

## **BRIEF HISTORIES**

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We live in a beautiful part of New Mexico. Every day we are surrounded by the clouds, the sky, the light on the distant mountains, the colors of the mesas. We are thankful for what we have. Los Alamos National Laboratory has provided employment and a chance to live here for many people. Yet the history of this land is not always apparent. I have undertaken to write a brief history of how our neighborhood was developed and of the land surrounding Pajarito Acres. The books and resources I've used are noted at the end of this article in the hope that you might be inspired to look deeper into the historical record.

*Kathy Gillespie, resident Pajarito Acres  
August 2016*

#### **Part I**

#### **Pajarito Acres, Development of Subdivision One**

The success of the wartime effort and the dedication of many of the workers at the "Lab" helped to continue the existence of Los Alamos. The town continued to grow, but housing was scarce. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) wanted to have more housing for the workers as well as remove itself from involvement in the housing market. Land on the plateau was sold to a developer and construction of homes in the White Rock area began in 1961. The plan for White Rock was established by 1963 and land could now be released for semi-rural two and three acre lots.

A group of people who lived and worked in Los Alamos wanted to have homes in a more rural neighborhood with room to have horses and other farm animals, tennis courts, a swimming pool near trails and open land. They began negotiations with the AEC in 1961 to obtain land for this development. They met and organized Pajarito Acres Development Association (PADA) and formally incorporated in February 1962. PADA was a group of volunteers who donated their time to this endeavor. United States Senator Clinton P. Anderson and representatives Joseph M. Montoya and Thomas G. Morris went on record as favoring this development.

Enough people put down earnest money and a contract was signed in July 1964 between the AEC and PADA to develop 150 homes on 578 acres. Originally it was proposed to develop, as one unit, the full area of the land south and east of State Road 4 between Pajarito and Potrillo canyons but after months construction and legal difficulties PADA withdrew from development of the last parcel of land. Cliffside Corporation was formed in September 1965 to manage this development, Subdivision 2.

*John B. Ramsay has written a full account of the development of Subdivision One, and it has been submitted to the Los Alamos Historical Society.*

## **Part II Pajarito Acres, Subdivision Two**

September 13, 1965 PADA transferred all responsibility for developing Subdivision Two to Cliffside Corporation, an entity created to develop these 149 acres. Subdivision Two divided 149 acres into 40 lots 2.5 acres and larger. These lots were on Estante Way, Hopi Lane and part of Potrillo Drive.

Henry Heyman, attorney for PADA, drew up the incorporation papers. It was to be integrated into the infrastructure of Subdivision One and would be under the same covenants, which restricted the use of the land yet gave freedom to owners to design their own house. These covenants also maintained the natural juniper/pinon forest in Pajarito Acres so that the neighborhood maintains much of the land's original characteristics.

In January and February of 1965, letters were sent back and forth between secretary John W. Taylor and Los Alamos county planner Ronald N. Short regarding the details of the original plat of Subdivision Two. A less conservative plan to increase the number of lots from 7 to 40 lots was proposed and accepted by County Planning Director Ronald Short. The consulting engineer, Lawrence A. Brewer of Farmington, NM was asked to adjust the plat. This was done and submitted in 10 days with construction drawings, drainage report, and a redrawn plat.

Other issues were worked out in a reasonable manner: Los Alamos attorney, Edwin W. Stockley, advised changes in the wording on the plat. Establishment of a sewer easement line across a lot in Subdivision One was granted and signed by the owners. Water easement language needed to be clear that water distribution is contained entirely within the public ways. Edwin Stockley observed it is not appropriate for the County to acquire ownership of gas, power or telephone system easements as they are not located within the public ways.

All references to gas, power and telephone system easements were removed from the dedicatory language. Arrival of the parts for the sewer lift station were delayed, but finally did come in time for construction to begin. People were eager to begin building and the final plat was signed and accepted by all parties on November 15, 1965. It was a great advantage that PADA had solved many of the problems in developing this land. The development of Subdivision Two represents cooperation and good will between Cliffside Corporation, PADA and the branches of Federal, State and County governments. Jerry Buchholz, treasurer of Cliffside, says "It was a 'magical' time of friendly cooperation between all interested parties."

