Picacho, Sunset, & Riverside

Credits for Snapshot Publications:

The Federal Highway Administration and the New Mexico Department of Transportation funded this publication series to preserve a record of the culture of the Hondo Valley. Contributors to the publications include Daniel Wells, Rick Wessel, and Samantha Ruscavage-Barz (SWCA), Kirsten Campbell (Parson's Brinkerhoff), and Karen Van Citters (VanCitters Historic Preservation). Billy Crews (SWCA) designed the publications and contributed to the photography, and Jean Ballagh (SWCA) edited the text. Cameron Saffell (New Mexico Farm and Ranch Museum) served as the peer reviewer. The Rio Grande Historical Collections at the New Mexico State University generously contributed numerous historic photographs. The following individuals provided oral histories for the publications: Lee Bonnell, Paul and Nellie Ruth Jones, Lupe Kelly, Andreas Salas, Gladys Nosker, Patsy Sanchez, Mary Sedillo, Marjorie Titsworth Slayton, John Thomas, Joe Torrez, Amanda and Ignacio Torrez.

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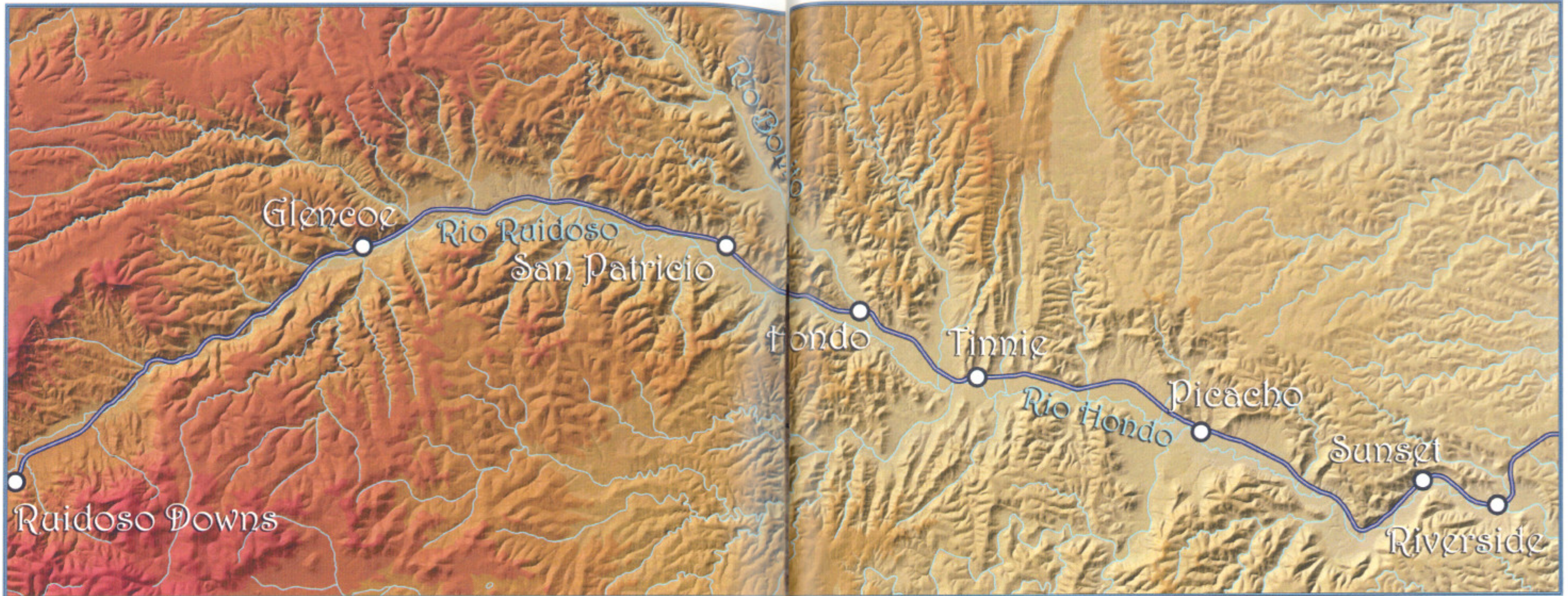
PICACHO, SUNSET, AND RIVERSIDE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the communities of Picacho, Sunset, and Riverside, located at the eastern end of the picturesque Hondo Valley in southeastern New Mexico. Picacho is situated amidst cottonwood and elm trees along the first terrace above the Hondo River. Current maps show the smaller community of Sunset about 5.5 miles east of Picacho, where the Hondo River curves northward just before beginning its winding journey across the rolling plains to the Pecos River east of Roswell. In the book *The Place Names of New Mexico*, Picacho is described simply as "one of several small Hispanic communities along the Rio Hondo," which does not begin to capture the uniqueness and history of this resilient community that has endured for more than a century in an environment that is both risky and rewarding. *Place Names* has even less to say about Sunset, stating that "old timers still recognize this name, but little else remains of this former community." Although Sunset was a much smaller community than Picacho and has been all but swallowed up by land consolidation resulting from large ranch development, it too was distinctive in its own right, certainly for those who lived there. Riverside began as a series of farms and ranches like the other communities of the Hondo valley and was the location of an early filling station owned by W. O. Norman. It was named "Big Hill", after the long climb of the hill to the east. After Norman sold his station in 1930, the name was changed to Riverside Camp, and later to just Riverside.

This booklet uses both archival and oral historical accounts to tell the stories of life in Picacho and Sunset from the beginnings of each community up to recent times. These stories of community lifeways are important, given that much of the history of these communities is being lost as a result of changes in land use and land tenure, episodes of highway construction, and movement of the descendants of the original families out of the area. The narrative is organized around three general themes that capture various aspects of historic lifeways through time. The first theme is community settlement and population, which includes a discussion of community beginnings in the middle to late nineteenth century, the pattern of settlement distribution in the community as well as key places of interest, and changes in settlement distribution over time along with the factors influencing those changes. The second theme pertains to how families made a living by farming and ranching, and includes stories about the challenges they faced. The third theme is education, religion, and social life—the community school system and school-related activities, community churches and church-related activities, and activities such as rodeos and dances and the places where these activities were held.

The story of Picacho, Sunset, and Riverside is one of a series of six community histories for the Hondo Valley. The other communities covered are Glencoe, San Patricio, Hondo, and Tinnie. Another publication will address the current understanding of the prehistory of the valley. This series is produced by the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) for the dual purpose of mitigating adverse effects to historic properties and providing a public benefit from the U.S. Highway 70 reconstruction project. US 70 is the major transportation route through the Hondo Valley, and changes to this route inadvertently affect the historic character of the communities that have existed along the road since the late 1800s. The series of community histories can help preserve the story of the historic character and lifestyle of the communities for future generations.



