



The Casa Grande, or Great House

CASA GRANDE
National Monument
ARIZONA

Casa Grande National Monument



United States Department of the Interior
Harold L. Ickes, Secretary

National Park Service, Newton B. Drury, Director



The Casa Grande is a ruined adobe watchtower, built by Indians who farmed the Gila Valley 600 years ago. The ruin is of great interest to both casual visitors and to students of Southwestern archeology. The importance of the Casa Grande lies not in size or beauty, for compared to other great ruins of the Southwest it has neither; but in the fact that it is the only building of its particular type which still stands. Ruined walls of other watchtowers have been located in the southern Arizona desert, but none is nearly complete like the Casa Grande.

The Prehistoric Indians of the Gila Valley

During the past 60 years, archeologists, by excavation and study of the ruins of southern Arizona, have pieced together an amazing story of the early human occupation of this region. Each year's work adds a little knowledge of

the Indians who lived along the Gila and its tributaries, before the days of Spanish exploration.

At present it is believed that Indians first farmed the Gila Valley about 300 years before the beginning of the Christian era. Small-scale irrigation must have been practiced in those early days, for there is nothing to indicate that Arizona's climate has changed materially during the past 2,000 years. The knowledge of farming methods probably came from Indians who lived farther south, in Mexico.

Today these Indians are called Hohokam. This is a term used by the modern Pima Indians, and means The Ancient Ones. The culture of the Hohokam was distinguished by several features, of which the most important are:

1. They lived in single-roomed houses of wattle and daub construction. The houses were similar in ap-

pearance to modern Pima and Papago homes, but with floors excavated a little below ground level.

2. Crops were maize (corn), beans, pumpkins, and probably cotton.
3. The dead were cremated.
4. The Hohokam were proficient in carving shell and stone.
5. The common decorated pottery was of a buff color with designs applied with red paint.

About 700 A. D. the Hohokam started digging enormous irrigation canals; some are 25 feet wide and 15 feet deep. The canals were lengthened gradually through the years until some reached total lengths of 20 to 25 miles. These canals represent the greatest achievements, in an economic sense, of the Hohokam.

During the twelfth century an enemy of the Hohokam appeared. At that time, at any rate, the Hohokam began to build high adobe walls around their villages, creating defensive sites which we call compounds. They were still living in compounds at the beginning of the fourteenth century when an alien group of Indians, the Salado, came out of the mountains to the north and moved in with the desert dwellers.

The Salado

The Salado Indians were so named because they lived principally on the headwaters of the Salt, or Salado, River in east central Arizona. They were Pueblo Indians, similar to the modern Zuni who live south of Gallup, N. Mex. They were also farmers, like the Hohokam, but Salado farming was usually dry farming; irrigation, when used, was on a small scale.

The Salado also lived in masonry houses of many rooms which sometimes were built three and four stories high. These large villages were usually constructed on a hill, ridge, or in a cave for protection. The dead were interred without cremation, and the decorated pottery was a polychrome ware with elaborate designs in red, black, and white.

A great drought of 23 years' duration (1277-1299) caused widespread population changes throughout northern Arizona and New Mexico, and it was probably this upheaval that caused some of the Salado to travel south into the desert. These, apparently, moved into Hohokam villages, and the evidence is that this joint occupation of Hohokam towns was a peaceful one in so far as the principals were concerned. The con-

tinued presence of an enemy group, or groups, who raided the farming villages is indicated by the defensive walls around the settlements and by the construction of lookouts or watchtowers.

The Casa Grande

The Casa Grande was a Salado building. Its thick walls of unreinforced adobe were constructed by a people accustomed to building structures of more than one story, which the Hohokam were not. It stands four stories high, dominating the village in which it was built and, from its upper levels, giving a wide view over the southern Arizona desert.

The use for which the Casa Grande was built is obvious from certain details of its construction. The builders started with a ground plan which consisted of a group of three narrow rooms laid side by side with a long room built across each end. Shallow trenches were dug in the ground as foundations, and construction of the walls began.

