REMEMBERING EARLY GREAT HOUSES: CHACO'S BEGINNINGS
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ABSTRACT
In this paper, I propose that the foundations of Chacoan great houses originated in the Northern San Juan Basin. Three particular sites dating to the late ninth century AD stand out as examples of early great houses. After examining and comparing these sites to classic Chaco Canyon great houses, I propose reasons for why similar architectural styles were used after a migration to the Southern San Juan Basin. The construction of great houses functioned as a form of social memory. Individuals seeking legitimation of power may have capitalized on creating and transforming social memory through the construction of buildings. By exhibiting control over the architectural structures that had been used in the Northern San Juan Basin, these leaders may have been demonstrating their power over the past, and therefore the future. Early great house sites in the Northern San Juan Basin are significant because their continuation may represent a shift in identity and social organization among the Ancestral Puebloans. Puebloans may have seen symbolism and group unity in their constructions. But sometimes the Ancestral Puebloans experienced dislocation and their social memories would have had to be reconstructed. One of the most powerful ways to do this must have been by constructing buildings with features reminiscent of the past. This very event occurred between the Pueblo I (AD 750-AD 900) and Pueblo II (AD 900-AD 1150) periods, when the Northern San Juan was depopulated and the Southern San Juan experienced population growth. New sites in the Southern San Juan, which were predecessors to the later Chacoan great houses, were constructed much like some of the sites in the Northern San Juan. Though the sites in the Southern San Juan became more elaborate, sites in the Northern San Juan are now interpreted as early great houses. Specific features and how those features functioned in a more abstract sense all point to the existence of early

INTRODUCTION
It would be hard to disagree that nearly every society implicates social memory in some form. Places, practices, and experiences all become charged with meaning in a society’s lifetime. The dwellings of Ancestral Puebloans must have also been charged with meaning. It would make sense, then, that Ancestral

2 ibid., 181
great houses.

Three particular sites stand out as examples of early great houses. These sites date to the late ninth century, or late Pueblo I period. I argue that these sites are predecessors to the great houses in Chaco Canyon and that classic great houses are actually elaborate forms of these early great houses. The continuation of and elaboration on these sites, mainly in Chaco Canyon, may be a form of social memory employed to create unity, to legitimate social change, and to remember the past.

PROPOSAL AND EXPECTATIONS

Between late Pueblo I and early Pueblo II, a significant population shift occurred in what is now the Four Corners area of the United States. Groups of people from the south, west, and north all converged in the Southern San Juan drainage basin, or the Chaco region. In the period immediately preceding this migration, a significant portion of early Pueblo populations lived in the Northern San Juan Basin. The largest villages of the Northern San Juan possess many similar characteristics to the later early and classic great houses in Chaco Canyon. Though there is evidence for early great houses in Chaco Canyon, I argue that the foundations of great houses originated in the Northern San Juan Basin. When rebuilding took place after AD 900, the Ancestral Puebloans used architectural styles similar to those they had used in the Northern San Juan. There are multiple reasons for why the Puebloans continued and elaborated on these styles. Most significant is that the construction of great houses functioned as a form of creating social memory. Individuals seeking legitimation of power may have capitalized on creating and transforming social memory through the construction of buildings. By exhibiting control over the architectural structures that had been used in the Northern San Juan Basin, these leaders may have been demonstrating their power over the past, and therefore the future.

I propose that there are distinct sites in the Northern San Juan Basin that both looked like, and functioned as, early great houses. I will test my proposal by first examining and defining the key characteristics of classic Chaco great houses. I will then consider whether these same characteristics are found in earlier sites in the Northern San Juan Basin. Lines of evidence that I will use to test my proposal include specific types of masonry, enclosed bi-wall kivas, warehouses, earthworks, roads, surrounding communities, and clear lines-of-sight to other sites and important land features. From this tangible evidence, I expect to extrapolate the ideo-

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4 Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 230-235.
7 See Glossary for an explanation of terms.
logical significance of the continuation of and elaboration on the early great house architecture. I will also use some ethnographic data to support my case. Given the way modern Puebloan descendants view great houses and their modern pueblos, it is useful to consider ethnographies and linguistics to understand the ideologies of the Ancestral Puebloans.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: DEFINING GREAT HOUSES

To understand how these earlier sites may be precursors to Chacoan great houses, a definition of what characterizes a great house is called for. Archaeologists have long recognized great houses based on characteristics such as architectural features, positions on the landscape, and monumental (or at least high-investment) construction. These features include specific types of masonry, enclosed bi-wall kivas, warehouses, earthworks, roads, surrounding communities, and clear lines-of-sight to other sites and important land features. Together, these features make great houses massive, imposing structures that are centers on the cultural landscape.

Lekson, Windes and McKenna write that “Great houses were constructed mostly, but not entirely, with the well-crafted core and veneer masonry typical of Chacoan building.” Sometimes banded, this type of masonry was neat and well planned. In classic Chaco great houses, these walls reached heights of up to four stories, certainly quite remarkable to anyone who might have been coming upon the structure.

