

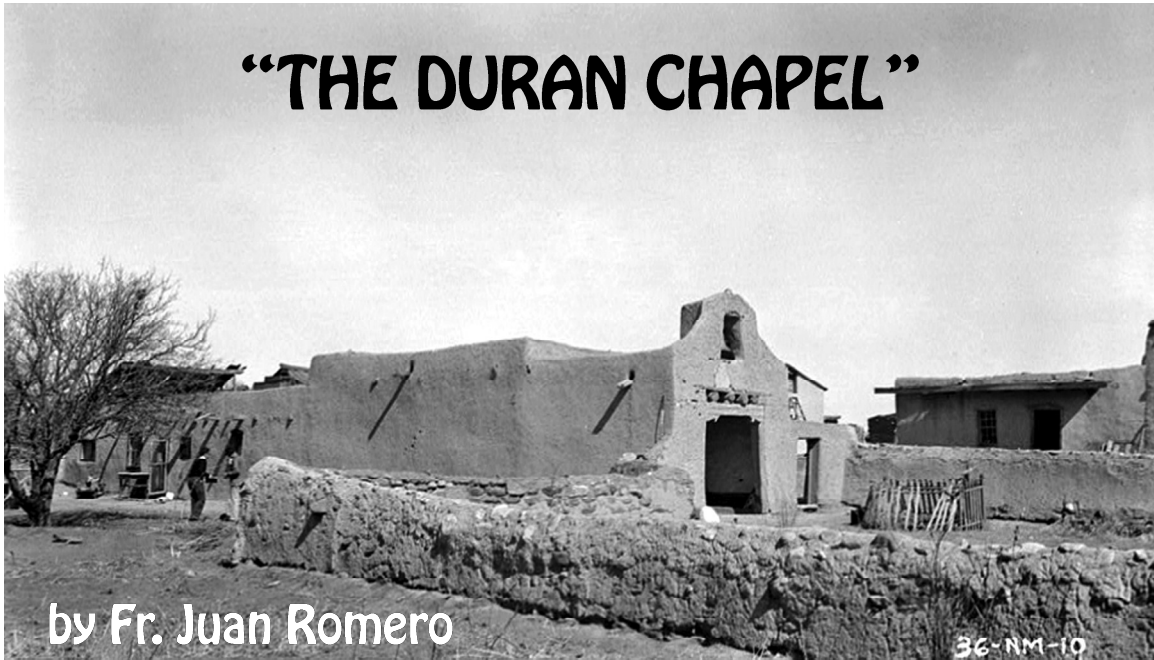
AYER Y HOY en TAOS

Yesterday and Today in Taos County and Northern New Mexico

Winter 2024

Issue #57

“THE DURAN CHAPEL”



by Fr. Juan Romero



CERAN ST. VRAIN

“A GENTLEMAN OF THE FRONTIER”

by WB Francis T. Cheetham

Tradiciones & Historias:

LAS CABANUELAS

by Michael Miller



A publication of the Taos County Historical Society

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and Northern New Mexico

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Taos County Historical Society's publication, *Ayer y Hoy en Taos - Taos County and Northern New Mexico*, is published semi-annually by the Historical Society.

We invite articles of a scholarly nature, as well as book reviews of recent publications pertinent to the Taos and northern New Mexico area. We are open to publishing occasional reminiscences, folklore, oral history and poetry that are of historical interest.

The Taos County Historical Society endeavors to maintain high standards of quality in *AYER Y HOY*, and we seek to make improvements as we go along. Readers' comments and suggestions are welcome.

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AYER Y HOY is distributed to all members of the Taos County Historical Society as a benefit of membership.

Editor

Dave Cordova

The Taos County Historical Society is a New Mexico non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of the historical resources of Taos County and Northern New Mexico. Membership is open to any interested person, regardless of residence.

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A Message from the TCHS President Ernestina Cordova

As we approach the end of another year, it is time to reflect on both the challenges and successes we've encountered. It has been particularly demanding with the ongoing renovation of the historic courthouse, however, we were fortunate to receive a generous offer from the Lunder Research Center, located on the campus of the Couse-Sharp Historic Site on Kit Carson Road, which has graciously loaned us, rent-free, space for our Archives and Library Committee. We are especially grateful to Virginia Dodier and Paul Figueroa, who are available on Mondays and Thursdays from 1:00-5:00 p.m. to continue their invaluable volunteer archival work and assist with any inquiries.



