

## A History of the Manby House

The Taos Center for the Arts (TCA) owns what was originally the buildings and adjacent property that were a part of the historic Manby Hacienda. These structures are more than 100 years old. This property was placed on the New Mexico State Register of Historic Places in 1980. The Stables Gallery, which is available for short-term rentals by artists, is located in the original horse stables and carriage house of the hacienda. The front rooms of the main house facing Paseo del Pueblo Norte and the connecting rooms facing an inner patio are leased to the restaurant Donabe, and Andean Software rents the southwest front rooms adjacent to the entrance to the Taos Inn.

The Manby Hacienda has a rich history. In 1898, Arthur Rochford Manby purchased 23 acres of land north of the historic Taos Inn and began construction of his hacienda, completing construction by 1907. This Spanish-style hacienda consisted of 19 rooms with eight kiva style fireplaces, and was set in a square with three wings surrounding a patio, two wells, stables, a carriage house, and tall outer adobe walls (see Figure 1). Timber and vigas were cut and hauled from nearby mountains; adobe bricks were made in the back pasture (currently Kit Carson Park). Behind the front ~ 12-foot-tall adobe wall and single gate was a courtyard with flagstones set in thick grass leading to the front door. Manby had 200 lilac bushes planted facing Taos Mountain that encompassed the entire north side of the main house (see Figure 1). Property that is now Kit Carson Park and cemetery were planted with locust, linden, elm, and cottonwood trees, and laid out with curved walking paths and sunken pools. Manby also had cottonwoods planted along what is now Paseo del Pueblo Norte. The Manby Hacienda was considered to be the finest and largest home in Taos with elegant Spanish furniture and fine oil paintings. Ironically, however, Arthur Manby was not a well-liked person in Taos. His decapitated body and head were separately found on July 3, 1929 in two of the front west rooms of the hacienda (see Figure 1, rooms “A” and “M”). His gruesome death remains what has been termed “the greatest unsolved mystery of the West”.

Who was Arthur Manby? His father was the Reverend Edward Francis Manby. The senior Manby and his wife Emily Norton, a talented watercolorist, lived in apparent luxury in the seaside resort of Morecambe in Lancashire, England. They had 9 children, Arthur being the 8th. Arthur was sent to Belfast for schooling, where he studied architecture and mineralogy. Arthur was also a talented watercolorist. He emigrated from England in 1883 at the age of 24, sailing to New York and then taking the train to Raton, New Mexico. He had read in British newspapers about rich resources and opportunities in the untamed Territory of New Mexico. He was described as an imperialist who dressed in expensive clothing. The cover of his biography, “To Possess the Land”, states that Manby “...saw in its wilderness an empire that he believed himself destined to rule”.



Manby spent the next 20 years of his life acquiring properties by conning, stealing, lying, begging, and bribing both Native Americans and Spanish families. He aggressively sought investors from England, New York, Chicago, and Maryland, promising profits on investors' money. He established four corporations which served primarily as financial fronts often to defraud investors. Manby's goal was to acquire the vast Antonio Martinez Land Grant (61,605.48 acres) near Taos. In 1913, Manby succeeded in acquiring 58,867 acres of the Land Grant that included the hot springs on the Rio Grande, today named Manby Hot Springs. It was his plan to build a grand hotel and gardens at the hot springs. However, Manby used investors' money to improve his personal estate rather than to make improvements to land grant properties. As noted in a 2017 Taos News article entitled "Taos' Unsolved Mystery: The Fallen Emperor", a search of the New Mexico State Archives reveals at least 30 filings for civil or criminal cases associated with Arthur Manby between 1902-1913. Within 3 years, the Land Grant was sold at public auction as a result of Manby's accumulation of debt. He retained the 23 acres of land that included his hacienda and surrounding gardens.

Manby continued trying to entice investors, including the multi-millionaire Dr. Victor C. Thorne of New York, to pay accumulating debts. But his ruses and deceptions had begun to catch up with him; investors were leery. He even formed the "United States Civil Secret Service Society", the purpose of which, according to his biographer Frank Waters, was to fleece its members of large sums of money. Manby became more bad-tempered and elusive, basically hiding in his hacienda. However, in December of 1919, Mable Dodge Stern and her husband Maurice Stern appeared at Manby's front door and asked to rent his home, to which he agreed. A friendship of sorts developed between Mabel and Manby—she respected his architectural skill and tasteful gardens, and loved the hot springs. However, based on an alleged shooting by Manby of a miner, relayed to Mabel by her future husband Tony Lujan, she became wary of Manby and moved out once she and Lujan built their own home near the Taos Pueblo.

