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DROUGHT, FAMINE AND DEPARTURE

In the spring of 1661 the Franciscan custos, Fray Alonso de Posada, ordered priests throughout the colony to confiscate the ceremonial equipment of the Pueblos, and in many instances to destroy the kivas. At Las Humanas, all seven kivas dating from that period show evidence that they were destroyed, and some archeologists believe excavation of other sites would reveal the same.

This failed to crush the religion, for near each deliberately destroyed kiva, in interior pueblo rooms where priests were not likely to venture, ceremonial goods have been found. Some of these room walls were painted, as kivas often were. The Pueblos kept their faith alive by moving their ceremonies inside, beyond the eyes of the priests. It was vital for the Pueblos to perform those ceremonies. They needed all the help they could get to face drought, disease, forced labor, Apache depredations, and famine.

When times got hard, the Spaniards pushed harder. Routine tasks of supporting the missions were demanding enough for the Pueblos. Occasional special tasks only added to their crushing work load.

Sixty men from Quarai were once forced to carry loads of pinyon nuts from Las Humanas through Abo Pass to the Rio Grande, for seventeen days straight. Who took care of their fields while they were gone? And who collected the pinyon nuts in the first place? It took nineteen Indians from Abo to carry corn from Las Humanas to Aguilar's house near Tajiique. Then, twenty-two Indians from the village of Galisteo were sent to pick up the corn and take it to Santa Fe.

The governors frequently criticized the Franciscans for collecting huge stores of grain, but the priests argued they were needed for times of famine. Indeed, in the 1660s and 1670s even nature conspired against the province. Drought came. Wise men among the Pueblos were not surprised, as the traditional ceremonies had been performed poorly, or sometimes not at all.

Unrelenting hot days withered the spirit along with the tiny corn plants. In the old days the Indians usually could store enough corn to survive times of minimal or failed crops, but that

was before there were so many newcomer mouths to feed. Rage increased when Spanish cattle broke into fields and grazed on the Pueblos' winter food.

It was in the midst of this drought that Fray Diego de Santander decided to build a new, larger church at Las Humanas. Apparently Santander finished the convento area, but he and his successor would lose the race to finish the sanctuary before the last hours of the province.

When famine was at its painful worst, Santander remodeled the kitchen and pantry to safely store what food was left. Santander had workmen create an interior, basement room which was accessible only through the convento. The room had no outside door at all, only a trap door with a ladder leading to an equally inaccessible room above. All this was immediately next to the kitchen.

Drought affected the surrounding Apaches, as well. Raids on the pueblos increased, and precious dwindling stores of food were stolen, adding to the misery of the violent raids themselves. In 1669 Fray Juan Bernal described the situation in a desperate letter: "One of these calamities is that the whole land is at war with the widespread heathen nation of the Apache Indians, who kill all the Christian Indians they can find. No road is safe; everyone travels at the risk of his life, for the heathen traverse them all, being courageous and brave. They hurl themselves at danger like people who know no God nor that there is any hell."

Disease rode the back of famine, and it subjected the subsistence Pueblo culture to horrendous mortality. Bernal's letter continues: "The second calamity is that for three years no crop has been harvested. Last year, 1668, a great many Indians perished of hunger, lying dead along the roads, in the ravines, and in their hovels. There were pueblos, like Las Humanas, where more than four hundred and fifty died of hunger. The same calamity still prevails, for, because there is no money, there is not a fanega of maize or wheat in all the kingdom. As a result the Spaniards, men as well as women, have sustained themselves for two years on the cowhides they have in their houses to sit on. They roast them and eat them. And the greatest woe of all is that they can no longer find a bit of leather to eat."

Food that Indian labor had produced and the missionaries had hoarded finally had to be used to supplement the meager stores in the villages. For instance, in the summer of 1672 at Abo Fray Gil de Avila distributed more than two tons of corn, meat from thirty seven sheep and twelve cows, plus seed corn that would later sprout and shrivel. The mission also supplied the governor's military detachment stationed nearby. The drought persisted, even after the storerooms were empty, and hundreds of people starved to death.

That same year a remarkable Salinas Pueblo leader named Don Esteban Clemente, who could both read and write Spanish, plotted a revolt. He planned to have Pueblo herders drive the Spaniards' horses to the mountains. Then they would attack and kill every Spaniard in the colony on the night of Holy Thursday. But the plot was discovered and Clemente was hanged.

Left ... Tabira Black-On-white canteen, Las Humanas



It was hunger that finally drove the Spaniards and the Indians from the Salinas. Las Humanas was abandoned first, in 1671. The few surviving Indians probably went to Abo, or joined their linguistic cousins in the Rio Grande Valley. Fray Joseph de Paredes was the priest at Las Humanas at the abandonment, and he must have gone north toward either Abo or Quarai. As he reached the crest of a small rise about five miles north of Las Humanas, Paredes probably looked back one last time to see the massive walls of the uncompleted second church.

By 1673 the storerooms at Abo were empty, and either Apaches or the Pueblos themselves burned the convento. Avila fled, and the pueblo was soon abandoned. The calamity continued for Avila, who joined the fight against the famine at the Rio Grande pueblo of Senecu but was killed in the convento there by Indians in an uprising in the winter of 1675.

Quarai, with its springs, lasted longest, but was abandoned by 1677. Today the departing view of the red sandstone church is obscured by greenery, but in 1677 there probably wasn't much, even at the head of the springs. Most likely the surviving Indians went north, into the Galisteo basin, surprisingly taking with them the remains of a long-buried, favorite priest, Fray Jer'onimo de la Llana.

The rest of the colony, Pueblos and Spaniards alike, absorbed the refugees from the desolated Salinas Province, leaving no one to hear the creak of roofs slowly collapsing, and no one to brush out the sand that blew into abandoned doorways. The Salinas became as quiet as when it had been a lake, so many centuries before.