Society Scholarship
A weekend symposium at Scottsdale's Museum of the West highlights the Taos Society of Artists.

As part of its ongoing exhibit Taos Society of Artists, Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West will host a symposium on topics relating to the society on April 6 and 7. Moderated by Dr. Beren Fehlauer, professor of art history at Arizona State University and adjunct curator of American art at the Phoenix Art Museum, the weekend will include talks from Barbara Brandenburg Brenner, Virginia Coose Leveille, Michael R. Grauer, Peter H. Hassrick, Tricia Lescher and Susan Sessions Rugh.

"There's been so much scholarship around the Taos Society that the symposium was just a natural fit for us," says Lescher, chief curator at Western Spirit. "With the symposium, much like with the paintings in the exhibition, we really saw this as a platform to bring in new and old scholarship.'

Each day of the symposium will follow a similar format: first, a firsthand account by relatives of members of the Taos Society; then, an artist locus, and finally, a lecture that gives a broader perspective of Taos.

"We wanted to invite a broad range of scholars as well as relatives of members to get some firsthand accounts to bring the listeners into the time period, and then bring in some more general topics so people could learn about Taos and the land and the people," says Western Spirit associate curator Rachel Pool. "The lectures from the two granddaughters, Barbara Brandenburg Brenner and Virginia Coose Leveille, will have a big interest. They were both born in Taos, grew up with the Society artists, and still live there."

Lescher's lecture will cover the Sands family's 1924 trip to Taos. "It's a family pioneer story, and a local story. It gives a great, big picture idea of who these artists were and their patronage and their relationships," Lescher says. "I have the letters from artists' wives to the Sands family as well as photos that have never been reproduced before. It's really now exciting research that grounds the artists in a clown to earth level and brings a humanistic side to the exhibition."

The lectures will begin each day at 11 a.m., and The Taos Society of Artists exhibition will run through April 30. "You can see the whole exhibition and then go to the symposium," Lescher says.