

University of New Mexico

## UNM Digital Repository

---

Faculty Publications

Architecture and Planning

---

9-2024

### Los molinitos de la gente: arquitectura popular en el Río Grande del Norte, 1600-1950

José A. Rivera

*University of New Mexico - Main Campus, jrivera@unm.edu*

Levi Romero

*University of New Mexico - Main Campus, xlromero@unm.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/arch\\_fsp](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/arch_fsp)



Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#), [Landscape Architecture Commons](#), and the [Urban, Community and Regional Planning Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Rivera, José A. and Levi Romero. "Los molinitos de la gente: arquitectura popular en el Río Grande del Norte, 1600-1950." (2024). [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/arch\\_fsp/14](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/arch_fsp/14)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Architecture and Planning at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

**Los molinitos de la gente:  
arquitectura popular en el Río Grande del Norte, 1600-1950**

**The small grist mills of the people:  
Folk Architecture in the Northern Río Grande, 1600-1950**

José A. Rivera, Professor Emeritus  
of Community and Regional Planning,  
UNM School of Architecture and Planning  
and  
Levi Romero, Associate Professor  
Department of Chicana & Chicano Studies  
University of New Mexico

**ABSTRACT**

For centuries, acequias and small grist mills in northern New Mexico villages played a major role in the agricultural economy of the region following the introduction of wheat from the Old World to the Americas. Wheat, in its ground form as flour, was a staple during the Spanish colonial period of the region. To process raw wheat, local mills (*molinos*) were essential infrastructure as were the *acequias* (ditches) that powered them. Most *molinos* were built from logs and were situated near the banks of watercourses. The wheel and axle were driven by the gravity force of water drawn from an acequia, itself diverted from a river. A few others were built from adobe bricks or stones, and at least in one case, a family adobe mill on the Camino Real was powered by burros. Researchers have documented the existence of several hundred small mills, often referred to as “traditional *molinos*,” spread throughout New Mexico with references in 1599 and 1601 at the first Spanish settlement, San Gabriel. While most fell into disuse by the late 1930s, a few continued in service until the 1940s and 1950s. We call them *molinitos de la gente* to distinguish them from the larger commercial mills built by wealthy merchants and other outside investors to supply wheat and other grains to U.S. Army posts and Indian reservations in New Mexico and the Southwest under contracts with the government. The *molinitos*, on the other hand, were family-owned and served the needs of local villages through bartering or other fee arrangements set by each miller. Unlike the permanent commercial mills, these small-scale mills were susceptible to the effects of weather conditions and required maintenance or replacement after decades of use, and most collapsed after prolonged periods of non-use and abandonment.

## Poetry of Remembrance



*Molino de los Parciantes*, Apodaca, NM (Courtesy of Levi Romero)

Poem by Levi Romero from *A Poetry of Remembrance: New and Rejected Works*, UNM Press 2009. Levi wrote this poem as a tribute to the *Molino de los Parciantes* that his uncle Sylviano Griego used to manage. He was selected as the Inaugural New Mexico State Poet Laureate in 2020 and awarded the post of New Mexico Centennial Poet in 2012.

Molino Abandonado

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
hay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
hay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

Abandoned Molino

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

la historia  
de un pueblo

*the history  
of a village*

hecha polvo

*turned to dust*

¿ qué pasó aquí,  
qué es esto?

*what happened,  
what is this?*

¿ en dónde está la sabiduría  
granma, granpa ?

*where is the wisdom  
granma, granpa?*

ya no quedan ni mías  
ni tansiquiera una tortilla dura

*not even crumbs remain  
not even a hardened tortilla*

¿ el sonido esta tarde?

*the sound this evening?*

una *Harley* retumbando por la plaza  
¿ y con eso seponemos de quedar contentos?

*a Harley roaring through the plaza  
and is that what should make us content?*

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
hay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
hay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

aquel molino  
en un tiempo con su rueda en el agua  
ahora, se usa de dispensa

*that molino  
at one time with its wheel in the water  
is now used as a storage shed*

¡ay, hasta miedo me da

*ay, I am even fearful*

arrimarme a este pueblo!  
las lenguas como flechas  
apuntadas y venenosas

*to approach this village  
tongues like arrows  
pointed and venomous*

somos hijos de los hijos  
de hombres en aquel antepasado  
que se trataban como hermanos  
ayudándose unos a los otros

*we are children of the children  
of men in that ancestral time  
who regarded each other as brothers  
assisting one another*

al estilo mano a mano

*hand to hand*

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
ay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
hay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

¿ qué pasó aquí,  
qué es esto?

*what happened here,  
what is this?*

¿ qué no te conozco,  
de qué familia eres?

*do I not know you,  
what family do you belong to?*

*! o, pues, yo y tu abuelo  
anduvimos juntos  
en la borrega en Colorado  
y en el betabel en Wyoming!*

*ooh well, your grandfather and I  
travelled together  
as shepherders in Colorado  
and in the sugar-beet fields of Wyoming!*

nos conocemos bien  
sin saber quién semos

*we know each other well  
without knowing who we are*

esta tarde, aquí

*here, this evening*

el maíz bailando  
seco en el viento

*the cornstalks dancing  
dry against the wind*

y el pueblo sin Molino

*and the village without its molino*

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
hay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

*sopla viento, sopla más  
y la paja volará  
hay preparado el banquete  
pa' todo el que vaya entrando*

*blow breeze, blow some more  
and the husk will fly  
prepared is the banquet  
for all who enter*