The Bill of Sale for the land from the AEC was signed July 6, 1966. Other documents were sent to complete the transfer of ownership of the roads, water and sewer systems to

the County. Herman Roser, representing the AEC, sent a letter October 28, 1966 accepting the final completion of all the work performed under the contract with Cliffside. The Corporation was legally dissolved in 1970. The last check had been written, insurance was terminated, the books were closed. The task it had undertaken, to develop the land for residential use, was now complete.

In reading through the papers and letters one is struck with the competence, dedication and hard work by all involved. John Taylor and Jerry Buchholz worked many hours, all volunteer time. The engineer, Lawrence Brewer, was professional and did excellent work as did the Los Alamos County planner, Ronald Short. Fifty one years later their work is still serving the homeowners in Pajarito Acres.

*The documents and letters concerning Subdivision 2 are stored in the archives of PAHOA*

### **Part III**

#### **Estate Rim Trail, Public Parkland**

Significant for us today is the change in the original plan for a park. The first plan set aside a section of eight acres along the rim of White Rock canyon as a park leaving an 18 acre finger of land along Water Canyon that would still be owned by the AEC. The government did not want to own this land, which was wedged between the residential boundary and the cliffs of Water and White Rock Canyons. Engineer Lawrence Brewer responded to this request and made an alternate plat. The original park of eight acres along the White Rock rim became a lot for another home, now lot #241. The 16-acre section along the canyons with a 50-foot access strip was substituted for the first proposed park.

On March 19, 1965, the County Planner Ronald Short wrote to John Taylor informing him that the Planning Commission accepts the Preliminary Plat of Pajarito Acres Subdivision Two. But their acceptance was on the condition that the park and park strip between lots #219 and #230 be dedicated to the County of Los Alamos. The final plat shows the park as drawn in the alternate plat.

County Council passed Ordinances No. 252 and 254 in 1980, establishing land preservation status for 60 public lands. The Pajarito Acre parks are listed on page 2 of Ord. 252. Since then the park has been mainly ignored by the local government. An effort this past year has been made to accurately show the name, location and zoning status on all county maps and to list it on the hiking trails of Los Alamos/White Rock.

As of this writing (August 2016) The Los Alamos Comprehensive Plan and Open Space Management Plan is being worked out. The Estate Rim Trail is proposed, by the Parks Department to be zoned W-1. This is the highest zoning protection level for lands to be preserved in their natural state. This process will take time and it may not be settled until next year. If there are more people who know about this natural park, this may help to protect the land from development and the subsequent loss of its natural beauty.

Rock climbers started using the land in 1954 to gain access to the climbing rocks above the Rio Grande and Water Canyon. This land also connects to the extensive back country trails, open to the public, in the adjoining DOE land. Today bicyclists, climbing clubs, horseback riders, hikers with their dogs and family, the elderly and visitors from lower elevations enjoy using this easy trail. They come to view the river below and see the distant Sangre de Cristo and Jemez mountains. The sound of the Rio Grande 800 feet below, the undeveloped land around the park and the solitude reward the person who makes the short hike from the trail head on Estante Way to the rim. A fortunate person may see an eagle as it soars along the rim, or hear the call of the canyon wren from below.

*From Wallace Stegner's Wilderness Letter.*

*"Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed;...if we pollute the last clear air and dirty the last clean streams and push our paved roads through the last of the silence."*

*The documents and letters concerning Estante Rim Trail are stored in the archives of PAHOA*

Residents and others who use and appreciate this beautiful natural parkland want to share their enjoyment of the trail with friends, visitors, and neighbors. Here are some comments from trail users:

***Comments:***

From Peter Lindberg: I walk this trail nearly every day with my enthusiastic dogs. Incredible peace, mountains, sunsets, sunrise and moonrise, a very spiritual place. Heavily used by rock climbers also with good access to superb climbing. Folks come from hundreds of miles away and other states to use this area. Have been using this easy trail for well over 20 years.

