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Fiesta of St. Francis at San Francisquito, Sonora

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Fiesta of St. Francis at San Francisquito, Sonora

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San Francisquito is approximately 50 miles southwest of Sells, Arizona, just across the Mexican border. It is one of a chain of Papago villages paralleling the border in Sonora. The Department of Anthropology at the University has known for several years that a fiesta important to the Papago Indians is held there at the same time as that of St. Francis in Magdalena, Sonora, each year. But until we made the trip in 1950 no one here had actually attended the affair.

We went from Tucson to Sells where we found a Papago to guide us to the village in return for the ride. Our guide was a retired reservation policeman with over 30 years service who has been in touch with reservation affairs all his life, and seemed quite willing to talk on any subject. Although a Presbyterian, he knew quite a bit about the Sonora Catholic faith.

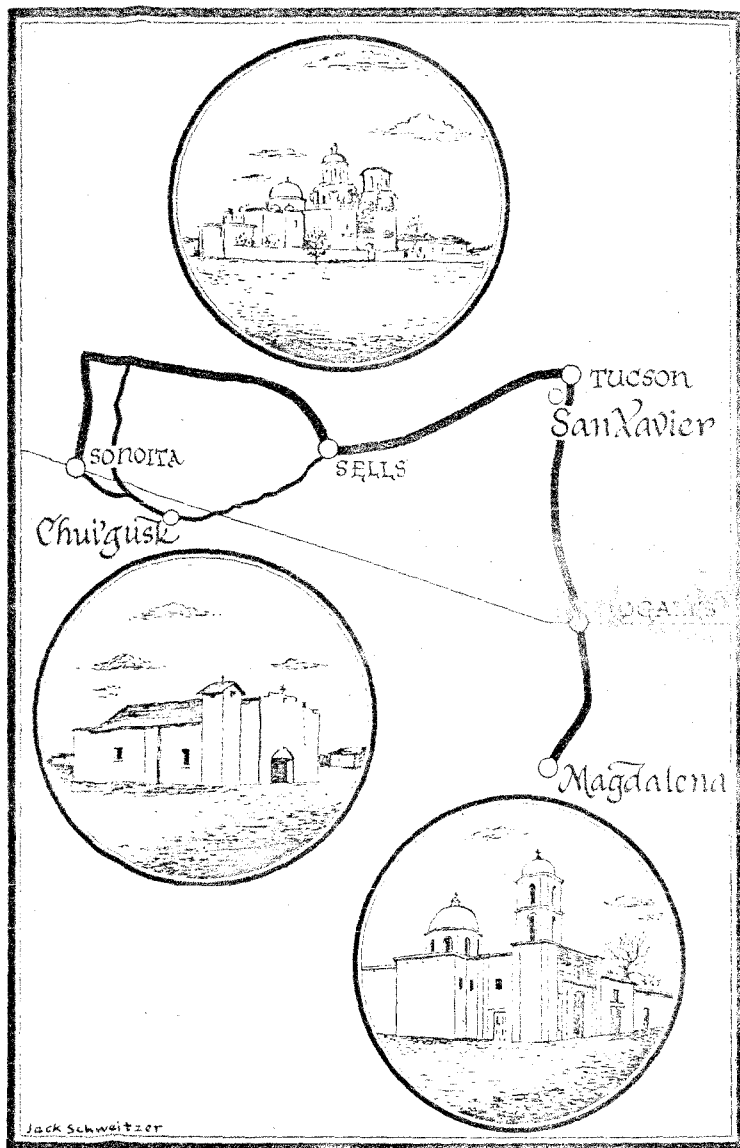
We were told in Sells that people were having trouble crossing the border, so we drove around through Sonoita, obtaining Mexican tourist permits. All of us had to buy them, although in the past Papagos were allowed to cross the border free for this fiesta.

San Francisquito is about 40 miles southeast of Sonoita over a very rough road that had knocked a hole in the gas tank of a 1940 Plymouth we passed.

Our guide told us he had attended this fiesta some 60 years ago when the village was located some miles further south. He said it had been held in the present location about ten years. The people from Tecolote, a formerly large village in Arizona, had founded this village after the Apaches were subdued. To the Papagos the town is known as *Chuubiy Guusk* (Jack Rabbit Falls Down).

THE VILLAGE

Though there are some houses scattered over the desert which are considered as belonging to the village, the main part consists of



fifteen or twenty houses around the church plaza, mostly on the north and east. Some were unoccupied. Our guide said 40 to 50 people reside here.

