

Stop 7 – Tufa House People

The post-colonial structure you see near the road is known as the Tufa House. Tufa is short for tufaceous limestone. The structure was built in the 1850s on top of the foundations of mission Indian quarters built in the 1750s. Look at the different colored rock in the walls. The limestone and darker sandstone represent different building periods. Fr. Francois Bouchu, a French-born priest, may have been the one to supervise the building of the Tufa House. He began serving the communities of San Fernando, Espada, and San Juan in 1855. He also restored the San Juan and Espada chapels and remained diligent to his mission communities until his death in 1907. Historians believe it was first used as a school for religion classes for students who attended the public school on the main road, now known as Presa Street. Over the generations, various community residents occupied the Tufa House. Janie Garza, a long-time resident of the area who lived in the Tufa house in the 1940s remembered the Italian, French, German, and Spanish voices she heard as a child at play. Another resident of San Juan in the 1920s and 30s remembered small brass bands playing in front of the church and community gatherings in the compound. In 1961, Edgar Byrum was allowed to live rent free in the Tufa House in exchange for caring for the grounds and opening and locking the Mission Chapel.

Today the Tufa House links the community to its historic past.