

INDIAN VILLAGE
(Seton Village)
Six miles southeast of Santa Fe, off U.S. Route 84-85
Seton Village
Santa Fe County
New Mexico

HABS No. NM-182

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NM-182

~~PHOTOGRAPHS~~

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
INTERMOUNTAIN SUPPORT OFFICE - SANTA FE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 728
Santa Fe, NM 87504-0728

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INDIAN VILLAGE

(Seton Village)

HABS No. NM-182

Location: Six miles southeast of Santa Fe, off U.S. Route 84-85

Present Owner/
Occupant: Dee Seton Barber

Present Use: Residence

Significance: Seton Village, New Mexico, was one of the first artists' colonies in the Santa Fe area as well as the home of the College of Indian Wisdom (later Seton Institute). Its owner and architect, Ernest Thompson Seton, was an author, artist, lecturer and naturalist, and a founder of the Boy Scout and Woodcraft League movements in the United States.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1931-1932. Ernest and Julia Seton built the village (then called "Indian Village" now Seton Village) near Santa Fe. The first adobe building was at the southeast corner of an oval "plaza" (not used as such) and the second "Lagunita" and "Lagunella" at southwest end of plaza. By the end of 1932, nine houses were built.
2. Architect: Ernest Thompson Seton. Seton was not an architect by trade. His drawings and plans for Seton village can better be described as guidelines than blueprints.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Ernest Thompson Seton and wife Julia Moss Buttrees Seton. Now owned by daughter Dee Seton Barber.
4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers: The Setons used local laborers to construct the buildings and used local materials, i.e., trees from their own land. The "Castle" is constructed of stone masonry and adobe. Seton hired local Hispanic and Indian laborers to construct the buildings and landscape the grounds. For running water he hired an expert, J. D. Sheets of Albuquerque, to dig wells, install plumbing and erect a windmill.
5. Original plans and construction: Plans were drawn up by E. T. Seton. Subsequent alterations designed by Julia Seton.

6. Alterations and additions:

1932. Stone retaining wall at south, single story T-shaped stone masonry house with vigas, exposed wood lintels, parapets, flat roof. West portion (top of N-S "T") 22'-0" x 46'-0" and leg extending east, 35'-0" x 24'-0" plus Inglenook. Basement, including vault.

Ca. 1933. Rectangular laundry at east end of basement, and kitchen added. Patio paving, pond and enclosing walls with gates added.

1934. Library added, long rectangular 17'-0" x 43'-6" extending north. Similar stone masonry but higher ceiling.

Ca. 1934. Low stone masonry walls at west end and patio wall added.

Ca. 1937. North addition to library 12'-6" x 17'-0" at north end, frame construction low ceiling with gable roof and decorative, stepping parapets at west and east. 5'-0" wide opening and steps from library.

1937. Second floor bedroom and bath added, approx 500 square feet.

1938. Balcony at south end of top of "T" enclosed and roofed for nursery and playroom.

Ca. 1936-1940. Portal added.

1940. Third floor open look-out room, 15 square feet, plus stairs.

Date unknown. Front door changed from west side to north near corner of patio.

During the 1950s Julia Seton initiated many changes, additions include:

Bar, 13'-0" x 14'-6" first floor at northeast.

Office, 9'-0" x 12'-6" first floor at south.

Storage/Workshop at south, 28 square feet, building placed 11'-0" away from "T" leg to south, with infill 11'-0" x 40'-0" connecting it to the south stone wall of the original house

Adobe addition 22'-0" x 15'-0" first floor at east.

Larger bedroom on the second floor adjacent to original one, 18'-0" x 20'-6"

Removal of roof and ceiling decking at front portal

Infilling pond in patio

Partition between living room and study, moving door to kitchen.

Mud plaster on west wall stone masonry

Library fireplace and chimney, infill two library windows

Front windows replaced with plate glass

Post 1975 changes:

Partitioning of living room to provide bedrooms

Kitchen rehab, gypsum board and bathroom fixtures removed

Front door moved back to west elevation

B. Historical Context:

1. Biography of Ernest Thompson Seton

Ernest Thompson Seton was born August 14, 1860, in South Shields, England. In 1866, his family emigrated to Canada. He spent eight years (1882-90) homesteading with a brother on the Upper Assiniboine (Manitoba) where he was able to take advantage of his professional art training and education by undertaking various hunting and zoological expeditions, studying and drawing native Canadian flora and fauna. In 1892, he was appointed provincial naturalist of the government of Manitoba, a post he held for the rest of his life.

