



Hondo Valley Snapshots

Hondo





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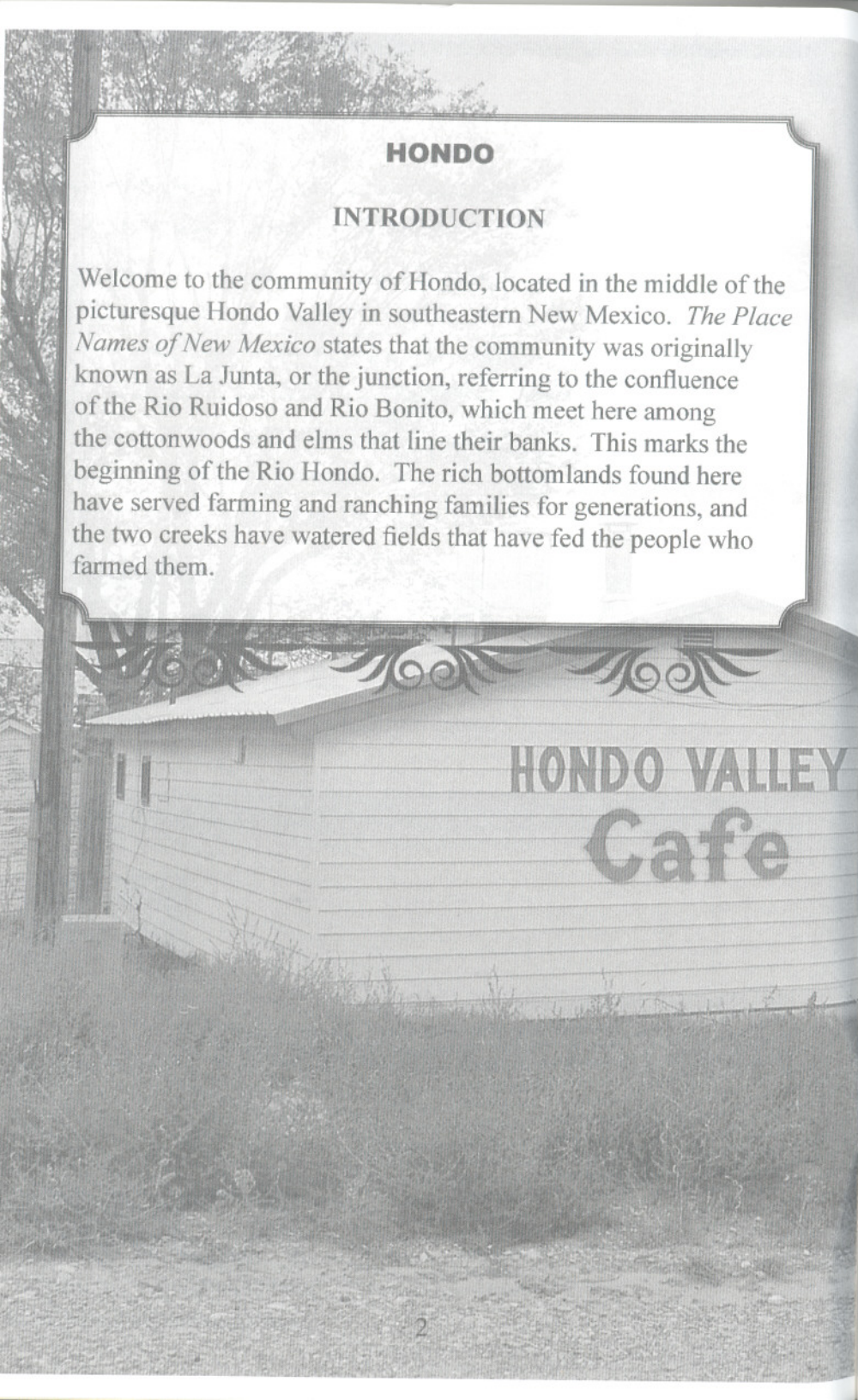




## HONDO

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the community of Hondo, located in the middle of the picturesque Hondo Valley in southeastern New Mexico. *The Place Names of New Mexico* states that the community was originally known as La Junta, or the junction, referring to the confluence of the Rio Ruidoso and Rio Bonito, which meet here among the cottonwoods and elms that line their banks. This marks the beginning of the Rio Hondo. The rich bottomlands found here have served farming and ranching families for generations, and the two creeks have watered fields that have fed the people who farmed them.

