SAN ACACIA and LA JOYITA
The Rio Grande flows through a gap between two mesas, defining the San Acacia area. Ancient Piro pueblos on the mesas, to early 1600s Spanish structures, indicates the region has been occupied for centuries. The original Spanish settlement was called Estancia de Acomilla, first mentioned in 1631.

Jumping ahead 200 years, the area was again settled for farming by the mid 1800s. The village was named San Acacio after the Roman general who was martyred for being a Christian. The name of the village was changed to the illegal form San Acacia by the railroad in 1882. In Spanish, it's either San Acacio or Santa Acacia. Evidently, the railroad didn't know this and the awkward form, San Acacia, remains as the official name of the village.

To the east was another small village called La Joyita. It was located near the confluence of the Rio Salado with the Rio Grande and had a small mission church called San José. La Joyita was destroyed by a flood in 1886. The church was rebuilt shortly thereafter in San Acacia on land donated by Enrique Gonzales. It was described as an adobe church with large vigas, also dedicated to San José. In 1920, San Acacia was transferred from the LaJoya parish to Socorro.

During the 1929 flood, as the people of San Acacia literally fled for their lives, the church was washed away. It was rebuilt a few years later, largely due to donations from the Crabree family, who operated a lumber yard and hardware store in Socorro. The paint hardly dried on the new church when it was destroyed by the flood of 1937. For the next ten years, the people of San Acacia attended mass at the new church in Alamillo.

Following World War II, the residents of San Acacia again built a small, nave type church. It was used until 1957, when it was dropped from the church rolls. The old San Acacia church still stands, with 50 years of non-use clearly evident. This church is unusual in that it faces north; most Catholic churches are built with the entrance facing east.
ALAMILLO
The village of Alamillo was settled in June 1800. It was named for a nearby Piro pueblo of the same name. This first settlement was likely on the east side of the Rio Grande, moving to it's present location, west of San Acacia, around 1850.

Today's mission church at Alamillo was built in 1928, dedicated to San Antonio. It escaped serious damage from the floods of 1929 and 1937, and remains a mission church of Socorro today.

POLVADERA
There is little documentation on the original mission church serving Polvadera and the sister village of Chamizal. Much of Chamizal was destroyed by floods in the 1890s, 1929 and 1937, with the old school house atop a hill, at the end of Escuela Street, the only survivor.

Following the 1898 flood, a new mission was built farther to the west on higher ground donated by the Luciano Luna family. A sign in today's church states it was dedicated on August 10, 1902 with Mayordomo Frutoso Barreras. The first mass was offered by Father Filiberto Martin from Socorro. If there is a reason why the Polvadera mission is dedicated to San Lorenzo, it is lost to time.

Years ago, the statue of the mission's saint was stolen, reportedly taken to Mexico. In today's church, the statue is chained to it's pedestal as a symbol he won't leave again.

Several miracles have been attributed to the santos. Due to these miracles, many Socorroan's make the 18-mile round-trip pilgrimage to the San Lorenzo mission each year on Good Friday.

The people of Polvadera, and the mayordomos over the past 105 years, have kept the church in excellent condition and remains an active mission church of Socorro.
LEMITAR
The Sagrada Familia Mission in Lemitar, was built in 1831 after the style of San Miguel church in Socorro. It has been renovated several times over the years and remains an excellent example of the mission church. In 1848, New Mexico became a territory of the United States. Ousted governor Manuel Armijo returned to his home in Lemitar, where he lived out the rest of his days. From 1848 to 1851, Lemitar was the county seat of Socorro County and local headquarters for the New Mexico Militia. Remnants of this pre-territorial fort can still be seen.

Though Lemitar today appears as a sleepy farming village, it has served several prominent roles in New Mexico's history. The large, beautiful mission church at Lemitar is testimony to these former days.

SABINO
Sabino was a small village on the east side of the Rio Grande, opposite to Lemitar. It is not to be confused with the village of Sabinal at the northern end of Socorro County.

The town existed since the early 1820s, with a mission built and dedicated to San Antonio. Due to it's location on the bank of the Rio Grande, the village succumbed to flooding, probably in the late 1850s. The mission disappears from church records after 1858. Today, Sabino, and the San Antonio mission, remain but a footnote in Socorro County history.

LA PARIDA and EL TAJO
Parida was a village on the east bank of the Rio Grande south of Pueblito. The 1850 census was 168 and only 48 by 1860. Church records list a San Antonio mission at Parida from 1867 to 1869, perhaps the year the Rio Grande claimed the village. Archeological surveys of the site have identified some of the surviving buildings, but not the mission.

Around 1850, another village sprang up south of Parida, almost across the river from Socorro, called El Tajo. It was built on a bluff well above the floodwaters of the Rio Grande. It's 1860 census shows 129 persons, presumably some of them the former residents of washed out Parida. El Tajo was visited periodically by the priest from San Marcial, offering mass held in private homes.

