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### 3. A Village and its Church ----- Las Trampas



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One of the oldest, most unspoiled and interesting of the mountain villages of New Mexico is Las Trampas (The Traps). The village, originally known as Santo Tomas Apostol del Rio de Las Trampas, is situated in a tight secluded valley at an elevation of 7,200 feet.

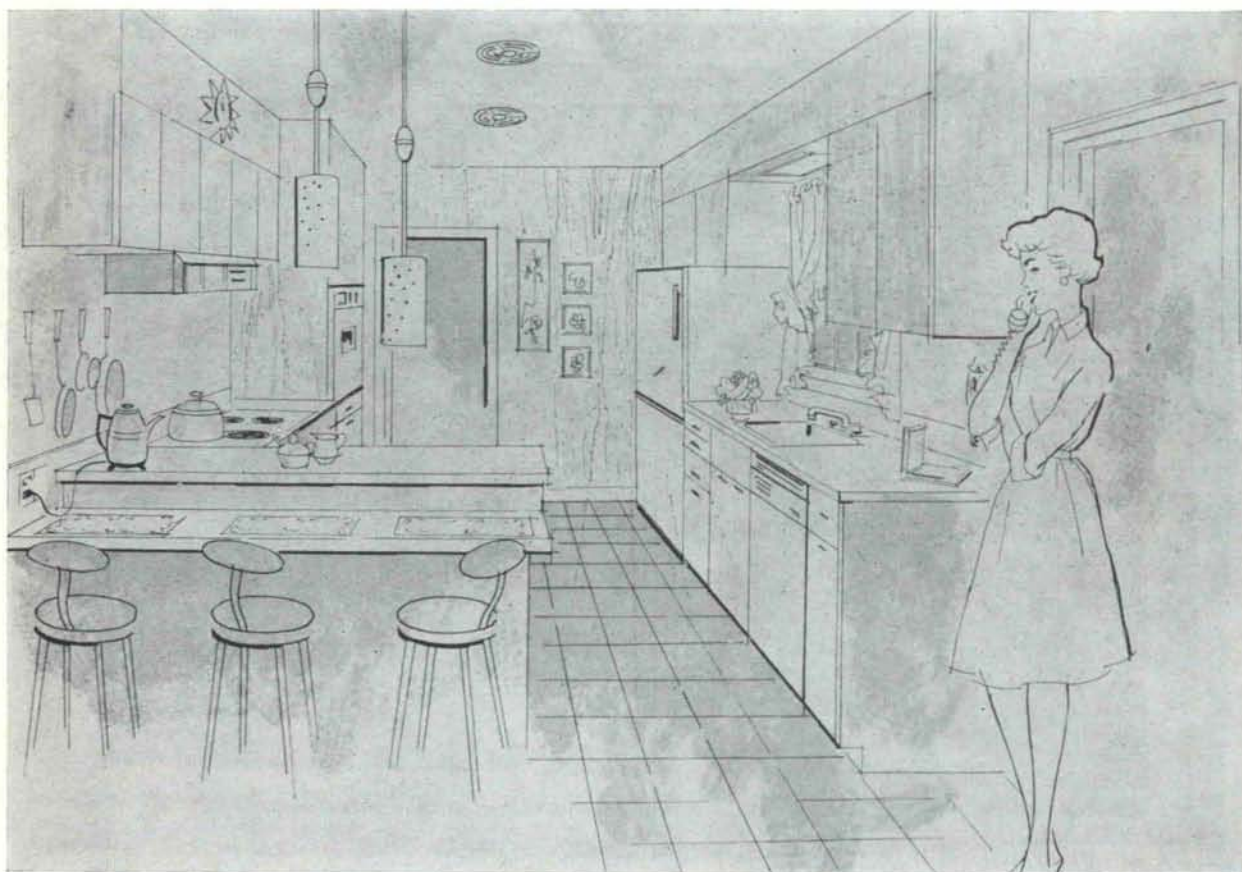
First settled in 1751 by twelve families from Santa Fe, the village flourished despite exposure to raids from the Comanche and Apache Indians until there were 63 families numbering 278 people in 1776. There was abundant land, timber, and water, for the Las Trampas community had over 46,000 acres

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granted to it. The village was administered from the mission at Picuris, over seven miles away, via a road often infested with hostile Indians. Naturally enough, the settlers soon petitioned for a church of their own. However, getting permission and sufficient funds to build a church 200 years ago took a determined community effort on the part of the settlers. This effort was described by Fray Francisco Dominguez, official commissary visitor to the missions of New Mexico in 1776:

"In 1760, when the holy Bishop Zamaron visited this kingdom, he left a license for them to build a chapel . . . This chapel has been built by alms from the whole kingdom, for the citizens of this place have begged throughout it. The chief promoter in all this has been one Juan Arguello who is more than 80 years old and this man asked me for alms for the said chapel during my visitation of Picuris. And since I have nothing, I gave him that, with many thanks for his devotion."