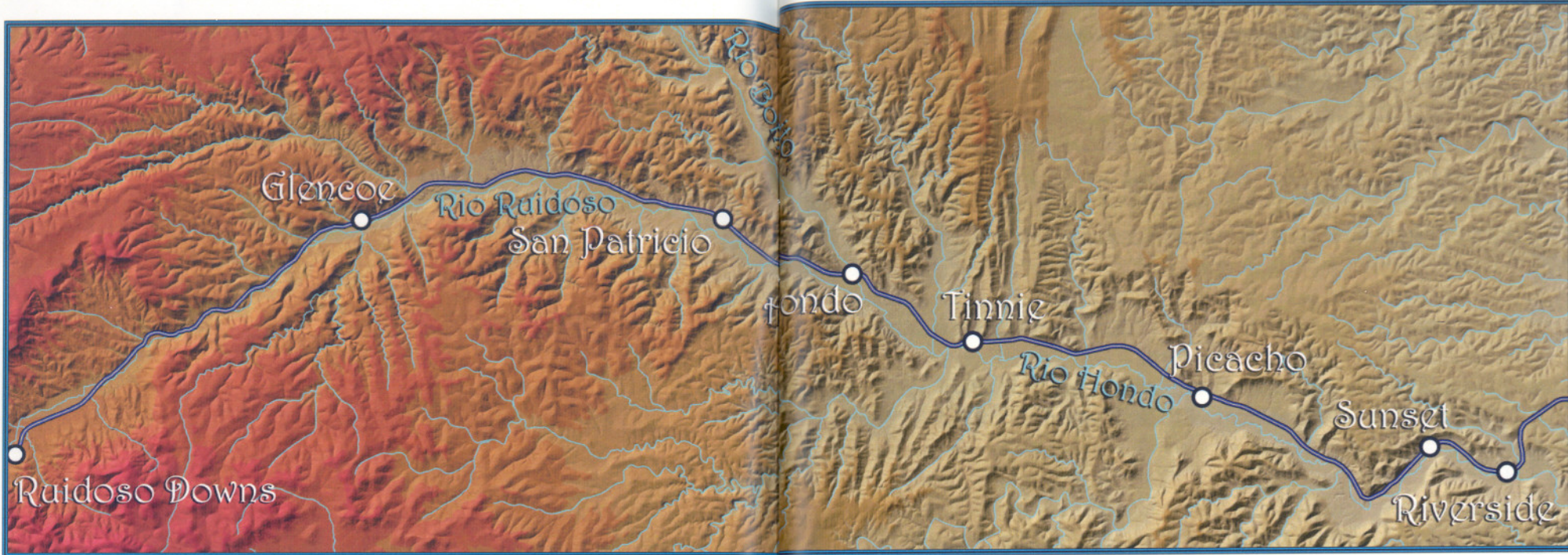


HONDO VALLEY  
Cafe

This book uses both archival and oral history accounts to tell the stories of life in Hondo from the beginnings of the community up to recent times. These stories of community lifeways are important given that much of the history of the community is being lost as a result of changes in land use and land tenure, episodes of highway construction and movement of the descendants of the original families out of the area. This book is organized around three general themes that capture various aspects of historic lifeways through time. The first theme is community settlement and population, which includes a discussion of community beginnings in the middle to late nineteenth century, the pattern of settlement distribution in the community as well as key places of interest, and changes in settlement distribution over time along with the factors influencing those changes. The second theme pertains to how families made a living by farming and ranching, and includes stories about the challenges they faced. The third theme is education, religion and social life—the community school system and school-related activities, the community church and church-related activities, Finally, and activities such as rodeos and dances, and the places where these activities were held.

The story of Hondo is one of a series of five community histories for the Hondo Valley. The other community histories cover Picacho/Sunset/Riverside, San Patricio, Glencoe and Tinnie. This series is produced by the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) for the dual purpose of mitigating adverse effects to historic properties and providing a public benefit resulting from the US Highway 70 reconstruction project. US 70 is the major transportation route through the Valley, and changes to this route inadvertently affect the historic character of the communities that have existed along the road since the late 1800s. The series of community histories can help preserve the historic character and lifestyle of the communities for future generations.





### A General History of the Hondo Valley

The area referred to as the “Hondo Valley” in this publication series includes both the Rio Ruidoso and Rio Hondo Valleys, as the Rio Ruidoso becomes the Rio Hondo after its confluence with the Rio Bonito. There are several distinct communities though the Valley including Glencoe, San Patricio, Hondo, Tinnie, Picacho and Sunset. While these communities share some similarities in their settlement history and natural environments, there are differences among the communities that result in unique histories that we are attempting to capture in this publication series. Most of the communities in the Hondo Valley were occupied for a number of years before they were given formal names, and many changed names several times before they came to have the names we know them by today.

The Hondo Valley has a long history of human use. The first documented habitations were built by the Jornada Mogollon people who lived in round subterranean pit houses. They built their villages between about AD 900 and 1450 on terraces overlooking the Rio Bonito and Rio Hondo and farmed in the valley bottoms. In the historic period the valley was occupied by Apache groups well into the nineteenth century. Apache people lived and farmed on a small scale in the valleys and hunted in the surrounding mountains. As Apaches gained the use of the horse through trade with Spanish and Mexican explorers and settlers in the 1600s and 1700s, they also staged raids on Mexican and Hispano trade routes and farms in the surrounding lowlands. Hispano farmers and traders fought back when attacked, but were unable to muster the military force necessary to pursue the attackers into the mountains. Thus the Apache exercised military control over the surrounding lowlands throughout the 1700s and early 1800s. This continued until after the area became part of the United States through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with Mexico in 1848.



One of the first priorities of the Americans in the newly formed Territory of New Mexico was to build a series of forts to establish a military presence in the area. Fort Stanton was built adjacent to the Rio Bonito in 1855. One of the primary orders of the troops at Fort Stanton was to make the area safe for settlement. Not only did the fort provide protection against Apache raids, but it also served as the major market for agricultural goods for early settlers. With the protection of Fort Stanton, Hispano and subsequent Euro-American immigrants to the Hondo Valley prospered by farming and herding sheep, goats and cattle.

During the late 1850s and early 1860s, Hispanics established farming and ranching communities along the Rio Bonito and Rio Hondo. These early settlers most likely came from Rio Grande valley communities and Manzano Mountain villages. They constructed *acequias* (irrigation ditches), grew corn, wheat and beans, and herded sheep and goats in the surrounding hills. Land was held in common and property was held by right of possession. After the United States took possession of the area they established the Homestead Act in 1862, which allowed settlers to have 160 acre lots of land as long as they improved the land by living and farming it for five years. Many of the Hispano farmers that had already settled there claimed their land as homesteads. Euro-American occupation of the southern Pecos Valley, to the east, began in earnest in the Hondo Valley during the 1860s, as ranchers from Texas like John Chisum moved in to utilize the areas rich grasslands. Lincoln County itself was established in 1869 and at that time consisted of almost all of southeastern New Mexico.

Ranching became more prevalent during the 1870s as Texas cattlemen discovered the lush valley grasslands and the high demand for beef at Fort Stanton. While most of the large cattle operations were located further east of the Hondo Valley along the Pecos River, there were a few ranches in the Valley itself. Robert Casey sold his ranch in Texas between 1868 and 1870, and relocated his family to a ranch in the Hondo Valley six miles east of Hondo. He also purchased a grist mill in the Valley and became somewhat of a commercial and political leader. Dave Warner, another Texan, established a ranch at the present day site of Tinnie in 1876. In 1885, John and Mahlon Thatcher and Frank Bloom established the Circle Diamond Ranch at Picacho, which was eventually purchased by the Diamond A Ranch.

