

Santa Rosa de Lima de Abiquiu

by J. Richard Salazar

Today, only ruined walls and adobe mounds remain of the once-thriving Plaza of Santa Rosa de Lima de Abiquiu. The remnant of the chapel dedicated to the former village's patron saint consists of the north wall of the nave, with a doorway leading to what was once the sacristy. The mounds indicate where some of the settlers' houses once stood. Most of the old plaza portion lying north of the chapel has been washed away by the Chama River, which has shifted its course some 500 yards to the south since the area was first settled, and now forms a large U-shaped bend through part of the old plaza. The river continues to eat away at the bank near

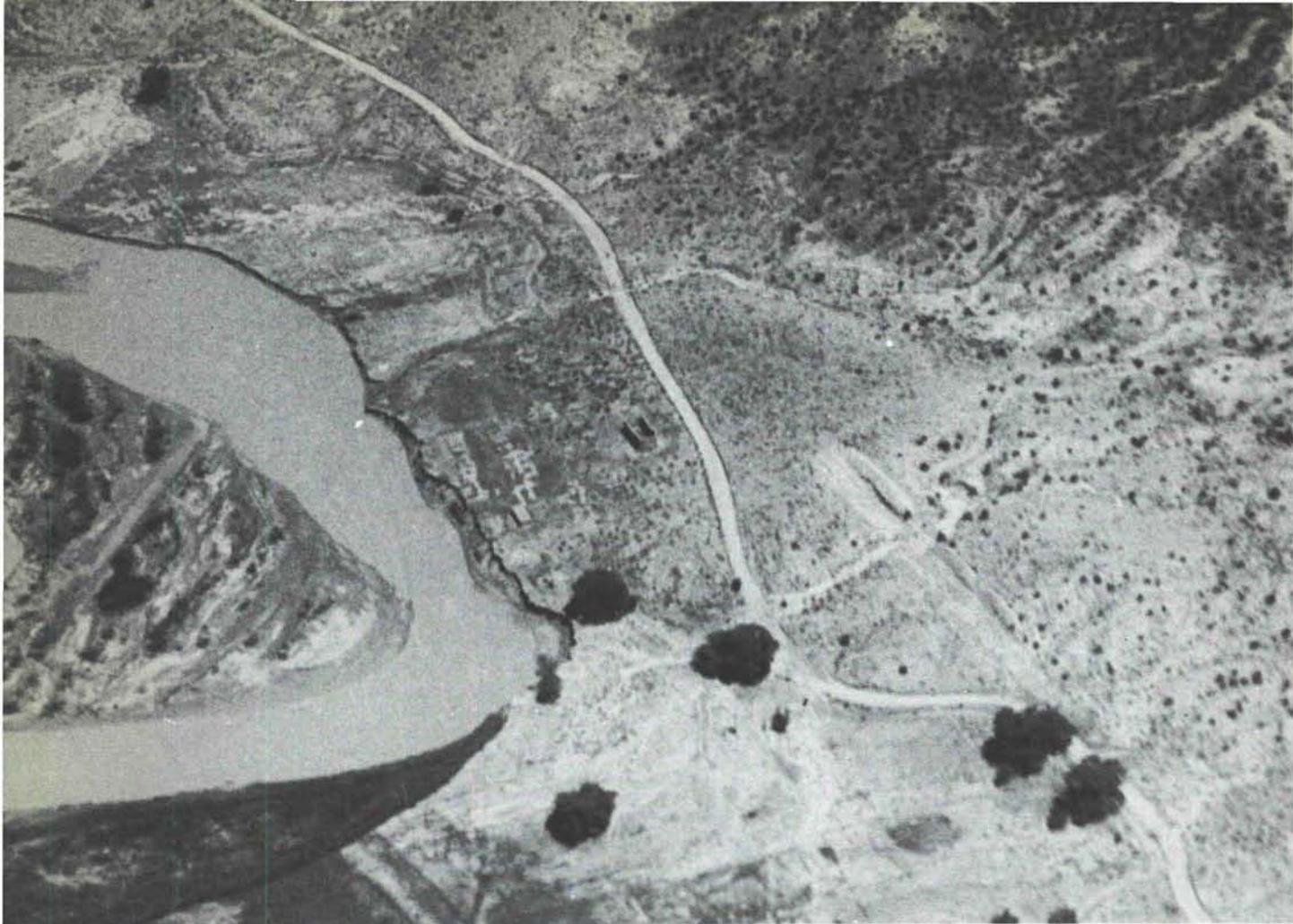
the chapel ruins, although plans are presently underway to stabilize the channel.

