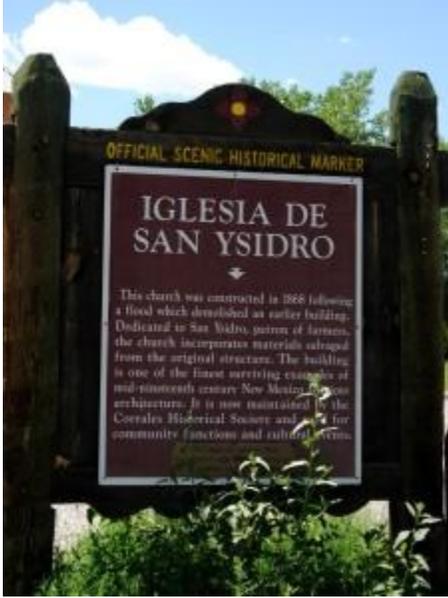


About Us



From the book *Corrales Historic Buildings*, compiled by the Corrales Historic Preservation Committee

Corrales, the Spanish word for corrals, was home to the Tiguex Indians for centuries before Spanish explorers laid claim to the region around 1540. Two pueblo ruins, unexcavated, are known to exist in the village, and many pithouses and artifacts have been discovered in villagers backyards.

The first evidence for human occupation of the Corrales area dates to about 500 A.D. and comes from pit house sites located along the sandy slopes above the valley floor. These pit houses eventually evolved into Indian pueblos with multiple aboveground rooms located closer to the river. These residents of the valley were the first agriculturalists, eating corn, beans and squash supplemented with wild game. The pueblo occupation had ended and their pueblos abandoned by the late 1600s when the Spanish settled permanently in New Mexico.

In 1710, a grant of the Alameda lands was given to Corporal Francisco Montes Vigil, A soldier in the Spanish army. The Alameda Land Grant, which included 106,274 acres, today provides clear title of ownership for all property within Corrales. Vigil was unable to settle on his grant as required by Spanish law, so he sold it in 1712 to Captain Juan Gonzales Bas who was then living in Bernalillo. Gonzales sold a portion of his land in 1718 to Salvador Martinez, whose wife, Rosala Garcia was related by marriage to Gonzales oldest daughter, Catalina.

In his 1776 report on the missions of New Mexico, Fray Francisco A. Dominguez located Corrales on the west side of the river and described it as having two parts, Lower Corrales and Upper Corrales. Lower Corrales was a settlement of ranchos with 26 families and 160 persons living in a farming community on the floodplain of the river. Upper Corrales, site of the present center of the village, is described as opposite the mission of Sandia, and part of its district is on not very good lands. This section was much smaller than Lower Corrales, with only 10 families totaling 42 people. The family names found in Spanish archives dating from 1713-1821, when as result of the Mexican Revolution, New Mexico became a province of Mexico, include Gonzales, Martinez, Baca, Gutierrez, Armijo, Montoya (Montolla), Silva, Chaves, Perea, Leal, Sanchez, and Martin. Following 1812 the names of Sandoval, Candelaria, and Garcia appear. These are living family names in Corrales today.

Existence in this desert environment was precarious, but the hardy population multiplied, and the land was divided among the descendants of Juan Gonzales and his relatives by the traditional Spanish method of establishing long, narrow strips stretching from the river to the sand hills. The more fertile and irrigable land in the river bottom was used for raising chile, corn, beans, fruits and vegetables, while the sand hills were used in common for the pasturing of sheep, cattle and horses.



Little is recorded of Corrales during the first 150 years of Spanish occupation since it was not on the major trade routes along the river from Santa Fe; even as late as 1870 the census records only 141 households with 687 residents, nearly all of whom were farmers, ranchers or laborers. Small as it was, though, the community was busy, attending mass at the call of the bell of the little adobe church of San Ysidro and gathering to celebrate the annual fiesta de San Ysidro in May.

The flooding of the land, both by irrigation of farmland and by the Rio Grande, established the shape and the patterns of development in Corrales. The old Corrales acequia, or irrigation ditch, was dug in the early 18th century, and water was brought into the ditch directly from the Rio Grande at a diversion point at the north end of the valley. Land was divided between heirs in the Spanish tradition into long, narrow ribbons to provide equal access to water in the irrigation ditch. These strips, which stretched from the river to the ceja – the high point on the east side of the Rio Puerco valley, about seventeen or eighteen miles to the west – have through the generations become narrower and narrower, and today the long east/west fields and roads in the village are the legacy of the importance of water in the valley.

European farmers from Italy and France began to settle in the Corrales valley in the 1860s (some said after 1879). Among the Italian families who settled here were the Palladinis, Targhettas and Salces; French families included the Alarys, Imberts, Leplats, and Lermusiaux. In 1879 the Alary family purchased land toward the north end of Corrales from the Montoya family, and by the 1880s they were successfully growing several varieties of grapes (up until that time the only type of grape grown in Corrales was the Mission grape). By 1900 Corrales was known for its vineyards and the making of wine, much of it by French and Italian families. By the late 1930s, most of the vineyards were gone, replaced by acres of orchards, pastures and cornfields. Several of these families continue to farm in Corrales today.



At the end of the 19th century Alejandro Sandoval moved to the village and bought large tracts of land. He served in the New Mexico House of Representatives and had the name of Corrales changed to Sandoval in honor of his father, Francisco Sandoval. The name remained until 1960 when some determined residents succeeded in having the name changed back to Corrales. Sandoval County still bears Don Alejandro's name.

In the 20th century Corrales began to see changes to the Spanish farming traditions in the village. In 1923-24, the grassy mesa west of the village (some 55,000 acres), which had been held over 200 years as common grazing land, was purchased by Robert Thompson, a cattle rancher. Also during this time, a rising water table, due to the aggradation of the Rio Grande, had significantly decreased the amount of formerly productive farmland, and caused intermittent flooding. In the 1920's the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) was created to improve the land and control the river floods. In the 1930s and 1940s the land was drained and two new irrigation ditches were added to the Corrales system. Many of the orchards still productive in the village were planted on the newly reclaimed lands.

The severe flooding of the Rio Grande was especially destructive to crops and buildings. Major floods were recorded in 1864, 1868, 1879 and 1904, and as a result there remain only remnants of buildings over 150 years old in Corrales.

Buildings were often sited in family cluster, on higher ground, against the ditch or road or beyond the limits of the irrigable land. Traditionally, the size of the buildings was determined by the local, available building materials such as mud and timbers. Most walls were enormously thick to support the weight of a dirt roof and were often made from terrones, a kind of sod brick cut from river edge and used wet (instead of adobe bricks). Wood materials were scarce, being carried in from the forests in the mountains, and their length determined the width of the rooms. These vigas and other wooden materials were frequently reused in the rebuilding following a flood. Building practices began to change as the opening trade with the United States, first along the Santa Fe Trail after 1821 and later with the arrival of the railroad in Albuquerque in 1880, brought new materials and immigrants to the area.

With the construction of a new bridge after World War II, Corrales became easier to reach and attracted a share of the population boom in Albuquerque of this time. Corrales became known for a haven for artists and other free spirits. The newcomers were active in creating a volunteer fire department, art galleries, and a municipal library. They eventually joined with longtime residents to incorporate as a village in 1971, in part a response to the fact that the huge Thompson ranch had been sold and was being developed as Rio Rancho, then one of the largest residential developments in the country. Corrales experienced enormous residential growth following its incorporation, growing from a population of about 3,000 to an estimated population

of around 10,000 today. Though surrounded by suburban growth, Corrales residents continue to enjoy the rural character of the historic village.