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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC ACOMA

AND/OR COMMON

Acoma Pueblo (Sky City)

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Off State Route 23, 13 miles south of U.S. 66

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Acoma

\_\_ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

STATE

New Mexico

CODE

35

COUNTY

Valencia

CODE

061

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

### CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

### OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

### PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

### STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS

### ACCESSIBLE

- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

### PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Governor, Acoma Pueblo (currently M. Garcia)

STREET & NUMBER

Acoma Indian Reservation

CITY, TOWN

San Fidel

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

New Mexico

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
 REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Southwest Title Plant, Bureau of Indian Affairs

STREET & NUMBER

Suite 1000, First National Bank Building East, 5301 Central Avenue, N.E.

CITY, TOWN

Albuquerque

STATE

New Mexico 87108

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1934, 1973-74

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
 SURVEY RECORDS

National Park Service

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Acoma Pueblo occupies the top of a giant mesa located about midway between Albuquerque and the Continental Divide on State Route 23 some 13 miles south of U.S. route 66 in New Mexico. The rugged mesa rises to a height of 357 feet above the surrounding dry grass and juniper-covered terrain. Acoma Valley and the Enchanted Mesa as well as other craggy rock formations are visible from the top of Acoma Rock. Craggy and abrupt escarpments, huge pillars, and cavernous clefts make up the impressive mesa. At the foot of this natural impregnable sandstone fortress are large dunes of white sand from 30 to 60 feet in height.

The village, consisting of a combination of ruins and adobe dwellings constructed in relatively modern times, occupies the approximately 70-acre area at the top which has a smooth surface for construction. It is roughly composed of three parallel east/west rows of buildings, each about 220-225 yards long and from 25 to 30 feet wide. The buildings are of the typical Pueblo style--flat roofed with thick adobe and sometimes stone walls which taper towards their tops; and the vigas or roof beams, are visible from the exterior.

A historical report from 1581 indicates that the village contained about 500 houses. In the past, the buildings rose to 3 or perhaps even 4 stories and were stepped down with the highest part facing south. The interiors were of white-washed plaster and had earthen floors. Windows in historic times were small and few and made of selenite. There were no doors, and access to the rooms was through the roof by means of ladders. The interior rooms were probably for storage, while the more accessible rooms were the actual living areas. Access to the mesa top in the past was achieved by a series of hand and toe holds which scaled the steep cliff in three areas. Indeed all of the building materials were carried to the mesa top on the backs of the builders. Natural reservoirs, some of which could contain 3000 to 5000 gallons of water, cut into the sandstone and supplied water to the inhabitants of Acoma.

Today, however, the character of the village is somewhat changed. Most of the upper stories have been torn down, and modern doors and glass windows have been added. A newly constructed road leads to the mesa top making use of the hand and toe holds unnecessary. Although the village is almost completely uninhabited at the present, most Acoma families have kept at least a room in the town; for many ceremonial events still occur there. Some modern dwellings at the foot of the mesa as well as on the road to the mesa top, are within landmark boundaries, but do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

The most outstanding feature remaining of the village is the church and mission complex, San Estevan del Rey, built sometime between 1629 and 1642 and repaired in 1799-1800. Further repairs were effected by the Museum of New Mexico in 1902 and 1924. The Pueblo of Acoma has recently received a matching grant from the National Park Service to continue to preserve the ancient village and mission. Of immediate importance is the repair of the cemetery wall.

(continued)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      1100 A.D. --present      BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Located on top of a giant craggy mesa south of Acoma, New Mexico, Acoma is one of the oldest continuously occupied villages in the United States (with the possible exception of Old Oraibi, Arizona). Its impressive location on the 357 foot high cliff made it an isolated and impregnable site in prehistoric times and gave it the name of Sky City. Founded perhaps as early as 1100 A.D., the village is still used today by the Acoma Indians for ceremonial purposes. Analyses of this long continuous span of use have the potential to increase the archeologist's understanding of Acoma Indian development, of the relationship of the Acoma Tribe to other Southwestern cultures, and of the Spanish-Indian interaction during the 16th and 17th centuries. The European-Native American combination of cultural traits is certainly well-documented at Acoma with the presence of the Mission of San Estevan del Rey, one of the earliest and most impressive of the Spanish colonial missions in New Mexico. This fine example of Spanish mission architecture exhibits the almost perfect blend of Indian and Spanish influence uniquely characteristic of the New Mexico missions.

### Prehistory and History

The prehistory of Acoma is known primarily through surface collections of pottery and through the 1950's excavations. Ceramic analysis suggests occupancy of Acoma perhaps as early as 1100 A.D. (Pueblo III period). The first inhabitants of Acoma were living in the Cebolleta Mesa area and moved up to the mesa top, possibly for defensive purposes.

An analysis of the pottery types indicates some of the developmental trends occurring at Acoma throughout its 750 year or so existence. The earliest excavated levels (dating from the 13th century, the latter part of Pueblo III times) were characterized by Northern Gray Corrugated, Tularosa Black-on-white (Northern Variant), and fairly abundant St. John's Polychrome wares. By the 14th century, these earlier pottery types had developed into glaze painted redwares, similar to those of the Zuni. Ruppert and Dittert (1953) suggest that these Pueblo IV Acoma pottery types developed directly out of the Pueblo III ceramics of the Cebolleta Mesa area. The use of glazes continued uninterrupted until the end of the 17th century. This redware pottery, as well as the use of rectangular rather than circular kivas by the modern Acoma, place the Acoma Indians with the Zuni, Hopi, and prehistoric pueblos of central Arizona despite their linguistic ties as Western Keresan speakers with the Eastern Keresan of the Rio Grande Valley.

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 270 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,3	2,6,1	5,6,0	3,8	6,4	6,2,0	B	1,3	2,6,4	2,1,0	3,8	6,3	3,4,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			
C	1,3	2,6,3	1,2,0	3,8	6,3	8,2,0	D	1,3	2,6,3	4,5,0	3,8	6,5	0,4,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

(verbatim excerpts from Snell, n.d.)

NAME / TITLE

Francine Weiss, Archeologist, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

3/26/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, N.W.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington, D.C. 20240

STATE

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been validated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DATE

Landmark  
Designated: Oct. 9, 1960  
date  
Boundary Certified:  
George F. Emery  
Nov. 7, 1977  
date

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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The church at Acoma presents an imposing sight from the southwest with its lofty, battered walls, strong towers, and rounded projecting vigas (roof beams). The immensity of the task of construction of the church can only be understood with the realization that all building materials, including the 14" square by 40' long roof beams from the San Mateo Mountains 30 miles away, were carried on the backs of the builders and inhabitants of the town. In order to raise the heavy logs for the roof structure, one wall of the church was usually built thicker than the other and served as a working platform and possibly as a fulcrum to raise the vigas into place. The church walls at Acoma rose to a height of 35 feet and therefore had to be rather thick. One wall at Acoma is over 7 feet thick and the other almost 5 feet. They taper upward, diminishing as much as 30 inches in thickness at the top, giving the characteristic slanting or "battered" exterior.

At the top of the wall, heavy brackets or corbels are set into the adobe to act as bearing surfaces for the transverse vigas. The vigas, left in the round at Acoma, are spaced a few feet apart and across them are laid ceiling boards--rough-hewn planks painted on the nether side. On these rest the adobe roof, six inches to a foot thick and weighing many tons. The roof is surrounded by a parapet several feet high, thus adding to the fortress-like appearance of the massive nave. The roof surface is pitched slightly and drained by canales or downspouts projecting through the parapet.

