# Collections through the Eyes of Docents

In the early 1950s, Shirley Jolly Minge and Ward Alan Minge took a late 19th century adobe building and in Corrales and turned it into a plazuela-style rancho to house their collection of vernacular art from New Mexico's Spanish Colonial and Territorial periods into the twentieth-century. The collection is now explored and highlighted through docent led tours at Casa San Ysidro: The Gutiérrez/Minge House. *Collections through the Eyes of Docents* offers a behind the scenes look at the histories and anecdotes collected from docent knowledge about the Minge Collection.

## Pitchfork in the Stone Barn

**By Carla Wright**

About 5' in height, the pitchfork in the Stone Barn was fashioned from one piece of wood, possibly the hackberry tree. The long handle and the four tines are one single piece of wood; it was burnished to add strength for farm work.

Setters had to utilize right brain or spatial qualities to solve survival needs: in the case of the pitchfork, being able to recognize branch and root formations as a basis for a tool. This visualization is the basis for artistry, source of artistic creation.

**Outhouse in Corral**
**By Karen McSorley**

What a cute little house! Is it a place to keep the dog or store garden tools? If you have seen the movie "Shrek" or if you have elderly relatives who lived on farms you may know this is an outhouse- that is, an outdoor potty. On New Mexico farms in the 1870's there was no running water. Hence outdoor "Facilities "- set a distance from the house- were required.

How does an outhouse work? A pit is dug and lye is added as a disinfectant. The little house, with floorboards, is constructed over the pit. If we open the door and peek inside we will find a bench with from one to several holes. (Sizes of holes correspond to sizes of bottoms.) No flushing is required because there is no water.

What about toilet paper? In the 1870's it was a non- existent commodity. Because materials were scarce nothing got wasted. Many materials were repurposed rather than being thrown away. My dad's family raised pigs and fed them corn. The corn cobs were saved and recycled for use in the outhouse. (You get the idea!) Another clever outhouse recycle idea was old catalogs
(Such as Sears). In my dad's family there were five boys so the bicycle pages were used last).
Note: If the weather was too inclement to trek to the outhouse, one could use the beautiful China pots with lids which were kept under the beds. One of the many chores for kids was emptying the chamber pots in the morning.

**Priest's Chair**
**By Linda Tigges**

This 17th or early 18th century wooden armchair represents a frontier version of the decorated and sometimes gilded *silla de brazos* seen in paintings of Catholic dignitaries and in photos in Spanish Colonial furniture collections. The straight-backed chair, found by Alan Minge at the Taos Pueblo, perhaps from the 1706 San Geronimo de Taos mission, is made of hand-adzed pine. It had wooden finials, now broken off; it has a torn buffalo hide backing held by bronze-headed tacks. The black painted circles on the front and back rails and stretchers, and the painted black lines, appear to be a local version of the extravagant use of bronze headed tacks and the carving seen on chairs of the Spanish and Mexico upper classes. Fringed velveteen or other upholstery may have covered the seat, or perhaps it had a pillow such as that described in a 1716 New Mexican document from the *Archivo General de la Nación* of an Inquisition *visita* where the *Reverendo Padre Commisario* was "seated at the high altar with a chair (*silla*) and pillow (*almohada*)". It is considered one of the more important pieces in the Minge collection.

**Clocha**
**By Jo Morris**

The word Colcha in Spanish means bedspread or quilt. In the Spanish Settlements of northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado in the early 1700 to the late 1800 Colchas were embroidered with a stitch called 'Colcha Stitch'. The inspiration might have come from a type of 16th century silk embroidered colcha from Spain and Portugal via Mexico. . It is done on 'Sabanilla' a loosely home woven fabric and in embroidered with remnants of naturally dyed wool strands. The types of designs used were greatly influenced by the American Indians. It had a revival in the 1930's and it continues today. This was done in the 1950's.