A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE HONDO VALLEY

The area referred to as "the Hondo Valley" in this publication series includes both the Rio Ruidoso and Rio Hondo valleys, as the Rio Ruidoso becomes the Rio Hondo after its confluence with the Rio Bonito at the community of Hondo. There are several distinct communities in the Valley, including Glencoe, San Patricio, Hondo, Tinnie, Picacho, and Sunset. While these communities share some similarities in their settlement history and natural environments, they also have unique histories. Most of the communities in the Hondo Valley were occupied for a number of years before they were given formal names, and many changed names several times before they came to have the names we know them by today.

The Hondo Valley has a long history of human use. The first documented settlements were built by the Jornada Mogollon people, who lived in round semi-subterranean pit houses. They built their villages between about A.D. 900 and 1450 on terraces overlooking the Rio Bonito and Rio Hondo and farmed in the valley bottoms. In historic times, parts of the Valley were occupied by Apache groups well into the nineteenth century. Apache people lived and farmed on a small scale in the valleys and hunted in the surrounding mountains. As Apaches acquired horses from Spanish and Mexican explorers and settlers in the 1600s and 1700s, they also staged raids on Mexican and Hispano trade routes and farms in the surrounding lowlands. Hispano farmers and traders fought back when attacked, but were unable to muster the military force necessary to pursue the attackers into the mountains. Thus, Apaches exercised military control over the surrounding lowlands throughout the 1700s and early 1800s, until the area became part of the United States through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with Mexico in 1848.

One of the first priorities of the Americans in the newly formed Territory of New Mexico was to build a series of forts to establish a military presence in the area. Fort Stanton was built adjacent to the Rio Bonito in 1855. One of the primary orders of the troops at Fort Stanton was to make the area safe for settlement. Not only did the fort provide protection against Apache raids, but it also served as the major market for agricultural goods for early settlers. With the protection of Fort Stanton, Hispanic and subsequent Euroamerican immigrants to the Hondo Valley prospered by farming and herding sheep, goats, and cattle.

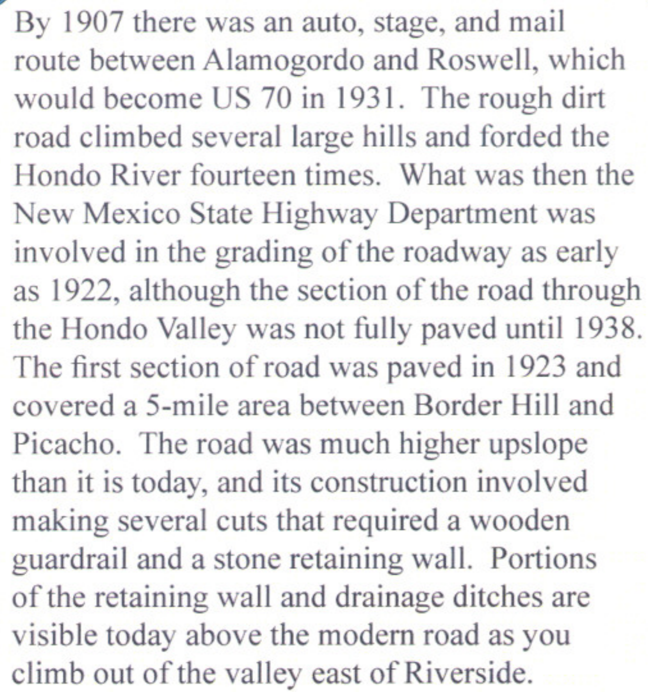
During the late 1850s and early 1860s, small Hispanic farming and ranching communities were established along the Rio Bonito and Rio Hondo. These early settlers most likely came from Rio Grande valley communities and Manzano Mountain villages. They constructed *acequias* (irrigation ditches), grew corn, wheat, and beans, and herded sheep and goats in the surrounding hills. Land was held in common, and property was held by right of possession. The United States passed the Homestead Act in 1862, which allowed settlers to have 160-acre lots of land as long as they improved the land by living and farming it for five years. Many of the Hispanic farmers who had already settled there claimed their land as homesteads. Euroamerican occupation of the southern Pecos Valley, to the east, began in earnest in the Hondo Valley during the 1860s, as ranchers from Texas like John Chisum moved in to utilize the area's rich grasslands. Lincoln County was established in 1869 and at that time included almost all of southeastern New Mexico.

Ranching became more prevalent during the 1870s, as Texas cattlemen discovered the lush valley grasslands and the high demand for beef at Fort Stanton. While most of the large cattle operations were located farther east of the Hondo Valley along the Pecos River, there were a few ranches in the Valley itself.

Robert Casey sold his ranch in Texas between 1868 and 1870 and relocated his family to a ranch in the Hondo Valley 6 miles east of Hondo. He also purchased a grist mill in the Valley and became something of a commercial and political leader. Dave Warner, another Texan, established a ranch at the present-day site of Tinnie in 1876. In 1885, John and Mahlon Thatcher and Frank Bloom established the Circle Diamond Ranch at Picacho; their property was eventually purchased by the Diamond A Ranch.

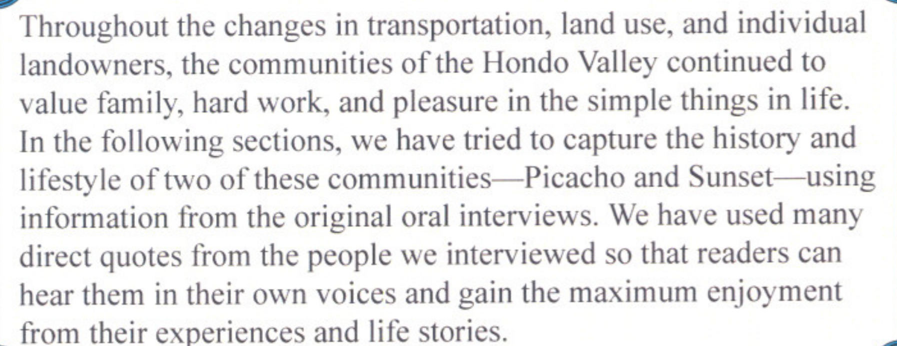
Acequias were constructed in the Hondo Valley beginning in the 1850s

By the end of the 1880s, many of the smaller farms in the Hondo Valley became concentrated in the hands of a few owners, both Euroamerican and Hispanic. The closing of Fort Stanton in 1896 meant that farmers switched to more profitable crops, including cotton and alfalfa. Fruit and vegetable production became one of the most important economic activities in the Valley and included apples, pears, and cabbage. However, by the early decades of the 20th century, the farming success of the Hondo Valley was eclipsed by farming and ranching booms in the Pecos Valley, and commercial activity moved to the towns of Roswell and Eddy (later renamed Carlsbad). The town of Lincoln remained the county seat until 1909, when it was replaced by Carrizozo.



By 1907 there was an auto, stage, and mail route between Alamogordo and Roswell, which would become US 70 in 1931. The rough dirt road climbed several large hills and forded the Hondo River fourteen times. What was then the New Mexico State Highway Department was involved in the grading of the roadway as early as 1922, although the section of the road through the Hondo Valley was not fully paved until 1938. The first section of road was paved in 1923 and covered a 5-mile area between Border Hill and Picacho. The road was much higher upslope than it is today, and its construction involved making several cuts that required a wooden guardrail and a stone retaining wall. Portions of the retaining wall and drainage ditches are visible today above the modern road as you climb out of the valley east of Riverside.

