

# Early Inhabitants of Los Ranchos

*Los Ranchos Historical Society*

Who were the early inhabitants of what is now Los Ranchos? Where did they come from? Why did they leave?

Archeologists have found evidence of early humans in the North Valley that date back 2500 years. They believe there are even older sites that were washed away and erased by river floods. What we do know from excavations in Los Ranchos that took place in the 1980s is that by 1300 there were at least eleven ancient Tiwa (called Tiguex by the Spanish) pueblos on both sides of the Rio Grande River and probably more beneath the river.

Two-story adobe and terrones (blocks cut from the bottom of the river) buildings sat on elevated ground. Below were fields of corn, squash, beans and other crops that were watered when the river flooded and by using early forms of irrigation. A rich environment of cottonwoods, yerba mansa, salt grass, willows, and sunflowers flourished. Prickly pear cactus, and Russian thistle grew in dryer areas. Sixty-seven species of mammals including wild turkeys, grizzly bear, wolf, mule deer and many birds were hunted for their meat, hides, and bones.

Well-researched documentaries, including a soon to be released documentary *Third Canyon Written on the Landscape* by the Solstice Project, focus on Chaco Canyon and Chaco outliers like Mesa Verde. They ask why these large complex ancient sites that contained large kivas (ceremonial chambers) and housed Pueblo and Navajo ancestors were abandoned in the late 1200's.



Top: Cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde. Bottom: Some members of the audience for our Los Ranchos historical Society talk in late April

Theories are that the 50-year drought in the Southwest and socio-political unrest brought on by hierarchies of power contributed to the mass exodus. New theories, some based on DNA evidence, suggest that the people who migrated east (including to what is now Los Ranchos) came from Mesa Verde, while those who migrated west came from Chaco.

Why did they leave? Anthropologists note that Apache and Dine' nomadic tribes arrived a century or two before the Spanish and may have had a symbiotic relationship with the Tiwa. When the first Spanish army arrived, they demanded food from the pueblos, abused and destroyed native spiritual items, and banned indigenous practices that celebrated the natural cycles of seasons, and the earth.

In 1680, there was a Pueblo Revolt that originated in Ohkay Owingeh (formerly known as San Juan Pueblo). They drove the Spanish out, only to see them return 12 years later. There is evidence that some Tiwa residents remained in Los Ranchos. Others may have fled to northern pueblos, and/or to Mexico.

Archeological evidence and oral histories suggest that in the late 1800s and early 1900s pueblo people interacted with residents of Los Ranchos, selling pottery, working on ranches, trading crops, and more. Pottery "sherds" (the spelling preferred by archeologists) collected in Los Ranchos were mostly from Santa Ana and Zia pueblos. Additional pottery sherds housed in Maxwell Museum were from Cochiti and San Felipe.

**More Information** about the Los Ranchos Historical Society  
[www.LosRanchosHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.LosRanchosHistoricalSociety.org)

Upcoming events, talks, activities and more!



View a video of a talk by Professor Stefan Schoberlein and Teri Reynoso: "Meet the Kromers: A Case Study of the Albuquerque Boheme, 1930s - 1950s"