He also took note of the 278 people who lived in the walled village in the following words:

"These settlers do not live in ranchos, but in a plaza . . . For the most part they are a ragged lot, but there are three or four who have enough to get along after a fashion. They are as festive as they are poor, and very merry. Almost all are their own masters and servants."

The then mighty rancheros and grandees of New Mexico have long since passed into history, while the meek and humble of places like Trampas have inherited their earth. Today they still water it, till it, plant it with corn, crosses and eventually with their dead.

Juan de Arguello, the spearhead of the church drive, died in 1789. To his burial record were added these words:

"Juan de Arguello, at the age of 112 years. Founder of the church and village. He died in full possession of his faculties."



45. water for the fields is carried across stream beds in hollowed logs



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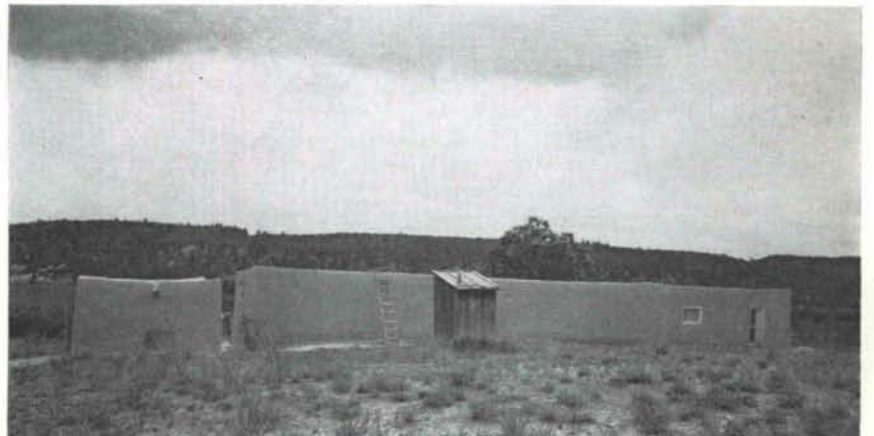


48. a well house



49. one of the two grist mills

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The  
Church of  
San Jose  
de Gracia  
de Las Trampas



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The descendants of these founders are still long-lived.

The church itself is one of the most important and best preserved examples of Spanish Colonial mission architecture in the Southwest. Completed about 1780, the church of San Jose de Gracia de Las Trampas, is regarded by architectural historians as a textbook example of mission church architecture. Built of adobe masonry and covered by an adobe-filled roof, this structure beautifully illustrates the compact geometric mass, the restricted fenestration, the clearstory above the roof of the nave, as well as a plan with clearly defined nave transepts, apse, baptistry, choir balcony and sacistry. The nave is spanned by vigas supported on elaborately cut corbels. The basic features of mission churches like San Jose de Garcia go back to the sixteenth century stone, vaulted "fortress" churches in Mexico, but the New Mexico churches were transformed by the limited technology and economy of the new province.

The floor is made of hand-hewn boards laid in five-foot panels under which a number of villagers are buried. The altar paintings were made by an itinerant folk artist who came to Las Trampas after the Civil War from Sonora, Mexico, and married a local girl. He settled down in the valley until he yielded to the lure of railroad-building pay in Colorado. Thus the village lost its foremost *santero* or image maker.

The village is still centered around the original plaza with some of its houses strung out along the rim of the valley nearer the fields and also along the highway.

An out migration of the people is very much in evidence in Las Trampas where there are many vacant or abandoned houses. If it were not for welfare payments and a tradition of close ties to the land, villages like Las Trampas would probably be almost completely depopulated.

