





The Pueblo of Abó was occupied continuously for at least 400 years prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Its early inhabitants were known as *Tompiros*. They were the mountain dwelling relatives of the Piro Indians who lived in pueblos along the Rio Grande in the Socorro region.

The Franciscan mission, *San Gregorio de Abó*, was established at the pueblo of Abó about 1620. The other pueblos that comprised the "Salinas Province" were Quarai, Las Humanas (Gran Quivira National Monument), Tenabo, Tabira, Chilili, and Tajique. They all had Franciscan missions or chapels during the seventeenth century. The name *Salinas* refers to the salt lakes in the Estancia Basin to the east of the pueblos. This province was the eastern frontier of Spanish expansion in New Mexico.

The salt lagoons provided a source of tribal wealth both before and after the arrival of the Spaniards. Abó was an important mission because it lay on the principal trade route from the Rio Grande to the salt lakes. It was probably the most architecturally sophisticated of all the seventeenth century mission churches. A report in 1641 stated that Abó had an organ and choir and 1,580 souls under its administration—a figure which may have included two other pueblos served by the Abó priest. While salt from the Salinas lakes was a principal export, it was the sale of piñon nuts that paid for the organ for the mission church.

A combination of drought, famine and Apache raids debilitated the eastern frontier during the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Abó was allegedly destroyed on October 7, 1672, when Apaches sacked and burned the church buildings and murdered the priest. The survivors probably joined their kin in the Rio Grande pueblos.

By the late 1670s the entire Salinas Province lay abandoned and in waste. In 1680, when the native population of New Mexico revolted against the Spanish invaders, a number of the Christianized Indians, including some who had lived at Abó, sought refuge with the Europeans who retreated to El Paso. The area of the Salinas Province was not resettled until the early 1800s, and then only by Spaniards.

The Abó site was purchased by the Museum of New Mexico in 1937 and was proclaimed a State Monument in 1938. Excavations in the mission, convento and parts of the pueblo began in 1938 with labor furnished by a WPA program and were concluded in 1939.

Abó State Monument is ten miles west of Mountainair, New Mexico, on U.S. Highway 60. The church and convento have been fenced to protect visitors from the hazardous conditions of the high sandstone walls. Abó is a National Historic Landmark. There are no on-site visitor facilities.

Nearby are the ruins of the pueblo of Las Humanas and the mission church *San Buenaventura* at Gran Quivira National Monument, 25 miles south of Mountainair on State Highway 14.

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Opposite: East wall of the mission church of San Gregorio de Abo, with a portion of the convento in foreground. Abo was the most sophisticated of the seventeenth century Franciscan churches. (Photo by Patrick King)



Above: Mission La Purisima Concepcion de Cuarac as it appears today at Quarai State Monument. Opposite page: View from interior of the church. Quarai was seat of the Holy Inquisition in the mid-1600s. (Photos by Patrick King)

As early as 1609, the Viceroy of New Spain ordered the Governor of New Mexico to concentrate the Pueblo Indians into fewer settlements in order to facilitate their administration. The mission and pueblo at Quarai may well have been the product of such a resettlement. The first church at Quarai was established in 1620 or earlier. A second, larger church was begun about 1620.

The historic inhabitants of Quarai spoke the Tiwa language, like the people of Kuaua, and the present-day Pueblo Indians of Isleta and Sandia.

Sixteenth century New Mexico was wracked by a bizarre conflict between ecclesiastical authorities and the civil government. The

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native people were caught in the middle. They had to provide labor for construction of the church structures and, after their completion, served as servants to the priests, provided them with food, and tended their animals and crops. The Spaniards also extracted tribute from the Pueblo families. As a result, a bitter dispute developed between the church and state in relation to New Mexico's most valuable resource—human labor.

Governors not only sabotaged the missions, but sometimes personally engaged in cruel methods of exploitation, assisted by equally corrupt local officials. The priests retaliated by wielding the power of excommunication with abandon. The church also had the power of the Holy Inquisition. The seat of the Inquisition in the middle 1600s was at the mission of Quarai, and it was here that people were charged with such crimes as witchcraft and blasphemy. This conflict weakened the Spanish position in New Mexico and stirred unrest among the native people, whose own religious practices were a point of dispute between Spanish church and state.

Along with these troubles were catastrophic raids upon the missionary settlements by Apaches. As if that were not enough, Quarai and the surrounding missions were struck by the dual specters of famine and pestilence in the early 1670s. Quarai was abandoned by Indian and Spaniard alike by 1675.

Quarai was purchased by the Museum of New Mexico in 1913 and was declared a State Monument in 1935. The monument consists of the large sandstone church, *La Purísima Concepción de Cuarac*, its attendant *convento* (priest's quarters), and the extensive pueblo remains.

C. F. Lummis described Quarai as “an ediface in ruins . . . but so tall, so solemn, so dominant of that strange, lonely landscape . . . On the Rhine it would be a suplative; in the wilderness of the Manzano it is a miracle.”

Excavations were carried out at Quarai in 1913 and 1920. In the 1930s the church was repaired and stabilized. A visitor center-museum was constructed at the site in 1970. Recently installed exhibits illustrate life at the pueblo and mission and display artifacts that were recovered from the excavations. An interpretive trail explains the various historic features of the site.

Quarai State Monument is eight miles north of Mountainair, on State Highway 14. There is an attractive picnic area at the monument and camping facilities are available at nearby U.S. Forest Service areas and at Manzano State Park. Quarai is a National Historic Landmark.

