

# EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS

## La Tiendita General Store



### **Introduction:**

This little store would have served the needs of both ranch and local residents. After the opening of the Old Santa Fe Trail, residents were able to purchase some of the goods that had been previously absent or difficult to obtain—particularly tools and building materials. With the coming of the railroad to New Mexico in the 1880s, a flood of goods came to the shelves of stores. Items such as kerosene lamps, fresh citrus, printed cottons, clothing patterns, notions, canned goods, dyes and seed packets would fill the shelves of the country store.

Of equal importance was the role that these small stores played in the gathering of raw materials and basic products of the land. In the case of outlying stores like *La Tiendita*, the goods gathered were wool and wool products. These local products were transported, along with livestock, back to towns like Las Vegas, New Mexico, home of the mercantile empires of the Ilfeld Company, Brown & Manzanares and Otero, Sellers & Company. These companies not only stocked the shelves of little stores but also gathered the products of the ranch that would then be shipped via the railroad back East. As a result the culture rapidly began to change in New Mexico. In the same way we see American goods influence foreign cultures today,

for better or worse, the quantities of manufactured goods from the east had a great influence on the New Mexican Territory. This influence is most noticeable in the contrast between the *Golondrinas Placita* that highlights the colonial era, the Baca House which emphasizes the transition between the colonial era and the opening of the Santa Fe Trail and the coming of the Americans and the Mora House when the influences of the coming of the railroad to the territory and later the state are fully realized.

Even the smallest stores of this period would be packed with both local and imported goods; the demand was great and the railroad made the importation of goods possible. Below are the varieties of goods and their uses:

**Medicine:** Medicine and tonics were widely available as represented by the small clear glass jars with original paper labels. These include:

*Epsom Salt* Relief of minor sprains & bruises in a bath

*Syrup of Ipecac* Causes vomiting

*Tincture of Iron* Helps cure anemia

*Tincture of Benzoin* Treats damaged skin

*Rose Water* Used for skin care and in sweets

*Oil of Wintergreen* Reduces headaches, fever & sore throat

*Syrup of Squills* Stimulating expectorant

*Chloroform Lineament* Helps sore limbs

*Compound of Licorice Powder* Treats coughs & ulcers

*Sweet Oil* Helps earaches & earwax removal

**Food and Food Service:** Plates, bowls, cups, coffee pots and spiders (frying pans) were in large supply. Tin products because of their light weight and durability for shipping were available in quantity but there were significant imports of cast iron and later stoneware. Knives, forks and spoons made of wood, tin, steel and cast iron would be available for purchase. At larger stores silverware would also be available. Non-perishable food made its way out west in the form of tinned and canned fruits and vegetables, salted and jerked meat stored in barrels, coffee, flour, dried beans, and tinned lard. Sugar had always been sought after and here you see it in paper wrapped cones. These could have been imported from the east or from Mexico. American sugar cones would gradually be replaced by granulated sugar in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century while cones are still produced in Mexico and South America. Wheat would continue to be grown and ground locally but the rail would bring a healthy

dose of competition with ground flour and corn meal in the white cloth sacks you see here. While locally grown produce could be found at small stores most people depended on their own gardens and anything found here would typically be surplus including eggs and meat. Wine and brandy had always been a staple in New Mexico and was traded up and down the *Camino Real*, but the railroad brought an influx of both whiskey and brandy. Wine and spirits would be stored in the glass bottles, jugs, and barrels seen here in the store. Santa Fe Trail merchant inventories show the importation of these spirits from the east as early as the 1830s.

**Personal Effects and Household Goods:** Items related to personal appearance, luxury goods, trinkets, notions and household tasks are found in *La Tiendita*. In the small glass case is manufactured lye soap, tin and silver boxes to hold personal goods, mirrors and toys such as marbles and jacks. Pipes are available along with pipe tobacco in the case and twist tobacco hanging from the *vigas*. Both could be used in pipes or rolled in paper and it was common for men and women to smoke. On the shelves, the glass oil lamps would have been greatly in demand since they provided ample light with a modest amount of fuel consumption. It was common for stores to be stocked with numerous extra glass shades since they were easily broken. Even with this more modern product, candles continued to be sold. Lamps needed fuel and the small tin cans with spouts hold oil. Cleaning products were always needed and the store stocked brooms, washing boards and as previously mentioned lye soap. This particular soap was very harsh and was probably used primarily for laundry as Northern New Mexicans had a long-standing tradition of using yucca root. Almost an entire shelf is devoted to radiant heat irons for pressing clothes. The result of line drying garments demanded the use of an iron. Households had multiple cast-iron clothing irons allowing one to always be heating while others were in use.

**Clothing:** Early settlers relied upon woolen, cotton and leather clothing primarily of their own manufacture with the addition of fancy fabrics and articles of clothing brought north on the *Camino Real*. With greater access to printed fabrics, yard goods, needles, thread and the other tools necessary to make clothing, householders were able to expand their ability to clothe their families. The small display case holds precious needles. Thread was a favored product, especially linen and sinew due to their strength. Durable canvas and yards of calico and other prints were a welcome addition. Ladies were able to join the world of current fashion by following the trends in patterns available and could add buttons, ribbons, beads and other decorations to their creations. Sewing machines were a prized purchase of women in both the east and the west. Such a labor saving device represented an important purchase for any family.

**Tools:** New Mexicans had always been resourceful in creating and repairing their own tools. Even the raw materials for their creation were hard to come by. However, with the introduction of the railroad, readily available manufactured tools and equipment needed for farming, construction, animal husbandry, hunting and trapping were more available. Tools such as axes, shovels and hammers line the

wall. Nails were shipped in barrels and sold by the pound. Horse tack and riding equipment would be a necessity and in this store bridles and spurs are for sale. The rope hanging from the ceiling served a variety of tasks; was sold in lengths and would be made from horsehair or hemp. Hunting, trapping and fishing were a part of everyday life and required specific tools for success. Here you see small game traps hanging on the wall and fishhooks in the small case. Farming of corn, beans, squash and wheat had always taken place with seed cultivation being done by individual families. But seed packets were a new product offering a wide variety of fruits and vegetables for smaller gardens.