**Tin Nicho**
**By Glynda Samford**

Metal was scarce during colonial times, thus early New Mexicans used any materials available to decorate their homes and churches. Tin cans discarded by American soldiers became a common source of metal for decorative art works. Tin work was thought of as the poor man's silversmithing and decorated many early New Mexican homes and churches. This traditional art form is part of New Mexican culture. The tin and glass nicho is the work of Higinio Gonzales, a prolific tinsmith, and dates to 1885. It is decorated with crimped rosettes and the birds for which he was noted. Nichos originally included pictures of a saints or religious icons.

**Zaguán Portones**
**By Dave Furbush**

Zaguans like this one were the typical main entry points to New Mexico ranchos during the Spanish-Colonial and Mexican periods, and through much of the U.S. Territorial period. Few examples remain intact today, and this one at Casa San Ysidro is believed to be the oldest surviving example. It was salvaged from the Horace Long house at Talpa, New Mexico (near Rancho de Taos). Although portions of the house were built as early as 1816 (based on tree-ring dating), it's unknown when the Zaguan itself was constructed. However, architectural historian Bainbridge Bunting and other experts point to several features that support a theory that the Zaguan was repurposed at the Long house after previously serving as the entryway into a nearby Spanish-Colonial presidio or small fort. Other accounts suggest that the fort itself was located onsite, adjacent to the house and was eventually incorporated into the evolving rancho, perhaps by Long himself after he arrived in 1839. Among the features that support the fort hypothesis are several unusual aspects of the doors (aka portones or puertones), which turn on ornate hand-forged iron truncheon hinges. Because iron was an expensive material during the early 19$^{th}$ century, such doors were typically set on wooden pintle hinges. Bunting speculated that such a prolific use of iron might have been necessary on the doors of a fort, if only because the doors would be opened and closed often, thus necessitating a sturdier and longer-lasting material than wood. Additionally, although difficult to discern in the photograph, the doors are perforated by more than 200 closely spaced hand-forged iron spikes, or large nails, and the entire Zaguan once held as many as 500 of these spikes. Clearly, this additional prolific use of iron was not necessary for structural integrity since other portones/puertones were constructed without metal. However, the embedded spikes might have been considered a useful addition to the basic defensive purpose that all portones provide, especially if the doors were installed in a military fort. The smaller wicket door that's incorporated into one of the larger doors further supports the fort hypothesis due to its larger-than-average size. Unlike the portones/puertones, which would be opened only to allow access by wagons or animals, the wicket door was used for routine pedestrian access. The larger size of the wicket door in this case may have been to accommodate a greater frequency of pedestrian traffic.

By 1970, the Zaguan and its large doors were at risk of demolition along with the rest of the Horace Long house, which had deteriorated beyond repair. It was then that Alan Minge acquired the structure and installed it at Casa San Ysidro. Alan is said to have tested the height of the Zaguan by

having a neighbor ride through on horseback wearing a sombrero, thus demonstrating that the structure conformed with traditional dimensions.

The adobe horno (or beehive oven) in this photo was constructed for Alan Minge by his Acoma friends Joe and Rose Ray. Although hornos are a truly iconic part of Southwestern culture, proliferating throughout Pueblo communities, the basic design was introduced to natives by Spanish-Colonial settlers. Coincidentally, however, that basic design may be as old as Pueblo culture itself, originating with the Moors who occupied Spain for 900 years prior to their expulsion in 1492. Today, hornos are an important part of Pueblo life, both for routine use in daily food preparation and for ceremonial purposes, especially on Feast Days. According to Puebloan tradition, some foods can only be prepared in an horno while other foods must never be prepared in an horno. At Casa San Ysidro, another horno (not shown here) is routinely used during Harvest Festival and on Heritage Day. During those events, a Pueblo baker demonstrates traditional techniques and prepares breads, pastries, and cookies for visitors.