From Mary Lindberg: We chose to live in Los Alamos because of the great trails nearby and the outdoor beauty. We moved to Estante Way in 1975. As the years have gone by and we grow older the smooth easy Estante Rim Trail has been a joy to hike. Through the years we have seen deer, elk, raccoon, fox, coyote, other critters, bugs and insects of all variety, hawks and many other birds. We have friends from around the country come to visit and we hike the trail with them. A unique aspect is the ability to access cave dwellings, spot pot shards, worked stone and walk in the footsteps of the ancients. This is an important community resource, which is a benefit to our hometown as a natural resource. It is an economic attraction and delight to all who gaze at the magnificence of White Rock Canyon.

From Evelyn Campbell: Mary Deal sold us our five-acre lot in Pajarito Acres in November, 1965. She discouraged us from buying it because it was not level and would be hard to build on. That was the reason it was interesting to us. We built into the "hill", which is a flat-topped mesa of volcanic tuff. On the hillside are collapsed cavates where the Anasazi had lived. The smoke stains in the roof of the dwellings can still be seen. Stan Ulam had purchased the lot next to ours. One day when all of us were exploring our lots, he pointed to one of the cavates and said, "Why do we have to worry about where to build a house, those people didn't." I used to take my grandson (now 33 years old) on walks on the trail back to where we could find similar traces of dwellings in the rocks and rock art. It was fun. This area is half way between Tsankawi and Bandelier, so it makes sense that the Anasazi were here as well.

From an interview with Rosie Colgate: Rosie and her husband moved to Pajarito Acres in 1987. After moving into their home they discovered the Estante Rim Trail located across the street. They felt it was a beautiful addition to their property. Almost every day they would walk the trail and enjoy the open country with big views all around them of the canyons and unspoiled land. Rosie says "the beauty was fabulous any time of the day, morning, noon or at sundown".

From Steve Doorn: Los Alamos has done a wonderful job of preserving its open spaces and associated trails and maintaining these areas in as natural a state as possible. When one considers the recent losses of our nearby forests due to the Cerro Grande and Las Conchas fires, I think it is especially important that the county becomes even more protective of the natural areas that remain. With these comments in mind, we strongly support the current efforts to preserve the area surrounding the Estante Rim Trail in its current natural state and as an Historic Area as well.

Steve Doorn also wrote: I would like to submit some more comments on the Estante Rim trail. I have been a resident of Los Alamos County for 24 years and have enjoyed hiking on the Estante Rim trail and nearby trails regularly during that time. I have recently moved near the trail head and now use the trails almost daily. The Estante Rim trail and the easy access it provides to the connecting trail network is a big reason why we moved into the area and the natural state of the trail and surrounding area is very important to us. Any alteration of the current character would be a big loss to the community. We consider the natural beauty of the area significant and look forward to sharing it with out of town visitors as well as with local friends. Another aspect that makes the natural state of the area significant is the range of wildlife it attracts. Most recently we have noticed a nesting pair of raptors in the area. While I am not a bird expert, I believe this is a pair of Peregrine falcons and would be very interested to hear if someone else can confirm this. I believe the falcons would not be attracted to the area if it were disturbed in any significant manner. In addition to the above qualities, the area also has a number of petroglyphs. Off one of the connecting trails we have found what appears to be an old

shepherd's or homesteader's cabin. These historical remnants add to the uniqueness of the area and should be preserved.

From Janet Estrada: Estante Rim Trail is the most amazing trail I have ever been on! Where else can you be so close to the Rio Grande, the grand view of its canyons and mesas, rock formations and authentic dwellings of the Anasazi!? Such breath taking beauty, so unique in what it offers! I have very fond memories of growing up with this trail just next to our property. I feel I may have not taken advantage of the extreme beauty so available to me as a child. Looking back, I am in awe of the memories I keep with me always of the place I grew up. Such a privilege

From Teri and Gary: We lived on Estante Way for 27 years. When we were preparing to move away, one of the things we knew we would miss the most was the Estante Rim Trail. We were on that trail at least one out of every three days. That is a lot of trail time. We took dinner guests there, out-of-town guests, and our dogs, in good and bad weather. We think the trail should be placed on the Los Alamos County Trails map and recognized as a Historic Area.

