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COVER—Santa Fe ski instructor Carol Dailey, U.S.
white-water slalom kayaking champion from 1957-
61, caught this shot of Los Alamos High School teen-
ager Richard Kandarian on the Rio Grande below
Pilar.

From Your Editors



FRED HARMAN



JOHN MEIGS

For a quarter of a century, **Fred Harman** was known
worldwide for his comic strip **Red Ryder and Little
Beaver**. Out of this grew a continuing radio show,
thirty-eight movies, years of personal appearances
at rodeos, fairs and parades and visits with GIs at
World War II and Korean War battle areas. A decade
ago, Harman put Red Ryder and Little Beaver out to
pasture in favor of his major love, the painting of
cowboys, Indians and the Colorado and New Mexico
vistas he has known since a young man. Last fall,
his first book, **The Great West in Paintings**, was pub-
lished by Swallow Press, Chicago.

John Meigs is one of those fortunate artists who
lives where he wants to, paints what he loves and,
like most involved people, has too many irons in
the fire. His work hangs in many museums and
private collections. At present, Meigs is working
on a book of Peter Hurd's watercolor sketches for
fall publication and a book on American prints of
the 1930s. His other love, historical restoration, is
served by work on the conversion of the Amador
Hotel in Las Cruces into a bank and on his house-
studio, called "Fort Meigs" by San Patricio neighbors.

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Inside Cover


A Word About Our New Look . . .

Readers of New Mexico Magazine's last three issues will have
noticed a new accent on how to do it — where to go, what to see,
how to prepare oneself to make the most of visits around our state.
New Mexico is a place with things to do: nature-watching, opera-
going, gourmet dining — the gamut is long and impressive. It's a
place to do things where, in the main, the air is still clean, the water
pure, the land pristine.

New Mexico has high mountains, cascading streams, yucca-
cloaked deserts. Its written history long predates the landing of the
Pilgrim Fathers. Its culture is a unique blend issuing from among
the oldest civilizations in the Western Hemisphere, the Spanish
conquistadores, Kit Carson and a gallery of frontiersmen, the arrival
of the United States on the scene. In totality, New Mexico is a
scenic-historical-ethnological blend unequalled in our country.

Beyond all this, New Mexico today is people — people of many
talents, from Indian potters to atomic scientists, from flamenco
dancers to 747 pilots; people of warmth and friendship. Most of
these people live in New Mexico because they wouldn't live any
place else. They welcome you to share in their good fortune.

New Mexico Magazine seeks to reflect this multiple allurements.
To this end, you will be treated to text, illustrations and maps on
delightful byways, to historical extravaganzas that took place in
settings you can visit, to talks with artists, writers and others of
the talented, to evenings at exotic restaurants.

What is your reaction to our new look? 

Walter Briggs

❖❖ EXTRA ❖❖

The Great Taos Bank Robbery

By Tony Hillerman

The newsroom of *The New Mexican* first got word of the incident about ten minutes after nine the morning of November 12, 1957. Mrs. Ruth Fish, who had served for many years as manager of the Taos Chamber of Commerce and almost as many as Taos correspondent for the Santa Fe newspaper, called collect and asked for the city editor.

She told the city editor that the Taos bank would be robbed that morning. She said that she would walk over to the bank and watch this operation. She promised to call in an eyewitness account before the first edition deadline at 11 a.m.

The city editor asked how Mrs. Fish knew the bank was to be robbed. Mrs. Fish, in a hurry to get off the telephone and become an eyewitness, explained very briefly that one of her lady friends had stopped in her office and told her so. The lady was now waiting so that they could walk down together and watch.

But, the city editor insisted, how did the lady friend know the bank was to be robbed that morning?

Because, Mrs. Fish explained with patience, the two bank robbers were standing in line at this very moment waiting their turn at the teller's cage.

But, persisted the city editor, how was it possible to predict that these two persons intended to rob the bank?

This presumption seemed safe, Mrs. Fish said, because one of the two men was disguised as a woman and because he was holding a pistol under his purse. Whereupon she said good-by and hung up.

TONY HILLERMAN, former executive editor of *The New Mexican* (Santa Fe), is journalism department chairman at the University of New Mexico.

SOL BAER FIELDING is not only an artist but a Hollywood producer of long repute. He illustrated New Mexico writer Jack Schaefer's book *The Great Endurance Horse Race* and produced from one of Schaefer's tales the movie *Trooper Hook*.

