GUERRERO VIEJO

FIELD GUIDE TO A CITY FOUND AND LOST

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Introduction

This field guide to one of the most fascinating places along the US-México borderlands was originally prepared for the 2002 meeting of the Southwest Division of the Association of American Geographers. Hosted by Texas A&M International University, and organized by Michael S. Yoder then of that institution's Department of Social Sciences, the "SWAAG" meeting involved approximately 100 professional and academic geographers from Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas. Some thirty of these scholars loaded into three vans on Saturday, 9 November and enjoyed a full day traveling from Laredo, Texas to Guerrero Viejo, Tamaulipas down the west side of the Río Bravo del Norte and returning up the east side of the Rio Grande. The highlight of the trip, of course, was Guerrero Viejo itself, a town found and lost.

The original guide prepared for that field trip proved to be a genuine success. Everyone on the trip found it to be exceptionally helpful for understanding what they were observing. A copy was deposited in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, and subsequently copied several times. A review of it appeared in the *SMRC Revista* vol. 37, no. 135, 2003, p. 20, published by the Southwest Mission Research Center, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona. Numerous copies were subsequently requested of the authors. The success with which the guide met was so great it was decided to make it available to the general public. The initial plan was to sell the guide in hotels and tourist shops along the border. It was later decided to simply make it available free of charge to anyone with access to a computer. Accordingly, the field guide was revised, updated, put into a portable document format (pdf), filed on a server at UT.

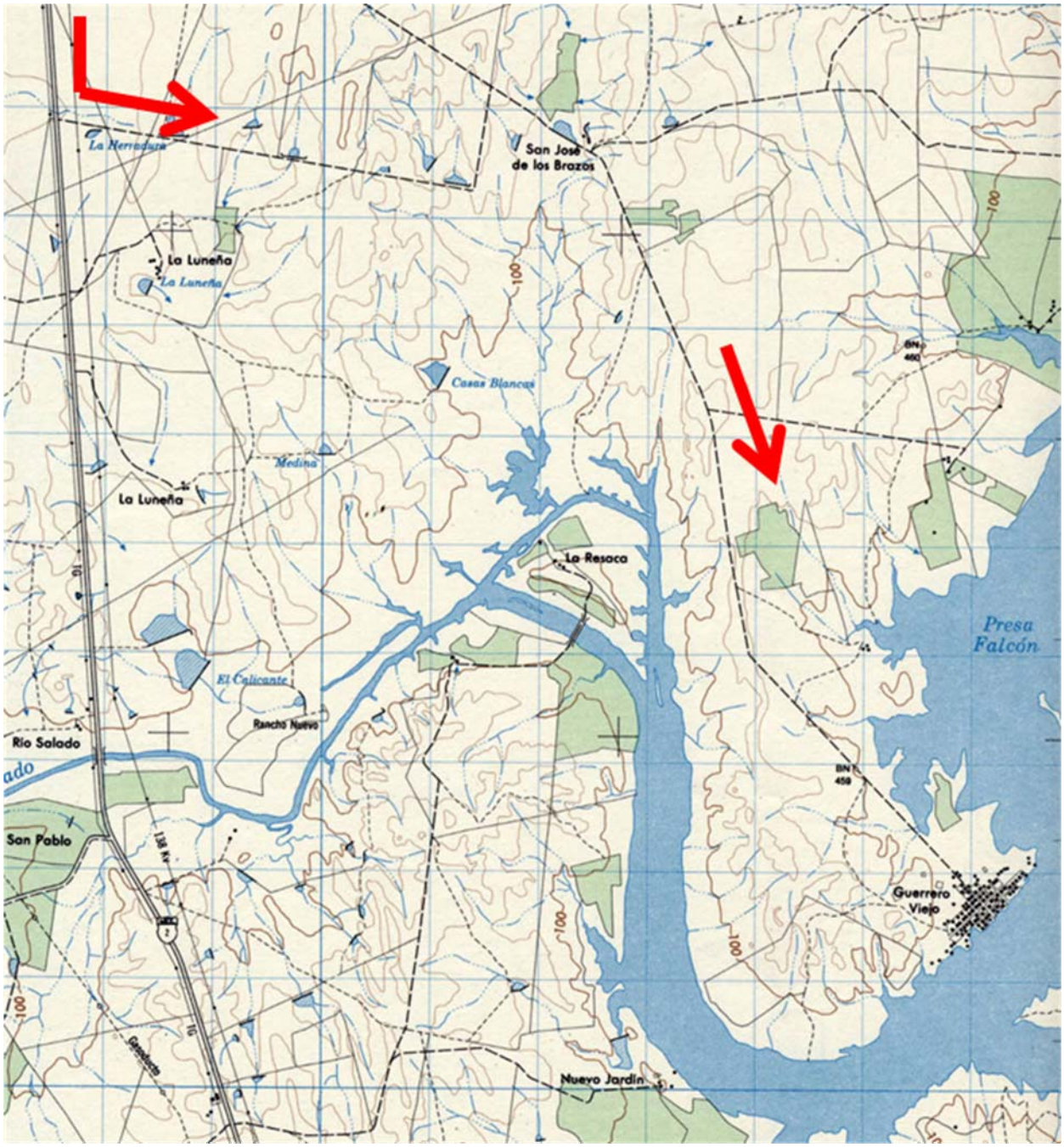
This field guide is designed to be printed out, and literally used as a guide to getting to, and visiting, Guerrero Viejo. Everything is black and white, save the cover, photographs 3 and 6, and maps 1 and 6. The color illustrations will reproduce well in black and white however people with color printers may prefer to print these illustrations in color. And, people wishing to keep a copy for their library shelf may want to print the cover on heavier paper than the rest of the document. The entire volume can either be stapled in the upper left hand corner, or bound (spiral, velo, or stapled and taped) along the left side.

Funds for the preparation of this field trip guide were provided by the Erich W. Zimmermann Regents Professorship in Geography, the Department of Geography and the Environment, and the College of Liberal Arts, The University of Texas at Austin. Assistance was provided by W. Eugene George, AIA, formerly of the School of Architecture, University of Texas at San Antonio.

The authors are a professor (WED) and a former graduate student (OIM) in the Department of Geography and the Environment, The University of Texas at Austin.

Schedule and Itinerary

Time	*Mileage*	*Place*
08:00	0	Depart Plaza San Agustín, Laredo, Texas
08:05	1	Cross Río Grande/Bravo bridge into Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, México, Left on Calle Victoria
08:07	2	Right on Periférico Luis Donaldo Colosio
08:20	7	Left on Highway 85 west toward Monterrey
08:30	16	Right on clover leaf to Highway 2 south toward Reynosa and Matamoros
09:10	54	Left on dirt road to Guerrero Viejo
09:25	58	Ranch gate
09:45	63	Arrive Guerrero Viejo
12:00		Depart Guerrero Viejo
12:25	68	Ranch gate
12:40	72	Left on Highway 2 south
12:45	75	Cross Río Salado
13:05	95	Left into Nuevo Ciudad Guerrero
13:10	97	Arrive Nuevo Guerrero for lunch
14:10		Depart Nuevo Guerrero
14:15	102	Photo stop on Falcon Dam
14:35	104	Cross back into the United States, clear customs and immigration
14:45	110	Left on Highway 83 north toward Laredo
15:00	134	Pass through Zapata, Texas
16:00	184	Arrive Plaza San Agustin, Laredo, Texas



Map 1. 1:50,000 map of Guerrero Viejo. Note: each grid is 1 km or .6 miles square.

