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### Belén's Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Site: Memory, Continuity and Recovery

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# **Belén's Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Site: Memory, Continuity and Recovery**



**Samuel E. Sisneros**

**Capstone Project, 12/15/2016  
Historic Preservation and Regionalism Certification Program  
(Chair: Francisco Uviña-Contreras, HPR Director)**

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# Belén's Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Site: Memory, Continuity and Recovery

Samuel E. Sisneros

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## **Contents:**

### **Introduction: Belén's Place Name Narrative Issue**

--- Page 1

### **Place and People: A Chronological History**

--- Page 10

### **The Oxcart Rebellion and the Construction of the Church and of a Parish**

--- Page 18

### **The Mission Pueblo, Identity and Growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

--- Page 23

### **Death of Fray Bernal and Birth of the Mexican Nation**

--- Page 25

### **The US Territorial Period and the Collapse of the Colonial Church**

--- Page 27

### **Memory of a Church and a People - Buried Remains**

--- Page 29

### **Las Madrinas - "Duration of Sacredness" and Intersections with the Author**

--- Page 30

### **Conclusion: Recovery of a Buried History**

--- Page 48

## **References**

## **Appendices**

## **Supplement - Plaza Vieja de Belén Preservation Project Manifesto**



## Introduction: Belén's Place Name Narrative Issue

The town of Belén is located in central New Mexico, thirty-five miles south of Albuquerque along the Río Grande agricultural corridor. It is on the ancient Camino Real de Tierra Adentro trading route connecting Santa Fe, New Mexico to Mexico City and was a historically important Río Abajo (south central New Mexico) principal community during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Likewise, as a modern railway and commercial crossroads town, Belén boasts to be the region's "Hub City."

The history of Belén's colonial plaza and Catholic Church, its founding families and their pioneer society has been continuously obscured by official and imagined narratives, historical amnesia and myth. In addition, political, cultural and environmental changes have disrupted this important space as demonstrated by little community memory and no official recognition of the original site of Belén's first colonial church and "Plaza Vieja" or old town plaza. Yet historical records reveal that many people lived in this vibrant cultural landscape and flourished during the colonial period well into 19<sup>th</sup> century and like Albuquerque and Santa Fe, Belén became an important cultural center and principal New Mexican village. But nevertheless, only the latter cities still maintain public use of their traditional plazas.

Heavy rain and floods demolished Belén's original colonial mission church in 1855 and soon after in 1860 American Catholic clergy built a new church approximately one mile west at a newer section of the town. As a result the old church, convent and cemetery lay in ruins for several decades. A 1905 map of Belén notes the location of the "Old Town Church Ruins" represented by a large and long rectangle. Next to it is a drawing of a smaller square representing the house of Lazaro Rael and wife Josefita Tafoya, the ancestors of the current owner of the church site property and other families still living in the area. (**Appendix 1**) It is said that in 1910 John Becker acquired the property and bulldozed the remaining walls of the church ruins removing the debris along with surrounding dirt to use as fill to make Becker Avenue extending from the train depot to his commercial business.<sup>1</sup> Although there is no documentation to show that Becker owned the Plaza Vieja property and whether he took fill material from there is lore or not, a 1942 photo shows Our

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<sup>1</sup> John Becker, who was born in Germany immigrated to Belén in 1871 and became a successful banker and merchant. He was credited for Belén's railroad development and built his business directly on part of the railroad depot. He could have easily brought in abundant fill material from other locations. The Jan 29, 1910 and Feb.5, 1910, *Belén Bulletin* reported Becker's road improvement activities including that at the depot he laid new macadam roadbed (layers of broken stone and old dirt hardened and rolled to a uniform surface). Although there is no mention where he got the macadam. On March 12, 1910 the newspaper also reported that Becker used coal cinder to harden the ground near the new depot.

Lady of Belén parish novice Servite, Brother Hayes pointing to the exposed foundation at the Plaza Vieja site property with members of the Manuel García/O’Neal family standing at his side.



The center picture shows Brother Andrew Hayes, O.S.M., pointing to the foundation of the first Belen church which was built at Plaza Vieja in 1793. Due to the fact that Mr. Becker bought the ruins in 1910 as road filling for Becker Avenue, nothing now remains of the church and even the foundation is indicated by only a slight rise of land. The little boy, who is looking the other way in a bored manner, is the son of Mr. Manuel O’Neal, the owner of the house which is built on the church site.

“150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Parish of Our Lady of Belén, 1793-1943,” Br. Andrew Hayes, O.S.M., compiler, *Our Lady of Belén Church*, Belén, New Mexico, 1943, p.3. Family members believe this photo shows the southeast quadrant of the property and that the child was most likely Fidel O’Neal standing aside his father Manuel O’Neal or an uncle.

Continuous private residency by the extended García/O’Neal, Rael and Tórrez families along with neighborhood residential growth and the advent of modern urbanization has caused complete disintegration of the site’s surface historical ruins and further disconnect to the Plaza Vieja and its use as a social and Catholic spiritual space by the larger general public. Yet even though the García/O’Neal family property is known to be the site of a colonial church there are no official historic markers designating the colonial mission church and its *convento* (built 1791 to 1793) or the colonial plaza. Regardless of this negligence, the family has kept alive the memory of this unique place which is known by locals as the Plaza Vieja.

Family matriarch, Valentina Sánchez O’Neal (1926-2005) single handedly attempted to preserve the memory of Belén’s Plaza Vieja and the site of its first Catholic Church. She turned the traditional family home into a museum which was in operation from late 1980’s through the 1990’s. Her labor of love and faith was the expressive link to her husband, Fidel O’Neal’s family property and its historical legacy.<sup>2</sup> The O’Neal house is said to have been built in the early 1900’s by Fidel’s father, Manuel García (O’Neal) on part of the church foundation. The now closed and

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<sup>2</sup> Fidel O’Neal or García (he went by either surname) was born in Belén in 1922 and died in 1986. Valentina Sánchez O’Neal was born in Belén in 1926 and died in 2005.

empty museum which was appropriately called “Museum of Memory” in the 1991 *Valencia County News Bulletin*, and the once colorful and vibrant outdoor signage of “Plaza Vieja”, “Site of First Our Lady of Belén Church-1793,” and an image of crowned Mary holding the Christ baby on her lap (traditional representation of Our Lady of Belén), along with a large cross, altars and a wooden gazebo all placed by Valentina have slowly aged and faded by time and the elements, yet they remain as iconic representations of the property’s historical use as a social and spiritual gathering place - the “old heart” of Belén. (See *Bulletin* and other articles in Appendix 2) This property site along with the García/O’Neal family and other Plaza Vieja families are the principal remaining threads that link, through continuity of place and memory, over two centuries back to the historic church and plaza.



Views of the property site taken in 2014. Courtesy of Samuel Sisneros.

Valentina O’Neal’s humble intentions to preserve and celebrate this memory continues to be countered by the century and a half culmination of Belén’s popular and official history and civic identity which emphasizes Becker Avenue & Main Street (modern downtown area) as the cultural and historical center. Popular celebrations also embrace an association of the place name of Belén to the biblical town of Bethlehem and the nativity scene instead of the traditional Marian reverence (discussed further on in this essay). Additionally, various civic plaques and commercial



branding as well as official web page content, and planning and marketing studies express an exclusive narrative of Belén's colonial beginnings such as: "Two Spaniards, Captain Don Diego Torres and Antonio Salazar, Torres' brother-in-law, founded Belén in 1740. They named it Belén, Spanish for Bethlehem, in honor of that town."<sup>3</sup> From this one-liner, the narrative usually jumps to the late 1800's and early 1900's nostalgic railroad history and anecdotes of Belén's "pioneer" John Becker. Minimal or no mention is generally made of Belén's Native American origins, overall settler history nor of the historic mission church and plaza site.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the most recent update of the City of Belén's website includes a "Visitors" section where it boasts of "Belén's rich history" and "cultural experience" stating "We were founded in 1740 as Nuestra Senora de Belen, interwoven with Spanish, German and other cultures over almost three centuries." It further states that "Belen's most important attraction is our historic downtown, where you can see the only Harvey House museum..." which "...supported the Santa Fe Railroad for decades in Belen."<sup>5</sup>

The exclusive renditions of Belén's history became further supported by a City of Belén and Chamber of Commerce renovation project in 2007 at the new civic plaza located at the entrance of Becker Avenue in downtown Belén. It includes an installation of a large archway entering into an area with two-dimensional steel nativity scene sculptures, a pedestrian stroll area, metal benches, and a pavilion connecting a few shops and art galleries.<sup>6</sup> The arch façade showcases the city and state emblems, engraved panels with civic and exclusive historical narratives, and signage touting the spot as "The Heart of Belén."<sup>7</sup> The new civic plaza location, which, with its commemorations and the sculptural nativity renderings while providing a modern social, civic and economic focal point de-emphasizes Belén's extensive colonial history and its Native American, Spanish/Mexican and Catholic origins.<sup>8</sup> Aside from the current limited official and popular

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted verbatim from City of Belén Web site: <http://www.Belen-nm.gov/about/history.htm> , Nov. 2014. In April 2016 the city of Belén redid the website but keep the same verbiage although eliminated a stock art conquistador helmet.

<sup>4</sup> For marketing narratives see "The Heart of Belén Strategic Marketing Plan," The Idea Group of Santa Fe, LLC, Dec. 27, 2004, pgs.3,4.; "Belén Station Area Planning Study– Prepared for the City of Belén & Mid-Region Council of Governments," Feb. 2009, HDR Consultant Team. One of the proposals in the plan includes the Plaza Vieja site as a possible site for development but gave little detail. Also the Design Planning Assistance Center (DPAC) a component of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of New Mexico did a preliminary economic development project. See "Belen Main Street Project" April 15, 2011 at <https://thebelenproject.wordpress.com/>

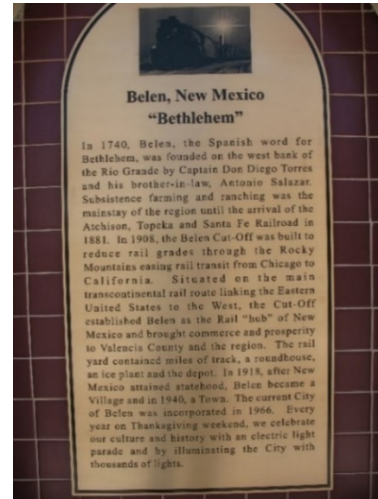
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.belen-nm.gov/Default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> These metal cut-out style sculptures are the same as another installation near the Cerro de Tomé which also lacks dimension both artistically and culturally.

<sup>7</sup> The modern plaza of Belén is located just a few street blocks (0.77 miles) south of the Plaza Vieja. The renovation project is highlighted in the *Valencia County News-Bulletin, Visitors Guide*, 2011-2012, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> The 2000 Census gave 68.61% as the Hispanic/Latino makeup of Belén.

historical narratives and visual representations, the complete history of Belén is much more complex and requires further illumination.



Civic plaza archway and installations. The nativity scene imagery continues across the street west of the archway. The bottom right piece represents the second church built by Bishop Lamy with the current modern Our Lady of Belén Catholic Church visible in the far background. Photos by Samuel Sisneros, 2014.

Before delving into the chronological history of Belén an immediate narrative recovery would be to posit that the colonial period naming of the Spanish land grant village of *Nuestra Señora de Belén* (“Our Lady” of Bethlehem) would have been less an association to a place name (biblical middle eastern city of Bethlehem) and was more constant with a Marian devotion and dedication to the particular personification and intercession of Mary and the mystery of her maternity similar to other Marian mystery name associations such as *Nuestra Señora de la Anunciación*, *Nuestra Señora de Pilar*, *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*, *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores*, *Nuestra Señora de Socorro*, *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción Inmaculada*, and other titles that became New Mexico church and place names.<sup>9</sup>

A demonstration of the parish of *Nuestra Señora de Belén*’s early adoration of the various Marian phases is found in the large paintings that are reported to have once hung on the walls in the Plaza Vieja church. These paintings each measuring approximately 5’ x 4’ have surprisingly survived and are in fairly good condition. The date and name of the painter is unknown however according a document discussed further on, the paintings could have been installed sometime between 1795 and 1801. The paintings are housed at the current church rectory and are out of public view and veneration. The five paintings represent Marian scenes including the “The Visitation” (restored), “The Magi,” “The Circumcision,” “The Flight to Egypt,” and “The Coronation.” **(Appendix 3)**

Also attesting to Our Lady of Belén parish’s continued dedication to Mary into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is the service of the Marian Servite order at Belén (1927-1981). Not only did they leave a mark in Belén’s Marian devotion but Servite clergy also produced the first historical annuals of Belén’s church and social history. The earliest work written in 1930, provides a fairly comprehensive history of Belén, citing as its sources earlier New Mexico general historical works and also informants from the community.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the early Belén Servite pastoral team, particularly Brother Hayes, should be heralded as Belén’s first modern historians, for their work has become the foundational historiography for Río Abajo studies.

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<sup>9</sup> Scrivani, Bro. Lawrence S.M. (2014) “The Place Afforded to Mary in the Initial Evangelization of the Stone Age People of New California,” *Marian Studies*: Vol. 62, Article 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Seminario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Belén New Mexico: Notas Históricas - Historical Notes*, Ward Anderson Printing Co., Albuquerque, c.1930. The author is only noted as the Servite Fathers.

Later works include *El Río Abajo*, Gilberto Espinosa, Tibo J. Chávez and Carter M. Waid, Pampa Print Shop, [1965?] and “The Community Influence and Cultural Power of *Nuestra Señora de Belén*”, Margaret Espinosa McDonalds, *Seeds of Struggle, Harvest of Faith: The History of the Catholic Church in New Mexico*, Editors: Barbe Awalt, Thomas J. Steele, Paul Rhett, LPD Publishing (1999).

Brother Hayes, the resident Servite who appeared in photo pointing to church ruins, was the author of subsequent works including the 150th anniversary publication of the parish history where the photo appeared.<sup>11</sup> Hayes wrote much about Belén parishioner's (especially Hispanic) special devotion to Mary saying that they "showered her honors" and "parishes were erected in her name" and finally that "Each succeeding generation was sternly admonished to hold fiestas in her honor. This race, so proud of its Catholic heritage, was determined not to forget Mary."<sup>12</sup>

The prevailing Marian philosophy with continued Our Lady of Belén parish dedication to Mary and the history of the original naming of Belén is countered by the current use of "Little Town of Bethlehem" motifs at the new plaza location with its simplistic civic and protestant overtones. Perhaps to non-Catholics, Bethlehem was a generic Christian concept easily identifiable and relatable as opposed to veneration of Mary. This perspective appears to have first manifested around the end of the first decade of the 1900's through civic interventions in the celebrations of the annual August 15 "Belen Fiestas."

In its August 8, 1908 issue, the Anglo and Protestant-centric English language newspaper *Belen Tribune* featured an unusual Spanish language headline story. The article, although titled in English "Come to Belen and enjoy the Fiesta of Our Lady of Belen" reads as a disjointed and unintentional dual civic booster and church announcement. It starts with an apparently Catholic explanation in Spanish of the celebration as a centuries old solemn observation and states that the "faithful Roman Apostolic Catholic devotees reunite every year on August 15 to pay homage and sacred respect to the memory of Our Lady of Belén, who in centuries past was chosen, adored and recognized as the patroness of the town of Belén (*la patrona de esta población*)."<sup>12</sup> It continues with a description of the upcoming church observations and mentions that a committee (civic) has obtained the privilege of using church property to conduct the other diversions of the feast day. It began to list the schedule of events in Spanish but switched to English almost as if the attractions and games were foreign or untraditional and the author could not find equivalent Spanish words (i.e., baseball game, hurdle race, endurance race). A smaller follow up English article on the fiestas

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<sup>11</sup> Brother Hayes was born in 1918 at Chicago. In 1941 he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was sent to Saint Joseph Sanatorium in Albuquerque where he stayed for a year. He arrived in Belén as a Brother for the Servite order in 1943 and served for a year before he went to the Saint Thomas Seminary at Denver, Colorado and after he was ordained a priest in 1946 he returned to Belén. He died of tuberculosis in 1948 at Albuquerque.

<sup>12</sup> The three known works of Brother Hayes are: *150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Parish of Our Lady of Belén, 1793-1943*, Andrew Hayes, Our Lady of Belén Church, Belén, N.M., 1943; "Bethlehem in the Southwest," *The Servite* 35, no. 10 (Oct. 1943): 30-34; "The First Lady of New Mexico," *The Servite*, 36, no. 9 (Sept. 1944): 20-22, Provincial Library and Archives in Chicago.

published on August 22, although highlighting the secular events, again called Our Lady of Belén the “patroness of the town.”

Two years later another front page article (completely in English) appeared in the August 13, 1910 issue titled “Come to Belén - Annual Fiesta Day.” This article lacked the official Catholic voice and although it mentioned “the feast day has been fostered by the Roman Catholic Church” it emphasized a secular event and provided a very unusual take on the church celebration. It reads “For many centuries during the annual harvest season it has been the custom of the people of the town of Belén to gather to observe a religious feast day of thanksgiving to the Almighty God for His mercies in providing an abundant harvest.” There was no mention of Mary and perhaps the agricultural emphasis was an attempt to make the occasion more palatable to outsider Protestant or secular sensitivities.<sup>13</sup>

These early modifications from Catholic religious Marian practices (Mary the patroness of Belén) to the Bethlehem name and Nativity scene celebrations demonstrate that there has been a shift toward a civic, ecumenical and commercial reinterpretation of Belén’s religious and place name history and identity. Regardless of these revisions, many Belenites have pride in the new civic plaza and its Bethlehem/Christian associations. The space is used today both civically and ecumenically for various functions especially around Christmas including “Miracle on Main Street Light Parade” and “Follow the Star to Bethlehem” events along with Protestant Church sponsored nativity plays. Although these events continue to reaffirm the altered version of its town’s naming, they nevertheless offer a city wide opportunity for civic boosting, public celebrations and for the most part community unity. Recent controversy surrounds the new plaza’s Christian motifs in the manger relief sculptures and civic Christmas celebrations of Belén’s “Christian place name.” It has been opposed by secularists (Freedom From Religion Foundation) who see it as an infringement of separation between church and state. A large part of the community including the mayor have publically defended the civic plaza manger scene and Christmas celebrations associated to it.

Simultaneous but not necessarily in congruence with the civic celebrations there has been a resurgence of two traditional folk Catholic traditions related to the nativity. These are *Los Pastores* and *Las Posadas*. *Los Pastores* or *La Gran Pastorela* is a 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish folk/ritual drama performed entirely in Spanish which embroils an elaborate script surrounding the shepherd’s long journey to adore the Christ Child and Holy Family. Local Belén Catholic

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<sup>13</sup> Articles found in “Belen Tribune,” 1908-1912, CSWR, call number AN2.B41.



Church parishioners revived *Los Pastores* in the early 1970's (wasn't performed in Belén since 1929) and have been annually performing it in Spanish since then primarily at rural Catholic churches.<sup>14</sup> *Los Pastores* is also reenacted throughout Mexico and the U.S. particularly in Texas within Mexican American communities. *Las Posadas* is another tradition still practiced in the Río Abajo. It is a community house-to-house chorus reenactment of Mary and Joseph looking for a lodge or a place to give birth to Jesus.



2016 performance of La Gran Pastorela de Belén at Immaculate Conception Church, Albuquerque, NM. on Dec. 18. This scene is the culmination where the character Bartolo is finally awakened from his sleep to adore the Christ baby (actual 6 week old baby). Bartolo (lying on cot) was played by Our Lady of Belén Church Deacon Rudy Zamora (from Albuquerque). The person playing the part of Joseph is the Deacon's son Daniel and Mary was played by Daniel's wife, Rachelle (from To'hajileé, N.M.). The child's names is Brennan. The rest of the actors and accompanying choir members are primarily from Belén, Jarales, Los Lunas, Peralta, Meadow Lake and Socorro. Photo by Samuel Sisneros.

This gradual and enduring shift away from traditional cultural and religious Marian expressions to the modern civic, popular and ecumenical celebrations along with a concerted effort to revitalize Catholic nativity traditions is one example of how Belén's comprehensive history is more complex

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<sup>14</sup> Filomena Baca (from Jarales) found an original play script hand written by Alberto Chávez (from Las Nutrias) in 1929 per suggestion of her mother who performed *Los Pastores* as a child in the early 1900s and knew the family of Alberto Chávez. Filomena has directed the Our Lady of Belén Catholic Church based group ever sense and has for the most part been true to the original script. See Program for 2016 "La Gran Pastorela de Belén," Dec. 10, 2016, UNM Keller Hall. A 2012 performance at Our Lady of Belén Church can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2P62FNuFVI>

than what is currently known and appreciated. Therefore the following chronological history is offered to include a wider understanding.

### **Place and People: A Chronological History**

The Belén area was initially populated earlier than the 1740 official settlement date. There were settlements between Isleta and Socorro by Tigua and Piro indigenous groups as early as AD 1200's. A pre-contact Pueblo pit-house archeological site is located on the east side of the river from Belén. During the 1500's contact period there were various Piro missions in the Manzano and Salinas areas (in the mountain range east of the Río Grande) who by the 1670's, as a result of Apache attacks, abandoned their areas and joined Isleta and Piro settlements near the river.<sup>15</sup> As the Piros were moving into the Río Grande valley, Juan de Oñate's 1598 colonizers, during their one hundred years of Spanish colonization and settlement, began to migrate from northern New Mexico to the Río Abajo area around the Isleta mission district. They established *estancias* (large land holdings) near the present towns of Los Padillas, Los Lunas, Valencia and Tomé. But in 1680 Spanish citizens along with Isletans and Piros fled New Mexico to El Paso area to escape the Pueblo Indian Revolt. More than a decade later, Diego de Vargas, post revolt re-colonizer, brought back many of the El Paso del Norte refugees. A few families settled back into the Río Abajo area.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, Genízaro Indians began to migrate to the area as early as the 1720's playing an important settlement role for several decades afterwards.