As early as 1915 the chapel and the plaza area were in ruins. A photograph taken about this date shows the structure roofless and the walls, although largely intact, in a state of deterioration. The doors are completely gone, along with the bell from the belfry. This photograph shows one home, directly north of the chapel, but with deteriorated walls. (Fig. 3)

No plaza was apparently laid out when the grantees were originally given their allotted farming lands by Governor Cruzat y Góngora in 1734.

Figure 1. The chapel remnant in 1976.





The first license for the chapel of Santa Rosa de Lima, whom the settlers took as their patron saint, was issued by Bishop of Durango and *Visitador General* Don Martín de Elisacochea in 1737, but documentary evidence reveals that by 1746 the chapel had not as yet been finished. Two years later the residents were forced to abandon their lands because of attacks by hostile Indians, but the building must have been completed, or nearly completed by that time, for when Governor Vélez Cachupín ordered the residents to return to their lands in 1750 he stipulated that their homes should be constructed in the usual defensive plaza plan. In placing the settlers in possession on April 17, according to these instructions, Alcalde Mayor Juan Joseph Lovato recorded: "I made the resettlement in the location in which the chapel is situated, and this being in the center, I made the measurement and designated the plaza in a square, which consisted of 135 varas [about 370 feet] on each side . . ." (SANM I, #1100).

The Bishop of Durango, Pedro Anselmo Sánchez de Tagle, promptly relicensed the Chapel of Santa Rosa de Lima. Ten years later, in 1760, it was relicensed by Bishop Pedro Tamarón y Romeral, and periodic relicenses were issued until 1826.

Fray Francisco Atanacio Domínguez during his visitation to New Mexico in 1776 briefly described the chapel and furnishings of Santa Rosa as follows:

In this direction [towards the east] there is a shrine of St. Rose of Lima belonging to the settlers, where they buried their dead when there was no church in the pueblo. Its furnishings consist of a paper print of the said Lady and nothing else. The settlers built it and provided the set of vestments, which is mother-of-pearl satin, but it is so old that even to look at it is indecorous. The most decent thing is the chalice with its paten, and this is the one in use at the mission for the time being. (Adams and Chavez: p. 126).

The inventory of the few furnishings at Santa Rosa as well as his statement on burials indicates that the use of the chapel was already declining. Virtually the same list of furnishings appears in the inventory of Santo Tomás turned over to Fray Theodore Alcina in 1807. (AASF, Accts.).

When Vicar General Juan Bautista Ladrón de Guevara visited New Mexico churches in 1818 he reported a much more extensive inventory for Santa Rosa, but indicated that virtually all of the furnishings belonging to the chapel were housed in Santo Tomás. However, in the structure were a crucifix,

as well as "an oil painted retablo, with a table, and in the middle of it a *bulto* [statue] of the patroness, Santa Rosa de Lima." (AASF Accts.). This is the first mention of a statue of the beloved patron saint. Guevara's brief statement that the chapel of Santa Rosa was 20 varas (approximately 55 feet) in length is the only contemporary report which mentions the chapel's dimensions. He also listed "a pulpit and a choir with its railing."

Sometime within the next four years a bell was cast for the chapel, indicating that it was still frequently in use. On receiving the transfer of the parish of Santo Tomás from his predecessor, on August 22, 1822, Fray Mariano Sánchez Vergara stated: "and having received from his hand and under formal inventory of the parish church with all its furnishings, noting only the lack of six large medals of metal, six small ones and one reliquary of the same which were used in the casting of the bell which is now in the chapel of Santa Rosa." (AASF Accts.).

In the report of his visitation of 1826 Vicar General Agustín Fernández San Vicente stated that there was "a bell in its bell tower," and gave the additional architectural information that the chapel had three doors with keys: "one which leads into the nave of the chapel, another which leads into the sacristy and a third which was the *puerta de gracias* [door of grace]." The meaning or location of this third door is not clear. Considering the chapel important to the religious life of Abiquiu, San Vicente again relicensed it and "recommends to the priest and devout parishioners of Santa Rosa, patroness of the chapel, that they take great pains, more and more each day, in paying homage and respect to the religious cults, and not to permit the temple, which was the first one built at this place of Abiquiu, to fall into ruins." (AASF Accts.).