His book, Wild Animals I Have Known (New York: Scribner's & Sons, 1900) made him a celebrity and enabled him to travel the country lecturing on nature, animals and later, American Indians. Seton would give more than 6,000 lectures in his lifetime.

Seton also had a primary role in the mounting conservation efforts in both Canada and the United States. In lectures he stressed the need for more wildlife sanctuaries and better conservation laws. When Theodore Roosevelt came to the White

House, Seton found a sympathetic audience at the highest level.

2. Involvement with Native Americans and their influence on his architectural ideas.

Seton's first actual encounter with Indian tribes on their home territory was probably in 1886, when he took a canoe trip to Lake of the Woods, collecting specimens and meeting with local Cree and Ojibwa residents. This trip was followed up by a visit to the Crow Reservation in southeastern Montana (1897). Here he became a student in the sign language known by all Plains tribes. He also made extensive notes and drawings of the Indians' tepee lodges and the various designs that decorated them. His next stop was at the Sioux and Cheyenne villages on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota (1901) where he observed smoke signals and from them worked out a standard code. On all of these trips he immersed himself in tribal religion, customs, and culture, beginning his lifelong advocacy of preserving native villages and customs.

In December, 1914, he made his first tour of the pueblos in New Mexico. Following a stopover in Albuquerque he spent two days photographing and sketching details of Laguna pueblo's adobe architecture. At Acoma he was able to sketch and photograph the old Spanish mission and the surrounding houses. In August 1915, Seton took his family on another Southwestern tour. In Oklahoma they visited several churches, schools, and other "white mens follies" in the Indian communities around Weatherford and Anadarko. All during the trip Seton took careful notes of the various tribes' customs and beliefs.

His interest in Native Americans and his knowledge of their culture was not superficial. When building Seton Village, he used his knowledge of Native American architecture to accurately reproduce the hogan and the kiva as well as the paintings that decorated them. In keeping with Indian tradition, the hogan was used as a general purpose center for the community and the kiva was a ceremonial structure. Seton made an honest effort to accurately portray the various tribes, perhaps only failing in his tendency to over romanticize the "noble savage." Despite this, his drawings and writings are commendably accurate representations of American Indian culture.

3. Woodcraft League of America.

In 1902 Seton began a movement that was eventually incorporated into the Woodcraft League of America. For a time

he worked with R. S. Baden-Powell in England, founder of the Boy Scout movement, but differences in philosophy soon split the partnership of Woodcraft and Boy Scouting.

4. Seton Village, site choice and College of Indian Wisdom.

Ernest and Julia Seton chose Santa Fe for their permanent home because it was their feeling that "this City of the Holy Faith was the spiritual capital of America, maybe of the world." (Seton, p. 251). The tract of land they purchased was a 2,500 acre parcel on the Sebastian De Vargas Grant. Santa Fe itself, lacking large industry, was attractive to those who sought its environmental qualities and Seton decided to build a new center of "spiritual refreshment for millions between the ages of four and ninety-four" and a training center for leaders of the outdoors cult movement.

In February, 1930, Seton officially took title to the land. He and his colleagues began erecting camping facilities and temporary living quarters on his new "Rancho" Seton village. He selected a broad, level spot on the western slope of a tier of hills and started with his first house, Yek Yek, and a row of adobe buildings designed to resemble ranch huts. Next a long, one-story adobe called Lagunita (Little Lake) was built. An office, a print shop, and a crafts shop known as Foothill Lodge soon followed. The Lodge served as the original museum where Seton displayed his art pieces, Indian artifacts, specimen collection and library volumes.

Seton contracted with Antonio Sanchez, 927 Agua Fria Street, Santa Fe, for Mexican laborers to build a road to Seton Village. Each laborer was paid \$4 per day (Seton Journal, March 26, 1930). J. D. Sheets, a professional contractor from Albuquerque, dug the well. He was paid \$1,178.21 for the boring and casing, \$485.86 for the windmill, \$265.40 for the tank, and \$19.20 for cement work.

Several guest houses built in the adobe style were constructed around the plaza. These were given such names as the Zoo Lodge, the Submarine, and the 'Dobie House. The Pullman Car House and the Red Barn were built around old railroad cars. This conversion of railroad cars into houses was achieved by plastering the exteriors of the cars with adobe.