## Los molinitos de la gente

The first Iberian acequia of New Mexico was dug at the confluence of the Río del Norte (now the Río Grande) and the Río Chama around 1598. In the high desert environment, water diverted from nearby rivers, streams, and creeks was essential for domestic consumption as well for food production and survival of the hundreds of settlements along the northern Río Grande corridor and eventually to the eastern side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. A few years after the founding of the first Spanish settlement, San Gabriel, Fray Juan de Torquemada conducted an inspection of New Mexico, then a kingdom and later a province of New Spain, and reported on the diversity of crops already thriving at the new colony:

San Gabriel ... está situado en treinta y siete grados de altura, y que tiene por vanda dos ríos, uno de los cuales es de menos agua, que el otro. Este chico [Río Chama] riega todas las sementeras de trigo, y cebada, y maíz, que ay de riego, y todas las demás cosas que se siembran en huertas, porque se dan en aquella tierra coles, cebollas, lechugas, y rábanos, y la demás verdura menuda, que en esta...dansen muchos y buenos melones, y sandías. El otro río es muy grande, y llámanle de el Norte [Río Grande], dase en el mucho pescado.... (*Monarquía Indiana por Fray Juan de Torquemada*, Libro Quinto, Cap. xxxx)

[Translation: San Gabriel....is situated at thirty-seven degrees latitude, and its banks consist of two rivers, one of which has less water than the other. This small one [Río Chama] irrigates all the varieties of wheat, barley, and corn, in cultivated fields, and other items that are planted in gardens, because those lands produce cabbage, onions, lettuce and beets, and other small vegetables that in this one...produces many and good melons and watermelons. The other river is very large; they call it [Río] del Norte, which provides a lot of fish....]

Of special interest is Torquemada's mention of water from the Río Chama to irrigate "all the varieties of wheat," a staple introduced from the Old World to the Americas as part of the Columbian Exchange of garden crops and grains. In an exhibit, "Grist for the Mill," that opened in January 2019 at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum in Las Cruces, New Mexico, the curator noted that the first recorded evidence of a grist mill occurred in a letter written in 1599 from Governor Don Juan de Oñate to his family in Mexico. Writing from the village of San Gabriel, Oñate states "the wheat is growing well, and the molino is ready." Adding to this account, the curator said:

Oñate arrived in New Mexico to find Native Americans grinding their corn, a new-world crop, with manos and metates. With this ancient technology, it was not possible to grind the wheat fine enough to expose

the gluten and allow the bread dough to rise before baking. Bread was a food staple in Spanish culture, so they brought seed and milling technology with them to the New World. (See news release by Craig Massey, 01/03/2019.)

In another letter addressed to his brothers and relatives on March 22, 1601, Governor Oñate again referred to wheat and the first grist mill in the Province of New Mexico: “Our wheat has been sown and harvested, and it does extremely well in that land. . . A flour mill has already been erected. More than 1,500 *fanegas* of wheat were gathered this year, and there remain to be harvested more than another three thousand” (Hammond and Rey 1953, pp. 619-620).

Oñate’s biographer, Marc Simmons, agrees. “The first water-powered mill was built in New Mexico by Juan de Oñate’s colonists in 1598. They brought the heavy grindstones with them up the Camino Real. Later, stones for new mills were quarried in the neighboring mountains” (*The Santa Fe New Mexican*, 05/20-23/2016). In time, the *pobladores* (settlers) of the northern Río Grande constructed molinos for flour production in villages along the river valleys using the gravity force of water to power the handmade machinery inside each mill. Estimates of horizontal-wheel mills operated on acequias range from 275 to 445. Simmons provides a colorful description of the mill owners known locally as the *molineros*:

Millers were unusually independent operators who constructed and ran their own mills. Since their work was seasonal, concentrated at harvest time in the fall, they had to add to their income with other kinds of work, such as farming or stock raising. Once the crops were out of the field, the rural folk shelled the corn and threshed and winnowed the wheat on the threshing floor. The grain was then placed in leather or cloth sacks, loaded on burros and hauled to the closest mill. Early descriptions invariably mention the miller as being dusted from head to foot with a covering of white flour. He put in long, tedious hours at his task, but during intervals when the equipment was running smoothly, he might relax by smoking *punche* (native tobacco), reciting the rosary or singing hymns. (Simmons, *op. cit.*)

Another account on the use of grist mills occurred in 1776 when Fray Francisco Atanacio Domínguez visited the Spanish missions and villas of colonial New Mexico. He notes that water-powered mills were already in use at Santa Fe during the summer, but when winter arrived and the river was frozen, grinding had to be done by hand. As to the source of water for the mills, he wrote:

The sierra that lies to the east of this villa abounds in the firewood and timber needed by the population. There is a lake in it, from which a river with the most crystalline water takes its source.... The water of this river runs three mills which are located from the foot of the sierras to just below our convent. Although they do not grind large quantities, at least they lighten the labor of grinding by hand. (Domínguez, 1776 p. 40).

In Charles Gritzner's study of "Hispano Gristmills in New Mexico," he cites a footnote from Fray Domínguez that pinpoints a reference to one of the three grist mills on the Santa Fe River: "One of these mills [in Santa Fe] was built by Vicar Roybal just above the villa and was granted by him in 1756 to Felipe Sandoval" (Gritzner 1974, p. 519). For other descriptions, Gritzner cites travel narratives and reports by Anglos from the eastern United States during the middle and late nineteenth century most of whom viewed these structures as primitive, old-fashioned oddities and inefficient as to quantity of bushels of wheat output. More useful is Gritzner's description of mill housing, mill site and power source, and the internal components. In brief, Gritzner states the millworks were housed in simple crib structures of horizontal notched logs, mostly a shell to protect the internal components from the elements. Floor plans typically were square with measurements from nine to fifteen feet. For siting, mills were built astride small acequias into which water could be diverted from an adjacent stream for the purpose of turning the wheels and millstones inside the log structure. Water from the ditch rushed down a millrace beneath the structure at a sharp angle, with a descent of four to six feet with sufficient velocity to power the mill. After passing beneath the mill, water was diverted for irrigation or in most cases was channeled back into the stream. Internal components included a waterwheel, an axle, an upper millstone, a suspended hopper where grain was fed into the upper stone, a paddle, and a flour bin. The millstones were hewn from abrasive rocks of volcanic origin found in the local area and were cut with grooves by the hand of the mill owner (Gritzner 1974).

