A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST — The Mission Church at Rancho De Taos

Probably the Mission Church of St. Francis of Assisi at Ranchos de Taos is the most photographed church in New Mexico, if not in the whole of the United States. The dramatic play of sun and shadow over the surfaces and planes of the apse present an ever changing subject for the photographer. The simplicity of the cubed masses of the building and the basic irregularity of the adobe walls have continually appealed to architects even of diametrically opposed points of view. In its plan, its spatial and sculptural qualities and in its details this building is a perfect illustration of folk tradition in architecture. Its use of materials drew its inspiration from the earlier architecture of the Pueblo people; the plan is obviously a provincial adaptation of the Baroque of Mexico; while many of the wood details of the church derive from the Greek and Queen Anne Revivals of the later nineteenth century.

The church was originally built in the early years of the 18th century, but its present plan dates from the rebuilding of 1772. As with many adobe buildings of New Mexico, the church has developed and evolved through changes and additions up to the present time. Many of the features such as the hipped roof of the towers, the window above the entrance door, the entrance itself and a number of interior details are an outgrowth of the late 19th century territorial style.

Credit: The plan and photographs of this building were made available for publication through the kindness of John Gaw Meem and the American Historic Building Survey of the National Park Service. The drawings and photographs were produced in 1934, by John J. Thompson and R. B. McComas under the direction of Mr. Meem and A. Leicester Hyde.