Genízaros were displaced and marginalized indigenous people in New Mexico and were, to various degrees, undergoing the process of becoming Spanish/Mexican subjects and citizens. This process began with captivity. Primarily children and female adults (captured plains Indians, Utes, Kiowas, Navajos and Apaches) were purchased at trade fairs from captor tribes, especially by the Comanche. Brought into Spanish and some Pueblo households as servants, they became indoctrinated with the Spanish culture and Catholic religion. Once they became of marrying age and worked off their servitude (although some remained servants indefinitely) they either worked as *peones* (peasants) for the elite land owners or acquired property and status depending on their political acumen, on who their marriage partners were, or if they completed military service. Many

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<sup>15</sup> Regge N. Wiseman, *The Belén Bridge Site and the Late Elmendorf Phase of Central New Mexico: Archaeology Notes 137* (Santa Fe, NM: Office of Archaeological Studies, Museum of New Mexico, 1995); Michael P. Marshal, *Río Abajo: Prehistory and History of a Río Abajo Province* (Santa Fe: New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 1984); Michael Bletzer, "The First Province of That Kingdom: Notes on the Colonial History of the Piro Area", *New Mexico Historical Review* 88 (2013).

<sup>16</sup> These Río Abajo pre-revolt and re-conquest families are discussed in Fray Angélico Chávez, *Origins of New Mexico Families: A Genealogy of the Spanish Colonial Period*, (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1992).



Genízaros lived as marginalized laborers and farmers scattered in or near Hispanic and Pueblo villages and some eventually organized into groups and acquired land primarily at Abiquiú, Ranchos de Taos, San Miguel del Vado, Carnuel and Belén.<sup>17</sup>

In 1733 an organized group of Río Abajo Genízaros advocated for participation in the Spanish system of community land ownership by petitioning the governor for land at the abandoned Sandía Pueblo. Antonio Gurulé, with wife Teresa Gallego and children, was the head petitioner. The list of Los Genízaros as they collectively called themselves included seventy-six persons representing individuals from the Pawnee, Jumano, Apache, Kiowa, Aa, Ute and Tano nations. The Genízaros were not granted their petition but many of them began to show up living in the Isleta jurisdiction and noted in the Isleta church sacramental records as early as the 1720s. These same families are later noted as residents of Belén demonstrating that Genízaros were established in Belén area prior to and during the Spanish land grant settlement. Historical records also tell us that the Belén area Genízaros were multi-tribal, had kinship and political ties to Isleta, became participants in the Spanish religious, civil and legal systems and were unified under a cultural identity.<sup>18</sup>

Spanish and Mestizo families also began to arrive at Belén by the 1740's. Primarily from Santa Cruz de la Cañada (near present day Española and Chimayo) and other areas in northern New Mexico. Thirty families headed by Captain Diego de Torres petitioned Governor Gaspar Dominguez de Mendoza for a Royal Land Grant. On December 9, 1740 they received and took possession of Nuestra Señora de Belén grant which included 121,633 acres.<sup>19</sup> Torres came to Belén from the Chama area with the status and means for supporting a large family and maintaining quarters for his many servants.<sup>20</sup> The other lead petitioner was Antonio de Salazar, husband of Torres' sister María Torres. Even though Salazar was categorized as a Spanish colonizer, he was also of Pueblo Indian ancestry. Antonio's father was Agustín Salazar who was noted as being an interpreter of his mother's native Indian language. Agustín's mother was María Hinojos, a Zuñí

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<sup>17</sup> Servitude in New Mexico was different from the chattel and plantation slavery of the southern U.S., because it involved a regional complex system of economic dependency, caste and racial identity, social positioning and kinship ties which led to a totally separate outcome than that of the African American slave experience. See *Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* by James F. Brooks and *Identifying captivity and capturing identity: narratives of American Indian slavery, Colorado and New Mexico, 1776-1934* by Estevan Rael-Gálvez.

<sup>18</sup> For a full narrative of the Belén Genízaro legacy see: Samuel Sisneros, "The Eighteenth-Century Genízaro Mission of Belén: In great union as if they were their own nation," *New Mexico Historical Review*, April, 2017 (anticipated).

<sup>19</sup> SANM I, Land Records, SG 13.

<sup>20</sup> Diego Torres was born around 1692, most likely at the El Paso del Norte refugee colony. He and his parents returned to Northern New Mexico with the Diego de Vargas re-conquest of Santa Fe on the same year as Diego's birth. They settled in Chama in 1731 where as an adult Diego Torres became the assistant Alcalde of Santa Clara.

Pueblo woman who was displaced in her young life during the Pueblo Revolt and was among the El Paso refugees where she married Agustín's father Bartolomé de Salazar.<sup>21</sup> As the Torres and Salazar families along with the other families from Northern New Mexico began to merge at Belén around 1743, the land and village center they moved into was not vacant.

Shortly after the land grantees arrived in Belén, a group of Genízaros claimed that Spanish settlers were trespassing on their land and committing many injustices towards them. The Captain of the Belén Genízaros was Antonio Casados, captive from the Apache Kiowa Nation and also previous servant of Diego Torres. In 1745 Casados traveled 2,500 miles to Mexico City with the head Pueblo War Chief and other cohorts to petition the viceroy. Casados asked the viceroy to protect the rights of his "pueblo" and to evict the Spanish from Belén. The viceroy ordered court in Santa Fe and in 1746 Casados and another Belén Genízaro, Luis Quintana, Apache, brought legal suit against the Belén land grant settlers. On the day of the trial Casados appeared with an escort of seventy Pueblo Indians. The governor was angered by this rebellious display along with the fact that Casados left the province without license. After nine days of testimony the issue was apparently laid to rest and both groups remained in Belén.<sup>22</sup> This episode demonstrates Genízaro and Pueblo collaboration including political networks with Genízaro and Pueblo leaders.<sup>23</sup>

Just a few years after this initial confrontation, the new amalgamated community of Belén was enumerated in 1750. The census recorded two segregated groups within Belén. The Spanish land grantee section included thirteen family units, with seventy Spanish categorized persons and twenty-three Indian house servants. A separate Genízaro section included twenty family units with sixty-nine persons. This first census of Belén reveals that Belén's Genízaro and Spanish ratio was half and half. Although combining the Indian house servants with the Genízaro population the community was more Indian at 57% with the Spanish class at 43%.

<i>Settlement</i>	<i>Family units</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Genízaros</i>	<i>Spanish (categorized)</i>	<i>House Servant Indians</i>	<i>Combined Genízaros &amp; Indian Servants</i>
<b>Genízaro Group</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>69</b>			
<b>Land Grant Group</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>93</b>		<b>70</b>	<b>23</b>	
	<b>33</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>69 (43%)</b>	<b>70 (43%)</b>	<b>23 (14%)</b>	<b>92 (57%)</b>

Data from 1750 Census of Belén.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Sisneros, "Salazar and Hinojos Family Ties," *Herencia*, Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico, (1996).

<sup>22</sup> Antonio Casados and Luis Quintana, Genízaros, proceeding against Fulano Barrera, Diego de Torres and Antonio Salazar over lands at Puesto de Belén, 12 February 1746, SANM I:183. See also: Copy letter, Don Pedro Cebrian, Conde de Fuenclara and Viceroy of New Spain Don Felix de Sandoval concerning complaints by Indians, October 20, 1745, Bancroft Library, P-E 228, doc. 32-33, CSWR microfilm, 868:7 reel 12.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Sisneros, "The Eighteenth-Century Genízaro Mission ..."

After 1750 both communities continued to flourish in the fertile valley of Belén and new rancho villages began to show up in outlying areas with the furthest being Sabinal. The settlement of Sabinal sheds light as to how Belén's plazas may have also been settled. As with the original Belén settlement, similarly Sabinal was a contested space by the two founding groups - Spanish and Genízaro. In 1765 the two groups filed a joint but separate request to the governor asking for permission to settle Sabinal. They, the "Nueve Blancos" and "Nueve Indios Genízaros" (nine Whites and nine Genízaro Indians) claimed to have already been working the land in the area even constructing an acequia system. Both groups provided a list of persons wishing to live there. Permission was granted to both groups under the condition they were given equal opportunity and land and they build their homes in a public square fashion. The Genízaros were separately instructed to build their houses at the entrance of the village along with building a protective fort for the whole community.<sup>24</sup> This episode reveals that the Genízaros and the Spanish folk were still segregated but becoming co-dependent.

In 1767 Spanish and Genízaro Sabinal residents complained about obstacles and abuses by the son and grandsons of Captain Diego Torrez. Josef Torrez and his sons were attempting to control Sabinal by halting the construction of ranchos and not allowing the complainants to pasture their horses there. The Genízaros said the Torrez family abused them to the point of threatening theirs and the life of their *governadorsillo* or local governor of their community.<sup>25</sup> Antonio Gurulé was one of the nine Genízaros involved in both the Sabinal settlement requests and in the complaints against the Torrez sons when he was listed as "El Cacique." With this title he could have been the mentioned *governadorsillo* and he most likely was the Antonio Gurulé, lead petitioner of "Los Genízaros" petition discussed earlier. Also on the list of Sabinal Genízaro settlers was Reymundo Jojola and his sons Juan Pedro and Tomás. This Jojola family was an important Isleta Tigua family that migrated to Belén and became known as Genízaros. Interestingly Ventura Jojola (De la Cruz) another Tigua/Genízaro was listed with the group of *Nueve Blancos*. Also one of the nine Genízaro Indians was Matías Fresquez who was of Piro Indian derivation from Los Lentos, an early Isleta village. Matías first married in 1769 to the daughter of Ventura Jojola (de la Cruz) and Jacinta Baca and in 1775, as a widower, he then married the daughter of the other Jojola Belén progenitor, Reymundo Jojola. As observed by these intertwined

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<sup>24</sup> Proceedings by settlers of Sabinal, 1765-1767, SANM I:869.

<sup>25</sup> The nine Indios Genízaros were Joseph Manuel Gurule, Matias Fresquez, Juan de Luna, Antonio Gurule, Antonio Rubi, Geronimo Silva, Juan Ramos, Reimundo Jojola and Juan Pedro Jojola de la Cruz. Many other names of Genízaros appear in the 1767 complaint.

family genealogies, the Sabinal settlers moved back and forth between the Belén plazas and Sabinal.

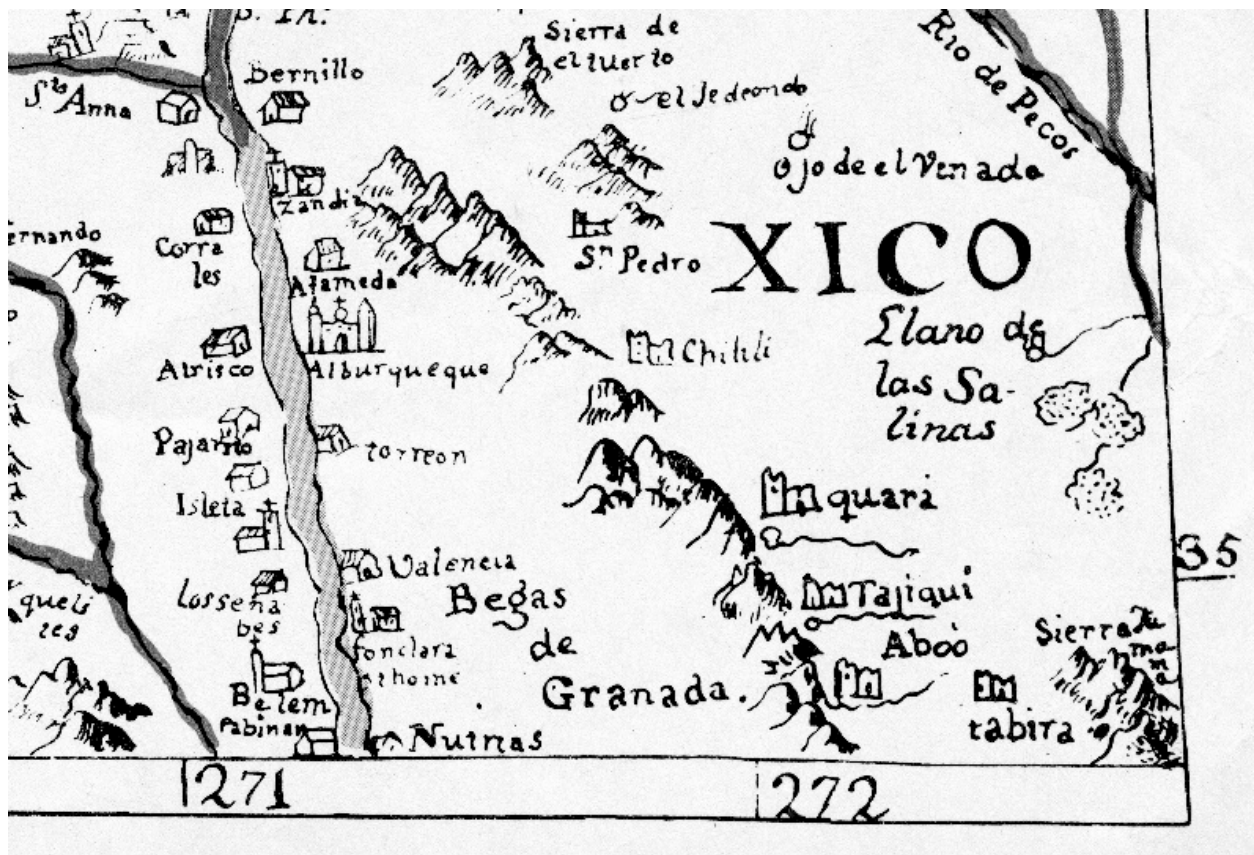
By 1776 Fray Dominguez referred to Belén as a settlement of “widely separated ranchos” and contained rich and productive irrigated land. He reported that Belén’s occupants included a total of ninety-six Spanish families (most likely including castes and Indian servants) with 593 persons and a Genízaro community of forty-nine family units with 209 persons. He also gave the population count for Sabinal with fifty-one family units and 214 persons. In his discussion of Genízaros in Belén he said they were similar to those in Santa Fe and negatively stated that they were impoverished and maintained themselves on small plots of land and also whatever they can “get their hands on” from their neighbors.<sup>26</sup>

Two years after Dominguez’ report, a subsequent account of “disorders in New Mexico” was given by Father Juan Agustín de Morfi in 1778, which provided a rare critical view of provincial affairs. Morfi wrote that the Spanish lacked discipline and were cruel and oppressive profiteers as opposed to the orderly Pueblo Indians. The Genízaro, on the other hand, he described as the poorest of the groups, rejected by the Pueblo Indians and forced to live with the Spaniards where they were neglected and left with little land or work but yet they were good soldiers and “very war like.” He stated that the Genízaros were some sixty families and lived in Belén and Tomé (did not mention any other New Mexico locations) and had a chief spokesman (name not given) who at the time was noted as taking a petition for community rights to Durango, México. Morfi also discussed the Sabinal settlement issue stating that Genízaros requested permission to establish El Sabinal, but the Spanish from Belén attempted to move in on the Genízaro Sabinal settlement. He suggested that the Spanish stay in Belén and the Genízaros remain in Sabinal where they were to “live in the manner of the Pueblo Indians” with privileges and exemptions. He reasoned the Genízaros were deserving of this because of their loyalty and military service.<sup>27</sup> Morfi’s report offers great insight into the settlement process of Belén’s growing plazas. In the same year Bernardo Miera y Pacheco drew up his map of New Mexico and noted “Belem” with a symbol of a steeple church which according to the legend meant “Pueblo of Indios Cristianos” or a village of Christian Indians.

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<sup>26</sup> Proceedings, 208.

<sup>27</sup> Fray Juan Agustín de Morfi, “Account of Disorders”, 1778, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), *História*, Vol. 25. Translation in Marc Simmons, *Coronado’s Land: Essay on Daily Life in Colonial New Mexico*, (UNM Press, Albuquerque, 1991), 127-161.



“Belem” is located at very bottom on the west bank of the river. Section of Plano Geográfico de la tierra descubierta nuevamente a los rumbos....., Don Bernardo Miera y Pacheco, San Felipe el Real de Chihuahua, 1778. Copy, Eleanor B. Adams Papers, Center for Southwest Research, UNM.

In 1790 Fray Cayetano Bernal, resident priest of Isleta took the second census of Belén.<sup>28</sup> It listed seven plazas of Belén. The first two plazas consisted of primarily elite Spanish class families and their Indian servants. Don Diego Antonio Sanchez, was the head rancher of Plaza #1. The largest of the Belén proper plazas was Plaza #2 (later called Los Bacas).<sup>29</sup> It included the head family of Miguel Antonio Baca and seven rancher families (core elite land owners), a few farmer families (dependent working class) and seventeen Indian house servants.

The third plaza, Nuestra Señora de Dolores de Los Genízaros contained some of the original Belén Genízaro families but also included new Genízaro and Mestizo migrants. Head family was that of Comandante (War Captain) Marcos Velasques with wife María Rosa Baca. Although Marcos is listed as Mestizo, his parents were noted as Genízaros living in Belén in the 1770's and were originally from Albuquerque where they married in 1765. Marcos' wife María

<sup>28</sup> Census of the jurisdiction of Albuquerque, 22 October 1790, SANM II:1092b.

<sup>29</sup> The August 7, 1803 Belén church baptism of the child of Juakin Alvares del Castillo notes the family's residency as second Plaza of “Belén de Los Bacas.”

Rosa Baca was the daughter of Genízaros, Ventura Jojola and Jacinta Baca. Four heads of families originated from El Paso area, three of which were from Socorro del Paso. Also in this plaza was the only Genízaro person in the Belén census listed with tribal affiliation. He was Matías Montaña, Navajo *criado* (servant brought up since childhood) of Bernabe Montaña. Several modern Belén families can trace their ancestry to Matías and his Genízara wife Juana María Silva (married in 1775) including the García/O'Neal family. The population of Genízaros in this plaza was 39%, with 53% total Indian (Genízaros, Indians and Coyotes), 15% Spanish and 39% Mestizo.

Los Trujillos (Plaza # 4) had a large percentage of Spanish categorized persons at 89% with a few Mestizos, Coyotes, and Indian servants but no Genízaros. The head households were that of Lieutenant “Don” Santiago Trujillo, Rancher and that of Nicolas Torres, grandson of Diego Torres. Plaza #5, Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Los Garcías was headed by the family of rancher Juakin Torres, and wife Isabel Chavez and their three Indian and Coyote servants. Plaza # 6, Nombre de Díos de Los Jarales is separated from the previous core plazas a couple of miles downriver. It was a small cluster of ranchos with only five families. The head family was that of Comandante José García and María Barbara de la Cruz (Baca or Jojola). Although José García’s birthplace is listed as Socorro, El Paso, he was actually of the Spanish class from Sonora and full surname was García Sandarte Lechuga.<sup>30</sup> María Barbara, on the other hand was native and was the daughter of Ventura Jojola (Cruz) and Jacinta Baca. Although Jarales had the least Indian residents it had the largest number of Mestizos. Similar to Plaza de Los Genízaros, Jarales had no ranching families or servants. All families were farmers with equal social standing.

San Antonio de Sabinal was the last plaza annotated in the Belén 1790 census. Located furthest downriver it was the second largest in population and had a majority of farmer families similar to Plaza de Los Genízaros and Jarales. The two rancher families do not appear to be lead families in the community as were the other rancher families in the central plazas and they also did not have Indian servants although one had a Spanish servant. The head family of Sabinal was that of farmer, Comandante Francisco Suazo, native from El Paso of Spanish category. Even with a high percentage of Spanish class it also had the highest number of Coyotes and was second in the total Indian residents next to the Plaza de Los Genízaros. This provides evidence that Genízaro families from the 1765 settlement remained in Sabinal.

The plazas of Sabinal, Los Genízaros, and Jarales had genealogical, social and political ties to the original Genízaro and Tigua Belén founders. They were also structured as Pueblo villages

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of this family see Angélico Chávez, *Origins of New Mexico Families*, 185.

with a *gobernadorcillo* (little governor), comandante (war chief) and cacique (social/spiritual leader) as evident in the Sabinal settlement documents.<sup>31</sup> The 1790 census shows that the Pueblo of Belén and its plazas were becoming mixed-race communities. Since 1750, forty years and one to two generations later, the racial component flipped in its Indian to Spanish ratio. In 1750 Belén was 57% Indian (Genízaros and Indian servants) and 43% Spanish. In 1790 it was 57% Spanish, 24% Indian (Coyotes, Indians servants and Genízaros), and 19% Mestizo.

Settlement/Plaza	Family units	Persons	Spanish	Genízaro	Mestizo	Coyote	Indian	Indian/Coyote/Genízaro
No. 1	4	18	12 (67%)	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	4 (22%)	4 (22%)
No. 2	47	251	143 (57%)	9 (4%)	56 (22%)	21 (8%)	22 (9%)	52 (21%)
No. 3, N.S. de los Dolores de Los Genízaros	34	145	22 (15%)	56 (39%)	46 (32%)	3 (2%)	18 (12%)	77 (53%)
No. 4, San Antonio de Los Trujillos	8	54	48 (89%)	0	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	3 (5%)	4 (7%)
No. 5, N.S. del Pilar de Los Garcías	30	157	115 (73%)	0	19 (13%)	10 (6%)	13 (8%)	23 (14%)
No. 6, Nombre de Dios de Los Jarales	5	36	15 (42%)	0	20 (55%)	1 (3%)	0	1 (3%)
San Antonio de Sabinal	52	227	149 (65%)	6 (3%)	24 (11%)	35 (15%)	13 (6%)	54 (24%)
<b>Combined Belén Plazas</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>504 (57%)</b>	<b>71 (8%)</b>	<b>169 (19%)</b>	<b>71 (8%)</b>	<b>73 (8%)</b>	<b>215 (24%)</b>

1790 Belén census data set.

The decline in people identified as Indian and increase in those listed as Mestizo informs us that there was an increase in Spanish/Indian unions. It could also indicate that some of the Indian and mixed races moved into the Spanish class category or it could be that simply more Spanish categorized migrants moved into the area. Most likely it was all of these factors. Also a few males from all the racial categories migrated from the El Paso area some bringing in a continued Isleta/Piro component.<sup>32</sup> Whatever their race, class status or place of origin, Belén residents witnessed more than forty years of change from its precarious start of two racially separated sections to a community that was blurring its racial and class categorizations and becoming a co-dependent colonial village at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After the 1790 census was taken Belén soon saw the birth of its parish and the construction of the mission church.

