

Transcript
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Greetings. Thank you all for attending today's talk on Helene Wurlitzer. Helene Wurlitzer has remained an enigma to many for over half a century, due in great part to the fact that she chose to remain anonymous, and that her many philanthropic works, which contributed to the betterment of humanity, be kept private.

So who was Helene Wurlitzer, and how did she end up in Taos, New Mexico? When did she establish the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico, and for what purpose? Who has benefited from her Foundation, and who continues to benefit? I presume these are questions that many may have, and which will hopefully be answered during the following presentation.

Helene's background. (Slide 1)

Helene's father, **Gustav Billing**, was born in Eschwege, Germany, a village approximately 4 hours south of Berlin. He immigrated to America in 1860, in essence a political refugee, choosing to escape the compulsory military service, or conscription - similar to the draft in the U.S, which was required by his homeland. He arrived in New York City and three years later joined the **Union Army** because he believed slavery should be abolished. **(Slide 2 - Soldier Gustav)** He excelled as a soldier and was promoted to the rank of first lieutenant in a very short period of time. However, his military career was cut short as a result of an injury he sustained when he was hit by shrapnel from a cannon ball. As a result, he was honorably **discharged in Washington D.C. in 1865. After being discharged he joined his brother's banking firm, Hagen and Billing, in New York City.** From there he traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio. Cincinnati at that time had a thriving German community. It is said the Ohio River, which runs through Cincinnati, was, to German immigrants, reminiscent of the Rhine River, and many were drawn to the area, and settled along its banks. It was there, in **1872, that he met and married Henriette Schneider, (Slide 3 - Henriette)** daughter of Dr. Carl Schneider, a renowned physician in Cincinnati. Shortly after their marriage the couple moved to Salt Lake City, Utah. The second wave of the Industrial Revolution was well underway and was rapidly expanding to the west. One industry,

mining, was booming, and Gustav Billing, supported by a group of investors, took over a mill and converted it into a smelter. Two years later, on **December 15, 1874, Helene was born in Salt Lake City. (Slide 4 - Baby Helene at 4 years of age)** In 1878, when Helene was four years old, Gustav moved his family to the famous Tabor Mansion in Denver, Colorado. From there he oversaw the operation of a silver and lead **smelter in Leadville, Colorado. (Slide 5) (Slide 6 - Helene at 5)**

In 1880, when Helene was six years old, Gustav sold the smelter in Leadville and purchased a small mining operation in Magdalena, New Mexico, a remote village just outside of Socorro, where he established another smelter.

Helene was eight years old when her parents moved to Magdalena. The mining operation, where silver and gold were mined, was extremely successful and prospered under his administration.

Even though Santa Fe was the Territorial Capital at the time, Socorro, due to the silver boom, was the largest city in the territory, its population exceeding that of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Socorro had all the characteristics common to successful mining towns all over the west. It was a bustling community renowned for its saloons and brothels. Helene, an independent and spirited child, found that living in such an unrestrained and carefree environment suited her quite well. Throughout her life she fondly recalled memories of her childhood experiences in Magdalena, especially her freedom and independence, playing with her dogs and riding her pet burro in the wild and colorful central New Mexican desert. She was a bright, strong willed, and adventurous child, and impressed many with her knowledge and her keen sense of responsibility at such a young age. It is said her attributes, in great part, were due to her mother's guidance and direction since her father was primarily involved in the administration and oversight of the mining operation. **(Slide 7 - Helene at 9)** It is noteworthy to mention that while living in Magdalena, Helene had the opportunity to meet Archbishop Lamy. Lamy, of French origin, was a powerful force in the religious, economic, and political developments in the territory in the latter part of the 19th century. He recognized Gustav Billing as a prominent business figure in the territory and invited him to Santa Fe for a visit. Billing himself had no religious

affiliation. He believed there was only one Supreme Architect and respected the varied beliefs of others. Shortly after their visit, the Archbishop, being duly impressed by Gustav and his mining operation, dispatched several priests to the Kelly Mine to bless the smelter, an act which boded well for Billing, since the majority of his laborers were Mexican Catholics who harbored resentment towards the Anglos due to the outcome of the Mexican American War (1846-48), which resulted in the United States absconding territory which had historically belonged to Mexico, territory that included most of what today is the Southwestern United States. **(Slides 8,9,10,11 - Kelly Mine)**

In **1887**, when **Helene was 13 years old**, the Billings moved back to Cincinnati, Ohio, the childhood home of her mother, Henriette. The transition was not easy for Helene. She found adjustment to gentrified city living difficult. **(Slide 12 - Helene at 13) (See p19, Lady of the Casa)**

In **1888**, shortly after her sister Ilse Louise was born, the family began making plans to **move back to Germany**. The motivation to move was based upon Helene's parent's desire to have her benefit from a better educational system, become immersed in the German language, and become familiar with the maternal and paternal members of her parents' extended families.