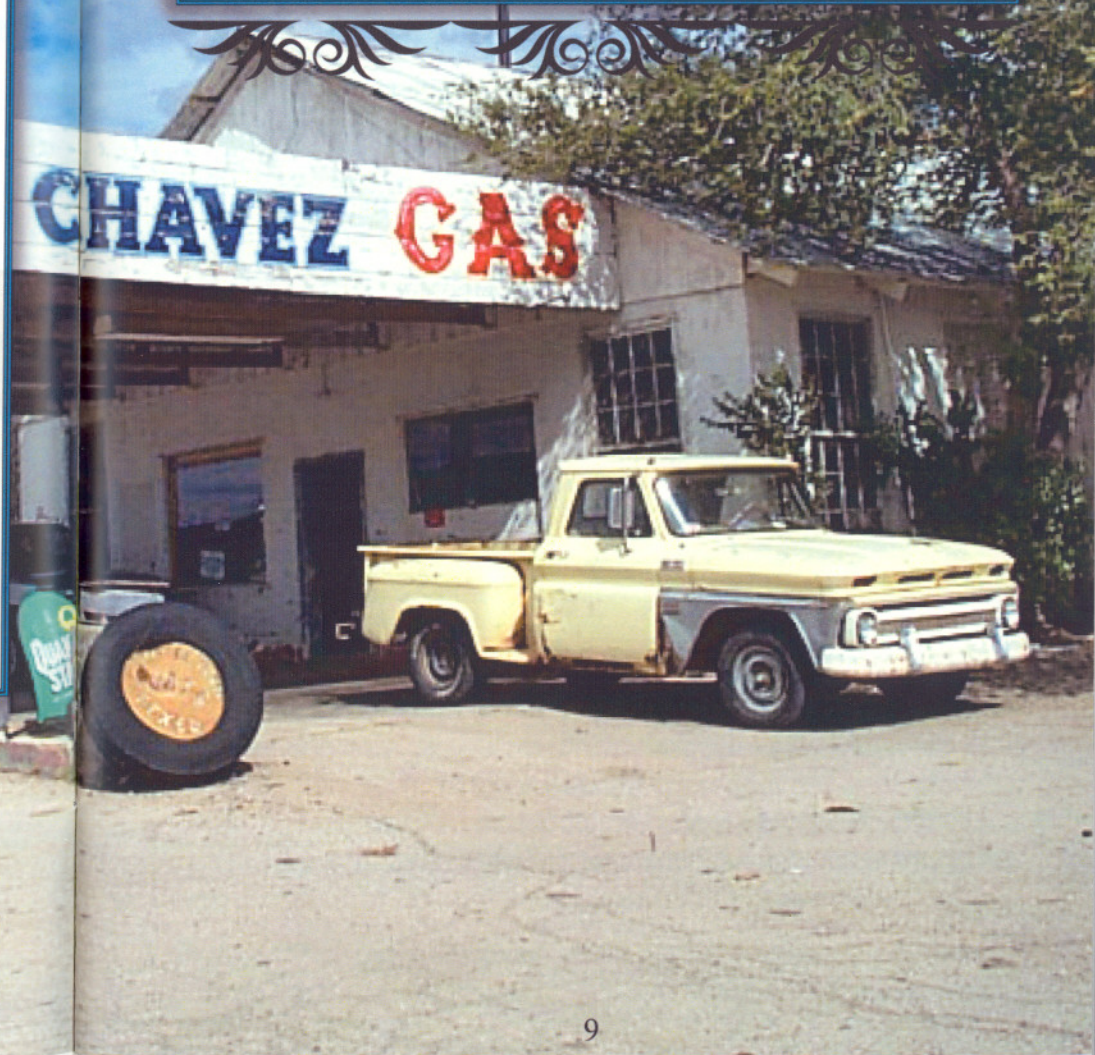
By the end of the 1880s, many of the smaller farms in the Hondo Valley became concentrated in the hands of a few owners, both Euro-American and Hispanic. The closing of Fort Stanton in 1896 meant that farmers switched to more profitable crops including cotton and alfalfa. Fruit and vegetable production became one of the most important economic activities in the Valley and included apples, pears, and cabbage. However, by the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the farming success of the Hondo Valley was eclipsed by farming and ranching booms in the Pecos Valley, and commercial activity moved to the towns of Roswell and Eddy (later renamed Carlsbad). The town of Lincoln remained the county seat until 1909, at which time Carrizozo became the county seat.