Despite the challenges, the Society has remained active and committed to our mission. Our archival committee successfully moved all files into storage to accommodate the courthouse renovation. Thanks to the generous donation from a long-time couple in our membership family, we have been able to cover part the cost of this storage. We are deeply grateful for their continued support.”

We are optimistic about returning to the courthouse by 2025, and our board is excited to soon call our renovated headquarters home.

Throughout the second half of the year, we have continued our tradition of hosting engaging lectures.

- **June 1** – *Aldo Leopold in Tres Piedras*
- **July 6** – Tour of Las Trampas, Truchas, & Córdoba Churches
- **August 3** – *Presbyterian Missions of Northern NM*
- **September 7** – *Arroyo Hondo Arriba Land Grant*
- **October 5** – *Southwestern Indian Detours*
- **November 2** – *Folklore: The Tejada Papers - Rodarte*
- **December 8** – *The Duran Chapel*.

We remain committed to preserving the history that has shaped our organization, and we look forward to continuing this vital work in the coming years.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to wish all our members a very happy holiday season. Thank you for your continued support and dedication to the mission of the Society.

I join our Board and Committees to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Warmest regards,

*Ernestina Cordova, President
Taos County Historical Society*

“THE DURAN CHAPEL”

by Fr. Juan Romero (Revised May 5, 2024)

A dust-heap since the mid-1960s, the Duran Chapel in the village of Talpa near Taos, NM was built in 1838. Its adobe rubble may be in for a remake because of Doreen Duran, resident of Albuquerque, who has been working with family members and others towards its restoration. A short distance east of the famous church of St. Francis in Ranchos de Taos, it was originally dedicated in honor of *Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Talpa* in Jalisco, Mexico for which the northern New Mexican village was named. A decade before the Duran Chapel was built, a sister chapel was built in 1828. This first one, built in honor of *San Juan de Los Lagos*, remains in good condition and in active use as a chapel of ease for the famous church of St. Francis. The presence of these two chapels named for Marian images from Jalisco so close together in northern New Mexico is a testament to commerce among traders along *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* connecting Mexico City to Santa Fe.

The Chapel in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary of Talpa (AKA The Duran Chapel), built in 1838 and re-roofed in 1851, was dedicated and given for the use of Padre Antonio José Martínez, Cura de Taos.

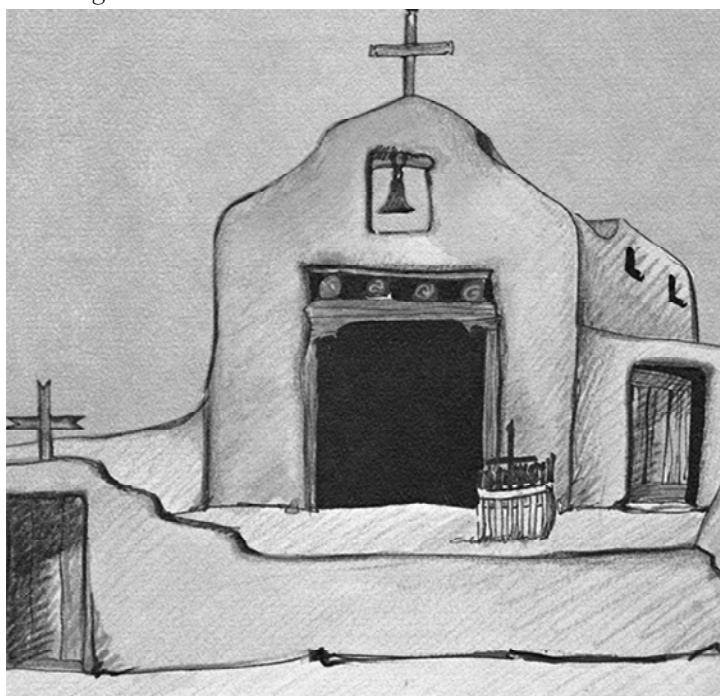
The chapel's intriguing history is the subject of a compelling book published in 1979, *The Chapel of Our Lady of Talpa* by William Wroth. The Taylor Museum of Fine Arts Center at Colorado Springs, Colorado published the booklet of one-hundred-plus pages and digitized it in 2008. The museum houses a first-rate collection of the original altar screen and accompanying *santos* by classic nineteenth century *santeros*, wood carvers of holy images. The publication offers an architectural blueprint of the chapel and other interesting data provided by the Works Project Administration (WPA) that President Roosevelt created to provide employment for artists, writers, and others during the Great Depression of the 1930s to early '40s. Modern rebuilders of the chapel will certainly use the floor plan in its reconstruction.