Helene attended a private girls' school in Freiburg, a beautiful community in the vicinity of the Black Forest. She excelled academically.

The Billings were giving serious consideration to relocating and establishing a permanent residence in Germany. However, their plans changed abruptly due to the untimely death of **Gustav, who died in Berlin at fifty years of age. (Slide 13 - Gustav Billing)** Henriette, instead, decided to move the family back to Cincinnati in 1890. **(Slide 14 - Helene at 18)** Henriette was an astute business woman in her own right and oversaw the mining operation in Socorro from Cincinnati. Helene, 16] years old at the time, **(Slide 15 - Billing Mansion)** and her sister, Ilse Louise, frequently accompanied their mother to the mining operation in Magdalena to oversee their business interests, but primarily to look out for the health and welfare of the miners. **In 1904 Henriette Billing sold the Kelly mine.**

Early Influence

During her teens and early adult years Helene was strongly influenced by the philanthropic and humanitarian endeavors of both sides of her family. While the men in her community were primarily busy with their business endeavours, the women were involved in the cultural and humanitarian affairs of the community, spearheading a number of projects in the creative and performing arts, museums, parks, libraries, institutions of higher learning, etc. Helene's exposure to such endeavors strongly influenced her values and remained with her for the rest of her life. **Even though she was very shy, she continued to be active in charitable, civic and cultural affairs** in the city.

In **1895, while living in Cincinnati, she met and married Howard Eugene Wurlitzer (b. Sept. 5, 1871, Cincinnati—d. Oct. 30, 1928, New York City). (Slide 16- Helene and Howard)** Howard, the son of Rudolph Wurlitzer, and founder of the famed Wurlitzer Music Company, did not have a formal education, but had a natural talent for business, which impressed his father. In fact, it was his father who withdrew Howard from school so he could learn every aspect of the music business, and who sent him to Germany to study the craft of making musical instruments. He rose up through the ranks of the business and eventually, at the passing of his father in 1915, became president of the company. He was the driving force for the famous music company, and under his leadership and innovation, the company prospered and became famous for its production of pianos, organs, and jukeboxes.

Philanthropic endeavors

Both Helene and Howard were very active in supporting the **Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music**. Between them they conceived and financed the idea of a **radio and television department for the study and application of these mediums for musical expression**. Helene also established a **scholarship program** for students who were attending the Conservatory. Due to her involvement, contributions to, and support of the College and its students, she was elected (in the 1930's) to be the **first woman to become a member of the board of regents for the Cincinnati College, and subsequently was bestowed an honorary doctorate degree in 1955. (Slide 16.5 - Helene's doctorate)**

Helene and Howard enjoyed a happy marriage together and had three children, Raimund (11/24/1896), Louise (10/20/1898), and Valeska (12/28/1900). **(Slides 17,18,19 - Wurlitzer children)** Tragically **Louise died in 1924**, at the early age of 26, from an epileptic seizure, a condition which resulted from a traumatic head injury she sustained in her youth. She was hit by a rock thrown by a misguided youth.

In 1915, about the same time he became president of the music company, Howard had his appendix removed and unfortunately contracted a staph infection which he was unable to find a cure for, and which haunted him for the remainder of his life. **(Slide 20- Helene and Howard)** He continued to run the Music Company but due to his poor health he eventually relinquished control of the company to his cousins. He sought medical attention at health facilities at home and abroad but was unsuccessful in finding a cure for the infection. He died in New York City on Oct. 30, 1928 at the age of 57, several days after attending and celebrating his mother's 85th birthday party. **(Slide 21 - Howard)** Helene was widowed at the age of 54. After the loss of her daughter and subsequently Howard's death, she took her aging mother, Henriette, into her home. When her mother was no longer able to attend concerts Helene would arrange to have members of the Cincinnati String Quartet play at the family home. She enjoyed her mother's companionship until Henriette's death in 1939.