In spite of this admonition, no later primary accounts of either the plaza or the chapel have come to light. By the time of U. S. occupation in 1846 few people lived at the site, but oral tradition indicates that the chapel was used for occasional services as late as 1900.

Archeological research concerning the immediate plaza area is continuing at the present time, and stabilization of the chapel remnant is underway. Detailed investigation, including excavation, on the outer boundaries of the larger area of the original 370-foot plaza, laid out in 1750, is necessary since mounds are located approximately at the east, south and west extremities.

Confusion in historical accounts has long existed concerning the chronology of events in the settlement of the Abiquiu area along the Chama River, due in part to the scarcity of extant records concerning the mid-1700's. Although the Spanish settlement of Santa Rosa de Lima was older, the history of the *genízaro* settlement established in 1754 by Governor Tomás Vélez Cachupín has fared somewhat better since this village, the present day Abiquiu, has been

Figure 2. Taken in 1932 by Charles Lindbergh. The river bank is eating away at the village remains. The chapel walls stand roofless.

Figure 3. The chapel in 1915.

in continuous existence. The *genízaros* were Indians who had lost their tribal identity by capture to other tribes, usually as children, and had in turn been captured or ransomed by the Spanish, or who had wandered into the settlements. By the middle of the 18th century their numbers were so large, that to encourage their assimilation, the authorities made land grants to them especially in the outlying areas. Thus, their communities would also serve as barriers against hostile Indian attack. Many of them intermarried with the Spaniards.

The few original surviving documents of the period, however, indicate that Spanish occupation in the Abiquiu area pre-dated that of the *genízaro* grant by some twenty years. The initial settlement began in the summer of 1734 when Bartolomé Trujillo, resident of the *Puesto* (small settlement) of San José de Chama (now Hernandez) petitioned Governor Gervasio Cruzat y Góngora, on behalf of himself and nine other heads of households, inter-related by blood or marriage, for a grant to farming lands "on both sides of the Chama River as far as the Arroyo de Abiquiu." They earnestly pleaded that the governor's mercy be extended to them in their need due to "our large families and lack of sufficient lands for our subsistence;" however, they asked for an extended period of time for settlement, since the plowing of their fields and building of their homes would be impossible before the onset of winter. On August 23, 1734 Governor Cruzat y Góngora approved a grant "to the lands which they request in the place which is called Abiquiu," specifying the amount to be given each individual and stipulating that the settlement be made within one year. Upon the governor's order *Alcalde Mayor* (chief local official) of Santa Cruz de la Cañada, Juan Paéz Hurtado, in whose jurisdiction the new settlement lay, placed each grantee in possession of his allotment on August 31-September 1.

In marking off Francisco Trujillo's tract, his southern boundary was designated as the "road which goes to the old pueblo of Abiquiu." The prehistoric Tewa Pueblo of Abiquiu was situated on the well-known hill west of the new settlement and became the site of the later *genízaro* community of Santa Tomás de Abiquiu. That the grantee Bartolomé Trujillo was actually occupying a portion of the lands without official sanction prior to the grant was apparent, since Paéz Hurtado used the location of Trujillo's house in designating one allotment and to his *acequia* (irrigation ditch) in making another. In referring to the outer boundary of the lands allotted, the *alcalde mayor* also referred to the "corrals in which Antonio de Salazar pens up his stock" indicating that this prominent land owner in the San José de Chama region, although not a grantee, was using some adjoining land for grazing.

In the spring of 1735 Joseph Antonio de Torres, another resident of the *Puesto* de San José de Chama, also became interested in joining the new Abiquiu settlers, and asked for permission to receive an al-

lotment of land. After consideration, the governor at first approved his request stipulating that Torres and Francisco Trujillo, one of the original grantees, would share the lands already allotted to the latter. Trujillo, however, balked at the order and the governor then disallowed Torres' request. The settlement was apparently completed within the specified time. Fray Miguel de Menchero listed twenty families of Spaniards as living at Santa Rosa in 1744 under the jurisdiction of the Franciscan friar at San Ildefonso.