The growth in popularity of automobiles had an effect on the valley in several ways. Although residents continued to use horse-drawn wagons to haul wood and goods from nearby towns, automobile use grew through the 1930s and 1940s for basic transportation needs. With the growth of trucking, residents didn't have to take their agricultural produce to regional shipping points like Capitan and Roswell, but were able to sell local fruit to buyers from Texas. As fruit production became less profitable, many farmers removed their orchards in favor of irrigated pasture. Other changes also came to the Hondo Valley. Electrical service arrived in 1947, and indoor plumbing became common after World War II.



Throughout the changes in transportation, land use, and individual landowners, the communities of the Hondo Valley continued to value family, hard work, and pleasure in the simple things in life. In the following sections, we have tried to capture the history and lifestyle of two of these communities—Picacho and Sunset—using information from the original oral interviews. We have used many direct quotes from the people we interviewed so that readers can hear them in their own voices and gain the maximum enjoyment from their experiences and life stories.

COMMUNITY SETTLEMENT AND IDENTITY

The first Hispanic immigrants to the Hondo Valley in the 1850s faced problems typical of many settlers on the Western frontier. Native Apaches, who resented intrusion into their homeland, confronted them. Harsh weather in the intermountain valley was unpredictable. The settlers had to build their own homes and irrigation ditches by hand and at the same time feed themselves and their families. Conditions were not easy, but the settlers found a toehold in the early years and adapted quickly. Most communities in the Hondo Valley were built in a linear arrangement, with houses along the main road and the edges of the valley so that farmers could be close to their irrigated fields and avoid the periodic floods that come raging down the canyon. The school and the Catholic Church were important gathering places for people living at the various scattered farms and ranches. Most houses in Picacho have a long, one-room-wide layout, with more than one outside door and often an addition at the back of the house. A decade or so after Hispanics came, Euroamericans began moving into the area. Some of the earliest settlers' names are preserved on land patent claims from the area that became Picacho, Sunset and Riverside. They include Jose Montaño (1875), Camilo Nuñez (1885), Joseph C. Lea (1885), Manuel Montaño (1885), Rafael Gutierrez (1889), George Clements (1892), and Rumnaldo Montaño (1899). Some descendants of these earliest settlers still live in the area.

The residents of the Hondo Valley identify with their communities, even if clear boundaries are not shown on a map. When asked where she is from, Lupe Kelly replies, "We say we're from Picacho. We're not from the Hondo Valley.…We are Picacho." When asked about the differences between the communities in the Hondo Valley, Patsy Sanchez says that "we didn't really dislike each other but we knew where we were from. We were from different areas…we definitely knew where everyone was from."

Linear arrangement of houses along US 70 in Picacho

Picacho

Picacho was settled around 1867 or 1868 by Hispanic sheep and goat herders from the vicinity of Socorro or Manzano. Lupe Kelly's family, the Kimbrells and the Salases, were among the first families to settle in Picacho. Mrs. Kelly says, "Here in Picacho… both my father's family and my mother's family were here. And we think they came from the Manzano area as far as we can tell. Probably the middle 1800s because our ditch started in 1865, so they were already here doing the farming and ranching."

The Fresquez House in Picacho

The Rio Hondo Bridge in its original location spanning the Pecos River

Robert Casey, one of the first Euroamericans in the Hondo Valley, purchased his ranch near Picacho in 1868 from Leopold Chene, a Frenchman. Casey was a Texas rancher looking to establish a location from which he could provide beef to both Fort Stanton and Fort Sumner. The Casey property was 6 miles east of Hondo and about 2 miles west of Picacho. Casey's ranch included a ranch house, a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, and an irrigation ditch. At that time, there were only four houses between Casey's ranch and the town of Lincoln, and only one settlement (Missouri Plaza) between the ranch and Fort McKavett, Texas, 400 miles away to the south/southeast. The ranch remained in the Casey family until 1960. Paul Jones, who lives in Glencoe, is the great-grandson of Robert Casey and says of his great-grandfather:

> My mother's granddad came here in 1867, and he settled right there below Tinnie, where those big fields are. As a matter of fact, he's buried on that place. The first little field as you go east from Tinnie, there's a little ring of shrubbery and a few rocks around it. He's buried there.... He's the first man killed in the [Lincoln] County War.

The Rio Hondo Bridge at its current location

The population of Picacho (which may or may not include Tinnie in the census record) was never very large. The count declined from 405 people in 1890 to 287 people in 1950.

Prior to 1923, US 70 through the Picacho area was well south of the road's current location, and this older road can be traced along sections of the frontage road today. It was originally a dirt road maintained by residents. The cemetery was on the north side of the road, and there were a few houses on the south side. The road was moved to its current location in 1937, leaving the community of Picacho south of the new highway.

View of Picacho Church from US 70

Sunset

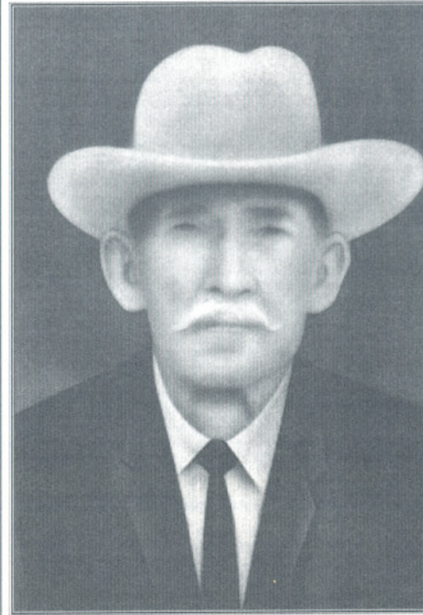
There are few historic records for Sunset. According to *The Place Names of New Mexico*, "little…remains of this former community, and the name's origin has been forgotten." Sunset was similar in most respects to the other communities in the Hondo Valley, especially Picacho. Members of Patsy Sanchez's family were some of the earliest settlers in Sunset in the late 1870s:

> My great grandfather, Camilo Nuñez, came there [Sunset]…I guess just looking for a place to live just like anybody else, a place to settle, and there was a river there so that made logical sense…. I would guess the family farm is just 160 acres…. They raised sheep and goats.

Mary Sedillo, another great-granddaughter of Camilo Nuñez, says of the size of the Sunset community in the early days, "There were quite a few [families in Sunset]…. We're talking about like 20 to 25 families just close to the road or in between the road and the river." Other families included the Clements, Avilas, Silvas, and Chavezes.

