

THE OWINGS GALLERY

Wm. P. Henderson  
Furniture  
Francis C. Wilson  
Vice President  
Admin. Bldg.  
Government Building

POURER, FRONZ AND SANDERS  
NEW YORK FURNITURE & DIS-  
MOUNTING FIRM FURNITURE IN-  
NATIVE NEW MEXICO OFFICE

TELEPHONE 500

THE PUEBLO-SPANISH BUILDING COMPANY, INC.

307 CARRILLO DEL NORTE BLD.

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

June 15, 1929

C. J. Brown,  
1st Construction Company,  
415 Railway Exchange Building,  
Kansas City - Mo.

TO:

1 Carved table- - - - -	\$185.00 ✓
8 " chairs @ \$50 - - - - -	400.00 ✓
2 " " @ \$60 - - - - -	120.00 ✓
1 " " lawby - - - - -	125.00 ✓
1 " "avenport - - - - -	250.00 ✓
2 Banzuitos @ \$25 - - - - -	50.00 ✓
1 Carved serving table- - - - -	150.00 ✓
	<u>\$1280.00</u>
Crating and express charges - - -	100.00 ✓
TOTAL- - - - -	<u>\$1380.00</u> ✓

My dear Mr. Brown -

I hope the furniture  
arrived in good shape and looks  
good to you. The waxing will probably  
have been rubbed up after the dust of shipment  
is got back in your new home.  
Sincerely yours  
Wm. P. Henderson

WILLIAM P. HENDERSON | BY DESCENT  
*The Brown Collection*



Cornelius Brown



Penelope Davenport Brown

*My Dear Mr. Brown-*

*I hope the furniture arrived in good shape and looks good to you. The waxing will probably have to be rubbed up after the dust of shipment. Good luck in your new house.*

*-Wm P. Henderson June 15, 1929*

Cornelius and Penelope Brown purchased their sixteen-piece suite of furniture in 1929 from William Penhallow Henderson's nascent Pueblo Spanish Building Company. Established four years earlier in Santa Fe after the collapse of son-in-law John Evans' Flying Heart Development Corporation, the Pueblo Spanish Building Company's corporate mission, "to carry on the business of architects and engineers," was to a great extent a continuation of Henderson's role in Evans' failed company.<sup>1</sup> Henderson, a successful painter, muralist and teacher in Chicago, moved to Santa Fe rather abruptly in 1916 to treat his wife's advanced pulmonary tuberculosis at the Sunmount Sanatorium. The anticipated one year stay became permanent as Henderson and his wife, poet, Alice Corbin "adopted Western dress, kept horses for transportation, learned Spanish, made friends in the pueblos, and in countless other daily mannerisms, over the ensuing years, took on the lifestyle of their surroundings."<sup>2</sup> By the mid-1920's, Henderson and Alice Corbin were ensconced in Santa Fe's intellectual milieu of artists, writers and archaeologists. Undaunted by the brilliant light of New Mexico, Henderson shed his muted Whistlerian palette and adopted vibrant Fauvist colors and multipoint perspective. Early critical reviews of his New Mexico work were very positive.

