Welcome to Centennial Journeys: Tales from Along the Road to Statehood and Beyond, a commemoration of New Mexico’s 2012 Centennial. I’m your host Claude Stephenson.

Ernest Blumenschein was in Paris when he first heard of Taos, New Mexico and saw sketches artist Joseph Sharp had drawn during his visit there. He was intrigued. He determined to go west on his return to America and convinced fellow artist Bert Philips to join him. They rendezvoused in Denver and bought a small two-horse team wagon to discover the west and headed south with their art supplies, painting and sketching the grand Rocky Mountain vistas on their journey. An idyllic summer trip, until they were confronted by five armed bandits, who finally decided they weren’t worth robbing.

They originally planned to head south to Mexico along the old Santa Fe Trail over Raton Pass, but were diverted by a Coloradan who convinced them to go to Taos. So they traversed La Veta Pass instead and headed south through the San Luis Valley and into New Mexico. Then disaster struck. On a rain-slickened decent near Questa, the wagon slid into a rut and one of the wheels splintered. The two artists flipped a coin and Philips stayed with the wagon while Blumenshein headed to Taos with the broken wheel in search of a blacksmith. Descending into the Taos Valley, Blumenshein was smitten by all he saw.

Wheel fixed, the adventurers arrived in Taos, sold their wagon, moved into an adobe house and began painting. After three months, Blumenshein went back to New York where he had obligations, but Philips stayed on. It took another twenty years, but Blumenshein was finally able to return to Taos in 1919, taking up residence on Ledoux Street. But by then, many other artists had “discovered” Taos.

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