On September 13, 1737 a license for the construction of a chapel dedicated to Santa Rosa de Lima, was granted by Bishop of Durango Don Martín de Elisacochea and thereafter the little frontier settlement was known by the name of this patron saint.

Some nine years later, on February 16, 1746, Miguel Martín Serrano of Santa Rosa de Lima filed civil action against Juan Trujillo for refusing access to an *acequia* which Martín Serrano used stating that he had been an original settler and had lived upon his land for a period of twelve years. At the same time, Martín Serrano also charged that Rosalia Baldés and her family were causing serious damage to himself and other downstream settlers by damming the Chama River above their lands and the chapel, asserting that a flood would wreak damage to the chapel, which, he mentioned, would be finished within a short time as it lacked only the completion of the roof.

Governor Joaquín Codallos y Rabál ordered *Alcalde Mayor* of Santa Cruz de la Cañada, Juan de Beytia, to investigate the issue. Proceeding to the site, de Beytia determined, after careful investigation, that Martín Serrano did not have a legitimate claim and so informed the governor. Codallos y Rabál ordered a fifty *peso* fine imposed on Martín Serrano for false accusations. The latter appealed the decision, claiming that the Baldés family, who were not original grantees, had no legal interest in the lands on which they were residing and petitioned the governor to reconsider. On further investigation, Codallos y Rabál, however, upheld his decision and demanded prompt payment.

As the largest northwestern frontier settlement along the Chama River, Santa Rosa de Lima de Abiquiu was subjected to continual Comanche and Ute attack and according to Fray Juan José Pérez Mirabál, in charge of ecclesiastical administration of the area, Governor Codallos y Rabál made little attempt to protect the settlers. In August of 1747 the Comanches raided Santa Rosa, killed a girl and an old woman, and carried off twenty-three women and children. Pérez Mirabál at the Mission of San Juan Pueblo, reported the disaster immediately to the governor, who ignored the report. Under pressure of another letter from Mirabál, and aroused public opinion, Codallos y Rabál finally ordered troops in pursuit. The Indians had a lead of four days, and the soldiers were unable to catch up with them. In the meantime, the irate citizens of Santa Rosa organized

a party of their own. Following the Comanche trail they found three dead women and the body of a newly-born child.

By the early spring of 1748 Indian problems had become so intense that the settlers of the outlying frontier settlements of Santa Rosa de Abiquiu, Ojo Caliente and Pueblo Quemado petitioned Governor Codallos y Rabál to be allowed to move back to areas of greater security until the marauding Indians had calmed down. Realizing the hostilities the settlers were experiencing, the governor granted their request on March 31, 1748 and the settlers moved into the more populated areas. Codallos y Rabál, however, specified that upon his order, or that of his successor, they would be obligated to resettle the areas. With the abandonment of these settlements, particularly Santa Rosa and Ojo Caliente, many families returned to the San José de Chama region. The next year, however, during the fall of 1749, the people of Chama were in a state of panic as the nomadic Indians now raided further south and continually menaced that area. In early November settlers at the Puesto de San José de Chama petitioned now Governor Tomas Vélez Cachupín for permission to abandon Chama also. Vélez Cachupín, however, unlike his predecessor, was much concerned with the necessity of frontier defense, and sharply denied the request specifying that any settler who left would be assessed a fine of 200 pesos and forced to return.

By the beginning of 1750 Indian problems had subsided somewhat and Vélez Cachupín ordered the residents of Santa Rosa to return to the area but to build their houses in the customary defensive plaza plan with the chapel as the center. Bartolomé Trujillo, Ygnacio Martín Serrano and Pablo Trujillo all objected to the forced resettlement, but Bartolomé, the original leader of the group, while declining to give up his right, specifically stated that he would resettle his *ranchito* after he was satisfied that the Indian problems had subsided. On April 16, 1750 Alcalde Mayor Juan Joseph Lovato led the settlers back to Santa Rosa and laid out the plaza, with the chapel situated in the center, leaving additional area for other settlers who might come later. Those who accompanied Lovato back to their lands were Miguel Martín Serrano, Juan Joseph de la Zerda, Gerónimo Martín Serrano, Ygnacio and Juan Baldés; the latter two representing themselves and their mother, Rosalia Baldés, who did not appear, and Manuel de la Rosa. In addition thirteen genízaro Indians were among the group and were placed at the home of Miguel de Montoya until the governor could place them elsewhere. This appears to be the first location of these Indians in the Abiquiu area. Vélez Cachupín also ordered a detachment of troops into the Abiquiu area until the plaza was established.