Another important element in terms of architecture is the types of kivas in great houses. Chacoans usually built bi-walled, enclosed kivas. A look at a few great kivas found in great houses shows that some also included peripheral rooms. These rooms, as well as most of the rooms in great houses, prove to be storage rooms (or warehouses) which housed food. For this reason, Lekson and colleagues define great houses as places that could be called palaces. It seems that few people actually lived in great houses, but other features, such as extensive middens (or trash deposits), show that they were used by large groups of people.

Middens, sometimes labeled architectural earthworks, are also used to define great houses. These deposits are unusually large and sometimes covered in adobe. At Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon, two

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9Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 68.


11Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 88.

12ibid., 89.

13ibid., 92.
mounds built on masonry facing were repeatedly enclosed with thick adobe, with stairs leading to the top. These earthworks may have been stages used during ritual activity.\textsuperscript{15}

Chacoans also built roads radiating from great houses to other surrounding sites and imposing landmarks. Archaeologists often use the existence of these road systems to argue that great houses were community centers and that their connection to important landmarks was significant.\textsuperscript{16}  Great houses almost, if not always, have views of surrounding areas. Lekson and colleagues write, “lines of sight and viewsheds were important elements of the cityscape.”

Clearly, great houses were important centers of the community. Massive size, a large amount of refuse and storage, roads, connections to other sites, and lines-of-sight all contribute to what makes a house “great.” By combining specific features of great houses and how those specific features may have functioned culturally, one can then examine whether or not early great houses existed in the Northern San Juan.

**Early Great Houses**

There are several important reasons for using the Northern San Juan as an area to examine early great houses. First, many large villages appear in the Pueblo I period in this area, far outnumbering those found in Chaco Canyon. Wilshusen and Van Dyke write, “both population and villages continually increased in the Four Corners from AD 750 on. By AD 860, at least one-third to one-half of the known population in the Anasazi world was in the Northern San Juan region.”\textsuperscript{18}  During the same period in the Southern San Juan, “population was either steady or declining.”\textsuperscript{19}  Population decline in one area and growth in another could indicate that people from the declining area must have migrated to the area where we see more growth. Region-wide studies of the Northern San Juan have shown precisely this.\textsuperscript{20}

Similarly, at about the time that the Northern San Juan population began to decline, more sites appeared to the south. Wilshusen and Van Dyke note that, “when people began to abandon the large villages of the Northern San Juan in the AD 880s and 890s, it should not surprise us that new communities with many traits of the northern villages began to appear close to the San Juan River.”\textsuperscript{20}  After the inhabitation of what they interpret as short-lived settlements near the San Juan, “candidate” great house communities (meaning the settlements that eventually become great houses) appeared in the Southern San Juan Basin.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14}ibid., 105; Windes, The Rise of Early Chacoan Great Houses, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 105.
\item \textsuperscript{16}ibid., 107.
\item \textsuperscript{18}Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 216.
\item \textsuperscript{19}ibid., 231.
\item \textsuperscript{20}ibid., 233-234.
\end{itemize}
Lekson, Windes, and McKenna write, “our limited tree-ring-dated sample suggest that single- and multiple-story great houses began to appear somewhat later, with the arrival of new immigrants from the south, west, and north by about AD 860/875.”

By the early tenth century, some of these sites, like Old Bonito and the great house at Casa del Rio, seem to mimic sites to the north. Both have a large central arc and Old Bonito has one large, central kiva. Casa del Rio’s Pueblo I construction also shows the beginning of two connected arcs. If the argument that the Northern San Juan inhabitants moved to the Southern San Juan holds, then sites to the north could be the beginnings of the great houses in Chaco Canyon. How, then, does one define an early great house? Choosing

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23 Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 77.
24 Windes, The Rise of Early Chacoan Great Houses, 17, Figure 3.2.
25 See Figure 7.6, Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 241 and Figure 3.4, Windes, The Rise of Early Chacoan Great Houses, 19.
from a large sample of late Pueblo I sites in the San Juan Basin, one can determine similarities among Northern sites, as well as later Southern sites.

Three key sites are considered here as evidence of early great houses. These sites are McPhee Pueblo, Casa del Rio, and Martin I. McPhee Pueblo (5MT4475, Figure 1) is located approximately half a kilometer west of the Dolores River, about six kilometers northwest of the town of Dolores, and was excavated during the Dolores Archaeological Project of the 1980s. The pueblo, oriented northeast and southwest, is part of a larger village, but is unique in its construction. First, its one hundred rooms make it much larger than many other contemporary sites. In addition, these rooms are situated in two joined, U-shaped room-

Figure 2. Map of Casa del Rio and surrounding refuse.26

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Figure 1. Map of Casa del Rio and surrounding refuse.26

26bid., 19, Figure 3.4.
blocks. In the plaza of the main arc, there are multiple pit structures, the largest of which is in the direct center. This pithouse was constructed with stone, but Windes notes that it was not a great kiva.  