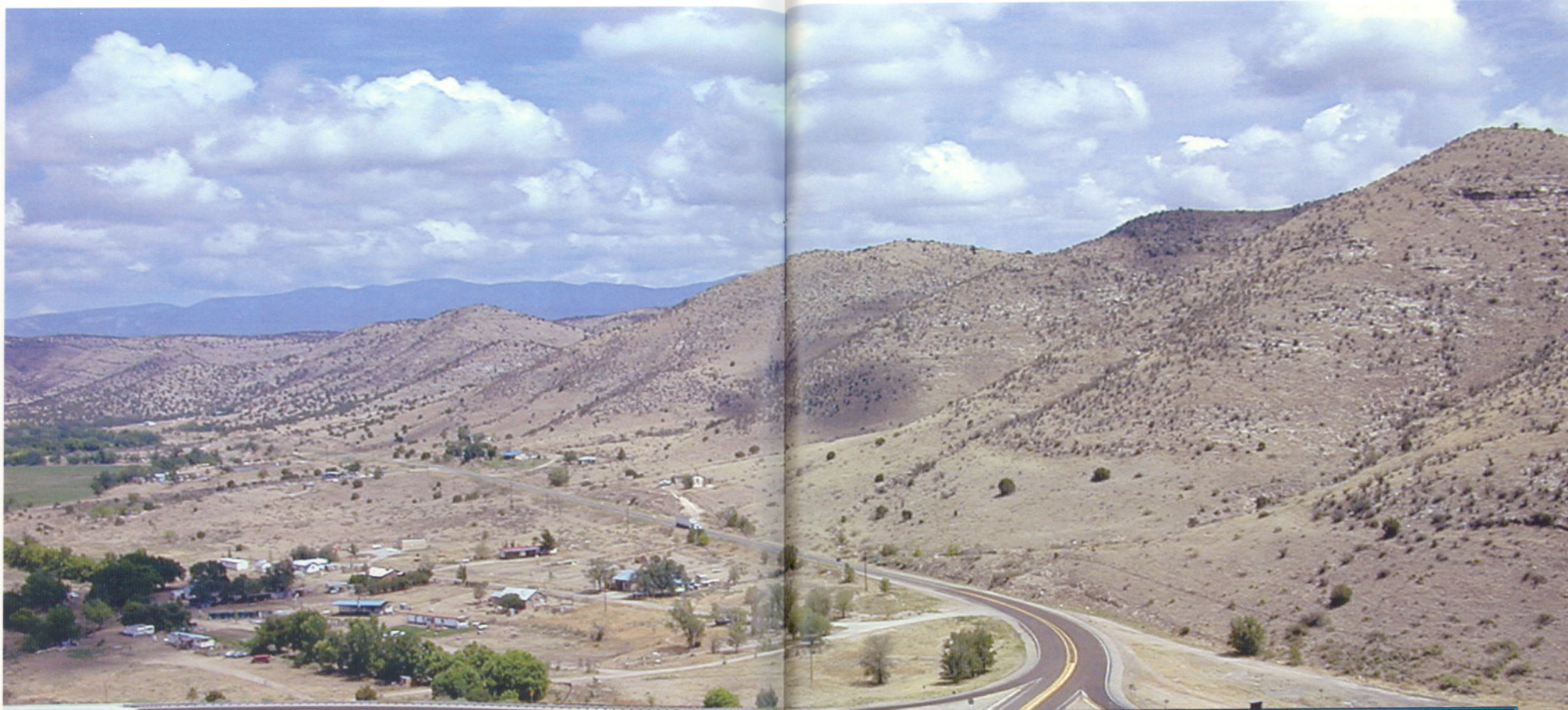
By 1907, there was an auto, stage and mail route between Alamogordo and Roswell, which would become US Highway 70 in 1931. The rough dirt road climbed several large hills and forded the Hondo River fourteen times. What was then the New Mexico State Highway Department was involved in the grading of the roadway as early as 1922, although the section of the road through the Hondo Valley was not fully paved until 1938. The first section of road was paved in 1923, and covered a five-mile area between Border Hill and Picacho. The road was much higher upslope than it is today, and involved making several cuts which required wooden guardrail and a stone retaining wall. Portions of the rock retaining wall and drainage ditches are visible today above the modern road as you climb out of the valley east of Riverside.

The growth in popularity of automobiles had an effect on the valley in several ways. Although residents continued to use horse drawn wagons to haul wood and goods from nearby towns, automobile use grew throughout the 1930s and 1940s for basic transportation needs. With the growth of trucking, residents did not have to take their agricultural produce to regional shipping points like Capitan and Roswell, but were able to sell local fruit to buyers that came from Texas. This was a profitable market for fruit growers throughout the 1940s, but the market faded away as apple growing in Washington state boomed and undercut local producers. As fruit production became less profitable, many farmers removed their orchards in favor of irrigated pasture. Other changes came to the Hondo Valley including the extension of electrical service in 1947. Indoor plumbing became common after World War II.

Throughout the changes in infrastructure, land use and individual landowners, the communities of the Hondo Valley retained their values of family, hard work and pleasure in the simple things in life. In the following sections, we have tried to capture the history and lifestyle of one of these communities—Hondo—using information from the original oral interviews. We have used a lot of the direct quotes from the people we interviewed so that the reader can gain the maximum enjoyment from the experience and life stories of the interviewees.







### COMMUNITY SETTLEMENT AND IDENTITY

The first Hispano immigrants to the Hondo Valley faced problems typical of many settlers on the western frontier. They were confronted by native Apaches that resented intrusion into their homeland, weather in the intermountain valley could be harsh, they had to build their own homes and irrigation ditches by hand and at the same time feed themselves and their families. Conditions were not easy; but the settlers found a toehold in the early years and adapted quickly. Settlers established the original community of Hondo, then known as La Junta, at the junction of the Rio Ruidoso and the Rio Bonito.

According to a 1927 oral history interview that J. Evetts Haley did with Frank Coe, Hispanic settlers in the Hondo Valley prior to 1861 lived in “*placitas*” at Picacho, Hondo and San Patricio. These early *placita* settlements were probably adobe family compounds enclosed for defensive purposes. Defense was a consideration because settlers were not necessarily on good terms with local Indians, and there are records of occasional skirmishes between the two groups, even after the establishment of Fort Stanton. As time went on, the valley became safer and people were able to spread out, building farmhouses on their individual parcels. Hondo still maintains a linear layout today, with wide open pastures separated by fence and tree lines, and dotted with farm buildings.



Some of the earliest settlers' names are preserved on land patent claims from the early 1870s. These include Lawrence Murray (1872), Emil Fritz (1873), Francisco Sanchez (1878), Jose Chavez (1880), Joseph Storm (1881), Pablo Chavez (1887), Marcoc Baca (1889), Avery Clenney (1890), Joseph Lea (1890), Manuel Maestes (1890), Jose Gonzales (1891), and Yginio Guerra (1892). Many of these settlers actually lived on the land that they patented for years before the official patent date. Some came and went depending on economic or political conditions. These early settlers engaged in a variety of farming and ranching pursuits in order to provide for their families. Some families moved into the Valley in order to ensure education opportunities for their children. Lou Coe, the first of the Coe family to arrive in the Hondo Valley, and his partner Joe Storm settled in La Junta in 1866 and obtained a contract to deliver hay and grain to Fort Stanton. Lou also planted apple trees and had an orchard in the Hondo area.

