**Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard**

**What Happened to the Gold?**

Hello Everyone! This is **Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard** and my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. KNNM 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience, with little known people, places and events that took place in the past, right here in your own back yard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas here in central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate, and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting our past.

Our show today will focus on the Gold Myth at what is now the Gran Quivira Unit of Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument in southern Torrance County.

The craze for gold and silver significantly contributed to the settlement of the American Southwest. Rumors and legends of buried treasure and gold are found from the Superstition Mountains in Arizona to Victorio Peak on New Mexico’s White Sands. Stories of the Lost Adams Diggings plus gold strikes in the Ortiz, Magdalena and Mogollon Mountains have become legendary. The tales were always bigger and better than the actual event and lingered long after the gold or silver strike was long gone.

For over three hundred years a gold myth has persisted at Gran Quivira, a prehistoric Indian ruin and seventeenth century Spanish mission, now administered by Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument. Does the name Gran Quivira have anything to do with the misconception, since Quivira was the mythical city of gold the Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado searched for all the way to Kansas? Or was there buried treasure and even gold bells hidden within the walls of the old ruins at one time?

The Tompiro/Jumano Indians occupied the site for over eight hundred years, but abandoned their home in the 1670s due to a thirty year drought and relentless Apache raids. The Tompiro integrated with other Pueblo tribes along the Rio Grande River while others migrated to El Paso, Texas and north to Galisteo. The Tompiro are now extinct; as well as, their language and much of their history. The abandoned pueblo weathered in the New Mexico sunshine for centuries, filling up with dust, before homesteaders arrived in the 1880s.

Evacuations of the site in the 1920s, 1950s and 1960s have proven the Tompiro Indians once traded with other tribes all the way to the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of Mexico during a time when they had only dogs for transportation. During their heyday, when the population of the site reached two thousand people, the tribe flourished and grew enough crops to sustain them for centuries on the now lonely mesa. They invented ingenious watering systems in order to survive until the drought years of the 1600s when the water dried up without a perennial water source.

During the century and a half the site remained abandoned it was often used as a camping location for those traveling between the settlements. Prior to the 1880s, there were few towns and roads along New Mexico’s east side. Those traveling between Las Vegas, Santa Fe and Lincoln had few choices but to camp along their route as there were no towns or hotels available. The old ruins provided the perfect location to get out of the wind, explore the ruins and search for buried treasure and artifacts. It would soon become a tradition to stop and dig for gold, treasure and Indian curios.

When and where did the gold myth start? According to Gordon Vivian an archaeologist who excavated the site in the 1950s and author of the book *Excavations of a 17th Century Jumano Pueblo, “*The stories of treasure probably originated with the survivors of the abandonment of 1672, since there are references, about a century later, to a buried treasure on the site.”

In Vivian’s theory, the Jumano tribe started the gold myth in order to get back at the Spanish and Franciscans who had made their lives difficult. He stated, “The El Paso area, the end of the journey for many of the Jumano survivors, was a prime source for later treasure maps,” he wrote. “It is a delightful picture of the descendants of the displaced Jumanos selling treasure charts of Gran Quivira to gullible Spaniards.”

Vivian points out permits to hunt for treasure were awarded during this era. A man named Don Pablo Yrissari first began digging at the site in the 1780s and later his descendants continued looking for the treasure until 1933. He had come to the United States through El Paso where he had come across the treasure chart. The Yrissari family apparently never found the gold or they would not have still been searching for it and fighting for permits centuries later in 1933.

Most of the treasure hunters believed the church of San Isidro was the main area to start looking for a long shaft that connected with a treasure cellar. When the site was abandoned in the 1670s, the Franciscans supposedly hid gold goblets and bells they planned to return for later. Vivian wrote, “They believed a tunnel would be found running northwest where it intercepted a second tunnel running eastward from the San Benaventura Church to the treasure cellar at the foot of the hill.”

Treasure hunters searched for centuries for the illusive gold and treasure supposedly buried at the site of the old Tompiro ruins. Yet, no one has ever reported finding anything on the site but Native American artifacts. Before Gran Quivira became part of the U.S. Park Service in 1909, the site was severely plundered by treasure hunters looking for the phantom gold and in the process destroying the history of the tribe.

William and Clara Corbin homesteaded the site in the late 1880s, but unfortunately they too were looking for the gold. The Corbins never found any gold or treasure, as William passed away and Clara remained living alone in the ruins of the San Benaventura Mission. She would live on the site until a few months before her death, but she never found any evidence the site had ever contained buried gold bells or treasure of any kind.

Visitors at the national monument still ask questions about the gold legend, but it is unlikely gold or any type of treasure were ever buried in the ruins of the old Tompiro ruins and Spanish mission. No treasure cellar was ever discovered, but countless historical artifacts were taken from the site over the centuries which could have added to the history interpreted at the monument. And more importantly, the bones and spirits of those buried at the site would not have been disturbed and disrespected.

The lure of gold and buried treasure caused the perpetuation of a gold myth to continue through the centuries at Gran Quivira. With the passing of each century, the myth became larger and richer, but in reality there was never any gold or treasure buried at Gran Quivira. Nor did Francisco Vasquez de Coronado find any gold during his endless pursuit of the Seven Cities of Cibola.

This has been **Archaeology in Your Back Yard,** a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes. This program was written by Dixie Boyle and produced by Bill Simms.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through November. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to **Archaeology in Your Back Yard** Monday at 1 PM, Tuesday at 7 PM, Friday at 10 AM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening.