

The Metamorphosis of MAD-rid, or Is it MAH-drid?

by Yvette Cohn Stoor

THE 2015 NEW MEXICO Genealogical Society's Annual Conference in Albuquerque featured Robert Julian, author of *The Place Names of New Mexico*, as a speaker. He was very entertaining and informative. However, I questioned his explanation of the pronunciation anomaly of Madrid, New Mexico. Basically, he stated it is the preferred and more English pronunciation that is utilized rather than the Spanish name pronunciation. One of the local attendees asserted that the strange pronunciation was a result of a relatively recent period when "mad" as in "crazy" people moved into the area. Sitting in the back of the room, I nodded in agreement. My family never utilized the MAD-rid pronunciation and I felt the new pronunciation had surfaced during my lifetime.

Curious about the correct origin of the name, I set out to research the town's history to hopefully discover why there are such strong opinions, and definitely two camps of thought, on the "right way" to pronounce its moniker. The quest enabled me to take a journey of the village's unique past.

Present day Madrid has new life as a quirky, artsy, hippy, biker hotspot, with a little bit of "island of misfit toys" feel to it. A popular route to take the "back way to Santa Fe" provides a beautiful drive and a wonderful place to take visitors. Situated on Highway 14 on the backside of the Sandia Mountains, Madrid is nestled in the rolling hills of the Ortiz range between the towns of Golden and Cerrillos. As you descend into the town, the tailings of the old coal mines and ruins of some of the mining operations are still visible.

The history of the town is interesting. In terms of New Mexico history, Madrid is virtually an adolescent. The town has the feel of a ghost and/or gold rush town; but, its birth and growth were due to the coal rush, and its demise started by a tragic explosion within the mine and then the end of World War II.

After searching through historical maps, Madrid doesn't show up until 1895 – 1897. Surrounding the area that would become Madrid were the towns of Golden, Cañon de Agua, San Pedro, Tuerto, Dolores and Cerrillos. In fact, the town was never incorporated, being privately owned by corporations for most of its existence.

Different sources have varied dates ranging from 1835 to mid-1800's for the actual discovery and mining of the anthracite and bituminous coal found in the hills. Primitive mining by Native Americans was evident prior to those dates. The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company kept a small operation functioning in the mid- 1800's and did not expand due to the lack of transportation in the area. When the railroad built a spur into Madrid in 1892, it enabled the vast trove of coal to be mined and transported all over the country. By 1893 a seven-story anthracite coal breaker was constructed, and by 1899 all coal production in the area was consolidated at Madrid.

The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company ceased operation around 1906. George Kaseman, a retail coal distributor and operator of the Hahn Coal Company in Albuquerque, found himself without a supplier. Kaseman

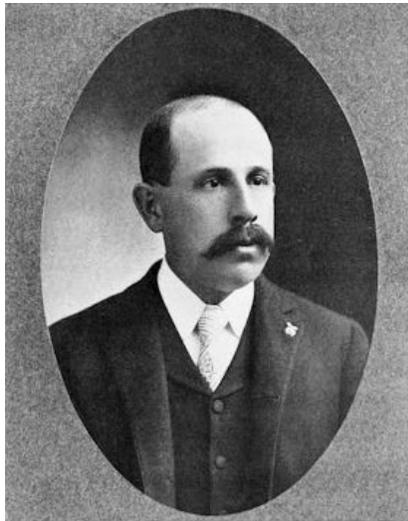


Historic mining operations in Madrid

decided to lease the property from the Santa Fe Railroad and Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, thus entering the mining business in 1906.

The estimated peak population of the town was between 2,000 and 2,500 residents. Included in that number were 400 miners and their families. Ever enterprising, Kaseman purchased and leased all the homes and businesses in the town. Wood framed cabins were dismantled in Kansas and brought to Madrid by train to house the miners and their families.

A cursory look at military enlistment records found a few persons who noted their birthplace as Madrid. One in particular, Aimo Lermusiak, noted his birthplace as Madrid, New Mexico in 1894. Of course, there were many existing families and births in and around the vicinity prior to this timeframe, but this speaks to the fact that Madrid did not have its own identity until the 1880s. Looking through census records, the population explodes between 1895 and 1900. The 1900 census records are witness to the influx of families from all over the United States and the world. Along with families from New Mexico, those looking to prosper in the area of Madrid and Cerrillos came from areas such as Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Georgia, Montana, Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, California, Wisconsin, Texas, Nebraska, Ohio, and Oregon. International immigrants included individuals and families from Sweden, Italy, Ireland, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, Wales, Poland, France, and Arabia. Surnames that were prevalent during this timeframe were Segura, Trujillo, Ortega, Baca, and notably large numbers of Romero and Delaney. The steady flow of new families into the area continued into the 1920s and 1930s, with the operation's peak coal production occurring around 1928, which coincided with the peak number of 725 employees.



George Kaseman.

Photo from *History of New Mexico: Its Resources and People, Vol. II*

George Ambrose Kaseman was involved in many endeavors and in 1919 he hired Oscar Huber to oversee the full operation of the mines and town. Records show that there were over forty mines comprising the network of Madrid's coal enterprise. Under Huber's direction, Madrid became a model for other mining towns to follow. Elementary and high schools were built along with a fully equipped hospital, a company store and the formation of an employee's club. The employee club mandated that all families contribute \$.50 to \$1.00 per month for community causes that included a Fourth of July Celebration and the Christmas light display that would become known throughout the United States. Pilots would purposely plan their route to fly over Madrid at night to see the beautiful display in the middle of the darkness. Also, the baseball park was constructed which hosted the Madrid Miners and was free for all residents.