A Suggested Walking Tour of Guerrero Viejo

After a nine mile drive over a dirt and rocky road, the sight of Guerrero Viejo's first buildings is indeed a welcome one. Drive past the first buildings and three or four blocks later you will arrive at a large vacant tract of land with a distinctive block building off to the left. This building is El Parián, the old city market. The cleared area here is a good place to park. One block further to the southeast is the plaza. The following self-guided tour begins there, at the northern corner, across from the church (see Map 2, next page).

North corner of the plaza

Stand here for a moment and take note of everything within your field of view. The church Nuestra Señora del Refugio, across Calle Veracruz, faces southwest. Note the water line clearly visible on the northwest side of the building. Although the lake level varied from time to time, at 93 meters above sea level this line indicates the "normal" or static pool (Map 3). The bluffs visible on the horizon behind and to the right of the church are in Texas, on the opposite side of Falcon Reservoir that cannot be seen from the plaza. The Río Grande (Río Bravo del Norte, as it is known in México) flows from your left to your right or from northwest to the southeast in this stretch.

Looking toward to your right, and just beyond the plaza, you will notice two things. First, the land surface slopes toward the southeast. Second, there are numerous linear piles of rocks engulfed by a young mesquite forest. These rock alignments are the remains of buildings that once stood here but were totally destroyed because they spent more than 40 years submerged by the lake. One of these buildings was the Teatro Anáhuac (Map 2, no. 7). Inundation, including both gentle water flow and turbulance resulting from wind- and boat-induced wave action, has clearly taken its toll. Approximately 200 meters southeast of the plaza, down slope from the former town and current mesquite forest is the Río Salado, a major tributary of the Río Grande. The Río Salado flows from your right to your left, or southwest to northeast in this particular stretch (overall it flows northwest to southeast). Guerrero Viejo is actually situated on the north or left bank of this stream, and not the west or right bank of the Río Grande.

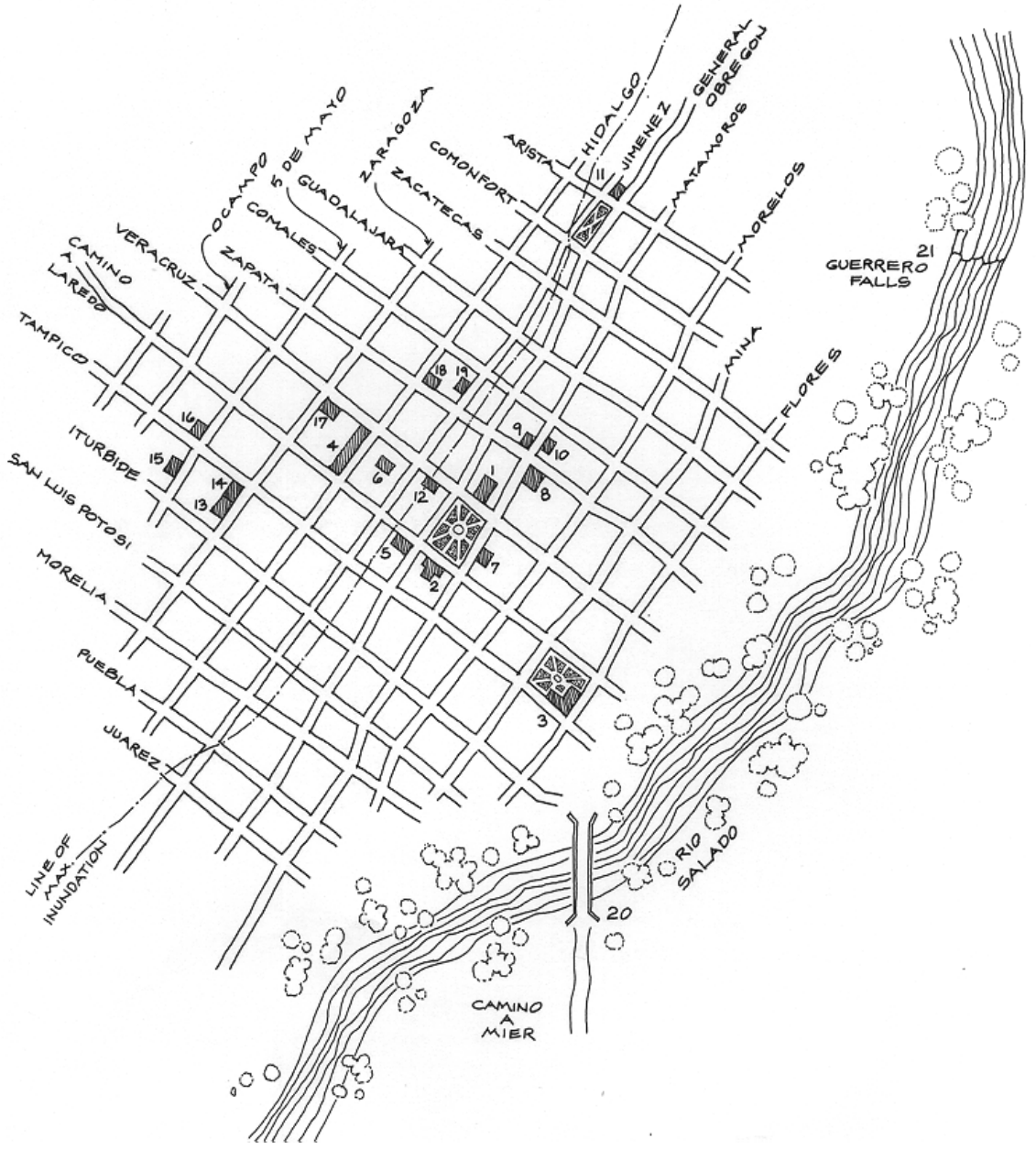
Looking toward the west and northwest, you will notice that buildings facing the plaza are in the same condition as buildings southeast of the plaza, for the same reasons. Behind them, however, and further upslope, you can see standing buildings that have been heavily damaged, but not totally destroyed by the lake. This is because they have not been completely submerged or submerged at all. Their upslope position protected them from inundation, and their deterioration was caused mostly because of abandonment, lack of maintenance, and pillage during the past fifty years.