**Shepherd's Bed**
**By Denise O'Connor**

The so-called Gatekeeper's Room is a favorite in Casa San Ysidro because it is arguably the most authentic re-imagined Spanish Colonial space with its dirt floor, the Shepherd's Bed, and a dark interior since it has no windows and only one door to the exterior. (The other door connects to the interior of the weaving room.) The room is so named because of its location next to the west zaguan, where a gatekeeper might have resided in a Colonial rancho.

The focus of the room is the Shepherd's Bed, built by Genaro Apodaca in 1967 when the room was constructed. The "bed" consists of two adobe platforms adjoining an adobe fogon (corner fireplace) and supported by rough timber and branches. These types of structures would have been built in a shepherd's hut to warm the room and provide a sleeping platform and cooking area off the dirt floor. Adobe is a very good conductor of heat and when there is a fire in the fogon, the platforms heat up nicely. The story goes that the shepherd could bring a sick or orphaned lamb into the room to care for it and keep it warm on the "bed" near the fireplace as well as keeping himself warm on cold nights. It is likely a shepherd's hut would have had no furnishings except a "bed" like this one. Notice the very fine collection of Native pottery displayed on the lower platform.

An amusing story about this room told by Alan Minge is that after compacting the dirt to form the floor, he left the door closed for a week or so. When he again entered the room, grass had sprouted in the soil!

**The Vigil Loom**
**By Denise O'Connor**

Weaving was the most important industry in Colonial New Mexico and, along with raw wool, hides and knitted wool stockings, provided the colonists with local products to trade for necessities being brought from Mexico on the annual caravans. The Churro sheep, introduced by the Spanish, were well adapted to the harsh climate and thrived in arid northern Nuevo Mexico.

This loom, ca. 1775 and collected from the Vigil family in Española, is an example of a European horizontal treadle loom. This type of loom has been used for thousands of years throughout the Old World and was brought to the New World by European colonists. This one is made of pine; it is constructed using mortise and tenon joinery and can be disassembled to move from summer to winter use, although it is very heavy. Notice how each leg is made of a single log. Originally it would have been level but the two front legs were shortened to address wood rot from having been stored in a barn for many years. It features four treadles which raise and lower the harnesses where the warp yarn is attached to the heddles. Amazingly, the loom still works! The modern horizontal treadle loom across the room operates in exactly the same way that this loom does but has six treadles allowing it to weave more complex patterns.

**Fanega Bin**
**By Linda Tigges**

*Fanega* is derived the Arabic word, *faníqa* or *fanique,* (originally meaning a sack), which, in the 18th century Spanish New World colonies, had two meanings.

The first is a dry measure of grain, usually corn or wheat, as contained in a fanega bin, a specially built rectangular wooden box with one end slanted allowing the grain to be easily emptied. Thought the size of fanega varies, a full fanega such as that found in the Albuquerque Museum's permanent exhibit, may contain some 55 liters or 12 bushels. A more common measure is the half fanega (*media fanega*) bin which holds 30 some liters. The half-measure fanega bins at Casa San Ysidro measure about 24 by 8 by 9 inches. An even smaller grain measure is the a*lmud,* also from the Arabic, measuring 4.25" by 10" by 10". It holds about a twelfth part of a fanega. All of the Casa San Ysidro bins are made of milled pine wood with dovetail joints, reinforced by manufactured screws and nails and by iron strips, showing that they were produced some time after the American entry in 1846. One of the half-fanega bins and the almud found at Casa San Ysidro were donated by the family of J. Richard Salazar, a pre-Revolt family from San Juan, New Mexico. (Richard states that the bins probably date to the early 1900s.)
In the barter economy of northern New Mexico where cash was unavailable or at least scarce, a fanega of corn or wheat was sometimes used as a form of currency.

