**Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard**

**History of Gran Quivira**

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 history of Gran Quivira.

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

The Homestead and pinto bean farming town of Gran Quivira began to organize before the turn of the 20th Century. The area was going through a wet cycle and the land opened up for homesteaders looking for free, farm land. Soon, they began arriving by the thousands, plowing up the land and building two and three room houses on the land where the buffalo had previously roamed.

Many of these homesteaders came from Nebraska as evidenced by the inscription of their names on the walls of the Mission of San Buenventura located the abandoned Tompiro ruins and Spanish pueblo on the hill that would soon overlook the farming town.

One of the first homesteaders to arrive in the new town was Elisha Dow, who had previously been living in Lincoln. A memoir left behind of his life was written, “The first settler in Gran Quivira was also the first of an educated, widely respected family that influenced the Estancia Valley, the Chupadera Slopes and more. His father was Aaron Dow, a Quaker, who founded a college at College Springs, Iowa and taught mathematics, Hebrew and Greek. Elisha filed a homestead claim and made a living as a trader, peddling with a fleet of 15 to 20 wagons up and down the valley trails from Gran Quivira to Chilili and beyond. Those who recall him say he was a tall, imposing man with a long beard. . .a quiet meditative Quaker, who played the accordion, enjoyed dancing, met and married Barbara McAfee, an Irish-Spanish woman of royal Spanish background, and attained some wealth in his widespread trading business.

As Yankee Clippers used ports of call, so his 15 to 20 wagons moved from settlement to settlement, picking up deliveries and dropping them off elsewhere along the way or at their final destination. His diary mentions pelts and wool as common cargo, along with food items such as pheasants, potatoes, partially cut up old cow, coffee, lard, corn, cheese and antelope meat. Wire fencing was peddled too, causing an increase in problems between the sheepherder Spanish and the new Anglo settlers seeping into New Mexico.”

Not only was Dow a peddler but he maintained a store at Gran Quivira, another one at Pinos Wells, plus later he moved his family to Tajique and built a third store with a home where the family lived. He would construct a final store in Chilili.

Dow’s daughter Ida Dow Garcia was the first postmistress in Gran Quivira in 1904. Homesteaders continued to steadily settle in the Gran Quivira area and by 1920 the community boasted a population of eight hundred residents. The soil around Gran Quiviria and Claunch was considered more fertile than that near Mountainair to the north. The only problem with farming the area was the water, so most farmers depended upon the rain. Gyp or Gypsum water was common in the area and in some cases stunted the pinto beans and was not good as drinking water for residents and livestock.

According to Bert Hermann’s book Mountainair, NM Centennial History 1903-2003, “The largest of several stores in Gran Quivira was that of Jones and Myrtle Turner, which dates back to 1927. Their daughter Louise Kite and her husband Jack are the last residents in town. At one time the village included three general stores, three mills, a dentist’s office, a barbershop, a schoolhouse and a high school built by the WPA. The remnants of the Miller Store, once the realm of “Gold Tooth” Miller still stands beside the Kite house. Vernie Wells, another son of homesteaders, maintains a cattle ranch up the road as do the Connell and Fulfer families.

Vernie Wells remembers how isolated Gran Quivira once was, “What is now Route 55 was just a wagon road until 1927 and 1928 when it was first bladed; paving started around 1948 but not completed until 1960. People helped one another. It was often an overnight trip to Mountainair. Farmers stayed overnight at the wagon yard.”

For many years the Assembly of God Church was the center of the community. In fact, it still remains so on a Sunday or an activity planned at the church grounds. By 1932, Gran Quivira had the largest Sunday school of any Assembly of God church in West Texas or New Mexico. Over the years, a new church has been built and the church converted into a community church so more people with differing faiths can attend.

As the bottom fell out of pinto bean farming, Gran Quiviria dwindled to a ghost town. Many of the farms are now part of large ranches.

A few families continue living in the Gran Quivira area, although most of the pinto bean farms have been abandoned and their inhabitants moved on to better locations with a better economy. As the centuries have passed, the population of Gran Quivira has arrived at its lowest level.

The land that once supported over two thousand Tompiro Indians would not be able to support the same number of people today. A view of the endless bean fields making up the land is even harder to imagine in some ways, as the land has reverted to prairie and grassland although an outline of the old bean fields can still be seen in places.

Gran Quivira and Claunch were both locations for singings and sermons by circuit preachers. Large crowds would camp at the location in order to enjoy visiting, pot luck meals, camping and group singings. Many of the old timers still have fond memories of these activities.

This has been Archaeology and History In your Own 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 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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