My interest in the chapel is personal and historical. My father's mother is a descendant of Nicolas Sandoval who built the chapel. One of Sandoval's daughters, Juana María, married a Duran from whom the chapel later took its name. One of Juana's daughters, Margarita Vigil, married my grandfather Juan B. Romero for whom I am named. Secondly, I am interested in the life and legacy of Padre Antonio José Martínez whose brothers in 1804 pioneered Arroyo Hondo twelve miles north of Taos and to whom my mother is related. In 1973, I published *Reluctant Dawn*, a biography about the Padre, and I maintain a blog about him, <thetaosconnecton.com>. More specifically, when the chapel was re-roofed in the summer of 1851, it was dedicated “*a disposición (sic) del presbítero Don Antonio José Martínez (sic)*”. *Esta Adoración [sic] de/ Mi Señora de Talpa/ Fue consedido y fabri/cado su oratorio A/ disposición [sic] del/ Presbítero Dn Ant/ José Martínez/ el día de hoy/ 2 de Julio/ de 1851- José de Gracia [Gonzales]*

This her prayer-chapel in veneration of my Lady of Talpa was today granted and refashioned for the disposition of the presbyter Don Antonio José Martínez

July 2, 1851 – José de Gracia [Gonzales]

Expert *santero* Jose de Gracia, at the direction of Sandoval, inscribed this dedication on *latillas* (planks) in between the *vigas* (beams) on the ceiling. The date of the inscription was significant because it precisely marked the time that Bishop Juan B. Lamy was arriving in Santa Fe as the new Vicar Apostolic of New Mexico, now for three years part of the United States. Within the westward expansion of the United States, S.W. Kearny occupied Santa Fe in 1846. The US-Mexican War ended with the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848, and New Mexico then became a territory of the United States. Civic-political adjustments took place rather quickly, but adjustments within the ecclesiastical sphere dragged on. The American Bishops met at Baltimore in 1850 and petitioned Pope



Pius XI to transfer jurisdiction of ecclesiastical affairs from the see of Durango in the Mexican Republic to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The Holy Father named French missionary Jean Baptiste Lamy as Vicar Apostolic to the new Vicariate Apostolic of New Mexico, a temporary missionary status dependent on the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri. Father Lamy was ordained a bishop in 1850 but did not take charge until he was fully credentialed a year later.

Ecclesiastical bureaucratic confusion occasioned a delay in the official transition of jurisdiction. Rome had mistakenly advised the neighboring Bishop of Sonora in Mexico instead of the proper Bishop of the far-flung Diocese of Durango. Consequently, New Mexican clergy

did not at first accept the change since Bishop Zubiria, their own ordinary or bishop-in-charge, had not formally been advised of the transfer of church jurisdiction. However, within a few months, and after a cordial meeting at Durango between Bishops Zubiria and Lamy, the confusion was resolved, and Bishop Lamy arrived in New Mexico by July 1851 to commence his new ministry. On July 1, a day before the Talpa Chapel was dedicated for the use of Padre Martínez, Bishop Lamy wrote a letter advising the clergy of New Mexico of arrival, and shortly afterwards he arrived into Santa Fe.

PENITENTE LAND

Many of the images within the Chapel were related to the Penitente Brotherhood for whom the Cura de Taos was chaplain. As laymen, members of the Penitente Brotherhood could not celebrate Mass nor administer the sacraments, but they served as the as “the spiritual backbone” of isolated Catholic communities where priests were scarce. The brotherhood had a deep devotion to the suffering Christ inherited from its roots in medieval Spanish Catholicism which took the form of voluntary self-flagellation, the carrying of heavy crosses (*maderos*), and other forms of self-mortification. Although some of their past penitential expressions may have been exaggerated, *Los Hermanos de Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno* modified those expressions in accord with the exhortations of Bishop José Laureano Zubiria of Durango. His Excellency in 1831 made

his first episcopal visitation to the northern outpost of his far-flung diocese. During the Bishop's visit, Padre Martínez finessed the occasion to be appointed as chaplain of the *Hermanidad*. He thereby somewhat assuaged the Bishop's concerns and exhorted the *Hermanos* toward moderate means of self-mortification. Bishop Zubiria followed up his visit with further correspondence in 1833. (Cf. Weigle, *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood*, 1976:195-6)

Penitente leaders held an organizational meeting in 1835 that some leaders consider to be the formal beginning of the Brotherhood. Three years later, Nicolás Sandoval— an active and influential Penitente — established the private chapel of Our Lady of Talpa. Sandoval and Padre Martínez had mutual roots in Santa Cruz east of Española, near the Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh/*San Juan Caballeros* at the junction of the Chama and Rio Grande rivers, the original site of the Spanish colonization of New Mexico in 1598.