The Torrez, Gutierrez and Montes families were among the earliest settlers in Hondo. Ignacio Torrez, who still lives in Hondo, stated that his maternal grandfather (Damian Gutierrez) and great uncles came to Hondo sometime in the 1880s and homesteaded "two [farm] sections here in Hondo from San Patricio down to about two miles from here." Two of the brothers homesteaded in the area that would later become San Patricio. Joe Torrez, Ignacio's son who also grew up in Hondo, remembers the stories his grandmother (Isabel Gutierrez) would tell him about the family's move to Hondo: "They moved over from the Isleta and Lemitar area. My grandmother use to tell me they came over here under cavalry escort to protect themselves from the Native Americans, so that the Indians wouldn't shoot arrows at them... The reason they were moving out of the Rio Grande Valley back in those days was because of flooding."

The main road through Hondo that became US 70 was more than an "irregular, winding cow trail" before the 1920s, as stated by George Coe in his autobiography. By the late 1930s, however, US 70 between Ruidoso and Roswell had been graded and oil treated. Most of the town of Hondo was located well south of the highway in the 1930s. The original community was established at the junction of the Rio Ruidoso and the Rio Hondo – a school was built and there were several homes.



Station Barn in Hondo

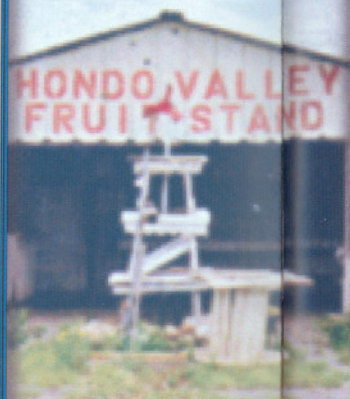


### *The Torrez Apple Orchard*

We are fortunate to have stories about life in the orchard business from Ignacio and Joe Torrez. Ignacio's father, Martin, started with a small orchard of ten apple trees that quickly grew to eight hundred trees in a 14-acre area. While apples were the orchard's primary crop, other fruits included cherries, prunes, peaches and pears. According to Ignacio Torrez, his father's orchard produced about 2,000 apples in a season, and these would be hauled in 400- or 500-bushel loads to places like Jal and San Antonio, Texas. Ignacio and his two brothers, along with three or four laborers from outside the family, would be kept busy for two months picking apples from the family orchard. Ignacio's boyhood experiences working in the orchard led him to start his own orchard in the 1940s:

"I'd say to myself when I grow up and have to make a living, I am going to do the same thing. So I bought this place and set out about 800 trees...I used to sell my fruit to San Antonio, Texas. The guys used to come from over there and haul [the fruit] out. That's the way I paid my little farm you know, a 14-acre farm, and I paid for it just selling apples from the same place."

When the Texas market began getting their produce from Mexico, Ignacio Torrez started selling his orchard produce from a fruit stand along U.S. 70. His son, Joe, worked at the fruit stand and also worked on the family farm. Joe talks about his tasks related to the orchard and the garden, starting with pruning the fruit trees:



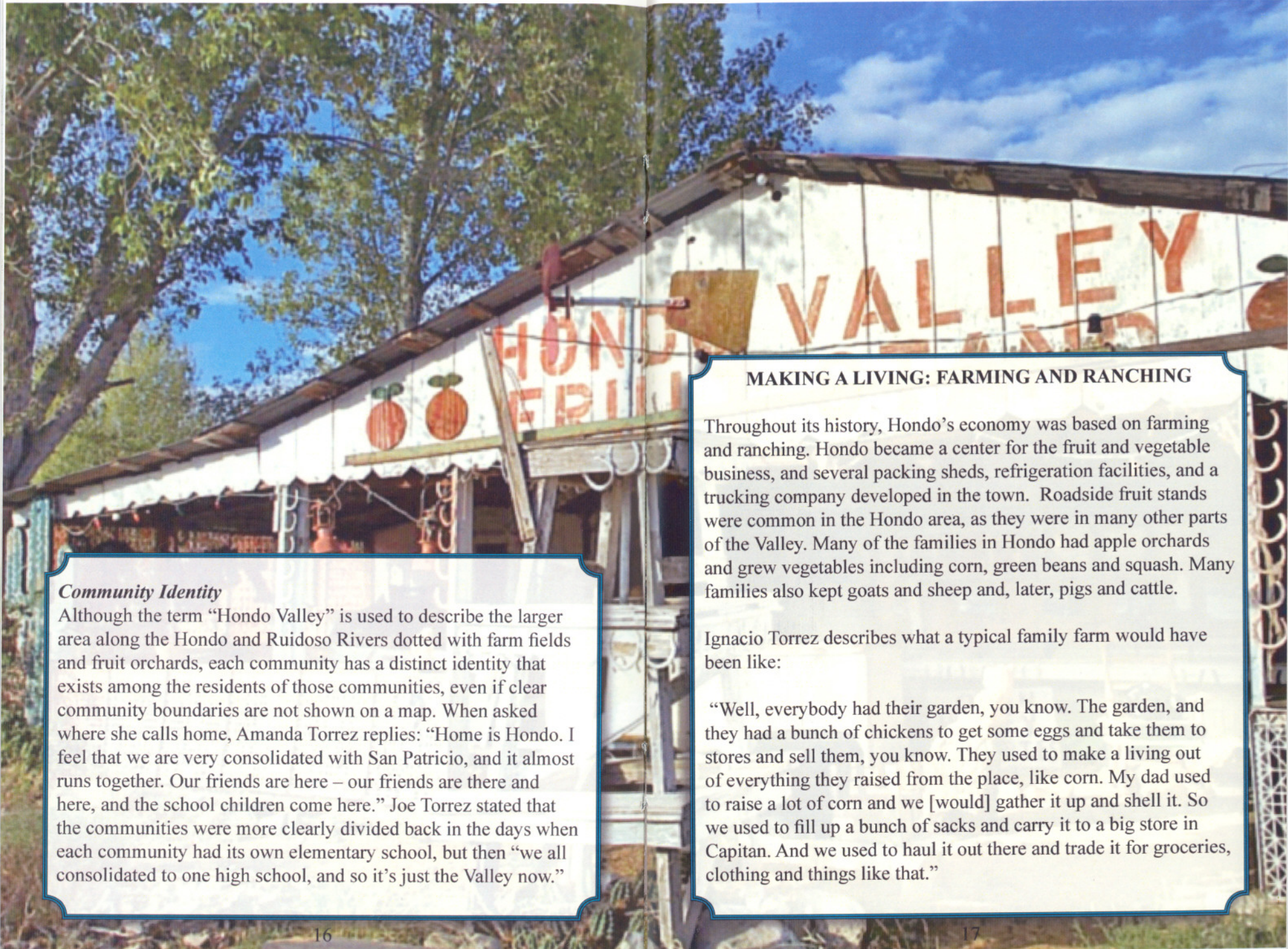
"My dad usually cut the larger branches, and we would clean up all the water sprouts. We also had the unpleasant job of picking and stacking the cuttings so we could remove them from the orchard. Once we had the orchard pruned and cleaned up came the spraying... Then came the harvest... We had fruit all late summer on... In the meantime we had to weed the garden and collect... the vegetables. When we had more than we could eat we would feed to excess to the pigs. We used to raise alfalfa in between the rows of apple trees while they were small and stack and save it for the milk cows and the calves."