Manby was characterized as having a brilliant mind, refined taste, and an appreciation of the visual beauty of the Taos Valley, on the one hand, yet he was devious, calculating, greedy, manipulating, persistent, and a murderer. In short, he was a loner, and had few if any friends in Taos.

Manby's body was found in 1929 when a US Deputy from Santa Fe tried to serve legal papers related to a lawsuit. When no one answered, the Deputy went to the courthouse in Taos Plaza and asked the Taos Deputy Sheriff, his brother, if anyone had seen Manby. Apparently the Taos Deputy Sheriff was told that Manby was likely dead because of flies swarming on his screen door. The end result was that these two law officers plus others who appeared at Manby's residence found his body in one of the front rooms of the house, and his head in the adjoining room along with his German police dog. It was rapidly concluded that Manby died of natural causes, with the assumption that the dog had chewed off Manby's head. Manby was buried that same day at the back of his property. The gruesome story of Manby's death reached national headlines, accompanied by questions of the manner of his death and the authenticity of the body as being that of Manby. In response to letters from Manby's family and the British consulate, the New Mexico Governor R.C. Dillon had Manby's body exhumed in late



August of 1929. Experts (Manby's dentist, a blacksmith, a detective sent by the Federal government, and Doc Martin) concluded (i) that the body was indeed that of Manby, identifying his dentures and jewelry, (ii) that he had been shot numerous times in the chest and face, and (iii) that his head had been severed from his body with a sharp object. Manby was later reburied at his current gravesite just outside of Kit Carson Cemetery. While people were questioned about the murder, the case was dropped in 1930.

But was this really Manby's body? A set of presumably Manby's dentures were found at Manby's bedside by a private detective hired by the Attorney General of New Mexico ~ July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1929, and the dentist who identified Manby's body by his dentures in August later recanted his story. Doc Martin destroyed his autopsy results because the state never paid him. And, there were reports that Manby was sighted both in Mexico and Italy after his "death". So, the mystery continues "to live and prosper".

What happened to the Manby Hacienda? Dr. Thorne held a mortgage on Manby's Hacienda, and following Manby's death, foreclosed on the property in 1931. All of Manby's possessions and treasures mysteriously disappeared by February of 1930. In 1936, Dr. Thorne sent Helen Williams to evaluate the condition of the house. Although the roof had fallen in, windows were broken, and squatters inhabited some rooms, Ms. Williams initiated an extensive renovation of the hacienda, including installation of the first central heating in Taos. She hired Max Luna, a master furniture builder and his students, to build furniture for all 19 rooms. Renovations were completed by 1940. She renamed it the Thorne House, and opened it as a community center to serve the people of Taos. Dr. Thorne died suddenly in 1948 without a will but left a trust fund, The Taos Foundation, for Ms. Williams to manage.

The Taos Artists' Association, created in response to Emil Bistram's dream of a museum and gallery for artists of Taos, was founded in 1952 and purchased the Thorne House and surrounding three acres for \$45,000 from the Taos Foundation. The house was turned into a museum in 1953, featuring period rooms furnished from local collections. And the stables were converted to a gallery (Stables Gallery), open for exhibition to all members of the Taos Artists' Association. The museum, however, turned out to be difficult to manage. As a result, from 1957-1968, the Taos Artists' Association, renamed the Taos Art Association in 1966, rented space in the Thorne House to the Millicent Rogers Museum. Space was thereafter rented to Del Sol, a weaving cooperative. In 1972, the Taos Art Association moved Stables Gallery from the stables to the front of Thorne House, and Clay and Fiber Gallery leased the stables location for ~ 20 years. Featured in the Stables Gallery was a very successful children's arts program called Project Discovery funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts secured by the Taos Art Association. Adjacent to the Stables Gallery in the Thorne House was the Taos Art Association Gift Shop that featured art furnishings, photography, prints, art books, paintings, and jewelry. The very front rooms of the Thorne House, adjacent to the Taos Inn (see Figure 1, room "S"), were initially rented in the early 1970's as two apartments. Brodsky Bookstore then rented this space ~ 1977, followed by Taos Pottery in 1999, and Andean Software in 2002. The Stables Gallery returned from the Thorne House to the stables location ~ 1993. In the mid to late 1990's, rooms in the Thorne House were rented to various enterprises including Taos Fleece Works, Taos Mountain Candles, and Spirit Riders.