While in Cincinnati, Helene continued to be quite active in philanthropic work. Some of her achievements were: After WWI she was a prominent participant in the **Carnegie Institute of International Education**, a student exchange program designed to further the cause of international understanding between American and German students. She often **hosted European students who were attending the Music Conservatory** at Cincinnati College, and was actively involved with the Cincinnati College and **instrumental in seeing the institution operate and maintain high academic standards. Helene helped establish a clinic to research the relationship between unrelated diseases and focal infection.** She also contributed to **cancer research.**

Eduardo Rael

In the early 1930's, while still in Cincinnati, and active with the Conservatory of Music, Helene met a young student from Taos who was attending the Conservatory on a full scholarship. She was informed the student had an outstanding debt of \$100 for incidental items which he had accrued over the previous academic year. The student, **Eduardo Rael, (Slide 22 - Rael)** a Taoseno, was studying voice at the Conservatory. According to Rael, Helene Wurlitzer approached him in the cafeteria, informed him of her desire to cover his outstanding debt, and asked if he would be willing to teach her how to speak and write Spanish. Delighted to be freed from the debt, and moved by her kindness and generosity, Eduardo immediately agreed to comply with her request. That was the beginning of an enduring and close friendship between the two. In fact, in their correspondence over the years, her salutation to Eduardo was "Mi Querido Ahijado" (dear godson) and her closing was "Tu Madrina" (your godmother). After graduating from the Conservatory, Rael traveled to Europe to sing in opera houses in Spain, Italy, and France. Helene, supporting Rael's creative work, provided financial support during his time in Europe. They continued to maintain close contact for the rest of their lives.

Having corresponded with Helene over the years, Eduardo Rael was aware of her losses and instrumental in encouraging her to liquidate her estate in Cincinnati and move to Taos. Rael recounted that Helene, even though she had an affinity with the Southwest, was somewhat reluctant to come to Taos, a reluctance based upon her knowledge that Taos was a remote mountain village, inhabited by Native Americans, Spanish colonists, and a handful of bohemian artists. She imagined such a move may prove to be quite a challenge after being so accustomed to her privileged cosmopolitan living in Cincinnati. However, Eduardo persisted, and eventually his persistence paid off. In the early 40's Helene moved to New Mexico, settling originally in Santa Fe, where she lived at the La Fonda Hotel for a number of weeks before eventually moving to Taos. Rael stated that he invited Helene to Taos to attend a social event being sponsored by local merchants where most in attendance were the "who's who of Taos." Several days after the gathering Helene approached Rael and said, "Well, Ahijado, you win, I'm moving to Taos." She informed him that her decision to move to Taos was due in great part to the friendliness and hospitality of the members of the community, the "unhurried tempo of the Spanish people," the "quiet dignity of the Pueblo Indians," and the beauty and serenity of the

area, She subsequently purchased property in the vicinity of the Los Pandos, Burch, and Liebert Streets. As it turns out, a portion of the property she purchased, which was located to the north of Los Pandos Road, was property owned by Eduardo Rael's mother. Soon after purchasing the property Helene hired a local builder and craftsman by the name of Arturo Vicente Martinez y Salazar, to build her home at 218 Los Pandos Rd. **(Slide 23, 24 - Helene's home/Helene with Eduardo)** When her home was completed, she had a Taos Pueblo Indian inscribe the lintel over the door, "Built In The 11TH Hour, 1942." **(Slide 25 - Inscription)** There has been much speculation regarding the meaning of the inscription. Some say the meaning refers to the Second World War, and the shortage of materials. However, her home was built exclusively with indigenous products from the surrounding area, and she had the wherewithal to purchase other necessary materials and furnishings, so in her case, there would likely have been no shortage of materials, making the reason for the inscription being related to the war less likely. A different meaning of the inscription seems more apropos: Helene was very fond of the Native Americans and was fascinated by their cultures. She visited many of the 19 pueblos in New Mexico, as well as the Hopi and Navajo Indians in Arizona. The

Message from the Hopi Elders follows:

You have been telling the people that this is the **Eleventh Hour**

Now you must go back and tell the people that this *is* the Hour

And there are things to be considered:

Where are you living?

What are you doing?

What are your relationships?

Are you in the right relation?

Where is your water?

Know your garden.

It is time to speak your truth.

Create your community.

Be good to each other.

Do not look outside yourself for the leader.

This could be a good time!