Walk northwest, away from the plaza, along Calle Veracruz

As you walk upslope, pay special attention to the condition of the buildings as you move away from the plaza. Note the water lines on the buildings. The further you walk, the

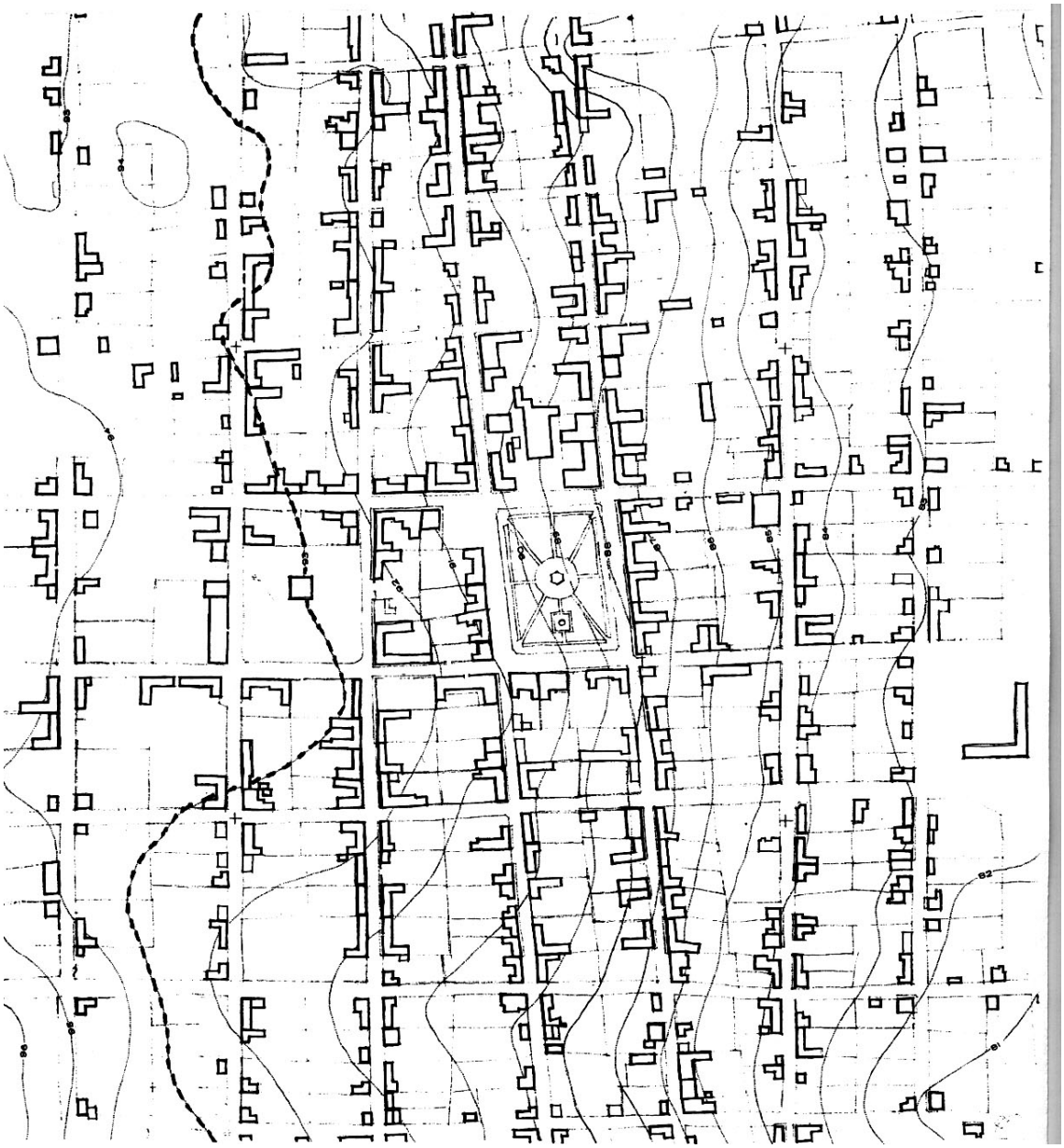
Map 2. Guerrero Viejo. See Map 3 for correct "Line of Max. Inundation."

1. Church Nuestra Señora del Refugio
2. Palacio Municipal
3. El Colegio (primary school)
4. González Benavides Primary School
5. Hotel Flores
6. El Parián (city market)
7. Anáhuac Theater (cinema)
8. Telegraph Office
9. Post Office
10. Tax Office
11. Customs Station
12. Store
13. Residence
14. Residence
15. Residence
16. Residence
17. Residence
18. Támez home
20. Bridge

