

Tigua Indians and El Paso at the Texas State Centennial Exposition, Part II

By Nicholas P. Houser

Hueco Tanks Mountain Memorial

In far West Texas, the centennial spurred interest to establish county, state, and federal parks at Hueco Tanks, Fort Davis, the Chisos Mountains in the Big Bend country, and the Valley of the Pyramids near Fabens.[26] The El Paso City Council, the county commissioners, the local centennial committee, the Woman's Division of the Chamber of Commerce, and the media all supported the establishment of a park at Hueco Tanks, the colossal granite megaliths located thirty miles east of El Paso. The park plan was to preserve the historic site and make it accessible to the public.

In the early 1900s, many El Pasoans advocated protecting this historic site and its rock art by creating a park.[27] In 1909, a farsighted editorial entitled "Hueco Tanks for Public Park" called for the establishment of a county park to preserve its history.[28] Jeanie M. Frank, local historian, wrote several articles on "The Tanks" and other Texas centennial subjects.[29] She and other non-Indians were unaware that it was a sacred site of the Tigua Indians.

In 1934, the Chamber of Commerce and city leaders contacted sculptor Gutzon Borglum, the creator of Mount Rushmore, to create a large-scale mountain memorial in the region to commemorate the Texas Centennial. Borglum, who at the time was blasting the presidential heads on the granite face of Mount Rushmore,



Tigua Indian delegation gathers in Ysleta prior to departure to the Texas Centennial Exposition. Dallas. Copyright does not apply.

traveled to El Paso on several occasions to examine the feasibility of such a project. He made a site survey of the Franklin Mountains and Hueco Tanks and explored funding potentials.

Borglum realized that the hard Hueco Tanks rock formation was far superior to the loose stone of the Franklin Mountains. He visited Hueco Tanks and developed a concept sketch for the proposed memorial. The sculptor also submitted a second centennial proposal—the placement of carved stone panels commemorating the region's history on the International Bridge between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.[30]

The sculptor proposed to carve a giant relief of Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions "with Indians in the background" on the rocky cliffs of Hueco Tanks.[31] The project, known as "The Hueco Tanks Mountain Memorial," was not realized because county voters on August 24, 1935, rejected a three-cent tax levy that would have supported land acquisition and development for new parks. If the county had accepted the $42,000 offer of Mrs. Pilar Escontrias, owner of the Hueco Tanks Ranch, the new park would have comprised an enormous area—the area encompassing Hueco Tanks plus four sections of land.[33]

During the next year, Gutzon Borglum and his supporters continued without success to promote the Hueco Tanks Mountain Memorial. Hueco Tanks did not become a state park until 1965 when the county purchased it for $115,000, a price that was more than twice the original offer. The new park includes the immediate area of "The Tanks," but not the four sections of land previously offered by the owner.[35] Borglum's Hueco Tanks memorial, if realized, would have been a national tourist attraction, but it also would have been a desecration of a sacred Native American site and a geologic wonder.

Texas Centennial Sponsors the Arts

The centennial stimulated public arts and spawned paintings, murals, sculptures, and plays about El Paso's rich multicultural heritage. Private and public monies, especially depression work programs, supported artists and writers, some of whom would become nationally recognized such as Tom Lea. The art projects promoted the area's historical heritage and tourism.

The artists, whose works celebrated the centennial included Tom Lea and José Aceves, Carillo Gonzáles, and Keith Martin.[36] Their paintings and drawings, with those of Leola Freeman, were prominently exhibited at the Texas Centennial Exposition.[37] Lea's large mural depicting the Texas cattle culture graced the wall of the Hall of State building at the Dallas exposition. His illustrations of centennial themes were featured in the *El Paso Herald Post's* Texas Centennial Edition.[38] In October of 1936, the McKee Construction Company completed construction of the Centennial Museum at the College of Mines. Above the building's entrance, Tom Lea created a large sandstone lintel depicting Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions at the Pass of the North in 1537.[39]



Tigua Indian with the Tribal Drum at Hueco Tanks. Damacio Colmenero, tribal Cacique with Sebastián Durán (right, with drum) at Hueco Tanks, ca. 1932.

