

Report from Bridging Ages Conference in Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA April 15 – 18, 2013

The Bridging Ages “Crossroads in History” conference in Las Cruces was a great success on many levels. People from Finland, India, Italy, Kenya, Latvia, Turkey, South Africa, Sweden, and twelve U.S. states participated.

Papers and workshops were presented on a variety of topics from museum interpretation to classroom instruction, from water wars in New Mexico to reconciliation in South Africa, and from language preservation to Manhattan Project exhibits. From early morning to late evening, the attendees to Bridging Ages 2013 in Las Cruces had a packed week of presentations, workshops, networking, excursions, and Time Travels.

The Time Travel to 1912 at Fort Selden had us making adobe mud bricks, picking cotton seeds out of cotton, doing needle point embroidering, shopping at the Women’s Improvement Association store, and debating whether women should have the right to vote. Our excursion to the plaza of Mesilla allowed us to visit the Taylor Historic Site and participate in the trial of Billy the Kid, followed by a Mexican dinner at La Posta restaurant.

The Western dinner and Blue Grass music at Fort Selden saw us whirling to a Virginia Reel from the 18th century as well as other dances. At Fort Selden, the light failed before our energy waned. Our all day excursion on the last day of the conference to Lincoln, a Wild West town where we saw Billy the Kid escape from jail, to Three Rivers petroglyph site with 21,000 examples of rock art, and to the White Sand National Monument had us dancing once again, this time on top of the white sand dunes.

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“Confronting Controversy in the U.S. National Parks”

How to interpret the American Civil War 1861-1865

Keynote speaker, Dr. Dwight Pitcaithley’s talk about the National Park Service and Civil War battlefields was a high point of the week. He explored how the National Park Service has changed the way that it interprets the causes of the U.S. Civil War by emphasizing the role of the protection of slavery as the main reason that the nation went to war. Confronting slavery as a cause of the war was traditionally avoided by park managers until 1998, when battlefield superintendents decided to incorporate explanations of slavery as a reason for the secession of eleven southern states from the Union in 1860-1861. The presentation detailed the resulting public outcry and the efforts of the NPS to deal with it.