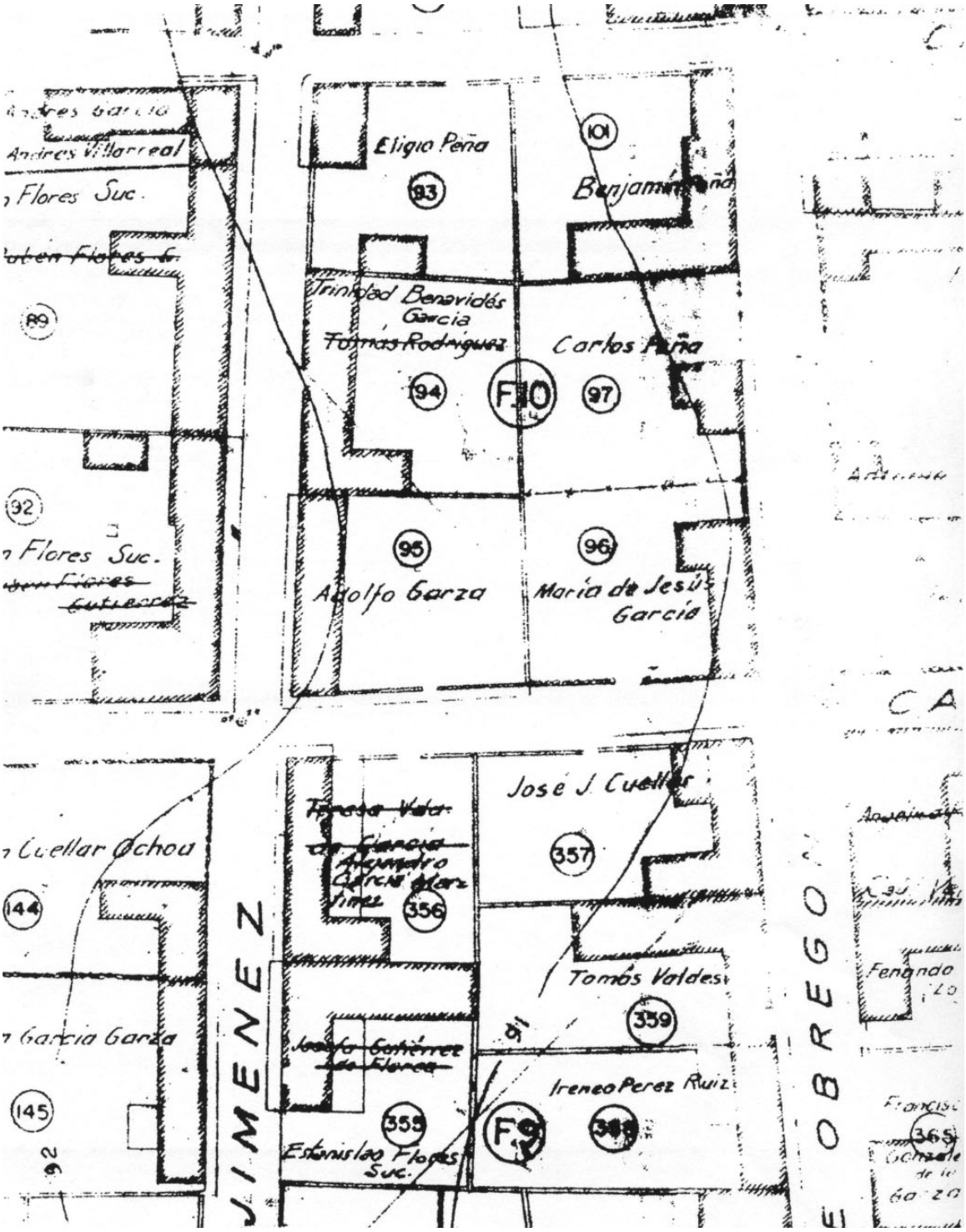


Drawn by M. Sánchez, (http://www.rice.edu/armadillo/Past/Book/Part5/townmap5.html)

closer the lines are to the ground surface. Halfway between calles Jimenez and Hidalgo you reach a point above the lake level at its maximum extent. Please note that Map 2 is wrong in this regard and Map 3 is correct.



Map 3. Composite map of Guerrero showing streets, property boundaries, buildings, and contour lines. This map was made by Gene George who compiled seven 1:500 scale maps dated 1947 and formerly kept in the Palacio Municipal (see Map 2).



Map 4. A portion of one of the Guerrero property maps used to compile Map 3.

Various architectural features

Feel free to walk into any buildings. Be careful, however, and be on the look out for snakes, animals, spiders, wasps, etc. Also be careful of loose rock, rusty wire, nails sticking through boards, low doorways and branches. Take a few minutes to explore some side streets, but you probably will not get far due to dense thorn forests and abundant rubble.

Be sure to look carefully at the architecture and construction. Note, for example, the quarry marks on the sandstone blocks, the keystones in the lintels, the decorative trim around windows and doors, and the remains of plaster and paint. Some exterior walls have trim work done in various architectural styles. Walls were made thick for strength and insulation. Both interior and exterior walls were covered with an adobe or lime plaster.

Ochre-colored sandstone was the primary construction material. According to Eugene George (1975), the quality of masonry in colonial towns along the lower Río Grande indicates that knowledge of complex techniques has been well understood since the eighteenth century.

Note that the stones comprising the walls are of roughly quarried blocks. However, the quoins and blocks around door openings were thoroughly squared and dressed. Stone was also the material for crafting architectural decorations, such as carved moldings, rain heads, door arches, and projecting rain spouts (*canales* or *gárgolas*). Some buildings at street intersections have enlarged lower external corners (*guarda cantones*). These features are not only ornamental, but they also functioned to protect the buildings from the projecting hubs of cart wheels. Loopholes (*troneras)* were common features in most if not all the early buildings. Also note the construction sequences evident in many buildings. For instance, you will see doors, windows, and arches that were filled in sometime after construction but prior to abandonment. You will also see where walls and rooms have been added and houses connected together.

Pay attention to the use of wood for shutters and doors, and iron hinges. Cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum*) and mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora* var. *torreyana*) were the preferred construction woods as they were obtained locally. Cypress was not only abundant, but easily worked, durable, and long lasting. It was used mainly for roof beans (*vigas*), some of them decorated. Look up as you enter each room. You might find a decorated *viga* with an inscription or the date when the house was built. Mesquite, a durable yet hard-to-work wood was used for lintels and fireplaces, door jambs, and thresholds.

Trees of various sizes and species continue to grow in many buildings. Many of these were not here when the town was inhabited. Their growth, therefore, occurred between 1953 and 1993, when they were on the margins of the lake. Accordingly, they tell us something about the speed of growth with abundant water in their rooting zones.

Typical Houses Preserved

Three blocks northwest of the plaza you will find some excellently preserved buildings (Map 2, no. 17). Take a careful look at the houses facing the intersection of calles Veracruz and Zaragoza, especially the one on the west corner. These houses are generally one row of rooms deep. The main part of each house had a flat roof. Adjacent to the main part of the houses, in the rear, you will find the kitchens. They had sloping roofs and fireplaces with exterior chimneys on the side away from the main part of the house. Shingles were not made locally and would have been brought in by riverboat. Accordingly, they date no earlier than the late nineteenth century. Each house had a large backyard that was separated from neighboring yards by a high wall. Each house also had a well in the backyard, and the patio surrounding the well often had a flagstone surface. Most household activities took place in the backyard. In the Spanish tradition (that probably extended back to ancient Rome and even earlier in the Middle East), the facades of the houses showed few, if any, signs of wealth or conspicuous consumption. Also note that these houses have elevated sidewalks whereas those closer to the plaza do not. Clearly, these are newer houses, probably built in the late nineteenth century, reflect urban expansion. Streets in the eighteenth century were mainly dirt and extended in width from front door to front door. Elevated sidewalks became important later on as carriages became a more popular and common mode of transportation.

The old market (El Parián)

The large building with multiple arches in the broad open area surround by calles Jimenez, Hidalgo, Veracruz, and Mexico (Map 2, no. 6) is the old market. Formerly known as *El Parián*, there is not much to look at here other than this rather impressive building and its surrounding public space that must have been a lively and bustling place when the city was inhabited. The market is located directly on the 93 meter contour line (Map 3), which was the normal shoreline of the lake.

The Hotel Flores and the Palacio Municipal

Less than 100 meters south of the market is a large two-story building that is also opposite the west corner of the plaza (Map 2, no. 5). This is the old Hotel Flores (Photograph 1). It is worth your time to walk around inside the building, looking at its construction and grandeur. Also, note the street in front of this building. It is not only paved with cobblestones, but it is lower in the center than at its edges (facilitating drainage down the center of the street), and it has a rather elaborate and attractive design. The curbs are also interesting, made of carved stone. When looking up the street, one will note that the cobblestones are only visible on two-thirds of the street, the side on which the Hotel Flores is still standing. The other one-third of the street is covered with debris from the collapsed building opposite the old hotel. From here, turn around and walk down slope past the plaza.

A half block down from the Hotel Flores and facing the plaza from the southwest are the remains of the old city hall (Map 2, no. 2; and Photograph 2).

Photograph 1. The Hotel Flores, ca. 1940s as viewed facing west from the plaza.