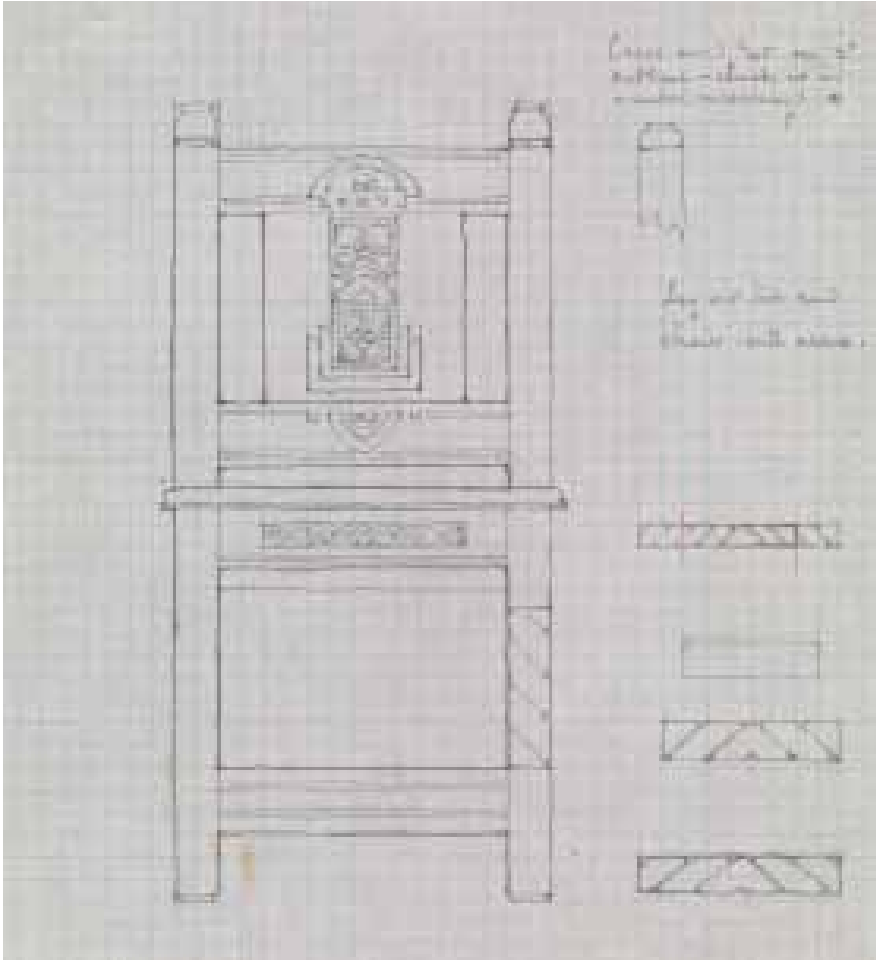
Henderson aggressively sought national exposure for his new paintings and from 1919 to 1925 he exhibited either alone or in group-shows at nineteen galleries and museums in Chicago, Boston, New York, San Diego and San Francisco.

Henderson's midlife career change from artist to architect and furniture designer began with the construction of his studio (1919) and home (1923-24) on Camino del Monte Sol. However, the 1922 wedding of Henderson's daughter to John Ganson Evans, the only child of Mabel Dodge Luhan, was perhaps the most compelling reason for this rather unexpected change. The twenty-year-old Evans established The Flying Heart Development Company in 1923 with Henderson as a minor shareholder. While Evans' development company was short lived, Henderson designed and built a two-story adobe home on Canyon Road now known as the Edwin Brooks house. The Brooks house and Hen-Cor, as the Henderson home was humorously known to friends and neighbors, both incorporated the New Mexico vernacular of plain and simple adobe massing into which Henderson integrated both traditional and progressive elements. The aesthetic success of these early buildings, as well as the daunting constraints of promoting his artwork in the geographic isolation of Santa Fe, was certainly an impetus to the establishment of the Pueblo Spanish Building Company.

Like Purcell and Elmslie, Green and Green, and many other progressive American architects, Henderson frequently created furniture as an organic component of his overall architectural design. Henderson's first New Mexico furniture was the dining room table and chairs designed at the request of his wife and like Hen-Cor, included a combination of vernacular and progressive elements. Unsurprisingly, this simple dining room set was popular with Henderson's friends and he soon had requests to make similar furniture for their adobe homes.