© Autumn 1966 issue, *New Mexico Quarterly*.

Cartoons by Sol Baer Fielding

While astonished by the foregoing, the city editor recalled later that he had no doubt at all that the bank would indeed be robbed in the fashion described. If the reader feels less sure at this point, it is because the city editor had two advantages. First, he knew Mrs. Fish. She is an elderly woman of dignity, charm and grandmotherly appearance with an unflawed reputation for accuracy. Second, he knew Taos. While bank robbers probably wouldn't stand politely in line with the paying customers in Omaha or Atlanta, there was no reason to believe they wouldn't in this peculiar little town.

As a matter of fact they were doing exactly this, and their courtliness was about to cause them trouble. The chain of events which followed did not reach its semifinal anticlimax until sixty hours later and was not officially ended until the following February, when the federal grand jury met sixty-five miles south in Santa Fe. By then the affair was being called The Great Taos Bank Robbery.

Lest the reader be misled by this title, he should be warned that Taos also lists in its litany of notable events The Great Flood of 1935. If the reader can accept the fact that Taos managed a Great Flood without a river and with the very modest amount of water available in its arid climate, he is prepared to hear more about what happened on November 12, 1957.

After the city editor collected his wits, he placed a long distance call to the bank. The secretary who answered didn't know anything about any bank robbery, but she referred the call to a higher ranking official. The city editor asked this gentleman if his bank had been robbed. Certainly not, said the banker. How in the world did such rumors get started?

A few minutes later Mrs. Fish called back, slightly breathless. She reported that she and her friend had walked through the alley behind the Safeway store and

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Baer Fielding

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arrived at the bank just as two men with drawn pistols dashed from the front door. One of the men was dressed as a woman, as previously reported. He ran awkwardly in his high heels. The two jumped into a green pickup truck parked in the alley and drove away. From what she had learned from spectators fortunate enough to arrive earlier, the two men had not taken any money from the bank. She would investigate further and call back. Mrs. Fish, a woman of impeccable courtesy, hung up

without a word of reproach to the city editor for causing her to be late for the event.

The city editor now placed another call to the banker. He asked the banker if he was sure his bank hadn't been robbed, or something. The bank official now was less confident. He was sure nobody had taken any money but he was also sure that something funny had been going on. He had been hearing something about a man dressed as a woman, and two men running wildly out of the bank lobby, and other confusing stories.

Meanwhile, the police reporter had called the Taos police department and said he was checking on a rumor that there had been a bank robbery. The policeman who answered said no, there hadn't been one and he guessed the police would be the first to hear about it if there was one, wouldn't they? The reporter said yes, he guessed that was true. Actually, the police would be approximately the last to hear about it, being informed only after the pastor of the local United Brethren Church entered the picture.

By then Mrs. Fish had made her third call and provided the city editor with a detailed account of what had happened in the bank lobby. The two men had arrived just as the bank opened its doors at 9 a.m. They found a crowd of Taos businessmen waiting to check out funds to fuel their cash registers for the day. The suspects joined the rush to the tellers' cages but were outdistanced, perhaps because of the high heels, and were stuck well back in the line. Customers quickly noticed that the line-stander clad as a woman had a full day's growth of dark stubble bristling through his pancake makeup and that the nylons encased an unseemly growth of leg hair. They also noticed that this person's costume was remarkably chic for Taos, which is one of the few places where a man can still feel adequately dressed in bib overalls and two-tone shoes. All this was enough to cause a modest amount of buzzing in the lobby, but probably not much. Taos is a tolerant village, well accustomed to whimsy. It has been said that if the late James Thurber had been raised here he would have never celebrated the antics of his family in print, since what seems outlandish in Columbus, Ohio, seems fairly normal in Taos. It is also said that if Sinclair Lewis had been a Taoseño, the Mr. Babbitt of his Main Street would have had a common-law wife and worn sandals. In Taos a certain amount of eccentricity is required for conformity.

Interest among the spectators quickened, however, when some of them saw — or thought they saw — a pistol

Culprits Armed to the Teeth



in the hand of the pseudowoman. The fleet-footed ones, who had beat the rush to the tellers' windows and therefore left early, spread the news of this unusual sight around Taos Plaza. Thus did Mrs. Fish receive the word, and thus were many curious townsfolk drawn to the bank to watch the spectacle.