BOSQUECITO
The village of Bosquecito is north of San Antonio on the east side of the river, settled as a farming community in the 1830s. A mission church was built in 1892, dedicated to San Gabriel, assigned to the Socorro parish, then to the San Marcial parish in 1916. Father Peltzer celebrated mass at Bosquecito every two months until about 1922, when the parish obtained it's first automobile. This allowed Father Peltzer to visit many of the mission churches along the Rio Grande more frequently.

Following the 1937 flood, the floodwaters were slow to recede, leaving much of the village standing in water for weeks. Eventually, the buildings collapsed into the muck.

Today, much of the village of Bosquecito, and the church, are crumbled ruins claimed by the tamarisk and cottonwood trees left by the floods. The San Gabriel
mission was located west of Bosquecito Road, opposite the home of long-term resident Ambrosio Armijo.

**LUIS LOPEZ**
The Hacienda de Luis Lopez was established in the 1600s and resettled as a farming community in the 1830s. The first church records begin in 1833 with the first mission, dedicated to San Jose, built shortly thereafter.

The original village was located between today's railroad tracks and the river. The mission, and much of the village, was destroyed in the 1895 flood, forcing the residents to rebuild farther to the west upon higher ground, where the small hamlet is located today.

The new mission was built around 1900 by the local people. And by built, this means every adobe brick, bucket of plaster, and every gallon of gypsum white wash was made by the people. The original stations of the cross were made by Abran Garcia, though replaced in later years when the church at Tokay was dismantled.

Today's San Jose mission at Luis Lopez, now over a century old, is another example of a community built church well maintained by the local families. It remains an active mission church to San Miguel parish in Socorro. Census records show Luis Lopez has a population of about 200 persons, about what the 1850 census takers counted.

**SAN ANTONIO and SAN ANTONITO**
The first mission church at San Antonio was established by Fray Antonio de Artega in the early 1600s, called San Antonio de Senecú. Like Socorro, this mission was destroyed during the 1680 Pueblo Revolt.

And, like Socorro, it remained abandoned until the early 1800s. By the 1830s, numerous farms had been established along the fertile lands hugging the Rio Grande.

A church was built during this era, supposedly over the foundation of the Senecú mission. It was called San Antonio de Aquinas mission. The structure was very similar to the plan of the San Miguel church in Socorro without the towers.

The exact history of this church is a bit hazy. Some sources state this mission was destroyed by the earthquakes in 1906. This is based largely on a photograph of the church with the inscription, “Destruída 1906,” or, destroyed 1906. Searching the 1906 Socorro Chieftain's, issue after issue contains detailed reports of area earthquake damage. However, there is no mention of damage to the San Antonio church.

Geologist and seismologist Dr. Alan Sanford, now retired from New Mexico Tech, has performed detailed studies of the magnitudes and epicenters of the 1906 Socorro earthquakes. Likewise, he finds no evidence that the tremors were sufficient to cause significant damage in San Antonio. Thus, the inscription on the old photo of San Antonio de Aquinas mission remains a mystery.

Church records tell a different story. San Miguel church history, written by Father Bernard Boudreau in 1973,
states San Antonio de Aquinas mission fell into disrepair until it was no longer used as a church.

At this same time, a new church was built in nearby San Antonito, a few miles south of San Antonio, between 1904 and 1906. Was this church built due to the disrepair of the San Antonio church? Regardless, it was dedicated in 1906 as a mission church to the newly formed San Marcial parish. It served the area until it, too, was destroyed by the floods of 1929.

The area now had no church. A committee was organized to rebuild the San Antonio church. Though times were rough due to the onset of the depression, Constancio Miera, and Mayordomos Mauricio Chaves and Seledon Jaramillo, led the project to completion in 1930. This is the community built church in San Antonio today. When the San Marcial parish was destroyed by the 1937 flood, San Antonio was transferred back to Socorro.

The old church, San Antonio de Aquinas, is now only a mound of melted adobe to the east of today's church.

SAN MARCIAL and LA PLAZA VIEJA
The area around Mesa del Contadero, or Black Mesa, was once a complex of several villages. The first was the farming community of La Mesa, established in the early 1800s on the north flank of the mesa. A mission church was built and served by priests from Socorro. Plagued by floods, the village relocated to the west side of the Rio Grande in 1866, on slightly higher ground, and named San Marcial.

With the Rio Grande and Mesa de Contadero (Black Mesa) to the east, and sandy hills to the west, the narrow valley in between proved ideal for growing a variety of crops and grazing for livestock. Most important is the fertile valley had ample water from the Rio Grande, the fields irrigated by a network of acequias. The area grew with farmers and ranchers.

One of the area ranchers, Pablo Gomez, donated land in San Marcial for a church. It was eagerly built by the area families, being designated a mission church to Socorro in 1880. By 1887, the growing church was redesignated to a parish, receiving it's own priest, to serve San Marcial and the surrounding communities.

