**Archaeology & History in Your Backyard**

**Ernie Pyle Visits Pop Shaffer**

Hello Everyone! This is Archaeology and History in Your Backyard and my name is Dixie. X 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience with little known people, places and events that took place in the past, right here in your own backyard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas in central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate, and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting our past.

Our show today will focus on an article written by Ernie Pyle after visiting Mountainair and Pop Shaffer.

This program was written by Ernie Pyle and produced by Bill Simms. Thank you for joining us today.

In 1942, Ernie Pyle, the famous World War II journalist from Albuquerque, wrote a series of stories about the Shaffer Hotel, Pop’s wooden animals and his enduring hobby—Rancho Bonito. These are said to be some of Pyle’s last articles before leaving for the war front.

Pyle wrote, “Mountainair, NM April 13, 1942. So many people for so many years have been pestering me to come up here and see Pop Shaffer that I finally got sick of the pestering and here I am.

Pop Shaffer is many thing—hotel-keeper, rancher, blacksmith, playboy, contractor, jokester—but the main thing about Pop Shaffer is his animal art. As far as I know, there’s no one in the world who does the kind of stuff he does. He simply goes into the woods with a keen eye, spots a snarled treetop or twisted bunch of roots, takes it home and saws off certain limbs, and you have a perfect image of a lion or a cow or a frog or whatever you want.

Pop started it only four years ago, but in that short time has finished 300 pieces and has about 700 more standing around the grounds waiting to be worked on. He is 62 now, and before he dies he wants to finish 1,000 pieces.

The thing is completely a hobby for Pop Shaffer. He could commercialize—and might some day—but hasn’t so far. He has never sold a one of his pieces, and has given only two away. They went to President and Mrs. Roosevelt.

Pop’s preposterous twisted animals range in size from a little dog you could hold in your hand, clear up to dinosaurs 40 feet long. He makes very little alteration in the stuff as it comes from the woods. As he says, it is done 95 per cent by nature.

The trick is being able to visualize a laughing mule in a gnarled treetop. Pop has tried to get other people to help him, but nobody else can do it. It’s just a crazy gift.

Thousands of tourists have come to see Pop’s animal collection, but his work has been displayed only twice outside of the ranch here: once last fall in Washington during art week, and the other time was in Block’s Store in Indianapolis.

When Pop arrived in New Mexico this little town was just opening up. Pop Shaffer homesteaded, he blacksmithed, he ran a hardware store, he contracted, and in 1923 he built a hotel. He still has the first two dollars he took in—silver dollars tacked up on the wall.

His hotel was successful—with government men swarming the country like flies—that he has tot urn people away every night. Or rather Ma Shaffer turns them away, for Pop retired while the retiring was good.

Shaffer still enjoys having fun and maybe cannot help himself. He likes to put on a fling-ding every once in awhile. He’ll go to Albuquerque and register at one hotel and wake up the next morning at a different one. He’ll go out to Hollywood and do the night clubs, and have his picture taken with the cuties, then buy the picture and bring it home.

He went to Washington last year and met Mrs. Roosevelt twice, and thinks she’s wonderful.

Pop cusses and smokes cigars ands till uses Hoosier expressions and throws matches on his own hotel floor.

Pop is sentimental about soldiers. He says they are saving us all from perdition, and we can’t do much for them. He’ll go to Albuquerque or Los Angeles start rounding up soldiers on the street and before the night is over will have spent $200 on them.

Pop’s Rancho Bonito would be a sight even if there weren’t any animals on it. There are many buildings, including a crazy house for his tenants, a showroom for his smaller pieces of animal art, a barn and chicken house.

Most of the ranch buildings are of stone, and every one is inlaid with rock pictures of everything from Uncle Sam to a cross-eyed owl. And the whole ranch is wildly colored, like a carnival.

Pop has a kind of patriotic complex which runs to red, white and blue. The front of the barn is three colors, and his showroom windows are alternate red, white and blue.

Pop loves to fish; loves it so much he has built a lake at the ranch. It isn’t much bigger than a barn, yet Pop has a rowboat and rows out in the middle of it and fishes.

He doesn’t depend on nature for fish worms either. For this arid land dries up so hard in the summer you couldn’t find an earthworm with a witching stick. So in the barn Pop has five washtubs of moistened earth and this earth is alive with fish worms.

Pop hasn’t confined his artistic talents solely to the ranch. In town, alongside the hotel, there is a garden. In 1931, Pop built an elaborate concrete fence along the front of this garden, all inlaid with rock pictures. Like his animals, it can’t be described. But you can find in that fencer practically everything in the Western Hemisphere or the Sears Roebuck catalog.

In the center panel of the fence there is worked out in dark rock this inscription—“Built by Pop Shaffer in 1931.”

It seems there have been many people interested in Pop Shaffer and his artistic talents over the years and this article by Ernie Pyle shows how many people throughout the country really felt about him.

This has been Archaeology and History in Your Backyard, a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through November. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to Archaeology and History in Your Backyard Tuesday at 7 PM, Thursday at 12:15 PM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening!

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