Photograph 2. The city hall as it appeared ca. 1940s. This photograph was taken looking southeast from the plaza. The statue of Benito Juarez is now in the plaza of Nuevo Ciudad Guerrero.

South corner of the plaza

Stand here for a moment and look to the southeast. All you see are piles of rock rubble and mesquite trees. The mesquite forest dominating the southeast side of Guerrero Viejo today did not exist when the town was under water. All of these trees are the result of post-1993 invasion. As recently as 1998, one could look off to the south and southeast and see the school while standing on this corner of the plaza. Clearly, these mesquite trees are growing at a rather rapid rate.

The "new" school

Walk 100 meters to the southeast of the plaza and you will find the school (Map 2, no. 3). This structure was built in the 20th century, as is evident by the use of concrete. Pay special attention to the ground surface and notice that the school is full of sediment up to the windowsills. While walking under the portico, pay special attention to the doors and windows. The sills of the windows can be seen, but the thresholds of the doors are buried. While in the various rooms one can also see where the sediment has been "shotgunned out" by rapidly flowing floodwaters coming in the windows. Also from the portico, turn and look back toward town. The ground surface between the school and the plaza is lacustrine sediment, deposited in less than 50 years. Finally, go to the east end of the school. Looking toward the plaza and church, find the spot from which Photograph 3 was taken in 1996. Note the differences in vegetation, especially the growth of mesquite.

Photograph 3. A view from the school toward the plaza and church, 1996.

The old bridge

From the south corner of the school, walk approximately 100 meters to the south. Here you will find the old bridge built over the Río Salado. In June 2002, water was flowing over the top of the bridge at a depth of no more than a few centimeters. Note the depth of the sediment *above* the bridge on either bank of the river. Obviously when the bridge was built, the ground surface on both banks was somewhat lower than the top of the bridge. Here one sees less than 50 years of lacustrine deposition, followed by stream down cutting.

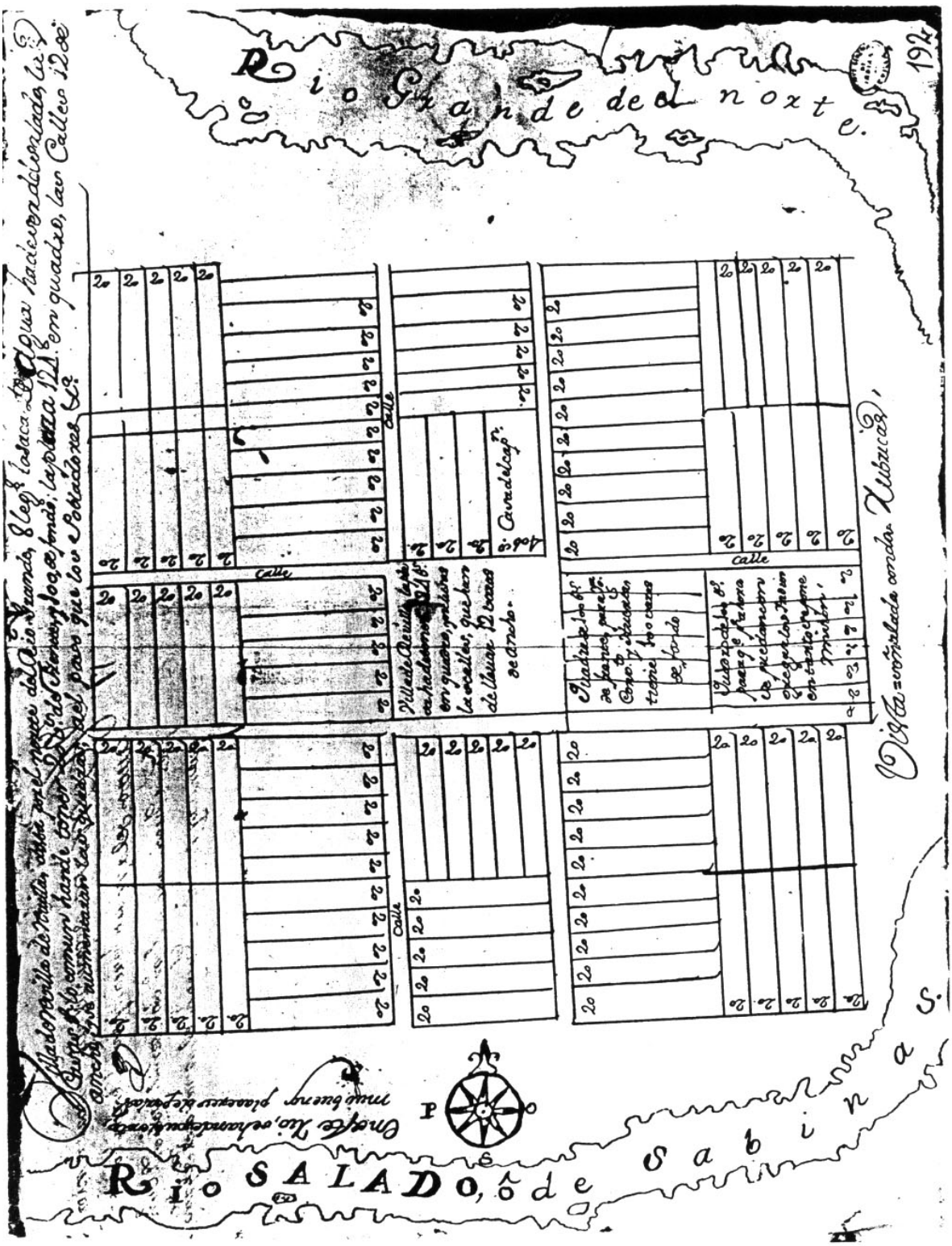
The Plaza

From the bridge and school, walk back to the plaza paying special note to the irregularity of the ground surface, the lacustrine sediment, and the young, and rapidly growing vegetation. At the plaza, climb the gazebo (*kiosko*) steps and take a long look around. Even from this elevation, the "new" school is obscured by the mesquite forest. The gazebo and the benches date from the period a few years before the town was abandoned and inundated (Photograph 4).

The plaza is a common feature in Hispanic cities and towns (Arreola 2002). It is not exclusively a place for social, religious, and political interaction; it also served as an urban planning tool, and a starting point from which the towns were designed and streets traced.

A 1757 report by José Tienda de Cuervo, a royal inspector of Nuevo Santander, stated that the first houses in Guerrero Viejo (then Revilla) were scattered over a broad area (Jones 1979). Revillanos were then required to create the customary plaza in order to comply with Spanish law. They established their dwellings and public buildings around a central plaza and along streets radiating from it in a grid pattern. Map 5 is the original town plan drawn in the 1750s. Note that it has no lots assigned for the church. As Dan Stanislawski (1947) pointed out, contrary to popular belief, the 1573 decree of King Phillip II stated "For the church there is to be the first assignment of *solares* after the streets and plazas are laid out. [It] should not be placed at the plaza, but at some distance, raised above the ground." The present location of the church was not the originally intended location. A comparison of Maps 2, 3, and 5 illustrates, among other things, that the original "ideal" was not followed and that local exigencies dictated variations from the plan. The lesson to be learned from this is that anyone who thinks that life on the frontier of New Spain conformed to official policy is fooling one person—her- or himself!