Several days later, one of the two suspects was to complain to federal agents that some among this growing crowd of spectators began giggling. Whether or not Taos residents were guilty of such churlishness, the two young men soon began suffering from stage fright. Embarrassed by the scrutiny of the crowd, they fled from the bank just as Mrs. Fish and her friend were arriving.

It was definitely established finally that both men were armed with loaded pistols. Although they were not to use these weapons until later, and then only when cruelly provoked, these revolvers are important because they lend an air of reality to The Great Taos Bank Robbery. It was much the same with The Great Flood of 1935. While it wasn't actually a flood in the usual definition, people actually did get wet and Taoseños defend this historic event from scoffers by pointing out that Governor Clyde Tingley declared an emergency and scores of families were evacuated into the National Guard Armory.

These facts seem persuasive unless one knows that this Great Flood was actually an epidemic of leaking roofs — the combined effect of a freakishly slow and persistent

rain and the traditional Taos habit of roofing flat-topped adobe buildings with hard-packed adobe clay. This roofing material is usually as effective as it is inexpensive, since Taos rainstorms are commonly brief, noisy and productive of very little moisture. Taos learned in 1935 that when an Eastern-style three-day drizzle happens such economical roofs tend to dissolve and pour through the ceilings. Residents, Taos-like, persist in using dirt roofs and profited from the experience only by the legends of bravery, charity and outrageous discomfort which it created.

Today Taoseños rely on the two loaded pistols to lend authenticity to their Great Taos Bank Robbery just as they drag out the governor's unlocking of the armory when an outsider deprecates their flood. But before these pistols started going off, a couple of things had to happen.

As Mrs. Fish reported, the two suspects roared away from the scene of their fiasco in the pickup truck. Their rush may have been prompted by the erroneous notion that someone would call the police, or perhaps by sheer embarrassment. Whatever the cause, the two ran a stop sign and sideswiped a car driven by the United Brethren minister. The minister was not in the mood that morning to turn the other fender. He insisted that the accident be reported to the police and that neither vehicle be moved until an officer arrived. The suspects took a dissenting position and insisted on driving away. The reader is aware that they had good reason for this rudeness but the pastor at the moment was not. Neither could he know that the man in the pickup who wore lipstick and face powder had gotten himself up as a female for the relatively innocent purpose of misleading bank personnel. It is safe to guess that the minister must have suspected a darker purpose, since Taos has long been known as a place of confusion concerning gender. At any rate, when the two men drove away, the minister gave chase.

Taos is a small community and its streets are few, narrow, crooked and short. It is a completely inappropriate setting for a high-speed automobile chase and offers limited opportunity for the chasers to elude the chaser. After two or three times around the village the two suspects must have faced the fact that there was no hope of shaking off their pursuer. They began firing their pistols at the minister's car. Thus discouraged, the minister stopped at a telephone and the police, at long last, learned that something was amiss in Taos.

This seeming lack of rapport between Taos and the forces of authority would not surprise those familiar with

