

Hacienda de los Martinez

Martinez Hacienda; Martinez House

1804–c. 1820, Antonio Severino Martinez; 1827–1882 alterations; 1974–1983 restoration. 708 Hacienda Rd. (Lower Ranchitos Rd.).

One of the best surviving and preserved Spanish Colonial houses in the American Southwest, the Martinez Hacienda documents life on the frontier of New Spain in the early nineteenth century.

In 1804, Antonio Severino Martín and his wife, María del Carmel Santistévan, moved with three of eventually six children from their home in Abiquiú to Taos Valley. Severino traced his ancestry to two *mestizo* brothers of mixed Spanish and Indian blood who had accompanied Juan de Oñate to New Mexico in 1598 and attained sufficient status to rank as Spaniards. As the family grew in Taos, their name evolved from Martín into “los Martines” and finally Martinez.

Arriving shortly after the plaza of Fernández de Taos (modern Taos) was founded in 1796, the Martinez family came seeking economic opportunity in what was then a remote edge of the far-flung Spanish Empire. They settled two miles south of Taos along the Rio del Pueblo (Taos River) in an area known as Los Ranchitos after the small ranches that Spanish colonists used seasonally to tend their livestock while continuing to live closer to the protective enclosure of Taos Pueblo to the north. After the provincial governor, Juan Bautista de Anza, lessened the threat of Indian raids by concluding a treaty with the Comanche in 1786, they began to stay more permanently in places like Ranchitos.

Severino Martinez expanded an existing four-room house and acquired additional land: at his death in 1827, he owned five parallel tracts abutting the river and amounting to five square miles. His house is now identified as a *hacienda*, but the term originally applied to the entire Martinez estate, including its *casa mayor* or main house. Large enough to be recognized locally as a *hacienda*, the estate was in fact small compared to those in Mexico, where such a property would have formed a more modest *estancia* or *ranchito*. Besides the family, the household had Native American servants, some of whom were owned as slaves. The Martinez hacienda grew crops (corn, squash, wheat, peas, and chili), raised livestock (primarily sheep,



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LOCATION



but also pigs, goats, oxen, mules, burros, and horses), and was an important trading post with Chihuahua, Mexico.

By the 1810s, Severino Martinez was the head, or *don*, of one of the wealthiest families in the Taos Valley. With Mexican Independence in 1821, he shifted his trade to the United States and entered local politics, serving both in the territorial government and as the mayor (*alcalde*) of Taos. His eldest son, Padré (Father) Antonio José Martinez, became in turn a prominent local figure who, as the parish priest of Taos, would oppose Bishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy's reform of the Catholic Church in New Mexico in the 1850s.

The *casa mayor* was at once the Martinez residence and a center of commercial, manufacturing, and agricultural activity, with a trading post, storerooms, workshops, and stables. Like the earlier plaza at **Ranchos de Taos**, it was a fortified structure with windowless outer walls capped by defensive parapets: the treaty of 1786 did not end the threat of Indians raids, which persisted into the nineteenth century. Despite its monolithic form, the house was not erected all at once but instead grew incrementally over nearly two decades, as building materials became available, seasonal chores permitted, and the need for more space arose.

Behind its cliff-like exterior, the house turns inward onto two courtyards (*placitas*), each entered through a double-gate entryway (*zaguán*) wide enough at approximately eleven feet for a wagon to pass. The front *placita* was the locus of daily life and functioned as an outdoor room. Shaded by porticoes (*portals*) on two sides (perhaps all four at one time), the *placita* held the household well along with one or more beehive ovens (*hornos*). Around it are thirteen single-file rooms: the family living quarters, kitchen, trading post and storerooms, and the *sala mayor*, a large formal room used for dances and community events. Most of these were entered directly from the courtyard, with only a few interior passageways between rooms. The rear *placita*, reached through an unusual arched corridor, was a corral for livestock. In addition to servants' quarters, it probably had stables and workshops for activities like weaving.

The house is built with adobe walls and roofs of vigas, on which are laid latillas or either split cedar or hand-hewn boards (*rajas*); a layer of grass, cattails, or rushes; and up to four feet of mud. The walls are plastered with clay mud and finished inside with *tierra blanca*, a whitewash mixture of white clay and wheat paste. Except for the *sala mayor*, with its floor of hand-hewn planks, the floors of packed earth are sealed with a mixture of clay, straw, wood ash, and either ox or cattle blood. Rooms typically had very little furniture apart from corner fireplaces, a few built-in benches (*bancos*), and storage boxes and bins.

Between 1827 and 1882, the house was altered by the addition of eleven exterior windows, two exterior doorways, and a portico on the east entrance facade. The property remained in the Martinez family until it was sold in 1931 to Desmond O'Ryan and Leona Read, who planned to make it a museum. After those plans fell through, the property reverted to the Martinez family in the 1940s, but was left unoccupied and began to fall into disrepair.

In *Taos Adobes* (1964), Bainbridge Bunting observed that the rear *placita* was entirely gone and concluded that the house had "deteriorated beyond the point of redemption." By then, however, the property had been purchased by Jerome and Anne Milford, who renovated and stabilized the remaining structure before they sold it in 1972 to the Kit Carson Memorial Foundation. Between 1974 and 1983, the foundation restored the house in stages to its present and presumed original form, though the reconstruction of the rear *placita* is necessarily conjectural.

The Martinez Hacienda is now owned by Taos Historic Museums and is open to the public during regularly scheduled hours.

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