

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIJERAS

By Anabel Sanchez

## 1. Historic Santo Niño Church

The building was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in March, 1978. The church building was once the home of Serafin Ramirez around the year 1870. Following Ramirez' death, the house was sold to Mrs. Jessie Keleher.



In February 1912 Mrs. Jessie Keleher gave the land to Pastor A. M. Mandalaria. Between 1912 and 1930 the land belonged to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and the church was called Immaculate Conception. The property had been donated to the pastor with the condition that it was to be used as a church. In 1930 the property was returned to the Keleher family.

Around 1935 the residents of Tijeras began using the building for a church again and renamed it Santo Niño (Holy Child). In 1940 Don Tomas Gonzales was made mayordomo of the church. Aided by members of the community he built a semi-circular adobe addition to the rear. This addition became the altar area with niches for the statues. Later, a small square room was added on the east side of the church. It was used as a sacristy where the priest and altar boys prepared for Mass.

The Archdiocese of Santa Fe took possession of the property in 1963 and it was subsequently sold to the New Mexico State Highway Department to make way for construction of Interstate 40. Tijeras became a parish in 1964 and in 1971 a new, larger church was built for the growing congregation.

When the Highway Department found it did not need to demolish the church to build the new road the building was given to the Village of Tijeras.

In 1994, members of the East Mountain Historical Society and the Village of Tijeras started cleaning the church in hopes of restoring the building to be used as a museum for local history. The EMHS applied for and was awarded a \$32,000 grant to begin restoration of the building.

The Village of Tijeras, through several additional sources of funding, completed the restoration of the historical church and on September 20, 2008, dedicated the Village Center which includes the historical church, a park, playground and a memorial honoring Vietnam veterans of the area. The East Mountain Historical Society displays historical photo exhibits in the church.

## 2. Tijeras Pueblo

Tijeras Pueblo was built around 1313 and by 1425 it had been deserted by year-round residents, long before Europeans came into the area.

The pueblo was initially built up to include a main structure consisting of 200 rooms, arranged in somewhat of a U-shape. A large ceremonial kiva constructed in the center of the pueblo area may indicate that it could have been important in the lives of members of nearby communities. Archaeological evidence indicates that Tijeras Pueblo was at least partially abandoned in the 14th century. It appears that around 1360, perhaps up to half of the occupants left.

Many adobe walls from the first occupation, in a state of neglect, succumbed to weathering and dissolved into the earth. But around 1390, building up of the pueblo began again. This occupation, however, was on a smaller scale than the original. The inhabitants continued to live there until about 1425, at which time the Pueblo was effectively abandoned. The reasons the population left the site may relate to drought and related land use issues, but this is not proven fact and other factors may have possibly been in play.

## 3. Tijeras

No permanent settlement in Tijeras Canyon was made in the 17th or early 18th century. At this time the canyon was frequented by Faraon Apaches who used it as a staging area for raids on Rio Abajo settlements. The Comanche replaced the Faraon Apaches as the most feared and the most admired of the nomadic raiders of Hispanic hamlets and pueblo villages. It was in response to this Comanche threat that the land grant called Canon de Carnue was founded as a buffer community. In 1763 a group of Hispanic settlers, primarily from Albuquerque, moved to the Canon de Carnue land grant along Tijeras Canyon. The village they formed was called San Miguel de Laredo and most likely was located near present day Carnuel. Following an Apache attack in October of 1770, the survivors fled back to Albuquerque.

In 1819 allotments were made for two village clusters in Canon de Carnue. Named for their patron saints, the villages became San Miguel de Laredo, located near the old San Miguel, and San Antonio de Padua, located about one mile north of the present intersection of North 14 and Interstate 40.

The Tijeras area was settled shortly after San Antonio. In 1880, with 15 families, it was the second-most densely populated of Canon de Carnue communities. Tijeras, meaning "scissors" in Spanish, was so named because major roads, north-south and east-west, came together like a scissors.

The Village of Tijeras was incorporated in 1973. The first mayor was Patricio Garcia. He was mayor from 1973 to 1976, followed by Felix Garcia, 1976 to 1988, Juan R. Griego, 1988 to 2000. Gloria J. Chavez has been mayor since 2000.