<sup>31</sup> This kind of organization also existed in the Abiquiú Genízaro community. Malcolm Ebright, *Advocates for the Oppressed: Hispanos, Indians, Genízaros, and Their Land in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2014), 67, n. 36 states that the Genízaro communities of Abiquiú and neighboring Ojo Caliente were organized in the same manner as the other Indian Pueblos including designating a governor, a teniente, a war captain (comandante) and two assistants.

<sup>32</sup> The Genízaro/Piro/Tigua interrelationship also existed in the El Paso missions. According to an account by Fr. Joaquin de Jesus Ruíz in 1773 the Piro community in Socorro (del Sur) was dwindling due to their mission being primary composed of Genízaros who were bought in New Mexico. Ruíz stated that “the said Genízaros were Apaches, captured by the Comanche and having no particular inclination toward their nation, and not knowing their own language lived peacefully in El Paso, first marrying their own and later they let in Spanish and Mestizos all benefiting from the rich fertile land.” AGN, Photocopy #25, pt. 3, f. 338-340, Center for Southwest Research, UNM.



## The Oxcart Rebellion and the Construction of the Church and of a Parish

The 1790s was the start of a pivotal period of growth for the community of Belén. Fray Cayetano Bernal, the enumerator of the 1790 census, was an important factor towards that growth. He was familiar with the many Rio Abajo villages from Albuquerque to Belén and his personal relationship with his parishioners and years of service in the area positioned him to become an important advocate for the spiritual and community development of these populations and especially for Belén.

Fray Cayetano José Ignacio Bernal, a creole native of Mexico City was born in 1744 and educated in the Franciscan Colegio de Santiago Tlatelolco.<sup>33</sup> He was assigned to the El Paso del Norte parishes as early as 1771 first appearing as a parish priest at Socorro, El Paso del Norte where he remained until 1775.<sup>34</sup> Sometime prior to 1779, Fray Bernal moved north to New Mexico where he ministered at the church in San Felipe Pueblo from 1779 to 1780, Isleta from 1780 to 1793 and Belén from 1793 to 1807.<sup>35</sup> From his earlier stay at the mission church and convent of San Agustín de Isleta, Bernal demonstrated his dedication and work as an advocate for the community of Belén. He tirelessly promoted for the separation of Belén and Tomé from the Isleta and Albuquerque ecclesiastical jurisdictions respectively, primarily because the distance from these communities to their mother churches was dangerous for him and for community members due to Apache attacks. Working toward the goal of forming separate parishes, Bernal and the Belén community petitioned the Bishop in Durango for a license to build a church in Belén as early as 1786. It was denied and a second petition in 1787 was presented. Don José Mariano de la Peña, attorney for the “Pueblo” of Belén, donated 56 pesos and 4 reales for the rights to a *licencia*, which was also dismissed. It wasn’t until 1790 that the Pueblo of Belén was admitted as a parish to the Holy Bishopric of Durango and on May 23, 1791 Governor Fernando de la Concha and the Illustrious S. Tristan, Bishop of Durango granted the license.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Baptized Aug. 14, 1744 at Asunción Sagrario Metropolitano, Centro, Mexico City, son of Don Miguel Bernal and Doña Juana de San Pedro Morales. LDS film number 000035183, Family search digital number 004534425, image number 00730. The previous baptism record coincides with Bernal’s autobiographical statement that he was 56 years and six months old and educated at the Colegio. July 1, 1801, AHAD.

<sup>34</sup> Bernal’s career vita is presented in *Spanish Frontier in North America*, David J. Weber, New Haven: Yale University Press. 1992 and in Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1678-1900, Fray Angelico Chavez, Archdiocese of Santa Fe., 1957.

<sup>35</sup> Father Bernal died in Albuquerque while eating dinner in Albuquerque. Note, April 26, 1807, Loose Documents, AASF, Reel 53, frame 630.

<sup>36</sup> AGN Provincia Internas, Vol. 161, part 1, Number 5, (MSS 867 CSWR Vol. 103A)

Legajo titled: Numero 5. Año de 1792. Sobre reunion de Misiones del Nuevo Mexico, en que resulta ahorro a la Real Hacienda.

In the same year the license was granted, Pedro de Nava, New Mexico military commander made a plea that churches be erected at the centers in all the plazas and posts “dispersed” in the Belén area and that a minister be placed in the community with additional half salary (*medio sinodo*) to administer to the “Genízaro Pueblo” which had forty families and to all the Spanish people.<sup>37</sup> He further said that the church should be built for the Genízaros and special amenities should be given to the Pueblo even though the Genízaros were unable to contribute any monies due to their “extreme poverty” stating they had the same lot as those of their “same class” that are found in Abiquíu.<sup>38</sup> He said that this Genízaro Pueblo was situated in the same site assigned for the construction of the church. Nava’s requests perhaps set into motion the order in 1791 for parishioners to begin gathering of rocks for the foundation and walls of the new church. But a second order in December of the same year by the interim governor interrupted the hauling of rocks led to a rebellion by a large group of Belén residents.

Mayor of the Albuquerque and Isleta districts, Manuel de Arteaga passed on the order to Don Miguel Baca, interim deputy mayor of the partido de Belén. According to the order, Baca was to produce a list of the droves of oxen in Belén and order the good ones dispatched to Isleta to haul vigas to build a bridge near the Pueblo of San Felipe. Toribio García Jurado, representative of the Belén common, handed Baca a pronouncement that the Belén residents would not provide oxcarts nor *peones* to drive them. The reason was that their resources were already taxed by the previous order given by the mayor to use their oxens to haul rocks to build the Belén church. He further attempted to excuse Belén residents from this mandate claiming they could not afford to lose their good oxens which were needed for hauling rocks. He further stated that all would be well if the rock was in the area but instead it had to be hauled from more than three leagues west of the new church construction. He ended his petition by stating that such demands would cripple his community.<sup>39</sup>

García’s advocacy did little good and Baca proceeded to detain García taking him as prisoner to jail at Isleta Pueblo. After his incarceration, a group of over forty men gathered on horseback at Plaza de Los Garcías where García was a resident. From Los Garcías, the rebel troop went on to the next village below “para abajo” to join those at the Plaza de Los Genízaros. From there the unified group galloped off to Isleta with the aim of freeing García. There they declared

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<sup>37</sup> SANM II, Roll 12, frame 0556

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Investigation related to request for oxcarts to build bridge, Dec. 12 1791 to April 1, 1792, SANM II, Roll 12, frames 768-793

that they should all be arrested since García was only their representative. The rebels were all arrested but soon were released only to re-group back in Belén with another group of about sixty men.<sup>40</sup>

Even though the revolt was suppressed early on, seven of the rebel leaders were held prisoners and sent to the “royal” jail in Santa Fe. In March of 1792, Governor Concha ordered these leaders to be questioned. Captain of the Militia and Mayor of Santa Fe, Don Antonio José Ortíz conducted the investigation. In the end, the prisoners were accused of lack of obedience to the governor and to the good order of the land. Each rebel leader was fined three silver pesos. Those leaders, in addition to Toribio García and his son Xavier, were Juan Pino, Andres Torres, José de Luna, Paulin Baca, and Juan Domingo Padilla.<sup>41</sup> They were all, for the most part (at least in the 1790 census), noted as being of the Spanish class. Toribio García Jurado migrated to Belén prior to 1790 and was from the Spanish class families of Albuquerque and Bernalillo. His father, Ramon García, was the military captain and mayor of Bernalillo in the early 1700s and his mother Bernardina Hurtado was an Albuquerque elite.<sup>42</sup> The identity of Toribio’s wife on the other hand attests to the complexity and fluidity of cast and race as expressed throughout this work. She was Antonia Teresa Guitierrez, whose father was Juan Gutierrez, Spanish of Bernalillo and mother, also an Antonia, was an Isleta Indian who wore the pueblo’s traditional *manta* or shawl at their 1728 wedding.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the García maternal Pueblo Indian ancestry, this entire Belén García clan were noted as being of the Spanish class. Needless to say all classes participated in the rebellion.

Fray Bernal never mentioned the Belén oxcart rebellion nor the 1791 church starting construction date in subsequent correspondence and reports nor is it known his participation in that event. Instead he wrote that the construction of the church and convent began in 1792 but the walls fell three times and in February of 1793, his Excellency Bishop Tristan asked for a priest (Bernal) to oversee the construction of Nuestra Señora de Belén Mission church and convent started from 1791 to 1793 with Genízaro and *vecino* (Spanish and Mestizo residents). In 1794 Bernal reported

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<sup>40</sup> Idem. Included in those who participated with the order and provided oxcarts and labor were Alferes Don. Nicolas Torres, Joaquin Castillo, José Carrillo, Juan Cristoval Sanchez, and Miguel Gabaldon and the residents of Los Galbadones and Sausal.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. The leaders (Los opuestos) who were arrested, questioned and fined were Toribio García, Xavier García, Juan Pino, Andres Torres, José de Luna, Paulin Baca, and Juan Domingo Padilla. The towns that participated in addition to Los Gabaldones and Sausal (northern Belén) were Tomé, Los Lentes and Albuquerque. A large list was provided of the names of those that provided oxcarts.

<sup>42</sup> *Origins*, p.183

<sup>43</sup> DM #43, Nov. 29, 1772. This is the marriage investigation the son of Toribio García. In the investigation it was brought out about the Isleta mother of Toribio’s wife. The actual 1728 marriage record of her and Juan Gutierrez notes Antonia (no surname) as Spanish of Isleta.

on the formation of Belén's parish and the construction of the mission church stressing that the Genízaros were the main focus of the community. He also treats Belén as a single Indian mission village with connecting rancho communities, calling it "La misión de Nuestra Señora de Belén de Indios Genízaros de diversas Naciones" or the mission of our Lady of Belén of Genízaro Indians from diverse nations. Bernal highlighted firstly that there were 36 Genízaro families with 87 persons followed by 15 *puestos* (outpost plazas) of Spanish and castes with 416 families and 1316 persons. Regardless if the Genízaro population was of lesser percentage, Bernal continued to emphasize Genízaros as the primary inhabitants of the central plaza of the mission or Pueblo and the Spanish and castas as the populace of outlying ranches.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that Bernal was using their Indian identity and "new" Christian status to achieve the goal of claiming Belén as a mission and Genízaros as mission Indians. Bernal also gave the "Indios Genízaros de diversas naciones" designation to the Pueblo of Santo Tomás de Abiquiú. Bernal would also add in a 1795 correspondence with government officials that there was an increase of forty Belén families of the "Genízaro race" as he framed it which gives further credence to the perception or function of the Genízaro as a tribe, nation or ethnic group.<sup>45</sup>

Bernal also boasted how Belén's production of fine cotton is larger and of better quality than some of the larger missions in central Mexico such as at Chiapas and Puebla. In addition, he proposed an economic development plan to include production of cotton and wool clothing products. He highlighted first that there were 36 Genízaro families with 87 persons followed by 15 *puestos* (outposts) of Spanish and castes with 416 families and 1316 persons.<sup>46</sup> The Genízaro population increased very little from 1790, while Belén's total population vastly increased in just four years. Perhaps Belén's growth is why Fray Bernal felt a commitment to champion the spiritual and economic development of Belén.

In 1795 Bernal came to the forefront as the lead proponent of a church and parish and foreman in the construction of the New Church. He presented an extensive report as evidence to demonstrate progress made in the construction of the church and convent. The report included historical background of his ministry, the process of obtaining parish designation, and an inventory of the church's sacramental and household belongings and a *plano* or floor plan of the church and

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<sup>44</sup> Fray Cayetano José Bernal, *Certificaciones de las misiones de Nuevo Mexico*, Belén, September 1, 1794, Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico, Legajo 10, Num.70, photocopy, CSWR, MSS 867, Vol. 127D; transcription, CSWR, MSS 22.

<sup>45</sup> Fray Cayetano José Ignacio Bernal to Francisco Paula Soto, Secretario de Gobierno, 16 May 1795, "Expediente sobre licencia de decir misa en la capilla de la Mision de Belén feligresia de Albuquerque en el Nuevo Mexico, solicitandose haga parroquia", AHAD, roll 195, frame 0484.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Also in 1797 Fray Hosio reported 124 Indians and 1283 Spanish. See *The Belen, New Mexico Story*, F. Stanley Pantex, TX, 1962.

convent, annotated in Bernal's hand writing. (**Appendix 4**) The *plano* included a convent with rooms for the resident cleric, church workers, office, kitchen, storage, and visitor's quarters. Perhaps the *plano* was used to push Bernal's agenda of creating additional church funding. Bernal noted in his report that there were expectations of completing the roof in 1797. Regardless of whether the construction was on schedule services were held in the church as early as 1793 as recorded in the sacramental records and in the 1796 church inventory. In the church registry a note that on March 1, 1793 Bernal presented to the teniente, José Francisco Pino the new church registry for the future recording of baptisms, marriages and burials.

Fray Cayetano Bernal's pioneering efforts to establish and build Belén's first parish, and church and convent to improve the living conditions of the community under his care merit a prominent place in Belén's history and mention in Belén's civic and ecclesiastical celebrations. Fray Bernal saw the change of the century into the 1800s but he did not live to see the change from the monarchy of Spain to the birth of a New "Mexican" nation. Bernal could have taken up residence at Belén as early as 1793 especially if the convento was constructed at the same time as the church. During the beginning of the 1800s Belén continued to expand including up to 15 settlements in 1800 and the establishment of the furthest New Mexico southern settlement of Nuestra Señora de Los Dolores de la Joya de Sevilleta.<sup>47</sup> Bernal issued a report in 1801 in which he gave the population for 1799 as 1283 Spaniards and Castas and 124 Genízaros with a total of 1407 residents. For 1801 he gave the population of 1,794 persons which included 105 Genízaros and the rest of the residents Bernal described as having a nature that "cannot be defined, because they all want to call themselves Spaniards, even though there are people of every cast." Therefore, in one year there was an increase of 387 persons with the Genízaro population decreasing by 19 persons.

Bernal's 1801 report continued with a discussion of the economic culture of Belén stating that because of poor access to tools and other required tasks that were necessary for their defense and sustenance they were only able to cultivate enough wheat, maize, pinto beans, chile, barley, garbanzo, anise, cumin, and cotton to support themselves for the year only. They also grew hemp to make ropes. Cotton was grown in small lots and was woven on a loom to make clothing and for trade. Sheep and goats were the principal stock raised and were plenty, especially at time of peace with the Apache. His report also noted that a small group of Genízaro residents and an even smaller group of Spanish folk worked on the church construction.

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<sup>47</sup> "New Mexico in 1801, Rick Hendricks, p.124

Even while the expansion was taking place and the economy and population was at an increase, the progress of the church's completion was slower. Some of the construction was not entirely complete by 1801 when Bernal proudly and proactively wrote "The church of this Mission is quite beautiful in terms of this country (New Mexico). It lacks on the main altar screen of the Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which at present is being executed. It is more than two *varas* tall and of corresponding width, is beautiful and inspires devotion. As for the rest, the church has what is necessary for administration, and on the building it lacks only the two crosses for the towers, which are three-tiered, and the merlons they are going to put to surmount the whole church."<sup>48</sup> Whether the minor details of the church were completed or not, by 1802 Bernal was well established at his beautiful church when it was noted that Bernal even though he had requested transfer was better off staying in Belén because of his old age and because he had established Belén as a "peaceful place constructing the church and his house along with a beautiful garden for his own leisure."<sup>49</sup>

### **The Mission Pueblo, Identity and Growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

In 1802 a list was drawn that annotates the Belén's membership and their donations to the *Cofradía de las Benditas Almas del Purgatorio* or confraternity of the Poor or Blessed Souls of Purgatory. Donations by each member is noted in the list which were primarily sheep, *sarapes*, goats, stockings, and *reales* (Spanish currency). Fray Bernal donated the substantial amount of ten lambs while most other residents contributed two to three lambs.<sup>50</sup> Participation in religious confraternities in practice involved prayers, devotions and masses for the departed but it also insured its life time members of modest means to a respectable burial and funeral and assistance to bereaved family members - a sort of survivor's benefits.<sup>51</sup> Fray Bernal was the first person enumerated in the confraternity roster. He was listed at the "Mision de Nuestra Señora de Belén, Plaza de Los Bacas" which means it was the first and principal plaza. It was followed by Plaza de Francisco Chavez (probably plaza #1 in 1790 census), Plaza de Los Genízaros de Belén, Plaza de Los Trujillos, Plaza de Los Garcías, Plaza de Los Jarales and Plaza de Sausal.<sup>52</sup>

With the exception of father Bernal, almost all of the confraternity members listed in Los Bacas are also annotated in the 1790 census of Belén as residents of plaza number two. Los Bacas, listed

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 128

<sup>49</sup> Loose Documents, AASF 1802, No.10.

<sup>50</sup> Cofradía de las Benditas Almas del Purgatorio, 1802, Loose documents, AASF, UNM, microfilm, roll 53, fr.395.

<sup>51</sup> *Death and Dying in New Mexico*, Martina Will de Chaparro, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 93.

<sup>52</sup> Cofradía de las Benditas Almas del Purgatorio, 1802.

first with the priest as the first resident indicates the location of the church and convent - for the priest would have resided at the convent. This along with the connection to the residents to plaza #2 indicate that the Plaza “Los Bacas” was an early 1800s name for the main plaza and mission pueblo of Belén. Additional evidence of this is found in a note in the oxcart/bridge rebellion documents which mentions a Juan Manchego (Genízaro) living in La Plaza de Juan Baca. Both Juan Baca and Juan Manchego were also listed at the plaza #2 of the 1790 census therefore the Plaza de Juan Baca was most likely the same as Plaza de Los Bacas. There is sufficient evidence to surmise that the Pueblo of Belén had as its nucleus the church, convent and plaza and that surrounding this center to the north and east were the first two plazas (Chaves and Baca plazas or sections) and on the southern side was Plaza de Los Genízaros. It could also be that the Plaza de los Genízaros was considered the actual mission section and was close in proximity to the central plaza. There are also references of Plaza de los Genízaros persons noted as residents of the Pueblo (“del Pueblo”).<sup>53</sup> The Genízaro plaza could have also been located at the entrance of the Belén Pueblo as was described in the formation of settlement of the Sabinal village.

Further complicating the confusion of the plazas relationship to the main Pueblo plaza and locality of the church is another location/ethnic Indian identity that was later given to these same residents. Between 1810-1842 many of the old Belén Genízaro families are noted as being residents of Los Janchis or Janchi Indian. This identity appears to be connected to the Comanche culture and history.<sup>54</sup> Neither the Genízaro and Janchi Indian identities nor the Plaza de Los Genízaros and the pueblo and mission associations remain in the current historical memory of Belén’s “Hispanic” natives. Nevertheless, the Plaza Vieja and original church site is still recognized by those descendants that remain in the area.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the descendants of original Plaza Vieja residents are members of the O’Neal/García clan whose ancestry links back to Alonzo Rael and wife Barbara Lovera who were listed second next to Father Bernal in the 1802 confraternity census. This Rael family were not noted in the 1790 Belén census and must have been on the move between Laguna, Isleta district and Belén. Although when they baptized their child María de la Soledad Rosalía in the Belén church in 1795 they were noted as previous residents of Los Lentes just a few miles south of Isleta Pueblo. Alonzo Rael and

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<sup>53</sup> One of these families was that of Manuel Galindo and María Isabel Chaves who also were incidentally the last family listed as from the plaza of Los Genízaros in 1819. Isletans at the same time were also referred to as “Indios del Pueblo” or simple “del Pueblo.”

<sup>54</sup> For more on the Janchi identity and locality see Sisneros, “The Eighteenth-Century Genízaro Mission of Belén:”

<sup>55</sup> Horvath purports to have located the Plaza de Los Genízaros at the railroad round-about near the Harvey House Museum but a closer look at his source reveals that the informant only mentions playing as a child at the ruins of an old building in that area. It could have been the ruins of the Plaza de Los Trujillos.



Barbara Lovera may have come with Father Bernal from the Isleta area. Alonzo who had earlier roots in Belén was the son of Pedro Marcial Rael and Isabel Sedillo, both originally from Belén but later resided in Isleta.<sup>56</sup> Barbara Lovera was a Spanish resident of Laguna and daughter of Don Francisco Lovera, alcalde of the Laguna district. The Rael family ended up living in close proximity to Father Bernal and thus to the church which demonstrates a solid link and continuity of place and family descendency from the early 1800s to the present O'Neal/García, Rael, and Torres families still living in the Plaza Vieja and will be discussed in the conclusion of this work.