There is a river flowing now very fast.
It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.
They will try to hold on to the shore.
They will feel they are being torn apart, and they will suffer greatly.
Know the river has its destination.
The elders say we must let go of the shore, and
push off into the river,
keep our eyes open,
and our heads above the water.
See who is in there with you and celebrate.
At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally.
Least of all ourselves.
For the moment we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.
The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves.
Banish the word "struggle" from your attitude, and your vocabulary.
All that we do must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.
We are the ones we've been waiting for.

The Elders

Oraibi, Arizona, Hopi Nation

(Slide 26 -Hopi Elder msg.) Helene, being a visionary and interested in the esoteric, suggests the inscription placed upon the entrance to her home is more within the context of the Hopi's prophetic message than it was with the war, and the scarcity of building materials. However, in the end, only Helene truly knew the reason for having such an inscription placed upon the lintel over the entrance to her home.

Henry A. Sauerwein

Dr. Henry A. Sauerwein **(Slide 27- Young Henry)** was an important character in the latter part of Helene's life. Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Henry graduated from Johns Hopkins University at the age of 21, receiving his PhD in Romance Languages and Philosophy. He was a brilliant young man and

because of his excellent academic status and youthful age, he was already on the radar of the U.S. Govt. He said that one day, shortly after his graduation, a limousine pulled up in front of his home and two men in black approached his front door. They said, "Dr. Sauerwein, we would like you to come work at the Pentagon." It was a momentous occasion, and he knew the decision he made would significantly determine the future direction of his life. His other option was to accept Johns Hopkins' offer to become the youngest professor at the University. It is not known why he made the decision he did, but he accepted the offer to work at the Pentagon, working there for approximately 10 years. It was while at the Pentagon that he met Burton Phillips, a young lawyer from Florida, and they became good friends. Phillips, it turns out, had friends in Taos, one being artist and businessman, Dick Dicus, who he visited in Taos annually during his summer vacation. He frequently invited Henry to accompany him to Taos. Both resigned from the Pentagon at the same time, likely due to the Pentagon's increasing intolerance toward homosexuals, and decided to leave their harried lives behind and move to quiet and secluded Taos. Henry packed his worldly possessions into his car and he, with his mother and Burton, moved to Taos in the early 1950's, and established residence. Shortly after his arrival he was invited to a party at the Dicus' residence. It was at that party that Henry Sauerwein met Helene Wurlitzer. She was so taken by Sauerwein's sharp wit, knowledge of languages, especially of German and Spanish, that they soon became good friends. Henry was hired by the State of New Mexico to drive the rural Bookmobile. He had no driver's license and could barely drive. However, while at the party, and discussing his dilemma with Secretary of State, Jesusita Perralt, she assured him he shouldn't worry. Several days later Henry received his licence in the mail. However, the prompt issue of his license did not help improve his driving skills. Many of the trees in the driveway to the main office at the Wurlitzer Foundation are a testimony to that fact.

In the early 1950's Helene contacted Henry and said, "Henry, I want you to come by so we can think up a foundation." It should be noted that Helene already had a functioning foundation in Cincinnati, Ohio, called the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation. However, when she and Sauerwein got together to collaborate on the creation of a Foundation in Taos, they came up with the idea of an artist-in-residence program. She established the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico in 1954. **(Slide 28 - Article)** She already had a board of directors in Cincinnati, but she formed an **advisory board in Taos,**

consisting of herself as president, Dr. Sauerwein as vice president, and three members of the community at large who represented the three prominent cultures in Taos; Jose Abigail Maes (Superintendent of Schools), Tony Reyna (Taos Pueblo Tribal member and future Pueblo Governor), and Emil Bisttram (Anglo painter). She dissolved the Cincinnati foundation and established the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico, with the administrative office being located in Taos. Her newly formed foundation was incorporated in 1956. Dr. Henry A. Sauerwein became the Executive Director of the Foundation, a position he kept for 42 years until his death in 1996. **(slide 29 - Ex. Dir. H.A.S)**

At the time of its creation the HWF of NM's philanthropic arm was broader in scope than exclusively an artist residence program. It was a philanthropic organization that reached out to many segments of the population in Taos, and did much as the foundation in Cincinnati was designed to do, namely to help others.

