



# Trujillo Homesteads

*Ranch Site Honors the Legacy of Hispanic Peoples in the West*

**In the year 2012, few are the places that truly hearken back to the realities of the Old West.** There are still a few left, however, and one such site, the Trujillo Homesteads, is likely to remain long after its recent designation as a national historic landmark.

Located in rural Mosca, Colorado, with Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve and the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east, the homesteads' lonely two-story log cabin still stands as a reminder of when pioneers came to the great swaths of land west of the Mississippi. "This site is unique both to the history of Colorado and the nation," says Peter Ericson, western Colorado program director for the Nature Conservancy, which has owned the homesteads

since 1999. Part of the conservancy's 103,000-acre Medano Zapata Ranch, where modern-day cowboys still herd bison, the 35.6-acre site is considered historically significant both for its role in American Latino heritage and as a potential archeological treasure chest for the artifacts left by the Trujillo family.

The first of the site's two homesteads, its house no longer standing, was founded in 1865 when Teofilo and Andrelitta Trujillo and their son, Pedro, moved to the area from Taos, Mexico, some of the first permanent settlers after the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862. They started what would become one of its wealthiest ranches, their house reportedly one of the finest in the valley with luxuries including oriental rugs and stained glass windows. Pedro started his own 160-acre homestead just a mile northeast in 1879, choosing to build a two-story log cabin rather than the traditional adobe dwelling on his father's property. He raised cattle, horses, and continued to add land to the site where 9 of his 16 children would be born.

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**The family's success eventually came at a tragic cost, however.**

Teofilo, in addition to cattle, had one of the biggest sheep operations in the area, a source of conflict with Anglo-American cattle ranchers, who did not get along with the mostly Hispanic American sheep herders. The growing animosity towards the Trujillos came to a violent head in 1902 when Teofilo's grand homestead was burned to the ground and several of his sheep killed. He sold his land to the cattlemen, moving to the town of San Luis, with Pedro abandoning his own homestead too for fear of becoming the next target, even though he had no sheep. After the Trujillos sold it, the site passed through several

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owners but due to its remoteness has not been used since the 1940s. Limited archeological excavations reveal sheep ranching artifacts, as well as ground stone pieces, which suggest that early Hispanics in the area used Native American technology or trade items. The architecture of Pedro's homestead also reflects cultural mingling, how first-generation Hispanic Americans "adapted elements of the new culture into their traditional lifestyle." The designation is part of the broader American Latino Heritage Initiative championed by Secretary of the

Interior Ken Salazar. "We are helping to ensure the story of the settlers, how they lived, and the influence they had on the culture and history of Colorado and our nation will be carried down to future generations," he said of the homesteads' landmarking when announcing the designation in January.

Since purchasing the property, the conservancy has stabilized and reconstructed Pedro's cabin, above, but the site is not open to the public due to the private ownership of the land as well as concerns about issues such as road access, looting, and visitor safety. Nevertheless, making it more accessible in some fashion is a "long term vision," according to Ericson.

**A virtual tour featuring both the cabin and reconstructions of Teofilo's homestead** are being considered, according to Kathy Faz, acting division chief of interpretation for Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve. "We are excited to have the site included as a story of the park," says Faz, adding that it represents the very beginning of Latino culture in America. "It really goes back to 'how did we even get here?'"

**ABOVE:** Restored cabin at the site, managed by the Nature Conservancy.