For example, in 1712 Francisco Rivera of Santa Cruz tried to pay a gambling debt with a half-fanega of wheat and four small hides, though the holder of the debt, Baltazar Trujillo, refused, stating that he accepted the grain but insisted that he was owed four large hides, not four small ones (SANM 1 #168). In 1714, when Antonio Godines of Santa Cruz prepared his will, he stated that he owed Alejo Martín of Santa Cruz two fanegas of corn, which his heirs were responsible for paying (SANM I #305).

A third, more complicated example has to do with the payment of 18th century New Mexican presidio soldiers who, by order of the viceroy were paid their 431 pesos salary in goods (not currency) from the Santa Fe presidio store. The goods, including corn and wheat, were brought from storerooms in New Spain by pack train. (New Mexicans raised corn and wheat, but not enough for the 100 presidio soldiers and their families.) A 1712 maximum store price list shows that among these goods was corn priced at three pesos per fanega. The process was that the soldiers made purchases of goods, drawing down on their salaries. For instance, a 1712 presidio store ledger shows that soldier Juan Cedillo Rico de Rojas drew down nine pesos from his yearly salary when he took three fanegas of corn. (For comparison,

at the same time, he also drew down four pesos for four liters, (about one pound) of chocolate. At the time an average horse was worth 10 to 12 pesos and a pair of good spurs sold for eight pesos.)

The second early 18th century use of fanega was as a measure of agricultural land. The measurement is based on the amount of grain used to seed an area of land, or, more often, the amount of grain that could be harvested from a measure of land. An example is found in the 1740 will of André Montoya of Santa Fe where he is described as a New Mexican trader of buffalo hides and buckskins and as a farmer. The will states that he leaves two pieces of land to be divided equally among his eight heirs, the first parcel being described as agricultural land "holding 20 fanegas of agricultural land located in Cieneguilla four leagues from Santa Fe". This description differs that of the second parcel about which he said he had not had time to plant, that was located "…on the other side the Rio Grande between the orchards of San Ildefonso and Cochiti". There being no planting or harvest, this land was not measured in fanegas, nor was it measured in the alternative, in *varas* (about 33 inches). In fact, it was not measured at all, his heirs apparently having to depend on their father's description and memories of others (SANM I #526).

Another example is found in the 1718 will of Cristóbal Tafoya of Santa Cruz who left his heirs land from which, the were measured five fanegas of wheat, beans, and peas, apparently all mixed together in the fanega bins (SANM I #938).

Though less common, the smaller almud measure was also used to measure of land, though according to historian Rick Hendricks, personal communication (October 14, 2020), when measuring land, one almud was about 1/8 of an acre and there were 12 almudes to one fanega or about 4-7 acres of land. Though not as often found in the documents, an almud was mentioned in a court case when a certain Nicolás Martín of Chimayo accused of injuring his cousin, Mateo Martín, of letting his horse eat some of ears of corn from Nicolás's fields. After some words and shoving, Nicolás hit Mateo on the head with a rock, causing an injury to bleed copiously and needing several stitches. Nicolás then fled, taking sanctuary in the church at Santa Cruz. The local alcalde then sent the case to Governor don Gerasio Cruzat y Góngora, and as part of the usual process, Nicolás's possessions and lands, few as they were, were sequestered to ensure payment of court costs. Listed among his possessions was a planted corn field in which one almud of corn could be planted, that is, it measured one almud in size. The result of the investigation was that Nicolás came out of sanctuary and the governor ordered him to pay for treatment of the wound and court costs, but no other punishment (SANM I #390).

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**Coa**
**By Linda Tigges**

COA PAPER 9 18 20 rh

In 1733, don Francisco Xesús Espejo, son of Colonel Joseph de Xesús Espejo of Cadiz, died in Albuquerque without heirs, asking in his will that his goods be sold at a public auction. His wishes were followed, with the bidding process and the financial proceeds transcribed and attached to the will (available today in the Spanish Archives of New Mexico). The auction appeared to have been well attended, probably due to the sale of ten horses (ordinary horses for trading, according to the will—the prevailing bid was 230 pesos made by trader Vicente Durán de Armijo), six equipped pack mules, and 13 arrobas of old iron. For our purposes, however, the sale of 24 *coas de fierro* or iron digging sticks valued at 36 pesos or 1 ½ pesos each, is of greater interest. These coas were almost certainly for trade (SANM I #1219).