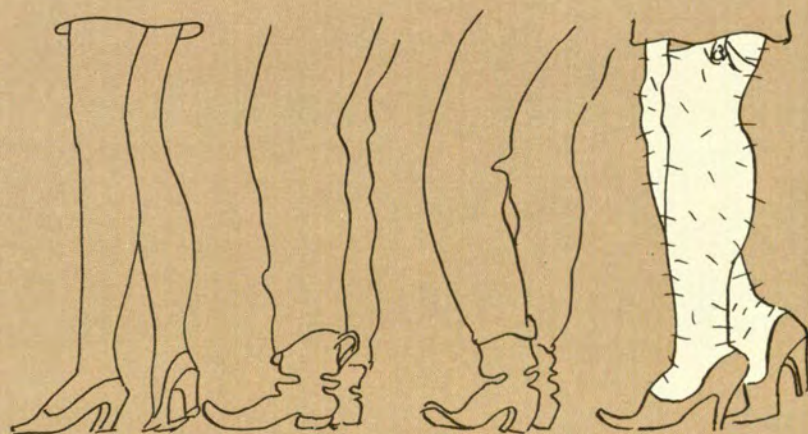
Brazen Attempt to Mooch Mazuma

the history of the village. The attitude of Taoseños had been largely responsible in 1847 for a joint proposal by Secretary of State Daniel Webster and Secretary of War C. M. Conrad that the United States withdraw from the Territory of New Mexico and "allow it to revert to its native inhabitants." The Webster-Conrad discouragement seems to have been due in large part to the fact that the townpeople of Taos, in a cooperative venture with the adjoining Taos Indian Pueblo, had scalped Territorial Governor Charles Bent. The residence where this unique impeachment occurred is still maintained by the village as a museum which, one suspects, celebrates the deed more than the martyr. On another and later occasion, U. S. Attorney W. W. H. Davis reported with disapproving sarcasm that the door of the Taos jail was "securely fastened with a twine string" and concluded that this lack of a bona fide lock might be why prisoners were so often missing when time came to try them. A person reading the Davis diary suspects he would have had more to say on this subject had his attention not been diverted by conditions at the Pontius Pilate Hotel. Mr. Davis had called the attention of the innkeeper to the lack of coverings on his bed and his host had corrected this deficiency by handing him the cloth off the dining table. Mr. Davis reported himself "somewhat exercised of mind" during the night with the question of how his host would supply the place of the table cloth when morning came. When the sheet reappeared on the breakfast table, the U. S. attorney celebrated this ingenuity with a heroic couplet:

*Thus it contrived the double debt to pay,
A sheet by night — a table cloth by day.*

The Taos jail is now locked, but its walls are still made of adobe which is vulnerable — as a prisoner named Danny Montoya recently demonstrated — to plastic spoons. Montoya spooned a hole through the wall but made two mistakes. First, he chose the wrong wall — digging his way into the county treasurer's office, which adjoins the lockup, instead of to freedom. Second, he underestimated his diameter, jammed himself into his exit route, and spent the night like a cork in a bottle with his head still in custody.

Aside from the jail, the disinterest of Taoseños in law enforcement can perhaps best be illustrated by an obituary article to which *El Crepusculo de Libertad*, a

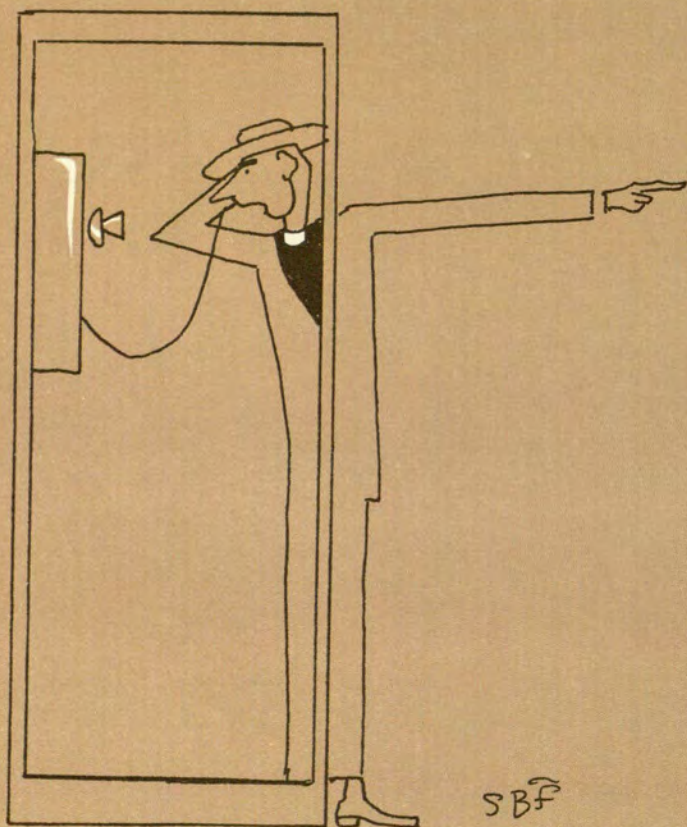


now-defunct Taos weekly newspaper, devoted two-thirds of its front page in 1953. The obituary reported the death of John Dunn, a very prominent Taos resident. It noted that Mr. Dunn had arrived in Taos after making his way from the Texas State Penitentiary without benefit of pardon or parole and with thirty-nine years and six months left to serve on a forty-year sentence. It recounted Mr. Dunn's exploits as operator of gambling establishments at Taos and elsewhere in the county. "John Dunn was at his best behind a roulette wheel or a monte table, where you never got more than was coming to you and if you didn't watch it was less."