The church, measuring 150 by 40 feet, faces east; and its facade consists of a bare wall penetrated only by the entrance door and a window to light the choir loft. The square flanking towers project boldly from the side walls and rise to belfries with rectilinear openings, reached by a winding stairway in a circular shaft in the south tower. The bells were brought from Mexico, probably during the 1800's. Patches of adobe plaster have crumbled away to reveal the rough flat fieldstones of the foundation and lower wall and the large adobe bricks above. The plan of the church is coffin-shaped, with a long nave narrowed at the west end to a polygonal sanctuary. There are no transepts.

Inside, the nave is cool, dim, and spacious, the walls whitened with gypsum. Over the front entrance is a choir loft, with a great transverse beam resting on decorated corbels and supported by two posts with bracket capitals. There are a few high windows located in the south wall opposite the convento. The end wall of the sanctuary is adorned by an original painting, and there is another painting on the south wall of the nave.

On the north side of the church is located the one-story domicile or convento with living rooms, workrooms, storerooms, and balcony arranged in a square around an enclosed patio. To the east of the church is the walled cemetery. The church and historic pueblo are still both used for ceremonial purposes by the Acoma Indians.

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The cemetery wall, as previously mentioned, is in need of repair, and some of the walls of the church need additional adobe plaster. Parts of the convento are in ruins. The aforementioned National Park Service matching grant money should help to correct some of these problems.

Excavations at Acoma were conducted in 1951 and 1952 in conjunction with an intensive survey project of the Cebolleta Mesa area. The field work was under the direction of Reynold Ruppé, then at Harvard University, and Edward Dittert, then at the University of Arizona. Dr. J. O. Brew of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, was in charge of the project. These excavations, along with pottery collections from the mesa top, indicate that Acoma has been continuously occupied since 1100 or 1200 A.D.

The 1951 excavations involved test trenches dug into a trash dump in the southeast corner of the mesa top. A large number of potsherds plus 38 bone and 122 stone artifacts were catalogued. The 1952 season uncovered a building hidden by the dump. Three rooms were excavated and walls were traced wherever possible. Unfortunately, much of the material used in the construction had been removed by the occupants for use in subsequent buildings so that it was sometimes difficult to discern definite walls. The excavated rooms date from the early Pueblo IV period before Spanish contact. The structure possibly represented one of the few remaining prehistoric buildings at Acoma, for it is thought that the earlier pueblo was primarily on the south side of the mesa top and was torn down when the mission and church were being repaired. The rooms were apparently built on top of a dump, and the area was reconverted into a dump after the building fell into disuse. One of the rooms had two fireplaces and associated ash pits. Aside from numerous potsherds, artifacts clearly associated with the building included: hammerstones, manos, mauls, abrading stones, a drill, a knife, a graver, and a metate.

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The present Acoma Tribe appears to have descended from the prehistoric inhabitants of the area. Further investigation at Acoma (in the trash areas and in remaining prehistoric structures, if any are found to exist) could help clarify the relationship between the Keresan and Pueblos to the west. Excavations at Acoma have bearing on the directions of trade and influence in the Southwest, the reasons for moving to the mesa tops during Pueblo III times, and the general blending of cultures which occurred as the Pueblo populations began to assume their historic and modern patterns.

Acoma was first visited by the Spanish in 1540 by some members of Coronado's expedition. In 1581, Acoma was visited by the Chamuscado-Rodriguez expedition, and in 1583 by Antonio de Espejo. In 1598, Onate stopped at Acoma and received a rather unfriendly welcome. Later that year, Onate's nephew, Juan de Zaldivar, was killed in a violent fight in the pueblo. The Spaniards under Vincente de Zaldivar retaliated in 1509 and sacked the town.