Los molinitos of northern New Mexico had little chance of surviving into the present day. Once commercial milling reduced the cost of flour and other milled grains, local milling was no longer efficient nor economical. Some mills were converted for use as storage sheds and others were abandoned. Eventually, the log buildings were not sufficiently durable to maintain them indefinitely. Exposed to the elements season to season, some eventually rotted out and collapsed. For those left standing, often the logs used to build the mill house were repurposed as fence and corral posts, or simply chopped for use as firewood in the kitchen stove. The internal components too were made of wood, and after decades of use would be replaced, and when the mills closed, those too were likely consumed as fuel or made into other household objects. Molinos were so abundant that after they collapsed from non-use, their millstones were left lying around the owner's property, and some were preserved as relics from the past. In more recent times, millstones are often used as landscape



materials in front of people's homes; a few others have been observed in public spaces such as footpaths bordered with millstones. There are also gravesites in some *camposantos* (cemeteries) that are framed by rows of *ruedas de molino* (millstones). Still others can be found at museum exhibits depicting life in New Mexico during the colonial and territorial periods.

Although reports exist as to many of their historical locations, very little has been done to survey what remnants, if any, exist on the ground today. At one time, researchers at the Rancho de las Golondrinas identified and studied the ruins of thirty traditional molinos. Photographic evidence can be found for historic molinos that no longer remain at Chamita, Vallecitos, Pecos, Ledoux, El Güique-Estaca, a ranch near Nambé, and the Hacienda Martínez in Taos. Reports by travelers and others describe small grist mills at various communities such as Manzano (1847, Torrence County), Peña Blanca (1855, Sandoval County), and Santa Cruz (1881, Santa Fe County). Earlier references date to the Spanish colonial period at San Gabriel around 1600, Santa Fe in 1756, Chimayó in 1776, and Ojo Caliente in 1807 (Gritzner 1974). In addition, longtime residents still have memories of places along acequias where molinos once operated and can point to rubble or stones that once served as foundations for the mill structures.

In 1988 David Snow prepared a report on the acequia systems of Santa Fe for the planning department of the city financed in part by a grant from the National Park Service and the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division. In it, he noted that acequias provided power to the operation of several grist mills along the Santa Fe River. The earliest known mill, he states, was called "el molino de San Francisco" and was located upstream from the plaza and built prior to 1756. The more numerous ones were built during the nineteenth century, one of which was located on the south side of the river just east of Cristo Rey Church. Higher up the river on the north bank was the "molino de las ánimas," on what was called the Acequia Rivera just west of 1497 Canyon Road. Two mills were referenced in property deeds from 1856 and 1887 and another in a plat from 1898 located somewhere along the Acequia Madre.

Outside of Snow's report, descendants of David Catanach relate oral and cite written history of another grist mill also located on the Santa Fe River. During the early 1880s, David Catanach, patriarch of this large Santa Fe family, was involved in a bitter controversy over control of water in the Santa Fe River. In 1880 a group of investors incorporated the Santa Fe Water and Improvement Company with plans to build a series of three reservoirs for the storage of water. Water from the reservoirs would be diverted through large pipes to sell water supply to the city. When the company sent a crew of sixty-five men to work on the lower reservoir, a group of landowners feared the plan to divert the channel of the river would deprive them of the waterpower necessary to run their businesses. David Catanach and six others who owned land adjacent to the Santa Fe River published a notice in the May 17, 1881, issue of *The Daily*

*New Mexican* saying they would resist any encroachment upon their water rights. In his case, Catanach owned and operated a grist and flour mill and charged that the company had no legal right to divert the river's channel nor sell its water to Santa Fe residents. Eventually, underground pipes were laid throughout the principal streets of Santa Fe. Water was turned on and flowed from the reservoir to the city (Miller, *The California Column in New Mexico*, 1982). When surface water in the river stopped flowing, downstream farmers at Agua Fría lost access to their irrigation water rights, and after years of having to resort to dry farming, they filed a complaint with the Territorial Governor of New Mexico in 1896 but their voices went unheard. [For the complete story, see Melinda Romero Pike, in *The Return of the River*, 2010. The Catanach grist mill later became known as "The Old Haunted Mill." See page 25 for a photo image courtesy of Rick Catanach, a descendant of David Catanach.]

To the north, David Kammer wrote a similar report, this time with a focus on the "Acequia Systems of the Upper Rio Mora." In a section of his report, Kammer includes a topic devoted to "traces of early mills." He notes that in local tradition these "small folk mills" were once found throughout the upper Mora valley and that long-time residents often refer to former molinos or their stone rubbles as landmarks. For an example, he points to the Acequia del Molino near Chacón and the Acequia de la Isla y Molino near Ledoux, as well as another molino at the desagüe of Acequia de las Cruces. Similarly, there are memories of a small molino that operated from the late 1800s to the early 1950s located on the Rito Griego just below the waterfall that brings water across the mountain from the Rito de La Presa. At Vallecitos de San Ysidro, a remote and isolated community, there were two molinos along the community ditch with remains of one located in the narrow gorge of the Río de La Casa below the Acequia de Vallecitos de San Ysidro. The remnants here include two stone columns that "flank a narrow arroyo just below a four foot drop, and several horizontal logs and bits of a stone foundation" that line the nearby ground. Residents conceded to Kammer that the quality of milling "was inferior to that done at the Cassidy Mill in Cleveland where most farmers took their grains," but they also asserted that these small molinos "were a part of the self-sufficiency characterizing the agricultural economy and that for small scale needs they offered a convenience" (Kammer 1992, p. 49).

