

Following the Santa Fe Trail Tour Supplement

September 22-26,2021

by Paul Duncan, Coordinator

Las Vegas, NM came into being as a community around 1835 when New Mexico was still part of Mexico. After Mexico won independence from Spain, they welcomed trade in "New Mexico" territory. Starting in 1820, trade goods moved from Kansas City, MO over the Santa Fe Trail to Santa Fe. The Ports of Entry into Mexico moved from Santa Fe to the Pecos Valley and later to Las Vegas. Las Vegas was well situated, close to the mountains with adequate water and on the edge of the extensive prairie grass lands that extended East. The Mexican Governors in Santa Fe wanted communities on the east side of the Southern Sangre de Cristo mountains to act as buffers to the nomadic plains tribes who followed the buffalo. These tribes, especially the Comanches became a major threat to settlers moving on the Santa Fe Trail. Santa Fe Governors awarded land grants to individuals who settled in "buffer" communities.

On Thursday (09/23/21) we will drive to Fort Union passing through Watrous, NM (originally La Junta) at the junction of NM-161 and I-25. The community is named after Samuel Watrous who came from VT in 1835 to establish a mercantile business. La Junta was located where the two routes of the Santa Fe Trail rejoined-the Mountain Route through Raton and the Cimarron Route near Clayton. During our 2019 tour to Clayton we viewed ruts of the Cimarron Cut-Off of the Santa Fe Trail. Samuel Watrous built a fort-like adobe compound and conducted his mercantile business there. Later, during the forty years that Ft. Union was active, he raised cattle to provide beef to the fort. His original adobe compound was renovated in 2004-2009 by private owners and is now headquarters for the Watrous Valley Ranch angus cow and calf operation

In 1850 Fort. Union was planned and built as the main U.S. Army military post in the New Mexico Territory. Located on the Santa Fe Trail the Fort existed from 1851-1891. Ruins of the Fort are currently located in the Fort Union National Monument managed by the National Park Service. We will have a picnic lunch at Ft. Union. The Visitor Center is currently closed for renovation but the book store and porta potties are open and there will be a ranger tour at 1PM. We plan to take the Ranger tour prior to returning to Las Vegas.

During the early years of the Civil War, the Confederacy planned to capture Ft. Union. A Confederate force left El Paso in 1862, marched up the Rio Grande Valley and took Santa Fe by force. A Union force from Colorado defeated the Confederates at Glorieta Pass and ended their Western ambitions in the West.

On Friday (09/24/21) we will travel past a number of the early buffer communities such as Tecolote (owl), Bernal, Rowe and Pecos on our way to the the **Pecos National Historic Park** and the village of Pecos. All of these communities were on the original (pre-1937) Route 66 that passed through Santa Fe and then south to Albuquerque.

Pecos National Historic Park (PNHP) was created in 1991 combining the Pecos Pueblo National Monument, the Glorieta Pass Civil War site, Santa Fe Trail sites and the Forked Lightning Ranch House and ranch land donated by actress Greer Garson. First, we will stop at the PNHP visitor center. The displays are superb, the bookstore complete and the rangers very helpful. On a previous Tin Lizzie tour to Portales, NM we visited the Blackwater Draw archeological site where Clovis Culture hunters were active. At Pecos, there is also evidence of Clovis Culture hunters (5-10,000 years ago). The Pecos Pueblo was the major Native American farming and trading community east of the southern Rocky Mountains. The Pueblo was first built around 1100. The systematic excavation of the Pecos Pueblo and Spanish Church (1915-29) was directed by Dr. Alfred Kidder and his exploratory techniques developed here were utilized throughout the American Southwest and Mesoamerica. Kidder used "Old Blue," his trustworthy 1911 Model T Ford throughout his 15-year project at Pecos. Famed New Mexico archeologist Earl Morris, a friend and colleague of Kidder, had a 1917 Model T Ford he called "Old Joe." The last inhabitants of Pecos Pueblo left in 1838 and moved to Jemez Pueblo which shared their Towa language.

The Pecos community was established on the Pecos River in the early 1800's as part of the San Miguel del Bado land grant (1794) and the Canon de Pecos land grant (1815). Ranching, both cattle and sheep, mining and tourism evolved. The railroad stopped in Pecos in 1880, the Terrero Mine (gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc) operated from 1882-1939, and Highway 66 originally went through Santa Rosa to Pecos and on to Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Guest and dude ranches were more profitable. Starting in the 1880's and for decades after that, health resorts catered to Easterners with tuberculosis seeking "the cure" in the high, dry New Mexico mountains. Today Pecos is a thriving community with many amenities including wilderness hiking in the Pecos Wilderness both summer and winter, fly fishing at a number of the private guest ranches, horseback riding and trips into the Pecos Wilderness.

References: Legends of America-Santa Fe Trail and Route 66 in the Pecos, River Valley, New Mexico; legendsofamerica.com

Images of America-Pecos, Paul R. Secord, Arcadia Publishing, 2014, ISBN 978-1-4671-3237-4.