



Left, Lowry Pueblo as it appeared forty years ago, when the author began to dig. Below, restored Lowry Pueblo, a National Historical Landmark. The two photographs were taken from nearly the same spot.

About forty years ago the postmaster of Spargo, Colorado, Mr. Courtney Dow, wrote that he would like to show me a large and unique ruin, perched on the rim of Cow Canyon in southwestern Colorado.

I visited the site in the company of Mr. Dow and found that it *was* large, interesting and untouched. I also noted that it included a Great Kiva—which made it unique for this area for, at that time, Great Kivas were known mostly from an area called Chaco Canyon, New Mexico. And here was one some 200 miles away from the homeland of such great ceremonial structures!

That fact aroused my curiosity about this site. Many questions came to mind, the most obvious one being “was there a relationship between the Great Kiva at Lowry Pueblo and those to the south and east?”

We spent four seasons at Lowry Pueblo, 1930–34, and excavated 37 dwelling rooms, eight kivas and the Great Kiva, or about 95 percent of the site. We were shot at by a homesteader who thought we were stealing his gold treasure (sic)! We endured snows, rains, floods, and droughts; we operated on a budget that was modest indeed (one year it was \$1,000); we weathered a depression; and yet we got a lot done. During our last season, we received heaven-sent help in the form of labor from the County Emergency Relief Administration (later W.P.A.).

What are some of the results of those four years of digging and research:

The site on which the pueblo was built is a knoll overlooking a small canyon at the bottom of which was formerly a small, permanent stream fed by springs. On clear days, to the southwest one can see the odd formations of sandstone that give their name to Monument Valley.

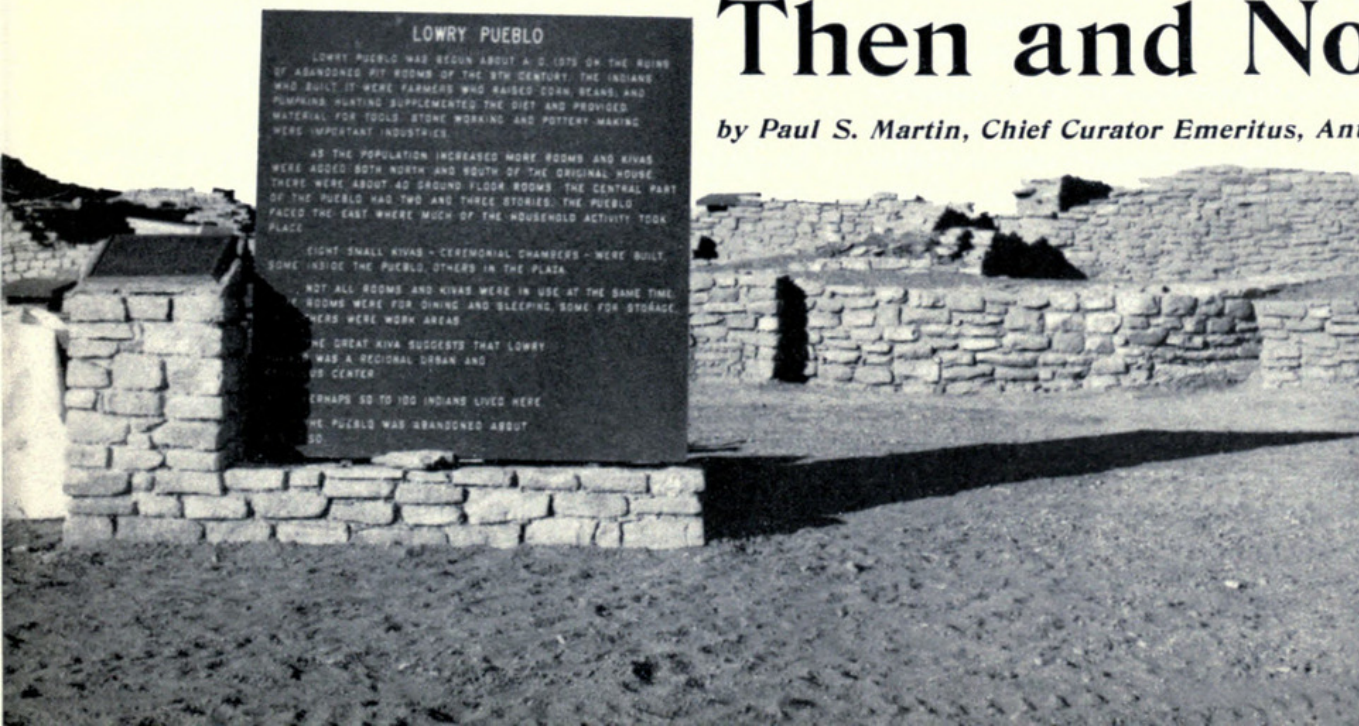
Sometime about A. D. 500–700, a group of farmer Indians settled on this knoll and dug their abodes, called pit houses, in the virgin clay. Several such subterranean structures were encountered beneath the walls and floors of the later town and below the floors of kivas, which are themselves also subterranean. Pottery and tools of stone and bone were found still present on these most ancient and earliest floors.

