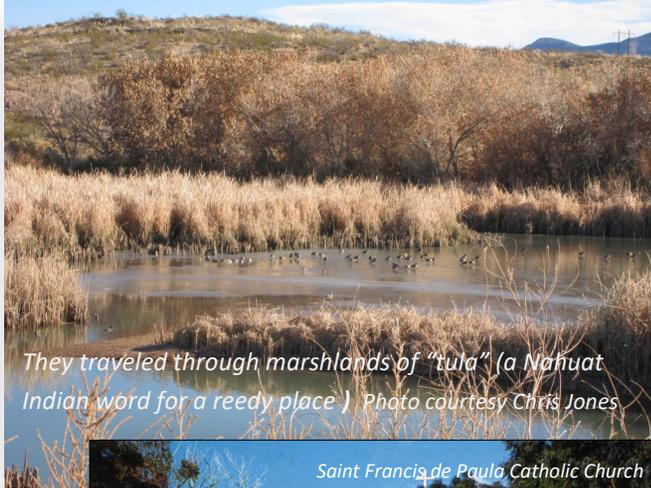


# TULAROSA, NEW MEXICO: *A History of Cross-Cultural Struggles and An Enduring River*

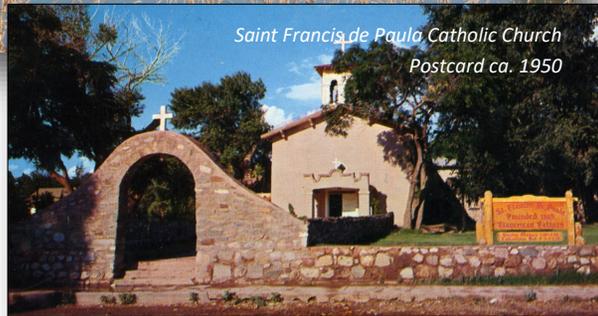
Decades before New Mexico became a state, Tularosa was founded by a small band of Mexican Americans from Mesilla along the Rio Grande and a few members of Isleta del Sur Pueblo near present day El Paso. They traveled through marshlands of “tula” (a Nahuatl word for reedy place) to arrive at a river emerging from sacred springs in Apache territory flowing west to sink into the basin floor some twenty miles away.

In the autumn of 1862, an advance party of men intended to establish a new settlement for their families by constructing an “acequia” to divert the river into a terraced irrigation system for homesteads, fields of corn, beans, watermelons, chili, onions and other garden vegetables surrounded by outlying fields for farm animals or crops. However, they faced a deeply threatened Mescalero Apache culture that was losing its ancestral territories to incoming Spanish and then American punitive military campaigns. A relentless series of Apache raids in retribution on livestock and food supplies of the villagers was only the first of many cultural conflicts the settlers endured to secure the village we know today.

In April 1868, the Tularosans gained protection of United States troops to secure the townsite and lands along the Rio Tularosa



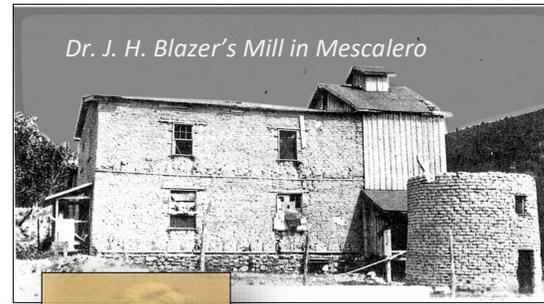
*They traveled through marshlands of “tula” (a Nahuatl Indian word for a reedy place) Photo courtesy Chris Jones*



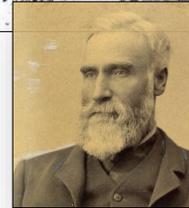
*Saint Francis de Paula Catholic Church Postcard ca. 1950*

from the Mescalero during the historic Battle of Round Mountain. The Mexicans fought with the strength of prayers to Saint Francis de Paula, and when they won, a mission church dedicated to San Francisco de Paula was first built and is still standing today. A Saints Day and Fiesta has been carried out every year for over 100 years.

