

The D

S

ma



- Amusements
- Television
- Theaters
- Music
- Art
- Book Reviews
- Travel
- Gardening
- Chess
- Camera Angles
- Stamp News



Cover Story Pages 2, 3

*Indians Built Abo Mis*



# Ancient Outpost Of Christian Research Disclo

By MARJORIE WHITE

Written Especially for Sundial

The massive red sandstone ruins of the 17th century mission of San Gregorio de Abo challenge the imagination of the modern, machine-minded tourists who visit the New Mexico state monument of Abo, just off Highway 60, 11 miles west of Mountainair.

"How could a group of primitive Indians build such an enormous structure with only stone tools?" they ask. "How many hands did it take to raise and set the tremendous foot-square roof beams? How did they fell the trees with stone axes and carry them from the mountains?"

To some visitors the motivation behind the construction of this ancient outpost of Christianity is even mre amazing than its architecture. "How did a Franciscan priest, newly-come from Spain inspire pagan Indians to build a Christian church and monastery? How did he bridge the barrier of language to transmit his plans?"

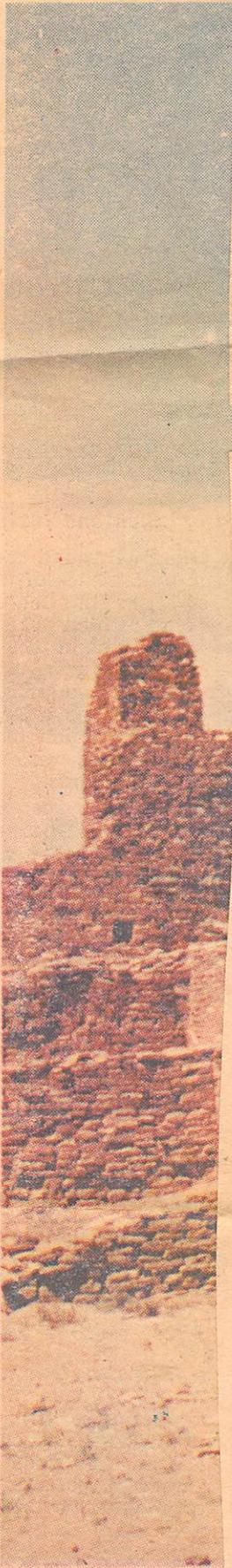
The story of the building of San Gregorio de Abo is lost in the silence of more than three centuries. But, archeological recoveries from the debris during excavation in 1938, plus occasional references in the Spanish archives help to reconstruct the history of the old mission—an impressive example of 17th century architecture and a memorial to the patient padres who dedicated their lives to teaching the Catholic faith and European culture to a heathen people.

Tompiro Indians established a village of two-three story homes on the site of Abo around 1400-1500, historians say. They were a sedentary, agrarian group, who raised crops of corn and pumpkins on the hillsides, gathered the fruits of native plants, and hunted in the nearby Manzano Mountains, where game is still abundant. Pinon nuts from the mountains and salt from the salinas (salt lakes) in the Estancia Basin to the east were important articles of trade with the Rio Grande pueblos for obsidian, turquoise cotton, feathers and other items for use in religious ceremonies. Now and then, they went east to trade with the nomadic Apaches and the Plains Indians.

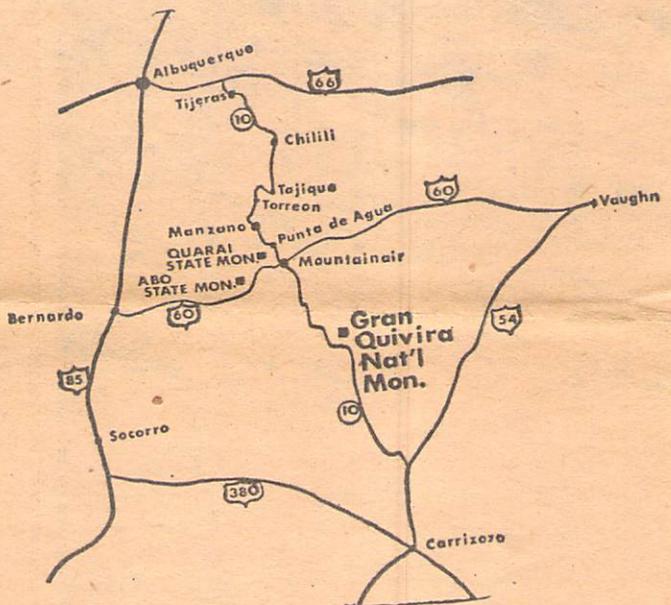
## MISSED PUEBLO

Coronado, the first Spanish explorer of New Mexico, missed seeing the Tompiro pueblo on his more northerly route in 1540, but the Chamuscado-Rodriguez expedition learned about it in 1581, though they failed to visit the Indians because of the heavy snows in Abo Pass. Don Antonio Espejo and two companions, searching in 1582, for two priests left behind on the Chamuscado exploration, are believed to be the first Spaniards to enter the village.