Ignacio Torrez discontinued the family orchard in 1981 "because it just quit." Joe Torrez describes the decline of his family's orchard business: "The crops would keep freezing. And then when we did have a crop there was just no market because we couldn't even give them away. People wouldn't even take them. And a lot of people that actually sell in the fruit stands, you know, they had to hand polish them and set them out there for the people and just about hand it to them. But we had apples for a few years that we couldn't even give away."



Preston and Harold Radcliff with apples for sale





**MAKING A LIVING: FARMING AND RANCHING**

Throughout its history, Hondo’s economy was based on farming and ranching. Hondo became a center for the fruit and vegetable business, and several packing sheds, refrigeration facilities, and a trucking company developed in the town. Roadside fruit stands were common in the Hondo area, as they were in many other parts of the Valley. Many of the families in Hondo had apple orchards and grew vegetables including corn, green beans and squash. Many families also kept goats and sheep and, later, pigs and cattle.

Ignacio Torrez describes what a typical family farm would have been like:

“Well, everybody had their garden, you know. The garden, and they had a bunch of chickens to get some eggs and take them to stores and sell them, you know. They used to make a living out of everything they raised from the place, like corn. My dad used to raise a lot of corn and we [would] gather it up and shell it. So we used to fill up a bunch of sacks and carry it to a big store in Capitan. And we used to haul it out there and trade it for groceries, clothing and things like that.”

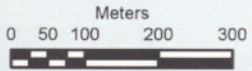
***Community Identity***

Although the term “Hondo Valley” is used to describe the larger area along the Hondo and Ruidoso Rivers dotted with farm fields and fruit orchards, each community has a distinct identity that exists among the residents of those communities, even if clear community boundaries are not shown on a map. When asked where she calls home, Amanda Torrez replies: “Home is Hondo. I feel that we are very consolidated with San Patricio, and it almost runs together. Our friends are here – our friends are there and here, and the school children come here.” Joe Torrez stated that the communities were more clearly divided back in the days when each community had its own elementary school, but then “we all consolidated to one high school, and so it’s just the Valley now.”