In the past each family raised corn, hay, wheat, pinto beans, and



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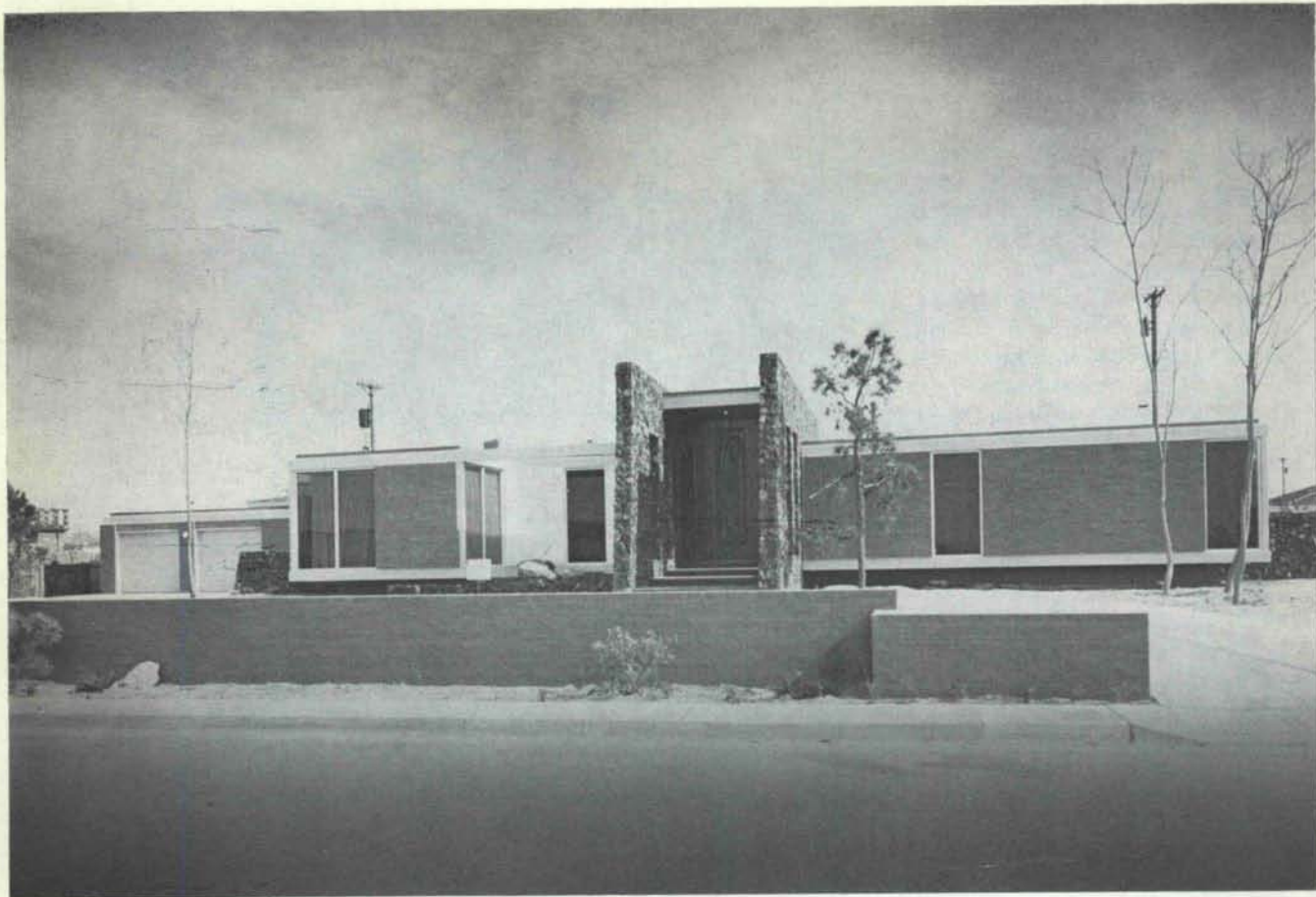


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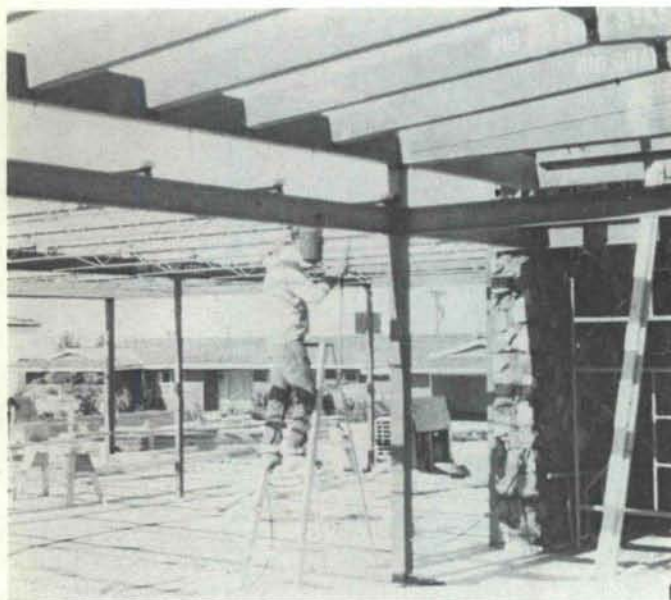
other garden crops as well as a good deal of livestock. Today Trampas no longer has 46,000 acres to supply its forage, cropland and timber. There are now only about 210 acres of irrigated cropland around the village plus some limited and often poor range allotments in the surrounding National Forest.

The farm units in Trampas are small and generally long and narrow as a result of the Spanish custom of subdividing the land among all of the heirs. Some of the holdings are less than 100 feet wide by 800 feet long. The crop pattern is still based upon the early settlers' goal of wresting a subsistence from the land; most of what is grown is fed to the farmers family and livestock, which include swine and poultry as well as sheep and cattle.





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