In August 1936, Damasio Colmenero, Tigua tribal cacique, posed for a large oil portrait by artist Keith Martin in the Paso del Norte Hotel. The portrait was publicized as a centennial activity.[40] The painting was temporarily exhibited in the Paso del Norte Hotel where the artist had his studio.[41]

Tigua History Celebrated

Newspaper writers who made the public aware of the Tigua legacy included Cleofas Calleros, Marshall Hail, Joseph Ignatius Driscoll, Jeanie M. Frank and Betty Luther. The El Paso Diocese published Driscoll's centennial booklet, "El Paso the Land of Romance" on its 400th birthday.[42] *The Beginnings of Spanish Settlement in the El Paso District* by Anne E. Hughes was reprinted by the El Paso Public School system in 1934 as a Texas Centennial activity. The historical treatise, written in 1914, focused on the early history of the settlement in the El Paso region. Subsequently, it has been annotated and re-published by Ysleta del Sur Pueblo.[43]

Several centennial articles concerned the Tigua Indians. On August 24, 1935, Marshall Hail wrote a newspaper article entitled "Change of Priest at Ysleta Stirred the Indians to Revolt." It concerned an event, which occurred in 1890 when Father M. Penella, S. J., assigned a secular curate to Ysleta Mission. Bishop Pierre Bourgade decided to remove the Jesuits from the El Paso area.[44] The replacement infuriated the Tigua Tribe because they had not been consulted. As a result of Indian opposition, Bishop Dunne was forced to reverse his decision.[45]



Tiguas march with the Tribal Drum at the Texas Centennial Exposition, Dallas.

J. N. Phillips wrote an article entitled "Early Day Ysleta Indian Band Save Spanish Deserters From Punishment."

It included an oral history tradition that he had recorded from Manuel Ortega. It helped make the public aware of the tribe's contributions to the development of the region.

Centennial Markers Recognize Tigua History

The placement of commemorative markers was a major activity of the Texas Centennial. The El Paso County Advisory Board of the Texas Centennial Commission produced stone and bronze plaques funded by the state for $200 each.[46] A few markers were privately financed by local civic organizations. During the centennial observance, at least twelve historical markers were installed within El Paso County.[47]

Four markers within the region recognized Tigua contributions, all of which have survived. The State of Texas erected two markers at the Ysleta Mission commemorating Tigua Indian history.[48] The Knights of Columbus donated a third marker at the mission. The fourth marker recognized the battle of Sierra Vieja near Valentine, Texas.

The Texas Centennial funded the marker at the Ysleta Mission which recognizes the founding of Ysleta Mission and the pueblo as a result of the 1680 Pueblo Indian Revolt in New Mexico. The State Historical Survey Commission, Texas Highway Department, Texas Society of Colonial Dames, and the Knights of Columbus authored the text. The plaque was unveiled in front of the Ysleta Mission on July 16th, the feast day of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, instead of on June 13th the feast day of San Antonio, the tribal patron saint. It was dedicated on this date because the tribal delegation and Cleofas Calleros were attending the Texas Centennial Exposition from June 11th through the 13th.

The Texas State Council of the Knights of Columbus erected the second Ysleta Mission marker. Outlined on the stone's vertical face is a design that features a patronizing image of a Tigua Indian kneeling before a Franciscan missionary. Above the image and text is a bas-relief of the mission landscape. The marker credited the Franciscans for founding the mission. The text honored the church for "civilizing and Christianizing" the Tigua. The plaque referred to Ysleta as the first Indian and Spanish settlement in Texas, when in fact it was specifically an Indian pueblo and not a Spanish settlement.