Photograph 4. A view of the plaza from the second floor of the Palacio Municipal ca. 1940s. Note the gazebo wasn't yet built, and the "old" school in the right rear.



Map 5. The official 1750s plan for the Villa de Revilla. The original is in the *Archivo General de Indias*, Sevilla, Spain. Each lot portrayed on this map is 20 varas wide and 100 varas long. A vara equals 33 1/3 inches; 36 varas equal 100 feet.

The Church Nuestra Señora del Refugio

While driving in, you doubtless noted the signs of INAH, the *Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia*. A few years ago, INAH stepped in and undertook some major restoration, focusing on the church (Map 2, no. 1; and Photographs 5 and 6). They repaired some walls that had collapsed, shored up others that were in danger of falling, cleaned out a great deal of sediment, and most importantly, added a roof and bars on all the doors and windows. Sometimes the gate where the front door should be is locked, sometimes it isn't. If it is not looked, feel free to wander around inside. Many people continue to use this church as a shrine.

Nuestra Señora del Refugio Church is unusual among colonial churches in Mexico because of two main characteristics. The first one is the location of the bells in the center of the façade (*espadaña*), instead of in towers on either side of the church. The church used to have three bells: the main one was in the upper central space. Smaller bells were located in each of the two lower spaces (Photograph 5). The one on the right side of the façade was a "*volteadora*," a turning bell. The second main characteristic of Nuestra Señora del Refugio was the three-nave interior. According to Elena Poniatowska (1997), this characteristic, found only in "important churches," was a source of pride for the former inhabitants of Guerrero.

Photograph 5. The church as it appeared ca. 1940s, at the peak of its use.

Photograph 6. The church as it appeared in 1996, at the depth of disrepair, and prior to any restoration work.

Nueva Ciudad Guerrero and Lunch

One hour is allocated for this "new" city that was built in the 1950s to house people displaced when Guerrero Viejo was inundated. A quick drive around and through town is sufficient to can get a general "feel" for this place. Not to be disparaging, but the town unfortunately lacks character and soul. It is functional to a fault. Nevertheless, you may wish to explore the town. If so you will not want to miss seeing the statue of Benito Juarez located on the plaza. This is one of the few items brought to the new town from the old town (Photographs 2 and 4).

In addition to driving and walking around for a few minutes, you may wish to have lunch at one of the few restaurants in town. As with most restaurants in small Mexican towns, food is good, plentiful, and inexpensive. Enchiladas, tacos, pollo (chicken), and *hamburguesas* are usually good, but *comidas corridas*, the Mexican counterpart to the Blue Plate Special, are always a good choice. Every place accepts both pesos and dollars, but ***not*** credit cards. Expect to pay slightly less for a typical lunch meal than you would in the US, but not much less.

Map 6. 1:50,000 map of Nueva Ciudad Guerrero and Falcon Dam. Note: each grid is 1 kilometer or .6 miles square.

A History of Guerrero Viejo

Oscar I. Maldonado

A town without history is like a tree without roots
that falls to the ground when barely touched
Rubén Flores Gutiérrez
Native chronicler of Guerrero Viejo

In her recent book about Guerrero Viejo, the famous Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska cites a traditional legend. She tells us that in 1862, during Benito Juarez's anticlerical regime, Bishop Ignacio Montes de Oca y Obregón traveled throughout his diocese. When he arrived in Guerrero, the bishop was stopped by soldiers at the entrance of the town, and was asked to show his belongings. Upset by this request, he exclaimed: "I curse this town. It will end under the waters" (Poniatowska and Payne 1997:14-15). Certainly, the bishop's malediction was not a prophecy, but the truth is that 90 years later Guerrero suffered the fate that a troubled Montes de Oca once desired.

Everyone who has written of this town, including both scientists and humanists, arrived at the same conclusion: with the inundation of Guerrero and Zapata (the former's twin-town on the U.S. side of the Río Grande), two hundred years of history were sank, figuratively and literally.

Nuevo Santander

The history of Guerrero Viejo is the history of the towns along the lower Río Grande. The vast region extending from the Nueces River in Texas to the Río Pánuco along the Tamaulipas-Veracruz border was known as the Costa del Seno Mexicano in the eighteenth century (Flores 1985). Its western boundary was the Sierra Madre Oriental and its eastern edge, the Gulf of Mexico.

Even though the first Spanish incursions to the Costa del Seno Mexicano date from the early sixteenth century, the region was one of the last territories to be colonized in New Spain (Gerhard 1982; Jones 1979; Robertson 1985). In 1519, the military explorer Alonso Álvarez de Pineda was sent to the region from Jamaica by Francisco de Garay. Álvarez de Pineda was the first European who saw the mouth of the Río Grande, a river he called *Río de las Palmas* (Robertson 1985). This designation was in response to his seeing Sabal palm (*Sabal texana*), a species that at one time grew profusely along the river in small stands or groves, and reached approximately 80 miles upstream from the Gulf of Mexico (Audubon Society 2002).

Álvarez de Pineda was also the only Spaniard to have peaceful encounters with local indigenous people. His tales to de Garay about gold ornaments motivated the later to send two other expeditions: the first one leaded by Diego de Camargo, and the second by Miguel Díaz de Auz. Both entourages were attacked by the natives and failed in their

efforts. A third expedition, leaded by de Garay himself suffered the same fate (Robertson 1985).

The Chichimec's gallant defense of their territory (Gerhard 1982) impeded Spaniards from going any further north for more than two hundred years. However, in the mid-eighteen century, the Spanish crown again attempted to colonize the Costa del Seno Mexicano. According to Eugene George (1975), there were four reasons for making this attempt. The first reason was the need to repel foreign expansion, mainly against France and its settlements in Louisiana. Secondly, since some settlements already existed in Texas (San Antonio and Nacogdoches) there was a need to maintain lines of communication and transportation. Thirdly, indigenous people living along the Río Grande were becoming increasingly hostile, particularly toward settlements in Coahuila, the state to the west. Finally, rumors of precious metals never stopped. Oakah Jones (1979:65) adds to this list of reasons, noting that Christianizing and "civilizing" natives was equally important. And, Gerhard (1982:360) adds to this list citing the growing interests of group of cattlemen. Indeed, colonial ranchers were moving northeast by the mid-1740s. For these reason, viceregal authorities decide to establish the new province of Nuevo Santander (Jones 1979) and settle the area.

José de Escandón was commissioned by the viceroy to lead the colonization effort of Nuevo Santander. Based at Querétaro (Flores 1985), he was lieutenant in the viceregal army, and had a reputation for "pacifying tribes" (George 1975) because of his work resettling abandoned missions in the Sierra Madre and exploring the lowlands of Tamaulipas (Gerhard 1982).