Further south at Angostura, located within the Algodones CDP of Sandoval County, Felipe García built a flour mill propelled by a large wheel at 30-40 ft. in diameter, slanted on an axle, with four burros walking along the wheel while rotating the axle (see pp. 22-23). A cable went into an adjacent building constructed of adobes where grinding stones were present. Troughs holding the ground grain separated the bran, the whole wheat and the white flour. The grinding stones were carved out of lava rock, and one was dated 1886. Travelers who passed through the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth century remarked on the fertility and lushness of the fields and orchards that lined the Camino Real in the vicinity of Algodones. Apples, peaches, quince,

pears, apricots and grapes were grown along with corn, chiles and beans. Generations later, remnants of ancient orchards of fruit and walnut trees still stood as evidence of the lush valley and the fruit of area. Angostura (the narrows) was also known for its shallow crossing on the Río del Norte with a gravel bed that could be forded anywhere. Once built, this unique burro-powered molino ground wheat and corn for local farmers as well as for the pueblos of Santa Ana, San Felipe, and Santo Domingo. Its exact location is not known but perhaps north of the mission church of San Miguel built in the 1920s. (See the brief history of Algodones in L. Chilton, K. Chilton and Polly E. Arango, et al, 1984, pp. 226-227. The account of the Felipe García mill appears in *El Cronicon: The Official Publication of the Sandoval County Historical Society*, June 1992.)

A handful of water powered molinos are still standing and have been listed in state and national registers. These include the Molino Barela de Truchas relocated to the Rancho de las Golondrinas, the Cordova Grist Mill in situ at Vadito near Peñasco, the Molino de los Duranes in situ at Ranchos de Taos, and the Cruz Las Trampas Molino reassembled and on loan to the Cleveland Roller Mill outside of Mora. Along with the Truchas Molino, the *Molino Viejo de Talpa*, built in the early 1880s, still stands at the Rancho de las Golondrinas after its relocation from Talpa in Taos County and is not yet listed. Another unlisted molino is located at Apodaca, a place near Dixon-Embudo, known as the *Molino de los Parciantes* (email, Levi Romero 03/19/2024). The log building is still intact but needs a new roof and other repairs. With some volunteer labor, it could be restored and preserved as a historic property in memory of the *molinero* (miller) and the *parciantes* (acequia farmers) who took wheat and other grains from their fields for milling. In remembrance of the times, Levi Romero wrote a poem about this mill, once managed by his uncle Sylviano Griego, titling it “*Molino Abandonado*” (Abandoned Molino). The repeating chorus line is taken from a traditional canto, “*trillando - el tril*”. It was sung at the *Molino de los parciantes* as crops such as corn, beans, chile, or wheat were laid out and sifted in *sabanas* in the afternoon breeze to remove dust and debris before threshing or milling. The *canto* was handed down to Levi Romero by Aaron Griego. Mr. Griego said that one person would stand at each end of the sabana and shake it while they sang the canto in unison as the breeze blew the debris from the produce that was being prepared for milling.

Overall, there is a need to inventory, document and preserve the history of the traditional grist mills of New Mexico in recognition that they sustained a self-sufficient way of life for multiple generations. Built from local materials into a simple design, they represent a legacy of folk architecture and ingenuity suited to the economy and environment of the time. As Earl Porter points out:

The typical Hispanic horizontal wheel water-powered grist mill may seem like an unimpressive, rather crude construction to some people. Not so! ...The superficial, unrefined appearance is simply the result of the

limited availability of tools, 100% use of non-manufactured local materials, and the absence of a professional millwright craft within colonial New Mexico. Beneath that coarse exterior lies the sophisticated heart of a machine in perfect harmony with its environment and the needs of its master (Earl Porter, handout).

In locations where the original logs are still present, mill structures could be rebuilt along with other repairs such as laying down more permanent roofing materials to protect them from the elements. In cases where only the millstones have survived, there are creative ways to display them and preserve the history and life of the molineros who once operated the molinitos. Such is the case with the molino once owned by Juan de la Cruz Borrego at El Güique-Estaca near the confluence of the Río Grande and the Río Chama. The geographic setting in the area made for ideal positioning of a grist mill due to a terrace-like drop off in the terrain from the Black Mesa bluffs on the western edge down to the irrigated orchards and fields that border the Río Grande bosque on the east bank of the floodplain. The original site of the Juan de la Cruz molino continues to be owned by the family. Rosella Borrego Jardine owns the family compound at the El Güique-Estaca border east of County Road 57, down to the irrigated fields in the terrace below the Acequia de San Rafael. Her nephew, Mark Naranjo, lives nearby on a parcel that aligns closely with the original route of the old Ancón Ditch. Both Rosella and Mark value and appreciate the legacy of the historic molino that was once operated by Don Juan de la Cruz, Rosella's grandfather. As to this family molino, Rosella, and Mark each possess and have preserved the two grindstones from the original site and display them next to their homes. Rosella's patio with one of the millstones in place is featured below where lava rocks frame a portion of her garden area. (Rivera, UNM Digital Repository, February 2024).



