**Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard**

**Torrance County Pioneers – Elias & Anisa Tabet**

Hello Everyone! This is Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard and my name is Dixie. X 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 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 Torrance County Pioneers Elias & Anisa Tabet.

This program was written by Dixie Boyle and produced by Bill Simms. Thank you for joining us today.

Mercantile stores were the most important businesses on the early American frontier. They carried a little bit of everything and provided the needs of those pioneers moving into the new country. Many families made a fortune over the years by going into the mercantile business instead of searching for gold or other pursuits. If a man had a good line of merchandise available, traded fairly with those he came into contact with they would succeed beyond their dreams.

Mercantile stores sold a little bit of everything during these years, so it was basically a one stop shopping set up. People bought clothes, shoes, wagons, wood, coffins and most anything anyone would need living in an isolated corner of the frontier. Women often bought material and sewing items since they made most of the clothes their family wore. Traveling to town to shop in one of these mercantile stores as well as visit with others shopping was many times the highlight of the month.

Lola T. Romero wrote the following in the Torrance County history book about the Tabet family, an important mercantile family who helped to shape the history of Torrance County.

My father Elias G. Tabet, came to America from Lebandon in 1889 with two brothers, Joseph and Kalestro, and two cousins. They were all young boys.

When they first came to America they went to California peddling clothes and linen. Stores were few at that time, and I recall dad telling us that they carried the merchandise in a suitcase strapped across their backs and they walked from place to place. California was described to us as being mostly orange groves and ranches.

After my father saved a few dollars, he returned to Lebanon and married Anisa Bashara in 1902. For three years they lived in Lebanon. My grandparents had vineyards, and my dad sold grapes. My brother Joseph was born in 1903 and I followed two years later.

When I was two months old my parents brought us to America on a Transatlantic French Liner. Aunt Sarah, my dad’s cousin, came with us. When we arrived in New York, she was permitted to stay. She went on to Ohio to be with an older sister who had come earlier and married.

However, we were not allowed to stay because my dad had pink eye. We went to Vera Cruz, Mexico, then to El Paso and New Mexico. We arrived in El Paso on August 1, 1905. It took us three months to get to Chilili, New Mexico where dad and Uncle Carlos opened a store.

I recall when Uncle John, my mother’s youngest brother, came from Lebanon. He came by buggy with Dr. Amble to see us. Mother was in tears as she hugged him. He held me in one arm and my brother in the other.

In the meantime, Uncle Tanous had opened a store in Manzano. In 1911 he decided to move to Bisbee, Arizona. My dad bought his store, and we moved to Manzano. My Uncles Joe and Kalestro opened a store in Punta and Uncle Carlos opened a cantina in Punta.

I will never forget my good life in Manzano. The people were friendly; the climate is healthy. I keep hoping that I can return to live there, but my children are concerned when I am far from them.

Alice M. Sanders wrote about the Tabet Brothers and the successful mercantile businesses they operated for years. They were always fair and honest with their customers according to those who knew them.

She wrote, “But Dad how was it that you and Mom left your homes in Lebanon, came half way round the world, to settle in Punta de Agua, and live among people with a different language and culture? Dad explained they were forced to leave in order to survive.

Their homeland was poor and offered my opportunities. Tanous Tabet was the first to come from the Tabet family in 1901 to Lincoln, New Mexico. in 1902 he and other cousins came to Torrance County as the railroad was being built and there was work in the mountain villages. These brave and ambitious men liked villages and people; they learned the language, opened grocery stores and settled. And so it was that the Tabet families were born to Torrance County.

John was eighteen when he left home and boarded a train for New Mexico Territory; his destination was Punta de Agua where his older brother had settled. When he arrived at the newly constructed railroad depot in Mountainair in June of 1908, he walked to one of the only stores in town. Uncle Charles was notified he needed to come and pick up his brother.

Mountainair at that time had many trees; there were few homes, and no streets. The grass was tall, the sheep roamed freely.

John worked in his brother’s store. He learned the language and went by horse and buggy from village to village selling clothing and linens. People were friendly and he had no trouble making friends and finding new customers for his uncles business.

Later he would marry and they would start raising their family in the booming town of Punta de Agua. Mom and dad lived in Punta for ten years. They bought a store for fifty dollars and a buggy. Later they bought a farm. Mother was a hard worker and helped dad in everything he did.

This has been Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard, a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes.

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 and History in Your Own Back Yard Tuesday at 7 PM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening!

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