

THE BRONCO

The Newsletter of the Blackwell School Alliance

Winter 2019



2019 Blackwell Block Party is On Its Way!

Yes, we're doing it again! Save the date:
Saturday, April 27, 2019.

The Blackwell Block Party is an annual one-day festival celebrating and commemorating the diverse culture and the rich heritage of Marfa. The 2019 Block Party brings great entertainment, delicious food, music, games, and fun for all ages. Everyone is invited.

This year, with Borderland Collective of San Marcos, we're creating a walking tour of Marfa featuring historic images and stories from the point of view of former students, teachers, friends, and neighbors of the Blackwell School.

Don't miss the fun, the fellowship, the time shared with friends, old and new—and be a part of our dream for Marfa.

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Blackwell School: Images & Voices from the Archive

History, Art, Storytelling, and the Rich Mosaic of Marfa's Borderland Heritage come together [HERE](#).



[Read more about the 2019 Blackwell Block Party on page 4.](#)

And a Community Art Spark

What's an Art Spark?

We're glad you asked.

Every year the Block Party features a community art project—designed to celebrate and commemorate our rich Hispanic culture and heritage—in a way that fosters pride,

ownership, and engagement on the part of all residents and visitors to Marfa. The first year it was a mural. In 2019, it's a walking tour with historic themes.

Next year? A surprise—one that will engage, honor, and represent our community

[Read more about the 2019 Art Spark on page 5.](#)

Board of Directors

President

Gretel Enck
432-295-3359

Vice President

Mario S. Rivera
432-729-3378

Treasurer

Kathleen Walstrom
432-729-4563

Secretary

Lionel Salgado
432-386-3934

Memberships

Betty A. Nunez
432-295-0470

Jessi Silva
432-295-0004

David Walstrom
432-729-4563

Blackwell School Alliance

P.O. Box 417
501 S. Abbott St
Marfa, TX 79843

blackwellschoolmarfa@
gmail.com

www.theblackwellschool.org

**THE BLACKWELL SCHOOL IS
OPEN EVERY SATURDAY FROM
10:00 AM TO 4:00 PM.
ADMISSION IS FREE.**

Letter from Gretel Enck

Dear Friends,

Winter is leaving quickly with the winds of spring blowing through. We've kept busy even through the slow part of the year, working with our architect to finish the Historic Structures Report and digesting all of the information it contains. And now we are gearing up for the second annual Blackwell Block Party, and working with some very creative and dedicated people in Borderland Collective to share more of the Blackwell School's history in a new way. We hope you will plan to be in Marfa on Saturday, April 27.

You can read more about those projects in this newsletter.

I would also like to talk to you about getting more involved in the Blackwell School Alliance. These days, we are a small yet determined group. You read here about all the good things we are doing. But in fact, we need help. We have some ongoing and upcoming projects that we would like to be doing, but we need more expertise and time and ideas. Specifically, we would like to be doing more in the areas of cataloging and preserving our collection, thinking about long-term exhibit planning, creating standards-based education curriculum, and extending our open hours.

To do this, we would like to add up to four new Board members this year, and more regular volunteers. Our Board of Directors meets the first Monday of every month. Board members should have a passion for our cause, be willing to assist in projects, and agree with the fundamentals of our strategic plan. They need not be former Blackwell students, although that is certainly welcome. We ask for a two-year commitment.

Volunteers should also have a passion for our mission, but the commitment can be less. The level of responsibility can also vary. If you have the time and experience, you can lead a project. Or you can take up a more modest level of participation in a project that catches your interest. We have a lot to choose from.

We are accepting letters of interest for service on our Board of Directors. Please write us an email or an old-fashioned letter and ask questions, or tell us you are interested in serving. New Board Members will be elected at our annual July members meeting on Monday, July 1, 2019.

Volunteers are welcome to stop into the Blackwell School any Saturday during open hours. Let's talk about what could work for you. Thank you.