William P. Henderson and his wife Alice in Las Vegas, 1921, William Penhallow Henderson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Chair Design, William Penhallow Henderson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

To meet the demands of friends and clients, Henderson turned to the group of artisans of the new Pueblo Spanish Building Company,

“Beginning as it were, from the ground up—after he had built his own and several other adobes—he then turned his Mexican workmen, adobe-makers, masons and plasters into wood-carvers and carpenters. After he had tried them out on the rough-hewn roof beams, corbels, hand-made doors and paneled bookcases of his own house, he set them to work on furniture, for which he supplied the designs as well as all the necessary instruction in joining and carving, thus initiating them into the mysteries of their own forgotten craft.”<sup>3</sup>

Henderson and his artisans were soon making furniture of “pine, hand-made, oak pegged (no nails) and carved; then stained and waxed.”<sup>4</sup>

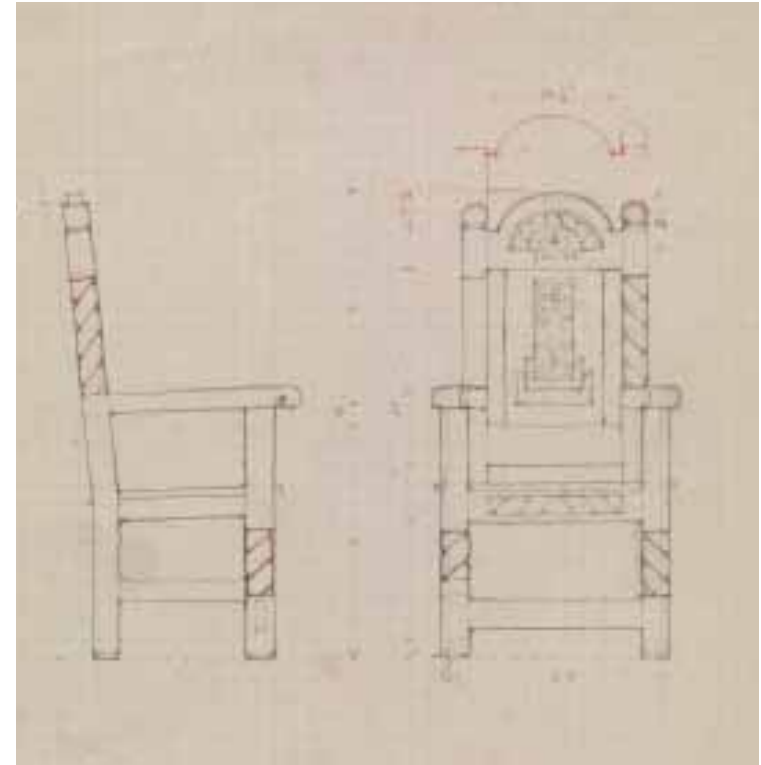
While Henderson’s early furniture was designed and constructed in the spirit of earlier New Mexico furniture, he soon developed a new furniture style that was as unique as his architecture, for which a great deal of it was made. Progressive and vernacular elements were amalgamated to achieve a graceful balance of rustic and handmade without appearing primitive or contrived. A curvilinear top rail or apron frequently softened the stark rectangularity of New Mexico vernacular furniture. Henderson invariably used premilled local pine stock that was fashioned and then “adzed” using a drawknife prior to the joining of the various elements.<sup>5</sup> The diagonally adzed surface, stained and waxed, shimmers in a subtle visual and tactile rhythm, simple and pure. The diagonal adzing is a singular foil for the more aggressively carved decorative panels.

The carved panels are uniquely Henderson. There is no antecedent in either New Mexico vernacular, Arts and Crafts or Spanish colonial revival furniture for these bursts of creative exuberance. Alice Corbin, in a 1929 article for *House and Garden*, commented on the improvisational nature of these decorative carves,

As a source of design, Mr. Henderson has sometimes, as in this instance, improvised upon Indian symbolic motives, in other examples he uses the naïve incised patterns of simple gouge work typical of the early New Mexican models, in still others he adopts the more elaborate Spanish-type carving---in each case suiting the furniture design and decoration to the interior it is meant to furnish.<sup>6</sup>

These carved panels are divided into two groups: Spanish floral and Pueblo geometric.<sup>7</sup> The two panel styles are quite distinct from one another. The Spanish floral designs are consistently bilaterally symmetric with the two halves being mirror images of one another. The Pueblo geometric panels combine stylized Native American images of the sun, clouds, rain and mountains into asymmetric compositions that are balanced using the principles of Jay Hambidge's Dynamic Symmetry. The Henderson rose, a rounded or squared quatrefoil, is ubiquitous to all but the simplest pieces and in some instances is the only carved design on the diagonally adzed pine surface.

