



Matus / Meza House

Building Condition Assessment Report
July 2009

a project of the
Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation
for the
San Ignacio Yaqui Council

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Executive Summary

The Matus-Meza house, located at 856 West Calle Santa Ana, is one of only a few remaining buildings in the Old Pascua Neighborhood from the early decades of the 20th Century. Due to its association with the early development of the Neighborhood and its unique architectural style, the Matus-Meza House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1991. The building has been vacant for most of the past two decades, following the death of the last permanent resident, Elisa Meza.

The Matus-Meza house is a small residential property that currently includes five rooms. These rooms were constructed during two main periods of development. The three northern rooms, constructed of adobe, were likely built in the 1920s, during the initial occupation of the Old Pascua Neighborhood. The southern two rooms were likely completed in the 1950s. The building currently has no mechanical system and the electrical and plumbing systems will need to be updated.

In addition to these remaining spaces, the residence also included additional outbuildings that have since been removed. The site retains many site features that date to the period of significance, including several small shrines constructed of cobblestone.

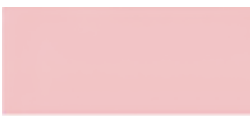
The building is currently in poor condition based on these years of neglect and vacancy. The most critical problems include poor roof drainage, burrowing vermin that have caused damage to adobe walls and the treat from vandalism and arson. Currently, the site is secured with chain-link fencing and the building is protected with a specially-designed security door.

The building and site offers several possibilities for adaptive re-use. While the building is small and in poor condition, it could be made usable with a moderate investment of capital. A Pima County Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant could be a

source of funding for the improvements required to make the building usable again.

Surrounding the site are a number of vacant parcels, including several currently owned by the City of Tucson. The two parcels directly west of the Matus-Meza House are privately owned; it may be possible to complete a land swap with the City of Tucson to consolidate several parcels into a single developable property. Given additional land, the site could be developed as a community garden or park. Under this scenario, the Matus-Meza House could become a support building for storage of tools or supplies. While the cost to repair the building would still be significant, re-use of the building as a support structure would not require the extensive repairs needed for the building to be permanently occupied.

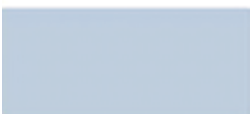
Location and Ownership Map



City of Tucson Owned



San Ignacio Yaqui Council Owned



Privately Owned

Historical Context

The Yaqui are an indigenous group from Sonora, Mexico, who during the 19th and 20th Centuries began moving into Southern Arizona to escape persecution from the Mexican government. It is estimated that between 1880 and 1915, at least 2,000 to 3,000 Yaqui refugees came to the United States, many of whom settled in the Tucson, Marana, Phoenix, and Yuma areas. Despite the fact that the United States (U.S.)-Mexico border was open at the time, the Yaqui feared persecution and deportation back to Mexico; as such they often hid their cultural identity by adopting Mexican surnames and finding employment as laborers for the railroad and agricultural industries (Spicer 1940). While the U.S. government did not declare the Yaqui to be political refugees, it did in essence grant the people political asylum (Gregonis 1991). Once the Yaqui believed that they would not be deported, their cultural traditions and religious ceremonies were revived and they began to form their own communities.

Four areas in and around Tucson were settled by the Yaqui and included, Mezquital on the east bank of the Santa Cruz River, Barrio Anita on the north end of Tucson, Tierra Floja a farm camp north of Tucson, and Little Mesquite, a farm hamlet in Marana. Today, Tierra Floja and Mezquital are gone; Barrio Anita remains a mixed community of Mexican, Tohono O'odham, and Yaqui residents, and Little Mesquite is now Yoem Pueblo. In 1920, a real estate investor, A.M. Franklin, provided 40-acres of land on the northwestern edge of Tucson to the Yaqui tribe to allow for the creation of a center for the "Yaqui Nation" in Arizona (Gregonis 1991; Spicer 1940). Many Yaquis did not like the idea of being consolidated into a single area and continued to be fearful of deportation; nevertheless, 20 families moved to the area that today is known as Old Pascua Village. As a result, Old Pascua Village became the first organized Community of Yaquis in the Tucson area (Gregonis 1991; Spicer 1940) and in 1971, a \$55,000 grant from the Catholic Church Development Program gave the Yaqui Indians at

Old Pascua Village ownership to the land they had squatted on for more than 50 years (Citizen 1971). The individuals and families that settled at Old Pascua Village built their homes on lots that were platted by Franklin, although many did not adhere to the exact lot designations. Within a few short years, more Yaqui people from neighboring communities began moving into Old Pascua Village to take advantage of the opportunity to have a permanent home; rather than continue living in the shacks and lean-tos along the banks of the Santa Cruz River (Gregonis 1991; Spicer 1940). One of the first homes and one of the first residents at Old Pascua Village, was the Matus/Meza House, and Antonio Matus.