Espejo's executor, and perhaps a friend or at least a business acquaintance, was Spanish-born don Joseph Reaño de Tagle, a merchant, livestock raiser, and in the mid-1700s, known as the richest man in New Mexico. When Reaño died in 1743, his lengthy probate inventory listed 12 coas valued at a total of 24 pesos at 2 pesos each (SANM I #762). Were these some of the coas from the earlier Espejo auction that Reaño had not yet sold or were they items from which he sought a profit and that he purchased elsewhere? Whatever their source, the two documents suggest that in mid-18th century New Mexico, these coas were, at least in the minds of these merchants, a trade item.

The coa was not a part of the Spanish-Moorish agricultural tool tradition; rather, it was borrowed from Nahuatl speaking natives of New Spain. The Nahuatl name for the tool is *cuahuitl*, (sometimes spelled *uictli*), which also means a tree, stick, or club.[1] In this case the meaning is that of a peculiarly shaped (at least to our minds) digging stick useful for digging and planting. An illustration shows two Indians digging potatoes with wooden coas and a third collecting them. For some reason, the long handle has a scroll-like attachment, perhaps a reinforcement or some kind of handle. Another illustration shows a drawing of a wooden coa near the left-hand margin, and in the center, of an Indian using it. The third image appears to be the original from which second image was drawn. The first and third images shown here are both from the mid-16th century Florentine Codex.[2] Finally, a photo from the Casa San Ysidro tool collection illustrates a later Spanish version of a blacksmith-forged iron coa. This coa is part spade with a socket for a wooden handle and with a flat arrow-like point.

It is not known when the Spanish adopted the coa, probably by the mid-1500s, likely coming to New Mexico with the Spanish entradas in the early 1600s. Certainly, by the time of the 1692 reconquest of New Mexico by don Diego de Vargas, coas had become part of the Spanish agricultural tradition. Vargas was by no stretch of imagination a farmer, but he was aware for this distant and isolated colony to

survive, it had to be at least partly self-sufficient and the colonists had to grow much of own food, all of which meant that they needed agricultural tools. This was no doubt why, in 1695, Vargas asked Viceroy Galve to send 500 each of axes, shovels, hoes, and coas for distribution among the struggling New Mexican settlers. To Vargas's regret, the viceregal treasurer announced that amount was unnecessary, and that he would only send 200 shovels and 250 of the other items. In addition, the treasurer stated that because of the weight of the iron, the tools would be sent from Parral to Santa Fe on the slower wagons rather than with the mule pack trains.[3]

As it turns out, later information suggests that the treasury agent might well have sent the full request as shown by a 1710 distribution of coas and plow points (SANM II #169), as well as by purchases by soldiers at the presidio store. The store came into being when, by a 1693 order of Spanish crown, a presidio with 100 soldiers was established in Santa Fe, making a store part of the presidio complex. Located on the north side of the plaza as part of the *casa reales*, it was probably at the site of the pre-revolt store of Governor Pedro López Mendizábal, near the present-day zaguan or entrance to the complex. As with most military installations, the store operated as a kind of post-exchange or commissary for soldiers and their families, which in New Mexico meant a place where they could buy agricultural tools as well as food weapons, horse gear, textiles, and other things. In 1712 the store price list (prepared by Vargas in 1704) showed that large (*grandes*) coas were available at the price of two to three pesos and the smaller (*chicas*) ones at one to two pesos.[4] A 1712 account book of soldier purchases, compiled as a part of a viceregal audit of the presidio's procurement and pricing of goods, showed that of the 85 soldiers recorded as having a store account, some 31 purchased coas at the price of one and two pesos each, frequently buying more than one.[5] Based on the store price list, the coas appear to have been the least expensive type of agricultural tool available. The heftier *azadon* (an Arabic work meaning a kind of hoe or tool for "ditching" (forming the irrigation ditch slopes) was priced at six to eight pesos, and a *hacha* (axe) was available at six pesos. An example of a soldier's purchase is that of Adjutant José Domínguez, an aide to Lieutenant Governor Villasur, who bought six coas for the low price of one peso each. Whether the six were for resale or for personal use, is unknown. (It may be recalled that Domínguez was killed in the 1720 Villasur massacre.)