The Tompiros apparently offered no resistance to Don Juan de Oñate, first Spanish governor of New Mexico, when he took oaths of allegiance in 1598. But some of the Indians from Abo are said to



- Amusements
- Television
- Theaters
- Music
- Art
- Book Reviews
- Travel
- Gardening
- Chess
- Camera Angles
- Stamp News

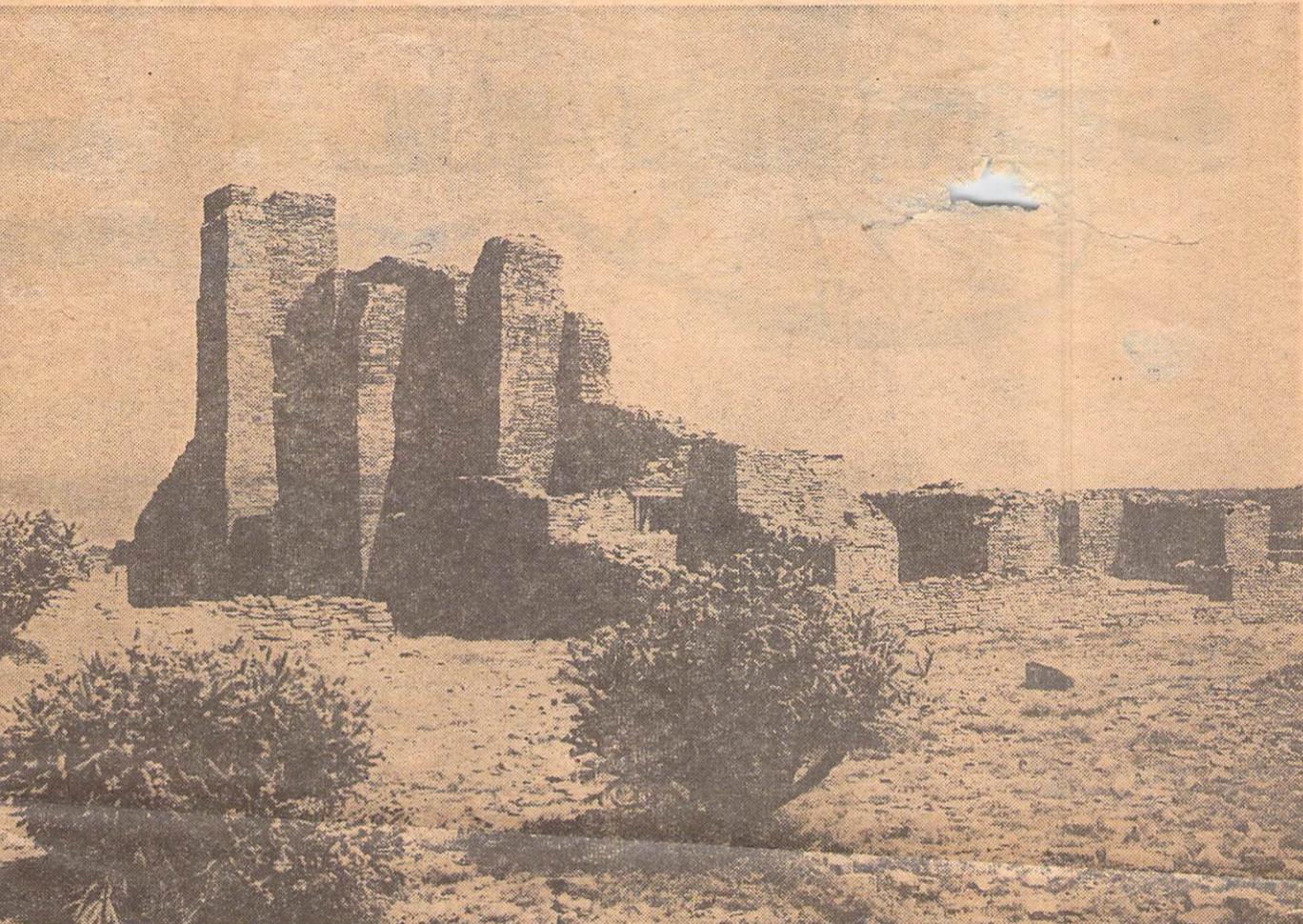


LOCATION MAP—The New Mexico state monument of Abo is easily accessible on a paved road, just off Highway 60, 11 miles west of Mountainair, and 28 miles east of the 85-60 intersection (Bernardo). Mounds of unexplored pueblo Indian dwellings surround the excavated remains of the 17th-century mission and monastery of San Gregorio de Abo. No tourist facilities are maintained at the monument.