Camilo Nuñez

According to historic records, the Montaños were also one of the earliest families to settle in the Sunset area. Jose and Manuel Montaño had settled in the area and built an acequia, or irrigation ditch, for their fields by 1867. By 1909 their farm was owned by Pierre Southworth, who established the Sunset Ranch Orchard Company, with 25 acres of apple orchards and 109 farm acres. Will Titsworth purchased the Sunset Ranch in 1913 for


Guillermo Nuñez

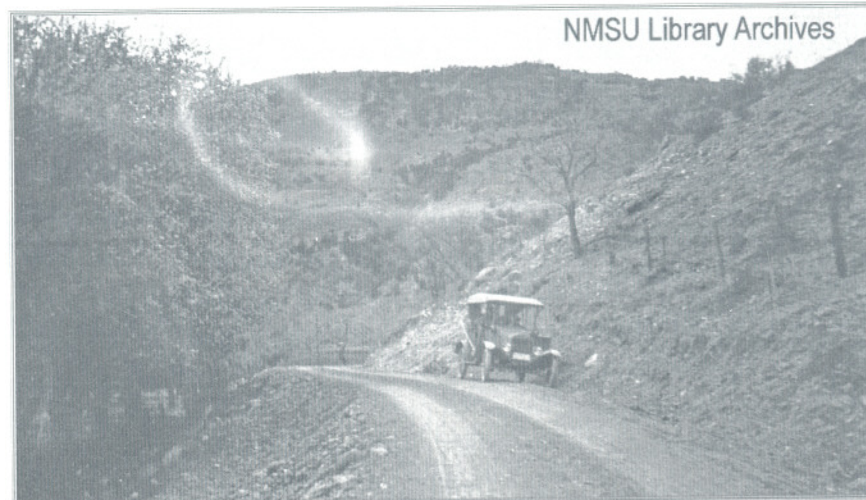
the Titsworth Company and continued to produce apples, but added lettuce, cabbage, and alfalfa. When the Titsworth Company dissolved at the death of George Titsworth in 1950, rancher Charles Fuller bought Sunset Ranch. The ranch was later bought by Robert O. Anderson and became part of Anderson's Diamond Circle Ranch, which was sold to the current owner, the Ford Secure Trust, in the early 1990s.

The Nuñez family were among the first settlers in the Hondo Valley

Quiet, tree-lined lane in Picacho

The route of US 70 between Sunset and Riverside changed many times over the years. The 1923 road construction plans, the earliest records of the alignment, show that the road was higher up the slope than it is now and ran along Border Hill. It was graded and plated between Border Hill and Picacho at that time. A stone retaining wall built for the road is still visible today from the main highway.

Stone retaining wall between Border Hill and Picacho



Old US 70

Patsy Sanchez's father worked on the original road construction when he was a teenager, and she recounts what the road was like for travel in those days. "He was always telling us how they worked on that road when they built that highway and…I think his grandpa bought a car and going down that hill was like a roller coaster to go down Picacho Hill."

Adobe building at Sunset

Riverside

Riverside was originally a car camp that sprang up in the late 1920s. The original plans (1923) for US 70 do not show any buildings at what would come to be known as Riverside. The 1937 plans for the US 70 realignment show "Riverside Camp," which consisted of several cabins and "car shelters" for travelers, a camp house, a tire repair shop, a garage, an icehouse, and a cactus garden. Riverside never developed into a farming and ranching community like Picacho and Sunset, but remained a well-known stop on the drive between Ruidoso and Roswell for many years.Patsy Sanchez and her sister worked at the Riverside car camp as waitresses, and she recounted her fond memories of that time:

> I started working at Riverside [when I turned sixteen] and I worked there every summer for seven years. But that was a big place. It was kind of half way between Ruidoso and Roswell. And there were like eight cabins and the restaurant and the service station. That was a busy place. Shorty Hill owned it all the time I was there…there must have been fifteen employees. And those that couldn't commute like us, some of them lived in those little cabins. It was a fun place to work. I remember that's when Johnny Cash came out and we played him on the jukebox. That was pretty neat. That place was always jam packed. It's hard to believe now. When you go by there, it's nothing.

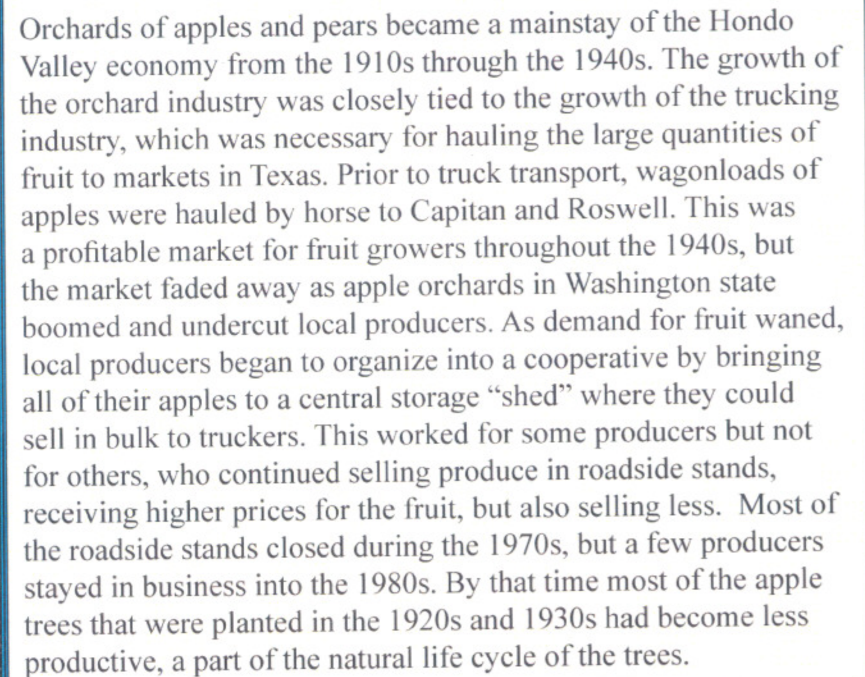
The development of Riverside as a tourist camp coincided with America's growing love of the automobile. From the 1920s onward, it became fashionable to spend annual vacations going on auto tours of the West. For those who had made the journey across the long, flat stretch of Texas and eastern New Mexico, Riverside made a refreshing stop before continuing on. Rest stops provided basic services to the tourists, a small cabin or camp spot, a service station with gas, and perhaps a bar, restaurant, or general store to stock up with picnic supplies. Tourist camps like these evolved into the motels and hotels that are present in nearly every American town today.

The Riverside Cafe

MAKING A LIVING: FARMING AND RANCHING

Throughout their history, each community's economy was based on farming and ranching. Water was a key factor in the success of the early settlements in Picacho and Sunset. Crop production would have been impossible without a reliable water supply, so one of the first activities of the earliest settlers would have been building an acequia. This early system would have been small and capable of watering only small parcels of land. Priority dates from the State Engineer's Office indicate that most of the irrigation ditches along the Hondo River were built between 1864 and 1874.

The ribbon of green that was the valley was surrounded by thousands of acres of high desert grassland that produced fodder for flocks of sheep and herds of goats and cattle. Some families were either farmers or ranchers exclusively; others dabbled in both, depending on the market and what would pay the most. In Picacho and Sunset, many families had orchards and grew vegetables such as corn and cabbage. Most families also kept goats and sheep and, later, pigs and cattle. Chickens and turkeys could also be found on many family farms.