The facilities ready, Seton's "College of Indian Wisdom" was officially opened in the summer of 1932. Twenty-five camp leaders were housed in the Indian village that had been constructed just north of the main plaza with tepees, wickiups, a few log cabins, a dining hall, a Pueblo kiva, and a Navajo hogan that served as the main auditorium.

The first College of Indian Wisdom was held from July 25 to August 25, 1932. The price for the six week session was \$175 (brochure advertising Seton Village, 1932. Classes were usually conducted outdoors in small temporary "huts." These huts were constructed by placing poles into the ground to serve as walls and covering the top with tree boughs and foliage to protect the students from sun and rain. The huts were approximately 6' x 8'.

The courses were fully accredited by the American Association of Colleges and were administered by Dr. H. L. Gossard, President of New Mexico Normal University (now New Mexico Highlands University at Las Vegas, New Mexico). Julia Seton acted as dean of the college and also performed the duties of keeper of the fires in the Woodcraft ceremonials. At the end of each semester, graduation exercises, complete with diplomas, were held at the kiva. A copy of the schedule of classes for the 1932 session and a transcription of Seton's diary for this period transcribed and annotated by Dee Seton Barber are included in the file.

The College of Indian Wisdom was highly respected at this time. Visitors and participants to the camp included Mary Austin, writer and poet; Martin Vigil, leader of the Tesuque Pueblo; Bert Philips, artist and co-founder of the Taos Art Colony; Fremont Ellis, one of the "Cinco Pintores" (Five Painters), founders of the Santa Fe Art Colony; Clyde Fisher from the American Museum of Natural History; and University Presidents Gossard from New Mexico Normal University and Zimmerman of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

In addition to these local notables, the guestbook from 1935 is signed by people from all over the country including Archbishop William Henry Francis and the Reverend Victor James Haton, O.S.B., from St. Dunstan's Abbey in Bedford Village, New York, and Rollins C. Mullenix, Professor of Zoology at Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin. Though many visitors to the college were individuals, about one-third of the entries in the guestbook are those of entire families.

Throughout its existence, Seton Village continued to expand. In the summer of 1935, it had more than twenty permanent buildings. By 1940, the Seton Institute had 200 students and a staff of 50 experts as well as 30 buildings. However, because of the political situation in Europe, overseas travel for Seton and his staff was no longer possible. Many of Seton's employees enlisted in the military. As the workload of the Institute and the lecture circuit grew, it got to be too much for the Setons. They announced their decision to discontinue the school after that year. Despite wartime

rationing however, the Setons continued to present their programs to area Boy Scout troops, Cub Scout packs, and other youth groups.

The building known as the Zoo Lodge served as the office of the College of Indian Wisdom. This building burned down in 1937 and most of the formal attendance and class records were destroyed in the fire. Seton's diaries and the college's guest books are the only remaining records of who was in attendance at the camp

5. Seton Village - The "Castle"

In February of 1935, newlyweds Ernest and Julia made final preparations for the "dream house" - the house that would later be called the "Castle." Local men were again hired to do the construction work. Upon completion, the Castle contained thirty rooms. Constructed of stone masonry, the central portion of the house ran from east to west. Long vigas supported the roof. Half of this space was occupied by bedrooms and the other half by the combination living room/library.

A small inglenook off of the dining room was a feature in all of the homes Seton built. Seton believed that this small, cozy room was more conducive to conversation than the larger, more open rooms in the house. To the rear of this portion, to the east, were the kitchen and pantry. Small, single-room second and third stories were built above the living room. Running north off the central axis was a long, high-ceilinged room suitable for large gatherings. Here were housed a portion of the library and many of Seton's works.

Guests and students at the College of Indian Wisdom usually camped, stayed in outlying cottages, or were housed in hotels in Santa Fe. Though the Setons entertained regularly, guests were rarely housed at the Castle.

After Seton's death in 1946, Julia Seton continued lecturing and held traveling exhibitions of his artwork. In 1947 she began a memorial fund which she later incorporated into a foundation to help maintain the Castle and other buildings. She also continued to publish books and gave guided tours of the Castle. Never having been fond of Santa Fe winters, during the 1940s and '50s, Julia closed up the house every year and she and her daughter spent their winters in southern California. This annual abandonment may have been the beginning of the Castle's subsequent deterioration.