Colonial Settlements

Historical sources reveal that Escandón was above all a visionary strategist. His plan for moving ahead and surveying Nuevo Santander involved several companies entering the region from seven different points to the south, west and north of the new province. His troops met near the mouth of the Río Grande in February 1947 (Flores 1985). As a result of his successful expedition, Escandón identified 14 places for settlements. His criteria for selecting these places were based on the existence of: first, abundant water for men and animals; second, land enough fertile for crops; third, healthy places, and fourth well drained land that would not inundate new settlements (Jones 1979).

Escandón's colonization of Nuevo Santander was initiated in 1748. More than 2,500 settlers, mainly from Nuevo León and Coahuila, responded to the first call for colonists, certainly attracted by the "generous provisions" offered. These include two hundred *pesos*, good land for crops and cattle, and tax exemption for ten years (Flores 1985; George 1975; Gerhard 1982; Jones 1979). Escandón himself led the first settlers along with 755 soldiers. They left Querétaro on early December 1748, and a few days later, on Christmas day, the first village Santa María de Llera was founded. After establishing Güemes, Padilla and Jiménez, Escandón proceeded to the north and founded the first two settlements on the Río Grande: Nuestra Señora de Camargo (on March 5, 1749) and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Reynosa (on March 14, 1749).

San Ygnacio de Loyola de Revilla, later known as Ciudad Guerrero

Escandón came back to the Río Grande one year later to establish additional villages. On October 10, 1550 he founded San Ygnacio de Loyola de Revilla, then simply known as Revilla, and later as Guerrero. The foundation of Revilla is interesting because it was the only settlement that was not granted by government support (Flores 1985; Garza-González 1996; Jones 1979). It was founded at the initiative of a successful rancher in Coahuila, Don Vicente Guerra, who personally offered to bring, at his own expenses, 50 families in order to settle them at the junction of the ríos Grande and Salado (Flores 1985). Escandón accepted Guerra's proposal since it conformed to the viceregal plans to settle the entire region. The town was named "Revilla", in honor of Viceroy Juan Fracisco Güemez y Horcasitas, Conde de Revillagigedo (Garza-González 1996).

Between its founding in 1550 and 1573, Revilla changed locations three times, though it always stayed along the Río Salado and close to the Río Grande. The town was first located at a place known as *Los Moros*. Three years later it was moved to *Los Nortes*, the ranch of Nicolás de la Garza y Falcón, one of Escandón's commissioners. Finally it was relocated to the place where it remained for 200 years. As one writer noted, "this was an ironic beginning to a long history of relocation." (Byfield 1966:3)

The community grew rapidly. Between1753 and 1755 the population increased 75% (Flores 1985). Two years later, there were 29 ranches and 50,000 head of cattle. It is interesting to note that both Escandón and his settlers were interested mainly in developing cattle ranches. The ranching traditions of both northern Mexico and Texas are thus rooted in these pioneers.

Visits from viceregal authorities (e.g., José Tienda de Cuervo, in 1557) resulted in certain formalizations of settlement and development. The town was rearranged according to royal decree, with a central plaza and grid pattern streets. By 1767 ranches were established in *porciones*, lots of land granted to those who had lived in the area six years or more. Those *porciones* had approximately nine-thirteenths of a mile of riverfront access and extended inland for eleven to fourteen miles (Jones 1979).

The people of Revilla, and other colonial settlements along the Río Grande, experienced a paradoxical sense of isolation and connectiveness during the remainder of the eighteenth century. They remained remote and isolated from the rest of the New Spain, but enjoyed a great deal of integration with the communities along the river. New "twin" settlements, inhabited by new families, began to appear on opposite banks of the Río Grande (Flores 1985). Thus, instead of dividing towns, the river actually unified them.

Incessant attacks from certain indigenous people were a constant threat to Nuevo Santander communities during their first decades, particularly those along the Río Grande. Flores (1985:16) reports that in 1792, Revilla, Mier, and Laredo were so seriously assaulted by Apaches and Comanches that military detachments had to be called in their defense. Other threats were prolonged droughts in some years, and floods

in others. Both caused crop failures. As for deceases, malaria and smallpox were always menacing the settlers' lives.

The nineteenth century arrived with political events of a national nature that began to change life in Revilla. The independence of Mexico was the first major change. As a result, colonial-related places names were often changed in honor of heroes of the independence movement. Consequently, "Revilla" was foresaken and renamed in honor of Vicente Guerrero, the moving force for independence and the second president of Mexico (Garza-González 1996).

The next great change involved Texas. When it declared its independence from Mexico in 1836, Texas claimed the Río Grande as the international boundary, and not the Nueces River, that was the boundary between Texas and Tamaulipas since 1803. The border was not delineated, however, until the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, whereby Mexico ceded more than one-half of its territory to the United States, included the claimed area between the Río Grande and the Nueces (Flores 1985). Suddenly communities that were unified by the river for nearly one hundred years were thereafter divided by it.

The Final Century of Guerrero

With the international boundary separating the communities that formerly shared a common past, border towns started to develop themselves in their own way. On the northern bank of the Río Grande, the twin town of Guerrero, Zapata, became the seat of a new county in 1858. Yet Guerrero remained the cultural and commercial hub of the region until the end of the nineteenth century. "People went there to shop, to attend school, and many were born there because it was the home of the only doctor" (Bailey (1955:21).

Ciudad Guerrero experienced a great deal of progress during the era of Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz. Mexico opened itself to imports from around the world, and the city saw commerce flourish. A customs house was established and Guerrero became the largest trade center in the lower Río Grande region. Later a free trade zone (*zona libre*) was created and the economy prospered even more (Flores 1985; Garza-González 1996). However, with the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917, this "flow of interaction" shifted in the opposite direction. Guerrero's population decreased dramatically and its prosperity dropped. Many *Guerrerenses* fled the violence, and moved to the other side of the river. This is stated most eloquently in the following quote.

> "… in 1913 the population of Zapata made a sudden jump when the Mexican Revolution frightened at least 500 people of Guerrero into fleeing across the river for sanctuary in their sister village. Many of these refugees already owned property on the north bank of the river, and life for them was not much different than it had been all their lives…" (Lott and Martínez as quoted in Flores 1955:23).

As Guerrero floundered, its twin city, Zapata, started to prosper, in no small way because of the entrepreneurship of former *Guerrerenses.* This prosperity was enhanced with other important developments on the northern bank of the lower Río Grande. Among these were the exploitation of oil and gas (1930), the building of an international toll bridge between Zapata and guerrero (1931), the first water system for the town, and last but not least, completion of U.S. Highway 83 that passed through the town and linked it to both Laredo and Brownsville (1935).

The prosperity enjoyed by Zapata during the "Great Depression" suffered by the reast of the U.S., and the economic recovery of Guerrero after the revolution lasted only a short time. In the late thirties, rumors began to circulate about the construction of the first international dam, that would force the residents to relocate the town.