Orchards of apples and pears became a mainstay of the Hondo Valley economy from the 1910s through the 1940s. The growth of the orchard industry was closely tied to the growth of the trucking industry, which was necessary for hauling the large quantities of fruit to markets in Texas. Prior to truck transport, wagonloads of apples were hauled by horse to Capitan and Roswell. This was a profitable market for fruit growers throughout the 1940s, but the market faded away as apple orchards in Washington state boomed and undercut local producers. As demand for fruit waned, local producers began to organize into a cooperative by bringing all of their apples to a central storage "shed" where they could sell in bulk to truckers. This worked for some producers but not for others, who continued selling produce in roadside stands, receiving higher prices for the fruit, but also selling less. Most of the roadside stands closed during the 1970s, but a few producers stayed in business into the 1980s. By that time most of the apple trees that were planted in the 1920s and 1930s had become less productive, a part of the natural life cycle of the trees.

Historic Hondo River Bridge

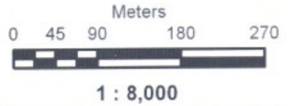
Old Picacho

Picacho School

Catholic Church

Post Office

Picacho Community



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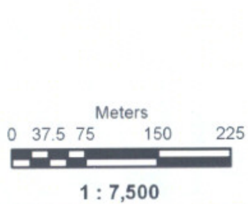
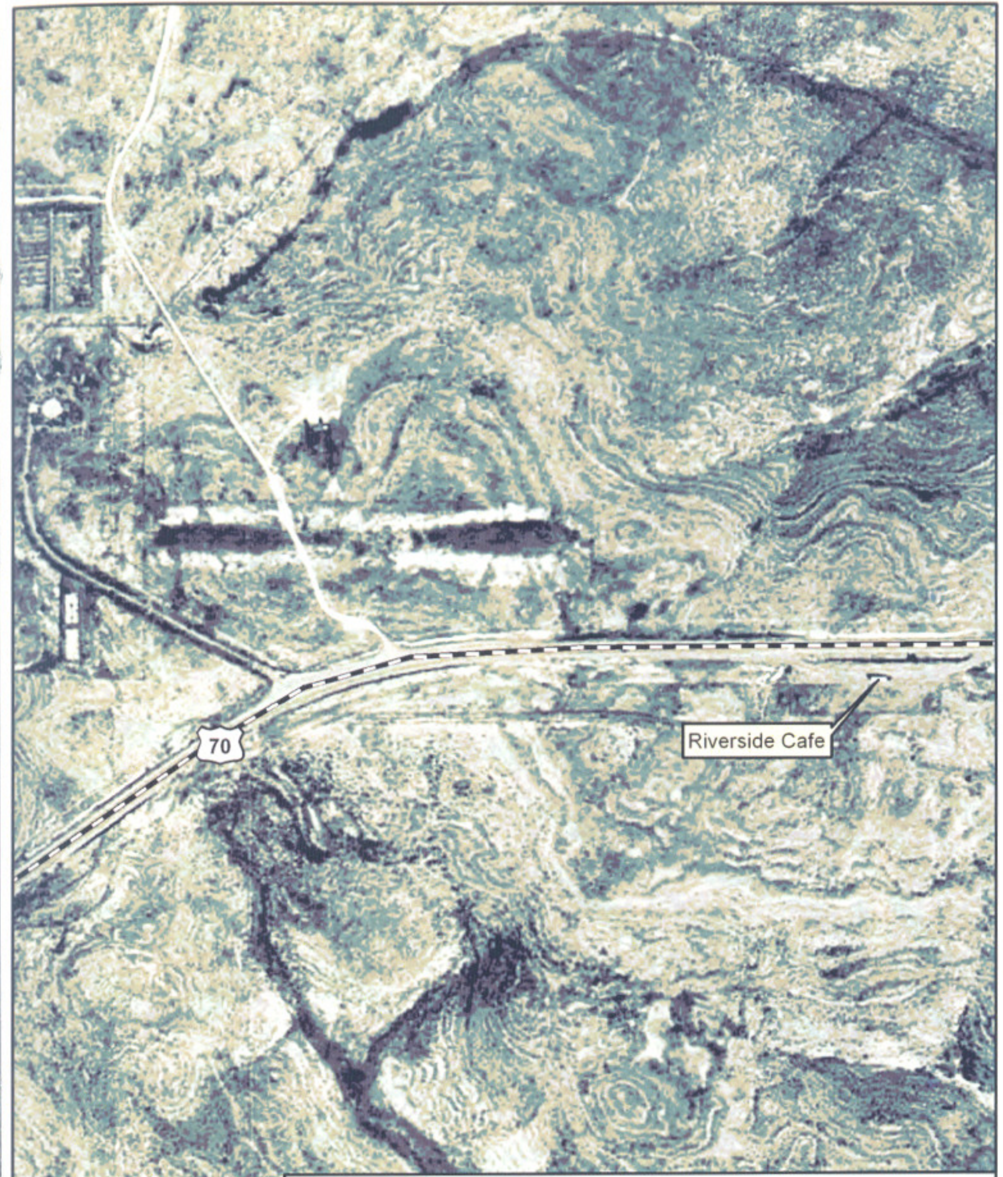
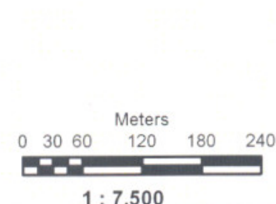
Sunset Community





