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THE RUINS OF ABO MISSION

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THE MISSION OF SAN GREGORIO DE ABÓ

By JOSEPH H. TOULOUSE, III*

THE RUINS of the Mission of San Gregorio de Abó are located in Section 25, Township 3 North, Range 5 East, New Mexico Principal Meridian; some ten miles west of Mountainair, New Mexico, on U. S. Highway 60. The boundary of the Cibola National Forest lies some two hundred yards to the west of the west boundary of the monument. The A. T. & S. F. railroad has a line running through the Abó Pass a mile to the south. The ruins lie on a point, at the junction of an unnamed arroyo with Barranco Arroyo, surrounded on all sides by low-lying hills or knolls covered with shrub trees. A spring lies on the south side of the Indian pueblo, and is the center of the small Spanish-American community of Abó Viejo. Seeps are encountered along the arroyo to the east. Cottonwood, locust, fruit and poplar trees have been planted by the Spanish-Americans around the spring, which yields a steady flow of water the year round.

The physiography of the Abó region is that of mesa, mountain and young valley. The Chupadera or Mesa de los Jumanos escarpment is seen forming the horizon to the south and to the northwest the sharp and rugged

* Extensive repair of the remaining standing walls at the Abó Mission has been in progress by the Museum of New Mexico and the University of New Mexico for the past seven months. The author, a graduate of the University, is supervisor of the project.

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Manzano Mountains. The Barranco Arroyo heads in the latter and has eroded deeply through the bed-rock to the west of the pueblo; small rock-bottomed arroyos cut through the pueblo, itself, and close to the Mission. The drainage is into the Abó Canyon and via the Rio Grande to the Gulf of Mexico.

The predominant geological formations of the region are the Abó Sandstone (Lower Permian) which because of its outstanding red color is noticeable for miles, and from which is derived the building material of the Pueblo and Mission; and the Chupadera limestone (Upper Permian) which caps the mesa of that name.¹

The first mention of the former Piro village of Abó is in *The Gallegos Relation of the Rodriguez Expedition, 1581-1582*.

... we are informed that away from the [Estancia] salinas were three very large pueblos. According to their [the Indians] indications they seemed to be large cities. They were not visited due to the heavy snow-fall which the discoverers experienced at that time.²

Hammond says in a footnote that these three cities were "... probably Abó, Tenabó, and Tabirá."³

From the Spanish Archives the first official visitation to Abó was in October, 1598, by Don Juan Oñate.⁴ Again Oñate sent an expedition against Abó, which he calls a

1. Darton, N. H.: "Red Beds" and Associated Formations in New Mexico." United States Geological Survey *Bulletin* 794, Washington, 1928.

2. Hammond, George P.: *The Gallegos Relation of the Rodriguez Expedition to New Mexico, 1581-1582*. Historical Society of New Mexico, Publication in History, vol. IV, p. 50. Santa Fe, 1927.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

4. Hammond, George P.: *Don Juan de Oñate and the Founding of New Mexico*. Historical Society of New Mexico, Publications in History, vol. II, p. 108. Santa Fe, 1927.

Jumano pueblo in 1601, lead by Zaldívar who was instructed to punish the Indians because of an attack upon a number of Spanish deserters.⁵

The first missionary work was begun upon Oñate's first visit to Abó in 1598.

... the first missionary labors were begun in this section [Salinas province] by Fray Francisco de San Miguel, a chaplain of Oñate's army. The headquarters of the fraill were at Pecos, but he ministered also to the Indians of the Tiqua pueblo of Quaraí and to the inhabitants of the three Piro villages above mentioned [Abó, Tenabó, and Tabirá]. The first actual missions among the Piro were established in 1629 by Francisco de Acevedo at Abó and Tabirá, and probably also at Tenabó, but ere the massive-walled churches and monasteries were complete, the village-dwellers of both the Salinas and the Rio Grande suffered so seriously from the ever-turbulent Apache, that every village of the Salinas was deserted before the Pueblo insurrection of 1680.⁶

Francisco de Acevado, who first actually established the missions among the Piro in 1629, was a native of Sevilla, Spain. He received the habit of his order in the Convento de México, January 10, 1625. It was under his supervision that the Missions of Abó, Tenabó, and Tabirá were built after his assignment to the Piro by Perea. He died and was buried at Abó, August 1, 1644.⁷

The years during which the Mission program was begun and carried on were very unsettled in affairs between the church and the state, notwithstanding, much was accomplished in the erection of the Missions.⁸

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 155.