National Register of Historic Places Listing

In 1991 the Matus/Meza House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) (Gregonis 1991) under Criteria A and C. The house was deemed significant under Criterion A for its association with the social and ethnic history of Yaqui people in Southern Arizona, and under Criterion C for its architectural significance (Gregonis 1991). The house and surrounding property are typical of homes and structures built at Old Pascua Village during the 1920s and the Matus/Meza House remains one of only four or five houses still standing that date to the establishment of Old Pascua Village.

Property History

The Matus/Meza House located at 856 West Calle Santa Ana (formally East Matus Street) in Tucson, Arizona lies within the confines of the Old Pascua Village (U.S Bureau of the Census 1930). The house is typical of Yaqui houses built during the 1920s and consists of a single-story adobe building and surrounding property encompassing 1 ½ lots. The surrounding property at one time housed additional outbuildings, including storage structures and an outhouse, and was once fully enclosed by a high masonry wall. Today, the remains of the original property include the main house and a portion of a 7-ft- masonry wall that flanks the east side of the lot. The house exhibits a deep setback from the street and is nearly flush with the northern property line, allowing for a large (former) courtyard-like area fronting the house and visible from the street.

The builder and first resident of the Matus/Meza house was Antonio Matus. Matus, a Yaqui Indian, moved to Old Pascua Village in 1926 during which time he constructed his home. Matus was born in Sonora, Mexico around 1846 and later married a woman (no information available) with whom he had three daughters (Bureau of the U.S. Census 1930). According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Matus was a widower and was head of a household that included his three daughters, members of his extended family, and one boarder. Matus died of natural causes a year later on January 10, 1931 (Arizona State Board of Health 1931). During his lifetime Matus was employed as an itinerant worker and was often away from his residence; when he was at home he held a ceremonial post at Old Pascua Village (Gregonis 1991).

The transfer of property from one family member to another is a typical pattern at Old Pascua Village and in 1937; Antonio Matus' niece, Julia A Valenzuela, retained title to the property until June of 1950. During her residence in the home, other members of her immediate and extended family periodically lived at the property. Sometime after 1950, the house was transferred to a Mexican



View of the exterior courtyard taken in late 1980s

couple, Eliseo and Elisa Meza. While a resident at Old Pascua Village, Elisa Meza had earned a reputation as a bruja or witch. Based on brief interviews with older residents of the neighborhood, she was not a trusted member of their community and many of them had unfavorable childhood remembrances of her (personal communication with Yaqui residents [names withheld] with Jennifer Levstik, Drew Gorski, and Demion Clinco on April 25, 2009]. What she had done to earn this reputation is not known. Elisa's husband passed away in 1968, and Elisa died in 1988. Upon her death she gave the property to the San Ignacio Yaqui Council of Old Pascua Village.

Architectural Context

Matus' original construction consisted of a three-roomed adobe house that included a kitchen and two bedrooms. The floors were polished concrete and the roof, typical of Yaqui vernacular architecture was a low-pitched gable roof with hewn-timbers (Gregonis 1991). Over the years, subsequent modifications were made to the house and surrounding property. These additions included a third bedroom on the southwest corner of the house, a closet on the northwest elevation of the house, a hall-like storage area along the east elevation of the house, and an enclosed porch with an arched doorway and dirt floor. These later additions were masonry and were covered with a flat roof. Although the date of these modifications is unknown, researcher and archaeologist, Linda Gregonis, estimates that the home was modified sometime between 1950 and 1962 during the Mesa's occupation of the house (1991). She further postulates that the modifications occurred during that time, as the flat roof construction is atypical of Yaqui construction but is commonly seen in Mexican vernacular architecture.