Some half dozen eating places were found, mostly east of the plaza in homes. One Mexican family ran a "restaurant" in an unoccupied home. We ate at a place run by a cousin of our guide.

A half of a beef hung from the ceiling and was cut up and cooked as needed. Some jerky went in the chile and stew. Steak, chile con carne, stews, tortillas, and beans were the usual dishes. A meal cost 75c, a standard charge regardless of choice in food.

There were four makeshift bars just outside the eastern edge of the plaza selling beer and mescal. The most popular had a loud-speaker system playing Mexican records.

An abandoned building on the south side of the plaza was used as a jail. There were two regular Mexican law officers, and three with 50, 30's deputized for the occasion. There were many fights, and the village had the appearance of a lawless town. We saw no fights while we were there.

An old church is located at the north edge of the plaza. Our guide said the ceremonies took place in this building until about six years ago when the present church was built.

The water supply comes from a *charco* located about a quarter mile northeast. There are several large cottonwood trees three feet or more in diameter at the *charco*. With the hedge of tamarack and a grove of mesquite, they seem to indicate a good supply of water at this location for many years.

Everyone bathed in the *charco*, walked their horses in it, and drank from it. Water was hauled to town in large barrels tied on horses. The town fields lay northwest, and are fenced. As no crops were planted at the time, we did not see the method of farming.

When we arrived about 2 p.m., October 2, the fiesta was well under way. There seemed to be at least 200 Papagos present, and almost as many Mexicans. Most of the Indians had come in wagons from the U. S. from villages such as Big Fields, Sells, South Well, Nemo, Manager's Dam, Tecolote, Hickiwan, Ajo, etc. Most were camped around houses of the village, parking their wagons close by or in the yards. Many cooked their food and slept there. Some slept in houses, especially if the owners were relatives. We counted 50

wagons in the town, and more came in during the day, accompanied by men on horseback. They came in caravans. We counted one train of six from Big Fields, with several men on horseback. We were told 12 wagonloads of people had been turned back at the border the day before by Mexican officials.

Most of the Mexicans came in cars or pickup trucks from places such as El Plomo, Sasabe, and Sonoita. They also camped in the town.

The majority of the people were well dressed, both Papagos and Mexicans. They kept admirably clean considering the shortage of water. Mexican young people were especially well dressed, and seemed to be mostly interested in the nightly dance. The Papagos from the U. S. were a little more expensively dressed. But some of the men looked rather shabby after passing out and sleeping on the ground all night.

We were well received by the people, both Mexicans and Papagos. There was some Papago resentment toward the Mexicans. One Mexican woman remarked that about three years ago they had started to come to the fiesta and had almost taken it over. Now, she said jokingly, maybe the Americans were coming to crowd out everybody. Only one time did we receive overt criticism. That was from a young Mexican when Mr. Schweitzer was taking some pictures. We saw Papagos we knew from the U. S., and talked with them. We were approached by and talked to by local Papagos. Several Mexican men bought us beers and we became acquainted with the two members of one of the Mexican *marachi* bands present.

Most of the people were drinking most of the time. They came and venerated and got to drinking as soon as possible, except for young Mexican girls and women.

We acted like ordinary males, except we didn't get as drunk. We sat in front of the church, and watched people go in and out; sauntered around; drank beer and listened to the *marachis*; talked to friends; went to the dance at night, and watched the nightly fireworks. We mixed in with the crowd and tried to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible, a rather impossible attempt as we were the only Americans in town.

THE CHURCH

About 75 feet long and 20 wide, it is located near the west end of the rectangular plaza which is fenced with barbed wire and

measures some 150 yards in length. The building is constructed of adobe, plastered inside and out. The exterior walls are white washed, but the inside is natural adobe color. The floor is of concrete.

The main entrance is on the east. A bell tower complete with bell stands at the southeast corner to the left of a person entering the church. The main part of the building is gabled roofed, for about 60 feet, with a shed roof on the remainder.

There is a space of about 6 feet from the door to the nearest pew. In this space against each side wall is a table which during this fiesta was covered with various religious items—rosaries, crucifixes, small statuettes, and holy pictures. Some (the tables were loaded to capacity) seem to belong to the church, but some were brought by the people from their home villages and placed on the table during the fiesta. Many people brought their images in small cases which we would call fibre laundry cases. One of these was left open on the table to the right of the entrance.

At the back of the rear pew on each side was a holy-water fount, one of cast concrete, the other of wood with an enamel or crockery receptacle for water.

Pews were placed in two rows leaving a center aisle. They were well but simply constructed of 2x4's and planks, without ornament but painted white. There were about 30, some 8 feet long.

