

SPECIAL REPORT
on
THE PROPOSED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
of
SAN MIGUEL del Vado

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I. HISTORICAL STATEMENT

San Miguel del Vado, situated in San Miguel County, New Mexico, was one of the first permanent Spanish settlements of the Pecos Valley, having been founded during the term of office of Governor Fernando Chacon, 1794-1805. It became the first settlement on the Santa Fe Trail reached by early traders from Missouri. Captain William Becknell, who opened up this trade, came into Santa Fe via San Miguel in 1821; and it was in San Miguel that he disposed of most of his goods.

Later, in 1841, the members of the famous Texas-Santa Fe Expedition, after their capture near Anton Chico by the Mexican forces of Governor Armijo, were imprisoned in San Miguel. Several members of that ill-fated expedition were shot in San Miguel's plaza, and the rest were sent to prison in Mexico, where they were later released through the intervention of the United States.

San Miguel has gradually passed into oblivion. Early Spanish town, important stopping point on the Santa Fe Trail, prison home of the ill-fated Texas-Santa Fe Expedition, it has retained its atmosphere of the past. Untouched by most of the modern civilization of the Anglos, it is worthy of preservation by the people of America.

II. PRESENT CONDITION

San Miguel del Vado, on the banks of the Pecos River some fifty miles southeast of Santa Fe, three miles south by dirt road from U. S. Highway 84 and 85 and one mile from the A.T. and S.F. Railway station at Ribera, is a sleepy little Spanish village. In its locale of river

valley, small farms, cottonwoods, pinon-covered mesas, brown adobe buildings and ruins, dirt streets, central plaza, and simple country folk, it has escaped the inroads of a materialistic modern civilization. Almost a ghost town now, it shows the wear of time, and its people, under the guardianship of the village priest, live in the manner of their Spanish ancestors.

The Catholic church and the nunnery of the Order of the Sorrowful Mother dominate the village, and here and there the ruins of adobe buildings bear contrast to those of somewhat more modern vintage. There is hardly any evidence here of the civilization of the twentieth century. One or two automobiles and a few tin roofs serve only to emphasize that San Miguel lives in the present as well as the past. No gasoline pump or up-to-date store or blaring signboard mars the peace of its ancient respectability. Taken as a whole, it represents in an almost pure state the typical Spanish-American folk-community of a day gone by.

The people who live in the village of San Miguel look to the local priest for guidance. To them he is the dispenser of justice, the keeper of law and order, as well as the father confessor. His people, some hundred families of them in and near the village, take from their small holdings of land the major portion of their sustenance. Pastoral and agricultural people, speaking the Spanish language, they have retained to a remarkable degree the customs brought to this Southwest by their ancestors centuries ago.

Could this picture but be retained, San Miguel in its state of dila-

pidated appeal, with its people living in the ways of their ancestors, would become recognized as an outstanding example of Spanish-American folk culture. In appearance and atmosphere much like Santa Fe must have been, before the coming of the American and the tourist, it would be passed on to future generations as a true example of the old Spanish and Mexican Southwest.

III. SUGGESTED PRESERVATION

It is recommended that San Miguel del Vado be designated by the Secretary as a national historic site. Such designation would emphasize the historical importance of San Miguel and could insure its retention as an outstanding example of Spanish-American folk culture. It is probable that a cooperative agreement could be entered into by the Secretary, the Catholic Church, and the individual property owners, said agreement to form the basis for the future preservation and development of the area.

The preservation of San Miguel should stress the retention of the charm and atmosphere of San Miguel approximately as it now is. Besides the protection of existing buildings, the stabilization of ruins, and the removal of unsightly modern accretions (such as tin roofs), preservation should include encouragement to property owners to live there as they have in the past and do now. It is believed that these people can do much to carry on, in a profitable way, their native arts, crafts, and industries, should San Miguel be designated as a national historic site.

San Miguel has all of the elements of the ideal historic site, be-

cause of its historical importance, its archaeological possibilities, its architectural structures, and its sociological aspects. This would seem to be, in fact, a logical area in which to probe these various fields of scientific endeavor, not only for their individual importance, but also for their relationship to each other and to San Miguel as a whole. For instance, in San Miguel the historian would delve fully into the possibilities of written accounts and documents, in addition to the material evidence presented by living people and historical remains; the archaeologist would have ample opportunity to study cultural remains through the excavation of various sites now in a state of ruin; the architect, with others faced with the problem of stabilization, would also be able to study in detail the architectural evolution of San Miguel in the Spanish, Mexican, and American periods; and the sociologist would find people living here who have retained the mannerisms, customs, and beliefs of their ancestors. Representatives of these four fields, working individually and together, would make it possible to present fully the story of San Miguel.