The interior of the house includes built-in niches, a wood-burning stove, and handmade wooden counters and cabinets. A river-rock fireplace is located in the southwest corner of the enclosed porch and a wagon wheel has been set into the wall of the porch to serve as a window (Gregonis 1991). Overall, the small size of the house is common for houses built at Old Pascua Village during the 1920s. Traditionally builders would construct a smaller dwelling and add on to it when the need arose, often to accommodate a larger family, as appears to be the case with the Matus/Meza house. This method and type of construction exhibited by the Matus/Meza house is reflective not only of the skills of its builder, but also of what materials, funds, and labor were available at the time of its construction and subsequent modifications (Gregonis 1991). The property also includes a large front yard measuring 45 ft by 90 ft, once surrounded by a 7-ft-high masonry wall, that today only survives



View of the exterior courtyard taken in late 1980s

along the east side of the property. During its occupation, the front yard also supported storage structures and an outhouse, but have since been razed. Today, a number of shrines occupied by the crumbling remains of catholic saints, a decorative wishing well, and what appear to be trash-filled pits are present in the front yard. Religious imagery is also found on the front of the house and within its interior, including palm-frond crosses and a dried sage bundle by the entrance, as well as palm-frond crosses and small cards depicting Jesus hanging on the walls and above the doors inside the home. The religious imagery found in and around the building is an example of the synchronization of traditional Yaqui beliefs and Catholicism, as evidenced by the co-mingling of sage bundles and crosses (crosses typically given out during Easter ceremonies, an important Yaqui religious celebration). In addition, the presence of shrines with catholic saints is reflective of Catholic Mexican households. The preponderance of religious images at this property exemplifies the important role of religion in both Yaqui and Mexican households.

During the 1920s and continuing into modern times, Yaqui household activities centered on extramural space. Much of daily life took place outside in kitchens, ramadas, and courtyards. The large yard and wall of the Matus/Meza house is reflective of the original character of Old Pascua Village and the role that outdoor space played in daily life. However, since its construction, many houses in Old Pascua Village have been razed or rehabilitated, resulting in the loss of yards as living and working space in the traditional Yaqui manner (Gregonis 1991). The most substantial of these changes at Old Pascua Village occurred in 1983 with the construction of 46 homes and the demolition of 69 others under a \$1.8 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Durate 1983; Svejcar 1984). As a result of numerous housing programs undertaken at Old Pascua Village, the Matus/Meza house remains one of four or five homes of similar type dating to the 1920s at Old Pascua Village that was not torn

down or dramatically altered between the 1960s and the 1980s (Gregonis 1991).



Cobblestone Shrine -1980s



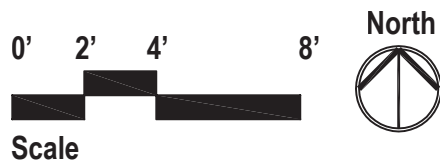
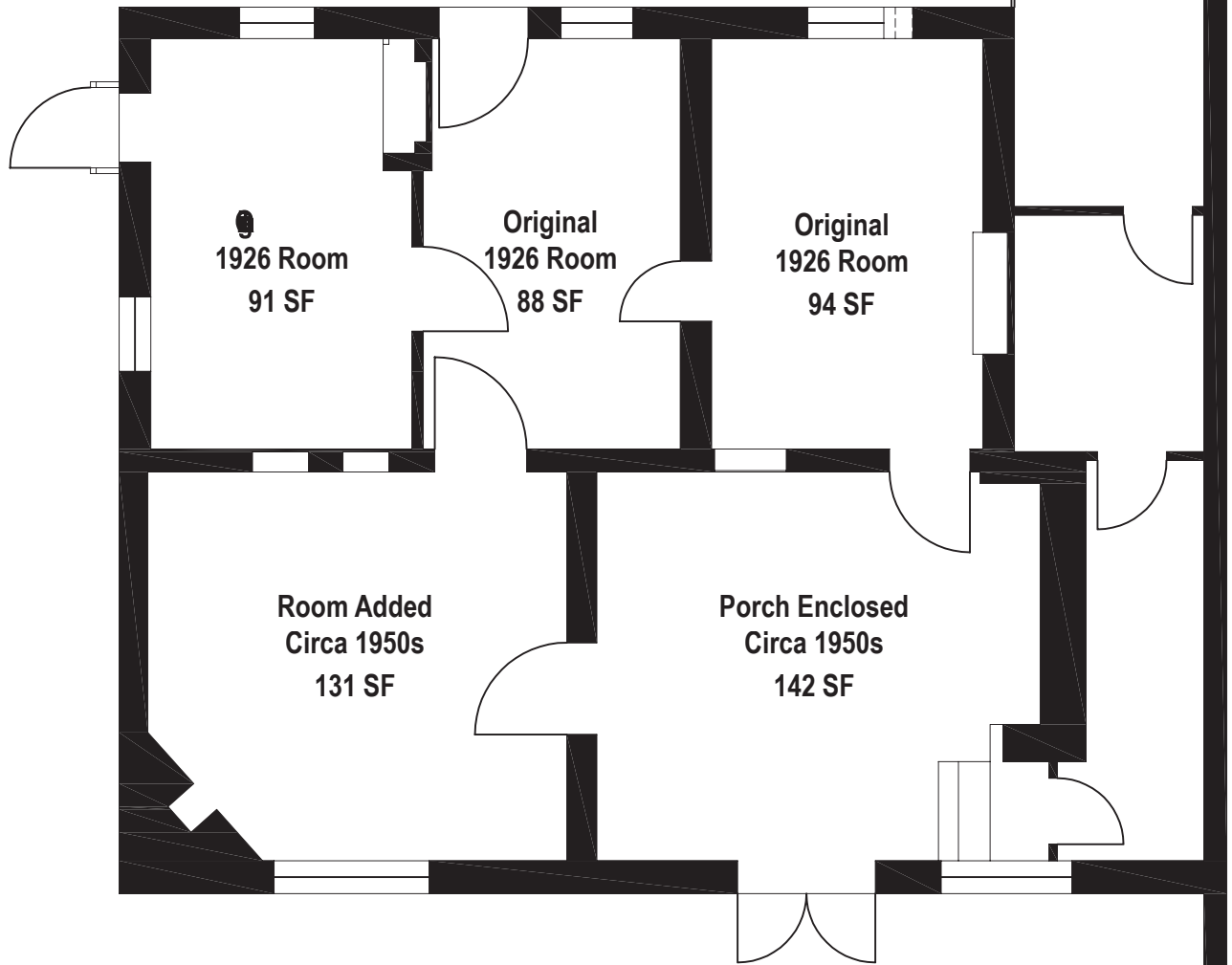
Interior image taken in late 1980s

The house has been more or less vacant since Elisa's death in 1988, although it served briefly as guest quarters for visitors of the Yaqui Council until 2000 until it was no longer considered habitable. The building has suffered vandalism over the years and has been used as a location for transients. The windows and front door have been boarded up and a door on the west elevation was destroyed.

In addition, the roof and the electrical system are in need of attention. Because of the Ad Hoc style of modifications to this house, the structural integrity of the roof has been greatly compromised. The three northern-most rooms are enclosed with a shallow gable roof, sloping to the north and the south. The southern addition to the three room core features a "reverse shed" slope that drains back towards the south slope of the gable form. The valley created by these two intersecting roof forms does not drain correctly and is the location where water has penetrated the roof framing and interior of the building.

Despite modifications to the house since its original construction; such as the additions of rooms and outdoor storage structures, these modifications do not detract from the buildings integrity; rather these alterations are a reflection of both Yaqui and Mexican vernacular architecture.

Current Floor Plan



Walls

The majority of both interior and exterior walls are constructed of adobe, approximately eight to ten inches thick. A footing and foundation was not observed. The walls are not uniform in appearance and likely were constructed like other parts of the house where available material was put together in a patchwork manner. Adobe was likely chosen because it was cheap, readily available and easy to work with given the limited resources of the neighborhood. All walls, including both interior and exterior surfaces, are finished with a hard cement plaster. Metal lath is apparent at some locations on the interior. The walls are painted white.

The corner fireplace is constructed of brick. Additionally, several other walls have areas of brick in-fill where adobe deterioration was repaired.

Walls suffer from several deficiencies. Most noticeable are the piles of eroded adobe visible at several of the walls where it appears that vermin and rodents have excavated through the walls. Because of the cement plaster finish, it is not clear if these damaged areas are compromising the structural integrity of the wall. Eliminating the source of the deterioration, the rodents and critters, would solve this problem and eliminate the likelihood of additional structural damage.