Riverside Community



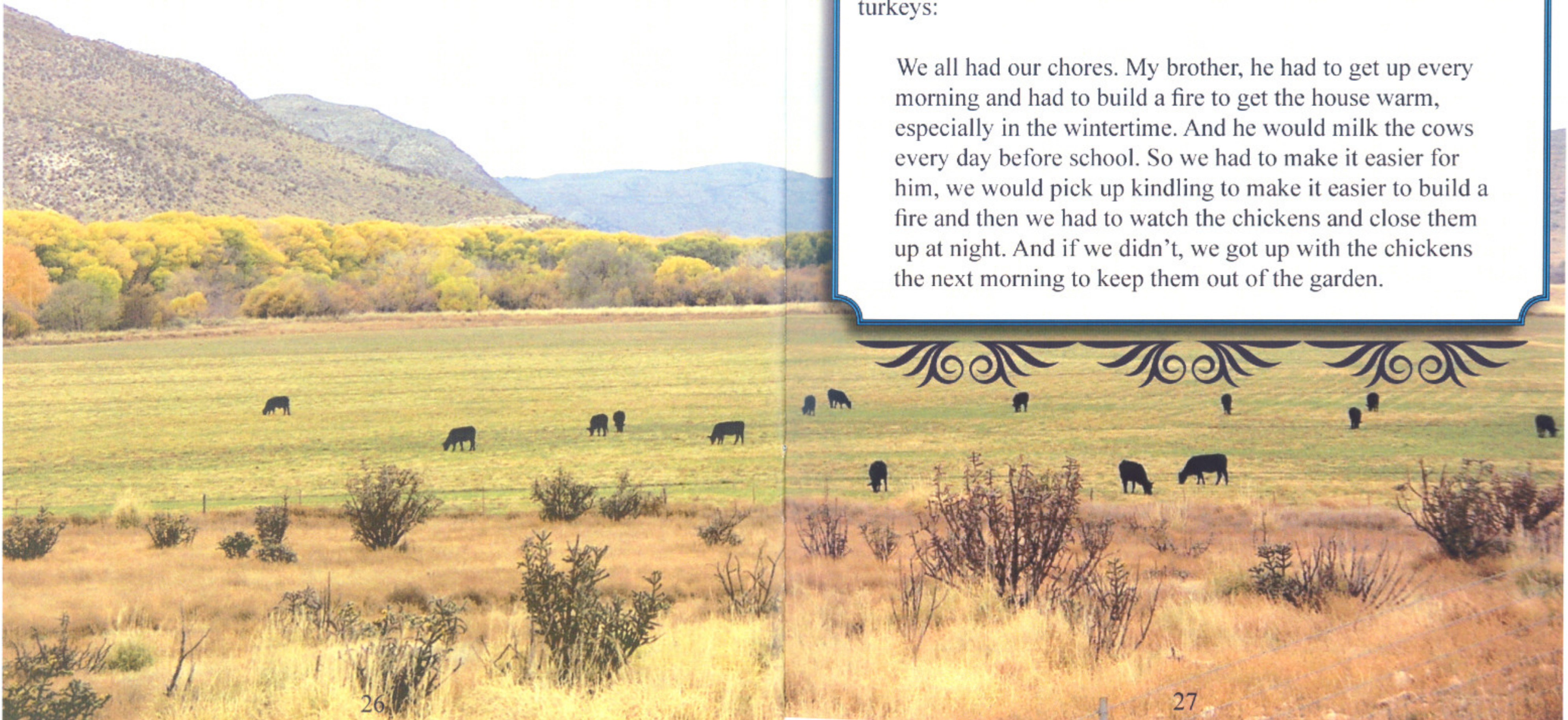
Changes in land use followed broader trends in the New Mexico and the national economy. The early settlers tended to have small garden plots and a few herd animals to support their families. Any surplus was loaded onto horse drawn wagons and hauled to local regional markets to make a little money or traded for supplies that the family wasn't able to produce themselves. Later, as trucking became more economical in the 1920s and 1930s, people began to plant larger plots and sell produce to truckers who acted as middlemen, hauling the goods to regional markets.

Life as a Farmer

Work on a farm or ranch is never ending, and chores were divided among all of the members of the family. The people interviewed for the histories of Picacho and Sunset said that their farms and ranches depended primarily on family labor, and only rarely hired people from outside the family to help out. Many modern-day comforts, such as plumbing, were not available until after World War II; electricity was not extended into the Hondo Valley until 1947. In spite of the hard work, people have many fond memories of those early days.

We can get an idea of life on a typical farm in Picacho from Lupe Kelly as she talks about her family, which had orchards, grew cabbages and hay, and kept cows, sheep, goats, chickens, and turkeys:

> We all had our chores. My brother, he had to get up every morning and had to build a fire to get the house warm, especially in the wintertime. And he would milk the cows every day before school. So we had to make it easier for him, we would pick up kindling to make it easier to build a fire and then we had to watch the chickens and close them up at night. And if we didn't, we got up with the chickens the next morning to keep them out of the garden.



Mrs. Kelly goes on to talk about the Picacho acequia:

> [The acequia] was for all the people in the valley from the other side of the [Hondo] bridge way down to Circle Diamond...it was part of the Rio Hondo stream system. There was always a *mayordomo*. I don't know who they were at that time but we still have them, and we have our bylaws and our rules.... Each one is responsible for their own part, you know, where the water runs on their property. And then we take up a collection, what we call dues for the part...from the dam to where it stops, where the people start using it.

Graveyard in Old Picacho

In terms of the acequia system in the Sunset area, we know the most about it from the area around the Sunset Ranch, originally homesteaded by the Montaño family. According to historic records, the first acequia, called the Montaño Ditch, was built in the late 1860s when the Montaños first settled the area. This small-scale irrigation would have been adequate to support the Montaño's family farm. When Reuben Michaelis owned the property at the beginning of the 1900s, he found that it would be difficult to support a farm without additional irrigation so he built a second acequia on the south side of the Rio Hondo, doubling the area of land that could be used for farming. Both acequias are still in use today.

Acequia in Picacho

In 1951, Patsy Sanchez's father bought a little farm called Rio Frio in Sunset, which had a fruit orchard, corn and other vegetables, and pigs. The family sold the fruit at their fruit stand along the highway. Most of their customers were Texans on their way to the racetrack in Ruidoso or other tourists passing through. Mrs. Sanchez describes the fruit stand:

> All of us used to work there during the summer, it was a beautiful place. It was a rock building, I don't even know who built it, it was there when we bought the place. It was all rock and it was totally cedar lined, ceiling and everything. I don't know what it was before we got it, evidently it was a small café or something because it had counters.... I remember sitting there for days on end. Sometimes nobody would come through. But mainly it was weekends.

Despite the occasional slow moments at the fruit stand, there was always more work to be done at home. Most families set aside the annual vegetable harvest by canning, a long, intensive process. Before refrigeration, fresh meat was available only if you killed and cleaned it yourself. The locally produced vegetables and meat formed the mainstays of the diet for most families. Patsy Sanchez continues:

> When we were growing up there at Rio Frio...we always grew our corn and we canned forever. It seemed like weeks at a time. You know, all our fruit, and we would make our jerky. We would kill our chickens and turkeys, slaughter the hogs and the calves.

Mary Sedillo remembers her father going to Roswell, a trip of two days by horse cart, to buy supplies that the family didn't grow themselves.

> He'd get the main groceries, which were 100 pounds of beans, 100 pounds of flour. That had to last a month.... Anything extra we would eat would be goat. And mother made cheese—the quesadillo.

They also relied on their neighbors for provisions. According to Mrs. Sedillo, "The Silvas...used to raise corn. And I remember... my Dad used to buy corn from them, or exchange, you know, a goat for corn or little things like that."

Herding

The first Hispanic settlers in the 1860s and 1870s brought with them the sheep and goats that had been traditionally kept by their forefathers. Herd animals were used for food (mutton, milk, and cheese) and clothing (wool) and as barter. Certain varieties of animals could better cope with the arid conditions of the West and were relatively low maintenance. In the mid 1860s, Euromerican cattlemen like John Chisum began to move into the Pecos Valley and by the 1870s used the Hondo Valley to drive cattle over the Sacramento Mountains to markets in Arizona.