Falcón Dam and the New Settlements

Economic development beyond that of cattle ranching is difficult in a semi-arid environment where water resources are unreliable at best, and scarce at worst. Such was the case along the Río Grande (House 1982). Not only is water a regional issue in northern Mexico and Texas, but it is a major issue between the United States and Mexico.

For all its problems, the issue of water in the Río Grande is actually "one of the most successful examples of bi-national cooperation" anywhere (House 1982:113). Given the precarious nature of water, it is remarkable how peaceful and productive bi-national relations have been (Audubon Society 1995). Negotiations have had a complex history though. The current management framework dates from a treaty that began with talks between U.S. and Mexican representatives to the International Boundary Commission in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez in 1943. Those meetings concluded in the Water Treaty that both countries' presidents signed in Washington D.C. in February 1944.

According the treaty, two of three proposed dams were required in order conserve, store and regulate "the greatest quantity of the annual flow of the river in a way to insure continuance of existing uses and the development of the greatest number of feasible projects" (Article 5 of the Treaty as quoted by Byfield 1966). The lowermost storage dam on the Río Grande would be built first, and engineers of the IBWC recommended the current location as the only one suitable. Two towns (Guerrero, in Tamaulipas and Zapata, in Texas) along with five villages (Falcón, Lopeño, Uribeño, Ramireño and San Ygnacio) and several ranches would have to be moved (Flores 1985).

The proposed dam was to be named Falcón, in honor to Ulises Falcón, the first settler that established an irrigation system in the lower Río Grande Valley (Poniatowska and Payne 1997). On September 7, 1949, plans were initiated by the IBWC. Construction began in June, 1951 (Bailey 1955). The construction enterprise was an enormous task (Flores 1985), due in large part to its international nature and location. Successful completion of the project required a great deal of coordination among governmental agencies in both countries.

The 1944 Treaty established the use ratio for each country according the present and future needs. Mexico was allowed to utilize 41.4 percent of the water stored in the reservoir, while the United States is allowed to use 58.2 percent. The electrical power generated by the dam was distributed equally to both parties. As for costs, those were distributed in proportion to the hydraulic benefits. The cost and arrangements for relocating local residents was a responsibility that fell to each country, respectively (Flores 1985).

The United States and Mexico approached the relocation problem in completely different ways. Overall, Mexico's government did a good job. It constructed a new town for the *Guerrerenses*, and even though it does not have the charm of the colonial city, it had from the beginning all modern facilities. The city was ready to be occupied as soon as the construction on the dam was concluded and long before the reservoir started to fill. The problem then was one of culture and sentiment; *Guerrerenses* had a strong emotional attachment to their historic town (Bailey 1955; Byfield 1966; Flores 1985).

Across the river American relocation was difficult and satisfactory solutions were attained only when the reservoir was beginning to inundate the towns (Bailey 1955; Byfield, 1966). Indeed, given that the U.S. did not have a timely solution to the resettlement problem, Zapateans remained in their towns until they were forced to evacuate, and only then the Red Cross stepped in to provid temporary shelter (Flores 1985).

Water began to be impounded in December 1952, and residents of Guerrero started to move out early in 1953 (George 1975). On October 11, 1953 the Mexican flag was taken down from above the Palacio Municipal and people said goodbye to their old town (Poniatowska and Payne 1997). Adding insult to injury, rain showers forced people to leave immediately. On October 19, 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and President Adolfo Ruiz Cortínez visited Nuevo Guerrero and inaugurated the international dam. A bronze plaque commemorates the event at the point where the two leaders met, in the reception room of the new Palacio Municipal (Poniatowska and Payne 1997).

By August 1954, most of Guerrero was submerged (George 1975), and the new lake inundated an area of 114,000 acres (46,132 ha), 55,000 (22,257 ha) in the United States and 59,000 (23,875 ha) in Mexico (Poniatowska and Payne 1997).

With the establishment of a new town in 1953, Guerrero could have turned into a "rootless tree." However, the citizens of Nuevo Ciudad Guerrero are still aware of their cultural legacy and are proud of it. According to Dr. Rubén Flores Gutiérrez, Guerrero's chronicler, "This pride and awareness have enabled us to continue and to tighten our bond as a community that has been in existence for 240 years and that has had to change locations four times during that period" (Flores Gutiérrez, 2002).

The Drought of the 1990s

Falcon Dam was constructed during the height of a drought that not only characterized the 1950s, but was one of the most severe in history of Río Grande. As severe as it was, however, it was surpassed in the 1990s (TUSCAN 2002). The 1990s will be long remembered as a decade of drought in both south Texas and northern Mexico. In Texas alone, rainfall in 1996 was only 20% of its normal amount. Guerrero Viejo remained submerged during the early years of the drought. It reappeared only later, as the prolonged drought resulted in a dramatic drop in the lake level. The old colonial city thus resurfaced, in ruins, but showing signs of its former grandeur.

There is no irrefutable evidence that the drought of the 1990s was caused by climate change (TUSCAN 2002). It is difficult to establish a direct correlation, but it appears "that the prolonged El Niño event of 1992-93 may have played a role in the unusual pattern of weather that occurred during the first half of 1993" (Lott 1994:370-371). As mentioned by John W. House (1982), water supplies in the Río Grande are often uncertain and unpredictable. In reality, the basin experiences periods of drought and incidents of periodic flooding. A drought occurs, on average, approximately once every seven to ten years (Audubon Society 1995). In recent times, droughts seem to occur every five years. Indeed, droughts have affected the water storage levels at both La Amistad, and Falcón reservoirs in 1983-85, 1989-90 and 1994-96 (Audubon Society 1995; IBWC, 1998). Falcón Reservoir reached its lowest level in 1995 (IBWC 1998), even if the peak of the drought was in 1996 (TWRI 1998).

As a result of drought, Mexico's share of water in the Amistad and Falcón reservoirs dropped dramatically to an alarming 7.95 % of the normal allocation on August 23, 1995 (Audubon Society 1995). As for the US, its share of the water fell to 42.8 % of conservation storage levels, roughly 1.42 million acre-feet, that year. In July of the following year (1996), however, the Texas Water Development Board reported that south Texas had only 20 % of its reservoir-stored water (TWRI 2002).

The drought of the 1990s, *which has not yet ended*, has been an economic disaster for the Lower Río Grande Valley. For example, in 1995 along financial losses resulting from the drought were estimated to be $224 million in Mexico and $143 million in Texas. Agriculture and ranching are the most affected sectors, with grain sorghum and corn production being hit the hardest (Audubon Society 1995).

As for Guerrero Viejo and its relocated former inhabitants, there is a far more poignant human story. In June 2002, the elderly gentlemen who opened the gate on the road to the abandoned town had but one thing to say about its recent history—its inundation and subsequent reappearance—"Why?"

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