Texas Centennial Text Recognizing the Ysleta Mission

"Site of the first mission in Texas, Corpus Christi De La Ysleta Del Sur, founded in 1682 by Don Antonio de Otermín and Padre Fray Francisco Ayeta, O.F.M. for the civilizing and Christianizing of the Tigua Indians, Pueblo revolt refugees, formerly located at La Ysleta, New Mexico. Building damaged by floods of the Rio Grande and later by fire, but rebuilt on the exact site and in part on the walls of the original structure. Nearby was established the Pueblo of Ysleta, first Indian and Spanish settlement in Texas. Erected by the Texas State Council, Knights of Columbus in 1936."[49]

"Paso Viejo Battle Plaque"

The historical marker that recognized Tigua valor at the battle of Paso Viejo was installed at that location on the Espy Miller Ranch near Van Horn. Simón Olguin, Tigua pueblo scout, and six buffalo soldiers were killed on June 11, 1880, as result of an Apache ambush.[50] The text plaque reads as follows:

> In this Vicinity June 12, 1880, the Apaches made their last stand in Presidio County when four Pueblo Indian Scouts of General Benj. H. Grierson, U.S.A. fought and defeated 20 Apache Warriors. Erected by the state of Texas 1936.[51]



President Roosevelt's motorcade at the Cotton Bowl with Tigua Indians, Texas Centennial Exposition. Dallas.

The date on the plaque is incorrect—it should be June 11th. Jack Shipman, local historian wrote the marker's text with the support of the Marfa Chamber of Commerce and the State of Texas. It was unveiled with a dedicatory ceremony, without Tigua Indian participation, on March 6, 1938.[52]

Mr. Shipman, program coordinator, remarked at the dedication that the Tigua Indians deserved recognition by the state. He stated in a letter to a member of the centennial organization: "I am indeed happy [that] the State of Texas has honored these valiant men with a marker. Wonder if you can find out if there are any of these Pueblo scout's descendants living in Ysleta now?"[53]

Summary

The Tigua Indians of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo participated in the state fairs of 1890, 1889 and 1936. The El Paso region was represented at these and other state fairs. Tribal involvement encouraged statewide recognition of their role in the historical development of the region and state.

The state fairs made Texas and the nation aware of the resources and economic potentials of El Paso and far west Texas. The centennial spawned many projects that would benefit education, the arts, and economic development. The 1936 Texas Centennial had a lasting positive impact on the El Paso region, which made people aware of a rich culturally diverse heritage.

All photos provided by the author.

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ENDNOTES
(continued)

26. *El Paso Times*, Feb. 9; Feb, 11, 1936; United States Library of Congress, The Gutzon Borglum Papers, McGee letter, Aug. 7, 1935.

27. *El Paso Herald*, July 10, 1929; Oct. 28, 1930.

28. *El Paso Herald*, July 19, 1909.

29. *El Paso Herald Post*, Jan. 24, 1935; Jan. 23, 1936.

30. US Library of Congress, Letter from G. Borglum to Rep. R. Ewing Thomason, May 8, 1935; Letter of May 6, 1935 to Mr. Arthur M. Huntington, Hispanic Society of America, from Earnest O. Bendix.

31. *El Paso Herald Post*, May 9, 1935; *El Paso Times*, Aug. 30, 1935.

32. *El Paso Times*, July 30, 1935; August 24, 1935.

33. *El Paso Herald Post*; July 22, July 24; July 30, 1935; *El Paso Times*, July 29, 1934 March 23, 1935; July 26, 1935.

34. El Paso Chamber of Commerce, Women's Division minutes, Feb. 1936, El Paso Public Library.

35. *El Paso Herald Post*, Sept. 12, 1965.

36. *El Paso Herald Post*, Jan. 27, 1936.

37. *El Paso Herald Post*, June 10, 1936.

38. *El Paso Herald Post*, May 3 0, 1936.