The Cornelius and Penelope Brown suite of Henderson furniture was built at the apogee of the Pueblo Spanish Building Company in early 1929. The furniture was commissioned for their new Kansas City home, which was completed in 1930. Many of the pieces have rope carved legs and rails that were appropriate for the Spanish Revival style house. The carved panels are bilaterally symmetric and the floral elements are developed through various permutations of the rounded Henderson rose.



Chair Design, William Penhallow Henderson Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

In keeping with New Mexico vernacular furniture, the mortise joints are open, but the wooden pins are exposed in the Arts and Crafts style. A particularly interesting progressive element is the stretchers of the two tables that were rope carved but fashioned with a Chinese cloud lift reminiscent of Greene and Greene.

Henderson completed and shipped the furniture to the Browns only four months before the October collapse of the stock market that ushered in the American Great Depression. Like so many Americans, both the Hendersons and Browns were forever changed by this economic calamity. Only six months after moving into their new Kansas City home, Cornelius Brown tragically died of a heart attack in 1930.<sup>8</sup> Henderson and the Pueblo Spanish Building Company struggled on through the early days of the Great Depression, but the bankruptcy of John Evans and the failure of his note for El Cuervo led to the dissolution of the company in 1937.

Penelope lived alone in the her Kansas city home until 1939 when she moved to San Diego to be close to her niece. Penelope retained the Henderson furniture until her death in 1968 when the furniture was past to her niece, and now to her nephew, the only surviving heir and present owner. This suite of furniture, complete since 1929, is shown here publicly for the first time.

—Karl L. Horn, *Santa Fe, New Mexico, April 2013*

1. Sze, Corinne P. The Edwin Brooks House 553 Canyon Road. *Bulletin of the Historic Santa Fe Foundation*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (December 1998), pg. 5.
2. Bell, David. Unpublished biography of William Penhallow Henderson. William Penhallow Henderson Papers, Box 6. Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
3. Corbin, Alice. Furniture for Colonial Spanish Homes. *House and Garden*, Vol. 54, No.1 (July 1928), pg. 92.
4. Letter from William Penhallow Henderson to Fred Leighton, March 12, 1931. William Penhallow Papers, Box 2, Correspondence 1931. Smithsonian Archives of American Art.
5. Interview with Sergio Tapia, December 21, 2012.
6. Corbin, pg. 92.
7. Horn, Karl L. *An American Journey: The Art of William Penhallow Henderson* (The Owings Gallery: Santa Fe, July 2010), pg. 11.
8. Interview with Benjamin Miller, January 2, 2012.







*Dining Room Set, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine*  
Dimensions on the following pages





*Dining Room Table*, d. 1929  
hand-carved and adzed pine  
96 1/4 L x 36 W x 30 H inches, details



*Dining Room Table*, d. 1929  
hand-carved and adzed pine  
96 1/4 L x 36 W x 30 H inches



*Two Arm Chairs*, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine  
47 3/4 H x 23 1/2 W x 19 3/4 D inches





*Eight Side Chairs*, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine  
34 3/4 H X 17 W X 14 3/4 D inches



*Davenport, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine, 37 3/4 H x 30 W x 84 L inches*





*Davenport*, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine, 37 3/4 H x 30 W x 84 L inches, details





*Carved Serving Table*, d. 1929  
hand-carved and adzed pine  
27 3/4 H x 22 W x 66 1/4 L inches