Aside from the growth of these early families in the central plaza during the early 1800s there was further southern expansion or migration from Belén. Sevilleta (also called La Joya de Sevilleta) or Alamillo was populated as early as 1800 initially under the spiritual guidance of Fr. Bernal. By 1810 Fr. José Pedro Rubí was still trying to provide a chapel for Sevilleta faithful now called Plaza de Sevilleta.<sup>57</sup> Sevilleta was near or at one of the old Piro villages abandoned much earlier. From this location the migrations from Belén communities went further south to Socorro, also a site of an older abandoned Piro village. Migrations to Socorro started around 1810 and in 1815 Belén's Xavier García (leader of oxcart rebellion), Anselmo Tafoya, Manuel Trujillo, Miguel Antonio Chavez, Pedro Baustista Pino, and José Montoya with 70 additional families petitioned for a land grant at Socorro. Spain granted it in 1817.<sup>58</sup> Records indicate that many of the Socorro residents were also from La Joya de Sevilleta and Sabinal thus testifying to a continuous north to south migration. Another expansion south was the little known 1849 emigration of over 4000 people primarily from Belén, Tomé and Socorro to northern Chihuahua at the time of the US occupation of New Mexico.<sup>59</sup>

## **Death of Fray Bernal and Birth of the Mexican Nation**

Father Bernal was the catalyst for Belén's growth from 1700s into the 1800s and the building of the church and the community along with expansion into other areas. At the time of

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<sup>56</sup> New Mexico Marriages: Churches of Immaculate Conception of Tomé and Our Lady of Belén, Raymond, Salas, New Mexico Genealogical Society, 1994, p.4. The San José de Laguna marriage record of February 4, 1784 notes the following: Alonzo Rael, widower, son of Marcial Rael and Isabel Cedillo, españoles, both deceased, originally from Belén and later resided in San Agustín de Isleta with María Barbara Lovera, española, resident of Laguna, daughter of Don Francisco Lovera and Doña María Gutierrez, originally from Belén. Godparents were Toribio García, mayor of the Pueblo of Acoma and his wife. Witnesses were Rafael Baca & Feliz Pino. In 1764, Lazaro Bartolo Rael (perhaps a brother of Alonzo) age 19 married Juana Paula Vallejos. (DM- April 25, 1764, no. 5, Tome)

<sup>57</sup> AHAD 220, 0298.

<sup>58</sup> *New Mexico Censuses of 1833 and 1845: Socorro and Surrounding Communities of the Rio Abajo*, New Mexico Genealogical Society, Albuquerque, 1994.

<sup>59</sup> "Los Emigrantes Nuevomexicanos: The 1849 Repatriation to Guadalupe and San Ignacio, Chihuahua, Mexico." Samuel E. Sisneros, Master Thesis, University of Texas at El Paso, 2001.

his death on April 26, 1807, Fray Bernal left Belén and the church in good condition and most likely was buried there although burial registries for that year are missing. Bernal's must have been content with his accomplishments during the previous decades.<sup>60</sup> A year after his departing, fellow Franciscan, brother Fray José Benito Pereyro, who in 1808, reported on New Mexico's missions and village churches wrote of Belén's mission church and convento:

Note #22: Mission of Nuestra Señora de Belén. The church was built new in the year 1793 through the efforts of the Rev. Father ex-Custos fray Cayetano Bernal and the local residents. It is well provided with vestments, albs, and the rest of the appurtenances, all new. It has a monstrance of silver gilt about half a vara tall which don José Pino lieutenant of this district gave. Owing to the generosity of this gentleman several sets of vestments were provided for this church even before the need was felt. The local residents of said mission also contributed. As a result, it is today the best provided with everything necessary. The convento is most decent, and is the best in the custody.<sup>61</sup>

Pereyro credited his colleague, the late Fray Cayetano Bernal's work in administrating the building of the Belén church and José Pino along with the contributions of community members to provide for a well-supported church and convent. Pereyro also gave information that the missions were each endowed with 300 pesos or more provided by the Royal Treasury and the three villas: Santa Fe, La Cañada (Santa Cruz) and Albuquerque were supported by local confraternities and obventions.<sup>62</sup>

While New Mexico clerics were reporting on their parish's conditions and expansions seeking funding from the bishop and the king, Spain was weakened by the invasion of France (1808-1813), which ignited Mexico's independence (1810-1821). Ironically the province of New Mexico, although at the cusp of the end of Spain's control, was finally advancing in the eyes of the Spanish crown who finally granted New Mexico the opportunity to send Don Pedro Bautista Pino as a representative to the Spanish royal courts. In 1811 Pino presented a detailed report of New Mexico's frontier communities including a notation of Belén and Abiquiú as Indian Pueblos. Although because of independence from Spain many of Pino's reforms never took place.<sup>63</sup> During the independence period the Spanish caste system also began to collapse and Belén's Genízaro identity and its unique Genízaro place name started to become out of use by local officials. The new Republic of Mexico was founded under the auspice that there would no longer be class and race stratifications. The Mexican administration brought in other changes to New Mexico and in

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<sup>60</sup> He died while having lunch or dinner with other clerics in Albuquerque. Loose docs., AASF.

<sup>61</sup> *Missions of New Mexico Since 1776*, John L. Kessell, p.245

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> H. Bailey Carroll and Juan Villasana Haggard, *Three New Mexico Chronicles: the Exposición of Don Pedro Bautista Pino, 1812; the Ojeada of Lic. Antonio Barreiro, 1832; and the additions by Don José Agustín de Escudero, 1849*, (Albuquerque, Quivira Society, 1942), 27.

Belén included, for a short duration, a schism in the parish community by two opposing priests stationed there.<sup>64</sup> Besides this and the normal continued growth of the communities it wasn't until the period of New Mexico history known as the US territorial period that Belén saw the final loss of its regional Genízaro/Janchi/Indian identity. It also went through a drastic change to its demographics and cultural landscape due to national restructuring and a specific environmental tragedy.

## **The US Territorial Period and the Collapse of the Colonial Church**

As a result of the 1846-1848 Texas and U.S. invasion and subsequent occupation of the northern Mexican states, New Mexico became part of the US. Even though Indian servitude was supposedly abolished during the Mexican administration it was still practiced and continued with more vigor with the US system. In Belén as well as throughout New Mexico new captives mostly Navajos were dispersed to Hispanic and some Pueblo and Anglo households. These later captives were never labeled, grouped, or united under the Genízaro category thus blending much quicker into the dominant Mexican culture.<sup>65</sup>

Besides these new additions of Indian captives there was no more mention of Belén's Indian legacy until 1867 when John Ward, Special Agent for Pueblos, wrote to New Mexico Superintendent of Indian Affairs stating that Belén and Abiquiú "have gone out of existence as Indian communities, although their race can be easily traced among the Mexicans residing at and in the vicinity of those places." He explained that enumeration for the Pueblos or "Village Indians" of Abiquiú, Pecos and Belén has not been done since 1809. Citing from colonial records, Ward gave the Belén Indian Pueblo population for 1790 as no data, 1808 as 135 and for 1809 as 133. Abiquiú respectively in 1790 was 216, for 1808 it was 122, and for 1809 it was 126. Pecos eventually disbanded and joined Jémez Pueblo. Ward brought up these demographics to offer evidence of the supposed disappearance of New Mexico Indian tribes and the general Pueblo depopulation to support the view, or expectation at the time, that Indians would become extinct.<sup>66</sup> Needless to say the extinction never took place and the decline or disappearance of segments of

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<sup>64</sup> *But Time and Chance: The Story of Padre Martinez of Taos, 1793-1867*, Fray Angelico Chavez, Sunstone Press; 1981.

<sup>65</sup> For an excellent examination into 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian captivity see: David M. Brugge, *Navajos in the Catholic Church Records of New Mexico, 1694-1875*, 3rd Edition (School for Advanced Research Press, Santa Fe, 2010).

<sup>66</sup> John Ward, Special Agent for Pueblos, Santa Fe, July 10, 1867, *Report of the Secretary of Interior, #55 & #56*, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Secretary of the Interior, 210- 213.

New Mexican Native Americans such as in Belén can be attributed to identity transformation, acculturation, intermarriage, and migration all of which are part of the process of *mestizaje*.<sup>67</sup>

Belén continued to advance as a Mestizo Mexican community and its plaza and church continued in use as a spiritual and public space until 1855 when a flood destroyed the wall structures of the church. There was much strife and a split in the community between those who wanted it re-built in the same area and those that wanted it built on higher ground. The new American Bishop Lamy built the new church at the separate location. Apparently with the flood and subsequent relocation of the church, the southern part of the plaza was abandoned and didn't repopulate until after 1905. According the crudely hand drawn 1905 map noted that the area south of the church was unpopulated. The map does not note most street names although it has the main streets drawn in at the same configuration as found in a modern map. But most importantly it includes locations of the households by names of male heads of family. At the point where two roads that later became Wisconsin Rd. and E. Ross Ave. meet, the 1905 map indicates a north to south elongated rectangle labeled "Old Town Church Ruins." Directly south-east of the ruins is the notation of the house of Lazaro Rael. Another house noted to the east is that of Dionicio Torres. To the north of the church ruins and Lazaro's house in closest proximity are those of Donaciano Torres, F. Chavez y Aragon, Isidro Gallegos, Isac Rael, Paulin Jaramillo, Valentin Jaramillo, José María Jaramillo, Juan Aragon, Pablo Gabaldon, Pedro Gabaldon and Feliciano Trujillo. The 1905 map of Belén connects the García/O'Neal and extended Rael families to the historic property. (See **Appendix 1**)

The Plaza Vieja or rather the original Belén mission plaza was a social center with its church consecrated as a spiritual place since the late 1700s and would have been referred to as simply La Plaza (not being old then). The Plaza Vieja name came into use particularly, at least in the church registries, during 1875-1895.<sup>68</sup> The parishioners noted with Plaza Vieja residency were exclusively Rael and Torres families or those closely connected to these two families. Some of the original families still remain in the area and are grandchildren and great-grandchildren of persons that appear on the 1905 map. The 1900 and 1910 censuses demonstrate that indeed these same households were enumerated in close proximity. Each U.S. federal census for Belén going back to

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<sup>67</sup>The *mestizaje* was the process of racial mixing between a Spanish and an Indian person creating a Mestizo. This was prevalent in the colonial period in the Americas.

<sup>68</sup> The first mention of the Plaza Vieja location is found in a church listing of male residents by village/barrio and fees paid or owed by them to the church for the years 1875-1880. Sections listed: Gabaldones, Chavez, Ladera, Sausal, Lecos, Chamisal, Chorro, Plaza Vieja, Belén, Los Trujillos, Jarales, Bosquesito, Pueblitos and Bosque. See AASF Loose Documents, Roll 4, frame 291-303.

1850 continuously shows the same families living near each other. Although the section of households is not noted as the Plaza Vieja area there is a pattern established that these same families were grounded in place as neighbors for six decades or more to the time when the church was still standing before the flood of 1855. In addition, these same families and the community space can be linked generationally back to late 1700's Belén residents.<sup>69</sup>

### **Memory of a Church and a People - Buried Remains**

As mentioned in the introduction nothing remains of the Church structure on the surface of the Belén Plaza Vieja site. What remains would be underground including the stone foundations of the church, perhaps some artifacts (any church vessels or valuable articles would have been immediately taken out) and the bones of the many deceased parishioners who were buried in this sacred ground. Father Bernal's 1795 report and floorplan contributes valuable information about the construction of the church and the material culture associated with it. (**Appendix 4b**) The floorplan delineates a cemetery located at the south side of the front entrance. The burial registry for the Belén church demonstrates that Father Bernal may not have buried the dead in the Belén church cemetery or in the church until the cemetery was blessed in 1800. Prior to this the Belén residents were buried in either the Tomé or Isleta churches.

It appears that the first burial was that of the ten-month son of José Torres and Manuela Luna, Spanish/Mestizo residents of Plaza de los Bacas. This and the subsequent five entries noted the bodies were buried in the new cemetery all of which were identified as Genízaros or Indian servants. Subsequent burials were noted as taking place simply at the church without distinction of whether the burial took place in the cemetery or in the ground inside the church. According to the burial registry approximately 3000 defunct were buried at the Plaza Vieja cemetery or in the

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<sup>69</sup> The following are extrapolations from Belén church sacramental books of entries with Plaza Vieja place of origin listed: 1886: p.225, Nicolas Torres d/ Dionicio y Genoveva Jaramillo; p.224, María Manuela Torres d/ Donanciano Torres y María Isabel Jaramillo; p.222, María de la Luz Tafolla, d/ José Tafolla y Maria Torres; 1887: p.234, María Luciana Galbaldon d/ Pablo y Victoriana Torres; p.230, Felipe Chavez, s/ Incarnacion y Beatriz Gabaldon, 1888: p.246, Fafaelita Rel d/ Luis Rel y Carlota Tafolla; p.241, José Rafael Jaramillo s/ Eulogio y Desideria Moya; p. 238, Días Torres s/ Dionicio Torres y Genoveba Jaramillo, 1889: p.257, Eufelia Rel, d/Yssac Rel y Carlota Vaca; p.252, María Gertrudes Torres, d/Donanciano Torres y Isabel Jaramillo; p.151, Josefa Jaramillo, d/Paulin Jaramillo y Sivestra Rel; p.248, Manuel Padilla, d /Antonio José Padilla y Josefa Rel, 1890: p. 273, Manuela Baca, d/Teofilo Baca y Teresa Torrez, 1890: p.272, María Rel, d/Luis Rel y Carlota Rel; p.269, Dimas Gabaldon, s/ Pablo Gabaldon y Visitacion Torres; p.267, José Rafael Rel, s/Lazaro Rel y Josefa Tafolla; p. 264, José Salomon Torres, s/Dionicio Torres y Genoveba Jaramillo; 1891: p.282 - Felipe Rel, s/Ysac Rel y Carlota Baca; p.275, María Torres, d/Donaciano Torrez y Isabel Jaramillo, 1892: p.293, Eulogia Rel, d/Lazaro Rel y Josefa Tafolla, 1893: p.302, Tomasa Rel, d/Luis Rel y Carlota Tafolla. The last place name notation of the Plaza Vieja was with the marriage of David Trujillo and Maria Rael in 1895. The last notation in Belén baptismal registry of place of residence of Plaza Vieja was Sept 21, 1893 for the baptism of Lorenzo Chavez, s/Incarnacion Chavez y Beatrix Gabaldon.

church starting in January 20, 1800 with the blessing of the Plaza Vieja cemetery to August 21, 1881 with the blessing of the new cemetery at the new church constructed in 1860.<sup>70</sup> Some of these burials were uncovered throughout the years at the Plaza Vieja site and at neighboring properties. Many bones were upturned either by additional floods or by way of discovery as a result of construction or landscaping. These bones were either returned to the ground at site or re-buried at the new Catholic Church cemetery.<sup>71</sup> Although in 1959 many complete skeletons were uncovered at adjacent properties and taken to UNM.<sup>72</sup> At that time neighbors mentioned that the cemetery still received burials up until 1899 extending the use of the cemetery. This suggests continued interments at the old cemetery. It also testifies to the “deep” connection local residents had to this sacred space and to their continued memory and sense of place.

### **Las Madrinas - “Duration of Sacredness” and Intersections with the Author**

Besides the buried remains the site also maintains a sense of continuity of place through spirituality and family lineages. This “duration of sacredness” can be framed by a matriarchal and matrilineal legacy. Since the onset of this project there have been certain Belén descendant community women (living and historical) who have serendipitously come into this projects’ research lens unveiling a generational collective female voice that resonates from the sacred grounds of Belén’s first church and old town plaza. These matriarchs along with Our Lady (Nuestra Señora), the Patroness of Belén, the metaphorical Mother Mission Church, “La” Plaza Vieja (feminine grammatical attributes) and the folk legend figure of La Indita (discussed later) are all manifestations of *Las Madrinas*. A *Madrina* is an authoritative female leader, caretaker and disseminator of knowledge and of the sacred - likened to the concept of keeper of the keys. They perform the social role of advocate, caretaker, guide, godmother, grandmother and sponsor for the cultural and spiritual landscape.

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<sup>70</sup> “Burial Records from Nuestra Señora de Belén, Belén, New Mexico 1793-1900.” Oswald Gilbert Baca, New Mexico Genealogical Society.

<sup>71</sup>It was reported that when Becker used the church adobe walls for fill dirt many bones were discovered in the wall area of the bell towers.

<sup>72</sup> The Albuquerque Tribune, March 7, 1959. Even though several sources demonstrate that UNM was involved I contacted the Maxwell Museum and they cannot find any records of the excavations.



Cynthia Gómez at Belén Plaza Vieja, 2012.

The first *madrina* to intersect my interest in Belén history was film documentarian Cynthia Gómez, a native Nuevomexicana with Belén family roots. Cynthia was doing preliminary work for her film “Without a Tribe” which is a region wide documentary on the Genízaro legacy.<sup>73</sup> Determined to find the original site of the Genízaro village of Belén we rode into town in 2012. We first went into the Harvey House Museum to see what might be exhibited on early Belén history. While scanning the exhibits looking for any display of colonial history, I overheard Patsy, unknown to me then, talking to her granddaughter (transference of knowledge) about her Belén family history. After striking a conversation with her she proceeded to show us a large 1905 map of Belén exhibited on one of the museum walls and pointed out to me the drawing of the old Church ruins on the map. She told us she lived next to the site of the ruins at the Plaza Vieja and directed us how to get there. Patsy is the daughter of Willie Flores and Josephine O’Neal. Josephine was the daughter of Manuel García O’Neal and Antonia Rael, earlier residents of the Plaza Vieja/Church site discussed later on. Pasty would in time become pivotal in my understanding of the spiritual landscape of the Plaza Vieja site and of the family foremothers.

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<sup>73</sup> See “Without a Tribe” trailer, Cynthia Gomez, 2011: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3eSl6Tt8b8>





Author Samuel Sisneros with Patsy Tórrez and Alberta O’Neal, Belén, New Mexico, 2015.

Patsy put me in contact with her cousin Alberta O’Neal, the owner of the Plaza Vieja site property which resulted in a unique property owner/community/researcher relationship. Together we formed a group commitment to recover the historical memory of the Plaza Vieja site. Alberta is the daughter of Fidel García O’Neal and Valentina Sánchez O’Neal (discussed in introduction). Alberta grew up at Belén and as the caretaker of the Plaza Vieja site property she is very much in touch with her family’s memory of the place. Below is a poem written by Alberta a few years before our meeting that best represents her intellectual, emotional and spiritual outlook and intimate understanding of the site’s “Duration of Sacredness” (line from poem).

## Plaza Vieja – Tierra Sagrada

*I am Witness to Your Crucifixion  
The Bell has been taken from Plaza Vieja  
Having gone the way of the Stone Mandela  
Buried in Legend and Mystery  
Though Ancient Faith and its Sacredness remains  
As silent Sentinels  
That sharpens the Wit  
Of the tenaciously faithful  
Those Forged souls  
They are forever our Ancestors  
As sure as they have wandered  
As surely as they have settled  
And fought to remain and belong  
They have cut this Earth  
For Sustenance  
Not able to sidestep  
The Graves of their comrades  
Requited remains therein are to be  
Acknowledged, Felt, and Treasured  
As Hallowed Ground  
Thus memorialized in Grace,  
And thru Rebirth is given tangible Evidence  
Of a Higher Form  
Possessing immunity from Corporeal Decay  
Thus revealing Heavenly Glow  
In the face of The Madonna and Child  
Welcoming all to Plaza Vieja  
Saints, Sinners, and Poor souls of Purgatory  
Spirits torn with Despair and  
Self- flagellation of the soul  
Those Entities Spiritually plagued with Drought,  
and  
Mixed with “Coyote” blood  
But None the less  
Possessing fervent and Intimate Knowledge  
Of La Cultura, Vida y Historias de Sangre  
Lineage whether found through Novelty, Shame or  
Destiny  
By Faith is destined to wander these Earthly  
grounds  
As though in Limbo  
The spoken word becomes lost  
The Written Word is fragmented  
Activating Sacred Prayer  
Thru Parched Lips  
Of those so Humble*

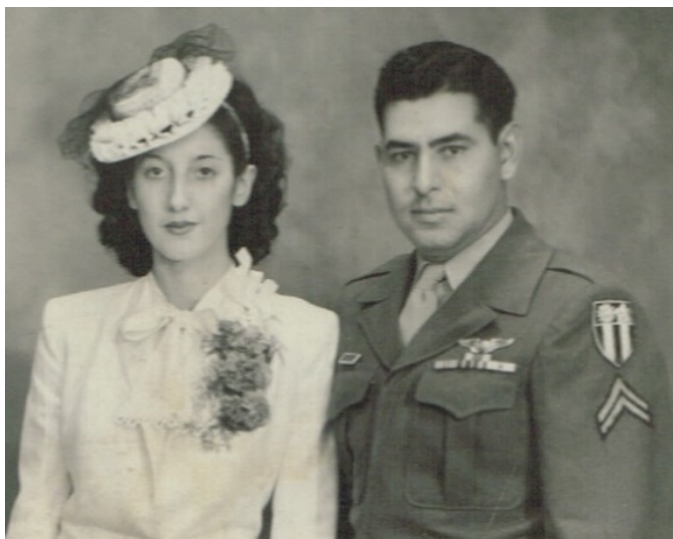
*Who have lived thru this arduous Plight  
Faith lingers in hope of Heavenly reward  
Memories of Prayers hidden or lost  
But, Surely Heaven has heard!  
And Faith returns as Comfort to all Spiritual  
Refugees  
Thus, now we take our refuge  
In Saintly Places  
Where all is Holy  
And as Sacred as a Light in the window  
Or an angel guarding the Night  
Sacred Life is Manifest in this Place  
Named Plaza Vieja de Belén  
Tierra Vieja  
Alma Vieja  
Palabra Vieja  
In this place The Difficulty of sacredness  
The Duality of Sacredness  
The Division of Sacredness  
The Duration of Sacredness  
Longingly Cries out from this Place  
Christened La Plaza Vieja de Belén  
It Beseeches to the world  
Now Bereft of Sanctity  
"Never reject me"  
"Do Not entomb me"  
"Do Not Abandon Me"  
Sacredness reaches out for Rebirth  
For Pure Hearts in recognition of  
This Ancient Land  
That is Plaza Vieja  
Alberta O'Neal, 2009*

During a subsequent visit to the Plaza Vieja site on Holy Week of 2016, Alberta O'Neal walked out of the property house with a thin purple veil and placed it around the center of a large wooden cross which had on its horizontal beam the words "Justo Juez" fashioned out of wire (now rusty). Alberta didn't know the meaning of this cross and I had always been intrigued with this large religious icon with its "Justo Juez" (Just Judge) insignia, which, upon passing I would wonder about its history and significance to this property.



