

AZTEC'S HISTORY

Aztec's recorded history begins in the summer of 1776 with the arrival of Father Francisco Atanosio Dominquez and Father Francisco Velaz de Escalante, two friars seeking a shorter overland route from Santa Fe to California. Dominquez and Escalante never did find a suitable trail to the missions of California. However, their efforts did provide a route for all other explorers and early settlers into the San Juan Basin region. Aztec's name can also be attributed to Escalante's finding large, ancient ruins that were believed to have been built by the Aztec Indians of Mexico.

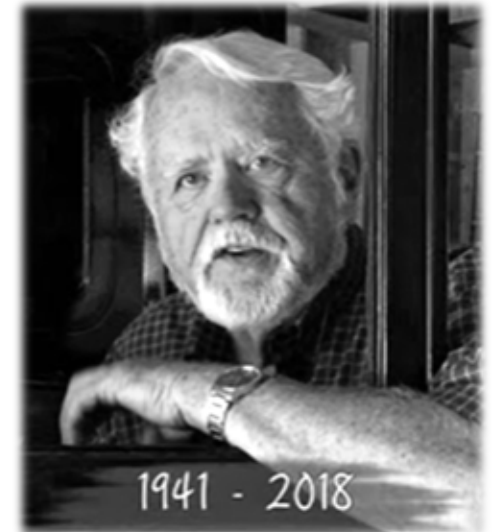
As an early trading post, Aztec became an established community in 1887. Unlike much of the West, Aztec settlers worked in agriculture and horticultural. Cattle and sheep were prevalent, however farming allowed Aztec to develop a character quite different from the rest of the Southwest. In 1895, Main Avenue boasted a blacksmith, drugstore, barber shop, livery barn, water-powered flour mill, saloon, mercantile store, two lawyers, a doctor and a dentist. By 1900, Aztec was a town of homes with picket fences and flower and vegetable gardens.

Agricultural helped grow Aztec's economy. In 1900, daily delivery to the post office was standard. Telephone service began in 1903, and by 1905 the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad operated a standard rail between Durango and Aztec, helping Aztec become a key shipping point for sheep and cattle. In 1908, DC-current electricity found its way to Aztec (converted to AC in the 1920s). In 1910 Aztec boasted 30 businesses including general merchandise, grocery, meat market, two newspapers, a bank, two lawyers, a bake shop, three doctors, two dentists, several carpenters and painters. The population of 700 people supported another 300 living in the surrounding farming communities. Aztec was the most convenient place to shop.

During The Depression, Aztec did not feel the ill effects as much as the rest of the nation. The bank did not close and citizens worked the land for food and supplies. Aztec was stagnant during the 1930s and '40s.

In 1901, the Durango Oil and Fuel Company drilled the first oil test in the county on the east side of Aztec. They drilled to depth of 1,700 feet, resulting in rainbow-colored water but no oil. In 1921 the Aztec Oil Syndicate began drilling on the outskirts of Aztec and found an abundance of oil at 985 feet. They then drilled to 1,750 feet and found natural gas, which was piped to Aztec for domestic and commercial use, making Aztec was the first town in New Mexico to use natural gas for fuel.

From 1916 to 1918, other companies found that "shallow" drilling produced oil. Drilling throughout the basin was increasing and bringing in oil field workers, many of whom were living in Aztec. In 1950, El Paso Natural Gas Company laid a transmission line extending the San Juan Basin to California. This gave Aztec increased revenue and greater opportunity for employment. Soon after, housing and businesses were booming. By 1955, Aztec's population was at an all time high: 7,000.



This Coloring Book is dedicated in honor of Dale Anderson. Dale played a major role in what the Aztec Museum and Pioneer Village has evolved today.