The Taos Artists' Association also opened the Taos Encore Theater in 1955, an open-air building with a tin roof in which basically all performing arts were presented: plays, concerts, films, lectures, and dance performances. The Taos Art Association raised money necessary to renovate the theater just prior to its burning down on Thanksgiving Day of 1969. The new Taos Community Auditorium opened in 1972, and was used initially by the Taos Little Theater, and later by the Taos School of Music, the Taos Community Theater, Taos High School, and Taos Pueblo Children's Theater as well as production companies from Santa Fe, Amarillo, and Denver. Many classic plays and musicals were performed on stage over the next 30 years, including "Man of La Mancha", "Guys and Dolls", "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Beauty and the Beast", a musical review in 1992 of the shows the Taos Art Association had produced in its last 20 years named "Flashback/20", and a radio play called "Manby", written by Steve Parks.

However, management of the Stables Gallery and associated artists by the Taos Art Association proved to be difficult. As stated in an article by Don Laine entitled "Taos Art Association, Surviving the Years and Itself", "...over the years the TAA [Taos Art Association]...has sometimes sparked enormous controversies dividing the art community and occasionally the entire town." The process to admit artists "qualified" for membership to the Taos Art Association became quite controversial, exemplified by the inability of the screening committee to reach a consensus on "qualified" artists. The Association amassed growing debt and decided to sell the parking lot behind the Taos Community Auditorium to the Town of Taos in 1975. Also in this year, as a result of the contentious selection of "qualified" artists, the 44 exhibiting artists took over Stables Gallery as an artists' cooperative, welcoming local, regional, and international artists. By 1980, however, the artists' cooperative began to dissolve. It was generally believed that the artists' cooperative failed to represent the cross section of local community artists. Stables Gallery membership was then changed to a community art center (Stables Art Center), show-casing local artists and craft-people. It is noteworthy that in the 1980's, the Taos Art Association cut down most of the trees in the much-loved lilac garden originally created by Arthur Manby (see Figure 1 for the location of the original lilac garden versus its current location).

By 2000, the fate of the Taos Art Association was again problematic. Stables Gallery and the Taos Community Auditorium were temporarily closed due to rising debt and conflicts among artists and the Taos Art Association. The Taos Art Association strongly considered selling the Manby House complex. But, in agreement with the Taos community, the Taos Art Association was transformed into the Taos Center for the Arts (TCA), with a new Board of Directors, new by-laws, and a new community-based approach to accommodate more and varied activities. The TCA received significant donations that allowed them to renovate the Stables/Carriage House, the Manby/Thorne House, and the Taos Community Auditorium. In 2001, the auditorium was reopened and in 2005, was sold to the Town of Taos. In 2002, the renovated Stables Gallery reopened. In 2004, the front rooms of the Manby/Thorne House were rented to Café Renato proprietors Kimberly and Renato Casara, who operated the restaurant until the spring of 2018. In the fall of 2018, this space was rented by Donabe restaurant. The offices of the TCA are located in the north and east rooms of the Manby/Thorne House. As a result of dedicated, community-minded directors, an energetic and supportive

Board of Directors, and amazing staff and volunteers, the TCA manages the many performances at the Taos Community Auditorium, that include live performances of the Metropolitan Opera and National Theater performances, current and classic movies, all in HD, and local dance and play performances. The TCA also enlists artist shows in the Encore Gallery, Stables Gallery, and Taos Inn, and encourages participation in all events from the entire Taos Community.

While there have been extensive renovations of the property comprising the original Manby Hacienda, the basic structures including most of the separating room walls, doors and windows, the kiva style fireplaces, and tall adobe walls remain intact. The adobe wall facing Paseo del Pueblo Norte was lowered in the 1970's. You are invited to visit this property to view the original stables windows, the carriage house doors, the original well located in the interior patio, the rooms of what was the Manby House, and imagine the grandeur of the home at its beginning and the architectural mastermind who built the hacienda and whose death remains an unsolved mystery.

Mary Hunzicker Dunn

Board of Directors, Taos Center for the Arts

Sources:

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"Losing Your Head in Taos", originally published July 2012, <https://dalneitzel.com>

"The Manby Story", author Sara Jean Gray, Editor Bill Christmas, fact checker- Nita Murphy—TCA history from Susan Nuss, TCA.

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"A Brief History of the Taos Art Association: 1952-1972", "one time use of copyrighted material may be used by TAA, for purposes of application for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places"—obtained from archives in Santa Fe SR # 763—copy written by David Witt, 4/16/1981

Newspaper clippings, multiple historical documents, newsletters, and meeting minutes from the office of the TCA, including "Taos Art Association, Surviving the Years and Itself", authored by Don Laine, April, 1984.

Personal communications with: Jane Plowden-Wardlaw, the first director of the Taos Art Association, from 1976-~1978; Carolyn Kalom, who was associated with the Taos Art Association from ~1966-2001; and Jean Marquardt, the director of the Taos Center for the Arts from 2002-~2013.