# Hondo Community



1 : 10,000



New Mexico



### *Acequias*

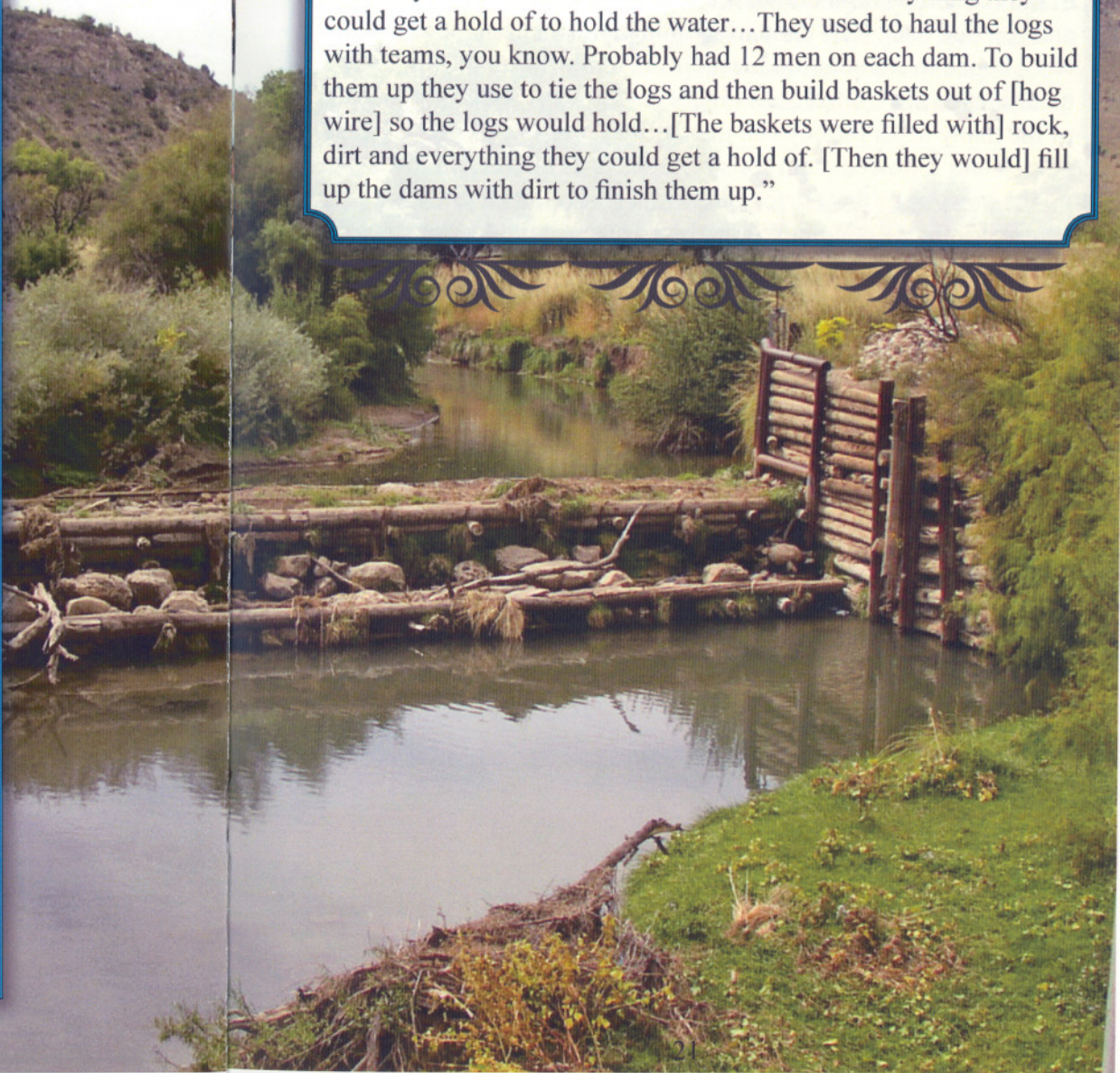
For anyone that farms in the American Southwest, water is a critical commodity. The climate of southern New Mexico is highly variable and prone to periods of drought. In order to insure that crops have the necessary water, the first thing that the original settlers did was dig gravity-fed irrigation ditches, or *acequias*, that led from the river to the fields. Gates regulated how much water went to a specific field, so that no one got too much or too little. The ditches had to be cleaned each spring before the crops began to grow, and it was each farmer's responsibility to help maintain their stretch of the ditch. Ditch bosses, or *mayordomos*, were elected each year or so to assign the tasks and make sure that everyone got their fair share of water. Priority dates from the State Engineer's Office indicate that most of the irrigation ditches along the Hondo River were built between 1864 and 1874.

When he was growing up, Joe Torrez helped work the ditches that fed his grandfather's and father's farms:

“Every year we would have to work our share on the *acequias*... We would have to cut the side banks and clean the bottom out at least two shovels deep... We would do our share and my Dad would come and help us out so we wouldn't fall too far back. The *majordomo*'s job was to assign the *tareas* [ditch section lengths] and ensure the depth and width was to his satisfaction... We also had to maintain the *atarques* [dams] as part of the annual cleaning of the *acequias*.”

Ignacio Torrez talks about how the dams, some of which are still standing, were built:

“They'd get some pine trees, you know real straight pine trees, and build them up just like... a log cabin, you know. And then they filled them back with dirt and debris. Everything they could get a hold of to hold the water... They used to haul the logs with teams, you know. Probably had 12 men on each dam. To build them up they use to tie the logs and then build baskets out of [hog wire] so the logs would hold... [The baskets were filled with] rock, dirt and everything they could get a hold of. [Then they would] fill up the dams with dirt to finish them up.”





### *Herding*

The initial Hispano settlers in the 1860s and 1870s brought with them the sheep and goats that had been traditionally kept by their forefathers. They used herd animals for food (mutton, milk and cheese), clothing (wool), and for barter. Sheep were a mainstay of the economy at the turn of the century; the wool was processed and shipped back East to be made into clothing. The market for wool began to wane as producers in Australia began to ship large quantities to the United States in the 1940s. Herding sheep was one of the many tasks for boys on the family farm. They were assigned a flock and followed them for several days as the sheep browsed on the grasslands that surround the Valley. Following the herd was hard work for a young boy; it involved sleeping under the stars and camping out for days, if not weeks, at a time.

Ignacio Torrez's father had a large herd of sheep that 14-year old Ignacio took care of from April until the end of May each year:

“He would fix me a little camp and left about maybe 100 to 200 head of sheep. I used to take care of them. Really, just sleep with them at night. And he would check on me every 2 to 3 hours to see how I was doing. I slept mostly all the time...We took care of the little ones, the little lambs you know. Whenever a lamb got down or something like that we use to board it. He would pick it up and take care of it.”

Joe Torrez's tasks as a young boy included taking care of cows and chickens before and after school: “Every morning before school, I would have to milk the cow and send her and her four calves out to pasture, feed the chickens and let them out. At night we would have to pen up the calves and chickens, feed them all and gather the eggs. I hated to go to school with milk splashed on my shoes.”



## EDUCATION, RELIGION AND SOCIAL LIFE

Every community has its gathering places. They are places where people come together to talk, learn, and worship. Places where people can share in the experience of living in a place and feel a common bond with their neighbors. In the Hondo valley, these places tend to be centered around the school, church and general stores that dot the communities.

### *Schools*

The first formal school instruction in Hondo occurred before 1880, since the earliest available school census records for Lincoln County start at 1880. The census records indicate that there were 44 students in the Hondo School District in 1880 and 113 students in 1920. The original Hondo Elementary School building, located at the current junction of US 70 and US 380 in Hondo, began as a two-room school built with a 1902 school construction bond. Two additional rooms were added later. The 1931 highway plans for US 70 show two basketball courts and two outhouses associated with the school. The school gym building was completed by the Works Progress Administration—part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal program—in 1935.