It seems likely that these first comers remained at the site, for it had many advantages to an incipient farmer folk and would not lightly be relinquished.

# Lowry Pueblo

## Then and Now

by Paul S. Martin, Chief Curator Emeritus, Anthropology





About the year A.D. 900, the pit house inhabitants embarked on a program that was eventually to alter radically their way of life. They built a cluster of four rooms or so with contiguous walls of stone masonry on *top* of the ground. Thus came into being a "pueblo," which means "village" and implies the so-called honeycomb structure of adjoining rooms, with stone-masonry partitions that served as a common wall for two rooms. This arrangement is a great economy in effort. The old-time subterranean abodes were retained as places of worship and rituals and still are today, called "ki-va"—or, literally, "house-old"—a most appropriate appellation.



*These two photos show the Great Kiva as it was when first found and as it looks today. Nearly 50 feet in diameter, the Great Kiva was the religious center of the Pueblo, and may have served the same function for nearby satellite communities.*

I am unable to give the explanation for this great change, but I am fairly sure it was brought about by a modification in some aspect of their culture, such as a shift in the economy, in the sociology, in the religion, or in all three. It was certainly an adaptation to a changing environment.

As the families extended through marriage, more rooms were added. When a daughter married, she brought her husband (from a nearby village) to live with her and her family, and more rooms were added to make space for the additional people. Family "suites" can be clearly observed by noting architectural features, connecting doors, and similarities in masonry styles.

Staple foods were beans, corn, and squash, plus meats obtained by hunting deer, antelope, mountain sheep, elk, and smaller mammals.

As the town grew in size, it became gradually more important. A Great Kiva some 47 feet in diameter was built, which is twice or three times as big as the smaller kivas. It is possible that this feature, the only one in the immediate area, also served nearby satellite communities.

The Great Kiva and much of the pottery are stylistically similar to great kivas and the pottery found in Chaco

Canyon, New Mexico, about 100 miles southeast of Lowry.

Eventually, the pueblo encompassed 50 rooms, and was two stories high. If all the rooms were simultaneously occupied, Lowry may have housed a population of about 60 to 100.

About A.D. 1200, the town was abruptly abandoned. Personal and family items were left behind when the people moved out.

Why was this pueblo abandoned? Why were hundreds of other towns also forsaken—mostly in the 13th century? Many explanations have been suggested, although none of them has been set up as a hypothesis to be tested. I

think we can definitely rule out epidemics, invasions, or meteoritic showers.

Two possibilities remain: a change in the pattern of rainfall so that moisture came at the wrong time of year to make possible the successful raising of crops. If farmers cannot grow crops, they cannot eat—and one solution is to move on. Where they moved is not known.

