

FAMILY CAREGIVER 2023 RESOURCE GUIDE

Pick One Up Today!



The largest resource in New Mexico for anyone caring for a family member or friend.

Find Information On:

- Healthcare
- Homecare
- Insurance Options
- Legal and Financial Resources
- Residential Options
- End-of-Life Resources and More.

For Distribution Locations visit CaregiversNM.com or call 505-242-2428

CAREGIVERSNM.COM

Woebegone Waldo

By Shannon Wagers

About 50 years ago, back in the zany 1970s, a very unofficial organization called the New Mexico Undevelopment Commission was founded (with tongue planted firmly in cheek) by the late Mark Acuff, editor of a scrappy little weekly newspaper called *The New Mexico Independent*, and a few like-minded co-conspirators. It was dedicated to the proposition that our state already had enough people and enough industry and was just fine the way it was, thank you. As befits a body with a mission like that, the “commission” didn’t do much, apart from printing bumper stickers with friendly messages like, “Texan Go Home!” and “Don’t Californicate New Mexico.” In the interest of full disclosure, I suppose I should admit that I worked at the *Independent* back in the day and was in sympathy with the commission’s goals. I still have my unofficial T-shirt in a drawer somewhere.

The commission sponsored an annual “Un-Picnic,” held in late summer amid the ruins of the long-abandoned community of Waldo, a couple of miles west of Cerrillos in Santa Fe County. This event took place under the shade of a stand of cottonwood trees that mark the old town site and featured, as I recall, a cow chip-throwing contest and the consumption of copious amounts of beer. The location was chosen in part to poke fun at the seeming absurdity of the Waldo off-ramp on Interstate 25, constructed at a cost of several million dollars to serve a town some six miles away over a bumpy dirt road, where nobody had lived for decades. Actually, the so-called “Exit to Nowhere” wasn’t a complete boondoggle. It was built in anticipation of several planned real estate developments in the area, none of which ever came to fruition. So, this was an appropriate venue for the Un-Picnic. The exit (No. 267) is still there, but the sign now reads “Waldo Canyon Road” instead of “Waldo,” a more accurate reflection of its destination.

Notwithstanding its present state of undevelopment, bordering on non-existence, Waldo has an interesting history. The town had its beginnings in the 1880s, when the newly-arrived Santa Fe Railroad piped water from springs in Waldo Canyon to fill the boilers of its steam locomotives, and to supply the mine at Madrid, about six miles



away. A few years later, a long row of coking ovens, constructed of brick and local stone, was built along the tracks to process coal from the Madrid mine.

Coke is an industrial fuel produced by burning coal in an enclosed space without enough air to allow complete combustion, a process known as destructive distillation. (Charcoal is produced from wood in a similar manner.) In both cases, the result is a concentrated fuel that burns hotter and cleaner than the original material. Coke from Waldo’s ovens was shipped to smelters and steel mills in nearby states.

From around the turn of the 20th century to the mid-1930s, Waldo had its own post office, and its own railway depot. A five-story plant producing zinc oxide paint pigment operated between 1918 and 1924. The population peaked at around 200 residents in the mid-1920s, and then began a steady decline. By 1954, the year the coal mine at Madrid shut down for good, Waldo was a ghost town.

The town was reportedly named for Judge Henry L. Waldo, a Missourian by birth, who came to New Mexico in 1862, served as chief justice of the territorial Supreme Court from 1876 to 1878, and later as a lawyer for the Santa Fe Railroad. The name may also honor Henry Waldo’s uncle, Dr. David Waldo, and father, Lawrence L. Waldo, who were both early traders on the Santa Fe Trail starting around 1828, and were well-known in Santa Fe and Taos. Lawrence Waldo was killed by insurgents during the 1847 Taos rebellion, when little Henry was just three years old.

Today, sadly, the *Independent* and the Undevelopment Commission are long gone, and not much is left of Waldo, except the foundations of a few buildings and the coke ovens, overgrown with desert scrub brush and tumbleweeds. The grove of cottonwoods still provides a shady spot for a picnic, and I imagine you could easily find a few cowpies lying around, if you want to try your hand at throwing them.