

Canyon Road

Canyon Road is one of the oldest roads still in use in the United States. The road follows a 13th century footpath trail that leads from the Pueblo village that Santa Fe is built upon, into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, an area that the Tewa speaking people refer to as “the eastern corner.” After Spanish settlement, the road became known as El Camino del Cañon.

Gentrification of the City of Santa Fe began with the displacement of Pueblo Indian groups by the arrival of the Spanish who established a central headquarters in the area north of the Rio Grande. Spanish soldiers and servants lived and worked in an area called the Barrio de Analco, located south of the Santa Fe River, which encompassed Canyon Road.

During the Mexican political reign of the city, the population grew to include more residents from Mexico, as well as nomadic Indian tribes of the Comanche, Navajo, Apache bands, Ute, and Paiutes. After the signing of the Treaty of the Guadalupe of Hidalgo in 1848, U.S. territorial occupation brought an influx of white settlers and miners to the downtown area of Santa Fe. Canyon Road connected farming communities along the Acequia Madre until the early 1900s, when the railroad brought visitors to the area, and wealthy business owners began catering to the tourism industry with restaurants and trade shops along the road. As the traditional adobe housing units aged, and the City adopted new public health and safety codes, many houses that existed for centuries were condemned and demolished. Those that could afford to rebuild were the one who were able to obtain capital to create new businesses.

Research into the City’s issue of gentrification was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and drew from data produced by local, regional, national sources, as well as focus group sessions with impacted communities. The report explained the history of gentrification stating, “Over the last 50 years, as tourism, the arts, upscale dining and retail transformed the core of Santa Fe, residents who could no longer afford to live close to Downtown moved to the outskirts. Over time, these changes shifted where and how people live, splintering the city into more distinct – but more stratified – neighborhoods.”

The report showed more than 20 indicators of gentrification evident in Santa Fe. These indicators included the displacement of traditionally Hispanic communities, investment trends, demographic data, home values, transportation, parks and affordable housing. A city survey in 2015 indicated that 62 percent of the people who work in Santa Fe commute from other neighboring towns; 72 percent of those commuters said the reason for their commute was because housing in town is too expensive.

According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, from the time period of 2009 – 2013, the median household income in downtown Santa Fe came from wealthy White individuals over the age of 60 years. Families that once lived in the Barrio de Analco gradually relocated to Hopewell-Mann and Airport Road neighborhoods due to the constraints of being lower income and communities of color.

Today, Canyon Road is an art mecca hosting more than 130 galleries, boutiques and restaurants within a seven-city block stretch of road. Almost every kind of art is sold with work ranging from realism, impressionism, abstraction, expressionism, and contemporary in the mediums of glass, ceramic, jewelry, and fiber artists, and paintings, sculpture, fashion and visual new media.

Santa Fe's Canyon Road is also renowned for the Christmas Eve “farolito walk”, which has become one of the City's most beloved traditions and attracts thousands of visitors annually. The tradition dates back to the 18th century, when lighting the paths to doors with small bonfires symbolized ushering the path for Christ’s birth.

Influenced by Chinese paper lanterns, brown paper bags became the famous luminaria that the local community uses to light sidewalks along Canyon Road. The paper bags are anchored with sand, and a small candle set inside, for a luminous outdoor display. Some refer to this décor as “farolitos” or “farol” which means “lantern,” and “luminaria” means “light”; both terms are used by New Mexicans to refer to the outdoor décor lighting tradition that continues.

For many years, art galleries and shops provided refreshments to visitors walking Canyon Road on Christmas Eve, while live music serenaded walkers, and people gathered around small bonfires in the streets for warmth, singing of Christmas carols. During the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the City turned Canyon Road’s “farolito walk” into its first drive-thru event. Spectators cruised down the lighted street lit with hundreds of farolitos — while maintaining pandemic-safe practices from the comfort of their vehicles. The following year, Canyon Road’s “farolito walk” was open to pedestrians with facial mask-wearing encouraged.

Sources:

1. Julyan, Robert. *The Place Names of New Mexico*, University of New Mexico Press, 1998.
2. [In Santa Fe, A Tale of Two Cities: Report details income, other divides among neighborhoods - Albuquerque Journal \(abqjournal.com\)](#)
3. [Luminarias or Farolitos? \(newmexico.org\)](#)
4. [City of Santa Fe turns Farolito Walk into Christmas Eve cruise | Local News | santafenewmexican.com](#)

Archival photos:

1905 [Corpus Christi procession on Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

1912 [La Conquistadora Procession, Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Jesse Nusbaum Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

1912. [Adobe building on Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Jesse Nusbaum Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

1947 [Cristo Rey Church Parish Hall, East Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

1990 [Geronimo restaurant on Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

1982 [Man lighting luminarias at Ernie's Restaurant on Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

2010? [Mural on Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

1990- [Preparing farolitos in the Canyon Road Acequia Madre neighborhood on Christmas eve, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

Local attractions:

[Historic Santa Fe Foundation](#)

[HOME \(cristoreyparish.org\)](#)

Geronimo restaurant: [Home | geronimo \(geronimorestaurant.com\)](#)

The Compound restaurant: [Compound Restaurant | Award Winning Dining on Canyon Road in Santa Fe, New Mexico](#)

El Farol: ["HAILED AS SANTA FE'S MOST HISTORIC AND ICONIC BAR AND RESTAURANT SINCE 1835" \(elfarolsantafe.com\)](#)

[Turner Carroll Gallery Santa Fe, New Mexico - Contemporary Art](#)