Mary Sedillo's family ranch near Riverside had goats and sheep. She talks about the chores that she would do on the ranch:

> We'd go and milk the goats, and each one of us had a chore. I had the chore of the milking goats. My sister had the ones that had the little babies, and my brother had the billy goats.

The goats also provided entertainment for the family, particularly for the children. Mrs. Sedillo described this entertainment:

> On Sunday afternoon they would get the billy goats and make like a little rodeo with the billy goats, and ride them, ride the billy goats, and that's about what we used to do in the afternoon. We also had three horses that were part of the rodeo.

Patsy Sanchez's family also kept goats and sheep. She talks about the hard work involved in caring for sheep:

> [W]hen you have sheep…you have to push them one at a time, literally push them one at a time to go in [the] chute, to go in the corral. You just gotta push them, and marking lambs you have to lift them…sheep were just kind of dumb, therefore harder to work with. First you have the marking, then you have the shearing…. When I was little…we used to have to tamp the wool down in the wool sacks, you'd get so full of ticks and that wasn't very pleasant. You don't get that with cattle, all the ticks in your ears and in your clothes. But it was fun. Still I never liked the ticks, I don't see how anyone would like ticks.

Mrs. Sanchez's family switched to cattle herding when the market for wool dropped in the 1980s. Up until that time, the angora goats were particularly profitable. She states says, "The angora goats were good money, they used to bring like three times more for the mohair than the sheep did for their wool." According to Mrs. Sanchez, cattle, on the other hand were "not easy, but I mean a lot more simple than sheep were," in terms of both herding cattle into a corral and caring for them.

Although he was not a rancher in Picacho, John Thomas, who spent a good part of his life in San Patricio, owned and kept cattle there as part of a dairy operation in 1934. Mr. Thomas talks about how he got the dairy:

> I'd worked on a dairy in Texas, when I was a boy, and I thought there was a lot of money. I bought a dairy, that was one of the things I did that we shoulda never did here, because feed costs so much and we lost a lot of money in that. But see, I had that orchard and I guess it was about [19] 34 then, we made a lot of money, Mickey [Mrs. Thomas] and I did. We had 15,000 bushels of apples, and I bought these cows with part of the money I made over the orchards…that was Picacho, where I had the dairy. Now I had my cousin, I let [him] run the place down there. I rented a farm down there at the Louise Massey and I thought, well I can make money, so I went down and took over the dairy, but I didn't do much better than he did.

Living on the Land

Besides growing crops and raising animals, people in Picacho and Sunset had to build houses and raise families. The first need was for shelter, and people built with whatever was at hand. Some of the first settlers built dugout houses, excavating a hole into a hillside and using the rock to build onto the front of the hole, creating a partially underground home. Such houses were well insulated but were usually abandoned or turned into storage rooms

Adobe ruin in Picacho

as freestanding houses were built. Adobe was the common building material before sawmills were established, one at La Maquina (1850s–1860s), which later became Blazer's Mill (1870s–1890s), and Paul Dowlin's mill on Ruidoso Creek. During the late 1800s milled lumber was widely available and was commonly used in local buildings.

Regarding the use of the dugout houses, Mary Sedillo said that "it was just a matter of surviving" for poor people in those days. She describes what these dugouts looked like:

> [T]he hill was right there, and they [dug] inside.... It's still there, that cave, you know, where they built. And it's about, oh probably ten feet...inside of the hill, and then they added another room [outside], which was [made] with stones.

Andrea Salas's grandfather, George Kimbrell, lived in a hillside dugout near Tinnie when he first came to the Hondo Valley in 1869. Mrs. Salas says that because of this, her grandfather was called "Bear."

Washing clothes in the early days before washing machines was a major chore. People used water from the Rio Hondo, which they had to carry to a suitable location for the laundry. Mary Sedillo describes washing clothes this way when she was a girl:

> My mother used to wash [clothes] in the river. We used to carry the water to one of the canyons. And she would wash, and then we had to rinse.... We didn't have no clotheslines. We used to throw them, like they do in Mexico, throw them over the bushes, what is it, the mesquites, you know. That was fun then. But I won't go back! Carry water and all that? No, I don't think so.

Self-reliance was necessary for more than food production. Local families also had to rely on each other for medicine, and traditional cures based on the use of wild plants were common in the valley, where the closest doctor was a long wagon ride away at either Fort Stanton or Roswell. Most people did not take the wagon ride to the doctor, even if they were very sick. A midwife was available for women having babies, since the doctor would not be able to make it to Picacho or Sunset before the baby was born. A few people may have been *curanderos*, or healers, who could help local folks who were seriously ill or injured. Local families were familiar with the plants that could be used to treat major and minor illnesses ranging from stomachaches to kidney infections. Paregoric oil was used to relieve pain, while peach leaves could be used for a stomachache. Mary Sedillo:

> We didn't go to doctors, medicines that we'd get come from close to the river. Peppermint and all the herbs, you know. The remedies, our parents they came from generation to generation, you know. [It's] what we had to use for a cold, stomachache, kidneys. My father was sick of kidneys one time, and they used to give him some kind of herb,

and he got well. The peach leaves, they used to use them for stomachache.... And there's times when some of these kids, they don't know nothing, or they know a lot about doctors, but if they don't get well and they want me to do something, I used to do the herbs, you know. And they take them and they get well.... There was...the one we used to have to wash our hair, it was a cactus. We didn't have shampoo, and the soap they used to make, it was made out of lard, pure lard. But the shampoo we used to use, we had to go up the hill when we take the goats and get the... yucca, but we had to cut it off and then get in there in the bottom. Take all that.... See what we went through? You all are lucky.

Sometimes wild plants were also collected for food, adding a bit of variety to the menu and helping balance the diet. When she was a girl, Mary Sedillo used to collect wild potatoes, which she describes as "small, little potatoes. Nothing like what we have now."

Historic Picacho School

EDUCATION, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL LIFE

Every community has its gathering places, where people come together to talk, learn, and worship, where they can share in the experience of living in a place and feel a common bond with their neighbors. In the Hondo Valley, these places tended to be centered around the school, the church, and the general stores that dot the communities.

School

The first schools in the Hondo Valley were established after the Territorial Legislature created Lincoln County in 1869. At first classes were held at local meeting halls and in family homes, but by the mid 1880s they were formalized in dedicated school buildings. It was at this time that school districts were established, with superintendents and school boards. The Picacho School is a good example of this kind of building, and many local children received formal education there. Education beyond the eighth grade was not available until Hondo High School was built in 1924. Most children attended first through sixth grade, but boys tended to begin working on family farms and ranches before they completed seventh or eighth grade. Girls usually completed the eighth grade. Class sizes varied, and different grades were combined in the same rooms in the two-room school. Overall, there were typically 30–40 children in the school at one time. The Hondo School District included the communities of Arabella, Blue Water, Picacho, Tinnie, Hondo, and San Patricio.

School also provided a social environment for children, where they were exposed to children that they might not meet otherwise and forged friendships that would last for a lifetime. The schoolhouse also served other functions and became a community center for pageants and performances where adults met socially. Thus, the school was an element that helped bind the community together for many years.