6. Ayer, Mrs. Edward E.: *The Memorial of Fray Alonso de Bena-vides:1630*. p. 215. Chicago, 1916.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

8. Scholes, France V.: *The Church and State in New Mexico, 1610-1650*. Historical Society of New Mexico, Publications in History, vol. VII. Albuquerque, 1937.

Not much mention of Abó is to be noted after its abandonment, sometime before the Pueblo insurrection of 1680. Not until the Nineteenth Century has it been mentioned in print or been visited. It was again visited in November, 1846, by Lieutenant J. W. Abert, United States Army, and mentioned, consequently, in his report.⁹

The first archaeological record made was by Bandelier in the years 1880-1885.⁹ Since that time many others have visited the site, notably Charles F. Lummis.¹⁰

Dendrochronological Record.

The only tree-ring dates available, as yet, for the Abó Mission are as follows: 1541+X-1646.¹¹ The first date here given of 1541+X is of small significance as the +X indicates an indefinite number of years have been lost from the outer portion of the beam beyond the date of 1541, this being due to hewing.

Iron Hinges Found at Abó.

In uncovering the front entrance leading into the Nave of the Mission three sill beams were disclosed. The middle one contained at either end two rather interesting iron hinges.

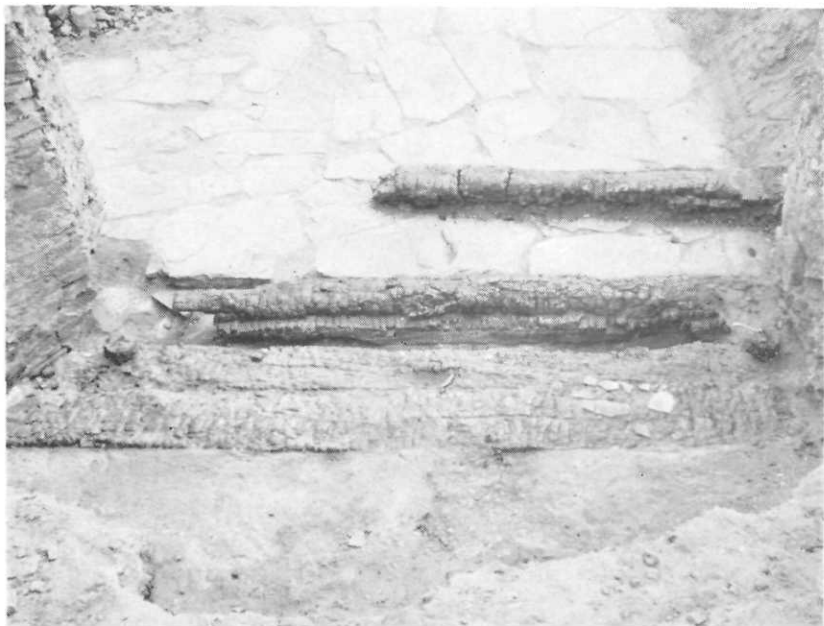
These are the first known to have been found in the entrance-ways of any of the missions in this area. Upon uncovering these hinges, both of which were constructed of iron, the poor condition of their preservation was noted and efforts taken to preserve them by sketching, photographing and use of preservative, but only one was saved completely as found, while the other only partially.

9. Bandelier, A. F.: *Final Report of Investigations among the Indians of the Southwestern United States*. Volumes I and II. Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America, American Series, Cambridge, 1892.

10. Lummis, Charles F.: *The Land of Poco Tiempo*. New York, 1902.

11. Stallings, W. S., Jr.: "Southwest Dated Ruins: I." *Tree-Ring Bulletin*, vol. 4, No. 2, p. 5, Oct., 1937. Tucson, Arizona.

These hinges are of the pivot type and were undoubtedly driven onto the door and then set in place with the pivot-point resting upon a small slab of iron which shows a small depression of use. The hinges stood about seven inches in height and four inches in diameter.



IRON HINGES FOUND IN DOORWAY AT ABO MISSION
LOOKING SOUTHWARD INTO NAVE, SHOWING HINGES IN SITU