On March 11, of the same year, Bishop of Durango Pedro Anselmo Sánchez de Tagle, evidently confident that the new settlement would be permanent, issued a second license for the chapel of

Santa Rosa de Lima.

Early in October, 1752 Bartolomé Trujillo petitioned Vélez Cachupín for his old ranch known as San Joseph de Gracia at Abiquiu, offering to pay the equivalent of sixty pesos *de la tierra* (barter currency) if allowed to resettle. On October 5, the governor ordered Lovato to regrant the said lands. Lovato complied and on the 12th resettled Trujillo but was still assessed the sixty-peso fine.

In 1754 Governor Vélez Cachupín made a land grant, bounded on the east by the Santa Rosa plaza, but including the allotments formerly designated to Juan Trujillo and Miguel Martín Serrano, to the Abiquiu genízaros and established their community on the nearby hill.

When Bishop Pedro Tamarón y Romeral of Durango made his visitation in 1760 he was unable to inspect the Abiquiu settlements "because of the height of the river and the poor condition of the canoe," but he listed the genízaro Pueblo of Santo Tomás as containing "57 Indian families with 166 persons." He also noted 104 Spanish families with a total census of 617 persons, obviously meaning the Santa Rosa de Lima residents. Bishop Tamarón also relicensed the chapel.

The mission church for the genízaro plaza, dedicated to *Santo Tomás El Apóstol* (St. Thomas the Apostle), was begun by Fray José Toledo who came to Abiquiu in 1755 and served until 1770. Abiquiu was then a *visita* of the Pueblo of Santa Clara mission until 1772, when Fray Sebastián Fernández took charge, and "found that Father Toledo had built the church walls halfway up on all sides. Finding it in this state, he put his hand to it so firmly that he took the food from his own mouth and used his royal alms to finish the work. . ." (Adams & Chavez, p. 120). Santa Rosa de Lima thereafter served as an *ayuda* (auxiliary) chapel of Santo Tomás El Apóstol.

The account of Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez made during his visitation of 1776 is the only description of the Abiquiu settlements during the late 1700's:

This mission [Santo Tomás] has charge of the administration of some settlers, part of whom live in farms scattered to the west and north, part live to the east in a small plaza. In this direction there is a shrine of Santa Rosa de Lima belonging to the settlers, where they buried their dead when there was no church in the pueblo. . .

I say the same thing about the lands of this settlement as about those of the pueblo, and like them they are watered by the same Chama River since they begin where the others leave off. Indeed, they do yield more and better crops than the others because the settlers work at it. Some are masters, others servants, others serve in both capacities as I have said in other settlements. (Adams & Chavez, p. 126).

As noted by Domínguez, the government authorities had established a yearly trade fair at Abiquiu by 1776 for the barter of goods between the Utes and

the Spanish-genízaro settlers, by which the Utes exchanged deerskins and sometimes captive Indian children for horses and corn. His account is as follows:

Every year, between the end of October and the beginning of November, many heathens of the Ute nation come to the vicinity of this pueblo. They come very well laden with good deerskins, and they celebrate their fair with them. This is held for the sole purpose of buying horses. If one is much to the taste and satisfaction of an Indian (the trial is a good race), he gives fifteen to twenty good deerskins for the horse; and if not, there is no purchase. They also sell deer or buffalo meat for maize or corn flour. Sometimes there are little captive heathen Indians (male or female) as with the Comanches, whom they resemble in the manner of selling them. (Adams & Chavez, pp. 252-253).

The acquisition of these children, who had lost their original tribal identities through capture, resulted in the continued influx of genízaros in the region.

As the population increased a scarcity of arable land caused an expansion from the Abiquiu regions, and the Santa Rosa plaza declined in importance. The 1787 census enumerated only nineteen families consisting of eighty persons attached to the chapel. In the early 1800's some families, including that of the influential Antonio Severino Martínez, left their Santa Rosa de Lima homes and settled as far away as the Taos Valley. During the first quarter of the 19th century this population explosion also resulted in numerous new settlements within the area, including Cañones, Barranco, El Rito, La Puente, Tierra Azul, Rio de Chama, Casita, Plaza Blanca, San Francisco, La Cueva, San Rafael and Gavilán. The residents of these communities continued to be under the jurisdiction of Santo Tomás, which became a full parish rather than a mission, and ayuda chapels were licensed to serve their needs on a smaller scale. Religious celebrations in them were held usually on patron saints' feast days, and other functions were observed on occasion, often without the direct participation of the parish priest.