Cover Story  
Ind

# ses Much Abo Mission History



**MASSIVE GRANDEUR**—There's melancholy grandeur in the massive ruined walls of San Gregorio mission church at Abo state monument, near Mountainair, N.M. Designed in medieval European

have participated in a battle at Quaral pueblo, eight miles east, in 1601, when Vicente Zaldivar led a punitive expedition against them for the massacre of two Spanish colonists. This is the only evidence of any hostile reaction by the Tompiros.

Visiting friars may have come to the Tomiro pueblo earlier, but the first resident priest was the Rev. Francisco Acevedo, who was assigned in 1629. He started construction of the mission church that year and named it for San Gregorio de Abo, a martyred Finnish bishop.

(Abo is pronounced locally with a long "A." In Spanish records, it was frequently spelled "Abbo," but always with the accent mark on the second syllable and a short "A.")

From 1629 to about 1675, when the pueblo was abandoned, Abo was one of the most prosperous, populous (estimated 800 residents), and successful mission endeavors in New Mexico. It was an administrative headquarters from which friars went out to smaller missions to the southeast, called by the Spanish.

The Rev. Acevedo, who is credited with designing the mission and monastery, was evidently a practical man. The lines of the structures are straight and simple, almost medieval, with little evidence of decoration except on the heavy beams that supported the roof of the church. The slabs of red sandstone, which must have been quarried with great difficulty with the simple stone tools of the Indians, are of irregular shapes and sizes, placed with the smoothest side inside.

## THINNER WALLS

The walls are not so thick as those of other missions of the same period, which may indicate that the Rev. Acevedo wished to save both materials and labor. The church faced south to get maximum light on the front. Only the west wall was buttressed, because the adjoining walls of the monastery reinforced the east side. Doors and windows were framed with wood and a wooden front door swung on crude pivotal iron hinges, which were unearthed in the excavation.

The church was 132 feet long and narrow, tapering from about 30 feet in front to about 40 feet in the sanctuary, where remains of three altars were found. The roof over the sanctuary rose eight feet above that of the nave. Was the spaciousness of the altar area intended to awe the Indian converts?

Today, as in the 17th century, you approach

style in 1629, the two and three foot thick walls once rose 40 to 50 feet high, with tremendous foot-square carved beams across the top to support a roof of pinon and juniper boughs.

the church through the terraced convento or monastery by a series of stone steps. You can see the set of steps that led from the outside up to the choir loft which was above the front door. As you walk around the stone and adobe ruins of the convento, you can trace its arrangement—a series of rectangular rooms opening off two courts. The kitchen has a large hearth and a well-preserved stone bench across one end. The other 20 or more rooms were apparently living quarters and storage rooms.

A few of the rooms have flagstone floors, but most were hard-packed dirt. Pieces of gypsum-based plaster, some white and some with traces of color and designs, indicate the walls of the church and the monastery were originally finished.

## THREE BURIAL SITES

Excavators found three separate burial sites—the traditional campo santo in front of the church, an area for the interment of children under the church floor, and a third graveyard in the rear of the church, formerly a garden. No work has been done on the mounds of earth which cover the ruins of the Indian dwellings.

Since San Gregorio de Abo was not built, as some early missions were, over a previous Indian pueblo, archeologists find special interest in the kiva, ceremonial chamber, in the west courtyard. Why is this pagan relic in a Christian mission? So far, researchers can only suggest that the padres did not expect miracles and as a concession to ancestral customs permitted the Indians the continued use of their secret underground rituals.

The Rev. Acevedo served as custodian of Abo for 30 years, a term which must have made a distinct change in the lives of his primitive charges. They learned new skills—how to make carts from the wood of forest trees, to fashion nails from bits of iron which the Spanish imported, to mold new shapes of utensils (cups with handles, soup plates, water jugs) from clay and to decorate them with new designs. The padres taught them how to weave stockings from the wool of the sheep with which the mission corral was stocked and how to make breeches and shirts of hides to trade to the colonists.

There were new foods to be tasted. The padres introduced fruits for the mission gardens —

(Continued on Following Page)