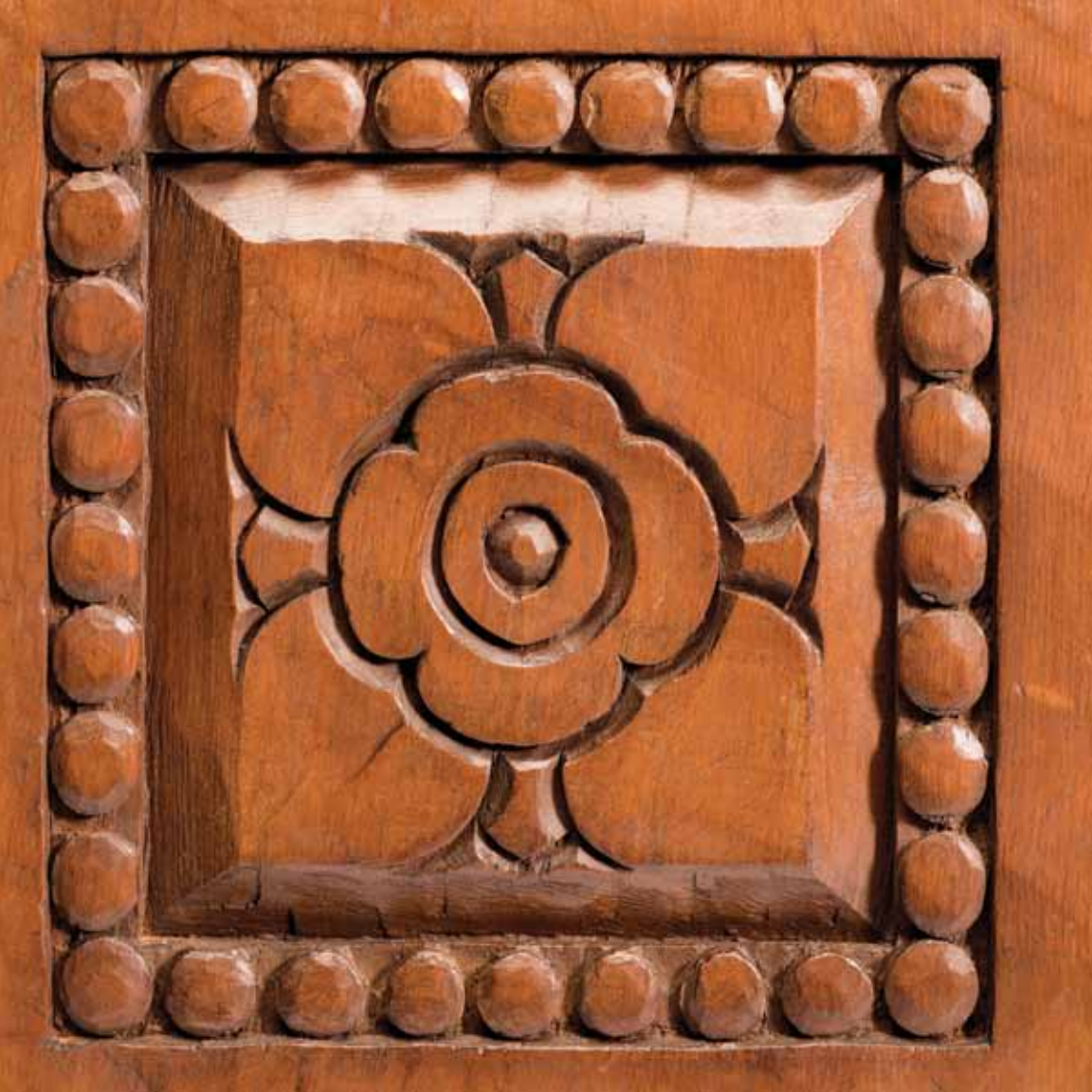


*Carved Serving Table*, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine  
27 3/4 H x 22 W x 66 1/4 L inches, details





*Banquitos*, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine, 12 1/2 H x 10 W x 14 L inches



*Lowboy*, d. 1929, hand-carved and adzed pine, 36 H x 18 W x 43 3/4 L inches

This catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition:

WILLIAM P. HENDERSON | BY DESCENT  
*The Brown Collection*

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THE OWINGS GALLERY

120 East Marcy Street, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Telephone: 505.982.6244

Fax: 505.983.4215

Web: [www.owingsgallery.com](http://www.owingsgallery.com)

Email: [info@owingsgallery.com](mailto:info@owingsgallery.com)

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