From: Norbert, Albuquerque Mountaineers

I looked at the Mountaineers history and It says that Potrillo Cliffs were discovered in 1954. Also we started going to the Big Enchilada, which uses the same approach trail, in the mid-70's. Potrillo is also used by the Albuquerque climbing club for some of their outings. Hope this helps a bit!

From David DeSimone: My family and I use this trail one to two times per week. We would like to keep this trail as it is. I live near the trail and every nice weekend I see many people walk down the trail for hiking or mountain climbing. This is a sign that residents and out-of-towners enjoy the scenery and challenging hikes. I am thinking this will be a great hike for cub/boy scouts this summer.

From Diane J. Spengler: The Estante Rim trail, how to start?... I LOVE this trail. I moved from near Overlook park about six years ago and I thought the trail by that house was irreplaceable for me I was so wrong. I hike the Estante trail almost every day with my dogs frequently heading to the very edge to see the Rio. In comparison to the other trails I have hiked in the area this one is the best kept, although it is obvious that the amount of foot traffic is tremendous I have never once had to pick up trash or seen any abuse. It is obvious that I am not the only one who loves this area. This trail and park are beautiful and lead to many more miles of protected trail on LANL land. The adjacent LANL property is protected from any development because it is natural breeding ground for eagles. Recent movement at the laboratory to post entrance signs and protective fencing is testament to the desire to keep the area undamaged for future generations. The entrance to these trails and the county park should also be protected. I have seen evidence of wildlife and cultural reasons to protect this area, recent sightings of a bobcat, deer, eagles,

pottery shards this area is rich in all of those and a real treasure for the locals for hiking and especially climbing (the wall on the edge has had climbers every evening for the past few weeks) it is fun to see and hear people enjoying all this area has to offer. Please consider protecting it now and for the future inhabitants both two legged and four.

From: Jeanne Gillespie, What the trail out back means to me: How do I describe my feelings about the trail next to my parents house, the house where I grew up in and I return to yearly as a place of peace, quiet and incredible beauty? This trail is a big part of many peoples' lives. We enjoy this most beautiful and amazing trail to great hiking, rock climbing, horseback riding, undisturbed beauty and quiet. As far back as I remember I have been hiking those trails, feeling fortunate to live in such a beautiful place. When I was younger I rode my horse all through those trails feeling like I was in the wild west. The beauty, vistas, caves, wild creatures and birds are unsurpassed. To stand anywhere out there and feel the quiet and solitude is refreshing to the soul.

A Pajarito Acres girl in my heart and soul

#### **Part IV**

##### **Brief History of the Pajarito Plateau, the mesas and canyons from Cochiti to Puye**

The first people arrived on the Plateau about 1200 AD. They built a number of large towns in the canyons and on the high ridges with year-round habitation. Many small structures were also built on the ridges and in scattered south facing caves. These were used for shelter during hunting and gathering activities. Trails would have crossed the country back and forth using the natural, easy pathways dictated by the ridges and deep canyons.

All the people left and moved to the valleys below by 1550 AD. There were no permanent residents on the plateau until the Spanish came and finally established their rule in 1680. The Pajarito Plateau was distant from the nearest towns and was included in the land grant system that was used to populate New Mexico. Former soldier Pedro Sanchez in 1742 requested and was granted land to help him support his large family of 12 children, 3 orphaned nephews and several servants. He was given title to approximately 38,000 acres, stretching from the north rim of Frijoles Canyon to Pajarito Canyon, between the Jemez Mountains on the west and the Rio Grande to the east. The boundaries were not exact but the custom of the people was to be easy about these matters.

The Sanchez family used the land mostly for warm weather grazing of their stock and for wood gathering. He built a summer cabin near the Rio. The land grant was not fenced, water was scarce, winters were harsh, and it did not lend itself to more development. Grazing rights were granted to other family and community members as was the custom of the culture. The 38,000 acres could reasonably sustain about 200 head of cattle each year. Light rain years and poor soil meant grasses did not grow back easily.

