

The History of the Hernández-Manby House and Taos Center for the Arts

Overview.

Arthur R. Manby was credited with designing and building from scratch the large adobe Manby House, completed in 1907, based on available information to his biographer, Frank Waters. However, recently located documents in the “Arthur R. Manby Papers” at the Chávez History Library show that in 1899 Manby purchased from the Hernández family an adobe 6-room structure, stables and adjacent building, and surrounding yard, which corresponds to approximately 70% of the current structure. This property was located on the east side of “Indian Pueblo Road” (Paseo del Pueblo Norte). While Manby certainly expanded the structure and improved the grounds, the Hernández family owned the original adobe structure and surrounding property. The Manby House (a.k.a. the Manby/Thorne House) was formally renamed the Hernández-Manby House in April 2022 by the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division to reflect the structure’s origin and acknowledge the now-available documentation of that history as well as to recognize the contribution of Arthur R. Manby to the final structure.

Taos Center for the Arts (TCA) owns what was originally the buildings and adjacent property that comprise the historic Hernández-Manby House. The Stables/Carriage House Gallery, which is available for rentals by artists and community organizations, is the original horse stables and carriage house. The front rooms of the main house facing Paseo del Pueblo Norte, the connecting rooms facing an inner patio, and southwest front rooms are leased to restaurant and retail businesses.

This newly revised document includes information about Arthur Manby’s contributions to the Hernández-Manby House, new narrative to support the earlier origin of the property, and a history of the art associations that evolved to the present Taos Center for the Arts.

Original History of Arthur Manby and the Manby House. Timeline

(This history is based primarily on *To Possess the Land: A Biography of Arthur Rochford Manby*, 1973 by Frank Waters).

Based on information available at the time to Frank Waters and extensively cited in his biography of Arthur Rochford Manby, Manby immigrated from England to New Mexico in 1883 to seek his fortune. He had been trained as an architect in Belfast, Ireland. Between 1891 and 1898, Manby purchased seven parcels of land (about 23 acres) just north of Kit Carson’s home and the old wall of Taos east of the public road to the Taos Pueblo. Between 1898 and 1900, Manby was believed to have initiated the construction of his “hacienda” on vacant land; construction was believed to be completed in 1907. Waters’ relates that adobe bricks were made on the property and ceiling beams (vigas) were brought from the mountains by native/local labor for the construction of Manby’s “hacienda”. The house was built in the Pueblo style (one story) with walls two- to four-feet thick, a flat parapeted roof with canales, hardwood floors, custom wooden Spanish doors, and generally wood-framed single-pane casement windows. The house contained 19 rooms set in a square with three wings, eight kiva-style fireplaces, and two outdoor wells in addition to separate stables, a carriage house, an inner courtyard, and outer adobe walls. Behind the front ~12-foot-tall adobe wall and single gate opening to Paseo del Pueblo Norte was a second courtyard with flagstones set in thick grass leading to the front door.



However, as will be documented below, most of the main adobe structures and original features were already in place on a 3-acre plot of land located east of the public road to Taos Pueblo that Manby purchased in 1899. What is true is that Manby expanded the property significantly.

Manby had 200 lilac bushes planted facing Taos Mountain to the north. 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.

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 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: A Biography of Arthur Rochford Manby*, 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 colonial 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.

Mancy'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. 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 9th, 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 sited both in Mexico and Italy after his "death". So, the mystery continues "to live and prosper".

Amended History correcting the origin of Manby House to the Hernández Family. Hernandez Family

(This amended history is based on documents from the "Arthur R. Manby Papers", Chávez History Library, Santa Fe, NM; Hernández family history; census records; and newspaper accounts).

Virginia Dodier is a retired museum professional, librarian, and archivist living in Taos, NM. She located a warranty deed (shown below) in the "Arthur R. Manby Papers" at the Chávez History Library that shows Arthur Manby purchased an adobe 6-room structure, stables and adjacent building, and associated yard east of "Indian Pueblo Road" (~ 3 acres) from Carlos A. Hernández and his wife Francisca M. de Hernández on Dec. 14, 1899, for \$200. Notably, the "X" on the warranty deed corresponds to the existing well in the center of the courtyard, the acequia is still visible in the area that is now the Lilac Garden, the stables and "WC" correspond to what is now the Stables/Carriage House Gallery, and Dr. T.P. Martin corresponds to the former residence of Dr. Thomas Paul Martin that is currently The Historic Taos Inn.