**Above and Below: Rosella's display of the grindstone**



A few small-scale molinos were built from adobes or stones and not logs, but those too need to be restored or documented in places where remnants or partial walls still exist. An adobe example can be found at El Llanito, a community north of the town of Bernalillo, Sandoval County. Here the partial walls are high and indicate they were made from *terrones* (sod blocks cut from a wet bank, marshland, or nearby riverbed) set on a stone foundation. The roof structure collapsed after a fire in the main floor along with a collapse of walls in a basement where the milling equipment still exists. The floor plan with high walls left standing suggest that the building had a pitched roof; the metal equipment in the lower basement suggest that the facility was widely used by wheat and corn farmers in the area, perhaps from nearby Pueblos and irrigated lands in the Town of Bernalillo. Further investigation is needed to determine if the power source was an acequia, steam, or electricity, along with development of a plan to restore the building as a historic structure. (See photos on page 24. Field visit to the molino was arranged through the assistance of local resident, Rick Catanach.)

In Mora County, there are partial walls of a molino built entirely from stones at Lucero, a community along state highway 442. This mill was built by Charles Bowmer, a physician and his wife who lived there in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As reported by Malcolm Ebright, Lucero was also known as Coyote Abajo and served as the staging area for the *Comancheros* and *Ciboleros* who traveled to the Great Plains to hunt buffalo and trade with Comanche and other tribes to the east. As happened in Mora, the growth of

settlements in the Guadalupita/Coyote district in the 1850s and 1860s coincided with the demand for flour, grain, and other food supplies at Fort Union. Between 1880 and 1930 the population remained relatively stable, at about 400. While the Bowmer house continues to be fairly well preserved, the roof of the mill eventually collapsed with only partial walls of stones and adobes still standing as of July 2010. (See Malcolm Ebright's Application for Registration of the Guadalupita/Coyote Historic District, 2010). There are other mills in the Mora Valley but were commercial scale and larger than the small folk mills we are featuring here: St. Vrain Mill, Cleveland Roller Mill, La Cueva Mill and the Gordon-Sánchez Mill. All are permanent structures and are still standing.

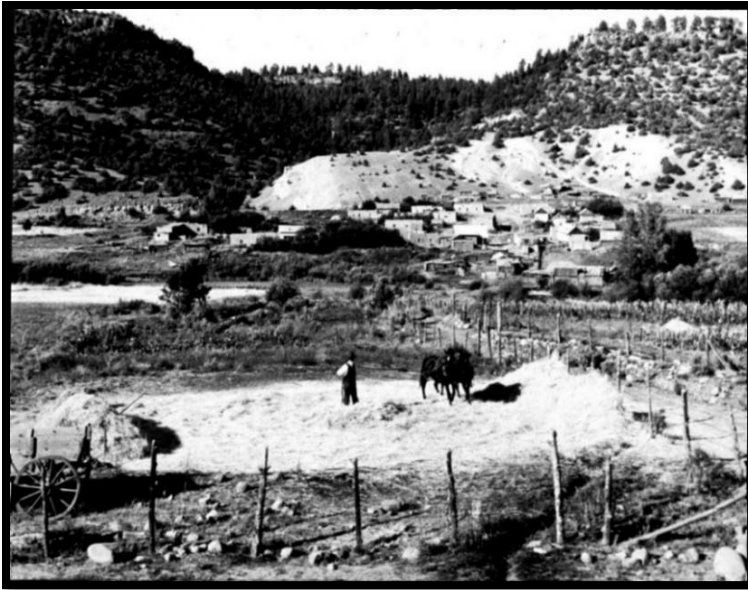


**Charles Bowmer Mill at Lucero. Courtesy of Malcolm Ebright 2010 Survey.**

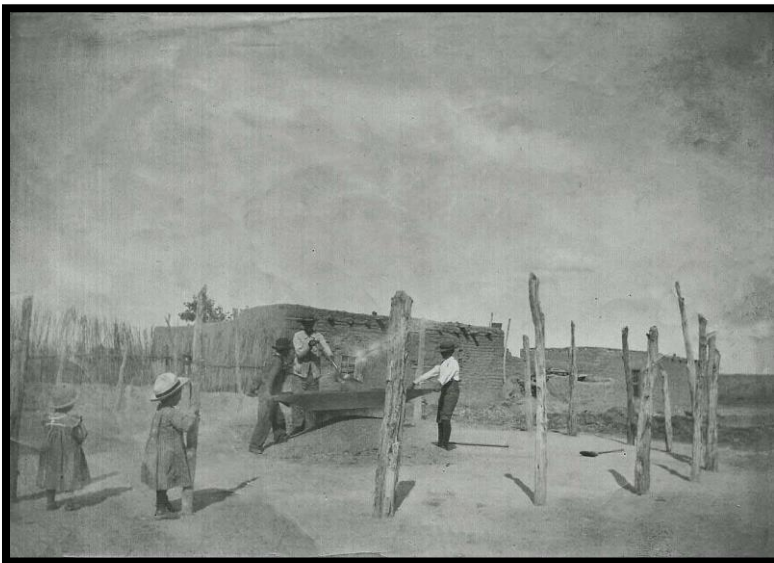
### **Photo Gallery: Los Molinitos**

Hundreds of these small folk mills were built in northern New Mexico during the Spanish, Mexican and the U.S. Territorial periods. Using simple hand tools, they were constructed from logs, handmade adobe bricks, or stones and then repaired and rebuilt when necessary. The logs to build the molino were cut from nearby forests, dragged by a team of oxen or horses, and then peeled by hand and sawed into the lengths needed to form the exterior walls of the mill house. The grinding stones were gathered from volcanic rock found in the area and taken back to the community in carts. Once back at home, the mill owner and family members hand-chiseled the stones before setting them in place on a revolving shaft. A cowhide bag where grain was poured to begin the milling process was also hand-crafted by the use of a crude needle for stitching with leather thongs to shape it into a cone like a funnel. In the typical case, one of the landowning villagers took the initiative to construct a molinito on his property for use by the rest of the community at a modest fee, sharing of the flour after the milling process, or under a bartering arrangement. In recognition

of this service, local people often referred to the structure under the given name of the original molinero and subsequent descendants: the José de la Luz and Pedro Barela Molino at Truchas, the Duranes Molino at Ranchos de Taos, the Corsinio and Lauriano Córdova Molino at Vadito, the Maximiano Cruz Molino at Las Trampas, the Juan de la Cruz Molino at El Güique-Estaca, and the Felipe García mill at Angostura.



