

# Andrea Fisher

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Fine Pottery

## San Ildefonso Pueblo



*Black Mesa at San Ildefonso Pueblo*

San Ildefonso Pueblo is located about twenty miles northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico, mostly on the eastern bank of the Rio Grande. Although their ancestry has been traced as far back as abandoned pueblos in the Mesa Verde area in southwestern Colorado, the most recent ancestral home of the people of San Ildefonso is in the area of Bandelier National Monument, the prehistoric villages of Tyuonyi, Otowi, Navawi and Tsankawi specifically. The area of Tsankawi abuts the reservation on its northwest side.

The San Ildefonso name was given to the village in 1617 when a mission church was established. Before then the village was called *Powhoge*, "where the water cuts through" (in Tewa). Today's pueblo was established

as long ago as the 1300's and when the Spanish arrived in 1540 they estimated the village population at about 2,000.

That village mission was destroyed during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and when Don Diego de Vargas returned to reclaim the San Ildefonso area in 1694, he found virtually the entire tribe on top of nearby Black Mesa. After an extended siege the two sides negotiated a treaty and the people returned to their village. However, the next 250 years were not good for them. Finally, the Spanish swine flu pandemic of 1918 reduced the tribe's population to about 90. The tribe's population has increased to more than 600 today but the only economic activity available for most on the pueblo involves the creation of art in one form or another. The only other jobs are off-pueblo. San Ildefonso's population is small compared to neighboring Santa Clara Pueblo, but the pueblo maintains its own religious traditions and ceremonial feast days.

San Ildefonso has produced fine ceramic art since early pre-Columbian times. The pueblo is most known for being the home of the most famous Pueblo Indian potter, Maria Martinez. Many other excellent potters have produced quality pottery from this pueblo, too, among them: Blue Corn, Tonita and Juan Roybal, Dora Tse Pe and Rose Gonzales. Of course the descendants of Maria Martinez are still important pillars of San Ildefonso's pottery tradition. Maria's influence reached far and wide, so far and wide that even Juan Quezada, founder of the Mata Ortiz pottery renaissance in Chihuahua, Mexico, came to San Ildefonso to learn from her.

### For more info:

[San Ildefonso Pueblo at Wikipedia](#)

[Pueblo of San Ildefonso official website](#)

*Pueblos of the Rio Grande*, by Daniel Gibson

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