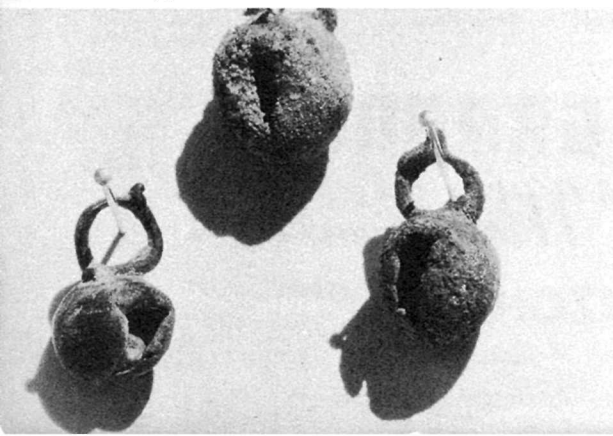
The material was an adobe of high lime content which is found several feet beneath the surface of the desert; the name for this is "caliche." The Salado method of building was not to press the adobe into bricks but to pile it up on the

walls in blocks which average 15 inches high by 3 feet long by the width of the wall. As soon as one block was made another was added alongside it until a course had been built around the building. As soon as one course was dry another was added.

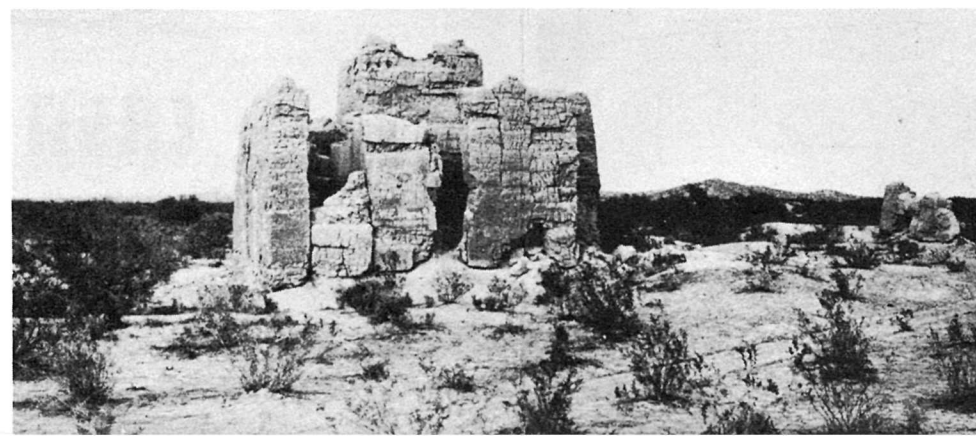
When the walls of the Casa Grande had reached a height of 7 feet above ground level (the height of one story), the builders filled the rooms with earth; they had no intention of living in or using those rooms. The building was then carried up two additional stories, and only the central room built on up through the fourth story.

The Salado, accustomed to building with masonry, were apparently afraid of adobe as a building material and yet wanted to construct a high tower. By filling in the first story of the building and carrying only the central room through the fourth floor they put an effective brace on the important inner walls. In other words, they built an artificial 7-foot hill, then constructed a 3-story house on the hill. Another ingenious piece of engineering was the manner in which the outer walls of the building were battered; 4 feet thick at the base, the walls are tapered until at the top of the third floor they are less than 2 feet thick.

