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THE HISTORY OF CASA GRANDE (15)

The best-known and best-preserved prehistoric structure within the United States is Casa Grande, in the Gila River valley, some twelve miles southwest of Florence, about sixteen miles from the Southern Pacific railroad station of Casa Grande, and a couple of miles from the new railroad town of Coolidge. The name is Spanish, simply meaning "large house."

The first historic mention of Arizona's ancient towns was by Friar Marcos de Niza in 1539, with a second by Pedro de Casteneda in connection with the Coronado expedition the following year. A ruin passed somewhere on the northern desert, they called Chichilticalli, understood to have been "Red House" in the Aztec tongue. Many students have tried to show that the route of Coronado embraced the locality of Casa Grande, but it probably came not nearer than seventy miles, along the San Pedro. Chichilticalli may have been near Fort Thomas, on the middle Gila. May I here advise my auditors that ethnologists unite in declaration that the Aztecs never dwelt in what now is Arizona. Probably the ancient settlements here antedated the Aztecan occupation of southern Mexico.

There seems little doubt that the first European who ever saw Casa Grande was a Jesuit, Eusebio Francisco Kino, who led a band of frians into northern Sonora about 1687, who established a chain of twenty-nine Jesuit missions and who labored among the Indians of Pimeria and Papagueria until his death. In 1694 to him was repeated a tale heard by Lieut. Juan Mateo Mange, nephew of the Governor of Sonora. Mange had heard of some great ancient houses near a river that flowed to the west. In November of the same year, Kino was led by Indians to Casa Grande, at that time apparently in almost as ruinous a condition as now. Mass was said in one of the rooms. Kino came again in 1699 with a military escort. The young soldier Mange, a member of this second party, wrote an interesting account of his trip and accurately described the ruins, adding a rough sketch and a ground plan of the main building. He told that the middle was four stories high andthe adjoining rooms were three stories the walls two yards thick, of strong mortar and clay, "so smooth on the inside that they looked like planed boards and so well burnished that they shone like Puebla earthen ware." The roofs of all the houses had been burned, save the ceiling of one room, which was of wooden beams, with superimposed layers of mortar and hard clay on reeds. He inferred that the settlement or city had been inhabited by a civilized race under regular government, this "evidenced by a main ditch which branches off from the river into the plains surrounding the city, which remained in the center of it". The guides told that a distance of a day's journey northward were similar ruins, undoubtedly those near Phoenix and Tempe, and also they spoke of ruins in another "ravine which joins the one they called Varde". In 1736 and in 1745 are records of visits to the ruins, respectively by Padre Ignatio Keller and Padre Jacobo Sedelmaier, missionaries from northern Sonora.

In 1762, in the "Rudo Ensayo", an anonymous writing attributed to Padre Juan Nentyg, is another description of the main building. Padre Francisco Garces, who, carrying the Cross into western Arizona, visited Casa Grande in 1775 on an exploring

trip that started at the presidio of Tubac, He was a member in the following year of a party led by Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, and which included also the Franciscan Padres Font and Tomas Eixarch, bound for the founding of San Francisco. Both Garces and Font left descriptions of Casa Grande. The former introduces in his narration an odd tale of hostility between the Hopi, the pueblo dwellers of northern Arizona, and the Pima, who dwelt in the vicinity of Casa Grande, in which he assumed "That the Moqui (Hopi) anciently extended to the Gila in early days". In this he was sustained by the evidence of Indians living in his mission of San Xavier, who told that the Moquis had built the houses whose ruins are still visible. Padre Garces therefore concluded that the ancient people "could be Moquis who came to fight and that, Harassed by the Pimas, who always have been numerous and valiant, they abandoned long ago these habitations on the River Gila; as also have they done this with that ruined pueblo which I found before my arrival in Moqui; and that they retired to the place where now they live, in a situation so advantageous, so defensible and with such precautions for self-defense in case of invasion." This was very good reasoning, later sustained.

Padre Font heard Indian tradition, "Which all reduces itself to fiction, mingled confusedly with some catholic truth". The Casa Grande, or Palace of Moctezuma, may have been inhabited some 500 years before, according to the stories and scanty notices there were of it and that the Indians gave, "because", he said, "as it appears the Mexicans (Aztecs) found it when in their transmigration the devil took them thru various lands, until they arrived at the promised land of Mexico and in their sojourns, which were long, they formed settlements and built edifices". The reverend historian spoke especially of finding the ground strewn with pieces of jars, pots and plates of various colors, "an indication that it was a large settlement and of distinct people from the Pima of the Gila, since these know not how to make such pottery." Padre Font recited one lengthy Pima legend, that of "El Hombre Amargo" (The Bitter Man), which has been repeated substantially in similar form to later investigators. In this legend is the story of a flood, from which refuge was taken on a high mountain range, called the Mountain of the Foam (Sierra de la Espuma), assumed to have been the Superstition Range, described as "cut off and steep like a corner of a bastion; with, high up near the top, a white brow, as of rock, which also continues along the range for a good distance; and the Indians say that this is the mark of foam of the water which rose to that height."

