1:35 Dwight Pitcaithley - The Civil War and secession in New Mexico

2:15 Q & A

**The Unique Legacy of Abraham Lincoln in New Mexico**

Christopher Schurtz, M.A.

Few American presidents had more of a singular impact on New Mexico than Abraham Lincoln. His impressions of New Mexico as a place are unclear, if he indeed had any. As one of the most well documented presidents in history, Lincoln left behind only a few sparse mentions of New Mexico, and that was within the ongoing debate about extending slavery into the western territories once they became states, which he firmly opposed. In short, he spoke or wrote very little about what was to many in Washington just a vast, sparsely populated, far western territory. Yet during his presidency, two different wars were fought on its soil, and the territory lost half of its landmass. Lincoln signed into law legislation that years after his death would aid the settlement and development of New Mexico. He has a county, a town, a range of mountains and a national forest named in his honor. And New Mexico’s Pueblo tribes still make use of ceremonial canes he presented them a century and a half ago. No other U.S. president can claim such a lasting and unique legacy in New Mexico.

The event that so defined Lincoln’s presidency, the Civil War, also played out in New Mexico, the furthest west the war ever got. Between July 1861 and March 1862, there were two major battles fought in central and northern New Mexico, a shameful surrender of Union troops near Las Cruces, and a dozen skirmishes between approximately 3,500 Confederates and 5,000 Union soldiers. Confederate forces mostly dominated the battlefield, but ultimately lack of supplies and support led to their retreat entirely from the territory by May 1862.1 In the months before war began, the New Mexico Territory was a pawn in a last-ditch Congressional chess game to avert war.2 New Mexico was an important part of a compromise proposal to avert the secession of the South. Known as the Crittenden Compromise, after Kentucky senator John J. Crittenden, it would have allowed territories south of the Missouri Compromise line, including all of New Mexico, to become a slave state if they so chose.

In a letter dated 1 February 1861 to his future Secretary of State William H. Seward, Lincoln wrote: “I say now, however, as I have all the while said, that on the territorial question–that is, the question of extending slavery under the national auspices, – I am inflexible. I am for no compromise which assists or permits the extension of the institution on soil owned by the nation. And any trick by which the nation is to acquire territory, and then allow some local authority to spread slavery over it, is as obnoxious as any other.”5 The compromise was roundly defeated in Congress, but by April, with the secession of the rest of the southern states, the time for compromise had passed.

New Mexico Territorial Governor Henry Connelly, a Lincoln appointee, urged New Mexicans to resist, saying in a proclamation published September 1861 in English and Spanish that the South’s “…long smothered vengeance against our Territory and people, they now seek to gratify…You cannot, you must not, hesitate to take up arms in defense of your homes, firesides, and families.”

**Canes of Power**

“Treaties of the 1860’s may be long forgotten, but the Canes presented to each of the 19 Pueblos by President Abraham Lincoln remain. Each is revered by the Pueblo people as a promise of continued sovereignty; each Cane remains a living reminder of Pueblo authority.”

[http://silverbulletproductions.com/documentary-films/canes-of-power/](https://hes32-ctp.trendmicro.com:443/wis/clicktime/v1/query?url=http%3a%2f%2fsilverbulletproductions.com%2fdocumentary%2dfilms%2fcanes%2dof%2dpower%2f&umid=e18553e7-a267-498a-8c46-64259f95aae0&auth=c5e193b2792d33bbda0d14ee5f909adbb398f028-602abcaad9583ced5121441d365538be0f1f7531)

**Christopher Schurtz**

Christopher Schurtz is a New Mexico historian who focuses on the history of Las Cruces and the Mesilla Valley. A former reporter for the *Las Cruces Sun-News*, Schurtz has a master’s degree in history from NMSU and is the author of the book *Historic Las Cruces*.

In 2009, Schurtz worked with the Branigan Cultural Center in Las Cruces to develop an exhibit examining Abraham Lincoln’s impact on New Mexico in support of a travelling exhibit on Lincoln produced by the Smithsonian. His article “The Unique Legacy of Abraham Lincoln” was published in the 2010 edition of the *Southern New Mexico Historical Journal*. In addition, Schurtz has served as a historical consultant and researcher for several local museums, and has taught courses in U.S. history, public history, and military history at New Mexico State University and El Paso Community College.

**Dwight Pitcaithley**

Dwight T. Pitcaithley is a college professor of history at New Mexico State University.  He retired from the National Park Service in June 2005 after serving as Chief Historian for ten years.  During his thirty-year career with the NPS, he served in Santa Fe, Boston, and Washington, DC where he focused on issues relating to historic preservation and the interpretation of historic sites.  He is the author of The U.S. Constitution and Secession: A Documentary Anthology of Slavery and White Supremacy (2018) and Tennessee Secedes: A Documentary History (forthcoming from the University of Tennessee Press.)

**Zoom Link**

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