Copper bells found in Casa Grande



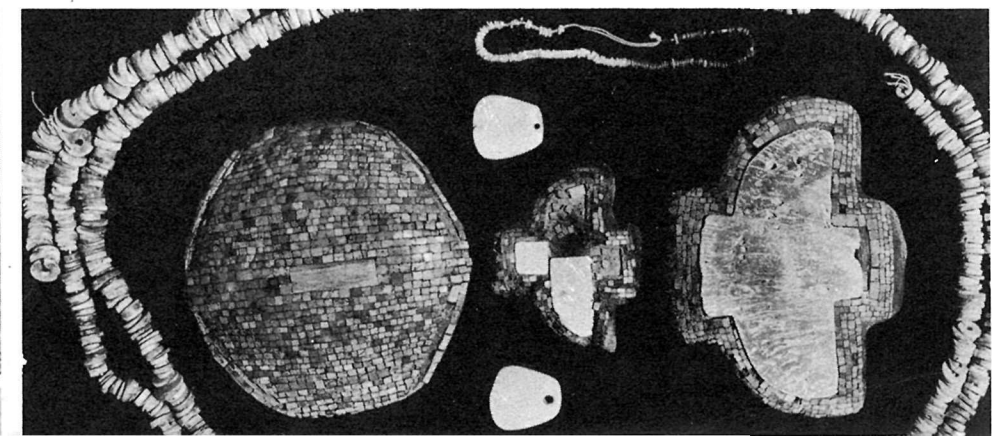
Casa Grande, in 1890



Pima Basket Maker



Ornaments found in Casa Grande



In addition to its use as a watchtower, the Casa Grande served as an apartment house. Its eleven large rooms probably accommodated as many families. Early excavations of the Casa Grande ruin recovered ordinary cooking and storage vessels, sleeping mats, corn cobs, and fragments of textiles—the ordinary remains to be found in prehistoric rooms.

The Casa Grande was in use for only a short time. It was probably built about 1350. By 1450 both Hohokam and Salado had abandoned the Gila. Just why these two groups of Indians left their villages for other regions is not known, but there is evidence which indicates that the land became so water-logged, because of centuries of irrigation, that it was impossible to raise crops.

Some of the Salado probably moved northeast to the modern Zuni country, south of Gallup, N. Mex.; others, south-east into Chihuahua, Mexico. The travels of the Hohokam have not been traced so well, but it seems they moved south into the Papago country.

Modern History

The earliest written account of the Casa Grande was by the Jesuit missionary, Father Kino, who visited the site in 1694 and gave it the name by which it is still known, Casa Grande (Big House). The building was already in ruins at the time of Father Kino's visit. The ceilings had been burned and the rooms filled with debris. The missionary's account of the ruins would still serve as a good description, for practically no change has occurred in the general outlines of the Casa Grande during the intervening 250 years.

In 1891, Cosmos Mindeleff excavated the Casa Grande for the Smithsonian Institution, and he was instrumental in

having the Casa Grande Ruins Reservation created by the Congress. Other excavations have been carried on at the Casa Grande group of ruins by the Smithsonian Institution (1905-6), the Southwest Museum (1929), and the Los Angeles County Museum (1930). Six prehistoric villages within the boundaries of the monument have been partially excavated; at least two other villages remain untouched.

The Casa Grande was made a national park by act of Congress in 1892; the designation was changed in 1918 to Casa Grande National Monument.