**Threshing wheat at La Placita, NM near Peñasco, 1939**



**Winnowing wheat by hand, Algodones NM, c. 1920s.  
Courtesy of Phil García.**



**Molino Barela de Truchas at Rancho de las Golondrinas, NM.**



**Molino de los Duranes, Ranchos de Taos, NM (Courtesy of Rachel Preston Prinz)**





**Laureano Córdova Grist Mill at Vadito, NM**



**Cruz Molino relocated from Las Trampas, now at Cleveland Roller Mill**



**El Molino Viejo de Talpa, relocated to the Rancho de las Golondrinas, NM**



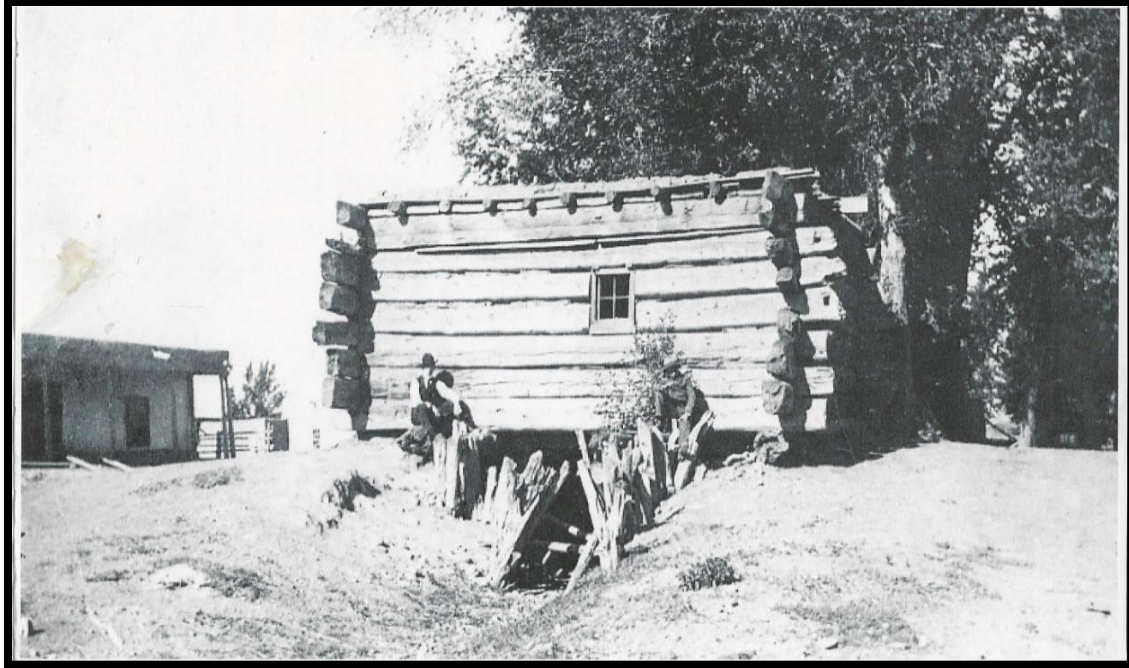
**Molino de los Parciantes, Apodaca, NM (Courtesy of Felicity Fonseca)**



**Traditional molino in Taos, NM, c. 1910**



**Old Mill near Chamita, NM. Photo by W.H. Jackson, ca. 1890. Denver Public Library, Western History Collection**



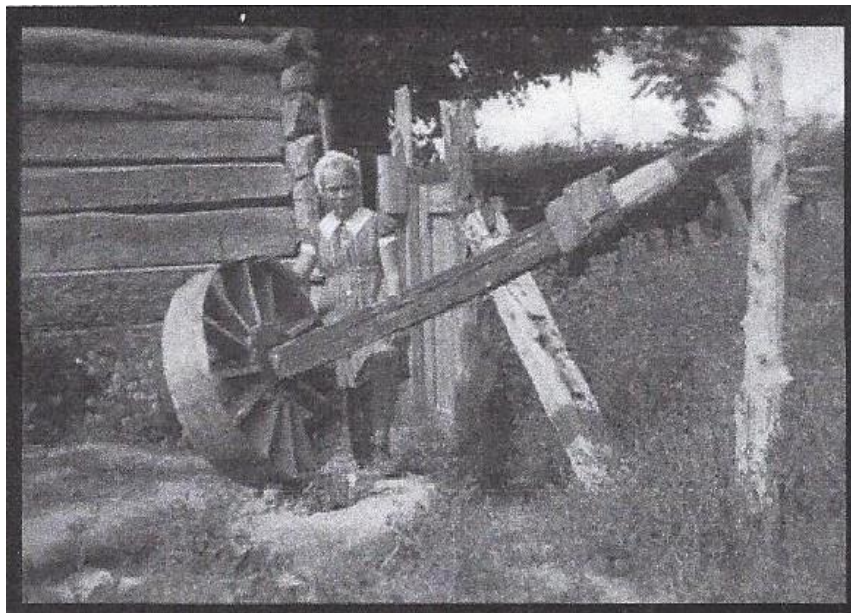
**Molino at Hacienda Martínez, n.d., Taos**



**Remains of an old water mill along the Río Vallecitos above La Madera.  
Photo by W. J. Perry 1923. Carson National Forest Historical Photographs**



**Juan de la Cruz Borrego Molino at El Güique-Estaca, NM. Photo by Ethel LeFevre, *New Mexico Magazine*, 1939**



**Molino de Juan de la Cruz Borrego.** By this time, the molino had fallen into disuse but was still standing, although some parts were removed such as the driveshaft and waterwheel as shown above. Roberto Valdez Thesis, UNM 2015.



