

# Tubac

By Deborah Neff

The town of Tubac, located about halfway between Tucson and Nogales on the Santa Cruz River, is a town of just under 1200. During the year, many of its visitors come to enjoy Tubac's colorful local art, Mexican souvenirs, and fine dining. Some come for the history.

Tubac was established as Arizona's first Spanish colonial garrison in 1754, prior to the founding of the Spanish military fort that would later become Tucson. Called "*Cuwak*" by the Tohono O'odham, Tubac's establishment as a Spanish colonial garrison incorporates a borderland history that includes O'odham uprisings, Apache attacks in the 1840's, and a major Apache siege in 1961. Tubac was also home to a Spanish mission, part of a string of more than 20 Spanish missions in eight mission districts.

Archaeologists say the town may have been occupied for over 11,000 years: by prehistoric mammoth hunters, the Hohokam, and, more recently, the O'odham who greeted the missionaries in 1645. Tubac has been part of three large nations: Spain, Mexico (since 1851), and since 1853, the U.S. Its foods, like the foods of the region, reflect its unique history. Led by Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, the Spaniards introduced cattle and wheat, and changed the landscape forever with the introduction of the horse that would be used by marauding Apaches to force Hispanic settlers into walled garrisons, like those at Tubac and Tucson.

In 1775, due to a reorganization of defenses, the Tubac garrison moved to Tucson, its corner towers reaching 20 feet high to defend against invasion. With a natural spring nearby and good farmland, the fort was used until Americans came to Tucson in 1856. Garrison life is reenacted in living history events in downtown Tucson today among what remains of the old fort. Like Tubac, Tucson was also once an O'odham village, its name derived from the Tohono O'odham word, "Chuk-son," shorthand for "village of the dark spring at the foot of the mountains."

By the time the first Spanish colonists arrived, some Native Americans were already growing European-derived grains, vegetables and fruits, supplementing staples of corn, beans and squash, and foods gathered from the desert. Cattle ranching, introduced by the Spaniards, had also begun to take hold, but herds were small. Pioneering Hispanic colonists lived lives of self-subsistence and hard work, much like Native Americans in the region did, well into historic times.

Which brings us back to food. Traditional food—Tubac food, Tucson food, and traditional southern Arizona food, more generally, is a colorful intermixture of recipes from the Native American, Spanish, cowboy, and Mexican—primarily Sonoran—foods eaten by those who came before. Foods that have come to be characteristic of our region's unique cultural history include a predominance of beef, wheat flour tortillas (rather than corn), green corn tamales, and pinto, rather than black, beans. Today Tucson

also boasts an endless variety of foods from all over the U.S. and Europe, along with foods brought into Tucson from people who have traveled afar, further enriching our menus, tastes, and palettes.

\*This piece appeared in *Flavors and Folklore of Southern Arizona*, Long Realty Cares (2016, p. 11)