Iron coas were also a trade items with the Pueblo farmers, or at least the Zunis. Coas are mentioned in a 1752 lawsuit between two traders, Salvador García de Noriega of Albuquerque and Juan García de la Mora, a Spaniard, of Rio Arriba. Salvador García accused De la Mora of reneging on a partnership for taking iron to the Zunis. When it became clear that De la Mora was not going to participate, García claimed a loss of income. He said he could have worked with another New Mexican, (don Bernardo Miera de Pacheco) in taking goods to El Paso, instead of waiting around for de la Mora. De la Mora denied any agreement, agreeing that on a return trip from El Paso, they had met and discussed the Zuni trade, but that they had been "just talking." He pointed out that he had traded with the Zunis for some time, and he knew that what the Zunis wanted were iron knives, hatchets, and coas. To accommodate that them, he had been sending a blacksmith Juan de Leyba with an anvil and iron bars to Zuni to meet their requests on site, and would continue to do so without a partner. García then sued, and after lengthy testimony by both of men before by Governor Tómas Vélez Cachupín, the impatient governor ordered perpetual silence on the matter, pointing out that, in any case, neither one had a license to trade with the Zunis (SANM #520).

A coa also appears in a July 1715 case in Chimayo that began when Joseph Vásquez, a married man from Santa Fe, was assaulted by Diego Martín, a local farmer. Earlier, while in Chimayo Vásquez had made visits to Martín's sister in spite of her dislike of him and of his being forbidden to do so by the alcalde. In July, when Vásquez once appeared at the house, the sister cried out for help to her brother who was irrigating his chili field. Martín, seeing Vásquez hiding in the back of the house, ran toward him carrying his coa. He reminded Vásquez that the alcalde had told him to stay away from his sister. This having no effect and seeing Vásquez pick up a rock, Martín hit him on the head with the pole of the coa. (Vásquez's version was that he stopped to light a cigarette when suddenly he saw a coa flying toward him. The fight accelerated as the two wrestled, with Vásquez (according to Martín) trying to put out his eye with his finger, whereupon, Martín bit the finger. Alcalde Joseph Trujillo was then called to

investigate the fight, asking for a medical opinion from visiting *cirujano* (surgeon), Francisco Xavier Romero. Romero stated the wound was the bleeding head wound was about four inches wide and one inch in length. Martín, seeing himself about to be arrested, took sanctuary in the Santa Cruz church. Eventually he left the church and he and Vásquez appeared before Governor Flores Mogollón in Santa Fe. The governor concluded the case by ordering Martín to pay medical and court costs and telling Vásquez to stay at home in Santa Fe with his wife (SANM I # 228).

In conclusion, Spanish court, military, probate and other documents show that coas, wooden or iron, were a common agricultural tool in New Mexico, probably in use in some from the early 1600s, and certainly after the 1692 reconquest. They are sometimes found in today's museum. Given their common use, is it possible that some of those were brought to or made in New Mexico in the 17th and 18th century? We know that blacksmiths frequently refigured iron for other uses and that many coas were lost over the years, but surely some coas like that at Casa San Ysidro, in the strange way objects have of lying about unused for some time only to be discovered much later, may have been those purchased by the presidio store at the 18th century or were even part of Vargas's 1695-96 tool distribution.

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