The first school in Picacho was probably built before 1880, since the earliest available school census records for Lincoln County start at 1880. The census records indicate that there were 86 students in the Picacho School District in 1880 and 103 students in 1920. The early Picacho school no longer exists. The Works Progress Administration—part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal program—built a second Picacho school in 1940, which is used as a residence today. The 1940 school was built to resemble early Protestant churches with its rectangular form, sash windows along the long side, main door in the gable end, and belfry above. This resemblance was not accidental, but related to the similar functions served by religion and education, to foster the moral, physical, and intellectual development of students. Sunset did not have a school; children from Sunset went to school in either Picacho or Tinnie.

Patsy Sanchez used to take the bus from Sunset to the Picacho school, and she talks about what the school looked like inside: "We had two rooms, the big room and the little room. The big room was fourth, fifth, and sixth, and the little room was first, second, and third. It had a basement where the kitchen was. It had the big room and the little room and then it had an auditorium." Mary Sedillo, who also attended the Picacho school, says that "different grades were divided with boards in between."

Classes in reading and arithmetic were usually followed by recess, at which time kids would play basketball or other games. Music and crafts were also an important part of the school curriculum. Mrs. Sanchez recalls these activities:

> We learned how to punch tin. You know, make things out of tin. We learned how to make belts and leather tooling and we learned how to square dance. And I just am amazed at all the things we learned how to do there. We had all kinds of crafts. We learned a little music. It had a stage and we used to put on plays. Elise Kimball was a pianist so she always played the piano. We put on school plays for Christmas and for Easter and for everything. And we played, this is what I really liked, we learned to play the tonette.

Basketball was an important school activity that often resulted in rivalries between the different Hondo Valley communities. During the time when the first Picacho school was active, each community had its own basketball team, as well as football and track. By the time the second Picacho school was built in 1940, not all of the communities had sports teams, and the main rivalries were between Hondo, San Patricio, Picacho, and Carrizozo.

Churches

Picacho and Sunset were predominantly Catholic communities. In the early days, people's homes were used for Sunday worship, where a family might dedicate a room to serve as a meeting space. Later the community built a church to hold more people. According to survey records, Picacho had a Catholic church by 1891. Sunset did not have a church, so people would come to the church in Picacho, where services were held once a month. The closest church with weekly services was in Hondo. Catholic nuns living in Picacho prepared the local children for their first communion. In addition to the monthly services, priests would also come to Picacho periodically for missions. Patsy Sanchez remembers these missions as "always a big event, and those were always very good missionaries." The church was also the gathering place for religious holidays and feasts. The Picacho church had fiestas in May and December with music, food, and games. Mary Sedillo remembers decorating the alter of the church:

We used to have the church right next door to [the school], but we only had services once a month.... [I]n the Catholic Church starting in April, they would start making a little altar and put all the saints or statues. And then in May when the little flowers start coming out, here we are, picking flowers for the Virgin Mary.

Social Life

The residents of Picacho and Sunset had many opportunities to socialize at church-related and school-related activities. In addition to the fiestas held at the church, St. Joseph's Day festivities were held at the Picacho School. Lupe Kelly says that during this feast day celebration, "they'd light these bonfires around and have the procession and then they would have the meal at the school cafeteria. A lot of people came. There was a lot of people here then." Christmas and Easter pageants were special events attended by Picacho and Sunset residents.

The school was also used as a community center for dances and potlucks, which were attended by people from all over the Hondo Valley. Movies were sometimes shown at the school, and Lupe Kelly recalls those occasions:

> I remember when I was maybe eight or nine, Miss Marie Fuller, she had the movie camera, you know, the projector, and she would order films, and they would show them for a quarter at school and so everybody would come and pay a quarter and watch the film at the Picacho school.... Every two to three months, she would get a film, whenever she could get one in. I remember we watched *Song of Bernadette*, and all the Heidi movies. And we thought it was great, because we had to go so far to see a movie.

Mary Sedillo recalls the fiestas and the fun and games that accompanied them:

> They did have...fiestas, in May and December and two or three more.... San Antonio...three of the saints, you know, that they would celebrate.... Oh they would have music... music and eating, like we all go out and eat. And games, little games like...[beans on the checkerboard]...we used to color the beans. Miss Kimbrell would let us color the beans. Some red and some other color, you know, so we'd know the difference. And then the checkerboard would be made out of cardboard. So, I mean, we had little things like that, so...like they still have now, but these ones we have now, boy, you got to pay for it. You won't get the kids to play anything with beans.

The school also served as a dance hall where people could be less inhibited and allowed to "cut loose." Patsy Sanchez recalls these dances:

> Everybody loved to dance back than. All you had to do was go to the post office, which is right next to it and say "Dance Saturday night" [on a flyer] and everybody would show up. Everybody would bring something to snack on. The band, which was J. B. Morris was the fiddler; he lived across the highway from us at Border Hill. He was the fiddler. His daughter, Frances Olene…played the guitar. I played the guitar and my sister and I played the mandolin. That was our band. And, it was just fun times.

The Sunset Bar was an important place for dancing and socializing for the residents of Picacho and Sunset. Mary Sedillo describes the bar:

> Just like a regular bar, [with] stools [and] no booths [or] tables...[it had one of] those big mirrors [behind the bar]…. They didn't have the dance in the bar, but they had a room next to it…connected to the house…. They used to live in the back, and then over here close to the bar was the dancing hall.

Dances were also held at the pool hall in Picacho. Andrea Salas went to those dances and said that they were held every other week and that it cost 50 cents to get in. A violin and guitar provided the music for the dance. A building next to the pool hall served as a jail when the dancers got too rowdy and needed a place to calm down.

WHY HISTORY IS IMPORTANT

History is important because it connects modern day people with the past. This publication uses historical records and recollections of what are now the elder members of the community to give the reader a sense of what it was like to live in the Picaho/Sunset/ Riverside area in the early and mid 20th century. The 20th century was witness to tremendous change in America, and the people interviewed here were witnesses to economic depressions, world wars, the social revolutions of the 1960s, the rise of technology, and the global society that we as Americans are part of today. Although the Hondo Valley communities may seem placid and far removed from these broad movements, the reach of these developments often had concrete effects on the lives of local residents. Improvements like the paving and rerouting of US 70 permitted faster and easier transportation to other parts of the state and, by extension, the rest of the country. New ideas, products, and people followed the road and contributed to the makeup of the valley as it exists today.

Through all the changes of the last century, the residents of the Hondo Valley communities retained the values that they inherited from their forefathers and foremothers and passed them down to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Although those values are ingrained and self-evident for our interviewees, this publication preserves the record of them for all of us. This is the common wisdom of people who lived on and depended on the land. Their example helps us understand what it took to survive and be happy without many of the common conveniences of the modern day such as electricity or cars. With the record of their lives committed to this history, we hold a summary of their lives to read, consider, and learn from.

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List of photographs donated by citizens of the Hondo Valley used in this volume of the Snapshot Publication Series:

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