THE PRIEST OF TAOS

Antonio José Martínez was born 1793 in front of the Santa Rosa chapel in Abiquiú (still standing but in ruins) along the Chama River. At the age of 19, he married a distant cousin who died in childbirth. A couple of years later, the young widower decided to become a priest. Leaving his daughter with her maternal grandparents, Martínez traveled one-way over a thousand miles from Taos south to the seminary in Durango. A bright student, he excelled in the study of Canon Law, and was ordained in 1822, a year after Mexico's independence from Spain. He returned to Taos where he had grown up since the age of eleven, and where he lived with his parents after his ordination while recuperating from an asthmatic condition.

After a few assignments outside of Taos, Padre Martínez in 1826 was appointed as priest-in-charge of his home church of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* at the Taos Plaza, dependent on the San Geronimo parish established at the Pueblo in the early 17th century. In the mid 1830s or early 1840's, Our Lady of Guadalupe church at the Taos Plaza became the seat or headquarters of the parish, and Padre Martínez officially became its pastor. The *Cura de Taos* would play a powerfully influential role in both church affairs and politics of New Mexico until his death in 1867.

After a sabbatical in Durango during 1842, Padre Martínez returned to Taos. Within a short time, the church of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* became a parish in its own right—no longer juridically dependent on the Pueblo Church of *San Geronimo* that had been the parish seat (headquarters) for over two centuries. Padre Martínez was named pastor, *cura proprio* of Guadalupe Church, no longer a mission of the Pueblo Church but now the parish headquarters. Soon thereafter, Governor Armijo certified Martínez as a civil lawyer, already recognized as an expert in Canon (Church) Law.

TRANSITION

These years were the precursor to the “transcendental epoch” in between the US occupation of New Mexico in 1846, the arrival of J.B. Lamy as the new bishop of New Mexico in 1851, and New Mexican statehood in 1912. (Benjamin Read, *Illustrated History of New Mexico*, 1912) As a major expression of Manifest Destiny, the American Army occupied Santa Fe in mid-August 1846. Steven Watts Kearny invited Padre Martínez and his brothers to swear allegiance to the United States and they did. Martínez took his printing press to Santa Fe and lent it to Kearny who printed his historic Law Code on it. Within weeks, Padre Martínez returned home and turned his seminary into a law school because he believed that, from now on, the one who would “ride the burro” of influence and authority in New Mexico would no longer be the clergyman but the attorney. (Cf. Santiago Valdez, *Biography of Padre Martínez*, 1877)

Padre Martínez adjusted relatively quickly and rather well to New Mexico's new political reality under the United States. However, for all his talents and accomplishments as the Priest of Taos and politician of New Mexico, Martínez had difficulties adjusting to the new ecclesiastical reality.

FATHER TALADRID – FATHER ORTIZ

In the early 1850s, Bishop Lamy traveled to France to recruit clergy for his new diocese and to Rome to take care of business. As travel companion and priest-secretary, he took with him Father Eulogio Ortiz, a former pupil of Padre Martínez at his home-preparatory seminary. He was also the nephew of Padre Juan Felipe Ortiz, former *Vicario* of Santa Fe on behalf of Bishop Zubiria of Durango.

Padre Martínez in a letter to Bishop Lamy divulged his frail health with concomitant advancing age, but the Bishop took it as a desire to retire from the strains of parish ministry. While in Rome, Bishop Lamy met Basque priest Father Damaso Taladrid and recruited him to work at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Taos where Padre Martínez was in semi-retirement. Father Taladrid arrived in Taos in May 1856, and the Bishop appointed him to succeed Padre Martínez. However, the two priests would prove to have a rocky relationship.