Even so, the pit structure became the focal point for special community activities and rituals. Casa del Rio (Figure 2) is located along the Chaco River, five miles downstream from Peñasco Blanco. The Pueblo I structure probably housed around sixteen families. Like McPhee, there are two connected arcs, though they are not as defined. The Pueblo I house is more crescent-shaped than U-shaped, and the second arc is not nearly as large. Oriented nearly east-west, the roomblock measures 112 meters and has a large midden to the south. Compared to contemporary sites, Casa del

27 ibid., 16
Rio is rather large. Though it is located in Chaco Canyon, I use it for comparative purposes because it was inhabited during approximately the same time as McPhee Pueblo and Martin I. Many of its main features, like its crescentic layout, resemble contemporary Puebloan dwellings.

Martin I (5MT2108, Figure 3) is located north-south on a mesita top above the Little Cahone Creek in Montezuma County. The site remains an anomaly in the area. A large dance plaza (labeled as 2 in Figure 3) marks the south end of the site, and a central kiva (labeled as 1 in Figure 3) lies in the middle. Roomblocks flank the kiva, which has at least four peripheral rooms. The site is about 280 meters long and 130 meters wide. A large midden extends down the eastern side of the mesa top, where the slope is more gradual.

Paul Martin fully excavated twelve rooms, the dance plaza, the kiva, four peripheral rooms on the kiva, and three pithouses at the site. In addition, he mapped general rubble to the north of the great kiva and around the excavated roomblocks on the east and west sides of the kiva. While re-mapping the site in September 2007, we noted that there were distinct roomblocks to the north of the great kiva. We mapped two additional sets of rooms. Because of Martin’s back dirt, it was difficult to tell if all the roomblocks connected. This data would be a significant addition to the argument that Martin I is an early great house.

Tree ring chronology dates the site to the AD 850-870s, contemporary with McPhee Pueblo and Casa del Rio. It exhibits similar features to the two, as well as with later great houses.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In order to understand the architecture of early and classic great houses, theories related to how we can see ideologies of the Ancestral Puebloans through architecture must be detailed. Theories about agency, landscape, and social memory in archaeology are useful to my discussion. Agency theory helps one understand how potential leaders could legitimate power through their own actions. By reinforcing or reinterpreting the past, potential leaders could take advantage of the group’s collective memory and change the present social organization.

Agency theory is important in understanding the use of social memory to legitimate power. Timothy Earle writes that individuals sometimes manipulate cultural relationships to centralize and extend their power. One way in which they do this is through the “construction of monuments that inform the society of a leader’s abilities to coordinate social labor.”

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30ibid., 20.
32ibid., 455, Figure 144; William J. Robinson and Bruce G. Harrill, Tree-Ring Dates from Colorado V, Mesa Verde Area (Tucson: Laboratory of Tree-Ring Dating Research, The University of Arizona, 1974).
Chaco Canyon, a leader who could organize the building or rebuilding of great houses demonstrated leadership. By using architecture that recalled the past, these leaders also exhibited control over the past. “Social memory is often used to create the appearance of a seamless social whole, naturalizing or legitimating authority.”

Individuals in Chaco Canyon may have used the built environment to legitimate their authority and to create social cohesion.

Michelle Hegmon writes:

The built environment reflects ideologies about social interactions. It both connects people to the landscape and perpetuates or changes social organization. Robert W. Preucel writes, “architecture and the built environment both encode and reproduce world views.”

Specifically in Chaco Canyon,

“Architecture constitutes the built environment; it is constructed by people in response to their needs and their conception of how both their community and the universe are ordered. Furthermore, once constructed, the built environment can contribute to maintaining and reinforcing social order, or if modified, the built environment can help to transform that order.”

Construction projects were useful because they employed social memory in order to create group cohesion, whether literally or symbolically. “Social memory may involve general links to a vague mythological antiquity based on reinterpretation of monuments or landscapes, or it may entail direct connections to specific ancestors in the recent past.”

By rebuilding in a similar architectural style to those used in the past, leaders were able to cope with social stresses. During the Late Bonito phase (AD 1100-1140), a climatic downturn and competition from other potential centers of power caused strife in the social organization in Chaco. New building projects “celebrated a renewed world order, yet at the same time provided a familiar sense of continuity with the preceding centuries.”

Crown and Wills examine kiva rebuilding in great houses and come to similar conclusions. Kiva rebuilding was triggered by changes in internal dynamics, whether they were membership changes or alteration in group structure.

In Chaco, building and rebuilding represented changes in the social order.

34ibid., 9-10.
35Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory, Meaning, and Masonry: The Late Bonito Chacoan Landscape, 414
38Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory, Meaning, and Masonry: The Late Bonito Chacoan Landscape, 413.
39ibid., 414.
to make references to an idealized history.\textsuperscript{43} New buildings also made reference to the past through intervisibility with historical sites.\textsuperscript{44} Constructing in a way which incorporated old sites or made clear connections to old sites was not merely a coincidence.

**METHODS**

My data is derived from observation at site Martin I-1938 while in the field in the fall of 2007. I participated in a project to re-record this site as part of a larger project in the Bureau of Land Management’s Canyons of the Ancients National Monument because the site had not been recorded extensively since Paul Martin excavated in the summer of 1938. Furthermore, a 1969 survey marked the site on the wrong side of the canyon that it overlooks. The site is largely unknown and needed to be accurately recorded.