One of the peacekeepers during the era of tensions between the Mescalero and Tularosans was Dr. Joseph H. Blazer, a Quaker with a highly respected sense of justice toward the Mescaleros. In return, Blazer was given land in the Mescalero treaty territory. He maintained two vital industries—a flour mill and a lumber



*Dr. J. H. Blazer’s Mill in Mescalero*



mill—for the surrounding communities.

The new families had little time to establish their households and

the terraced irrigation of river water before thousands of cattle were driven during the 1880’s from Texas over the Sacramento Mountains with a very different code of land and water use. Spanish law recognized traditional and legal rights of land and water-use owned in common. The American court only recognized a system of private use in paper titles recorded in courts far away in a foreign language. The newcomers began to wrest land and water-use out from under the previous Spanish system.

During the territorial decades, New Mexico applied for and waited for statehood, negotiating the vast changes in government and power at work along the Tularosa River, including a debilitating drought of 1889, where cattle died around dry waterholes. But the river continued to run, a reliable natural resource as valuable as gold. Thomas Benton Catron and A.B. Fall set up the Tularosa Land and Cattle Development Company, buying water rights within the village and transferring them outside the village with paper transfers.

The settlers also had to rise to armed struggle with the ranching interests of the James West enterprise who settled along the Rio Tularosa. For almost a decade, ranchers diverted the

river water for their cattle and ranch development that the villagers downstream depended on. The villagers confronted them but were threatened in return. In April 1881, early in the irrigation season when their water disappeared, Cruz Padilla deputized a posse out of the Dona Ana County court system and with four other Tularosans attempted to arrest the men upstream: the five Tularosans were massacred. The James West crew then turned themselves in to the Lincoln County court house and served a few weeks for the murders.

Until New Mexico finally became a state in 1912, corrupt rings of wealthy politicians applied for legal titles in court houses, often far from the Tularosa settlement. The cultural conflicts of that time period underlay the history of the Santa Fe Ring, the El Paso Ring, the Tularosa Land and Cattle Company, and many other business ventures by connected insiders while the villagers hired Albert Fountain to sue Fall. In 1906, in district court in Alamogordo, New Mexico, most of the Rio Tularosa waters had been claimed by outside ranching interests, but by Decree, the Village itself retained the communal traditional rights still in use today.

Enduring the new hotels, saloons, and real estate speculators such as Patrick Cogle and the Fruedenthal brothers Phoebe, Norris and Luis, followed by an American school, and political system, the cultures slowly blended as the children grew up together, created farming commerce, forged new friendships, and settled in as the water quietly flowed with its secrets.

*All Photographs courtesy of Tularosa Basin History Museum unless otherwise noted*

# Rio Tularosa: Prehistoric High Desert Water Management

The irrigation ditches that Tularosa settlers constructed may have followed a far earlier system of ditches constructed by an early Jornada Mogollon village that lived and cultivated along the Rio Tularosa 1400 years ago.

Archaeologists from Jornada Research Institute have uncovered a great kiva, over 50 pithouses, and a complex system of terraced irrigation fields fed by a reservoir upslope that gathered water from rain storms, snow melts, and numerous springs, and by turnouts upstream along the river. Paleobotanical findings include a very high percentage of corn, along with agave, cattails, and four-wing saltbush. Radio carbon dates are giving the time of occupation as ca. A.D. 650 to 800 time period.

Stone metates and manos, worked hand tools, bladed lithics, and imported ceramics have been documented. Both decorated and daily use pottery suggest this site was part of an important east west trade route that facilitated exchange of valuable resources such as pottery, salt, and shells from the Pacific Ocean.



*Terraced irrigation fields hug the slopes of Rio Tularosa like a high tech topographic map. The leveled fields were carefully terraced to guide the water slowly from highest to lowest levels in a descending pattern of various cultivated crops.*

As one of the few remaining traditional acequia systems and communal water management in New Mexico, Tularosa was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

# Tularosa Village Historic District



***El Agua es la Vida!***