Hondo was the only community in the Valley offering the opportunity for a high school education. In his book, *Dreams Can Become a Reality*, Fermin Montes provides the history of high school education in the Valley, starting with the first high school teacher in Hondo for the 1923-24 school year. By the 1925-26 school year, the Hondo high school program became a two-year accredited program and grew into a four-year accredited program by 1930. Both high school and elementary grades shared the old four-room Hondo Elementary School building.

Hondo Elementary and High School became an independent school district in 1935. It was around this time that concerted efforts were made to get a separate high school building in Hondo. It took many years for this dream to be realized, but the crucial first step toward the high school moved forward in 1946 with George Titsworth's gift of ten acres of land in the Hondo area specifically for construction of a high school. By April 1947, plans for the school had been completed and a construction contract had been awarded. The Hondo Valley Union High School opened its doors in September 1948 with 76 students.



The original Hondo Elementary School



The original Hondo Elementary School closed in 1955 and was moved to the new elementary school adjoining the high school. The closures of the Tinnie elementary school in 1955, the Picacho elementary school in 1958, and the San Patricio elementary school in 1960 completed the consolidation of the Hondo School District. This school district complex was destroyed by fire in 1982; the school complex has since been rebuilt.


Lee Bonnell attended high school in Hondo, and remembers the school having six teachers and about 156 kids. The extra-curricular activities at that time included football, baseball, basketball and track.

After completing elementary school in Picacho, Patsy Sanchez finished her education at Hondo High School. Mrs. Sanchez has this to say about her experience there:

“That was also a fun place to go to school. We used to do school plays there all the time. We had a terrific band teacher. His name was Mr. Lara...Mr. Lara was such a dynamic and energetic person. One year, for Homecoming, he got the bands from Capitan, Carrizozo, Hondo, and Ruidoso all together. We went to everybody’s homecoming and did a half-time show with probably 200 in the band. It was fantastic. We had a marching band, a brass band, and a choir.”









Mr. Torrez goes on to say that “[d]ancing is one of the activities that continues on with the students that attended the Hondo Schools. A Hondo Fiesta dancer can usually recognize another by the way they dance. Hondo students have been able to travel all over the country and to Mexico as a result of participating in the fiestas.” Over the years the dancers have also performed in Nashville, Disney World, Disneyland, San Antonio, Tucson, as well as many places in New Mexico.

The Apple Blossom Festival was another community activity in Hondo. The festival was held every spring at the old elementary school gym, which had become an apple packing plant. Patsy Sanchez describes the event as “a big to-do,” and says that the activities included a talent contest. With the decline of the orchard business in Hondo, the Apple Festival was discontinued.



Moving further back in time, we get an idea about one type of social activity that was important to the residents of Hondo during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from an historical account of Jim Green’s life in Hondo. Green lived in Hondo during the early 1900s and was an accomplished fiddle player at the regular dances held in Hondo and other communities. Green’s grand-niece, Roberta Haldane, described them:

“The dances were organized. Five or six instruments were on hand, a hall was rented, and the musicians were paid. Sometimes you could make as much as 10 or 15 dollars at a time when wages were generally a dollar a day. Dances usually broke up at midnight, and the musicians were fed then.”





### *Churches*

Like schools, in the early days churches served the community members that were within a short walking or riding distance. They were sometimes no more than a spare room located in a family home. There was not a permanent priest, and services were usually offered only when a traveling priest from larger towns passed through on a regular circuit. Not much is known about the Catholic church in Hondo, which still stands just west of the US 70/US 380 intersection along the old highway frontage road. Joe Torrez says that the church was built around 1950 and was in use until 1967, at which time the Valley Catholic churches were consolidated into a single church, St. Jude's, in San Patricio. Torrez also says that a small yearly fiesta was held at the church that included dinner and bingo to raise money to support the church.





### ***Baseball Games***

In addition to dances and fiestas, Hondo residents had other opportunities to get together socially. Baseball games provided one such opportunity. Hondo had a baseball team during the 1930s comprised of men from across the Valley. Every week, usually on Sunday, the team played against other teams in the region including Carrizozo, Lincoln, White Oaks, and the Mescalero Apaches.

Johnny Thomas, a long-time resident of San Patricio, played catcher and shortstop on the Hondo baseball team:

“Well we use to play everybody...The [Mescalero Apache] Indians, you know the Indians had never been beaten... We was the only ones who beat the Indians. They really shook their heads, but we had this professional pitcher from back East. He had got into trouble back there, he was kinda on the high net out here... We beat everybody except...I don't think anybody ever beat us to tell you the truth. We had a good team. And Henry Montgomery was our Coach and then Bert Pflingsten was a coach one year... That was about all we ever had back in them days for entertainment on Sunday you know...But I loved the baseball team.”

### **WHY HISTORY IS IMPORTANT**

History is important because it connects modern day people with the past. This publication uses historical records and recollections of what are now the elder members of the community to give the reader a sense of what it was like to live in Hondo in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was witness to tremendous change in America and the people interviewed here were witnesses to economic depressions, world wars, the social revolutions of the 1960s, the rise of technology and the global society that we as Americans are today. Although the Hondo Valley communities may seem placid and far removed from these broad movements, the reach of these developments often had concrete effects on the lives of local residents. Things like the paving and re-routing of US 70 enabled faster and easier transportation to the rest of the state and by extension, to the rest of the country. New ideas, products and people followed the road and contributed to the makeup of the valley as it is today.

Throughout the changes of the last century, residents retained the values that they inherited from their forefathers and foremothers, just as the interviewees passed them down to their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Although the values are ingrained and may be subconscious in today's inheritors, this work brings them to the forefront. It contains the common wisdom of people who lived and depended on the land. Their example serves to help us understand what it took to survive and be happy, without many of the common conveniences of the modern day such as electricity or cars. With the record of their lives committed to this history, we hold before us the summary of their lives to read, consider and learn. As such, this preserves a portion of the culture that has been passed down, and continues to evolve over time.



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