Helene Wurlitzer, through her foundation in Taos, helped the **indigent**, those with **medical needs**, those that needed **housing, donated property** (land and a house) for the creation of the first **Taos Animal Shelter**, believing that healthy animals would mean a healthier community, provided **academic scholarships** to Taos High graduating students interested in pursuing a post secondary education in the creative arts, and also continued to contribute to **cancer research**. She **provided musical instruments**, space, and hired local musical talent to provide free music lessons to local children. Joe Baum taught violin, viola, and cello. Ramon Hernandez taught guitar. All the while providing housing or stipends, instruments, and material to artists in the creative arts of music, literature, and the visual arts.

What motivated Helene? Apart from her natural propensity to help others, she was keenly aware of the times and saw that **federal support for artists was dwindling** as money was being funneled away from the arts and being directed to the space race and the military industrial complex. She understood the importance of supporting artists, and **believed that artists were those members in society that help keep us connected to our humanity**, and our soul. She **recognized the signs in society**, and in government, that suggested the human condition was rapidly deteriorating and becoming more imbalanced. She realized that **inspiration was essential** for both creativity and artistic expression and

that the establishment of an artist residence program could **provide a nurturing, unencumbered and stress free environment** where artists could work in quiet and solitude, allowing inspiration and creativity to flourish. She wanted the Foundation to be a haven where creativity would prosper, as well as a **respite for artists**, where they could be free of the harried lives back home, to heal emotionally or physically if necessary. One of the most generous aspects of her philosophy was to **“place no expectations upon the artist,”** believing that expectations were sure to stifle the creative spirit. She also believed an essential factor for a successful creative experience was **“time.”** In the early days of the Foundation’s operation it was not uncommon for artists to stay from 6-12 months. Over time, because of an increasing number of applicants, the length of the residency was eventually reduced to three months. Today, the Foundation provides one 10 week session and two 12 week sessions, still ample time for artists to immerse themselves in their work and be productive.

Helene had an uncanny gift of discerning needs in the community, especially the needs of artists. The stories of her generosity and benevolence abound and are too many to account for at this time. However, to name a few: **Andrew Dasburg**, painter, had been suffering from Addison’s disease, a rare adrenal gland disorder, for a number of years and had been unable to paint. Helene became aware of his condition and after meeting with him at her home, agreed to pay for his medical care and his medication. Dasburg had some of his most prosperous years painting after receiving her help. **Dr. Isaac Udell**, a chiropractor who arrived in Taos in the 1920’s, delivered over 3,000 babies in Taos County, and never charged for his service, was also an artist. He painted, sculpted, and carved Spanish Colonial furniture. When he fell upon hard times Helene helped him out financially. In turn, he left a rare and unusual collection of 13 large Penitente Paintings (Los Hermanos Penitentes) in her possession. **Agnes Martin**, in the 1950’s received a stipend from the Foundation to purchase materials for her work, work that she exhibited at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York in 1957. Her exhibition drew much attention and was the beginning of an immensely successful career. Other notable artists who benefitted from Helene and the Foundation were: Scott Momaday, Tom and Dorothy Benrimo, Bob Ray, Earl Stroh, and Robert Ellis. **Robert Ellis** and his family, wife Rosa, and young daughter were living in Galveston, Texas, and lost their home during Hurricane Carla in 1961. Ms. Wurlitzer heard of their plight from a mutual friend and invited the Ellis’ to come stay in one of the artist “casitas” until they were able to get back on their feet. Helene heard of a Zuni painter, **Kai Sa** (Percy Sandy), who was

married to a Taos Pueblo woman, and in desperate financial straits. Helene invited the family to lunch and before they left, offered to help them out financially. The family was able to resume a normal life and Kai Sa was able to continue with his painting. **Patricinio Barela**, renowned carver, was supported personally, and as an artist, by Helene. According to Dr. Sauerwein, Helene is probably one of a few who paid Barela a fair and honest price for his work. Many took advantage of Barela due to his lifelong struggle with alcohol. Often Helene would invite Barela, as she did many others, into her home to share a meal with her.

Helene Wurlitzer was visited by tragedy and significant losses throughout her life, but none of them, individually, or combined, deterred her from focusing on her life's purpose, "to serve others." She lived a full and benevolent life. Many lives were changed for the better from the good she did and many lives continue to reap the benefits from her generosity. Hundreds of artists from the United States and countries all over the world have benefited greatly from her generosity and vision to support "artists and the creative spirit." Helene's legacy continues and hers is the "**gift that keeps on giving.**" (Slide 30 - Helene at 87)