The development and interpretation program at San Miguel should not go too far beyond preservation and protection. Too much maintenance, marking, and guiding would destroy the essential quiet charm of this old town.

IV. SUMMARY

San Miguel del Vado, located some fifty miles southeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico, is worthy of designation as a national historic site, because

of its historical importance and its opportunity to present in authentic detail a picture of Spanish-American folk culture. As a national historic site it will be preserved for this and future generations. To utilize San Miguel to the utmost, and to insure its proper development, the historian, the archaeologist, the architect, and the sociologist will be called upon to explore fully their respective fields here. Together, they will be able to demonstrate the common ground upon which they all may meet in a study of the living historic community.

Aubrey Meschery

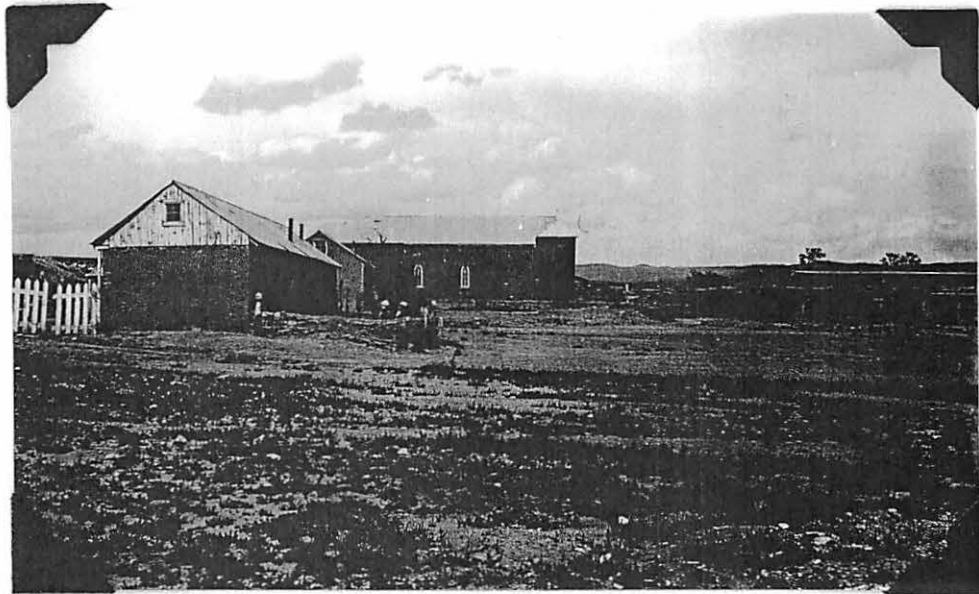
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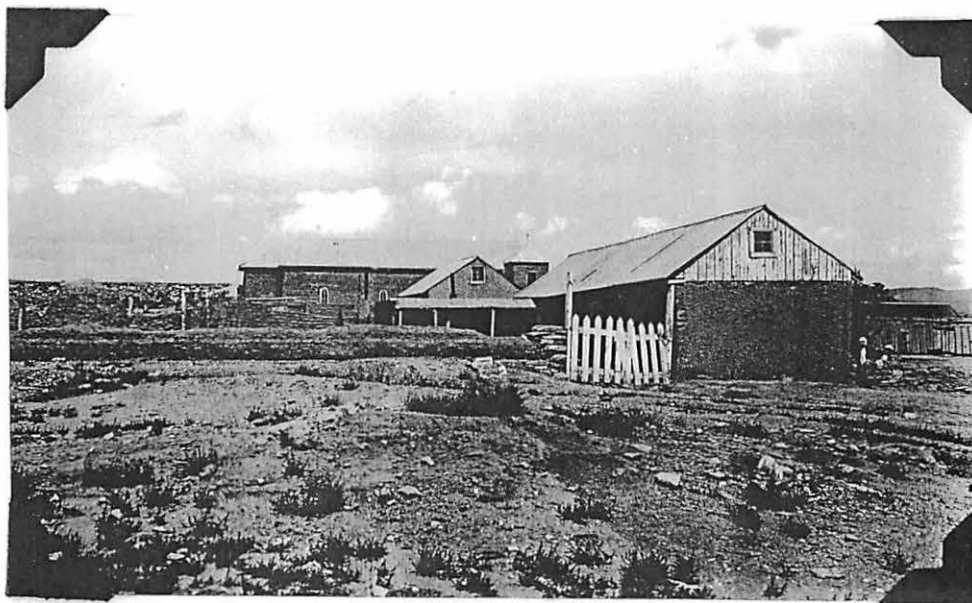
CHURCH OF SAN MIGUEL DEL VADO



