



# TRC Research Update

## The First Four Investigators

### *The Men Who Refused to Look Away*

**TRC Research Report:** RR-021

**Classification:** Public Release

When we began organizing the earliest records contained within **The Mesilla Files**, one pattern quickly became impossible to ignore.

Although hundreds of people contributed stories over the decades, **four men repeatedly surfaced at the very beginning of nearly every major investigation.**

They came from different backgrounds.

They lived in different generations.

Yet each inherited the questions left behind by the one before him.

Together, they laid the foundation for everything we are investigating today.

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## Father Miguel Serrano

### The First Observer

The earliest known investigator was **Father Miguel Serrano**, a parish priest serving the Mesilla Valley during the late nineteenth century.

Unlike later researchers, Serrano never considered himself an investigator.

He simply wrote down what people told him.

His journals contain some of the first known references to:

- The Mark on the Wrist
- Strange symbols in the desert
- Captain Elias Voss
- Unusual travelers arriving from the wilderness
- A mysterious boundary later called the Mesilla Veil

Because he listened without judgment, people trusted him with stories they might never have shared elsewhere.

Today, many of our oldest investigations begin with his careful observations.

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## **Sheriff Tomas Ortega**

### **The Man Who Wanted Evidence**

Nearly forty years later, **Sheriff Tomas Ortega** inherited many of the same stories.

Unlike Serrano, Ortega approached them as a lawman.

He wanted witnesses.

Physical evidence.

Explanations.

He interviewed ranchers, prospectors, railroad workers, soldiers, and travelers.

Instead of dismissing unusual reports, he documented them.

His notebooks reveal one important realization.

The strange events occurring around Mesilla were not isolated incidents.

They appeared connected.

His disappearance in 1936 remains one of the greatest mysteries in the archive.

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## **Howard H. Hunter**

## The Professional Researcher

Howard Hunter transformed curiosity into organized investigation.

Beginning in the 1950s, he traveled throughout southern New Mexico interviewing witnesses, photographing locations, collecting maps, and preserving documents.

Hunter was among the first to use terms now familiar throughout the archive:

- The Mesilla Veil
- The Old Desert
- The Enclosure

He believed these mysteries deserved serious documentation, regardless of whether they could be explained.

Many of the interviews preserved by Hunter remain among the most valuable resources in the TRC collection.

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## Theodore Ray Mercer

### The Collector

Beginning in the 1960s, **Theodore Ray Mercer** quietly continued where Hunter left off.

Unlike earlier investigators, Mercer spent decades building relationships with ranchers, historians, military veterans, bar owners, survey crews, and longtime residents throughout New Mexico and northern Mexico.

He rarely published anything.

Instead, he collected.

Maps.

Letters.

Photographs.

Recordings.

Personal journals.

His philosophy was simple:

*"Someone else may someday figure out what all of this means."*

Fortunately for us...

He preserved nearly everything.

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## Four Generations...

One Investigation

Looking back across more than a century, it's remarkable how each investigator contributed something unique.

**Father Serrano** listened.

**Sheriff Ortega** documented.

**Howard Hunter** organized.

**Theodore Ray Mercer** preserved.

None of them solved the mystery.

But each ensured that the next generation had a little more information than the last.

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## Where We Stand Today

Today, the **TRC Research Center** continues the work begun by these four remarkable men.

With the addition of the **TOX Archive**, **Maggie Jackson's research collection**, and the analytical work of **Dr. Thadius Malone**, we now possess more information than any previous generation of investigators.

Even so, we remain at the beginning of this journey.

Every newly cataloged journal reveals another unanswered question.

Every recovered photograph suggests another forgotten story.

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Every map hints that there may still be places no one has fully explored.

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## Dylan's Notes

*"When I read through the oldest journals, I realized something that changed the way I looked at this entire project. None of these men were trying to become famous. They weren't chasing headlines or trying to prove a theory. They simply believed that strange events deserved to be recorded before they were forgotten. Because of them, we're able to continue asking questions more than a hundred years later. In many ways, we're not starting a new investigation—we're continuing one they began."*

— Dylan Carrillo

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**TRC Research Center**

**Collect Everything. Verify What You Can. Question Everything Else.**

**The records have been preserved. The investigation continues.**