Justo Juez cross as it appears in 2016 in front of the gazebo. The wooden relief carving depicting Christ with thorn crown has been replaced with a star motif metal plate.

Alberta commented that placing the veil over the cross is the least she could do to honor holy week and her mother. Sitting next to this cross mounted in front of the gazebo, Alberta began to tell about her mother Valentina Sánchez role in the spiritual activities at the family home and property. Valentina was not only connected to Belén and the Plaza Vieja history through her marriage into the García/O'Neal family but she was also a descendant of old Belén families. **(See ancestry charts Appendix 5)**



Valentina and Fidel O'Neal García, undated.



Lola Lovato and Oster Sanchez - Valentina's parents





Francisco Lovato and Valentina Gallegos – Maternal Grandparents of Valentina.  
(Photos courtesy of Alberta O’Neal)

Alberta said that her mother Valentina built elaborate altars and niches and hosted private and public prayers inside the museum/house and at the outside property. Alberta then brought out a set of pictures she had just found in an old suitcase. The photos were of a particular elaborate outdoor installation which was located at the back western side of the property. At the center was the same Justo Juez cross that Alberta had placed the veil upon but in the photo it was located at another place in the yard. Alberta was not able to explain the meaning of the outdoor installation but she guesses that her mother must have put it up for Easter sometime after 1985.

Upon closer analysis of the photos it became apparent that it was an unusual and unique altar type piece. For one it was on the ground and very earthy with rock terraces as opposed to being set on an indoor table. Secondly it does not look like a decorative concoction made up for the visitor, personal admiration or general landscaping, but rather it looks to be a functional and devotional installation. Placed upon the back line of the property fence, it had plenty of space in front of it along with chairs on both sides indicating it was intended for public observance or group prayer perhaps with Valentina leading the prayer or sitting on one of the side chairs as the *mayordoma* (steward/organizer).



Photos found by Alberta of her mother's installation. The flag and a chariot appear to be outside of the installation space and could be part of the general yard decoration.



The objects in Valentina's installation match almost exactly the iconographic elements depicted in modern Justo Juez prayer cards and devotional candles. To the right of the cross is the rooster (associated with Saint Peter's denial of Jesus and below the rooster is a representation of Veronica's veil (cloth used to wipe face of Jesus as he carried the cross). To the left is a ladder

with extended rope tied around the cross (ladder used to bound Christ). Leaning against the ladder are the instruments of Christ's crucifixion (the scourge, pitcher of vinegar and gall, lance, swords etc.) The wooden cross is held up by mounted rocks and at the base of the cross is a "Justo Juez" devotional glass candle. On the ground in front of the cross are objects such as a scull in the form of a printed drawing (represents Golgotha or place of Christ's execution), an apple (Adam's sin), a lantern (used by the arresting soldiers) and unidentified items in wooden basket (could be the bag of coins and dice). Another essential element in the Justo Juez iconography is the sun (darkened or eclipsed at Christ's death) and it is possible Valentina's altar was placed at the west end of the property so that the sun would appear at sunset over the rooster. If its location accounts for the inclusion of the actual sun, than this would be a unique cosmological interactive devotional.

Valentina's elaborate assemblage could have been part of a Catholic folk devotion to Justo Juez if she knew of such a devotion. But she certainly had the image of the candle to model. In traditional Catholicism the Justo Juez prayer is used for protection from adversaries and prayer for justice. Aside from the use of prayer cards and candles my research has not yet seen evidence of a traditional outdoor expressions of the Justo Juez iconography in New Mexico or in Latin America.



Traditional Catholic devotional card - illustration and Spanish language prayer.

Valentina's outdoor piece could also simply be an attempt to use the same Justo Juez iconography for a one-time Holy Week and Easter remembrance and reverence. Another photo indicates that Valentina may have gone beyond the passion motif and extended it as an Easter



Resurrection celebration with the Justo Juez cross completely decorated with white flowers and outdoor electric lighting added to illuminate the cross. Knowingly or unknowingly, Valentina could have been expressing an earlier New Mexico form of pictorial aid to religious education and devotion as found in colonial hide paintings which implored instruments of the Passion of Christ known as "Arma Christi" in the Spanish and Latin American world during the 1700's.<sup>74</sup>



Hide painting at San Miguel Chapel, Santa Fe, NM. Image from *A Sense of Mission: Historic Churches of the Southwest*, David Wakely and Thomas A. Drain, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1994.

<sup>74</sup> See Kelly Thomas Donahue's thesis "An Odyssey of Images: The Flemish, Spanish and New Spanish Print Sources of New Mexico Colonial Hide Painting" Santa Cruz, 1990. Donahue labels them Crucifixion with Instruments of the Passion.

Examples of Arma Christi hide paintings are rare and only two examples exist. One at the San Miguel Chapel and the other at the Museum of International Folks Art both located in Santa Fe, New Mexico. These New Mexico hide painting are uniquely regional expressions used as an educational tool for colonial period Native American conversion. The items of Christ's passion depicted in these rare hide painting include the rooster on top of column, cherubs, holy vessels, Christ crucified and the instruments or passion of Christ's death.<sup>75</sup>

An even earlier expression with the use of the passion of Christ iconography is found in 16<sup>th</sup> century tradition of the *Cruz Atrial* which has origins in Spain but became uniquely Mexican in purpose and style. The outdoor public use of the *atrio* or atrium occurred in the new world especially in 16<sup>th</sup> century Mexico as an outgrowth of effective evangelization of indigenous groups. As the church filled with newly converted the congregation began to spill outside at the front of the church creating an atrium space. The atrio became the gathering place for large evangelization events and was also simultaneously used for burials of deceased new Christians. The central element and axis of these atriums and attached outdoor open chapels became the *cruz atrial* or atrial cross marking it as a gathering and teaching place.<sup>76</sup> They were placed outside at the forefront of the church at the center of the *atrio* or atrium.

The *cruz atrial* in the Americas involved the crafting by Indian artisans of large stone crosses which stylistically evolved to express uniquely indigenous design and symbolism with noticeable pre-conquest Aztec stone carving design. The atrial crosses consistently featured the insignia of the "INRI" at the upper section and Christ's head or a round crown or celestial disc at the crossbar. Along the lateral sides are various Indian floral and vegetal motifs surrounding the iconographic items of the passion of Christ's death including the ladder, rooster, column, dice, etc. as also seen in the Justo Juez prayer card, candle, Valentina's outdoor altar and in the colonial hide paintings.

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<sup>75</sup>Art historian Felipe Mirabal informed me that the few existing New Mexico hide paintings are examples of the Spanish world's depictions of the "Arma Christi."

<sup>76</sup>For discussion of *atrios* in New Mexico churches see *Religious Architecture of New Mexico*, George Kubler, Rio Grande Press, Inc. 1940. For a discussion on the Native Mexican Indian influence on the *cruz atrial* see *Framing the Sacred: The Indian Churches of Early Colonial Mexico*, Elenor Wake, University of Oklahoma Press:Norman, 2010.



Examples of atrial crosses in southern México. (Images pulled from internet sources)



New Mexico examples of how large crosses are used in the atrium as a centering element. Santuario de Chimayo and Truchas. (Images pulled from internet sources)

Indeed, Valentina's large Justo Juez cross, with the thorn-crowned Christ head wood carving or the later celestial metal plate both placed at the center of the cross, and its use as a focal point in the outdoor installation or in front of the gazebo is evocative of the colonial atrial cross tradition. Regardless of its origin or intentions or possible connections to earlier artistic and religious traditions and possible deeper connection to the mechanisms of colonial evangelization, the recovery of Valentina's unique Plaza Vieja Justo Juez installation and the continued use of the "atrial" cross as a central outdoor locator of this sacred space, contributes greatly to knowledge of the continued sacredness and religious use of the Plaza Vieja. Though Valentina may have brought her own religious understandings and family traditions to the García/Rael property she most likely continued the duration of sacredness from her mother-in-law, Antonia Rael who also demonstrated a unique spirituality and a strong sense of place.





Antonia “Mama Toña” Rael. Undated



Antonia with husband Manuel García and children. Undated  
(Photos Courtesy of Alberta O’Neal and Patsy Torrez)

Antonia Rael was the daughter of Lázaro Rael and Josefita Tafoya (house noted next to church ruins in 1905 map).<sup>77</sup> Lazaro Rael’s mother was Guadalupe Rael who was the daughter of Alonzo Rael and Bárbara Lovera. Alonzo and Bárbara were early Plaza Vieja residents listed as neighbors to Fray Bernal’s residency in the 1802 census (Los Bacas). The priest residency would have been the convent which therefore situates this family at the church grounds. Perhaps Antonia acquired her spirituality and sense of place from the generations of her family’s residency at this holy space.

Family members recall that Antonia held prayer novenas at the house with large community participation. She had a particular homage and devotion to San José, the patron saint of the Universal Church also known for his intercession of prayers for unborn children, fathers, workers, travelers, immigrants, a happy death and protection. It is unknown why she had this

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<sup>77</sup>Surprisingly Manuel and Antonia were not living in Lazaro’s household in 1910 but rather they and their two young daughters were living in the household of Antonia’s sister María and her husband David Trujillo. Both Manuel and David were listed as laborers at the railroad. In the 1900 census Household #410 is that of Lazaro Rael head, his wife Josefa, and children Albino, Patrocinio and Antonia who is listed as “Tonia” 15-year-old. She and Patrocinio are listed as servants. They must have been servants for one of the rico houses in the newer part of the city.

particular devotion but perhaps San José's protection was needed for another particular facet of Antonia's life. Even though the details have been lost, family members say that Antonia had a curse or spell put upon her. It is also recalled that Antonia lived in fear of something. Perhaps because of this curse Antonia could have turned to San José or to the Justo Juez for protection for herself and for the family and property. It is also possible that these devotions were handed down from Antonia's mother Josefita Tafoya.



Josefita Tafoya, Undated (Photo Courtesy of Alberta O'Neal)

Josefita Tafoya's spirituality or traditional practices are unknown in the family historical memory but she is responsible for transferring the Rael family land to her daughter Antonia Rael and son-in-law Manuel García O'Neal. It is believed that Josefita and her husband Lazaro owned 114 acres at the area. In the early 1900's they began parceling out land to the family and in 1902 they sold a property bordered by their house to their son Albino Rael.<sup>78</sup> By 1924 Josefita Tafoya

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<sup>78</sup> The two parcels were sold for the sum of 25 US dollars. 28 Nov. 1902 Warranty deed in property of Alberta O'Neal. January 30, 1912. This land transferred from Albino Rael and Preciliana Montañó to Virginia Rael. Virginia Rael was the daughter of Lazaro Rael and Josefita Tafoya and wife of Crecencio Baca. Registered Deeds are in private collection.

de Rael, than noted as a widow, transferred a large section of the family land, including the current property, to her daughter Antonia Rael and Antonia's husband Manuel García O'Neal.<sup>79</sup>

Manuel's maternal ancestry is also deeply rooted in Belén. His mother, Delfinia (Virginia) García, was one of the more interesting members of this Belén family not only because her family lineages go back to Belén's Native American settlers but also because her life was riddled with drama and mystique. Born "Delfinia de los Remedios" to José Isidoro García and María Petra Montaña, she was baptized as a baby on September 4, 1869. The 1880 census listed her as "Derfinia" but later her name was phonetically altered to Virginia.<sup>80</sup> Just three years after the census "Delfinia" who would have been considered adolescent by today's standards gave birth to her first child at age 14. The baptismal entry listed her baby, María Adela as a "hija natural" with father unknown (or at least not recorded). Two years later Delfinia had a second child outside of wedlock. His name was given as Manuel at the March 5, 1885 baptism when it was also noted that he was the illegitimate son of "Delfina" García with no mention of a father.<sup>81</sup>

The same year as Manuel's birth a census was taken which offers additional information about Delfinia's living arrangements as an unwed mother of two children. At this time she was listed as Virginia, a nineteen-year-old daughter in the household of her parents José Isidoro García and Petra Montaña. Following Virginia's enumeration is that of her sister Manuela, age 15, followed by a María, age 4. This María was most likely Virginia's child María Adela who would have been closer to two years old but the censuses are known for listing inexact ages. Interestingly, Delfinia's (Virginia) second child Manuel, who would have been four months old at the time of the census, is not listed. Perhaps the newborn Manuel was quietly asleep and escaped the census takers enumeration.

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<sup>79</sup> Documento Garantizado, Josefa Tafoya de Rael to Manuel A. García, April, 8, 1924, Filled Feb. 26, 1969, County of Valencia Clerks Office.

<sup>80</sup> "Delfinia" is expressed in the documents with various forms such as "Delfina", "Derfinia", "Virginia" and Delphine.

<sup>81</sup> Extraction in "Bautismos: Nuestra Señora de Belén Church, 1 January 1866 through 13 March 1895," Santa Fe, N.M.: Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1998. The extraction was checked with microfilm copy of original record and determined to be accurate. According to this baptismal record, Manuel García would have been born around Feb. 27-29, 1885. Another record that corroborates the baptismal record is the 1941-42 Kansas, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway service card of Manuel "O'Neal" where his date of birth is given as Feb. 25, 1885. See: *Kansas, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Prior Service Records, 1859-1935* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. Original: *Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company Records*. Topeka Kansas: Kansas State Historical Society.



Delfinia and Charles O'Neal, c. 1885,  
(Photo courtesy of Alberta O'Neal)



Delfinia in her later years perhaps during a return visit to Belén. (Photo from *Ancestry.com*)

Shortly after the 1885 census was taken, Delfinia (Virginia) García married Charles “Carlos” O’Neil on Jan. 20<sup>th</sup> 1886. The marriage registry listed her as the legitimate daughter of José Isidoro García and Petra Montaña.<sup>82</sup> Almost a year after their marriage in 1886, Virginia and her husband Charles gave birth to a legitimate son, Luis Carlos O’Neal.<sup>83</sup> Sometime prior to 1900, she left her children, Adela and Manuel, in the care of her parents. It appears Luis Carlos died close to birth. Delfinia (or Virginia) and her O’Neal husband were not listed in the Belén 1900 census. However, the census lists Manuel and Adela living in the household of their grandparents. Adela who was seventeen in the census married in the same year on Sept. 10<sup>th</sup> to Melciades García. In the marriage registry, Adela’s mother was noted as Virginia García and again with no mention of a father. Likewise, Manuel García’s April 8, 1907 marriage also didn’t mention a father. His

<sup>82</sup> AASF extractions, Our Lady of Belén Church, p. 78. The entry reads: “*On the 20<sup>th</sup> of January of 1886, in the Church of Belén, I married and veiled Carlos O’Neil legitimate son of Carlos O’Neil and of Susan Bechtal, deceased, from Waukan (Iowa) with Virginia García legitimate daughter of Isidoro García and of Petra Montaña, from Belén*”

<sup>83</sup> Extractions, p.342. The entry reads “O’Neil, Luis Carlos, of Belén, born on 1 Dec. 1886 and baptized on 19 Dec. 1886 son of Charles O’Neil y Virginia García. Godparents: Luis Boul y Manuela García.” Luis Carlos may have died as an infant since he doesn’t show up in further documents.



union with Antonia Rael simply noted that Manuel was the son of Delfinia García and was brought up (*criado por*) by Isidoro García (his grandfather).<sup>84</sup> Both Manuel and Adela remained in Belén as demonstrated by their respective marriages.

It is unknown if Delfinia returned to Belén to attend the marriages of her first two children but records indicate that she lived out her adulthood in Arizona and California. The family oral tradition is that Charles O'Neal and wife "Virginia" went to California on many trips where they eventually got a divorce.<sup>85</sup> Delfinia shows up in the 1900 census of Globe, Arizona where she was listed as Delphine O'Neil, birth date Oct. 1868, divorced head of household, birth place listed as New Mexico and with occupation of laundress. The census also noted she gave birth to eight children with five living all born in Arizona between 1888-1899. Listing three dead children indicates that she was referring to her Belén children, two of which were very much alive. Perhaps she was avoiding the stigma or guilt of leaving her first born children in Belén. By 1906, Delfinia married again on October 20 to Charles Quinn, a well-known Arizona miner.<sup>86</sup> The couple remained in Globe and had three daughters and one son of their own as indicated in the 1910 census. By 1916 the family is listed as still living in Globe.<sup>87</sup> Charles Quinn died Jan.1, 1919.<sup>88</sup> A year later in 1920, Delfinia is listed as a 52 year old widow living in Globe with her Quinn children. By 1930 Delfinia and part of the family were in Los Angeles, California. The 1930 census gave her race as "Mexican" and the rest of her family "White."

Delfinia Quinn remained in Los Angeles until her death on March 8, 1940. It is unknown what became of Charles O'Neil. The mystique that surrounded this attractive, young petite women, standing next to the older gun toting outsider in the historic photo is notable. But the circumstances surrounding her exile out of Belén, bearing twelve children, and marrying two Irish men will remain a mystery in the scope of this essay. On the other hand, the historical record can enlighten us with information about Delfinia's parents Isidro García and Petra Montañó and their ancestry which is equally as interesting as her life was.

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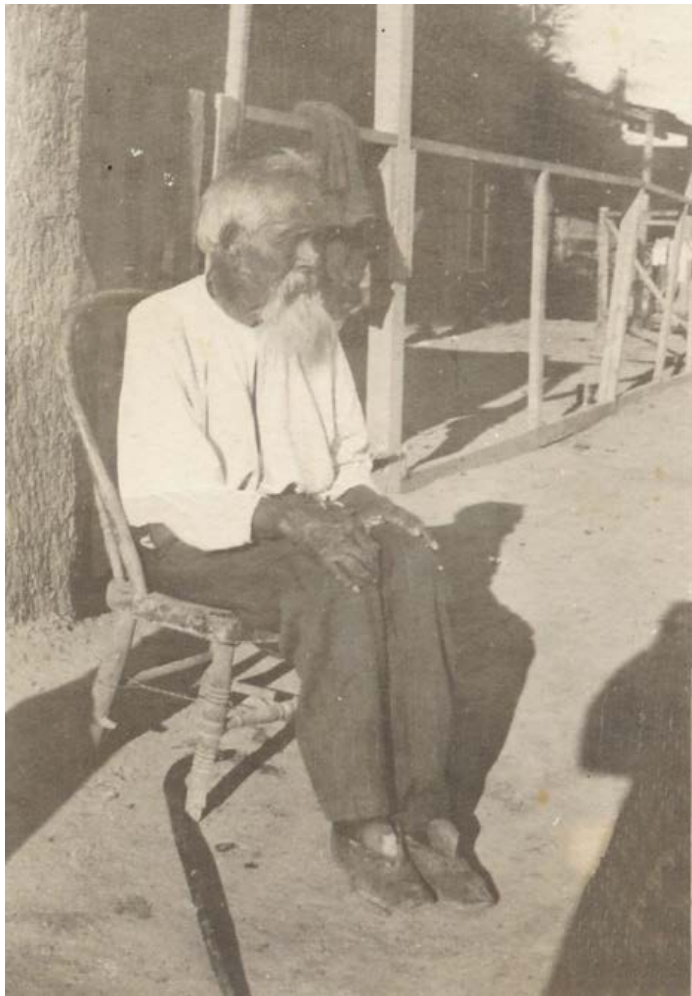
<sup>84</sup> AASF, POS reel 111A, p.214.

<sup>85</sup> Conversation with Alberta O'Neal.

<sup>86</sup> Ancestry.com

<sup>87</sup> *Globe city directory*.

<sup>88</sup> "The Bisbee Daily Review," Jan. 2, 1919, p.7



Isidoro García, undated (Photo courtesy of Alberta O'Neal)

As a child Isidoro (Isidro) García and his mother María Antonia García were both listed in the 1860 census as Indian servants living in the household of Rafael García. The house next to them was that of Father R.E. Paulett and his 4 servants. The other house next to the Garcías was that of a French carpenter (probably working on the new church). The other surrounding houses are of Garcías and the area they lived in was most likely Los Garcías, the new town area where the new Church was built. The Rafael García family and their servants could have provided labor for the construction of the new church. Isidoro's mother most likely was a territorial period captive of unknown Native American origins. Isidoro's wife, Petra Montaña however descends from early colonial period Belén Genízaros. **(Ancestry charts of the García/O'Neal and of the author of this study in Appendix 5)** It is possible that this family's Native American origins is the basis for the legend of La Indita or Aztec Princess of Belén who is the last matriarch discussed in this narrative.

The figure of La Indita which can be viewed as the Pueblo of Belén's indigenous metaphorical and mythical *abuela*, is demonstrated in a local folk story told primarily by the García/O'Neal/Torrez and Lovato families of the Plaza Vieja. The story is told that a mysterious Native American woman called "La Indita" or "Aztec Princess" came from the interior of Mexico to Belén where she lived in a room behind the church at the Plaza Vieja. It is said that she was "regal and noble in appearance" with piercing dark eyes and long hair, wore fine jewelry and clothing and was the splendor of the pueblo. One story is that she suddenly disappeared either returning to Mexico or moving away with a Spanish officer. Another version is that after her Spanish officer deserted her she died broken hearted and was buried in the Plaza Vieja church where many would hear her spirit's mournful cries begging to return to Mexico or longing for her lover.<sup>89</sup> The legend or romance narrative of La Indita appears at first to sound like another typical version of the fanciful Indian princess stories one would hear in the eastern U.S. But considering the Native American history of Belén, then this legend could be a unique regional expression of local blood memory at one level or an attempt to legitimize Belén's indigenous and church history which has been made illegitimate, forgotten and buried.<sup>90</sup> (Appendix 6)

### **Conclusion: Recovery of a Buried History**

Despite Belén's buried history there still remains a sense of place of the Plaza Vieja throughout the many years and the notion to recover the site's legacy. Layered in-between Valentina Sánchez O'Neal's testimony about her labor of faith as described in the "Museum of Memory" article, is found perhaps a prediction she made when she said "I think Archeologists would have a field day" at the property. Indeed, archeologists descended on the property and had a field day (literally) during the summer of 2015. The University of New Mexico Public Archeology program conducted ground penetrating radar (GPR) and test excavations. The GPR mapped out underground anomalies but because of time constraints their limited testing did not find historic structures on the property.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Matt Baca, "Who was the Indian Princess?" *La Historia del Río Abajo, Belén News-Bulletin*, September 20, 2008. Collaborating versions of the story were told to me in 2014 by Alberta O'Neal, Virginia Torrez and Rosendo Lovato, grandchildren of Manuel García O'Neal and were also the informants for Matt Baca's article.