When surveying the site, we noticed the oversight of a few roomblocks in the map that Martin had made. I remapped the site, adding the roomblocks that were not originally indicated. These newly recognized roomblocks provide further insight into the distinctness of the site, and I will address these characteristics later.

While working at Martin I, we also conducted a surface collection. This sherd collection and Martin’s collection of artifacts and dendrochronology samples all contributed to a better estimate of the dates of potential occupation of the site. The dendrochronology dates had been analyzed in 1938 and 1974, but the additional sherd collection we conducted supports this data. Though more extensively analyzed in 1974, the dates were consistent and showed the site to have been built and maintained between the AD 850s and 870s.\textsuperscript{45} The dates given to Martin I are important because of its unusual characteristics for its period and because I can compare the site to similar sites dating to the same period.

Through further research, I found that similar sites existed in the area surrounding the Martin I site. Documentation of these sites is further evidence of the existence of early great houses in the Northern San Juan Basin. McPhee Pueblo was documented during the Dolores Archaeological Project in the 1980s. Casa del Rio is south of the Northern San Juan Basin, but dates to the same time period as the other sites. I use defining characteristics of Chaco great houses -- specific types of masonry, enclosed bi-wall kivas, midden size, surrounding communities, and clear lines-of-sight to other sites and important land features -- to define these sites as early great houses.

**DISCUSSION**

\textsuperscript{41}Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory and Construction of Chacoan Society, 186.
\textsuperscript{42}Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory, Meaning, and Masonry: The Late Bonito Chacoan Landscape, 414.
\textsuperscript{43}ibid., 423.
\textsuperscript{44}ibid., 424.
\textsuperscript{45}Martin, Modified Basketmaker Sites, Ackmen-Lowry Area, Southwestern Colorado, 1938; Robinson and Harrill, Tree-Ring Dates from Colorado V, Mesa Verde Area
Two Early Great Houses: McPhee Pueblo and Casa del Rio

The most defining features of classic great houses remain its masonry and form. Therefore, it makes sense to look for similarities in masonry in Pueblo I sites. McPhee Pueblo exhibits “clear, Type I Chaco masonry in its central arc.” In its initial construction, Casa del Rio also had Type I masonry, which was carried into its great house construction. Both McPhee and Casa del Rio exhibit two arcs of masonry rooms, which connect in the center. The layout makes plazas a central feature, just like at classic great houses.

Archaeologists often use great kivas to define great houses, as well. Windes notes that construction including kivas built within the house construction (enclosed) and a great kiva in the plaza or nearby is typical of great houses. Early great houses may reveal similar construction. At McPhee, although the large central pit structure may not be a great kiva, it most certainly is a central feature and it is in the plaza of the central arc. In fact, maps of the central arc at McPhee Pueblo, including its retaining wall, and Peñasco Blanco (in Chaco Canyon) are strikingly similar. Both have an arc of room blocks, a retaining wall, and a large pit structure or kiva in the middle.

In Chaco, size matters, so early great houses must also have been impressive. McPhee Pueblo clearly stands out from its surrounding room blocks. It has two connecting arcs with an associated large stone pit structure, larger than the surrounding pit structures. At Casa del Rio, the roomblock measures 112 meters long and may have housed sixteen families. In comparison, the great house built above it only housed about four families.

These large roomblocks are impressive alone, but smaller roomblocks and sites also surround them: “Within the northern villages are usually one or two very large roomblocks 100-200 m long, with multiple pit structures. Much smaller roomblocks flank or surround them.”

Strikingly, McPhee Pueblo is not an entire site in itself- it is only one roomblock from McPhee Village. As discussed earlier, great houses are community centers surrounded by many other, smaller sites. This is shown in midden size, connectivity to other areas, and community structures.

At Casa del Rio, roads make the site a clear center of a community. Windes writes, “Casa del Rio is the nexus of several prehistoric roads.” Additionally, Casa del Rio’s refuse is massive. Though much of the waste was probably tossed out by later great house users, the Pueblo I deposits are

46Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 238.
47Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 77.
49See Figure 3.5, ibid., 20.
50Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 238.
51Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 74.
53Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 238.
The household size alone cannot account for the midden deposits, so community use must have occurred. Other lines of evidence attest to this, as well. The site, named after its large amounts of groundstone, must have experienced a great deal of food production. Casa del Rio is located in an area that “gives it a better advantage for horticultural production than any other location in and around Chaco…The setting allows a multitude of crop production strategies.” The inhabitants of Casa del Rio may have recognized the importance of their location and the site probably acted as an important center of food production and possibly ritual gathering and feasting. This would explain its large deposition of both groundstone and refuse.

Figure 4. Illustration of Martin I kiva and roomblocks, based on surface survey and maps.  


56ibid., 18.

57Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 76.
Ives documented a large amount of river cobbles and groundstone on the surface of McPhee Pueblo.\textsuperscript{58} Excavation further supported that the amount of groundstone at McPhee Pueblo seemed to be higher than at other sites.\textsuperscript{59} Perhaps intensive food production was also occurring at McPhee Pueblo as it may have in Casa del Rio.\textsuperscript{60} Additionally, McPhee Pueblo’s midden reached more than three feet in depth, abnormally large for the number of households. McPhee Pueblo also had a high number of storage rooms. Lekson, Windes, and McKenna argue that warehouses, or storage areas, (along with large middens) show high food production at great houses.\textsuperscript{61} The potential connection between food production, storage, and great houses can also clearly be seen at early great houses.

Not only were great houses community centers, but they were literally centered on the landscape. Therefore, it would be useful to examine how possible early great houses might also be centered. As discussed earlier, Casa del Rio was built in an important area in terms of food production. The site was also “situated within clear sight of the communication shrine located at the top edge of the West Mesa cliffs overlooking the region.”\textsuperscript{62} Lekson, Windes, and McKenna note, however, that they are uncertain whether the communication system was built along with or after the building of great houses. Regardless, the site has clear views of an imposing land feature- the West Mesa cliffs. The line-of-sight was probably not coincidental.

A Striking New Example of an Early Great House: Martin’s Site I- 1938

Martin I has been lost in the archaeological literature in the past 70 years,

\textsuperscript{58}Gay A. Ives, McPhee Pueblo Site Form (Denver: Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation,1978)).
\textsuperscript{59}Wilshusen, personal communication, 2007.
\textsuperscript{61}Lekson, Windes and McKenna, Architecture, 92.
\textsuperscript{62}ibid., 75.
but its unique features necessitate examination. I argue that Martin I is an early great house like McPhee Pueblo and Casa del Rio. The unusual construction of the Martin I great kiva shows at least some experimentation with masonry. It also associates Martin I with later sites, rather than contemporary sites, which often exhibit large, square, underground pits like at McPhee Pueblo. The kiva at Martin I is round, mostly aboveground, possibly not roofed, and built with large stone slabs.

The great kiva at Martin I is also surrounded by roomblocks (see Figure 4 for an illustration of the roomblocks and kiva). While mapping the site in the fall of 2007, we noted roomblocks that were distinct from those shown on Martin’s original map. Though it was hard to distinguish whether or not they connected into an arc around the kiva due to Martin’s excavation back dirt, the kiva was clearly in the center of a plaza.

Moreover, there are at least four peripheral rooms adjoined to the kiva, showing the beginnings of a bi-wall or enclosed

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63Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 219, Figure 7.3; Windes, The Rise of Early Chacoan Great Houses, 17, Figure 3.2

64Martin, Modified Basketmaker Sites, Ackmen-Lowry Area, Southwestern Colorado, 1938, 350.
Martin I is relatively impressive in size, just as Chaco great houses were and are. In addition to the central kiva (Figure 6), Martin I has a significant dance plaza (25 meters in diameter) on its southern end (Figure 7). The one meter-thick kiva walls (Figure 5) are also quite impressive. Like at great houses, the size of the architecture at Martin I probably astonished visitors. The large dance plaza at Martin I most likely saw community use rather than use only by the inhabitants of the site, like at classic great houses. Its size attests to this, as well as the associated midden. A large amount of debris has eroded down the eastern slope of the mesa top where Martin I lies. Martin, during excavations, collected a significant amount of artifacts. Even in areas where he did not excavate, there is a substantial amount of midden.

If Martin I was a community center, we would expect to see communities surrounding it. In fact, a simple walk down Paul Martin’s original road to Martin I shows that it is clearly surrounded by other sites. Visitors to Martin I can also see that the site was a center on the landscape. The Puebloans constructed the site on the point of a mesa top. There are clear views to the north, as well as views above the mesa valleys. The site also overlooks the Little Cahone Creek. Standing on the west side of the great kiva, one can see the La Platas
mountain range almost perfectly due east from the sight. In a notch between surrounding mesas, a clear view of almost the entire mountain range can only be seen from the great kiva. The kiva site placement is not a coincidence− it was clearly placed in a spot where a prominent land feature could be seen.

Recreating a Masonry of the North: Later Great Houses, Social Memory, and Power

Having established that some sites in the Northern San Juan Basin could be considered early great houses, the next step is to examine why immigrants to the Southern San Juan continued using similar architecture and site placement. Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Lekson, McKenna and Windes all make reference to and explain that the depopulation of the Northern San Juan and consequent rise in population in the Southern San Juan points to migration. They also note that additional migrants came from the west and south. Perhaps multiple groups of people flocked to Chaco during the late Pueblo I period, creating a need for social integration. This shift may also have marked a shift in political organization. Lekson and colleagues write, “many Pueblo people remember Chaco as a place where both wonderful and terrible things happened, and its end signaled the beginning of new ceremonial understandings, new social contracts, new ways of living.” If Pueblo people remember Chaco’s end this way, Chacoans may have remembered the Northern San Juan’s end (or period of depopulation) in the same way. Even if their reasons for leaving the Northern San Juan were negative, the migratory group continued to use similar architectural styles.