The Blackwell School Alliance, in partnership with Borderland Collective, presents a walking tour of Marfa's history from the perspective of former students, teachers, friends, and neighbors of the Blackwell School. **We need your help to make the project a reality.** Please consider making a donation today. Every bit helps to create the walking tour, pay the artists, fund the entertainments for the party, and ensure that we can always provide our guests with a free buffet lunch and a wonderful reunion and party.

Visit our fundraising website at

www.gofundme.com/2019-blackwell-block-party-and-community-art-spark

or mail us a check made out to **Blackwell School Alliance** to

Blackwell School Alliance

PO Box 417

Marfa, TX 79843

And, thank you for your support!

Historic Structures Report

We have in our hands our Historic Structure Report completed by architect Sue Ann Pemberton, and we are pleased to report, “This one-story structure is well built and in sound condition. The stone perimeter footing shows no sign of cracks or movement. The roof is misshapen and bows on the south slope but is not of structural concern at this time. While some interior modifications, wall finishes and fenestrations require attention, the Blackwell School building should serve the community for years to come.”

In addition, the report describes the philosophy behind the recommendation of a combined approach of Preservation and Rehabilitation: “The approach merges the goal to retain the school’s historic character, with the need to repair existing historic materials, while retaining changes that have

recurred over time. In order to be a living functional building, modern amenities must be incorporated. Bringing the building up to current codes and standards will make it operational for its intended use. It is also important to have compliant access to and within the building, as well as mechanical and electrical systems that provide the service needed for current and future use. The basic philosophy is to preserve the current historic property while making changes to meet the continued use of the building.”

The report goes on to evaluate and describe the building’s structure and condition in great detail, with architectural drawings, site photographs, and written observations.

Finally, recommendations, priorities, and next steps are explained—again, with appropriate detail—so that we can plan the route ahead.

The Historic Structure Report will be available to view, in its entirety, at the 2019 Blackwell Block Party—along with the Board’s Capital Campaign plan to raise the money needed for the work. We hope you will take a look and give us your feedback.



One question in preparing the HSR was: how do we want the building to look when we are done? We agreed that if possible, we would like to restore the building to how it looked in this photograph. The arch, the belfry, and the chimneys are important architectural features, even if they pre-date the memory of students who are currently involved in preservation efforts. We love the arch! And we know that it existed for many years. This photograph was taken no earlier than 1927. We know this because the band hall is visible on the lower left. The band hall was built in 1927. This is one of the many conversations that went into the creation of the HSR.

2019 Blackwell Block Party

The Blackwell School Alliance hosts the Block Party as part of our mission to serve the Marfa community through culture, history, and education.

The Block Party is a free, family friendly event serving multiple generations and people of all backgrounds through art, dance, music, stories, and food. The Party is held on the grounds of the Blackwell School and Blackwell Park in south Marfa.

Saturday, April 27, 2019

11:00 a.m.

Kick off the Day with the unveiling of our Walking Tour at a site to be determined in Marfa, then move to the Blackwell School.

11:30 a.m.

Lunch is served: tamales, carne, agua fresca, y mas--and it is free, our gift to you. Everyone is welcome.

11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Primo and Beebe bring their special musical blend of traditional and Texas favorites.

1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Mexico 2000 Ballet Folklorico, a professional dance company from Dallas, performs.

12:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Presentation of Historic Structures Report, activities for kids, loteria, and more fun.

2:30 to 3:00 p.m.

Marfa Public Radio presents stories of our borderland home.

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

DJ Natalie Melendez provides the soundtrack for a lazy afternoon visiting with friends and eating cake (Yes, once again we will have a giant cake.).



...and Community Art Spark

Picture yourself walking down the main street of Marfa, a sunny day, any day. You turn the corner to cut over to grab a coffee or some breakfast, check your mail box, meet your friends at the bar. There on the wall is something different, and it makes you smile. There is a photograph six feet high from a bygone era of Marfa's history. You think you don't know the laughing children in the photograph, but maybe that one looks like your mom, or maybe your neighbor. You've got a minute, so you pull up the audio link on your phone. A marching band plays a song, and a woman tells a story related to the photograph. Her voice is rich with the spirit of the borderlands. Whether you've met her before or not, you know this woman. She is our history, our heritage, the keeper of another time before the Marfa of today.