In 1965 Julia built and lived in a smaller house near the Castle. She remained in this house until her death on April 28, 1975. In 1966 and 1967, Seton Castle became a Hindu Temple to Krishna. Julia rented the Castle to the Hare Krishna's "because, she said, we saw eye to eye spiritually."¹ After the Krishna's left, the house was reoccupied by the Seton's daughter, Dee Seton Barber, and her family, and has served as their private home ever since. The only activity related to the College of Indian Wisdom or Seton Village held since that time was a 50th anniversary reunion of Seton Village residents and students that took place August 16, 1980. This date also coincided with the 120th anniversary of Ernest Thompson Seton's birth.

6. Seton Village structures and architectural philosophy.

The main structures at Seton Village were the Seton's home, known as "The Castle," the hogan and the kiva. In her book, By a Thousand Fires, Julia Seton described her husband's philosophy of architecture: "Seton held that the fundamental principle of architecture, as of all arts, and indeed of everything good in the world, was Truth. A building must be true to its object, true to its matter, and true to its maker. Or, to be more specific, true architecture considers, first of all, the purpose of the building, and permits no capricious notion to direct the form to the injury of its utility" (Seton, pp 255-256).

This statement was a summing up of an article Seton had published a few years earlier. This article, entitled "The House That Is Mine," was published in House and Garden in 1923. In it Seton wrote: "I went at the building of my country home with more than common ardor, and with convictions of unusual strength and clearness. And whether I should build a pigpen or a palace, these are the seven basic principles that I was determined should dominate." Following is a summary of his principles.

1. "The purpose must dictate the plan no matter where it lead me. I will not crowd my foot into a boot that does not fit merely because it seems to the eye a beautiful boot. It is because of adherence to these principles that each of the world's great buildings differs from the next."

2. "My building must be of sound construction. What pleasure can anyone find in a structure that is evidently

¹. Clipping from an article in The New Mexican written by Peter Nabokov, date unknown.

doomed to early collapse? It would be like doing exquisite carving on a snow man or building fine castles of tidal sand. Instinctively the world resents flimsiness."

3. "Honesty. Many, many times I have heard the architect say to his client in effect: "Now what shall we pretend this building is going to be? ...My answer to this gentleman was more energetic than polite. I don't want my building to pretend anything. It shall be first of all a home, strong and weatherproof, and later it may be beautiful; but whatever it is, it shall be honest. I will not put up a box and pretend it is a beam. I will not mark off cement in squares, and pretend it is tile or paving stone. If I can afford nothing better than a tar-paper shanty, it will stand up as a tar-paper shanty, honest in the sight of God and man - honest and unashamed."

4. "My home must be of beautiful colors. Color is, of all, the easiest feature to get in a house, and the one most ignored by builders. In such cases as they have thought about it, they have sought out the most hideous colors available - chocolate, slate, fireproof red - and with these deliberately obliterated the otherwise beautiful intrinsic colors of the brick and timber."

5. "The human touch with its consequent endless variation. The machine is death to art. The wavering, erring, human touch consecrated the object treated, by showing everywhere the gropings of a mind after some subtle charm...Anything that a machine does must be less beautiful than the same thing made by a loving human hand."

6. "Curvature. The ugliest line that can be drawn is a long, unbroken, mathematically correct, straight line. Because it is so ugly, the modern builder tries how much and how many of these he can get in...There are no straight lines in Nature, not one; and whenever man contrives one, Nature speedily sets about bending it. Straight lines are always ugly in proportion to their length."

7. "Simplicity. The more complicated, the better was the rule of the builders who spoiled New York... The result was a jumble of silly turrets, rope moldings nailed on, make-believe columns one inch thick; not one broad stretch of honest, smooth, dignified masonry."

Julia Seton had ideas about architecture as well. In her book By a Thousand Fires, she writes: "But one characteristic of the country house is enduring-it is never finished. Because it expresses an individuality, and because individualities

keep on developing, there will be changes in the house every year." Mrs. Seton lived up to this quote. She was responsible for most of the later additions to the castle. The changes she made were generally in the direction of opening up to allow more light.

PART II - ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- C. General Statement: Both Ernest Thompson Seton and Julia Seton liked to experiment with different building materials, old and new. This has resulted in an irregular massing of rectangular forms stepping up from the basement to the unroofed lookout on the second floor roof. The three major components of Seton Village at this time are the castle, the kiva and the hogan.