39. Metz, Leon C., *Robert E. McKee Master Builder*, edited by Nancy Hamilton (El Paso, Texas, Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation, 1997).

40. *El Paso Herald Post*, Aug. 26, 1936.

41. A subsequent article about the portrait included a biography of the artist and identified the local patrons (El Paso *Times*, May 31, 1936). Keith Martin studied portraiture under Wayman Adams (1883-1959), a well-known painter from Indiana. Martin later became a well-known portrait painter. Swarthmore College owns several Keith Martin paintings but the status of the cacique's portrait is unknown. Communication to N.P. Houser from Dr. Constance Hungerford, Provost and Mari S. Michener Professor of Art History, Swarthmore College, Dec. 19, 2003.

42. Driscoll. Joseph I., *El Paso The Land of Romance on its 400th Birthday*, in Diocese of El Paso Centennial Celebrations booklet, edited by Cleofas Calleros, El Paso. (Cited: Calleros, 1951: footnote #8.)

43. Hughes, Anne E., "The Beginnings of Spanish Settlement in the El Paso District, Vol. 1, No. 3" (Berkeley, California: 1915), Reprinted by El Paso Public Schools, 1935.

44. Owens, Lilliana, *Carlos M. Pinto, S. J., Apostle of El Paso 1892-1919*, Jesuit Studies-Southwest, No. 2. (El Paso, TX: Revista Catolica Press, 1951) 47.

45. *El Paso Herald Post,* Aug. 24, Aug. 29, 1935.

46. *El Paso Herald Post,* March 21, 1936; El Paso *Times,* Nov. 5, 1935; Sept. 21, 1936; Sept, 22, 1936.

47. *El Paso Times,* "Six Markers are Received" (title). "Pass to the North Monument Will be Unveiled at 6 p.m. Today. (subtitle). "Six more markers for historical points in El Paso County have been received and will be unveiled soon. Mrs. E.F. Quisenberry, chairman of the El Paso County Advisory Board of the Texas Centennial Commission, said today. They are: San Elizario, Socorro, Ft. Bliss, El Camino Real, Butterfield Stage station, and the Pass to the North."—[Pass to the North Marker]. The marker bears the inscription: "On May 4, 1598, Don Juan de Oñate, adelantado and captain general, Governor of New Mexico, first named El Paso del Rio del Norte. Through this old pass, the lowest snow free feasible route from Atlantic to Pacific through the Rocky Mountains, extend today the great trunk lines of telegraph and railroad. The City of El Paso marks the place and perpetuates the name. Erected by the State of Texas, 1936." *El Paso Times,* Sept. 21, 1936: 7:6. (See Calleros, 1951, page 16 photo of marker which is ". . . located opposite Courchesne rock quarry on Highway 80A, upper valley." 1936).

    Timmons, W.H. Historic Markers, Memorials, Plaques In El Paso, unpublished descriptive inventory, El Paso Public Library, special collections. 1980.

48. *El Paso Times,* June 28, 1936.

49. Many Tigua Indians were forced to serve as burden bearers during the march from New Mexico to El Paso del Norte. The burdens included food and supplies for the Spanish refugees, which had been seized from Tigua Indians at Isleta Pueblo, New Mexico. (Houser, Nicholas P. "Tigua Pueblo." *Handbook of North American Indians,* Vol. 9, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1979), 336-342.

50. U.S. National Archives, 1880, Record Group 94, Register of Enlistments; Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 137.

51. Houser, Nicholas P. 2003, "Tigua Indian Scouts in Defense of the Pass of the North—Three Centuries of Service" Vol 5. Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo Archives. (El Paso, 2003) 175-182. Three Tigua Indians held their ground to protect the body of their principal scout, while the soldiers retreated. The attacking Apaches withdrew from the battle.

52. Shipman Papers, 1938, El Paso Public Library,

53. Shipman Papers, Letter of Nov. 20, 1937, El Paso Public Library.