The use of similar architecture to the north may have represented change through continuity. By employing types of architecture that were used in the north, the Ancestral Puebloans may have been creating and recreating their social memory. This process could have unified disparate groups and restructured social, political, and ritual aspects of the community. Most importantly, potential new leaders could have taken advantage of the opportunity to rebuild and may have used architecture as a symbol of social memory in order to legitimate their power.

Connections to the Landscape and Remembering the Past

The newly arrived immigrants to Chaco seem to have placed importance on older sites. They built on top of sites or incorporated them into the new buildings. At Casa del Rio, the Chacoans built a great house directly on top of a curve in the main Pueblo I roomblock. The Chacoans also built links to older sites: “In [the Red Willow outlier community], a road seg-

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67 ibid., 77.
68 ibid., 100.
69 ibid., 76-77.
ment was built to link a Classic Bonito phase great house with an abandoned early Pueblo II period great kiva several miles away. This association with older sites must have evoked deep symbolic meaning for the site inhabitants. Memories of their past were kept intact and reenacted within their present buildings.

Stein and Fowler’s “Manuelito Model,” formed while working in Manuelito Canyon, shows how these connections to past sites might have played out after the depopulation of Chaco Canyon. Their model states that 1) great houses continued to be built based on Chacoan architecture after Chaco’s depopulation, and that 2) these constructions were linked through the use of roads or pathways connecting subsequent great houses to each other, acting as paths through time. Fowler and Stein “recognize that the so-called nucleated pueblos of the Pueblo II period are in actuality ritual landscapes, and contend that these buildings are the apogee of the same tradition of sacred technology of which Chaco Era great houses are an earlier manifestation.” Traditions of ritual landscapes persisted during and after Chaco Canyon’s apex and decline.

Ethnographic literature also shows that modern Pueblo people place great importance on the landscape and its relationship to the past. As Van Dyke states, “the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest United States have an intimate and complex relationship with the landscape, interweaving the physical, the social, and the mythic.” Modern Puebloan descendants such as the Keres, Tewa, Zuni, and Hopi view the physical landscape as the center of a spiritual world. The landscape is integral in the worldviews of these groups. Even now their built landscape reflects social and spiritual order.

A historical perspective of three villages that were subject to Apache raids during the Spanish Reconquest supports the ethnographically documented importance of landscape. During the late seventeenth century, the villages of Cochiti, San Marcos, and San Felipe came together on the top of Cochiti mesa to counter raids from the Apaches. There, they built the village Kotyiti, which was an “architectural

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71 Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory and Construction of Chacoan Society, 192.
73 Ibid., 101.
74 Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory, Meaning, and Masonry: The Late Bonito Chacoan Landscape, 417.
76 Preucel, Making Pueblo Communities, 58-77.
Preucel, Making Pueblo Communities, 58-77.

78 ibid., 70.

79 Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory, Meaning, and Masonry: The Late Bonito Chacoan Landscape, 423.

77 Fast

Creating an Identity

Another reason for the continuation of architectural style is that the immigrants to Chaco Canyon needed to create a social identity. At the time of movement and relocation, the Ancestral Pueblos may have needed to create a conception of how their community and universe were ordered. A continuation of previous styles would maintain or reinforce social order.

Windes writes that “early versions of the later classic Chacoan great houses… might also have served to bond the scattered San Juan Basin communities and link people, in memory at least, to their former homelands.”

If this is the case, early versions of the great houses must have had even earlier versions. Having demonstrated this point using sites that precede Classic Chaco Canyon, it makes sense to examine how they bonded the communities.

As Hobsbawm and Ranger write, social memory was employed in “establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of group, real or artificial communities.”

Scattered groups probably rebuilt their communities in the Southern San Juan to create social identity. Perhaps the group did not actually identify as a whole, but by building structures reminiscent of the past, the group was able to generate a shared social memory of the past.

As seen in Kotyiti, three distinct groups were able to create a shared identity
by building a pueblo reminiscent of past constructions.\textsuperscript{82} Not only did the building represent a return to tradition ideologically, it required the participation of individuals in its construction. In a syndicated effort, the inhabitants participated in creating a shared identity. As Cameron and Duff write, “material constructions embody practice in the making of tradition through the act of participation.”\textsuperscript{83}

The need to integrate groups may have also presented an opportunity to individuals seeking power. A shift in social organization may have occurred during the move into Chaco Canyon in the late AD 800s. The similar architectural styles might explain this shift and how it manifested in the built environment.

**Shifting Social Organization**

Crown and Wills provide clues to why the Pueblo people continued using similar architecture and incorporated older sites.\textsuperscript{84} Their examination of kiva rebuilding can be extended to apply to the construction of great houses. For example, they write that, “the periodicity in kiva rebuilding was triggered by internal dynamics within the user group, such as membership changes or significant alteration in group structure.”\textsuperscript{85} In the Southern San Juan, (re)building was certainly triggered by alteration in group structure. Suddenly, in late Pueblo I and early Pueblo II, multitudes of people arrived in the area, and the social system must have experienced a shock. Add to the situation the different histories of all the people, and the need to incorporate everyone became even greater. Wilshusen and Van Dyke observe that high local population densities in Northern San Juan Pueblo I villages, disparate cultural groups, differences in socioreligious organization, and relative lack of well-defined, decision-making hierarchies “made for a volatile combination.”\textsuperscript{86} The emigrants from the Northern San Juan probably carried social baggage with them into the Chaco area and may have wanted to start over, or at least live as they did before the stressful period.

