

The Last Frontier Series by Jim Harris. Originally published in the Hobbs News Sun, Hobbs, New Mexico on Sept. 8, 2013

## Lea County Loses A Historian Lea County History

With the recent death of Max Clampitt, Lea County lost not only a public servant dedicated to his community, but also a man who felt compelled to chronicle the history of the place that had been his home for most of his life.

Over the last few years, and over cups of steaming black coffee, Max and I spent quite a few hours talking about our corner of New Mexico. He drove up to Lovington to the Lea County Museum where I work, and we would discuss a prized historic photo he had recently found to add to his extensive collection or we considered the subject of an upcoming column he was writing for the News Sun.

One subject Max and I always came back to was Gil Hinshaw's book "Lea, New Mexico's Last Frontier," the one work both of us considered the most important book about Lea County.

I hope Max was aware that in the last weeks of his life the Lea County Museum staff was in the process of reprinting Gil's 1976 publication. I hope Max was aware that in the last three weeks Thomson-Shore, Inc., publishers in Dexter, Michigan, were printing several hundred copies of the book that is essential reading for knowledge of Lea County history.

Max Clampitt was Lea County's historian, the county's popular or "folk historian," might be the best title for him, but both of us talked several times about Gil Hinshaw being our county's "academic historian." Hinshaw is a man experienced in writing and publishing several regional histories, such as the works he did on the

towns of Tucumcari and Lovington and books on the Civil War.

Since he so valued Gil's book, I think Max would be happy about the title I have chosen for this column, "The Last Frontier," and I hope up there in heaven Max feels good about my taking up his mantle of writing Lea folk's history of the county.

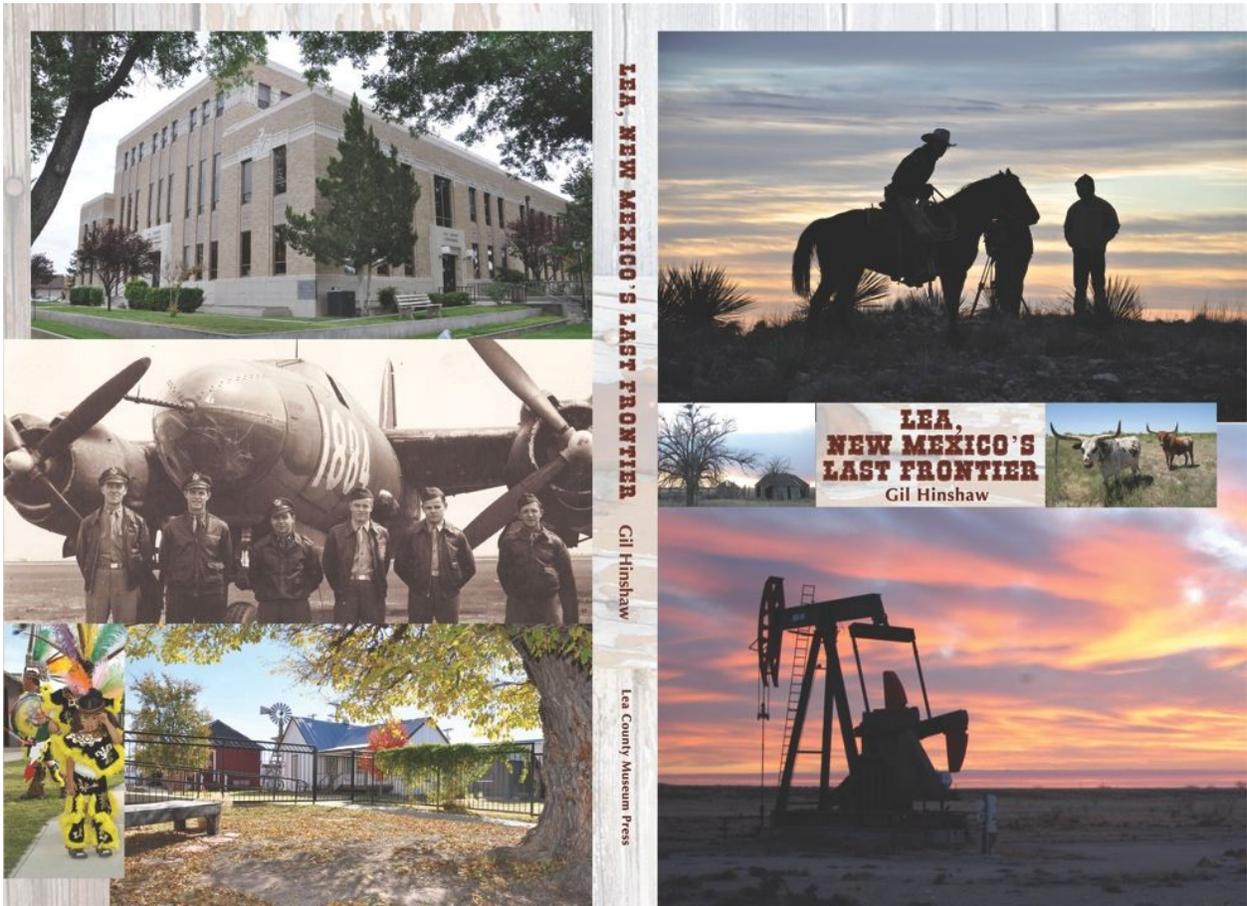
I did not ask my friend Gil Hinshaw if it is okay that I borrow a part of his book's title for this column. Gil will be aware of this column only when he reads this first edition.

For "The Last Frontier," I would like to make it my goal to combine the folksy contemporary narratives and historic photographs found in Max's columns with the more formal and footnoted narratives that Gil wrote in his county history book some 37 years ago.

For several years in the 1990s and the first two years of the new century, I wrote a weekly history and travel column called "The Southwest" for the News Sun. For the last 11 years I have written a column called "Lea County Museum History Notebook" for the Lovington Leader.

I will continue to write that column for the Leader, and "The Last Frontier" will be completely different in subject matter, although as the historical subjects relate to museum programs or exhibits, similar references may be found in both writings.

Writing this initial essay, I already feel back at home at the Hobbs News Sun.



This image shows the front and back of the Lea County Museum's reprint of the Gil Hinshaw book "Lea, New Mexico's Last Frontier." Hinshaw's book was published by the Hobbs News-Sun in 1976 with two reprintings, one in 1977 and another in 1983. The book will arrive in Lea in the next few weeks.