Figure 1. Schematic drawing of the Manby/Thorne House (date of drawing prior to 1980). Red text/lines reflect original structures omitted from the drawing and identification of current occupants of rooms. TCA occupies: E, F, G, H, I, J, K in Main Manby/Thorne House and T. Donabe occupies: A, B, C, D, L, R, M, N, O, P. Andean Software occupies: S.





Figure 2. Photograph of interior room “M” of Manby/Thorne House, taken following completion of 1940 renovation. Room structure with indicated doorways is maintained in Donabe. See Figure 1 for reference.

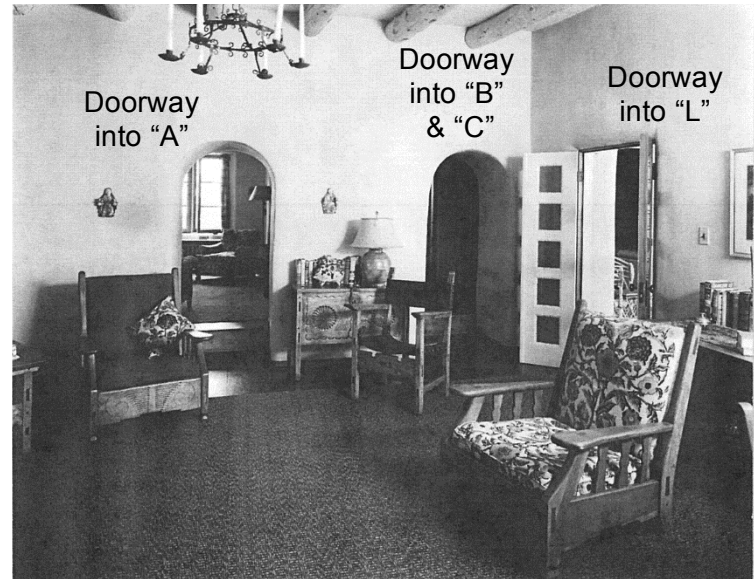


Figure 3. Photograph of interior room “O” of Manby/Thorne House, taken following completion of 1940 renovation. Identification of room “O” is based on the more central (rather than corner) location of the fireplace. Fireplace is depicted in Figure 1 (in room “O”) but no longer exists. A curtain covering a west-facing window is shown in upper right. Photo taken facing south. The kitchen area of Donabe occupies this space today.



Figure 4. Photograph of interior room “M” of Manby/Thorne House, taken following completion of 1940 renovation. See Figure 1 for reference. Fireplace is seen in Donabe. Manby’s body was found either in room “M” or “A”.



Figure 5. Photograph of interior room “L” of Manby/Thorne House, taken following completion of 1940 renovation. Photo taken facing east. Fireplace on north wall has been removed, but location is visible on floor of Donabe. See Figure 1 for reference.



Figure 6. Photograph of interior room “S” of Manby/Thorne House, taken following completion of 1940 renovation. Kiva fireplace and location of wall cutout (indicated by arrow) are visible in back of Andean Software. Photo taken facing south. See Figure 1 for reference.

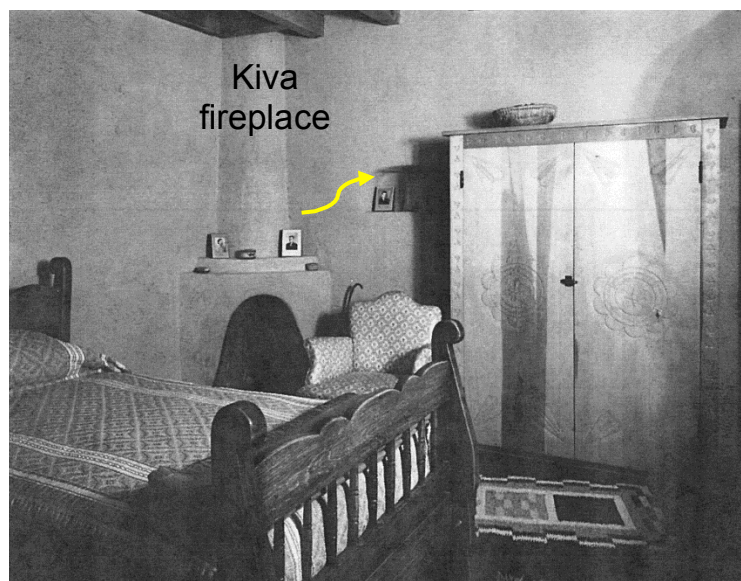


Figure 7. Photograph of interior of old stables after conversion to Stables Gallery in 1955. Stables Gallery was located in the stables/carriage house from 1953-1972, and from ~2002-present.