Cement plaster is not recommended for adobe. Cement plaster is a hard material that expands and contracts at a different rate than adobe. Cement plaster also traps moisture, the primary cause of damage to adobe walls. Because the cement plaster is not breathable, moisture that wicks into the wall through capillary action has nowhere to go and erodes the wall. Since the cement plaster is a hard material, it is difficult to determine the condition of the adobe behind the exterior surface. It is not possible to thoroughly evaluate the condition of the adobe walls because the cement plaster is hiding the condition of the adobe. It is possible the walls are in good condition based on the overall stability of the structure. In a few locations, the plaster is missing

and the adobe wall has been exposed to weathering and decay. Additional investigation should be performed during the stabilization of the building to determine the extent of damaged adobe.



Deteriorated adobe at base of wall caused by burrowing vermin



Infill masonry at the base of the eastern wall in the north-central room

Roof

The building has two roof framing systems, one enclosing the original three room adobe core and the other framing in the two rooms at the south of the building. Overall, the roof and roof structure is in very poor condition. Serious structural problems, including rotted and split joists, are present. Many of these problems are created by the incompatible roof shapes “nested” together to create the overall form of the building. The three northern-most rooms are enclosed with a shallow gable roof, sloping to the north and the south. The southern addition to the three room core features a “reverse shed” slope that drains back towards the south slope of the gable form. The valley created by these two intersecting roof forms does not drain correctly and is the location where water has penetrated the roof framing and interior of the building. Portions of the roof where the two roofs come together could collapse if they are not further stabilized.

The northern gable form is created with a random assortment of framing members. Many of these members appear to have been structurally compromised by a fire, at an unknown date, within the structure. The framing consists of a 4 x 4 ridge beam (larger at the kitchen) that supports sloped 2x members at approximately 30- 38” on-center. The 2x members are supported at the north wall and the interior wall where the “reverse shed” is also supported. 2x4 ceiling members are attached to each joist at the end walls and also supported by 1x6 decking attached to the sloped rafter. Where the fire caused the joists to fail, additional 2x members have been added. 1x6 tongue and groove decking is present above the sloped rafters. The decking appears to be in good condition.

The southern “reverse shed” is framed with 2 x 6 joists at approximately 30” O.C. The joists were placed directly on top of the original gable roof as the edge of the gable roof is visible on the interior of the reverse shed. The joists in the eastern room are doubled up and are in overall better condition.



Roof framing at south wall. Note rotted joist ends.



Site-built roof framing in northern rooms



Typical roof framing in northern rooms.

One joist in the western room has been split near the north supporting wall. This joist appears to be in danger of splitting and should be stabilized or replaced. 1x8 and 1x10 decking is above the joists.

A temporary rolled asphalt roof appears to have been installed in the last 5 years. The asphalt is in fair condition. While there are problem areas with the roofing, it does appear to keep most of the water out of the building. The roof is littered with loose debris and household items, including a crock pot and chair. These items place additional strain on the roof and add to the difficulty of draining water from the roof. The items should be removed immediately and any holes should be patched to prevent additional infiltration of water.

The future use of the building will determine the extent of roof repairs required to make the building safe. If occupation of the building is desired, the entire roof and framing will need to be replaced. If a more modest use of the building is envisioned, such as an accessory shed for a community garden, the repairs required will be more modest. Stabilization and repair of roof framing is the most urgent and costly need for the building. Either scenario will require repairs costing between several thousand to over \$10,000.



Split roof joist at SW at room in southwest corner. Notice severe water damage to roof decking caused by faulty roof design.



Charred roof framing with additional framing placed on top. This condition exists throughout the northern rooms



Roof with loose debris

Windows and Doors

Windows and doors are in very poor condition. Most of the window sashes have been removed and are in-filled with plywood coverings. Exterior door are also in poor condition and will require significant repairs to be operable. Interior wood doors range from fair to poor condition. Several three-panel wood doors are still present and appear to be repairable.



Arched opening at southeastern room



Exterior wood door at north-central room



Wood framed window opening at southwest room.

Built-In

Interior built-ins consist of a variety of wall niches, a built-in cabinet in the kitchen and the cobblestone fireplace in the southwest room. These unique elements add a great deal of character to this space, even in its current poor condition. These accents should be preserved and additional research should be compiled to understand their history and how they were used, including any ceremonial uses.



Built-in wood cabinet in the kitchen



Cobblestone fireplace in the southwest room

Mechanical and Electrical

The building currently has no services. It appears that the building had limited electrical and water in the kitchen. No bathroom plumbing exists in the remaining portion of the building. These function appear to have located in the western rooms that were removed at some time in the past.

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