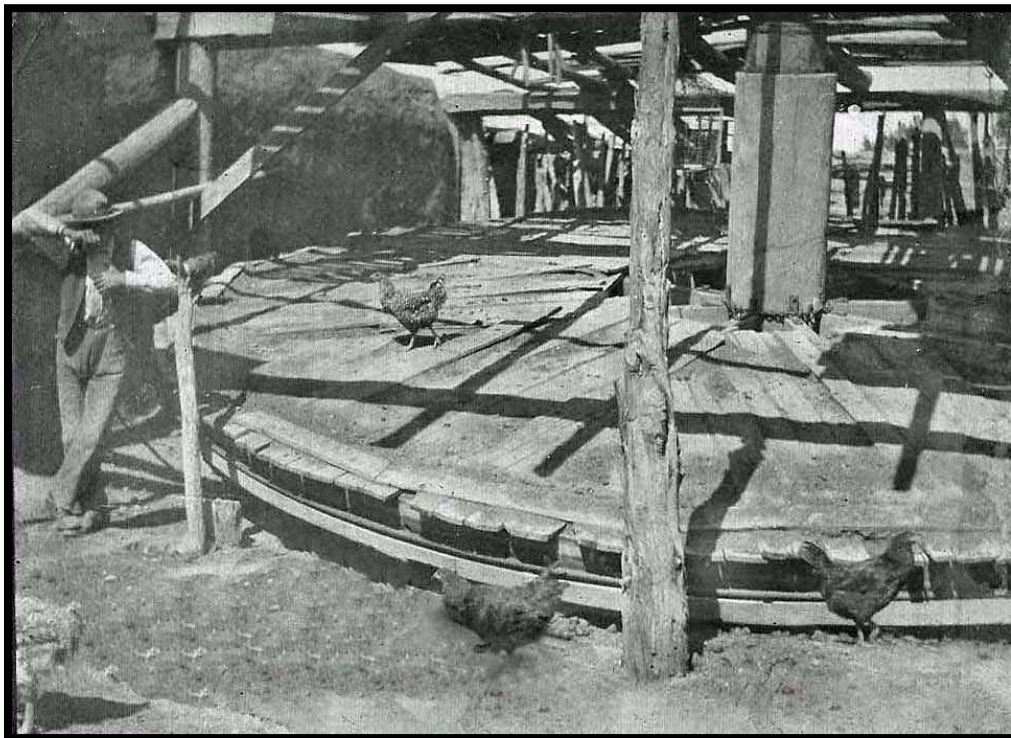
**Juan de la Cruz Borrego 1882-1964**



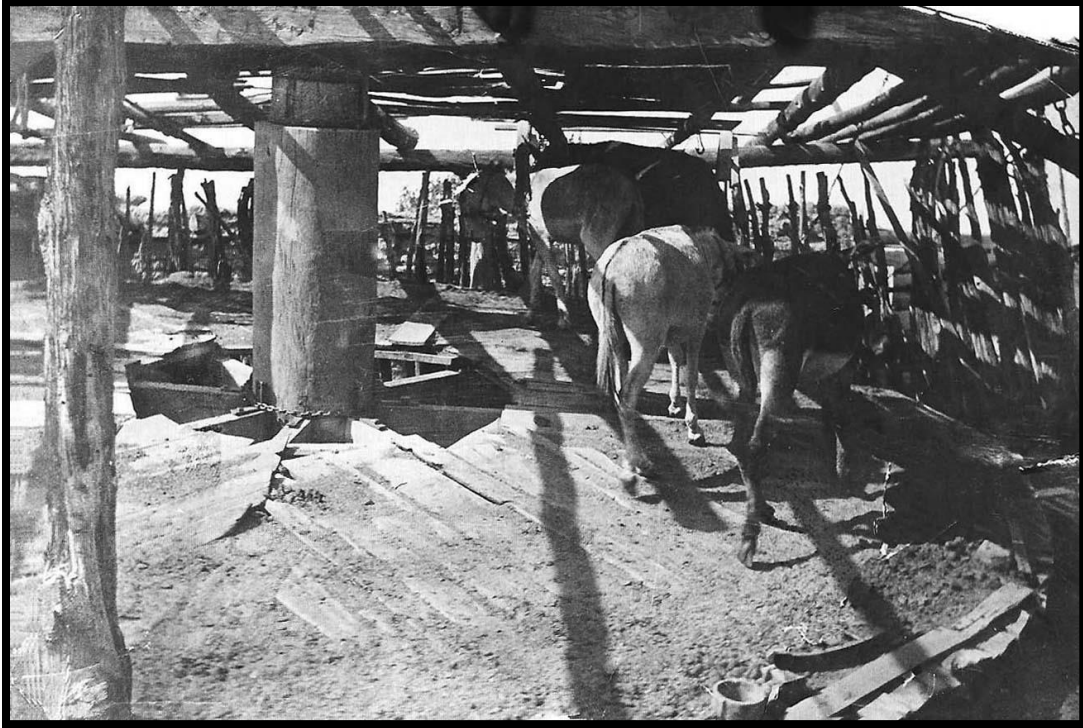
**William H. Roberts, Old mill on Acequia Madre above Manhattan Street, Santa Fe, ca. 1920-1930. Courtesy of the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, 149931**  
[Note the adobe construction versus the log-built design of most other mills.]