The physical act of building the structures probably worked as a form of constructing social identity and memory, as well. Chacoan great houses were massive and would have required the efforts of the entire community to build them. Not only does this suggest that the social order in Chaco required some type of “rank or entitlement of particular individuals,” but shows that the community was invested in building new centers.\textsuperscript{87} With the involvement of all individuals, each person might feel a sense of ownership and belonging. Once these impressive structures were built, participation in ritual events inside them

\textsuperscript{82}Preucel, Making Pueblo Communities, 58-77.
\textsuperscript{84}Crown and Wills, Modifying Pottery and Kivas at Chaco: Pentimento, Restoration, Or Renewal?, 511-532.
\textsuperscript{85}ibid., 526.
\textsuperscript{86}Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 218.
\textsuperscript{87}ibid., 246.
might also have served to create social identity.\textsuperscript{88} Hegmon writes:

“[Architecture] is constructed in a historical and social context, and the intended uses of an architectural facility will ordinarily be considered in its design and construction. Thus the social context will, in a sense, have shaped the structure. In turn, the form of the structure will continue to shape the activities that take place within it and the perceptions of the participants.”\textsuperscript{89}

Building and using these structures may have solidified social identity by both employing historical architecture and by using them for ritual and domestic activities which may have harkened back to the Northern San Juan.

As mentioned earlier, the societies of the San Juan may also have experienced a shift in social organization during this time of movement— or perhaps a shift caused the migration. Whatever the case, social memory probably aided in restoring harmony (real or imagined). So what may this shift have been? Wilshusen and Van Dyke suggest that there may have been two levels of organization in the Pueblo I Dolores villages, seen in burials at abandoned villages, though the “general assessment is that [these villages] were basically egalitarian.”\textsuperscript{90}

Adler and Wilshusen write that early forms of great kivas during Pueblo I represent a shift from small communities to larger, aggregated villages.\textsuperscript{91} Additionally, they argue that monuments may have been built during periods of initial change and the establishment of a common ideology.\textsuperscript{92} The period leading up to the move to Chaco seems to be marked by social change and may have even caused the move.

Ideas about the significance of these early great kivas are useful in understanding possible sources of power during Pueblo I. Adler and Wilshusen write that, “as the size of the interacting community increases, social integrative facilities of a more monumental nature tend to be constructed and used almost exclusively for ritual activities.” They argue that ritual activities were one way to mediate stresses involving control of information and decision-making in larger communities.\textsuperscript{93} It seems then, that whoever controls the ritual events also controls information. Therefore, construction of monumental architecture may suggest a shift in social organization where a few have access to all the information and decision-making.

The move to Chaco, then, may have opened doors for individuals to wield even more power. Van Dyke notes that, “a shift toward institutionalized inequality is implied” in Chaco Canyon as compared to

\textsuperscript{88}Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory and Construction of Chacoan Society, 194.
\textsuperscript{89}Hegmon, Social Integration and Architecture, 7.
\textsuperscript{90}Wilshusen and Van Dyke, Chaco’s Beginnings, 245.
\textsuperscript{92}ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{93}ibid., 133.
the Northern San Juan Basin.\textsuperscript{94} Additionally, Cameron and Duff write, “immigrants likely brought the memory of the power achieved through control of communal ritual in Pueblo I villages, as well as ways community members might use these ideas and symbols to appropriate power.”\textsuperscript{95}

Without delving into the drastically different social structure in Chaco Canyon versus the earlier Northern San Juan, we can safely say that tremendous transformation in social organization took place. How certain individuals legitimated their positions is of more importance here.

Without explicitly declaring leadership, some individuals may have capitalized on memories of the past to legitimate their power. Hegmon notes that, “order depends more on integration and cooperation than on force.”\textsuperscript{96} Therefore, these leaders must have asserted their positions in a way more

\textsuperscript{94}Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory and Construction of Chacoan Society, 184.
\textsuperscript{95}Cameron and Duff, History and Process in Village Formation: Context and Contrast from the Northern Southwest, 38
\textsuperscript{96}Hegmon, Social Integration and Architecture, 5.
coercive than forceful. Referencing Chaco Canyon’s later depopulation in the AD 1000s, Cameron and Duff write, “the Chaco regional system was a constantly shifting and dynamic ‘structure’ within which individuals built on historical events and traditions to further their own goals and, in the aggregate, transform society.” While leaders legitimated power, the community as a whole contributed to the transformation.

Van Dyke writes that, “great house builders seeking legitimacy could have profited from symbolic references to long-term continuity.” Architecture is a form of symbolism that may have functioned as a sign of continuity for the immigrants to Chaco. By directing the construction of places similar to those from the Northern San Juan, individuals could have been creating a sense of social continuity, and for that matter, social memory.