<sup>90</sup> Blood memory is a concept in Native American literature that counters blood quantum by instead looking to ancestry, heritage, beliefs, storytelling and communal memory to blend racial/cultural identity (blood) and history (memory) and reimagine and retell the past to claim a self-identity. See Natalie Harkin "The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives: Memory in the Blood" *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Vol.14, No. 3, 2014.

<sup>91</sup>"Plaza Vieja de Belen, New Mexico. Test Excavations." May 2015, Caroline Gabe and Emily Lena Jones, Dept. of Anthropology, UNM.



Alberta with niece Theresa Carabajal (embracing Alberta) and family gather to witness archeologists' work and to share their memories of family and place.



UNM Students preparing for excavation. Prior to archeologist's arrival myself and family members joined with Dr. Charlie Carrillo (standing), Anthropologist, Santero and Belén descendant member who performed a traditional penitente *sudario* (prayer for the souls of the dead) at the site. Notice at back fence the altar with San José that Alberta and Patsy spontaneously put up for the occasion. These community spiritual activities attest to the duration of sacredness and also a continued sense of cultural ownership.

Meanwhile, with the aid of soil probes, long underground strips of rocks have been identified. I and Charlie Leplain (Alberta's husband) dug up two areas and revealed what appears to be two to four feet wide massive rock foundations. Viewing the exposed rock formations I think of the 1791 Belén oxcart rebellion and how these large rocks were carted to the area by tired oxen and labored into this very spot by the hands of our Genízaro Indian, Spanish, Coyote and Mestizo ancestors as they built Belén's first church. Alberta and I, as descendants of those that constructed the church and prayed at this consecrated place, are both mesmerized by the rock structure. I liken it to the backbone or buried skeleton of Nuestra Señora (the Church) and Alberta views it as a beautiful sculpture further drawing us into Belén's past. As we contemplate her long duration of sacredness we wonder about the possibilities of her recovery and public recognition.





February 2016, Patsy, Alberta and Samuel Sisneros in front of apparent rock foundation discovery. Independent Archeologists and Architectural historians have looked at this and believe it is consistent with a colonial rock foundation for a large building.

To test the account given during the 1791 oxcart rebellion that the Belén settlers hauled rocks from the west I drove approximately 3.5 miles west from the Plaza Vieja on Aragon road which was apparently the early main road westward (1905 map). The end of Aragon road comes up to

the base of the West Mesa which contains large embedded and loose rocks that match those found at the excavated site.

This historical and archeological recovery project is not the first to look into the potential of the Plaza Vieja site. The idea was proposed in a planning study by a consultant group during the 2009 planning stages of the new Belén roadrunner train station that was built just a couple of blocks away from the site. It was proposed that the Plaza Vieja site on “private property” be used as a walking tour destination but they gave little detail or historical background nor did they contact the owners about this idea.<sup>92</sup> (**Appendix 7**) It is hoped that through further archeological excavation and interpretation and engagement with the property’s owner, the Belén community, Belén City officials and with private and state entities that a preservation, development and exhibition plan can someday resume the Plaza Vieja as a public destination.<sup>93</sup> (**See Supplement - Belén Plaza Vieja Preservation Project Manifesto**)

Though the Plaza Vieja site would never be restored to its original state as a functional church and regardless of its historical neglect, its memory remains through oral history, family histories, legends, historical documents and potentially archeological artifacts. To further demonstrate the notion of continuity of memory, place and community following are images of a *descanso* (resting place) which is located just outside of the fence of the property site.



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<sup>92</sup> “Belén Station Area Planning Study– Prepared for the City of Belén & Mid-Region Council of Governments,” Feb. 2009, HDR Consultant Team. This plan did include a proposal to include Plaza Vieja as a possible site for development but gave little detail. (**See Appendix 7**)

<sup>93</sup> Toward this end a possible model site would be the Campo de Cahuenga at Los Angeles, California which involved extensive archeological excavation and the execution of a successful historical park. The Campo de Cahuenga ruins are closely comparable to the Belén Plaza Vieja site involving a buried massive stone foundation structure from the colonial period. The Campo de Cahuenga Park includes an above ground replication of the original foundation with raw materials from the original source, areas with reconstructed adobe walls (a few feet high), signage and explanatory panels, a modern courtyard with lawn and trees and a parking lot. See: Roberta S. Greenwood, *Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly*, Vol. 38, Numbers 2 & 3, Spring & Summer, 2002.

The *descanso* metal cross fixture memorializes the tragic death of David Edward Gabaldón who in 2003, at the age 27, died as a result of a tragic ATV accident near where the *descanso* was placed. David belonged to an old Belén family from the Plaza Vieja neighborhood. Be it accidental and circumstantial, the well-kept and regularly decorated road side monument cross nevertheless stands as an intersection to this narrative and as a reminder in the larger historical and cultural context not just to the birth, family life, culture, religion and death of Belén residents - as a church and graveyard do, but also of the sacredness and endurance of this space known as the Plaza Vieja. Thusly and lastly, the final lines from Alberta's poem speaks of how this important historical site beckons for its recovery and the reverence and commemoration it deserves:

*Sacredness reaches out for Rebirth  
For Pure Hearts in recognition of  
This Ancient Land  
That is Plaza Vieja*

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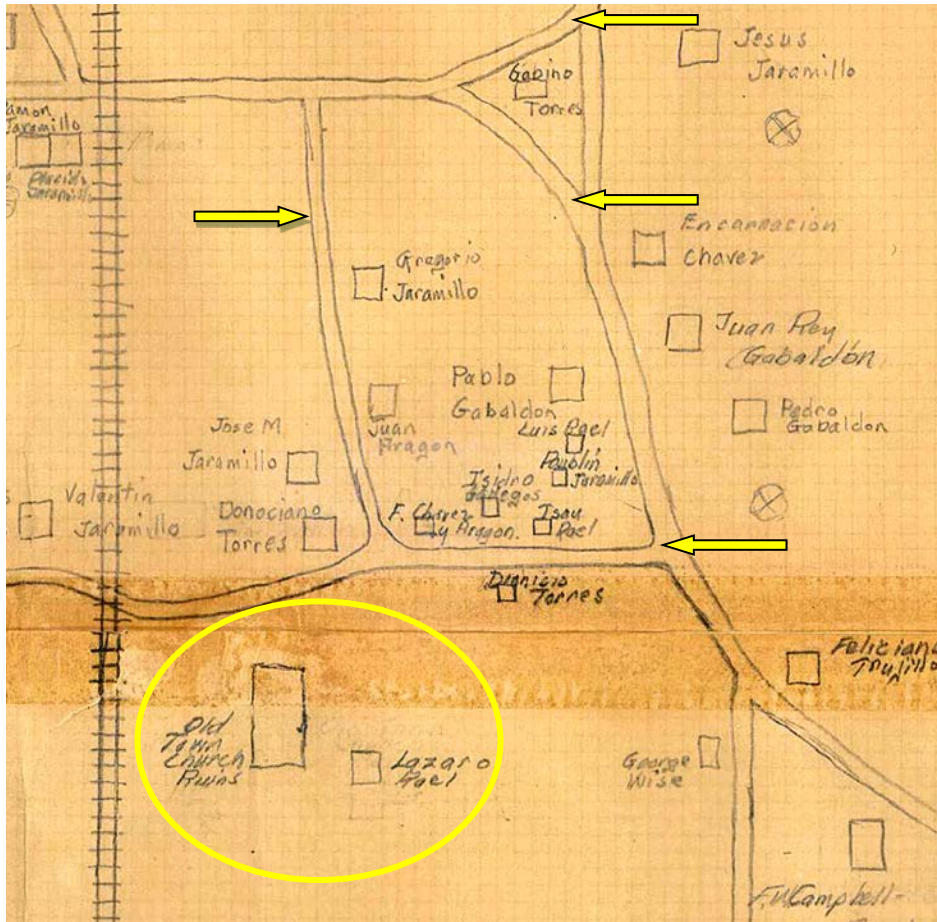
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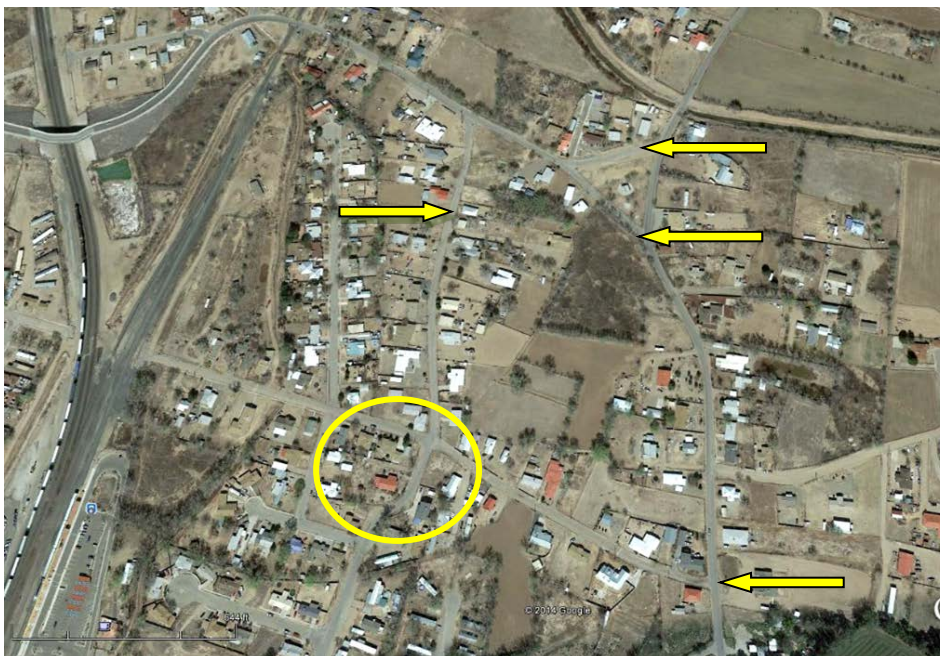
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## Appendix 1



Northeast quadrant, 1905 Map, Attributed to F.W. Campbell, Harvey House Museum, Belén, New Mexico.



Google Earth, Copied Nov.12, 2014, Yellow Oval highlights red roof of the Museum building and Church property. Yellow arrows point to same road configuration as in 1905 map. Bottom left corner is the new Railrunner Station.



# O'Neal builds museum of memory on old site of Our Lady of Belen

by SANDY BATTIN  
News-Bulletin Staff Writer

Valentina O'Neal has created a monument both to the first church in Belen — and to a way of life.

The museum of which she is founder, curator and caretaker sits on what was once a plaza at the exact site at which the first Our Lady of Belen Church was built in 1793.

But it is also a monument to Manuel and Antonia O'Neal, the parents of her husband Fidel, a couple she helped care for for years and whom she considers as close as her own family. For it is the home at the site of the church in which they lived most of their married life.

Situated behind her own home on Ross Avenue, her museum tells not only the story of the O'Neals, but of how people of their generation lived. It is filled with one surprise after another

— everything from old dolls to tiny dishes made to hold a pat of butter to an antique console radio.

While there are pictures, holy cards and other images of Our Lady, there are also similar devotional items for St. Joseph to whom Antonia O'Neal was dedicated. Each year, she invited all her neighbors to a celebration of her patron saint's day.

A museum isn't something just everyone suddenly builds. But it was a project that enriched O'Neal's life so much that she's willing to share it.

It was something of therapy for O'Neal after her husband, Fidel, died. She was feeling depressed, without a purpose in life.

"I looked around and said no one cares and I just decided to go at it full blast," she said.

The place has been as much a savior to her as she has been to it. It's taken her out of her doldrums, it's given her a chance to put her

artistic and preservative talents into play and it's given her a way to meet people as interested in saving the past as she is.

The place was about to fall apart. But something told me I could have it restored," she said. She did some of the work herself, hired others to do larger projects.

She loves telling the story.

The old Our Lady of Belen, O'Neal said she's been told, resembled the one in Ialeta, which was its mother church.

There was a square in the area and, O'Neal says, a dance hall across the street where her parents brought her along when she was a child.

Interesting stories abound. She's heard that the Spaniards brought an Aztec princess with them and that she sickened and died here and is buried somewhere on the old churchground. And, she said, "some people claim there's buried treasure here."

(Continued on Page B-3)

## Museum of memory

(Continued from Page B-1)

She hasn't come across it yet, but she does occasionally find bits and pieces — the uses most of which are obscure today — that indicate this is a place of history. For instance, she and her daughter speculate that a curved spike found there might be from the lance of a conquistador.

Another thing she has put on display from the old house is an ancient, age-darkened cross which has a design of wheat on it — "I don't know why," she said.

"I think an archaeologist would have a field day."

So far, none of them have showed up on her doorstep — but then, O'Neal says, "I don't think they know about it."

The house is about 85 years old and is made from turren cut from the ground near the river. O'Neal even has a display of turren and adobe to show the differences.

Fidel O'Neal's grandfather was a stonemason who came to Belen from Sioux City, Iowa, and married Delfina Garcia.

She opened the home as a museum about three years ago when a garden club asked to see it.

Enter the museum to an eclectic display of old-time pieces and modern southwestern art. In the enclosed porch — a spot where O'Neal herself has laid the brick tiles — there's a tall pine cone tree she made with her sister Joanne Sanchez.

Under it is a wicker baby doll carriage given her by Merlene Johnson of Belen and a pair of modern and old-fashioned trains.

Enter the front door to the cozy living room warmed by a fire in the corner live-style fireplace O'Neal recently added. A blue-washed bench with an eagle cut in its back sits, stuffed in pillows, across from the fireplace.

On the opposite wall, one of Antonia O'Neal's patron St. Joseph sits in a glass-fronted niche, looking out over the family catechisms and other religious articles.

O'Neal's mother's Sacred Heart presides in a frame of carved wood and inlaid mirrors while a Santo Nino de Prague sparkles in rich robes in a special case.

Through a door is a little girl's room, full of dolls and the Shirley Temple posters O'Neal loves.

In another bedroom right through the door is a fascinating Murphy bed which folds up into an ornate carved cabinet.

An old craftsman-style rocking chair and a pair of high-top ladies' boots complete the antique picture.

A tiny room at the back of the house was Manuel O'Neal's favorite, a place he could "sit and read the Spanish Bible and play the guitar," his daughter-in-law recalled.

A photo of Antonia's mother — "She's supposed to be a full-blooded Apache" — gazes severely down at the room.

The kitchen still contains an old wood stove in perfect condition and a large collection of pretty dishes. Ingenious cabinets built right into the thick adobe wall demonstrate Manuel's construction and design skills.

In the rear of the building is a sun-kissed enclosed portal with yet another monument to St. Joseph and a line of antique tins covering an entire wall.

An old copper tub and a variety of antique tools and implements fill a long banner. O'Neal's daughter has painted stylized sunbursts on the wall.

This will be the first year O'Neal plans on decorating with luminarias and she's put out a large painted Nativity scene.

"I've done all the landscaping myself," she said. "When I started, there was nothing but weeds and two trees."

She's put outside a cannon, an old mechanical cornhusker, an Amish wagon from Mexico.

She thinks the O'Neals — Manuel, Antonia and Fidel — are watching her even now, probably happy with the work she's done on the house.

"They're probably looking at it," she said, "giving me the strength to do it."

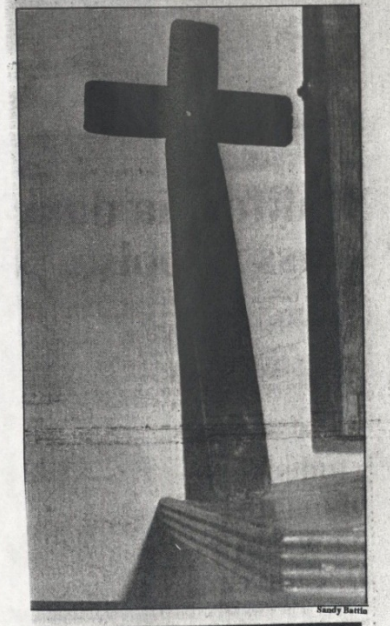
And she believes others feel as strongly about the place as she does. "I've had people come in here and they say they don't know whether to bless themselves or what when they come in," she said.



Valentina O'Neal shows item — perhaps from a conquistador? — she found.



Above, a row of candles awaits lighting in an outdoor display in front of the museum. Below is a cross which was used in the 1793 Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church. Valentina O'Neal points out its wheat design.







Valencia County News Bulletin, December 21, 1991, B3.

The plywood cutout, which Alberta refers to as “The Madonna” has, as of March 2016 fallen, and put away. Alberta reports that Valentina paid a local sign painter to paint the signage. Undoubtedly, Valentina provided the sign painter the following image that came out in the 1993, 200<sup>th</sup> Church anniversary booklet. The booklet states that the image is of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century statute from Germany of Our Lady of Belén. The statute would in fact be a local version since it has the Spanish abbreviation of Nuestra Señora along with the 1793 date engraved on the statute.



Image from: *Our Lady of Belén 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Booklet, 200 Years of Faith 1793-1993*, Tibo J. Chavez, Jr., Fiesta Committee, Our Lady of Belén Parish.

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DEC. 21, 1991

Recap of 1991 article on in the 2010 Belén Bulletin “A Century of News,” 100 Years archive edition which stresses Valentina’s faith and way of life.



Valentina Sanchez O'Neal is surrounded by some of the dolls in a collection at her museum in Belen.

### Belen Residents Celebrate Faith

Woman Builds Shrine To Late Husband

By Arley Sanchez

**B**ELEN — Valentina “Tina” O’Neal has two loves especially dear to her heart: the memory of her late husband, Fidel, and the Catholic Church.

She has honored both by establishing a museum at a home the spot south of her life in at Belen’s “Plaza Vieja” (Old Plaza), on a site where the original Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church once stood.

This week, O’Neal and other Belen residents will celebrate the bicentennial of the founding of the Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church with a theme of 200 years of faith.

O’Neal lives in a home neighboring the museum, which is testament to the faith and love she felt in her family and the church.

O’Neal has filled every room with mementos from the past, family heirlooms,

**SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

**Thursday**

- 6 p.m. — Mass with “Fidel” by the youth choir choir, the church of Our Lady of Belen.
- 7 p.m. — Birthday party and refreshments at Funded Hall.
- 8 p.m. — Dance at parish hall with music by every American band from the band.

**Friday**

- 7 p.m. — Vespers service and crowning of the Virgin Mary by the youth choir.
- 8 p.m. — Dance at parish hall with music by every American band from the band.
- 9 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 10 p.m. — Fiesta parade.

**Saturday**

- 10 a.m. — Fiesta mass and procession with music by every American band from the band.
- 11 a.m. — Entertainment at parish hall.
- 12 p.m. — Lunch at parish hall.
- 1 p.m. — Entertainment at parish hall.
- 2 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 3 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 4 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 5 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 6 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 7 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 8 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 9 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 10 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 11 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 12 a.m. — Dance at parish hall.

**Sunday**

- 10 a.m. — Fiesta mass and procession with music by every American band from the band.
- 11 a.m. — Entertainment at parish hall.
- 12 p.m. — Lunch at parish hall.
- 1 p.m. — Entertainment at parish hall.
- 2 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 3 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 4 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 5 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 6 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 7 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 8 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 9 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 10 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 11 p.m. — Dance at parish hall.
- 12 a.m. — Dance at parish hall.

antique furniture, and historical treasures found in antique stores or donated by friends.

There are even artifacts that occasionally have surfaced from her back yard, which she said is the site of an ancient church burial ground, she said she has found old tools, coins, buttons or other artifacts just while landscaping her yard.

She tells the legend of an ancient Aztec princess buried there.

“I still haven’t come across her,” O’Neal says, laughing. “The legend says that the Spaniards brought her here with all her jewelry, and then she became ill, and she was buried here.”

O’Neal shows a crudely carved wooden cross with a crucifixion marking, found on a bed of lace. It came from the original church, around 1793, she says. And there’s a sun-baked vase, beautiful and colorful, from the original church, lying in her yard like a bone.

Her treasure possessions chronicle her life with her husband and her family. There’s her parents’ marriage license. There’s Fidel’s photos and the tag from his service in the Army and Air Force.

An old wedding dress from an unknown period is among exhibits O’Neal’s museum.

during World War II. There are her father-in-law and father’s railroad pass.

MORE: See BELÉN on PAGE 4

Metro Plus, Aug. 11, 1993

## Belen Residents Celebrate Faith

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

where both men worked for most of their lives. There are photos of her two daughters.

O’Neal, 66, says her husband always wanted to establish a chapel but died eight years ago before he could see his dream. She decided to go ahead and establish the museum as a memorial.

“Working on this helped me to cope with losing my husband,” O’Neal says, adding that she opens her home to people who want to see it.

“Schoolkids come by the busloads,” she says.

The Shirley Temple Room, she says, is the most popular with schoolchildren. Dolls and stuffed animals lounge on a quilt-covered bed. Paintings of Shirley Temple and President John F. Kennedy’s children, Caroline and John-John giving “The Salute,” hang on the walls. There’s a box of rubber dolls depicting modern-day wrestlers like “Hulk Hogan.” She says the children can name all the dolls in the box, admitting she can’t name any of them.

Ruperto Baca, a fiesta organizer, says an open house will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday at the museum. He says O’Neal and her family have been cornerstones of the church.

“I enjoy people and I enjoy showing what I’ve accomplished,” O’Neal says.

When they first got married in 1946, Fidel and Tina lived with her in-laws in two rooms of the house, which had been sealed off. She shows an old wood cookstove that still works and a recessed cabinet built into the thick adobe wall. An inoperable crank-style telephone is attached to the wall.