The second possible explanation is that the people had progressed as far as they could. Without a new technology for growing crops or new source of energy, they were doomed.

After we finished our work, Lowry Pueblo was again abandoned—the first time, about A.D. 1200, and the second time, in 1934. And there this ancient village stood, untended, unwanted, unnecessary.

It remained in obscurity until just three years ago. In 1965, Dr. Robert Lister, Professor of Anthropology, University of Colorado, Boulder, in cooperation with the United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, recommended that Lowry Pueblo be set aside as a "National Historic Landmark."

I am indebted to the Colorado State Director of the



Bureau of Land Management, Mr. E. I. Rowland, who informs me that “. . . the Historic Landmark program is handled by the Park Service. Designation of a site is made by the Secretary of the Interior. The Historic Sites Act of 1935 directs the Secretary of the Interior to make a nation-wide survey for the purpose of determining those of exceptional value. The survey is conducted by National Park Service historians and archaeologists. Their recommendations are screened by a Consulting Committee and by the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historical Sites, Buildings and Monuments. The Board then submits its recommendations to the Secretary who has final responsi-

In two seasons' time (1966-1967) and with the help of excavators, masons, and bulldozers, Mr. Lancaster finished the imposing job.

On October 17, 1967, Lowry Pueblo was dedicated by the members and more than 300 guests of the Colorado office of the Bureau of Land Management. After an invocation given in Navajo by a Navajo Indian, some Hopi children from a nearby school (Fort Lewis) put on a brief sacred dance, perhaps reminiscent of ancient ceremonial dances. A few remarks by guests, and a dedication announcement and the brief ceremony ended with Lowry Pueblo now a *National Historic Landmark*.



Left, Paul Martin's party excavating the small kiva at Lowry, in 1931. At right, Paul Martin atop a 1926 Pierce-Arrow touring car. Martin filmed the area and the site from this vantage point.

bility for declaring sites eligible for the Registry of National Historic Landmarks.”

Mr. Rowland also advised me of some of the criteria used in selecting Landmarks. The site must have exceptional value in American history and must have produced information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures or shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States.

Lowry Pueblo passed all requirements. All that remained was to implement the decision of the Secretary by reopening and repairing the site. A team was organized to draw up plans for the re-excavation and stabilization of the pueblo, kivas and Great Kiva. This group consisted of Lister and experts from the Bureau of Land Management, William E. Claycomb, R. F. Noble, James H. O'Connor, E. I. Rowland, W. Reynolds, and A. W. Zimmerman.

Mr. Allan Lancaster, famous in the National Park Service for his excavations and restorations at Mesa Verde National Park, was placed in charge of the work. By a happy coincidence, Mr. Lancaster was my chief assistant at Lowry ruin and others from 1928-1932. No person more eminently fitted for the job of rehabilitating Lowry Pueblo could have been found.

I was invited to be present at the ceremony, which was simple and moving. It seemed strange to be sitting on a platform with Al Lancaster and other notables and to realize that some 30 years earlier, I had partially earned my spurs by excavating this site.

Today, Lowry Pueblo is reached by good roads in less than an hour from Cortez, Colorado. All the wind-blown dirt that had accumulated against the outer walls of the building during 10 centuries has been removed. I saw walls and other features that I had never before seen, since we could not afford to move such masses of dirt (thousands of tons). The Great Kiva has been completely restored except for the roof. The rooms are easily viewed from many key spots and at these spots the Bureau of Land Management has erected informative, easily-read signs that give the tourist a clear idea of what he is looking at. A bronze plaque denoting national ownership and other addenda greet the visitor as he walks toward this great and ancient town.

Today, Lowry Pueblo is an impressive and noble sight. I was awed, because I realized that here Man had lived, worshipped, adapted to an arid ecological environment and had at last been forced to relinquish his heritage—because corn no longer would grow?





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