The chapel of Santa Rosa de Lima continued to be relicensed throughout this period. On August 31, 1787 Bishop Estevan Lorenzo de Tristán issued a license for a period of three years. Subsequent licenses were reissued December 19, 1791; August 22, 1797 and November 16, 1803.

The Spanish settlers in the Abiquiu area, who had originally taken Santa Rosa de Lima as their Patroness, were reluctant to accept Santo Tomás El Apostól as patron saint when the mission church was completed at the *genízaro* settlement (present day Abiquiu) in the early 1770's, and as noted by Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez in 1776, continued to use the name *Santa Rosa*. For this reason, some writers have erroneously assumed that the Domínguez-Es-

calante expedition to Utah stayed at Santa Rosa de Lima de Abiquiu on July 30-31, 1776 and celebrated mass before continuing its journey, since the Escalante journal refers to the stopping place as "El Pueblo of Santa Rosa de Abiquiu." However, the journal clearly described the location of present day Abiquiu and only Indian settlements were referred to as *pueblos*.

The 1976 publication of *The Domínguez-Escalante Journal*, sponsored by the Domínguez-Escalante State-Federal Bicentennial Committee, as translated by Fray Angelico Chavez and edited by Ted J. Warner, clarifies the location on pages 4-5. In his visitation a few weeks before the Utah expedition, Domínguez gave a full description of the Santo Tomás El Apostól Church and noted that the small settlement of Santa Rosa de Lima de Abiquiu, with its chapel, lay to the east of the *genízaro* village. (See: Eleanor B. Adams and Fray Angelico Chavez, *The Missions of New Mexico, 1776*, pp. 120-126).

When Vicar General Juan Bautista de Guevara, by order of the Bishop of Durango, visited all churches and missions in 1818 he listed an extensive inventory of furnishings for the chapel, but noted that most of the objects were actually housed at the Church of Santo Tomás. Vicar General Agustín Fernández San Vicente, in his visitation of 1826, listed virtually the same inventory. San Vicente approved previous licenses and exhorted the parish of Santo Tomás not to let the chapel fall into ruins.

When U. S. military forces occupied New Mexico in 1846, however, the plaza was virtually abandoned. Occasional services appear to have been held at the chapel as late as 1900. By 1915 the walls were still largely intact, but gradual deterioration has reduced the structure to a remnant.

The ruins of the venerable chapel have always been esteemed by the citizens of the Abiquiu region, although the plaza area has long since passed into private ownership, and the shifting course of the Chama River has obliterated most of the northern portion.

During the late spring and summer of 1975, the people of Abiquiu became interested in preserving the historical tradition of the area and formed a corporation known as "La Asociación de Santa Rosa de Lima de Abiquiu." One of its purposes was to acquire the land which encompasses the ruins of La Capilla and the extant plaza area and to promote some type of stabilization for the remains of the chapel, as well as to revive the celebration of Santa Rosa de Lima.

These attempts proved to be relatively successful. The local association convinced the then-owner, Alva Simpson, Jr., to donate to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe a portion of the area contained in the old plaza site, along with the chapel ruins, some 1.88 acres. On August 30, the feast day of Santa Rosa de Lima, 1975, Mr. Simpson officially deeded the land to the Archdiocese and a special mass was celebrated on the site. The standing wall of the chapel is being