In a southern room, a rocking chair and guitar mark the place where her father-in-law sat by the window, read his bible and played the guitar, she says.

Three years ago, O’Neal built a sunlit addition, replete with glass windows and skylights. Sitting on a banco painted with sunbursts are antique tools and tins, including a red Prince Albert can with tobacco and wheatstraw rolling paper still inside.

“Kids sometimes still want to know if I’m going to let him out,” O’Neal jokes.

Baca says this year’s Fiestas de Belen are special because of the bicentennial observance.

“What has brought us this far is the faith of the people,” Baca says. “We were already here at the time of George Washington . . . We existed just to survive and what helped us survive was our faith.”



### Appendix 3



*The Magi - The three kings present gifts to the Christ Child*

*All five Marian scenes hung in the old Belen Church. Research is continuing into their origin , but initial information is that they were painted in the late 1700's by a Mexican artist. The paintings are in need of restoration and the museum of New Mexico has offered assistance. These paintings are believed to have been commissioned for the plaza vieja church and may well be the oldest art work in Belen. Reproductions of all color prints due to the courtesy and kindness of Beverly & Casey Luna and Kim & Mike Luna. Proceeds from the sale of this booklet are to be used toward restoration.*





*The Visitation - Mary and Joseph visit with Elizabeth and Zachary*



*The Circumcision - The Jewish rite is performed on infant Jesus*



*The Flight to Egypt - Mary and Joseph flee with the infant Jesus*



*The Coronation - Mary is crowned upon her death and assumption*



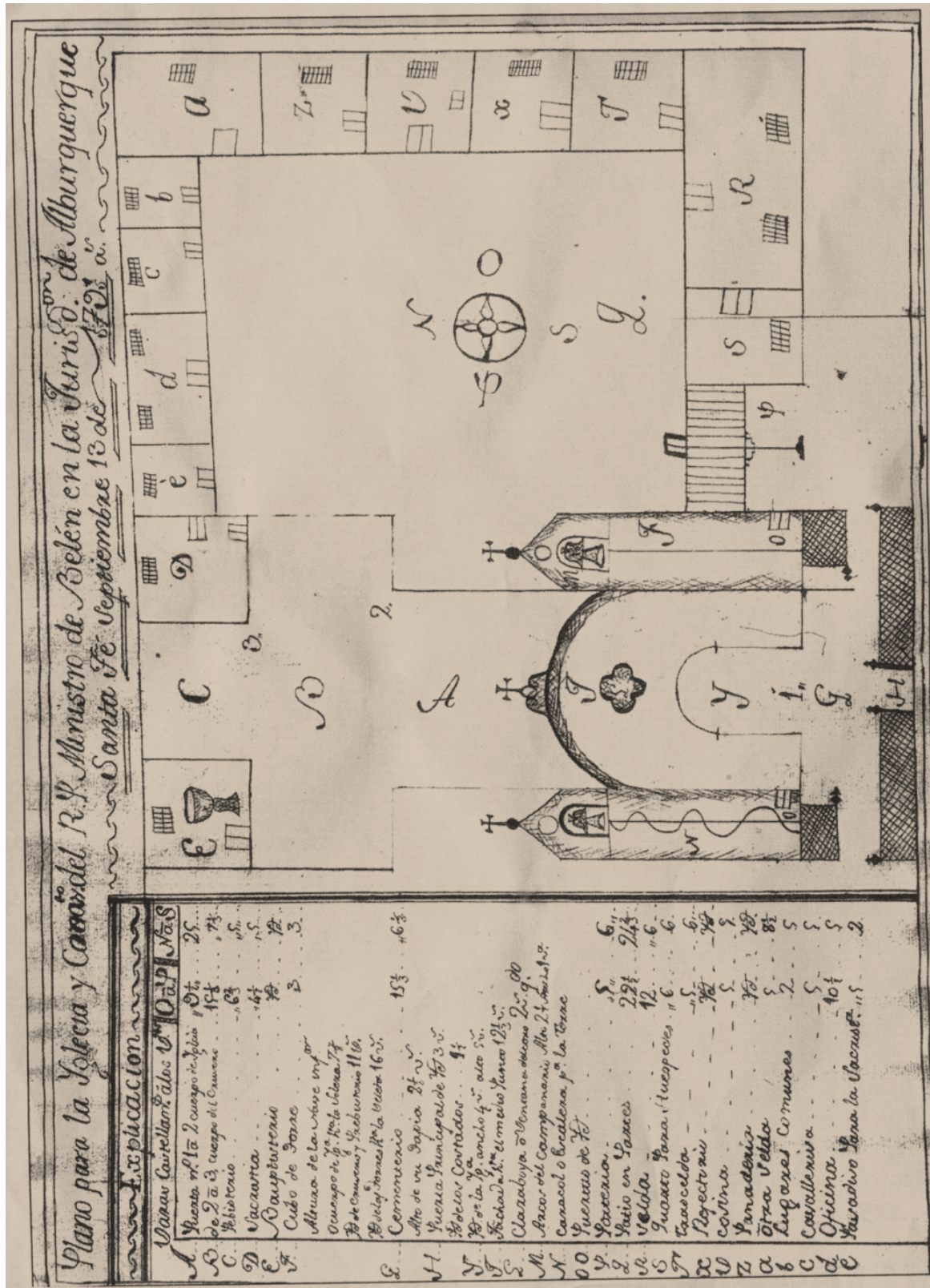
Fig. 26 Unidentified artist, *The Visitation*, Mexico, late eighteenth century, oil on canvas, 65 x 40 inches, Archdiocese of Santa Fe and Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church, Belen, New Mexico. Photo by Blair Clark.

The Museum of New Mexico restored and exhibited the “Visitation” painting. See *Painting the Divine: Images of Mary in the New World*, Josef Diaz and Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, The New Mexico History Museum, Italy, 2015.



## Appendix 4

“Floor plan of the church and convent of the Reverend Minister of Belén (Fr. Cayetano José Ignacio Bernal) in the Jurisdiction of Albuquerque, September 13, 1795, Santa Fe, New Mexico,” *Expediente sobre que se concede Licencia de decir misa en la Capilla que se ha fabricado en la Mision de Belén feligresia de Alburquerque en el Nuevo Mexico, solicitandose haga Parroquia. 1797*” Archivo Historico del Archobispado de Durango (AHAD), Microfilm # 195, frames 0408-0504, (plano frame 0484), New Mexico State University Library, Las Cruces, New Mexico.



## Appendix 4a

The explicación/legend included in the *plano* can be used for archeological and virtual recovery of the church.

			O a P	N a S	W to E	N to S
A	Puerto No.1 a 2 cuerpo de Iglecia	1 <sup>st</sup> door to 2 <sup>nd</sup> body of church	9 1/2	25	26	68
B	de 2 a 3 cuerpo del crucero	From 2 <sup>nd</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> body of the cross layout	15 1/3	7 1/3	41	19
C	Presbiterio	Presbytery	6 2/3	5	16	14
D	Sacristia	Sacristy or vestry	4 1/2	5	12	14
E	Bautisterio	Baptistery	4 1/2	5	12	14
F	Cubo de Torre	Bell tower structure (cube)	3	3	8	8
	Altura de la Nave infor(inferior)?	Height of lower nave				
O	Cuerpo de Yglecia hasta la Solera	Body of church to the ??	7 7/8		22	
O	cuerpo de crucero y presbiterio	Body of the cross and baptistery	11 varas		30	
O	cuerpo de las Torres hasta la veleta	Height from towers to weather vane	16 varas		44	
G	Cementerio	Cemetery	15 1/3	6 1/3	41	16
	Alto de su Tapia	Height of cemetery fence	2 1/2		7	
H	Puerta principal de cementerio	Main cemetery door	3		8	
	Puerta de los costados	Side doors	1 1/2		5	
Y	Puerta de la Iglecia	Church door	4 by 5		11	13
J	Fachada hasta el medio punto	Façade to middle point	12 1/3		33	
L	Claraboya o ventana del coro	Choir window	2 ?			
M	Arcos del companario	Belfry arches	2 1/3 x 1		5.5	3
N	Caracol o Escalera para la torre	Bell tower staircase				
OO	Puertas de Torre	Bell tower doors				
P	Porteria	Courtyard?	5	6	14	16.5
Q	Patio en partes	Patio in parts	22 1/2	24 2/3	61.5	62
R	Selda (celda)	Convent cell	12	6	33	16.5
S	Quarto para huespedes	Guest rooms	6	6	16.5	16.5
T	Traselda	Back convent cell	5	6	14	16.5
X	Refeitorio	Dining room	5	6	14	16.5
V	Cosina	Kitchen	5	5	14	14
Z	Panaderia	Bakery	5	5	14	14
a	Otra selda	Another convent cell	5	8 1/2	14	23
b	Lugares comunes	Common space	2	5	6	14
c	Caballerisa	Stable	5	5	14	14
d	Oficina	Office	10 1/2	5	29	14
e	Pasadiso (pasadizo) para la Sacristan	Passageway to sacristy	5	2	14	6

### Explicación/Legend

The legend (in varas) with added English translation. The sections with the east to west (O a P) and north to south (N a S) coordinates include the church and attached rooms and spaces including sacristy, offices, bell tower, quest rooms, kitchen, bakery, outdoor patios, fences, and cemetery.

## Appendix 4b

Bernal's report attached to the *plano* also recorded the material belongings of the church:

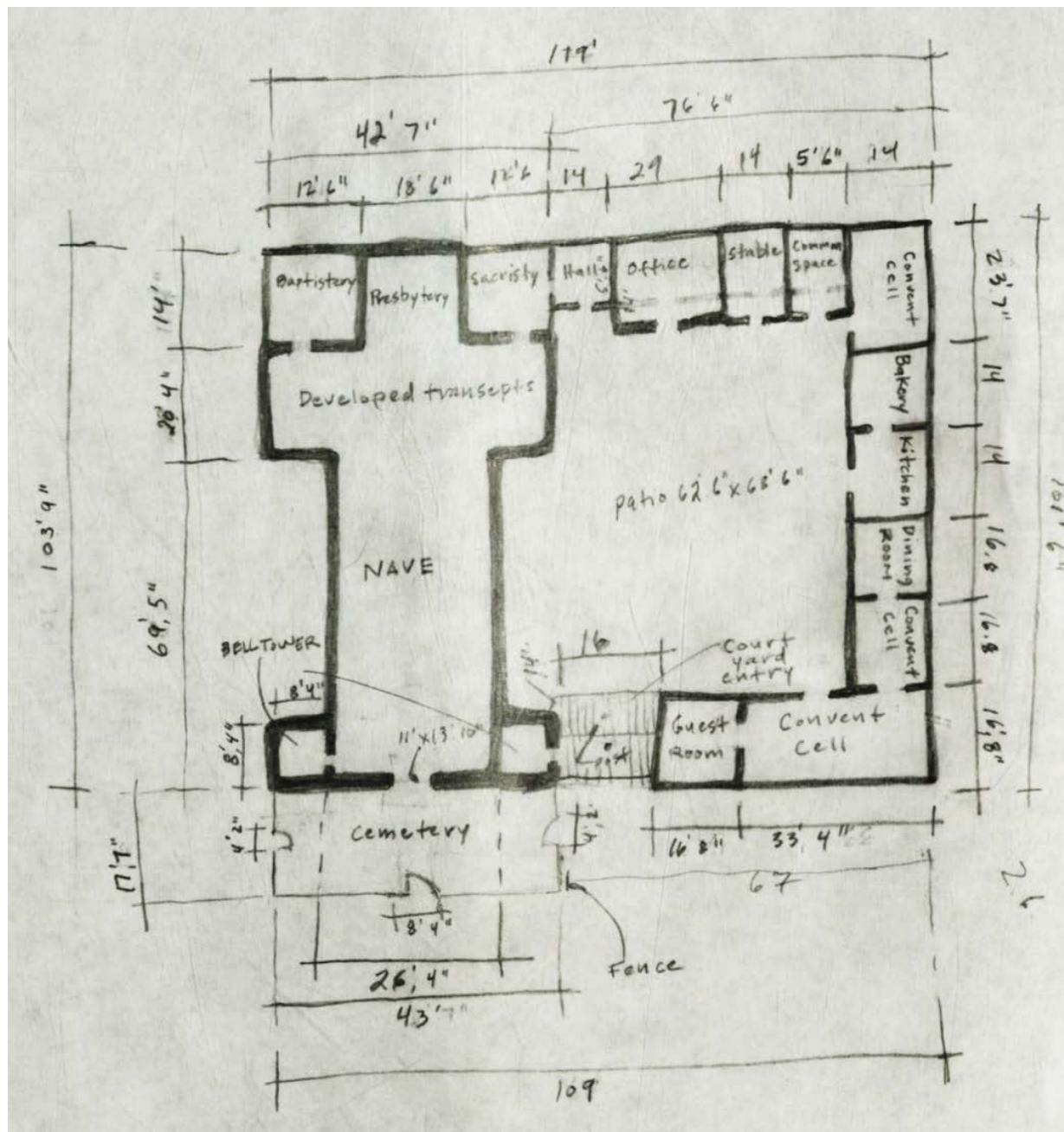
"Inventory of ornaments, sacred vessels, and adornments corresponding to the church of Nuestra Señora de Belén that at the expense of the residents they have had in place since the year 1793," June 1796.

- Ornamento blanco de espolinado con gallon de plata y flueco mestizo de plata y oro
- Manipulo, bolsa y pano de calix forrado en Sangaleta nacar
- Otro (ornamento) Colorado de Luvtrina con guarnacion de Liston de lama estola manipulo bolsa, y pano de calix flueco de plata  
angosta haze a Negro por el otro lado con guarnacion de Rrecillo Amarillo
- Una copa de espolinado que haze a blanco, y Colorado quarnecida con gallon de plata ancho, y angosto forrado en sangaleta Nacar y  
flueco Mestizo de Plata y oro en la muceta.
- Una dicha (Copa) de capichola Negra con Guarnicion de Revecillo amarillo forado en sangaleta Negro.
- Un frontal colorado de Lustrina con Guarnacion de Galon de Plata y el flueco Mestisso de Plata, y de oro forrado en contence.
- Una palia colorada de Lustrina Guarnaceda de Liston de lama con Punta de ylo.
- Un Almaisal de Lustrina floreada.
- Basos Sagrados
  - Un Calix de Plata con Patena dorada y cucharita.
  - Una Ara de atercia.
  - Unas crismeras de Bidrio con casquillos de Plata y penseles de lo mismo en su Petaquilla de Palma.
- Ropa Blanca
  - Dos Albas de Britana con encaje Ancho abajo y angosto en las Mangas.
  - Dos Amitos de Bretana con el mismo en caje y sus Listones.
  - Dos Tablas de Manteles de Bretana con caje Ancho.
  - Unos Corporales Dobles de estopilla.
  - Tres Purificadores de Ydem (estopilla)
  - Dos monotijos de Bretana con encaje de ylo.
  - Una sobrePellis de ydem. con Ydem (Bretana con encaje de ylo)
  - Un pano de Bretana Para el comulgatorio
  - Un Sarape pa. cubrir los ornamentos.
- Metales
  - Una campana de mas de media vara.
  - Otra dicha de tocar altos.
  - Un Plato de metal Amarillo.
- Dos pares de vinajeras de cristal
- Una palangana de cobre que sirve de Pila Bautismo.
- Un asetze de cobre con ysopi de Palo
- Dos candelarios de Metal Blanco.
- Libros
  - Un misal nuevo con sus Registros.
  - Dos manuales
  - Tres libros pa. las Partidas de Baupismo casamientos y entierros
- Imagenes
  - Un quadro de Nuestra Señora de Belén pintada al de 7/8 de Alto
  - Una Imajen de Nuestro Senor Crusificado en su cruz. Palo su altura 2/3

Y por ser verdad lo expressado arriva esta existencia lo firme como Ministro de esta de Belén en veinte y tres de Noviembre de mil setecientos noventa y sies anos.

Fray Cayetano José Ign. Bernal (rubric)

Below are versions of the *plano* and its application to the site.



Tracing of plan with adjusted (vara to feet) measurements and added room labels taken from *explicacion*. Scale not proportional. By Samuel Sisneros







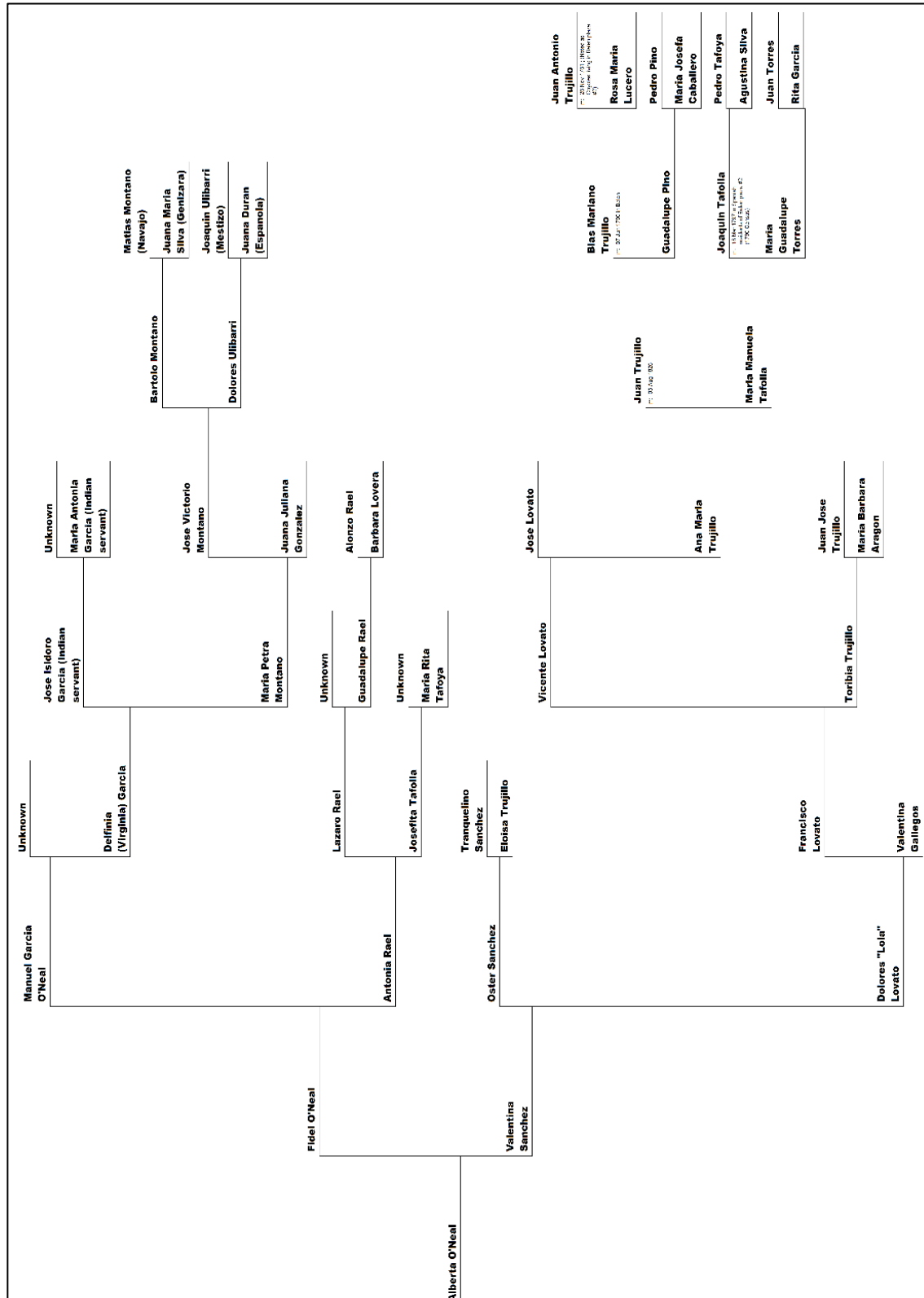
The Belen Church and convent layout is similar to many New Mexican churches like this one at Acoma Pueblo. Photograph taken September 1926. John Gaw Meem  
Collection: Non-Job Specific Photos, CSWR.



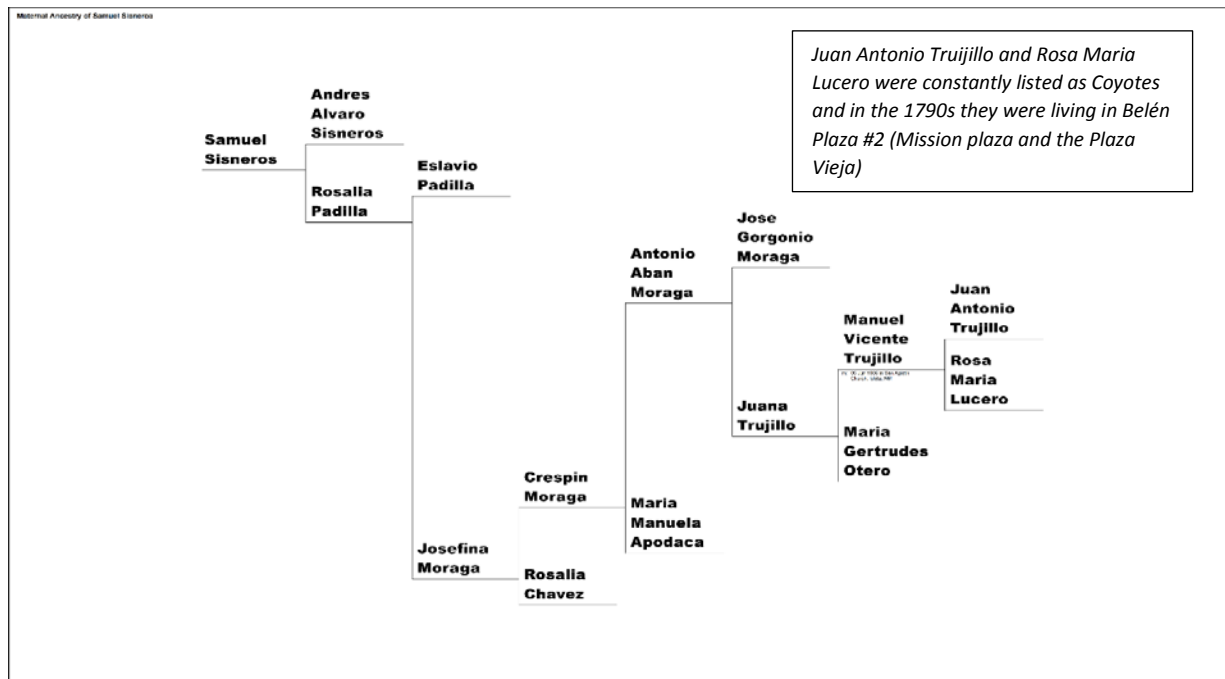
Dimensions from 1795 *plano* overlaid on Google earth image. Rational for placement: A) Visibly higher elevation on west side of property. One historical document tells that community tried to elevate area because of concern of floods. B) Appearance of more adobe melt at this area. C) Properties southwest of site have reported human bones consistent with possible cemetery at the south side of the church. D) Present house on property is said to have been built on top of the foundation of church/convent. Original house is lined up on a north to south directional.

