

## Ormand Family Activity

October 2009: Tucson Presidio

**Did I say that I like downtown? Tucson is a surprising town. I knew about the Presidio, of course, but I was looking at a map and found there is a Presidio Historical Site, just a few blocks north of the Pima County Courthouse. So on an off-Friday, we went to see it.**



**Here in the heart of our funny little city is an adobe fortification! The historical reconstructionists have taken great care to present what the northeast bastion of our Spanish-era "castle" would have looked like. Except for the telephone pole and the pickup truck, it is an impressive job!**



Inside is impressive, too. The most impressive thing to me, however, is that pattern that looks like a crosswalk in the dirt. That is the remnant, the foundation, of the **original** 250-year-old Presidio wall!



A closeup of the foundation. This park used to be part of a city parking lot, and they were preparing it to pave it over when they found relics. They stopped and called in the archaeologists, and the rest is history. (Did I really just say that??)

The covered structure in the middle looks like a well, but of course it isn't - in those days, the Santa Cruz ran, and the town got its water from springs not far from here (where what would later become the "Elysian Grove" was located - but that's a future adventure). Before the Spaniards governed Alta Pimeria, civilizations of agricultural indians had their pit-house dwellings all around the base of the black mountain (from which indian word is supposedly where Tucson gets its name). The archaeological remnants aren't much to look at - but here they are.



The park was manned by a husband and wife pair of docents, who were obviously passionate about their volunteer (retired) occupation. They even tried to enlist us to become Presidio Historical volunteers! But they kindly took this picture of us standing around the horno. Behind us is a typical barracks chamber for married soldiers.



**One wall was done up with a mural to depict how the large Presidio yard may have looked in the 1700s. The fortification enclosed several acres, and included the original Chapel San Augustin - precursor to the present San Augustine Cathedral. Another sight we have yet to see. A few times a month, more Historical**

**volunteers dress up in period clothing and armour, and enact daily life in Spanish Tucson. This includes firing an old cannon - odd I've never heard it. They also bake tortillas in the horno and invite visitors to a taste of history. Another visit for another time. Soon.**

**The fourth side of the tower area opens to a courtyard in front of the gift shop and museum. The building is another original, formerly a boarding house, now restored with Rio Nuevo dollars. Glad it has done some good. Actually, the whole Rio Nuevo thing is kind of a morbid joke among Tucsonans, but the docents shone a little light on what most of us don't know: On the other side of the river is where the Fransiscans operated a school and workhouse - the Convento. I knew that Rio Nuevo included restoring the Convento. What I didn't know is that, after the area was abandoned, it was used by Tucson as a garbage dump! A lot of Rio Nuevo time and money has gone into cleaning up that dump - with no visible progress for Tucsonans to judge the success of the project. I guess we just need to be more patient with government projects (Did I really just say that??)**

**Inside the museum,  
Charity expresses her  
infatuation for a military  
man.**

**Soldado de Cuervo -  
leather armour. Or shield,  
at least, and a lance.  
Gunpowder was a  
precious resource, so the  
lance was an important  
weapon against the  
Apache. Colonial Light  
Infantry of the Spanish  
Empire.**



**The little museum includes a little gift  
shop. At which Faith has to get a poke  
bonnet. Which I would have thought  
would come more from the early  
American era in Tucson, not the Spanish  
or Mexican.**

We are now done with today's visit. Outside, there is a blue paint line on the sidewalks that marks the extent of the old Presidio. Someday we will follow it all the way around, through the Courthouse which contains some above-ground remnants of the original wall. Today, as we follow it westward, we realize we don't have time to do much more... and there across the street is Old Town Artisans. We haven't been there for a long time, so we alter our plans and go inside.

Mostly, this is modern artsy craft stuff for Tucson visitors and resident elites who go in for overpriced "cultural" goodies. Most of it is weird. Some of it is quite good. All of it is interesting and unique. Like these Frieda Kahlo earrings that Faith discovered in the most interesting, crowded, and colorful shop of the lot. I think this is in the "weird" category. But Faith is kind of a Frieda fan.



Charity is quite taken with a pair of mannequins in Aztec dance costumes.

**The female one. Charity wants a get-up like this. I think she's the wrong ethnic background.**



**We are now done with the Presidio and Old Town Artisans, the time we have to leave is coming up, and we are hungry. My plan is to visit one of Tucson's best-loved downtown restaurants - Cafe Poca Cosa. They don't have a menu, because the chef invents it new every day. Twice a day, in fact. The server (who clearly enjoys her job) brings a blackboard slate to our table with today's offerings. The one "constant" is the Poca Cosa Platter, which the chef loads with three samples. Different samples. Everyone at the table will have a different selection! That's what Charity and I get. Faith surprises me by getting something other than her usual quesadilla (which, after a sort, the Cafe has today). Jerri gets a (large!) bowl of excellent soup with fine pasta noodles. Afterwards we get dessert - cheesecake, chocolate mousse, and *flan*. Everything excellent! Kinda pricey for frequent visits, however...**



**Charity tries on the poke bonnet at our table in the Cafe.**