# Water Brought People to Tijeras Pueblo



*The Pueblo was excavated in the 1970s by students led by Jim Judge and, later, Linda Cordell of the UNM anthropology department. Photo courtesy Linda Cordell*

*By Denise Tessier*

When native people started leaving the Colorado Plateau and Mesa Verde in the 1200s, they came to what is now Tijeras Pueblo because two arroyos came together here with a seep or spring, creating good water for people and crops, says Linda Cordell. Tijeras Pueblo was built at this seep, the “heart” of the pueblo.

Cordell, for many years a professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico and editor of the seminal history, *Tijeras Canyon: Analyses of the Past*, described the pueblo’s history and her 1970s work at the site during a members-only tour of the pueblo for the East Mountain Historical Society in October.

“People were very selective about where they lived because of the short growing season,” Cordell said, “and Tijeras Pueblo was one of the places founded as a community at this time.” Construction of the pueblo dates to the early 1300s, and tree ring records show Tijeras and the Galisteo Basin were among the “wettest” areas east of the Sandia Mountains.

“Pueblo people talk about how good the hunting was,” Cordell added.

LA 581 (the pueblo’s number as assigned by the Laboratory of Anthropology at the Museum of New Mexico), was excavated by UNM students over nearly eight years in the 1970s, four of those years under Cordell.

New Mexico now has 250,000 LA site numbers assigned, Cordell said. “We selected this site for excavation because it could be guarded by the Ranger Station.”

The pueblo was built partly of adobe and partly of stone, and Cordell said students “often found hand prints where people patted the clay. Depending on the room, some (walls) had plaster and one had paintings. To me, adobe is about having water.”

Excavations revealed 132 rooms, many with timber that could be dated through tree rings. In the 1970s, archeologists prepared the timber for tree-ring dating on-site, using alcohol and turpentine, the result of which is a “40-year-old archeology catastrophe,” in Cordell’s words. A small blank spot in the vegetation can be seen near the pueblo’s base where their tent had been set up for work.

But the work yielded much information. “People were cutting trees all the time” throughout the pueblo’s history, Cordell said. From this dating, archeologists believe the site was occupied over many years from about 1199 to 1425 AD.

In addition to excavating rooms, Cordell and her students excavated a large portion of an ash pile. Pueblo people would continuously throw debris from the edge of the plaza down below onto this pile. “In pueblo ideology, trash is sacred,” she said. “What comes from the earth must be returned to the ash pile.”

They found three ceremonial kivas—stacked. Once a kiva was no longer used, she said, it was deliberately burned and a new one was built on top. “Decommissioning space and renewing it is also part of Pueblo culture.”

Where there was a change in vegetation, the field school ran a trench and found a great kiva. Its walls were double courses of stone masonry 10 to 12 feet high, “filled with almost pure sand or clay. It was carefully closed,” Cordell said. In the floor of one area, they found a roof support post that had been burned in place and they sent it to the Tree-ring Laboratory in Tucson for tree ring dating, which revealed its time at 1313 AD. In addition to water, Tijeras Pueblo had ready access to two kinds of clay, from which residents made two kinds of pottery. Gray clay turned white when fired, from which residents created black on white pottery, Cordell said. They also fired a red, iron-rich clay, which is the earliest evidence of what is known as Rio Grande glazeware.

Lead was used as flux and for pigment on the pottery.

Before Cordell and her students left their field work, they backfilled the pueblo ruin, which today is covered by what Cordell called a “horribly invasive species” of vegetation. Friends of Tijeras Pueblo created the interpretive trail now used by visitors. “It’s still very much a work in progress,” she said.

Tijeras Pueblo was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2006. It is an “ancestral pueblo,” meaning its descendants live in Pueblo Indian villages today, but Cordell said no one modern pueblo has claimed it. “It appears to be a pueblo that included people from lots of areas.”

“It’s likely some descendants of (Tijeras) are at Zuni,” she said, because Zuni Pueblo maintains an active shrine in the Sandia Mountains. Today, the Pueblo of Isleta also maintains interest in Tijeras Pueblo and consults with both the Forest Service and the Friends of Tijeras Pueblo.



*“We selected this site for excavation because it could be guarded by the Ranger Station,” Dr. Cordell said during the EMHS tour of the site, which includes a reconstruction made by Friends of Tijeras Pueblo. Photo by Denise Tessier*