

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

1. STATE New Mexico	2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO. Theme XX - Architecture (Colonial), IV, VIII, XVI
3. NAME(S) OF SITE San Estevan del Rey Mission Church (Acoma).	4. APPROX. ACREAGE 45 acres
5. EXACT LOCATION (County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet) Acoma, State 23, 13 miles south of its junction with U.S. 66.	
6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (Also administrator if different from owner) Mr. Syme Sanchez, Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico.	
7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant)	

The great church of San Estevan del Rey Mission, built between 1629 and 1642 and repaired in 1799-1800, is the finest and most impressive of the Spanish Colonial Mission churches in New Mexico. The Spanish colonial architecture of New Mexico is markedly different from that of the other mission fields in the United States. Less magnificent than the baroque architecture of Texas and Arizona, and more primitive than the missions of California, the unique character of the New Mexican missions resides in their almost perfect blend of Indian and Spanish influences. The New Mexico churches are Spanish in plan and general form, but they owe much of their construction and decorative detail to the tradition of the Pueblo Indians.

History

San Estevan del Rey mission was founded in 1629 by the Franciscan missionary, Fray Juan Ramirez, and the great church, completed about 1642, was erected under his supervision. In the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680, the Acoma Indians murdered the resident priest. Following the reconquest of New Mexico in 1692, they successfully resisted an attack in 1696 on their mesa by Don Diego de Vargas and continued to hold out until induced to surrender to Spanish authority in 1699. The mission church suffered relatively little damage during the Rebellion and, with some repairs in 1799-1800, continued to serve the Acomas during the remainder of the Spanish Period. The great church was repaired again in 1902 and 1924 by the Museum of New Mexico.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works)

See page 4.

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, IABS, etc.)

See page 4.

10. PHOTOGRAPHS* ATTACHED: YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		11. CONDITION Good	12. PRESENT USE (Museum, farm, etc.) Church and Museum	13. DATE OF VISIT March 24, 1968
14. NAME OF RECORDER (Signature) Charles W. Snell		15. TITLE Historian	16. DATE April 30, 1968	

\* DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10 1/2 SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

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6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . . Page 2.

STATE New Mexico	San Estevan del Rey Mission Church, (Acoma).
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7. Continued:

Present Appearance

The ancient pueblo of Acoma and the church of San Estevan del Rey mission crown a rugged flat-topped mesa that rises 350 feet above the surrounding desert. Construction of the church must have been a herculean task, for all materials were carried on the back of Indians up steep trails. Timbers for the roof, 14 inches square and over 40 feet long, were brought from the San Mateo mountains 30 miles away. Soil for a burial ground, and for the padre's garden in the mission patio was also brought up from the valley. The Franciscan padres who directed the labor of the mission Indians in New Mexico must have had recollections of the baroque architecture of Spain with its ornate and colorful carving in stone and wood, but they were confronted by unskilled laborers and had, perforce, to modify their architectural ambitions to conform to the abilities of the workmen and the materials which they could procure. It is striking that no arches, vaults, or domes were used in the mission churches of New Mexico. It was probably thought safer to avoid arched construction in so easily weathered a material as adobe, and in churches built of stone, arches were perhaps not used because the Indians did not know how to cut and trim stones into precise shapes of voussoirs. The remoteness and scarcity of lumber and the difficulty of shaping it into arched centering probably also accounts in some measure for the simple post-and-lintel structural system employed. In general, Indian women and children built the adobe walls of the churches, as they had in the pueblos; the men considered this beneath their dignity, but took readily to carpentry and woodwork. In order to raise the heavy logs for the roof structure one wall of the church was usually built thicker than the other, to serve as a working platform and possibly as a fulcrum for levering the vigas or roof beams into place. The church walls at Acoma rose to a height of more than 35 feet. Consequently they had to be much thicker than the walls of the pueblos. At Acoma one church wall is over 7 feet thick, and the other almost 5. They taper upward, diminishing as much as 30 inches in thickness to the top, giving a characteristic slanting or "battered" exterior silhouette.

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.

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New Mexico	San Estevan del Rey Mission Church, New Mexico

7. Continued:

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 at Acoma presents an imposing sight from the southwest with its lofty, battered walls, strong towers, and projecting vigas. The great 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 bell-fries with rectilinear openings, reached by a winding stairway in a circular shaft in the south tower. 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. The few windows are located high up and in the south wall opposite the convento. The corbels are cut in vigorous, heavy curves and painted to give a barbaric splendor to the roof. The Pueblo Indians, who had made mural paintings in black, white, blue-green, yellow, and red for their prehistoric kivas or ceremonial chambers, were sometimes allowed by the padres to project their ancestral art on the walls of a Christian mission. At Acoma the end wall of the sanctuary is adorned by a great original painting, simulating in crude and vigorous forms the carved and painted reredos over the altar in Spanish baroque churches. On the north side of the church is located the one-story domicile or convento, with an enclosed patio, living rooms, workrooms, storerooms, and a balcony.

The church is still used for religious purposes at festival time. The adjacent convento and other mission buildings, partially in ruins, are still largely intact. The Acoma Indians are keeping the church and their historic pueblo in good repair. They charge an admission fee to visit the pueblo, and additional fees to enter the church and to take photographs. They also provide guide service.