Gambling is not legal in New Mexico. Nor, for that matter, is escaping from prison. Yet before John Dunn died in 1953 at the age of ninety-four, he had lived sixty-four years in Taos, had been in the public eye enough to have the John Dunn Bridge bear his name, and had not been molested by the law. One can only assume that, as in the case of The Great Taos Bank Robbery, police were slow in getting the word.

Once the police were belatedly informed of the doings of November 12, at the bank and elsewhere, they reacted with vigor. A search began immediately for the two suspects. The State Police were notified and the Federal Bureau of Investigation was told of the apparent affront to the Federal Banking Act. By noon, the population of Taos — then normally about 1,850 — had been swollen by an influx of various types of officers. In addition to

Courageous Minister Is Discouraged by Display of Force



the genuine gendarmes representing federal, state, county and village governments, volunteer organizations such as the Mounted Patrol and Sheriff's Posse were mobilized.

Authorities soon had the escape vehicle. It was driven into the midst of a swarm of lawmen by Jose T. Cárdenas. Mr. Cárdenas, when he collected himself from the shock of having guns pointed at him, explained that he had loaned his truck to a friend the previous day and that it had been left at his house that morning bearing signs of collision damage. Mr. Cárdenas was at that moment in search of this friend to demand an explanation.

The reader might well pause here and recollect that it is traditional among robbers to steal escape vehicles, and not to borrow them from friends. Borrowing, while more polite, leads to speedy identification when the car is recovered. Mr. Cárdenas was able to tell police that he had loaned his truck to an acquaintance, whom we shall call Cipriano Mondragón, and that Mr. Mondragón was accompanied by a twenty-three-year-old visitor from Maine, to whom we will assign the name of Eddie Mackey.

Police also quickly received a hint of why the two

had borrowed the truck a day early. Witnesses were found who had seen them at the entrance of the bank the previous morning — the morning of November 11. The witnesses remembered this because they thought it odd to see a man dressed as a woman trying to get into the bank on Veterans Day. If any doubts remained on the subject, this should have proved that the two were not professional bank bandits, since professionals presumably would know about national bank holidays.

At this point, the authorities appeared to be in an unusually happy position. They knew the identities of both men they sought. They had excellent descriptions of the suspects. They were confident both were afoot in Taos. The village is small, the lawmen were numerous, and there was every reason for confidence that the two culprits would be in custody in a very few minutes. The officers fanned out from the plaza to press their search.

This proved to be a mistake, because Mondragón and Mackey had decided to walk down to the plaza to try to borrow some money. While the federal, state, county and city officers and their volunteer posses manned roadblocks and poked around in the outlying areas, the two fugitives were making a door-to-door canvass of downtown bars soliciting loans from the bartenders. Not unnaturally, the barkeepers considered the two as poor credit risks at the moment. By the time it occurred to someone to inform the law of this activity, Mondragón and Mackey had become discouraged and wandered off.

When the sun dipped behind the Conejos Mountains, the lawmen had found Mondragón's female attire abandoned in an outdoor toilet but the fugitives were still at large. The hunt continued through the night, brightening the frosty November darkness with flashlights and electric lanterns. Considering the number of officers involved and the modest dimensions of Taos it is safe to guess that at least one policeman looked almost everywhere at least once, except in the deserted house where the two had chosen to sleep. When the sun rose over the Taos Mountains the morning of November 13, Mondragón and Mackey were still at large.

