**Archaeology & History in Your Back Yard**

**A little History of Torrance County’s Early Years**

Hello Everyone! This is Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard and my name is Dixie. X 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience with little known people, places and events that took place in the past, right here in your own back yard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas in central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting our past.

Our show today will focus on the development of Torrance County and the early years.

This program was written by Dixie Boyle and produced by Bill Simms. Thank you for joining us today.

The Estancia Valley is an inland basin shaped like a giant oval. Before the building of the railroads, the salt lakes in the Valley were almost the only source of supply of this commodity in northern New Mexico. The people of Santa Fe transported it in wagons to the capital and from there to Taos and other nearby points where it was traded for grain and other supplies from the north.

After the homesteaders settled the Valley, the New Mexico Salt Company, an Estancia organization operated the salt lakes, and shipped one hundred tons per month. In addition they sold another 75 ton directly from the lakes.

When the country was thrown open for homesteading, there was little to encourage immigration. With the building of the Santa Fe Central Railroad from Santa Fe to Torrance in 1902-3, movement into the region increased though not at a steady rate.

The Territorial Legislature established boundaries of Torrance County, which included all of the Estancia Valley in 1903. The counties official organization date is January of 1905.

The county was created from territory taken from Valencia, Lincoln, Socorro and Bernalillo counties. It was named for Francis J. Torrance, one of the promoters of the Santa Fe Central Railroad.

Progresso, an upcoming community at the turn of the 20th Century and now non-existent located southeast of Willard, was named the county seat. The only buildings at Progresso were those of sheep rancher Colonel J. Francisco Chavez. On January 1, 1905, the Santa Fe Central Railroad sent a special train to Progresso with a passenger car to serve as a courthouse on wheels. Here the newly elected officials of the county took the oath of office on Monday, January 2, 1905.

The following year Estancia was made the county seat where it has since remained. The first office space for the county officers was rented from the Dunlavy Mercantile Company for $12.00 a month; later, rooms were rented from William Gregg at $20.00 a month. This building burned and most of the county records were lost. A company from Santa Fe was awarded a contract to build a new courthouse at a cost of $11,445 in 1909.

The first settlers irrigated gardens, orchards and truck patches. Windmills were used to raise water from wells. Not much was done in the way of large scale irrigation for crops until the mid-1930s. Joe Bagley, Ray Brown and Madison Davis developed the first large projects. When more wells were dug, it doubled the irrigation projects in the Valley.

The first crops were corn, wheat, potatoes and beans. Many of the people came from wheat growing states, so wheat was their first interest. A flour mill was built at McIntosh, later to be moved to Estancia.

Some of these first crops were taken in wagons to other parts of the Territory. They were also taken to Texas and Colorado where they were sold from house to house. A Mr. White at Mountainair had the first re-cleaner. He paid the farmers a good price so they hauled to him from long distances. Merchants bought and shipped a few beans. In 1915, Neal Jenson installed a bean re-cleaner and began buying beans in Estancia. Soon thereafter, the Estancia Lumber Company added another re-cleaner.

The first truck patches were planted in the spring of 1904. Most of the ground was raw prairie plowed for the first time, and the people were just learning the art of irrigating, so they were happily surprised at the yield. The county took first prize for the best and largest collection of vegetables at the Territorial Fair held in Albuquerque that fall.

The first schools were organized in 1903 while Torrance County was still a part of other counties from which it was created. Most of these schools were in the towns. As settlement increased, the need for rural schools arose. When the county seat was organized, Juan C. Jaramillo was elected superintendent of schools, a position he held until 1909 when C.L. Burt became the superintendent. The first teacher’s institute began in Estancia July 31, 1905 and continued two weeks. Josephine Corbett from Mountainair conducted the sessions.

The need for new schools continued to grow and new ones were built, until at one time there were more than fifty in the county. Then the drought came and people moved away. Consolidation became a definite trend about 1921. Large schools were organized from several small ones. Emigration continued and many of these new schools found themselves without enough pupils to continue. It was then consolidation with the town began, and now the little, red school house is not much more than a fond memory.

The United States Postal Guide lists post offices at Eastview, Punta, Tajique and Torreon as early as 1896. The office at Manzano was established a short time later. Jose Zamora, Diego Serna and Juan Jaramillo were among those who served as postmaster.

The native people in the mountain towns raised corn, wheat and feed crops. Beans were raised for their own use, and herds of goats were kept for milk and meat. Farther out in the Valley there were ranches where sheep were raised.

The Sunshine Valley Utilities Company was organized to build telephone lines connecting the towns. Farmers along the lines were given telephone service if they wanted it.

Many of the towns throughout Torrance County went through hard years when the drought came and they could no longer grow pinto beans. Some like Progresso, the original county seat, no longer exists but when the county was organized they were considered the up and coming town. All towns wanted to be the county seat.

Today many of these old towns are completely gone with little to show their locations.

This has been Archaeology and History in Your Back yard, a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through November. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to Archaeology and History in Your Own Back Yard Monday at 1 PM, Tuesday at 7 PM, Friday at 10 AM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening!

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