You continue on your way, and around another corner, you find another image plastered to a blank wall. A teenage boy and girl lean against a car and smile. Their clothes, the car, the black and white photo take you back to a time before time. This audio features the voice of a man—each story a piece of the puzzle of a community's history.

If you are new to Marfa, perhaps you had no idea of all the wonders and hardships of Marfa before the art. You want to learn more. If you were born here, you see your family and its history reflected in the town's history. You want to learn more, too.

You realize that more of these giant pictures dot the town. You pick up a guide to the walking tour at the coffee shop and spend the rest of the afternoon exploring, learning, laughing, mourning, and understanding a little bit more about who we are.

The Blackwell School Alliance, in partnership with Borderland Collective, presents a walking tour of Marfa's history from the perspective of former students, teachers, friends, and neighbors of the Blackwell School.

The project will gather oral histories, sounds, and images to create a walking tour of twenty sites around the community, debuting at the 2019 Blackwell Block Party on Saturday, April 27. The images will be on display for one year. In addition, a newspaper will be created that contains a map guiding locals and visitors alike on the walking tour and a selection of photographs and stories associated with the tour. The newspaper will be distributed across the community in stores, hotels, community centers, schools, and government offices.

During the Block Party, Borderland Collective will set up an interactive activity allowing the community to contribute further to the historical narratives. This thematic and interactive art program and experience brings together diverse communities and varied visions to create a tangible and educational public art work in Marfa to foster pride, ownership, and engagement.



Borderland Collective is a long-term art and education project that utilizes collaborations between artists, educators, youth, and community members to engage complex issues and build space for diverse perspectives, meaningful dialogue, and modes of creation and reflection. Started in 2007 in the small oil town of Big Lake, Texas by public school teacher Ryan Sprott and artist Jason Reed, the project has worked in various and fluid ways with a few hundred participants to date, each of whom has been an integral part of our work. Among them include young women navigating between Native American tradition and urban culture in Albuquerque, East Asian and African refugees new to America and searching for a sense of place in San Antonio, young men who ranch in Mexico on the weekends but call Presidio, Texas home, or undergrads at Washington and Lee University touring our Northern Triangle traveling exhibition and mapping out their family migration stories. The collective in Borderland Collective, therefore, references a mindset rather than a set group of members, allowing for ever-evolving modes of practice and perspective. Borderland Collective projects are archived at Texas State University, have been exhibited in galleries and public spaces in Texas, Arizona, Illinois, New York, Washington D.C, and Mexico City, and have been shared through lectures and publications across the globe.

Listing on the National Register

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America’s historic and archeological resources.

Naturally, we think the Blackwell School should be on this list.

Another goal for 2019, therefore, is to submit our application to the Texas Historical Commission. Then, we work together with an assigned representative from THC to prepare our application for national submission.

This project has been on our list for a couple of years, but we needed to wait until the Historic Structures Report was done because that document provides us with the physical description of our building necessary for the National Register application.

In addition, we needed to do more historical research to figure out some of the mysteries involved with our building and other buildings that provided education to Marfa students in the early days of the city’s history.

A particular sticking point is the connection with the Methodist Church. You may recall that we have a copy of a handwritten document from 1940 written by Carmen Mendias. This document states that the building was built for a church and used during the week as a school. The school opened in 1889.

Yet in 2017, students from UTSA found physical evidence in the building that proved it could not have been built before 1905. Deed research by historian Lonn Taylor found the property being sold to the school district in 1909, and subsequent investigation into newspaper archives found articles documenting the new school—our current Blackwell School building—being built in the summer of 1909.

But what about the Methodist Church? Does that story go with another building?

Longstanding documentation tells us that the original school in Marfa was on Galveston Street and opened in 1885. We also know that in 1892 a new elementary school opened at the site of the current school, and that the Anglo children went to the new school. Little mention is made of what happened to the children of Mexican descent.

