

Historic Agua Fría village

The history of the Agua Fría village dates back to 3,000 B.C. and may be the oldest and largest agricultural settlement of its kind in North America. Located five miles southwest of the Santa Fe Plaza, the area was primarily farmed by Native Americans in the region until a drought in 1250 A.D., then again between 1300 until 1400 when the settlement was finally abandoned.

The Village of Agua Fria-Quemado

When the Spanish first arrived, Kha'p'oe Ówîngeh, also known as the Pueblo of Santa Clara, referred to the area by a Tewa name, P'o'Karige, meaning "cold water place". The cold springs along Agua Fria served as a central hub for area settlement. Tewa and Tano Indians named the village Ca-Tee-Ka meaning "cold water," which is likely a reference to the cold temperatures of high elevation mountain springs such as the Santa Fe River which flowed through the area via acequias and converged with the Rio Grande. Later Spanish colonists named the village, "Agua Fria," which means "cold water".

In 1693, a land grant was given to Captain (Maestro del Campo) Roque Madrid, for his service in the "Reconquest" of New Mexico in 1692, led by General Diego de Vargas. The boundaries of Madrid's land grant extend from Ojito Fresco to Pueblo Quemado. For two generations, Captain Madrid's family farmed the area since 1640. Other soldiers were also given land grants to farm the Agua Fría area.

The Agua Fría village is located on the site of an abandoned Indian pueblo called Quemado, in Spanish means "burned," because the village burned sometime between 500-800 A.D. A map, drawn in 1766, by José de Urrutia, demonstrates the physical layout of the Villa de Santa Fé. Historical records of Spanish soldier Juan Candelaria notes Cristóbal Baca establishing a settlement at Quemado in 1730, placing the land grant at one and one quarter league from the capital with irrigation water coming from the Santa Fé River (Armijo 1929:284-286).

In 1776, Fray Domínguez wrote that Quemado was one league west and at the very outskirts of Santa Fé. It was an Indian pueblo in the old days and had this name because it was purposely burned. The settlement near this place was later called Agua Fria. The burned pueblo was excavated after the Santa Fé River laid part of it bare (Adams and Chávez 1956:41).

The main crops cultivated in the Agua Fría village were corn, wheat, alfalfa, beans and squash, which were traded as commodities in downtown Santa Fe. A central main street road, Agua Fría Street, connected the small agricultural community to the heart of Santa Fe. The Agua Fría village was a well-known trade and rest stop along the "El Camino Real del Adentro", or the "Royal Road of the Interior" route between Mexico and Santa Fe. The area's natural springs were also a place where travelers stopped to "wash up" before entering the city of Santa Fe.

During the Mexican period (1821-1848), Hispano Villages and Pueblo Indians reported frequent Indian raids. Even though the government in Mexico City taxed the citizens of New Mexico, the funds were insufficient to provide military defense against raiding. In 1837, residents from the Chimayó-Santa Cruz de la Cañada became frustrated by imposed taxes and contemptuous treatment by New Mexico Governor Albino Pérez. A revolution, also known as the Revolt of 1837 or the Chimayó Rebellion, occurred on August 3, 1837. Citizens chased Governor Perez from northern

New Mexico and cornered him at the intersection of Hickok and Agua Fria Street where he was decapitated.

In 1835, the Catholic church of San Isidro, was built by area residents and is host to many burials with headstones dating back to the 1880s. The church was named after the patron saint of farmers, gardeners, and workers (San Isidro or Saint Isidore). Each spring, the community celebrates the feast day of San Ysidro observed on May 15. Offerings and prayers are made to the patron saint so that the agricultural fields are blessed with an abundant harvest, plenty of rain, and protection from drought and pestilence.

In the 1990s, the Agua Fría village won the City of Santa Fe's "traditional historic community" designation, which provides some protection from annexation. In September 2021, Cornerstones, a Santa Fe organization known to restore historic churches and cultural places within northern New Mexico, along with several volunteers built a torreón on Agua Fría Street as a homage to the village's deep history. The torreón or small rock tower has a diameter of 10 feet at the base and 11 to 12 feet high. Historically, Spanish colonials and Native Americans used towers as lookout posts and to store crops.

After the Santa Fe Improvement Company dammed the river in 1880, and reservoirs were built on the Santa Fe River during the early 1900s, water supply from the river was reduced and Agua Fría's farming tradition waned. In an effort to continue community-based farming practices that dates back to the city's Pueblo occupation, the Three Sisters Collective, a local activist group, began working in 2020 with Santa Fe County and Reunity Resources, a 501c3 nonprofit that operates a regenerative two-acre urban farm and soil+compost yard. Community members along with representatives of the Three Sisters Collective farmed an area at the juncture of the San Ysidro river crossing. Volunteers helped to tend the crops, harvest, and demonstrate indigenous cooking methods, which included the butchering of a sheep in October of 2021.

Sources:

1. Julyan, Robert. The Place Names of New Mexico, University of New Mexico Press, 1998.
2. Whitmore, Jane. The traditional village of Agua Fria. Landmarks Preservation Consultants, Santa Fe, N.M., 1983.
3. [Agua Fria Village, N.M. | Four Corners Region \(fourcornersgeotourism.com\)](#)
4. [Agua Fria Village — Historic Santa Fe Foundation](#)
5. [Group building torreón in Agua Fría to commemorate area's past | Local News | santafenewmexican.com](#)
6. [Stone structure completed as tribute to history of Agua Fría | Local News | santafenewmexican.com](#)
7. [Resolution 2017-47-p0001 - p0004.pdf \(santafecountynm.gov\)](#)
8. [Adopted Village of Agua Fria Community Plan.pdf \(santafecountynm.gov\)](#)
9. [Trail Dust: 'The farmer saint' long popular in New Mexico | Trail Dust | santafenewmexican.com](#)
10. [A Moment in Time, Etched in Stone | New Mexico History Museum Blog \(nmhistorymuseum.org\)](#)
11. Agua Fria Historian: [Pike, Melinda Romero \(sflivingtreasures.org\)](#)

12. [A Once and Future River—Land&People | The Trust for Public Land \(tpl.org\)](#)
13. Definition of a [league | measurement | Britannica](#)

Archival Photos:

1. 1912 [Homes in Agua Fria Village near Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Jesse Nusbaum Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)
2. 1911 [Two Mexican boys near Agua Fria Village, Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Jesse Nusbaum Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)
3. 1910 [Home in Agua Fria Village near Santa Fe, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)