REAR VIEW



CHURCH AND MODERN STRUCTURES



A DIFFERENT ANGLE



DILAPIDATED APPEAL



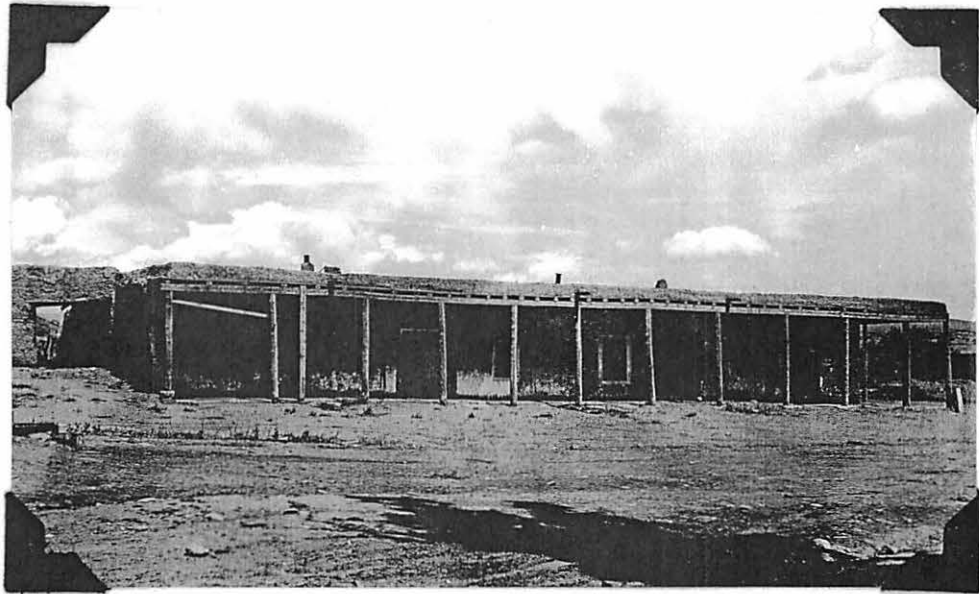
RUINS OF ANOTHER DAY



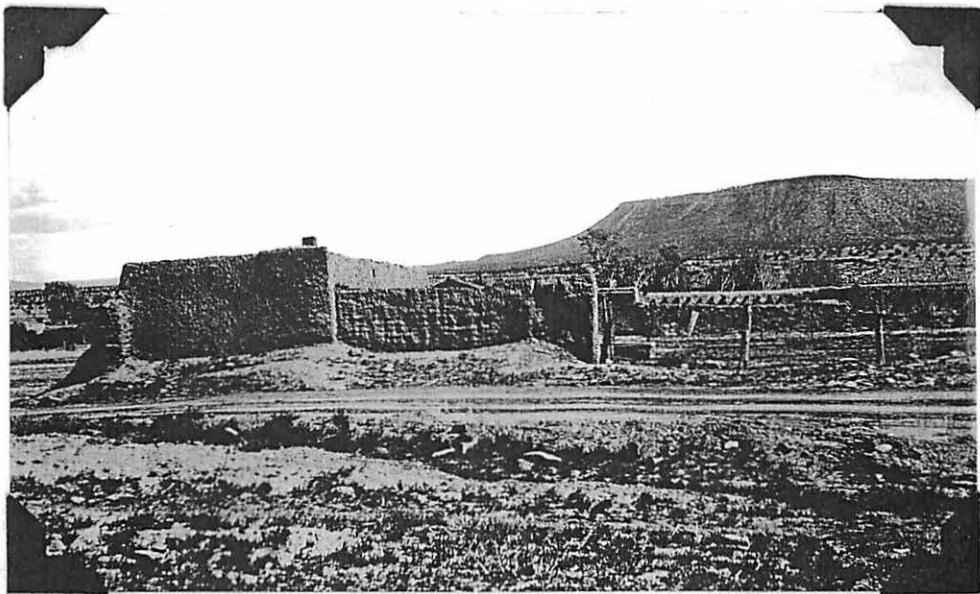
MORE RUINS



ONCE AN INTERIOR



TYPICAL SPANISH-AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE



MODERN AMONG ANCIENT