The conversion of Acoma by the Franciscans began during the 1620's with the efforts of Father Geronimo de Zarate Salmeron who spent some time there between 1623 and 1626. In June, 1629, Father Juan Ramirez became the first permanent priest stationed at Acoma. It is probable that construction of the Mission of San Estevan del Rey was begun by Ramirez upon his arrival. Despite the changes since 1700, the present church can be considered the original mission built near the middle of the 17th century. It is the oldest church of European construction in New Mexico and is one of the finest examples of the ancestors of modern Santa Fe (Spanish-Pueblo) architecture. As is the case with other New Mexico churches of the 17th century, the mission at Acoma is Spanish in plan and general form but owes much of its construction and decorative detail to the tradition of the Pueblo Indians.

The successors of Father Juan Ramirez as guardian of Acoma are not well known. In 1665-66, Father Diego de Santander, who had earlier begun the mission of San Buenaventura de Humanas, was stationed at the Church of San Estevan del Rey; and Father Nicolas Freitas served at Acoma sometime during the 1660's. Acoma took part in the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680, and all of the Spaniards in the village were killed, including Father Lucas Moldonado, assigned to Acoma in 1672. He was the last priest to be stationed there during the 17th century.

In the years following the Pueblo Rebellion, Acoma was not punished as severely as some of the more easterly pueblos. In 1696, the village succeeded in preventing its capture by Governor De Vargas. It held out until July, 1699, when the Indians submitted to Governor Cubero who changed the name of the pueblo from San Estevan de Acoma to San Pedro; later the first name was restored.

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During the 18th century, the village continued under Spanish control. In 1706, the population was 760 and the church was being restored. Father Antonio Miranda was resident priest at that time and also ministered to Laguna.

In 1744, the priest of Acoma ministered to 110 families. (Laguna had its own priest by that time.) By 1749, Acoma's population was 960 and Father Ignacio was the resident priest. During that year, Governor Capuchin almost drove the Acomas to revolt by his extortions of corn and sheep.

In 1760, the population was 1,052, as compared to 1,500 in 1680. By 1782, the mission had become a visita of Laguna, and by 1800, the population was barely 800.

In recent times, the people of Acoma have erected homes near their fields, and permanent villages have grown up at Acomita and other towns several miles from the rocky mesa top. As a result, Acoma presently does not have a permanent population. However, most of the residents of the newer villages still maintain their homes in the mother pueblo, and ceremonies are commonly held in the church and on the streets of the Sky City.



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Acoma

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Refer to the black lines on the accompanying USGS map (Acoma Pueblo, N. M. 7.5' Quad.) for a clarification of the boundary description. Beginning at a point on the west section line of Sec. 28, T8N, R7W, about 650 feet south of the northwest corner of said section, at the intersection of the section line with the 6340-foot contour line, the boundary proceeds: in a generally north-eastern direction along the 6340-foot contour to its intersection with the southwest right-of-way of the secondary, light-duty road north and east of Acoma Rock; then southeast along the southwest right-of-way of said road about 400 feet until it again intersects the 6340-foot contour; then generally south-east along the 6340-foot contour line until it again intersects said road; then along the southern and western rights-of-way of the road for about 1000 feet until its intersection with the 6340-foot contour line; then generally south and slightly west along the 6340-foot contour until it intersects with a wash which runs to the southeast of Acoma Rock; then northwest along this wash to the foot of Acoma Rock; then due east about 400 feet to its intersection with another wash just west of Acoma Rock; then generally north along this wash to its intersection with the 6340-foot contour; and then generally northeast along the 6340-foot contour to the point of beginning.

In other words, the boundary of the landmark basically conforms to the 6340-foot contour line which surrounds Acoma Rock, the mesa on which the village is located. Much of the impressive nature of the landmark stems from its location on top of Acoma Rock. Not only is this setting visually spectacular, but it also is integral to the importance of the site. The mesa-top location afforded the inhabitants an expansive view of the surrounding territory which might have been necessary for defensive purposes, and the craggy approach to the mesa top would certainly have discouraged any enemies. In addition, the 6340-foot contour serves as an appropriate landmark boundary because there is undoubtedly some cultural refuse scattered around the sides of the mesa. The 6340-foot contour, several hundred feet from the mesa bottom, includes this material.