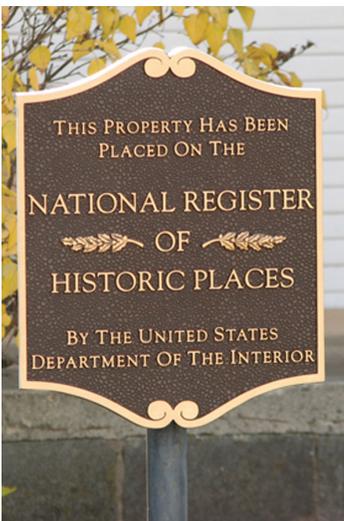
Recently, we were able to spend time at the Presidio County Courthouse tracking down deed information about that Galveston Street property. In 1885, the property in question was sold to the County Judge of Presidio County—the entity in charge of schooling at that time. In May 1909, the newspaper reported that, “The board then decided to sell the old Mexican School property and to build a new and up to date school house on property in the southern part of the city, in as much as the present location is too small and the old house is in a dilapidated condition.” Deed records show that in 1910, the Galveston Street property was sold by Presidio County to a private owner.

This still doesn’t explain the connection of the school to a church. But it does—at least circumstantially—explain where the “Mexican School” existed before our current building came into existence.

And it supports what we know about the history of the Blackwell School. This strengthens our application, as the picture of our history comes into focus.

Listing in the National Register is an honor that recognizes the value of our preservation efforts. It is also the first step towards eligibility for National Park Service-administered federal preservation tax credits that have leveraged more than \$45 billion in private investment and National Park Service grant programs like Save America’s Treasures and Preserve America.

Stay tuned for more information as we work our way through the process.



Having a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places recognizes that the property has historical significance. It also makes more funding opportunities and assistance available.

Capital Campaign is Coming

You have been waiting a long time for this moment. So many pieces of the puzzle are falling into place. We have documented the historical research. Our architect has inspected, investigated, and interpreted the physical evidence of the building. Alumni have told stories about their time in and around the old adobe school house.

Now, we are putting together a proposal. Much of our discussion of the moment is around lumping versus splitting. *What do we mean by that?* As you can imagine, our building needs a lot of love. And our Historic Structures Report addresses that in detail. And, conveniently, it has the necessary work divided into phases. For example, some of the fixes naturally go together: replacing the windows should happen at the same time as we are replastering the exterior walls.

So *splitting* would be to address each cluster of tasks separately: raise some money, do a cluster of tasks; raise some more money, do another cluster of tasks. *Lumping* would be to jump right in and think of the restoration as one big project, raise all the money, and do the whole thing.

There are pros and cons to both approaches. And so you are invited to add your voice to this discussion when you attend the Block Party on April 27. The Historic Structures Report will be on display and you can provide input on a questionnaire.

And then, look out! However we proceed, we will undertake a major capital campaign to finally make the school house the historic site we have long wanted—maintaining its historic integrity while making the upgrades necessary for it to be a modern, fully functioning museum and community center.

Ending the Year on a Tasty Note

The Blackwell School capped a great year with our third annual Holiday Read Aloud with READ BIG BEND. On Saturday, December 15, participants enjoyed stories about Christmas and other seasonal holidays read out loud by community volunteers. The Holiday Read Aloud combines the Blackwell School's celebration of Marfa's Hispanic heritage with READ BIG BEND's commitment to early literacy development and sharing a love of reading. Stories are bilingual, and guests are provided a cozy space, as well as delicious holiday treats (although, next year we are considering tamales instead of cookies!). We live in such a supportive community. Our best work is done with great partners like the READ program.

December's readers included Allison Scott, Brit Webb, Ann Marie Nafziger, Genevieve Bassham, and David and Kathleen Mims Walstrom. Attendees were delighted by the story of Charro Claus and his borderland gift-delivery burros, made hungry by the mouth-watering tale of Too Many Tamales, and learned why Shanté Keys eats New Year's Peas.



Blackwell School Alliance
PO Box 417
501 S. Abbott St.
Marta, TX 79843