## Appendix 5

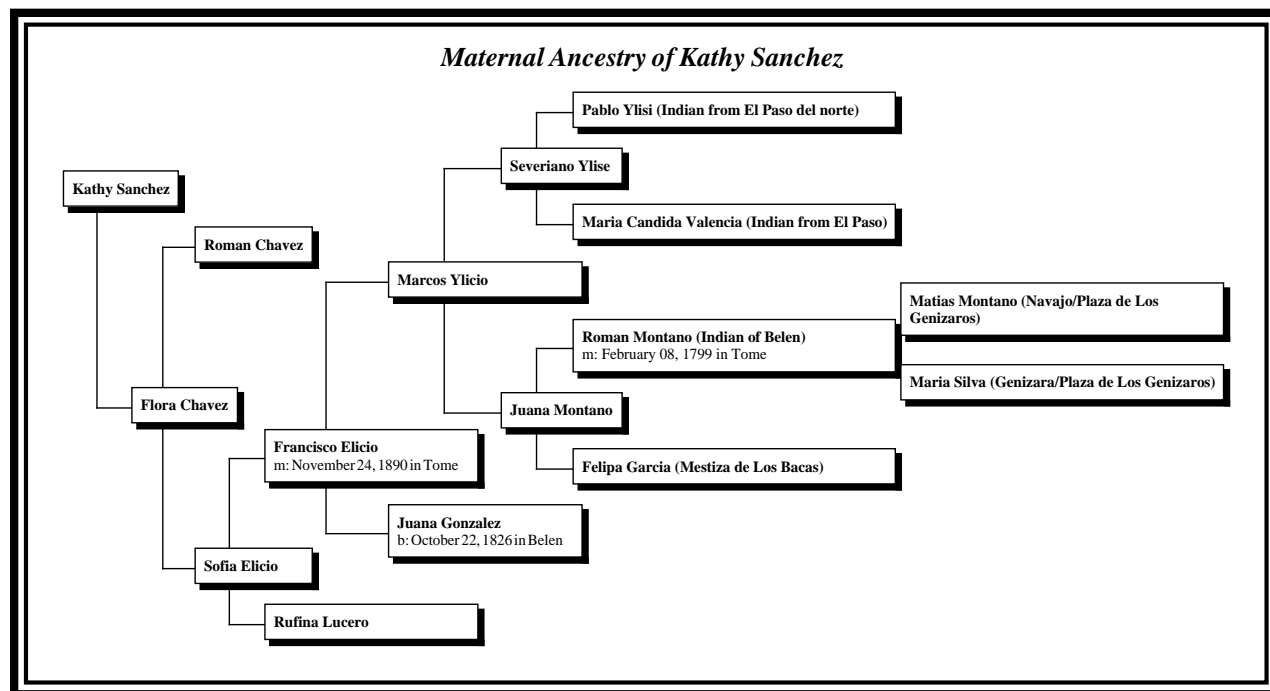
The following genealogies are representative of similar lineages and kinships that most descendants from the original Belén families would encounter in their family ancestry. Alberta and Samuel are both descendants of some of the Spanish/Mestizo and Genízaro/Coyote settlers of Belén and have common ancestors.



Ancestry Chart #1 Ancestry of Alberta O'Neal Juan Antonio Trujillo and Rosa Maria Lucero were listed as Coyotes in Los Bacas in the 1790 Census. This is the common ancestors that Alberta has with



Ancestral Chart #2, Maternal Ancestry of Samuel Sisneros (Notice Samuel and Alberta have common lineage to Juan Antonio Trujillo and Rosa María Lucero, Coyote residents of Belén Plaza #2 in the early 1750s)



Ancestry chart #3. Ancestry of Kathy Preissler Sanchez. She like Alberta and many others share the extended web of lineages back to Matías Montano and María Silva, Genízaros from Belén. Notice she also descends from El Paso area Indians that migrated to Belén.



# Who was the Indian princess?

*La Historia del Río Abajo* is a monthly column about Valencia County history written by members of the Valencia County Historical Society.

Dr. Matt Baca, the author of this month's column, is a native of Adelino who spent many years as a teacher and administrator before retiring from the Belén Public Schools and as a university instructor. He has contributed many articles to *La Historia del Río Abajo*, focusing on our community's traditions and cultural diversity.

Opinions expressed in this and all columns of *La Historia del Río Abajo* are the author's alone and not necessarily those of the News-Bulletin, the Valencia County Historical Society or any other group or individual.

## la historia del río abajo



Matt Baca

Before it is swept away by the river of oblivion, this writer wishes to share a little-known legend about a mysterious Native American woman who once lived in Belén.

In the late 1700s or early 1800s, there lived a mysterious woman who claimed to be an Indian princess. We don't know her name, although many called her "La Indita." Others called her the

"Aztec Princess," suggesting that she came from a rich, powerful Indian tribe and culture in Old Mexico.

Many facts have been lost through the cloudy lenses of time, and to tell her story, one must rely on the few facts that have filtered down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

For example, Manuel O'Neil, told his grandson, Rosendo Lovato, and his granddaughter, Roberta O'Neil, of an Indian woman who lived near Belén's original town plaza and Catholic Church, located by the intersection of Ross and Wisconsin today.

Virginia Torres, 95, confirms that an Indian did indeed live in Belén's Old Town, or Plaza Vieja, in the early 1800s. Mrs. Torres' father-in-law, Judge Melchor Torres, told her that the Indian lady lived in a room behind the Catholic Church. Judge Torres said the woman was regal in appearance, with copper-colored skin, piercing black eyes and wavy, waist-long hair that was as black as obsidian.

This noble-looking woman was the subject of speculation and curiosity among the people of Belén. She remained rather aloof, but was otherwise friendly, speaking Spanish haltingly. She sometimes attended church services and sometimes attended wedding dances held in the popular dance hall located across the road from the old church.

Where did this beautiful stranger come from? And why did she live in Belén?

Some say that La Indita came to the Río Abajo on one of the many caravans that traveled to and from Mexico. According to these reports, she was brought here by a dashing young Spanish officer, undoubtedly her lover. Perhaps their romantic relationship had



THIS PORTRAIT of what the Indita princess might have looked like was sketched by Mark Sokol, the son-in-law of historian Matt Baca, the author of this month's edition of *La Historia del Río Abajo*.

been frowned upon by the officer's Spanish family or in her Indian culture, forcing them to flee to New Mexico. Perhaps they chose Belén as a central location for the few moments when they could secretly meet as the officer performed his duties along the Camino Real, or royal highway, through New Mexico.

According to Mrs. Torres, after several years, La Indita suddenly disappeared, perhaps returning to her tribe in Mexico if her lover was killed or perhaps joining her young officer as his wife in some other location.

Others say that La Indita's lover deserted her, and she slowly pined away, finally dying of loneliness and a broken heart. Reportedly her funeral Mass was held at the church in Plaza Vieja.

Manuel O'Neil told his grandson, Rosendo Lovato, that those who attended the service were amazed by the fine jewelry and clothing La Indita wore. Her necklaces were made of ebony overlaid with gold and silver and encrusted with turquoise.

It is likely that the morning sun filtering through the high church window reflected off La Indita's jewelry so brightly that those in attendance had to shade their eyes. Few had ever seen such splendor.

La Indita was laid to rest somewhere within the church. According to Gordon Stuart, a well-traveled historian from Corrales, burials beneath church floors were common in Catholic churches throughout Europe and Latin America. Rich, influential or holy people were

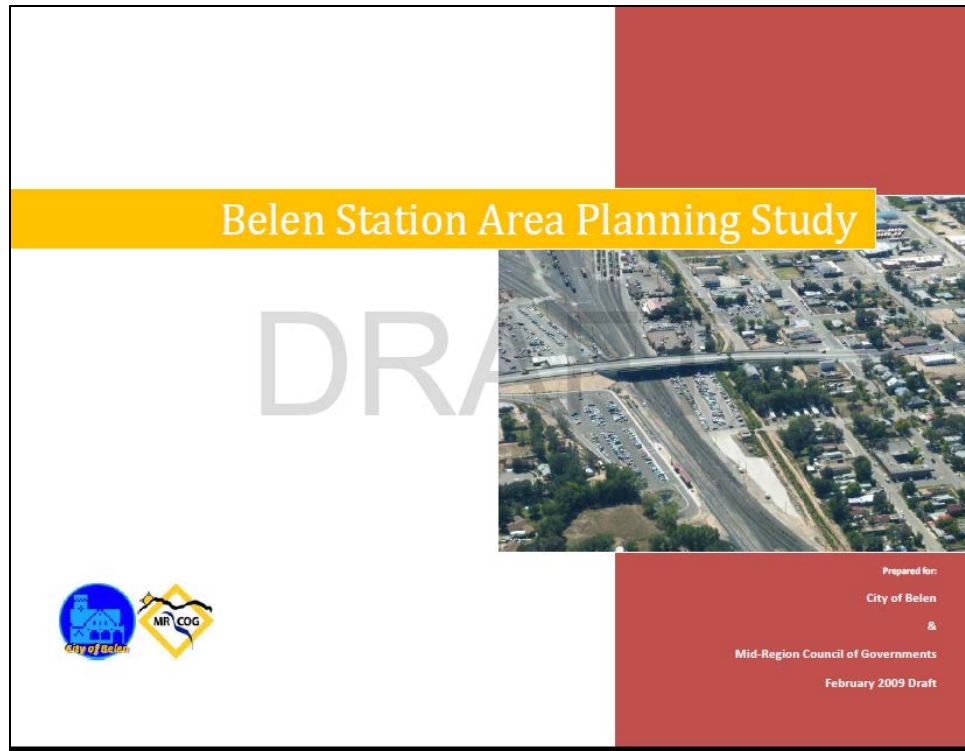
honored by such burials, an indication of the great respect that many had for La Indita.

After some time, people in the vicinity of the church began hearing the mournful cries of a woman in the night. Some felt it was La Indita's spirit yearning to be released and returned to her home in Mexico. Or perhaps she yearned for her Spanish officer.

If the story of La Indita is not a fable, one wonders if there was a higher purpose for her stay in Belén.

The Indians have a saying: No matter how high a bird flies, it has to eventually land somewhere. However briefly, La Indita landed in Belén, graced its citizens with her presence and quickly departed, forever adding to the beauty, romance and mystery of our historic Río Abajo.





Belen Station Area Planning Study

### Key Frontages and Gateways

The Rail Runner Express has created a new gateway into Belen. Locating arrival art or gateways and landscaping areas that front the tracks well before the train pulls up to the platform is important to creating a sense of arrival. Once visitors step down to the platform they should not have to look far to understand that they have arrived at their destination and are ready to explore. Welcoming frontages and way finding elements visible from the platform can reassure visitors that Belen is a safe, comfortable and interesting place to visit. All of the arrival elements should be designed and planned as an integrated system that express community identity, history while providing clear directions to points of interest and community facilities. For further information please refer to the "Arrival Park" description on page 49.

Figure 9, Schematic Plan: Pedestrian Connections and Plazas & Parks on page 50 identifies key frontages on several buildings, parking lots and open spaces that front the tracks as well as locations for arrival "gateways". The first of the gateways is located at the intersection of the tracks and Aragon Road. The second is at the intersection of Ross Avenue and the tracks and the third is the north façade of the Reinken Avenue Overpass. Key building and parking lot frontages include the Harvey House Museum site, the BNSF offices and parking lots, The Kuhn Hotel, the Rail Café, the station site parking lot and any new development on the station site.

Harvey House Museum and BNSF Admin office are visible from the platform

Parking lot frontage visible from the platform

February 2009 Draft

PLAN ELEMENTS 45



#### Harvey House/ First Street Plaza

The "Heart of Belen" Project identified the area at the intersection of Becker Avenue and 1<sup>st</sup> Street including the Harvey House Site as a key location for a downtown plaza. The Harvey House Site is just north of the intersection and out of direct alignment with Becker Avenue. Creating a plaza area that ties the intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Becker Avenue with the Harvey house site will create an active outdoor gathering space that enhances the overall pedestrian environment, provides a sense of place and continues the vision of the "Heart of Belen" Project .

It is envisioned as a high use area and focal point of the historic district. As a major public plaza the following things need to be considered:

- Determine plaza function, size and activities.
- Respond to micro climate in the plaza design.
- Consider views, circulation, boundaries and subspaces particularly as they relate to Becker Avenue, 1<sup>st</sup> street, the Acequia , the Harvey House and the Rail Yard.
- Provide appropriate amount of seating.
- Provide an abundance of shade with trees and portals.
- Provide interactive civic art and fountains.
- Increase safety through wayfinding, lighting and visibility.



View from the Harvey House towards Becker Ave & the Heart of Belen



Example of a public plaza with street and building frontage.

#### Plaza Vieja

One block south of the intersection of Wisconsin Street and Ross Avenue is the site of the original Catholic Church in Belen which was moved after flooding destroyed most of the buildings in the

area. The site is currently a private residence. There is an opportunity to consider redeveloping it as a historic landmark which can also function as small neighborhood community center and park that provides a play area for children, a plaza designed for neighborhood events and shade and seating for everyday use.

DRAFT



# Plaza Vieja de Belén Preservation Project Manifesto

## Samuel Sisneros

The following manifesto is the framework for development of a long-range preservation project for the Belén Plaza Vieja and colonial church and convent site. My commitment is to assist in the recovery and preservation efforts as a liaison, regional historian and preservationist for the Plaza Vieja de Belén Preservation Project.

### Biographical Statement

I am a native New Mexican with roots in Belén and the Rio Abajo area. I obtained my MA degree in Borderlands History with a minor in Public History from the University of Texas at El Paso. I am a staff member at the Center for Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico where I work as an archivist. Prior to this I was a Senior Archivist at the New Mexico National Hispanic Cultural Center and at the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives.

My research is focused on ethnographic history, settlement patterns, migrations, family histories and village social structures of Rio Abajo communities. It attempts to bring to surface the unknown, uncelebrated and erased social histories of the region. In particular my work looks into historical ruptures, continuities and discontinuities that have taken place in these communities. I plan to use my educational background and work as an archivist and historian along with the methods of Historic Preservation and Regionalism to offer a unique and informed perspective towards a deeper and inclusive understanding of history and preservation of culture, tradition, identity, place and memory in traditional communities in New Mexico.

# Manifesto

We the Belén city residents, Belén Plaza Vieja community members, property heirs, descendants of original Belén Plaza inhabitants and interested persons do hereby present this manifesto to preserve the historic site and memory of Belén's Plaza Vieja as our cultural legacy.

## We recognize that:

1. The original inhabitants of the Belén Plaza Vieja are the ancestors of many New Mexicans from the Rio Abajo region and beyond.
2. The original Nuestra Señora de Belén mission church was the hearth of the Plaza Vieja and the Plaza Vieja was a central gathering place where culture was expressed and social history was made.
3. The current site of the museum is known to be the historical location of the Nuestra Señora de Belén Catholic Church erected in 1795 with continued use until 1860.
4. The Belén Plaza Vieja has historical and cultural significance as a Colonial and Territorial New Mexican and U.S. space because:
  - Since the early 1700s recorded human activity and expression of cultural values has taken place at the Plaza Vieja site. The site represents a cultural landscape, which is a living link to what came before and what will come in the future.
  - The property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of American history.
  - Its history and use as a social space is equal to that of other regional preserved sites such as the traditional plazas of Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Abiquiu and other mission village plazas.
  - It was a place of early Spanish colonial migration and settlement.
  - It was the original site of a uniquely New Mexican Native American Genízaro community whose descendants still live in the area. It was perhaps the largest historical community of freed Native American servants in the current U.S. boundaries. Many of who were bought, ransomed or taken captives as children from the Apache, Navajo and Comanche nations. These groups of mixed tribe people intermarried and became identified as Genízaros. They and their

contemporary descendants were recognized as indigenous people by the 2007 New Mexico Legislature - *House Memorial 40 (HM40)* and *Senate Memorial 59 (SM59)*, "Genízaros, In Recognition," 2007 New Mexico State Legislature, Regular Session.

- The 1750 Census of Belén listed 13 Spanish and Mestizo (mixed Spanish and Indian) households and 20 Genízaro households. Total Spanish/Mestizo was 70 persons and total Genízaro was 92 persons. These are the founding families of Belén.
  - By 1790s Belén was the central mission plaza with five or more connecting plazas or hamlets under its ecclesiastical and political jurisdiction. These plazas were Los Trujillos, Los Gabaldones, Plaza de los Genízaros, Nuestra Señora de Pilar de Los Garcias, Jarales and later Sabinal and La Jolla.
  - The church ground is sacred and holy since it was an official mission church and generations worshiped and were buried there.
  - Documented and oral histories provide evidence of the Plaza Vieja continuance as a social space including 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century marriages, baptisms, religious feasts and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a dance hall across the street from the museum along with religious events held by the O'Neil/Garcia family at the site.
5. The Nuestra Señora de Belén mission church as with any traditional Catholic Church in New Mexico included a consecrated graveyard on the grounds. Therefore there could be a significant amount of burials and human bones on the church grounds since it was the practice to bury parishioners inside the church or just outside the church. From 1795 to 1860 the Church burial register lists hundreds of burials at this site many of which are noted as being Indian, Genízaros, or Indian house servants.
  6. Archeological excavation of the Plaza Vieja site is likely to yield important information of the Colonial, Mexican and Territorial period history and possibly prehistory.
  7. Valentina Sanchez O'Neal was the founder, curator and caretaker of the Museum at the site on Ross Avenue. Her tireless work in the promotion and maintenance of the historical memory of place has immense importance. Her husband Fidel O'Neal inherited the Plaza Vieja property from continuous family residency.

8. The Belén Plaza site is worthy of recognition by local city, state and national entities because it is a distinctive representation of society's cultural heritage and has contributed to the larger historic context.
9. There are disparities in the official historical narrative of Belén involving an emphasis of a post 1900 history and invisibility of the colonial Spanish, Mexican and Native American history. The current Belén civic plaza, which embraces this narrative, lacks contextual design ignoring the critical perspective of time and place.

Our intentions are to:

1. Recover and preserve the historic memory of the place and people of the Belen Plaza Vieja.
2. Acquire official recognition and local community awareness of the historical church and Plaza of Belén.
3. Restore and reinvigorate the O'Neal house/museum and/or the outdoor property or repurpose it possibly as a chapel.
4. Rekindle a sense of place for the local residents in the community and general public through educational efforts and by placing historical markers of recognition and street exhibits on site and at other Belén Plaza locations.
5. Recognize and celebrate the forgotten Genízaro Native American captive/servant history and identity.
6. Promote community revitalization and cultural tourism development connecting to existing establishments such as the Harvey House, the Belén civic Plaza, current Catholic Church and the NM Rail Runner train depot.
7. Create a heritage corridor or district to protect against inappropriate development at the site and surrounding area.
8. Encourage sustainable building in harmony with the rural and agricultural landscapes and lifeways.
9. Assist owners of the Plaza Vieja square properties to apply for federal grants-in aid for preservation activities.
10. Seek public funds to:
  - A. Contract archeological work if needed.
  - B. Protect the property and perhaps adjacent property in perpetuity with Public Purchase of Development Rights.
  - C. Purchase cultural artifacts for exhibition in Museum or at the Harvey House.

D. Design exhibit and educational programming for site.

Our plan of action is to:

1. Collect further documentation on the social and family histories of the Belén Plaza Vieja including photos, documents and oral and video history interviews to be used in a comprehensive report or for exhibition.
2. Initiate a preservation committee with local residents and interested persons.
3. Conduct an archeological excavation of the site. Human remains would be handled with respect and dignity.
4. Solicit assistance from State Historic Preservation Office to conduct a survey of the Plaza Vieja historic property.
5. Contact city/municipal officials to obtain ordinances and codes for future museum and additional building and to educate and inform on preservation issues.
6. Apply for National Register for Historic Places.
7. Seek tax credit for rehabilitation work of the site from National Park Service by applying first to the State Historic Preservation Office.
8. Determine whether the church cemetery area constitutes claim for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.
9. Conduct comparison study of Belén Plaza Vieja Genízaro burials with the African Burial Ground National Monument and African Burial Ground Way in New York City. (The monument preserves a site containing the remains of more than 400 Africans buried during the late 17th and 18th centuries in a portion of what was the largest colonial-era cemetery for people of African descent, some free, most enslaved. The site's excavation and study was called "the most important historic urban archeological project in the United States.")
10. Conduct comparison study of Belén Plaza Vieja church foundation ruins (after excavation) with the Campo de Cahuenga ruins in Los Angeles, Ca.
11. Partner with like-minded organizations, agencies, and individuals to further the preservation cause.
12. Prepare a comprehensive historic preservation and economic development plan.
13. Create a virtual reconstruction of the colonial church using 3-D modeling software.