In 1871 the structure was visited by Capt. F. E. Grossman, who tried to trace the connection between the ruins and the modern Indians, and who found at least one sustaining legend, telling that the Pimas claimed to be the direct descendants of Chief So-ho (of whose line Si-va-no erected Casa Grande), who governed a large empire long before the Spaniards were known. His people cultivated the soil, dug immense canals, spun cotton cloth and made baskets and earthenware. The narrator refers to the certainty, "That the house was built before the Pimas knew of the use of iron, for many stone hatchets have been found in the ruins, and the ends of lintels over doors and windows showed by their hacked appearance that only blunt tools were used. It also appears that the builders were without trowels, for the marks of fingers of the workmen are plainly visibld both in the plastering and in the walls where the plastering has fallen off."

The first American visitors were trappers, hunting the beaver, which were abundant in nearly all the Arizona streams of continuous flow. Among these visitors were the Patties, about 1825, and ,in 1833, Pauline Weaver, a French trapper, who guided the Mormon Battalion in 1846 and who led the Rich Hill party of placer miners in 1863. His autograph is on the walls.

Lieut. Wm. H. Emory in 1846 had sketches made of the ruins still showing the central upper room, and heard from the Indians their own version of the immaculate conception from which sprang the founder of the race which built all the houses found in ruins.

The most systematic exploration of the Casa Grande settlement was made by Dr. J. W. Fewkes of the Division of Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, in 1892 and between 1906 and 1908. Most of the work by Dr. Fewkes was done outside of the principal structure. He opened up a number of mounds that turned out to be pueblo houses, in two cases built upon the debris of older structures, abandoned after centuries of use. A number of compounds were excavated as well as several ceremonial houses. It was deduced that the canals had been dug by means of wooden shovels, the material probably carried to a distance by women and children. There were reservoirs for the conservation of water for drinking. Compared with the ruins of the Salt River Valley, comparatively few mortuary remains were found, tho, as at Tempe, there were evidences both of burial and cremation. Apparently the last settlement was of later date than in the neighboring valley of Salt River.

Dr. Fewkes has expressed an opinion that the builders of Casa Grande might racially be traced down to the Pimas of today, a statement that has brought out strong opposition from a number of sources. On the other hand, it would appear much easier to believe that the builders of Casa Grande (Pima "Va-a-ki") and of the great houses of the Salt River Valley, the "Hohokam" of the Pimas, were the progenitors of some of the dozen pueblo building tribes now living in northeastern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico. The character of the buildings of the lower valleys is not very different from the architecture of the Zunis, Moquis or New Mexican Pueblos, all of them industrious people, with a high class of culture that dates far back of the coming of the Spaniards, when the tribes of Pimeria were found by the Spaniards about as they were fifty years ago. The similarity in pottery cannot be considered evidence of great weight, for the designs on the ancient ware readily could have been copied by the modern Indian potters. It should be noted, also, that the best of the modern pottery is of Maricopa manufacture. The Maricopas have lived near Casa Grande for a comparatively short period of time. Among the Pimas the making of pottery, save of the rudest kind, is understood to have been comparatively modern.

The speaker has asked many old Pimas about the Hohokam and has rarely gotten any answer except, "We don't know anything about them." In 1880, while going to the great corn dance on the upper Pima reservation, in company with the old war chief of the Pimas, they was passed the great ruin on the Tempe road, east of Phoenix, a structure many times the area of Casa Grande. The old Indian was asked what he knew of the ancient building. He called it "Una Casa de Montezuma" and added in Spanish, with a sweep of his hand, "When here came the fathers of my forefathers, all then was as it is now. We know nothing of these people".

Dr. Fewkes concreted the tops of some of the walls uncovered by himself. In 1902 the ruin was covered with a corrugated roof, similar to that of a hay barn. These obviously modern additions, however incongruous, it is hoped, will serve the purpose of preserving for the eyes of future generations a link of highest value connecting with an ancient culture of which there is no written record. The Casa Grande ruins for a number of years have been maintained as a national monument, now under direct charge of Frank Pinkley, Superintendent of Southwestern Monuments. The reservation of 480 acres was set aside by presidential order in 1892, its present monument status giving in 1918.

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There should be understanding that there is much to the Casa Grande National Monument beside its most prominent structure. This was not the largest of the buildir possibly little more than a watch tower, with ceremonial chambers. It lies near t center of a great walled enclosure, 216x420 feet, called by the scientists "Compou A", this filled with houses save for a couple of plazas or market places.

Probably even older is "Compound B", 165x300, 800 feet to the northeast, within its walls evidences of a great communal house. On the western slope and summit of this ruin for several years have been staged successive Casa Grande pageants that have brought the ruins into the modern lime light of publicity. Spectators have been seated in an auditorium built upon a vast kitchen midden. This, in ordinary languag was nothing more than a rubbish heap, built up by garbage and debris of centuries, over several communal occupations. All around, especially toward the river and toward Florence, are many other ruin mounds. Since the Fewkes investigations, comparatively little exploration has been done, tho a party from the Southwest Museum of Lo Angeles recently has been digging, with interesting results.

It is pleasing to note that Casa Grande is one ruin where the pot hunter is barred. Superintendent Pinkley keeps watch and ward. He has gathered a collection in a museum to which I can only refer, but which should be visited by every Arizonan. I have said little of the purely archaeological features of the ancient city. The domestic life of the simple people of long ago seems fairly well defined thru researches past and under way. But who they were and whence they came and why they went and against whom they reared their castles are questions still unsolved.

A one hours continuance of the Union Oil Company's "Forward Arizona" program is presented over K T A R every Wednesday evening between eight and nine o'clock.

Yours truly,

UNION OIL COMPANY OF ARIZONA
Phoenix Arizona

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