The "Arthur R. Manby Papers" were entered into the collection at the Chávez History Library around 2000 as a gift of Allen and Valerie McNown, antique shop owners in Nambé, New Mexico. In his biography of Manby, Frank Waters lists the names of 6 families (sourced from warranty deeds, Taos County Records) from whom Manby purchased the 7 pieces of land that contributed to the 23 acres of the "Manby hacienda" property. However, the Hernández family is not included, presumably because the 1899 warranty deed was not available to Mr. Waters at the time of his research.

Carlos Hernández was the younger brother of B.C. (Benigno Cárdenas) Hernández, the first Mexican American U.S. Congressman from New Mexico (1915-1917, 1919-1921). (B.C. Hernández was Ms. Dodier's great-grandfather on her mother's side.) The brothers were two of the 12 children of

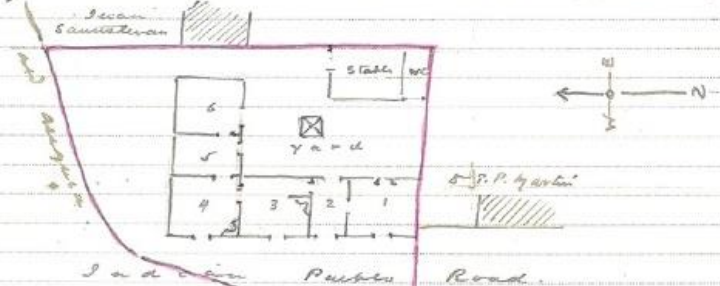
Warranty deed dated December 14, 1899, for the purchase of property on Indian Pueblo Road by Arthur R. Manby from Carlos A. Hernández and his wife Francisca M. de Hernández.

WARRANTY DEED.

This Deed, Made this 14th day of December in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety-nine, between Carlos A. Hernández and his wife Francisca M. de Hernández of the County of Taos and New Mexico of the first part, and Arthur Manby of the County of Taos and New Mexico of the second part:

WITNESSETH, That the said parties of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Two hundred Dollars, to the said parties of the first part in hand paid by the said party of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby confessed and acknowledged; have granted, bargained, sold and conveyed, and by these presents do grant, bargain, sell, convey and confirm unto the said party of the second part, his heirs and assigns forever, all the following described lots or parcels of land, situate, lying and being in the County of Taos and Territory of New Mexico, to wit:

That certain Dwelling House and Plot of Land adjacent to the town of San Fernando de Taos situate on the Indian Pueblo Road on the East side thereof containing 6 Rooms yard and outhouses also a triangular plot of land bounded on the South by aforesaid House Eastward by adobe wall of Juan Sautieranus property, North and Westward by old Arroyo and as more particularly shown in the accompanying sketch and included within the line marked Red on accompanying Plan which is hereby made an exhibit to and a part of this deed.



TOGETHER with all and singular the hereditaments and appurtenances thereto belonging, or in anywise appertaining, and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues and profits thereof; and all the estate, right, title, interest, claim and demand whatsoever of the said parties of the first part, either in law or equity, of, in and to the above bargained premises, with the hereditaments and appurtenances.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said premises above bargained and described, with the appurtenances unto the said party of the second part, his heirs and assigns forever. And the said Carlos A. Hernández and his wife Francisca M. de Hernández,

parties of the first part, for them set their heirs, executors, administrators and assigns; do covenant, grant, bargain and agree to and with the said party of the second part, his heirs and assigns, that at the time of the executing and delivery of these presents they were well seized of the premises above conveyed, as of good, sure, perfect, absolute and indefeasible estate of inheritance, in law, in fee simple, and have good right, full power and lawful authority to grant, bargain, sell and convey the same in manner and form aforesaid, and that the same are free and clear from all former and other grants, bargains, sales, liens, taxes, assessments and incumbrances of whatever kind or nature soever.

and the above bargained premises in the quiet and peaceable possession of the said party of the second part, his heirs and assigns, against all and every person or persons lawfully claiming or to claim the whole or any part thereof, the said parties of the first part shall and will warrant and forever defend.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, The said parties of the first part have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year first above written.