**Felipe García mill built of adobes, Angostura NM. Courtesy of Phil García.**



**Large diameter wheel at Felipe García mill with adobe building on the left. Courtesy of Phil García.**



**Burros that once powered the Felipe Garcia mill. Courtesy of Phil García.**



**Felipe García 1832-1914. Courtesy of Phil García.**





**Molino at El Llanito, near Town of Bernalillo, with walls on main floor constructed of terrones**



**Adjacent basement floor of molino at El Llanito after collapse of walls and removal of terrones with milling equipment left behind**



*The Old Haunted Mill. About Santa Fe.*

22845 'The Old Haunted Mill,' near Santa Fe, ca. 1897 (s)



*Catanach's  
Dec. 1896*

31648 'Catanach's' near Santa Fe, December, 1896 (s)

**David Catanach's "Old Haunted Mill" and residence 1896-1897. (Courtesy of Rick Catanach)**



**A pair of millstones from a molino awaiting to be displayed in a proposed acequia archive center**

**EXAMPLES OF MILLSTONE DISPLAYS ELSEWHERE IN THE U.S.**





## Sources

Levi Romero, *A Poetry of Remembrance: New and Rejected Works*, University of New Mexico Press, 2009.

Fray Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana*, 3 vols., 3rd ed. (México, D.F.: Editorial Salvador Chávez Hayhoe, 1943), I: 678.

Craig Massey, "Flour Power: Gristmill exhibit opens in Las Cruces," Press Release, New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, January 03, 2019.

George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey (1953), *Don Juan de Oñate, Colonizer of New Mexico 1595-1628*. Coronado Cuarto Centennial Publications 1540-1940, Vol. VI, University of New Mexico Press.

Marc Simmons, "Early New Mexico had hundreds of mills," *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 20-23, 2016.

Fray Francisco Atanacio Domínguez, *The Missions of New Mexico, 1776*, Translated and Annotated by Eleonor B. Adams and Fray Angélico Chávez. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1956.

Charles F. Gritzner, "Hispano Gristmills in New Mexico," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Dec. 1974, Vol. 64, No. 4, pp. 514-524. Published by Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of AAG.

David H. Snow, Archaeologist, Planning Department, City of Santa Fe, *The Santa Fe Acequia Systems*, financed in part by a grant from the National Park Service and the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 1988. [Note: the website of the Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary at 1800 Upper Canyon Road relates the history of this property listed on the National Register of Historic Places indicating that it was built as a sawmill in 1847 by the US Army and later converted into a grist mill in 1852 followed by eventual purchase by artist Randall Davey in 1920 who converted the mill into his home and studio.]

Darlis A. Miller, *The California Column in New Mexico*, UNM Press 1982, pp. 166-169.

Melinda Romero Pike, "Memorias del Río," in A. Kyce Bello, ed., *The Return of the River: Writers, Scholars, and Citizens Speak on Behalf of the Santa Fe River*, Sunstone Press, 2010, pp. 39-44. The complete article can also be viewed at the Google Books website.

David Kammer, Historian, *Report on the Historic Acequia Systems of the Upper Río Mora* prepared for the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, July 1992.

Lance Chilton, Katerine Chilton, Polly E. Arango, et al., *New Mexico: A New Guide to the Colorful State*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984.

*El Crónica: The Official Publication of the Sandoval County Historical Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 1992).

Earl Porter, "Molino Barela de Truchas and the Spanish Colonial Flour Mills of New Mexico," handout prepared by the Rancho de las Golondrinas, New Mexico, n.d. Also see Louann Jordan, *El Rancho de las Golondrinas: Spanish Colonial Life in New Mexico*, guidebook published by the Colonial New Mexico Historical Society, 1977, Rev. 1983, 1993.

José A. Rivera, "The Juan de la Cruz Molino: Folk Architecture at El Güique-Estaca New Mexico." *UNM Digital Repository* (2024) [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/arch\\_fsp/13](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/arch_fsp/13)

Malcolm Ebright, *Application for Registration of the Guadalupita/Coyote Historic District on the New Mexico State Register of Historic Properties*, submitted to the Historic Preservation Division, Santa Fe, New Mexico, July 23, 2010.

Rachel Preston Prinz, *National Register of Historic Places Form*, Molino de los Duranes, 2019. [This nomination report featured the photograph of the Molino de los Duranes at Ranchos de Taos, NM]

Ethel Austin LeFevre, "The Mills Grind Slowly," *New Mexico Magazine*, November 1939, Vol. 17, No. 11, pp. 20 and 42. [This article featured the photograph of the Juan de la Cruz Borrego Molino]

Roberto H. Valdez, *A Case Study in Toponymy: Sampling and Classifying a Tri-Lingual Place Name Inventory Found in the North-Central State of New Mexico* (2015) University of New Mexico Digital Repository. [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/geog\\_etds/29](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/geog_etds/29)

Adele Oliveira, "Acequias de Santa Fe: Preserving What Remains," *El Palacio: Art, History & Culture of the Southwest*, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs: Summer 2024. [This article featured the photograph of the Old mill on Acequia Madre above Manhattan Street, Santa Fe, NM]