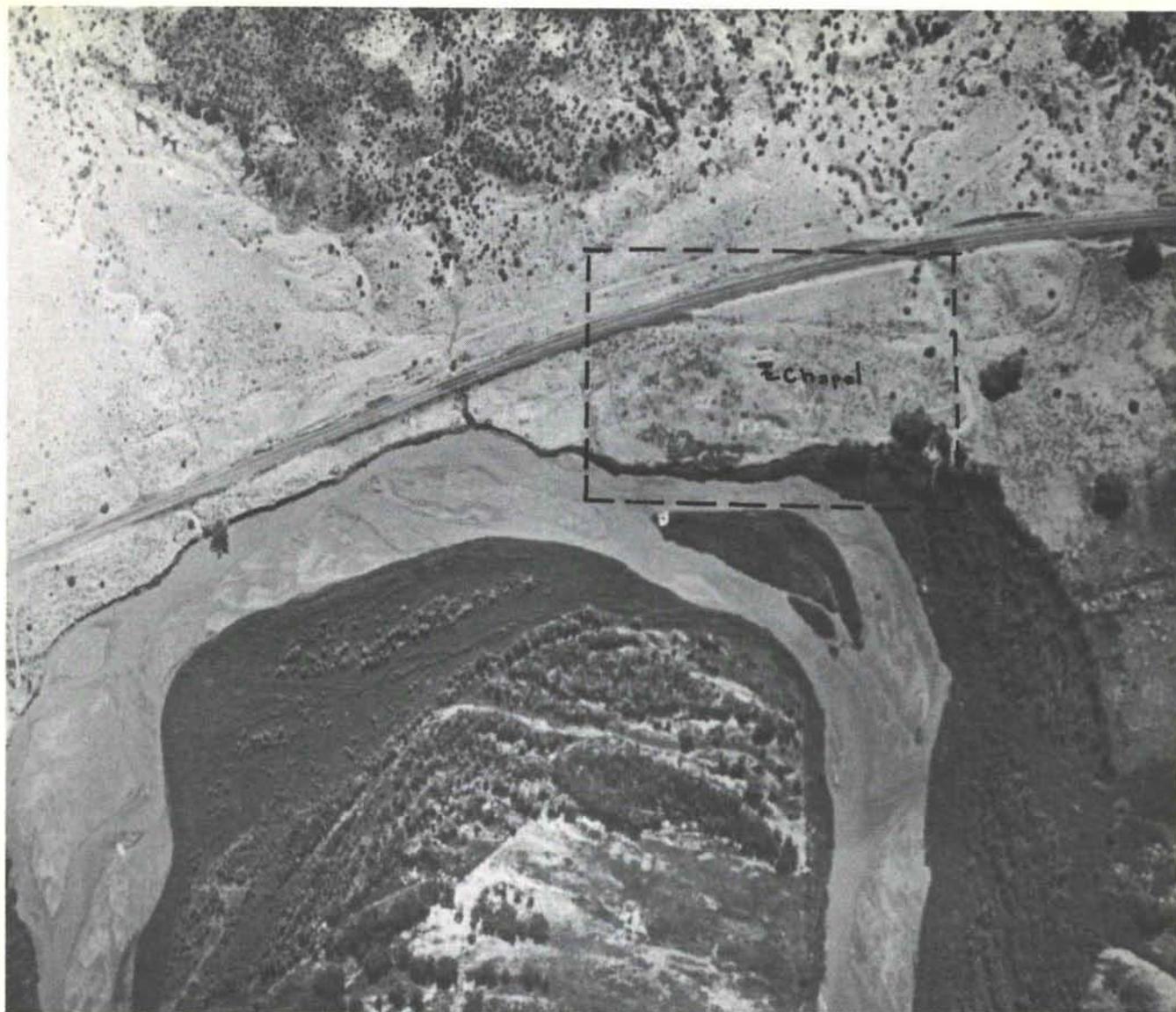


Figure 4. From the air in 1976 little can be seen of the once large plaza—shown by the dotted line. The river has changed course, deepening the bend further and further into the plaza area.

stabilized and archeological research in the plaza area is underway. A major important project under consideration is the reinforcement of the Chama River bank to prevent further erosion of the site.

Another purpose for the incorporation was to locate and obtain the bulto of Santa Rosa, which had

previously been stolen from an Abiquiu morada, recovered by the State Police in 1973, then illegally sold to a collector. At this time the *santo* has been located and legal means are being taken in order to retrieve the beloved statue and return it to the people of Abiquiu. J. R. S.

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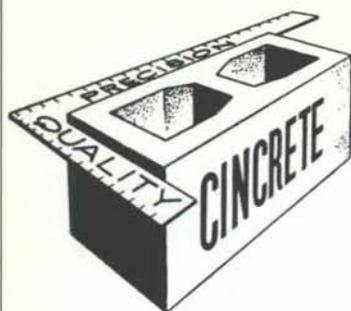
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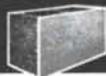
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