In the 1890s, the railroad moved their main yards from flood prone Socorro to San Marcial. Many workers relocated to build the maintenance shops, offices, and the roundhouse to service the AT&SF line. Local people were hired as well. This was a major boom to the growth of the area, which by now had actually developed into three towns less than a mile apart: old San Marcial (La Plaza Vieja), San Geronimo, and New Town San Marcial. The population exceeded 2000 people.

In the early 1900s, Father Peter Peltzer was assigned to the San Marcial parish, serving the mission churches in the area. This included the missions at Paraje, Valverde, San Pedro, San Antonito, San Antonio, and Bosquecito. Additionally, the Padre offered mass in private homes or schools at Milligan Ranch, Cantarecio, Carthage and Pueblitos. All of these towns and villages were assigned to the San Marcial parish.

In the mid-1920s, Father Peltzer was transferred to San Miguel parish in Socorro, being replaced by Father Emile Barrat to head the San Marcial parish.
Many of these towns along the Rio Grande, and the 
churches, were inundated by flood waters on August 
20, 1929. New Town San Marcial, La Mesa and 
Valverde were completely destroyed, including the 
new parish church under construction near the train 
station. Once the floodwaters receded, area ranchers 
rebuilt the soaked mission at La Plaza Vieja.

Building the new church was also restarted, being 
dedicated on May 10, 1937. Unfortunately, only a few 
months later, another disastrous flood down the Rio 
Grande destroyed everything in the area, including the 
new parish church.

The 1937 flood was the kiss of death to the area. 
Virtually no residents remained, nor are there but a few 
today. The San Marcial parish was discontinued and the 
area missions were transferred back to the Socorro 
parish.

MAGDALENA
A small wooden building near the railroad station was 
Magdalena's first Catholic church. Being 26 miles from 
the Rio Grande, at least it was safe from floods. Instead, 
it was destroyed by fire in 1918 - burning to the ground 
because the village had no water.

The construction of a new church was quickly begun. A 
large basement was first built as the foundation for the 
planned church. Shortly after construction began, the 
mines closed and the population and money waned. It 
was decided to complete the structure with the funds 
they had, building the church in the basement. 
Dedicated in 1920, it may be the only Catholic church 
in the southwest built underground.

Naturally, the church was dedicated to Saint Mary 
Magdalen after the “face on the mountain” -- an image 
so recognized since early colonial times. Receiving it's 
own priest, Magdalena became a parish.

In 1973, Father Emmanuell DeBaenst was transferred 
from Magdalena to Carrizozo. Magdalena lost her 
parish status.

KELLY
In 1894, Adolfo Torres organized the families in the 
growing mining town of Kelly to start a church. The 
first church was an old saloon. As the town continued to 
grow, they built a new church atop a hill overlooking 
the town and the mines, dedicated to San Juan Bautista. 
It was first served by a priest from Socorro, then 
became a mission church to the new Magdalena parish 
in 1919.

The Kelly mines went silent by the mid-1920s. Few 
people remained. Many of the abandoned houses and 
buildings were dismantled for their wood and 
furnishing during the 1930s depression years. When 
the mines were temporarily opened during World War 
II, there wasn't much of a town left.

Many of the former residents of Kelly moved to 
Magdalena and Socorro, but kept the church in good 
repair for the annual fiestas. However, the church atop 
the hill was getting difficult to reach as the years went 
by.

In 1948, the former residents decided to tear down the 
old church and rebuild it across from the Kelly Mine for 
better access. Headed by Adolfo Tafoya, they 
dismantled the church, plank-by-plank, and rebuilt it 
exactly like the original. This is the landmark church in 
Kelly today.

The San Juan Bautista mission was rededicated in 
1949, served by Father Salvatore di Giovanni from the 
Magdalena parish for years. The first Mayordomos 
were Mr. and Mrs. Dominico Zamora. In 1973, Kelly 
was returned to the Socorro parish.

Today, Kelly may be a ghost town, but the spirit of the 
church and her people has never died. The former 
residents keep the church in pristine condition. Mass is 
still held in the mission each June for the Juan de 
Bautista fiestas and annual town reunion. Carlos and 
Olivia Tafoya are today's Mayordomos.

According to church records, Socorro priests also 
served Herrick's Camp and Culebra in the 1890 through
1910 era. The author has been unable to identify these sites. If you know anything about these two sites, or have additional information on Socorro's mission churches, please contact the author.

The history of the missions in northern Socorro County, and the area's Protestant churches, will be presented in future articles.

Some of the references used in this article: San Miguel church records; “Rio Abajo” by Michael Marshall; “Old San Miguel Mission” by Father Bernard Boudreau; additional church records and research courtesy of John Taylor; Socorro Chieftain archives; Herbert Yeo 1937 flood photos, and interviews with Bennie Barreras, Ted Armijo, Charles Headen, Carlos and Olivia Tafoya, and others.

Additional photos not appearing in the original article.

The San Acacia Cemetery as it appears today, with Ladron Peak looming to the west.