The land was sold in 1851 by eight of the eleven Sanchez heirs to Jose Ramon Vigil. The price he paid was a yoke of oxen, 36 ewes, one ram and twenty dollars in cash. His name was attached to the tract, and the land is still named Ramon Vigil Grant on maps today. The old customs of easy land boundaries, and allowing people to graze their cattle on the land continued. Early in the 1870s Ramon Vigil, who was now in his 70s, sold the land to Father Hayes for \$4,000. Father Hayes acted as a custodian of the land until 1880 when he sold it to two men who lived in the east for \$3.00 per acre for the substantial amount of \$100,000.

The old economy of barter and subsistence farming changed when the railroad came in 1880. The economy became based on money and the buying and selling of goods. The owners wanted to earn back the high price of the land and profit was now the goal of the new owners. A three-year lease was sold to W. C. Bishop, from Texas, to graze a herd of 3,000 cattle. The land could not sustain this large number. Two very severe winters killed many of the animals. Native grasses did not grow back and were replaced with plants from lower elevations that were useless for the cattle. The Texan did not renew the lease and left on the railroad three years later with what remained of his stock.

The owners next effort at profitable land use was to lease the timber rights to lumberman Harry S. Buckman from Oregon. He built a bridge across the Rio in White Rock Canyon. This washed out the first year. Other bridges also washed out. He built roads to his lumber camp in Water Canyon, bunkhouses, and corrals. The cost of running this project and the lack of large stands of trees caused Buckman to pack up and leave in 1903. He claimed he had barely broken even during his years on the plateau.

The new economy the railroad brought, the change from subsistence and barter to one based on money and goods, was a basis for animosity between the old and new cultures. Old attitudes toward land use persisted in the Hispanic community. Three heirs of Pedro Sanchez, who had not sold their share of the land, wanted a portion of the profits made by Buckman and his timber sales. They sued in 1903 for their part of the money. Transcript of the trial shows how different the new land laws were from the previous laws. The heirs proved their use of the land but lost the suit because they had not paid taxes on the land. History of use did not count, and the new land laws prevailed.

Ancient native artifacts found in the abandoned habitations on the plateau in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century began to interest the scientific world. Adolf Bandelier was the first to show determined interest. An account of the efforts to create a national park of the Pajarito Plateau is too long and involved for this short essay. Although the plan did not succeed, a small part of the proposed park is now Bandelier National Monument.

Frank Bond and Company, Inc., was the last private entity to own the Ramon Vigil Grant. G.W. Bond and wife Agnes, sold the land to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for \$34,330.47 on December 20, 1934. Roads and buildings in Frijoles Canyon were developed and administered by the Federal Government. In late 1942, the Pajarito Plateau

was requisitioned for wartime use. Quickly, in December of that year, the boys' school that had been in Los Alamos since 1917 was closed. The summer homesteaders were paid for their land and left. The project to develop the atomic bomb and the modern era began. Today untrained eyes look at the plateau and see a land, if not lush, at least well forested with juniper and pinion. Overgrazing, careless and unplanned cutting of timber, and suppression of the small natural fires that replaced soil nutrients has changed the grasses and forest. Native grasses have been choked out by thick patches of weeds, and the forest in many places is thickly over grown. Tests of the soil show it is very low in nitrogen, phosphorus and organic matter and is slightly alkaline and salty. One person wrote, "essentially it is mainly sand."

People who live in White Rock and the neighborhoods of Pajarito Acres and La Senda enjoy the beauty that still remains. Many birds, large mammals, small reptiles, and insects live on the plateau and share this lovely land with the population of Los Alamos County. The distant views of the mountains and the unforgettable New Mexico sky continue to inspire and enrich the lives of all who live and visit this land.

*Resources for this brief history of the Pajarito Plateau:*

On Rims and Ridges, the Los Alamos Area since 1880, Hal K. Rothman  
Anasazi Ruins of the Southwest in Color, William M. Ferguson and Arthur H. Rohn  
Land Grants & Lawsuits in Northern New Mexico, Malcolm Ebricht  
The Peopling of Bandelier, Edited by Robert P. Powers  
Transcript of the "Prince Trial", 1903