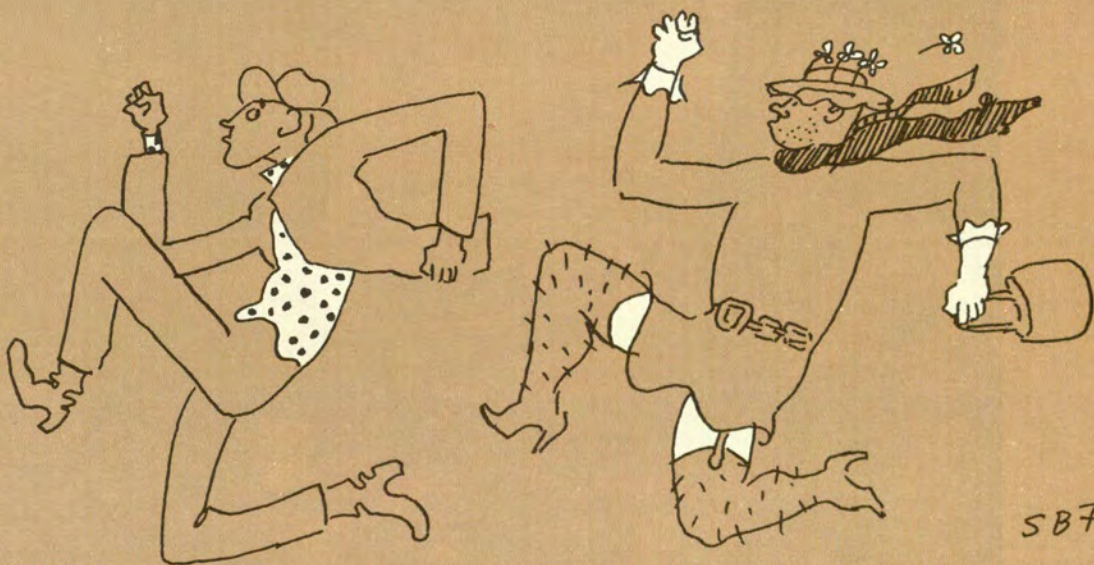
November 13 passed with a methodical and fruitless combing of the village. There was a brief flurry of excitement when officers learned, twelve hours too late to do them any good, where Mondragón and Mackey had spent the previous night. They discovered that a neighborhood householder had happened by their hideout, had stopped to chat with the fugitives about the excitement they had caused and had then left to buy them some groceries.

Kit Carson Park -- A Chilling Refuge of Last Resort

The reader by now will not be surprised to know that this good neighbor did not bother to notify the police. But he did play a little joke on the culprits when he returned with the food, telling them that they had critically wounded the minister and that officers had orders to get them dead or alive. This unnerving bit of misinformation drove the two to make their second return to the plaza the next morning to renew the attempt to borrow traveling money. While one can imagine that their pleas were eloquent, the bartenders remained adamant. Mondragón told a reporter two days later that by now he and Mackey were "feeling mighty blue."

If the fugitives were depressed by November 13, it is safe to guess that those involved in the search for them shared this feeling. Taos does not lend itself to extended manhunts, since the posse members soon run out of places to look. To make matters worse, the press had taken the matter lightly from the first and the newspaper irreverence increased as the search dragged on. When November 14 wore on without a sign of the fugitives, those in charge of the hunt must have been casting about for a dignified excuse to call off the whole affair.

That night, a Taos resident named Nat Flores was lying on his bed reading the evening paper when he heard a tapping on his window. Outside he saw two young men whom he recognized as Mondragón and Mackey. The two inquired if he might provide them with a meal and Flores, with typical "my house is your house" Taos hospitality, invited his visitors in for supper. During the meal, Flores and Joe V. Montoya, a brother-in-law who had stopped in for a chat, found Mondragón and Mackey in a gloomy mood. The two said they had spent the previous night in frost-bitten discomfort in Kit Carson Park, a small recreation area not far from Taos Plaza. One of the possemen, Mackey complained, had almost stepped on his finger. Flores and Montoya, after a lengthy argument in which Flores recalled quoting passages from the Bible, persuaded the two that they should accept a ride down to the sheriff's office after supper.



The final footnote on The Great Taos Bank Robbery was not written until February 4, 1958. After the surrender, officers found the two refreshingly frank about their activities. In due course, Cipriano Mondragón and Eddie Mackey were accused by the U. S. district attorney of conspiring to violate the provisions of the Federal Banking Act and their case was placed on the winter docket for consideration by the federal grand jury. Unfortunately, grand jury proceedings are secret so we will never know exactly what happened when the case was presented. We do know that the jury returned a "no bill," which indicates — at the very least — that the jurors could not be convinced that Mondragón and Mackey took their pistols into the Taos bank with felonious intentions. If the jurors were not familiar with Taos, they may have suspected the FBI imagined the whole unlikely episode.

Thus The Great Taos Bank Robbery was denied the official federal imprimatur of indictments and was left as the sort of thing Alice's Mad Hatter might call an Unfelonious Unrobbery.

Still, if you happen to be in Taos on Veterans Day and the man on the next bar stool happens to be an Old Taos Hand, you're likely to hear something like this:

"You know, tomorrow is the anniversary of our Big Bank Robbery . . ."

Or maybe he'll tell you about The Great Flood of 1935.