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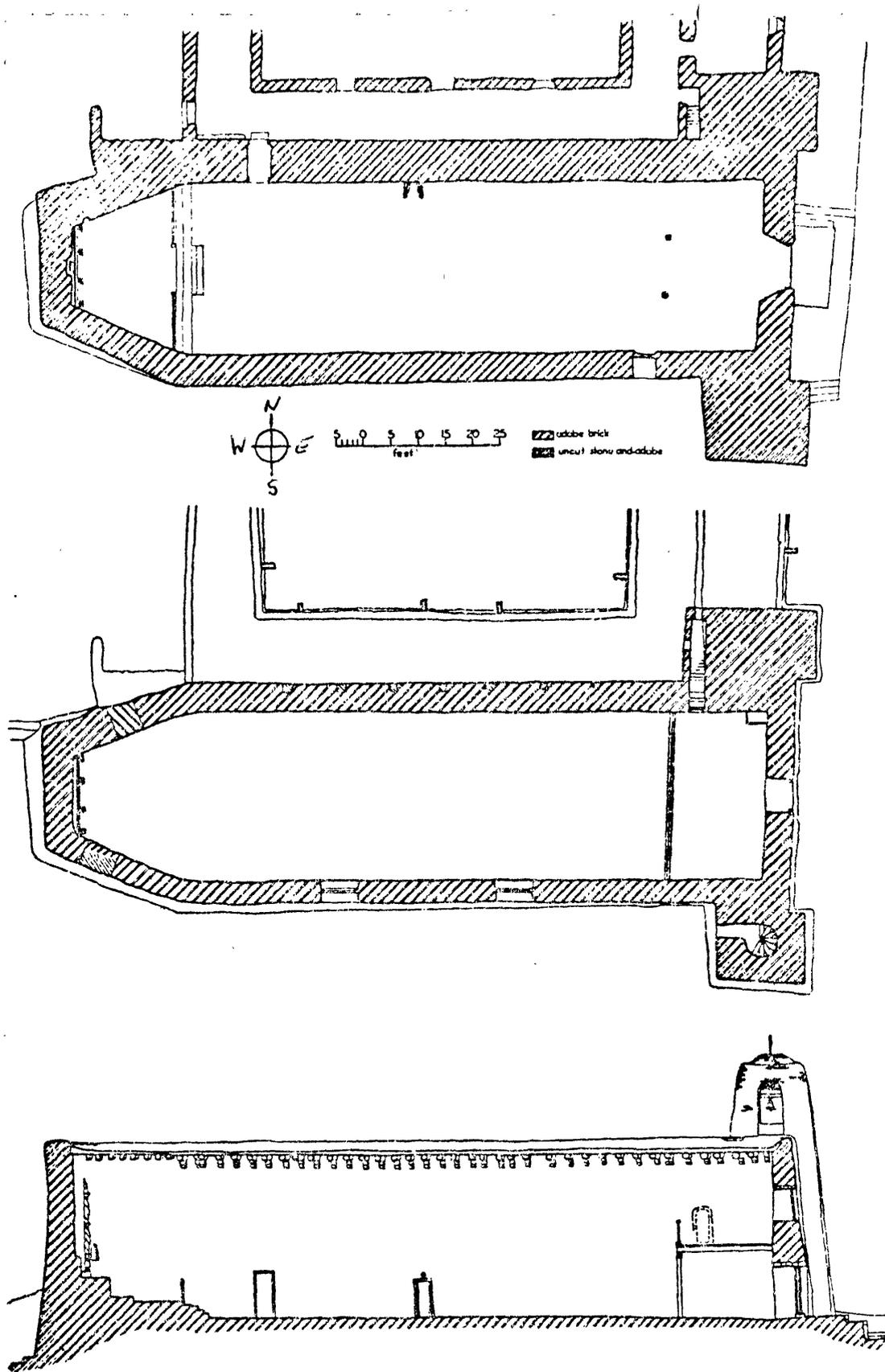
STATE	NAME(S) OF SITE
New Mexico	San Estevan del Rey Mission

8. Bibliographical References.

Herbert E. Bolton, Spanish Exploration in the Southwest, 1542-1706 (New York, 1916), G. P. Hammond, Don Juan de Onate and the Founding of New Mexico (Santa Fe, 1926); George Hübler, The Religious Architecture of New Mexico (Colorado Springs, 1942); Hubert H. Bancroft, History of Arizona and New Mexico (San Francisco, 1889), ; Cleve Hallenbeck, Spanish Missions of the Old Southwest (New York, 1926), 17-37; Trent E. Sanford, The Architecture of the Old Southwest (New York, 1950), 276-277; Rexford Newcomb, Spanish Colonial Architecture in the United States (New York, 1937); Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York, 1952), 187-193; James G. VanDerPool, "Historical Development of Architecture in the U.S.A., 1632-1912," (N.P.S. Typescript, 1966), 97-98; New Mexico, A Guide to the Colorful State (American Guide Series)(New York, 1953), 331-332.

9. Reports and Studies:

Historic American Building Survey (31 sheets, 1934) (34 photos, 1934) William R. Hogan, "Brief Special Report on Acoma" (Region Three, NPS, Santa Fe, April, 1938); Erik K. Reed, "Supplementary Report on Acoma, New Mexico" (Region Three, NPS, Santa Fe, February, 1942).



32. Acoma. Above: Plan at ground level. Center: Plan at window level. Below: Longitudinal section.