The village endured many disasters from fires and from a massive flood that occurred in 1925. On December 7, 1932, tragedy and loss of life struck the town when an explosion occurred in the Morgan Jones mine and killed approximately fourteen miners. Six years later, in June 1938, George Kaseman and six others were tragically killed in an accident in Hobbs, New Mexico when 160 quarts of nitroglycerin exploded prematurely at an oil-drilling site. Shortly after, Oscar Huber leased the property and operation from the railroad and the Kaseman estate, eventually purchasing it in its entirety in 1947.

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The war efforts kept the mine in operation throughout the 1940s, but as the 1950s approached, the demand for coal had diminished and the remaining families drifted away in search of other work. By 1959 the town was considered a ghost town and remained vacant for many years with the entire town going up for sale in 1970s. Oscar Huber had died in 1962 and his heirs inherited the town.

One of the most complete accounts of the demise of Madrid was published in an issue of *Desert Magazine* in 1973 written by Buddy Hays. The article titled "Ghost Town for Sale" noted a sale price of \$500,000 and

included the restaurant, opera house, museum, and 150 or so rundown vacated ramshackle homes, all sitting on 361 acres of land. At that time, Mr. Hays noted that 60 or so people were still living there and therefore did not consider their home a "ghost town." Around the same time, the Albuquerque newspapers published articles about the sale of the town, stating that Joe Huber, son of Oscar, had entered into a sales agreement with a California based company that wanted to use the area for movie sets, but the sale fell through and litigation ensued. Huber began to sell the vacant houses that were mostly unlivable for \$2,000 to \$8,000. This same article states that the town was named for an old family in the area.

Joe Huber remained dedicated to the town he'd grown up in and its new community until his death in the late 1986.

It was during this period and after Huber's death that most locals and old families noticed a change in the area. The abandoned buildings attracted squatters from varied backgrounds. There was talk of occult activities and disturbing occurrences in and around the town. In visiting with a native of Madrid, she noted that she left the area at that time, because it had become frightening for her to live there.

Living in the area myself and having family living in the area for many generations, I can attest to this disturbing and dark period for the village. Recollections of crazy people living in the village seemed to coincide with the new pronunciation: MAD-rid.

Another theory on the MAD-rid pronunciation: One of the financial investors and suppliers of the pre-fabricated homes that were transported to the area for the influx of miners and their families was from New Madrid, Missouri, which is pronounced MAD-rid. The timeframe was estimated to be between 1899 and 1901. This particular piece of trivia is one reason given for the different pronunciation. It is interesting to note that Spanish Governor Bernardo de Gálvez founded the town of New Madrid, Missouri between 1777 and 1778; therefore, the variant pronunciation occurred there, also.

Another theory on the MAH-drid pronunciation: Old families of the East Mountains say the name is the Spanish pronunciation and was named for the Madrid family. The Madrid name was first noted in the early 1600s in New Mexico. The family escaped the Pueblo Revolt and returned with the Reconquest in 1693. Sargento Mayor Roque Madrid was instrumental during the Vargas Expeditions in 1692 and 1693 and the Pueblo uprising in 1696. Historians and publications point to the prominent Sargento Mayor Roque Madrid, who lead numerous expeditions all over New Mexico, as the first who noted the presence of coal in the hills of this vicinity.

Digging a little deeper, we find what may be the smoking gun on the strange pronunciation.

"When Perry Como and his song and dance troupe were in town last year filming a segment of his televised Christmas Special for 1979, Como came through famously with residents by calling their rustic, reawakening ghost town "MAD-rid." Emphasis on the MAD That's as it should be in Madrid, New Mexico."

Quote from an article written by Dan B. McCarthy in *Desert Magazine*,
"Coal, Como and Christmas: A Combo that May Revive Madrid,"



Some of the collections at the Madrid Old Coal Town Museum.
Photo by Yvette Cohn Stoor.

In 1980 *Desert Magazine* reported on the singer-entertainer Perry Como's visit to New Mexico. In 1979, Perry Como and his performance troupe came through as they were filming segments for his upcoming Christmas special. Como endeared himself to the locals by proclaiming the town to be "MAD-rid."

On a recent visit to the old mine town we visited with many of the residents, mostly newcomers, consisting of a vast array of authors, artists, and musicians from all over the world; all searching and finding a place to call home in this eclectic and quirky village. I was happy to leave the town feeling that, as it was in the 1900s, Madrid remains a delightful mixing bowl of personalities all leaning toward the MAD-rid pronunciation.

So, as the saying goes I say "to-MAY-to" you say "to-MAH-to." Regardless of how you decide to pronounce the town's name, one thing is certain - enjoying a delicious green chile cheeseburger and beer at the Mineshaft Tavern along with the great people, music, and cool vibe.



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About the Author: Yvette Cohn Stoor is an NMGS Board member and is the Chair for the *Primeras Familias de Nuevo México* project. A native New Mexican, her family has resided in the state for 13 generations in northern New Mexico and 11 generations in the Rio Abajo area. She has published articles in various genealogical and historical publications. In her previous life, she was a program management specialist for Honeywell Aerospace.



Upcoming NMGS Programs

July 2:

"My DNA Results Are In. Now What?" presented by Miguel Tórréz, NMGS Genetic DNA program chairman; Botts Hall, Albuquerque Special Collections Library, Edith and Central, 10:30

August 6:

"Hispanics in WWI," presented by Henrietta M. Christmas and Dorothy Chavez Wiskup; Botts Hall, 10:30

September 3:

"Preparing and Developing an Oral History," presented by Aaron Taylor; Botts Hall, 10:30

October 22:

Second Annual NMGS Genealogy Conference featuring Cyndi Ingle of *Cyndi's List*; Nativo Lodge, Albuquerque, time and details to be announced