The sanctuary walls were covered with white cloth (the wall behind the altar and the side walls extending to the pew nearest it). On these walls, from eye level to the ceiling, numerous pictures were arranged in rows. Pictures, probably about 150 in all, ranged in size from about 5x8 inches to some 14x18 inches.

There was a crucifix in the center of the altar and a candelabra on each side of it. Like the tables at the opposite end of the church, the altar was laden to capacity. It was about 12 by 3 feet.

The remaining wall space of the sanctuary was taken up by statues on pedestals, and small tables at the foot of several had small candles burning. Around each statue and in any space not otherwise occupied were varicolored paper flowers. The over-all impression was that the space around the walls of the sanctuary was jammed with images and flowers and candles.

THE IMAGE

The figure of St. Francis was placed on a bier with its head toward the altar on the north side of the sanctuary so that there was

room to walk around it. It is said to have been brought from Magdalena about six years ago. Our guide said he thought the Indians had bought it from a man living south of Magdalena for \$180. Santa Rosa was also trying to buy it, but the people of Chuwhiy Guvsk got it because they lived in Mexico. But a Mexican girl from El Plomo said that her father had brought it.

The present church is said to have been built to house this image. The senior author viewed the figure from the opposite end of the church. From there it appeared to be made of wood painted white. However, only the feet were visible as the rest of the figure was draped with numerous clothes—vari-colored as well as white. It was a life-size figure and carved apparently in half rather than full round.

CEREMONIES

Rituals in the church were limited to rosary services held morning and evening (Tuesday, Oct. 3, 1950 at 6:30 p.m. and Wednesday, Oct. 4, at 7:30 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.) and individual devotions and veneration of the image of the Saint by village groups on arrival.

A group from South Well arrived at the village in five wagons on Tuesday in mid-afternoon. Within twenty minutes after their arrival at the vilage they came to the church walking in line, two by two. Each person carried one or more pictures, many decorated with pink or blue ribbons. They entered the church as a group and went to the sanctuary. There they went in single file to the image of St. Francis and stood, holding their pictures in front of them. Perhaps two to four of the group of ten would stand by the image at once. As each person finished his devotions, he passed around the sanctuary, stopping at the center of the altar and at various statues. He or she would pause at each place for a few minutes. Finally he or she stood near the first pew facing the altar while the rest of the group completed its devotions. The group left the church as a group, and seemed to carry as many images as it brought. However, other individuals not in the South Wells group left images in the church, apparently to be picked up after the fiesta.

I (JS) didn't see the South Well people return to their wagons, but later I saw other people return to their wagons from performing essentially the same devotions. They wrapped their pictures or packed them in cases and placed them in the wagons.

A group from Big Fields, and one from Sells went through about the same procedure later that afternoon.

The Rosary services on Wednesday evening were led by a Mexican girl named Carmen from El Plomo. She led the rosary in Spanish, saying the first half of the prayer and the congregation responding. In addition to the usual prayers of the rosary the congregation after each "Our Father," added: Leader — "St. Francis Xavier," Congregation—"Pray for us." Then a hymn was sung beginning with the words "Ave Maria." The other services appeared to be essentially the same.

DANCING

Dances were held on a concrete area in the plaza east and slightly south of the church. Portable generators supplied electric lights there and at the various refreshment booths around the plaza.

Tuesday evening a Mexican band took over the band stand and played for an hour or so. Then they were stopped by the police and a Papago band took over. Carmen, the rosary leader from El Plomo, said the next night that the Papagos had objected to the Mexican band, and said that if the Mexicans wanted to have a dance they could have it somewhere else in the village, but the concrete dance floor was for Papagos. And since this was a Papago fiesta they wanted a Papago band. There seemed to be no objection to Mexicans dancing at the Papago dance. The controversy was over the music only. Wednesday night the Papago band played the entire evening, and the Mexican band played outside the plaza where a few couples danced in the dust.

About midnight Tuesday a *Pascola* began dancing at one end of the floor to the music of a violin and harp. He danced in his bare feet but was otherwise clothed in his everyday garments, including a straw hat. He wore cocoon rattles on his ankles and a leather belt with bells. For one dance he was joined by an old woman who danced opposite him following the steps he did.

Wednesday night two *Pascolas* danced, beginning about the same time as the social dance, and alternating with the band selections for the rest of the night. They were joined once by a young girl who danced with them.

The fiesta was still going strong when we left the morning of fifth of October. But one person told us it would break up some time that day.