Incorporating old sites in the construction of new communities also may have legitimated rulers: “what better way for great house builders to legitimate social inequality at Red Willow than through the construction of a physical connection with the community’s past?” Not only did leaders legitimate their positions with these connections, they connected the community to their past— a past that was probably less hierarchical. Strategically or not, po-

97 Cameron and Duff, History and Process in Village Formation: Context and Contrast from the Northern Southwest, 34.
98 Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory and Construction of Chacoan Society, 188.
99 ibid., 193.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
In this paper, I have addressed three sites which could qualify as early great houses. By defining characteristics of late Chacoan great houses, I was able to compare these three sites in terms of architecture, function, and position on the landscape. McPhee Pueblo, Casa del Rio, and Martin I all exhibit unusual characteristics compared to contemporary sites. I argue that these sites are in fact early great houses, which explains their relative uniqueness. Chacoan great houses are important in that they have large middens, massive architecture, clear visibility to other sites and land features, and are centers on the landscape. McPhee Pueblo, Casa del Rio, and Martin I exhibit the same characteristics. Extensive middens, groundstone and pottery assemblages, and storage rooms associated with each site show massive amounts of food production. Each also boasts some sort of community structure. At McPhee, it is the large pit structure in the middle of the plaza and at Martin I, it is the dance plaza and great kiva. Casa del Rio’s main community structure seems to be its enormous crescentic roomblocks. Distinct architecture at the sites further associates them with Chacoan great houses. Compared to contemporary sites, McPhee Pueblo, Casa del Rio, and Martin I are huge structures. McPhee and Casa del Rio exhibit Type I masonry and Martin I’s great kiva masonry cannot escape the notice of
visitors. Arcing roomblocks and plazas further distinguish the sites. Additionally, Casa del Rio and Martin I were constructed in areas with views of surrounding land features and in areas which made them distinct from other sites. Casa del Rio lies on highly productive land (compared to the land surrounding it) and Martin I is on a mesa top, giving it clear views over the Little Cahone Creek.

These sites were probably impressive to the Ancestral Puebloans, just as great houses must have been. Their images probably remained in the minds of the people as they moved south during the late Pueblo I and early Pueblo II periods. As the Puebloans rebuilt in the Southern San Juan Basin, social memory was at work. The groups probably needed a way to create social identity and restructure social organization. Building similar communities to what had been in the Northern San Juan was probably important because it helped accomplish social unity. The Ancestral Puebloans probably were not rebuilding and elaborating on construction techniques they had used in the past simply because they worked, but because the group as a whole could remember them. The past seems to have been embodied in the building of the Chacoan great houses. Potential leaders in Chaco Canyon may have capitalized on this process of social memory in order to legitimate their authority. Using similar architectural styles to those used in the Northern San Juan Basin, leaders could have stated a claim to the past. Architecture was and is used as a tool for restructuring social organization, and leaders in Chaco Canyon may have recognized this.

Recognizing the existence of early great houses not only explains where the idea for Chacoan great houses may have come from, but could help archaeologists understand the social organization of Chaco Canyon. Ruth Van Dyke explains that architecture, places, and ideology are closely linked. Without understanding how Chaco came to be and where its history lies, we cannot begin to comprehend how Chaco worked. Further research based on the acknowledgement that early great houses might have existed in the Northern San Juan could greatly benefit archaeologists of the San Juan, and I would encourage such work.

Van Dyke, Ruth M., Memory and Construction of Chacoan Society, 193.
GLOSSARY

**Banded masonry:**
Masonry form in which stones are lined in rows. See right for examples.

**Core-and-veneer masonry:**
Walls consisting of two facings made of pecked, or worked, stone. The space between the facings is filled with rubble or other materials such as mud, earth, or household trash.\(^{101}\)

**Dendrochronology:**
A dating method based on the ring sequence or number of rings in a tree. Each year, a tree adds a ring of growth. This ring is affected by climatic conditions—when the climate is favorable, trees will grow a larger ring. When the climate is dry in a given year, the tree will only put on a thin layer. Similar trees in the same area will exhibit similar growth. By finding older and younger trees from the same area which overlap in age, a chronology can be developed, and dates can be obtained. Timber is often well preserved in the southwest, so archaeological sites which incorporated timber as a building tool can be dated with this method.

**Kiva:**
Subterranean structure usually used as a ritual center.

**Bi-wall:** Kiva has two masonry walls surrounding it, or otherwise peripheral rooms. (Also referred to as enclosed.)

**Great kiva:** Multi-household very large, round, subterranean structures containing highly formalized interior features and furniture. These features include a low masonry bench, four wooden posts, raised floor vaults, a raised fire box and deflector, and antechamber, and often peripheral rooms.

**Midden:**
Mound of refuse outside buildings. Usually contain broken pots, trash, and sometimes skeletal remains.

**Roomblock:**
Multiple rooms connected in a line or arc.

**Warehouse:**
A storeroom or workroom.

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Works Cited