Signed, Sealed and Delivered in presence of
 Luis Cardenas }
 Carlos A. Hernández }
 Francisca M. de Hernández }



Juan José Hernández, an adobe mason, and his wife Manuela Cárdenas. The family arrived in Taos from Rio Arriba County in the late 1850's. B.C. and Carlos Hernández were born in Taos in the late 1860's. In the 1880's they worked for Antonio Joseph at the Ojo Caliente mineral springs. B.C. Hernández relocated to Rio Arriba County in the 1890's and continued in business and politics. Carlos Hernández remained in Ojo Caliente, where he was a prominent merchant. In 1895 Carlos brought his widowed mother, Manuela, to live with his family in Ojo Caliente. Ms. Dodier believes that Carlos and Francisca Hernández sold the Taos property to Arthur Manby on his mother's behalf. The warranty deed shows a diagram of the 6-room adobe structure, apparently drawn by Manby. The exact date of the construction of the Hernández home is not known, but certainly precedes its sale in 1899.

A then contemporary account (*Las Vegas Daily Optic*, Jan. 8, 1900, page 2) of Manby's activities shortly after his purchase relates that "A. R. Manby has been making some repairs and re-building part of the wall of the Hernandez house at [Taos into which] he has recently moved."

While Arthur Manby expanded the house by adding 5 or 6 rooms and improved the property, he did not build or design the original 6-room adobe home, which at some point in time was divided into 13 rooms.

The Historic and Cultural Significance of the Property's Use Following the Death of Arthur Manby.

Dr. Thorne held a mortgage on Manby's 23-acre "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 main house, including the addition of two apartments and installation of the first central heating in Taos. She hired Max Luna, a master furniture builder, and his students to build furniture for all rooms. Renovations were completed by 1940.

In an article entitled "Manby House Undergoes Renovation" in the *Tempo Magazine of The Taos News* by Rick Romancita (Sept. 12-18, 2002), the then Executive Director of the TCA states "... walls from the 1972 Stables Art Gallery in the Manby House have been removed revealing doors, windows, 'a strange closet' and an outline of a fireplace." "Bones, pottery shards and other mysterious objects were found when an old door was dug out of the wall." Perhaps these discoveries reflected Ms. Williams' renovations or even renovations by Manby of the Hernández home.

Ms. Williams renamed Manby's house 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 horse stables were converted to a gallery (Stables Gallery), open for exhibition to all members of the Taos Artists' Association.

A news release in 1953 or 1954 from the New Mexico State Tourist Bureau "Land of Enchantment" advertised the creation of the Taos Historical Museum and Art Gallery by the Taos Artists' Association. This news release also contained the statement that "A portion of the original Thorne property was lately acquired by the State of New Mexico for inclusion in the newly established Kit Carson Memorial Park...". It is likely that this property consisted of 20 acres and was acquired from Ms. Williams.

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, were initially rented in the early 1970's as two apartments. Brodsky Bookstore then rented this space ~ 1977, followed by Taos Pottery in 1999, Andean Software in 2002, and Sky Eagle Collection in 2021. 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.

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), showcasing 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.

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/Thorne 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 Gallery, 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/Carriage House 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 Hernández-Manby 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 of London. 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 Hernández-Manby House, 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. The newly discovered evidence that the Hernández Family owned the structures and property on 133 Paseo del Pueblo Norte and sold said property to Arthur R. Manby in 1899 creates a 123-year long history of the property that extends, develops, and enriches the narrative of the original structure and property to include, importantly, Taos families and cultures before the turn of the twentieth century.

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 the Hernández-Manby House and imagine the grandeur of the home at its beginning and the architectural masterminds who built and remolded this structure.

Mary Hunzicker Dunn
Board of Directors, Taos Center for the Arts

Sources for the original history of Arthur Manby and the fate of the property after Manby's death:

"The Mysterious Mr. Manby", TCA history files

"The Building", by Taos Art Association (TCA History files. Sources included: Kit Egri, her taped and penned memories of the early days of the TAA, Mabel Luhan, Edge of Taos Desert [Vol 4 of Intimate Memories], 1937; Frank Waters, *To Possess the Land: A Biography of Arthur Rochford Manby*, Swallow Press, Chicago, 1973)

"This Bizarre and Long Forgotten New Mexico Mystery Has Yet to be Solved", Brandie Erisman, New Mexico, Oct 25, 2017 (Google search)

"Taos' Unsolved Mystery", "The Fallen" Emperor', Arthur Rochford Manby, "2017 Taos News Article by Scott Gerdes (Google search)

"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.

To Possess the Land: A Biography of Arthur Rochford Manby, 1973 by Frank Waters, The Swallow Press, Inc., Chicago

"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.

Sources for the revised history:

Documents obtained by Virginia Dodier from the "Arthur R. Manby Papers", Chávez History Library, Santa Fe, NM; Hernández family history; census records; and newspaper accounts.