

# Chamber names Cox family for cowboy honor

## Ranchers recognized during Western Bank's celebration

By MARVIN TESSNEER  
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The Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce is celebrating Western Bank's National Day of the American Cowboy Saturday, July 25, by recognizing the pioneer W.W. Cox ranch family of the Organ Mountains.

The chamber held its first American Cowboy event last year, honoring Frank DuBois, former New Mexico Department of Agriculture director, state secretary of agriculture and founder of the DuBois Rodeo Scholarship at New Mexico State University.

The narration on the Cox family has been compiled by agriculture committee member Steve Wilmeth, who interviewed members of the Cox family and researched historical documents.

W.W. Cox arrived at San Augustine in the Organ Mountains in 1888 looking for rangeland for his sheep.

W.W. Cox was originally from Dewitt, Texas, inland from the Gulf of Mexico. Disputes caused by cat-d-rusting and lingering Civil War animosity developed into a feud.

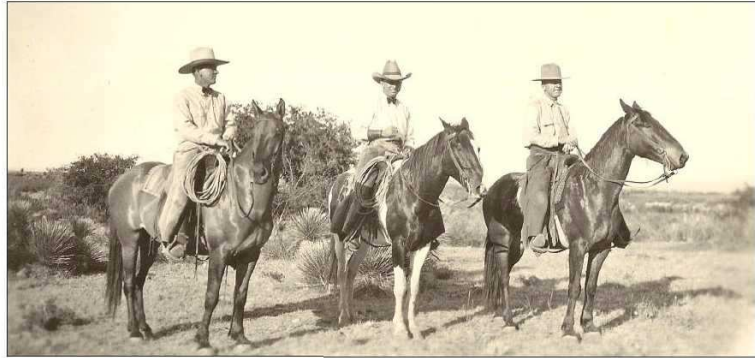
One of the victims was James W. Cox, W.W. Cox's father, who was killed in an ambush. W.W. Cox vowed he would get even, but had to leave Texas "in a hurry," according to the narrative.

W.W. Cox eventually went into the beef business and increased his grazing holdings to 150,000 acres. He and his wife, the former Margaret Rhode, had 10 children, including Hal, Jim and A.B., who became ranchers.

W.W. Cox died in 1923. The ranch operated as an estate until 1926, when the brothers and Eckert Stablein brought the ranch from the other heirs. They ran it until 1936, when Hal took the northern portion, Jim bought out Stablein and A.B. used his money to buy an Otero Mesa ranch, according to the narration.

Sara Cox Hopkins, a granddaughter of W.W. Cox and daughter of A.B. Cox, said she believes people who are tied to the land are part of what has made this a great country.

She and her husband, Dale, graze 100 head of cattle on about 36 sections of land on the west side and northern end of the



The Cox brothers, from left, A.B., Hal and Jim, are mounted and ready to work cattle on their range east of the Organ Mountains. They took the time to put on ties for this formal photograph taken in 1920.

Organ Mountains.

Her father, A.B. Cox, was born in the first Cox home, a family complex on the east side of the Organ Mountains surrounded by a 3-foot adobe wall. At first, access was by ladder.

According to historical accounts, W.W. Cox first raised sheep.

"I was shocked when I heard this," Sara Cox Hopkins said. "None of us ever had sheep."

Sara Cox Hopkins grew up as a cowgirl on her father's ranch on the Otero Mesa close to Dell City, Texas.

"I kept riding until a horse fell on me and warped me some," she said.

"People who have agricultural roots, who are connected with the land, give us strong patriotic spirit," she continued. "The Coxes have been here for about 120 years. They made something out of nothing. A lot of the Coxes are still cowboys and ranchers. And a lot of the boys and one girl served

in the Army and Navy during World War II."

Sara Cox Hopkins also has gained fame with her Organ Mountain paintings, and many are displayed in area homes.

She still is a cowgirl at heart. She and her husband are inoculating cows to stop a disease that has been causing calf abortions.

After the war, A.B. Cox returned to Dona Ana County and put together the east Organ Mountains ranch that is now being run by Sara and Dale Hopkins. World War II brought an end to the W.W. Cox cattle spread. By 1942, the Department of Defense had established the Alamogordo, N.M., aircraft bombing range in the Tularosa Basin east of the Cox cattle ranch.

Now, most of that ranch country is the White Sands Missile Range.

When the Manhattan Project's Los Alamos National Laboratory decided to build and test the atomic bomb, it was instructed

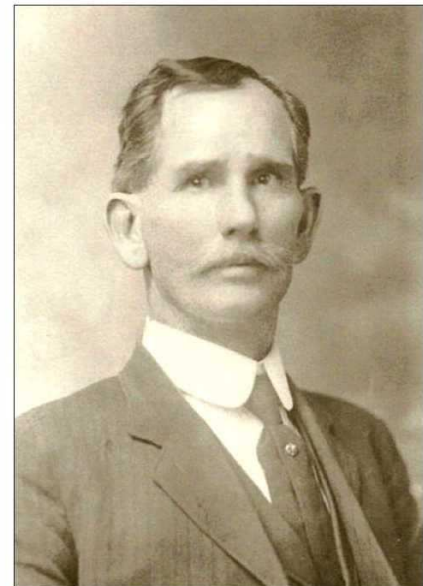
to find an area with few inhabitants, mostly clear skies, no railways or major highways and no major aircraft routes – the Tularosa Basin.

After a United States condemnation suit in 1945, Hal and Jim Cox lost 90 percent of their ranching operations.

The bomb was assembled at the former McDonald home and was detonated on July 16, 1945 at Trinity Site.

Rob Cox, one of Jim Cox's son, had served with the 8th Armored Division in WWII, was one of the last Coxes to live at the old W.W. Cox home site. After the war he had ranched near Winston, N.M., but he had acquired the old Cox home in 1970 where he lived until his death last year.

The celebration will be held from 10 a.m. to noon at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum and will feature a Cox family slide show along with the narration about the family ranch history.



Rancher W.W. Cox is a local American cowboy legend.