1. Architectural Descriptions

The Castle: Presently, the front patio (northwest corner) has stuccoed, thin, low enclosing walls of hollow core tile and soft brick in an irregularly shaped and angled configuration. Some of the original wood gates remain. It now has flagstone paving in the south area and brick at the barbecue (N). Stone masonry walls enclosing planting beds adjacent to the library and bedroom walls probably date to the earlier construction phases. The south retaining wall rises up to five feet above grade at the south and three feet above grade adjacent to the south addition. The northeast patio with steps rising about three feet up to the library addition, consists of flagstone paving with a curving, stone masonry retaining wall defining the northeast edge (probably done after 1950). At the arbor (once covered portal) some decking remains, some porch balusters are missing. It has simple angular corbels, is 11 feet deep, with stone and concrete steps from drive and steps up to entry door with masonry walls each side of steps.

The core house is constructed of rubble stone masonry and exposed vigas, with wood windows and doors. 1950s additions and the southwest corner porch enclosure of 1938 are primarily wood frame construction, with some exceptions being adobe. Most are stuccoed with overhanging or built up roofs or 90 lb rolled roofing. There is a second roof over the original flat roof parapets of the library. Decorative features include curved parapet at the addition to the library, painted, carved wood and ceramic tile. Crenelations on the small lookout parapet and stuccoed brackets under the enclosed porch at the southwest corner add the two, small castellated, medievalist touches. Important doors made of vertical boards with multiple lights above and curved corners and carved lintels. Stone and plastered fireplaces and oak floors are in the core house.

The Hogan. The Hogan was built before the Kiva. Seton prepared drawings and oversaw construction. In 1932 the council ring was moved from "headquarters" to the Hogan and was re-built. The Hogan was also called the "Covered Council Ring." It's first use took place May 28, 1932, the First Grand Council for leaders in the Woodcraft League.

Presently the Hogan has lost architectural and artistic features, historical materials, and structural stability due to a lack of maintenance and repair.

The Hogan is fashioned after a Navajo dwelling. Its exterior is circular, approximately 20' in diameter, with wood posts, stucco walls and a conical roof. The interior has lateral and horizontal wood structural posts that divide the stuccoed walls into a series of horizontal spaces in which Pueblo Indian figures in ceremonial dress are painted.

The Kiva. Built in 1936, the Kiva is very different from the Hogan. While the Hogan was used for meetings, the Kiva was only used for the most important ceremonies. It was "consecrated" by the south clan of San Ildefonso Pueblo. The Kiva was used through the 1950s by Boy and Girl Scout Troops.

The Kiva is a circular, partially underground structure, approximately 15 feet in diameter, built to emulate the kivas used for male meetings of Pueblo Indians. Construction is of wooden posts finished with stucco, a flat tar roof on vigas with parapet walls and canales. The entrance is through a roof opening. There is a door opening on the west facade but the door is missing. The kiva has no windows. Interior features include a dirt floor and a ceiling of exposed logs. A snake painted in the Pueblo Style winds across the stucco walls (this is the only decorative feature). There are simple wood benches circling the perimeter and wood framed niches in the walls.

The Kiva is threatened by deterioration from water infiltration and vandalism from disuse. The roof covering is failing. Interior murals are water damaged and vandalized. The exterior stairs, door, and interior benches are destroyed by vandalism.

Presently the roofs and walls of both the Hogan and the Kiva are covered by tarps to protect them from further damage until a planned restoration can be executed.

Part III Sources of Information

A. Architectural Drawings:

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Journals of Ernest Thompson Seton written in 1930
Original advertising literature for Seton Village
Original guestbook for visitors, 1935

2. Secondary Sources

Anderson, H. Allan. The Chief: Ernest Thompson Seton and the Changing West. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986.

Lutts, Ralph H. The Nature Fakers: Wildlife, Science and Sentiment. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing Co., 1990

Seton, Julia M. By a Thousand Fires: Nature Notes and Extracts from the Life and Unpublished Journals of Ernest Thompson Seton. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967.

Wadland, John Henry, Ph.D., Ernest Thompson Seton: Man In Nature and the Progressive Era 1880-1915, unpublished dissertation, Yale University (Canada), 1977.

C. Interviews:

Dee Seton Barber, August 6-8, 1995.
Steve Zimmer, Philmont Scout Ranch, telephone interview 8/1/95.

D. Supplemental Materials:

Preliminary Report prepared by Catherine Colby, National Park Service, Southwest Regional Office, 7/95.

Biography from Canadian Finding Aid No. 1694

Janus 1985 NHL Condition Assessment Report.

NOTE: Information on College of Indian Wisdom is housed in the National Archives of Canada. Per Roeanne Moctar at the Canadian Archives, these documents have never been microfilmed. The Archives will not release original documents through interlibrary or inter-archive loan. The only way these files can be viewed is on-site in Manitoba.