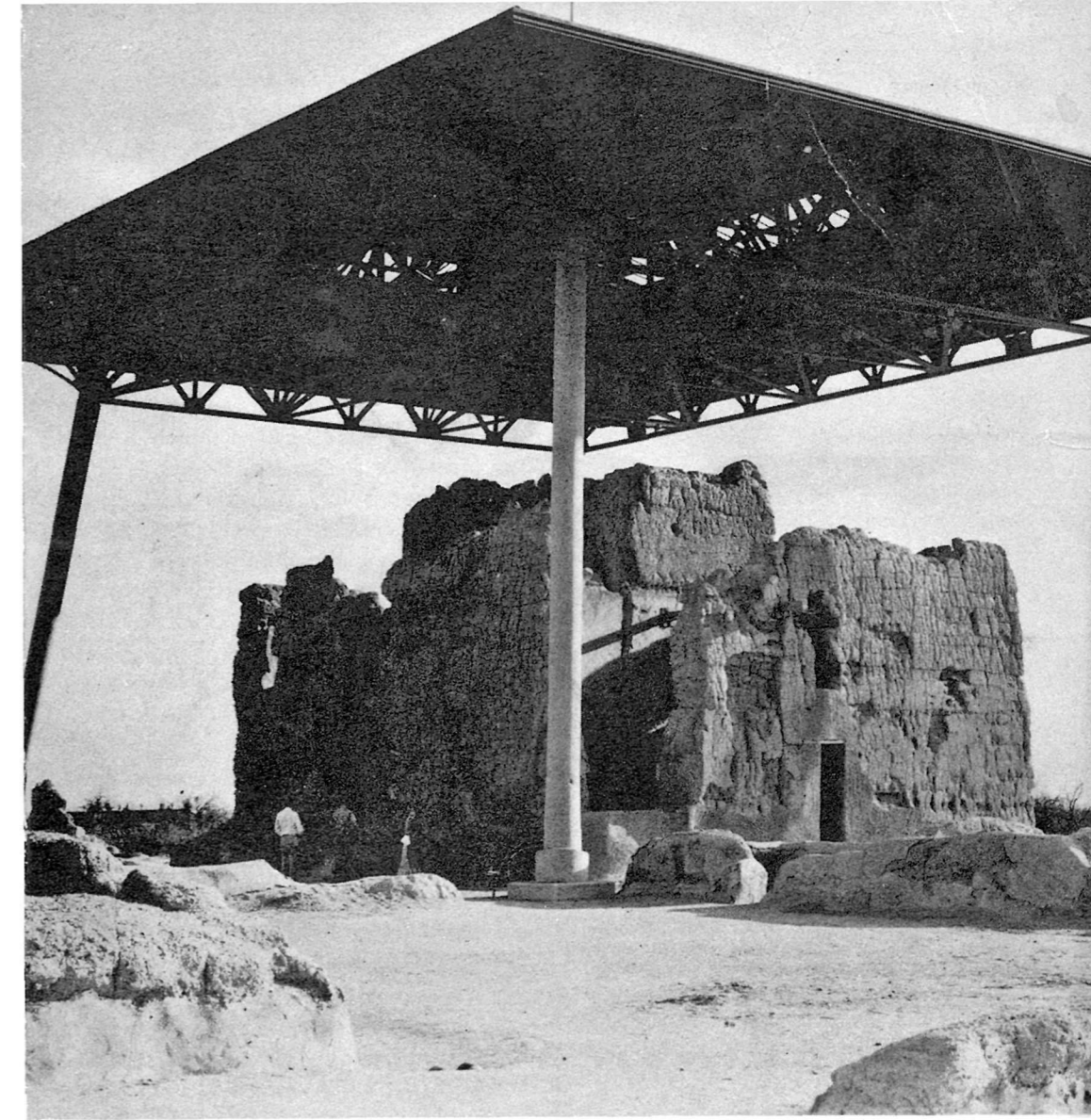
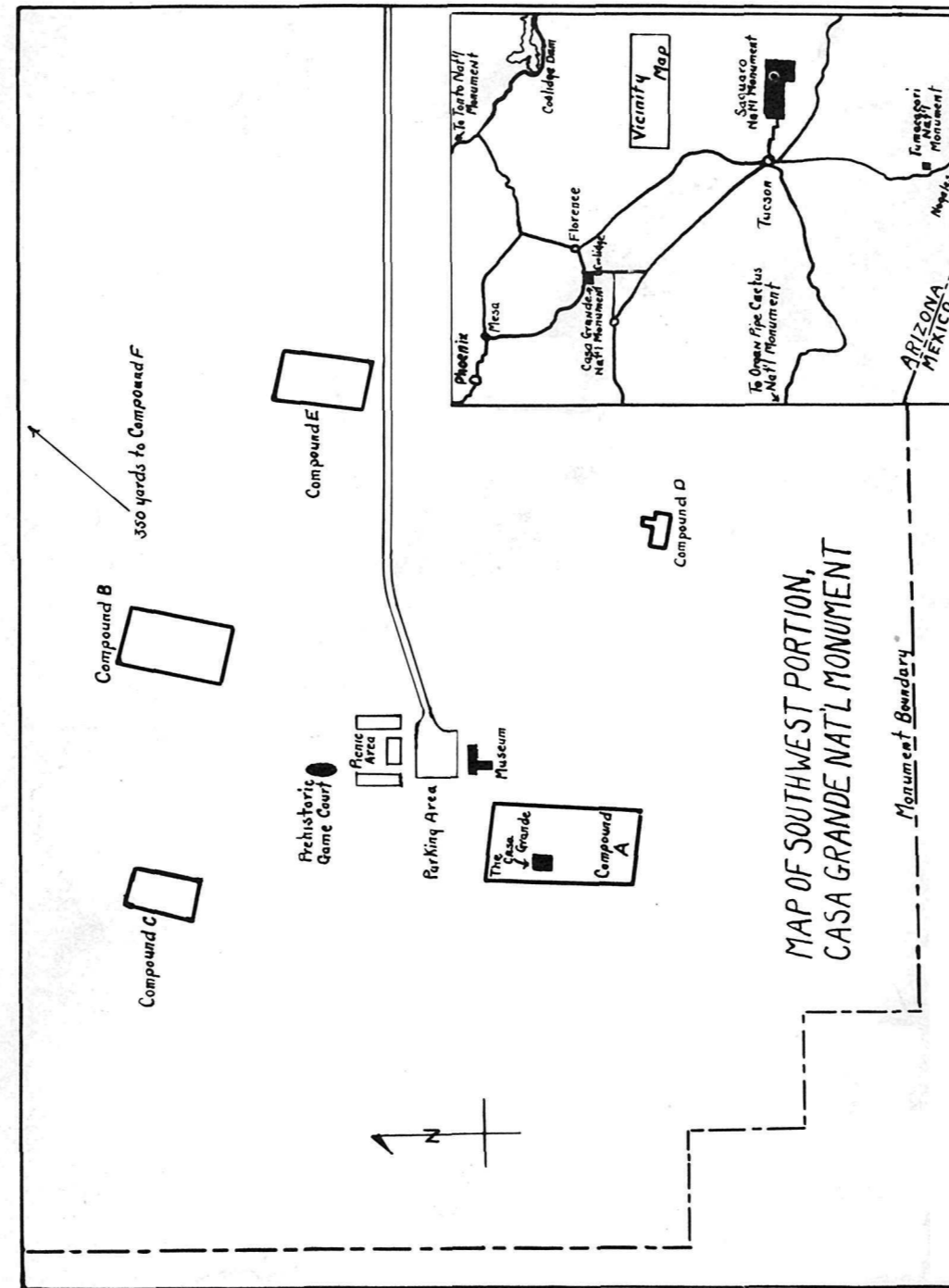
Administration and Facilities

Casa Grande National Monument is located on Arizona State Highway 87, two miles north of Coolidge. It is almost half way between Phoenix and Tucson; 57 miles from Phoenix; 67 from Tucson. Coolidge is on a main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad.

A museum exhibit is maintained in the headquarters area, in which prehistoric artifacts from the Casa Grande group and other ruins of the vicinity are displayed. There is a picnic ground with tables, shade, and water.

Guide service to the ruins is maintained daily from 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. The guide fee is 25 cents for each adult. For persons who desire to visit Casa Grande often there is a yearly ticket, non-transferable, for 50 cents. Uniformed men of the armed forces of the United States, Indians, and children under 16 years of age accompanied by adults who will assume responsibility for their conduct, are admitted free. There is no charge in the museum or for use of the picnic area.

Address all communications to The Superintendent, Southwestern National Monuments, Coolidge, Ariz.



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