A significant pinch-point was the desire of Padre Martínez to preside at the wedding of a favorite niece at Guadalupe Church where the Padre had been in charge for three decades. Father Taladrid, however, did not permit Padre Martínez to preside at the marriage. As a result, the Padre arranged to have his niece's wedding at his private oratory that he had just finished constructing at his own house nearby, a five-minute walk from the church. Since a Catholic wedding is supposed to take place in church, Bishop Lamy, in September 1856, penalized Padre Martínez with “suspension” for having presided at the wedding at his private house-chapel (oratory). The Bishop *suspended* the Padre's “faculties”, i.e., his license, to preach, hear Confessions (give absolution), and publicly celebrate Mass.

In another incident, Father Taladrid found that Padre Martínez was celebrating Mass in “private unlicensed chapels in various communities”, and complained to Bishop Lamy. Shortly afterwards, by 1857, Father Taladrid was removed from the parish, likely for causing too many problems not only for the retired pastor of Taos, but also for its people.

[Some people] came to ask me to go to celebrate a low Mass on the 15th of this month [of September, feast of Our Sorrowful Mother, a special devotion of Penitentes] **in a chapel under the title of Our Lady of Talpa** [my emphasis] ... Father Martínez had celebrated it every year ... this priest was not authorized by any law to celebrate Mass in any oratory or chapel without previous permission from his legitimate Bishop. (AASF, L.D. 1856, NO. 24; Quoted in Wroth, *Talpa Chapel*)

FATHER EULOGIO ORTIZ

Padre Martínez suggested to Bishop Lamy that he appoint Padre Medina as Father Taladrid's successor. Medina was a young native New Mexican priest whom Padre Martínez had taught in his preparatory seminary at his house. However, the Bishop chose Father Eulogio Ortiz to succeed Father Taladrid and become the new priest in charge of Guadalupe parish. Father Ortiz was also a former student at Padre Martínez' preparatory seminary, also nephew of Vicario Ortiz and traveling companion of Bishop Lamy. The Padre's initial joy was soon dashed. One of the “last straws” in the struggles between Padre Martínez and Bishop Lamy concerned the Duran Chapel and Father Ortiz.

After his 1856 *suspensio a divinis*, “suspension from divine things” and 1858 excommunication, Padre Martínez was regularly using the Talpa Chapel that had become his base. His many relatives and partisans were regular

attendees at the Chapel, and they supported their beloved, aging, and sickly priest who had served the community for three decades.

The Duran Chapel was also a headquarters for the influential members of the *Hermanidad, Los Penitentes*. As Holy Week approached in 1858, Father Ortiz arranged the removal of Penitente-related images and vestments from the chapel. Taking the *santos* and vestments at this sacred time was calculated to impede the Holy Week ceremonies scheduled to soon take place there. This outraged Padre Martinez who immediately communicated his anger and fully expected Bishop Lamy to severely reprimand the younger priest. Martinez fumed to his Bishop:

Such abuses [of Father José Eulogio Ortiz] have reached such a point of monstrosity, Illustrious Sir...to commit the tumultuous and sacrilegious action with which he broke into the oratory of Nicolas Sandoval dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and—with his accomplices— carried off its *santos* with injurious violence that has motivated his shameful appearance before the court of Santa Fe. An action such as this man did is a double sacrilege [my emphasis] because it was performed inside a sacred place and to sacred objects, with smashing of the doors and threats with weapons. The laws...describe excommunication for the authors of such violence, not to mention the penalties of the Civil law. [my emphasis]

(Quoted in *Talpa Chapel*, p. 36; AASF, L.D. 1858, No. 17.)

What is quite ironic about this outburst is the demand of Padre Martínez for the “excommunication” of Father Ortiz. It had the effect of triggering his own formal excommunication by April 1858, a few weeks after his letter to Bishop Lamy.

Padre Martinez thereafter began to use as his base the chapel of *Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Talpa*, AKA the Duran Chapel. The United States Census of 1860 claimed over 300 congregants for the chapel. They included family members and parishioners whose allegiance remained with the Padre. Father Angelico Chavez, dean of New Mexican historians, in his book *My Penitente Land* claims that the rupture was “not a true schism”. Nevertheless, there definitely was a split. The Padre’s younger son Vicente Ferrer Romero—a preteen when his father was suspended in 1856 and excommunicated in 1858—became a lay leader and effective circuit rider for the Presbyterian Church. The Padre’s youngest brother became a Presbyterian as did, for a while, Pedro Sanchez who had married the Padre’s favorite niece in his house chapel and authored a biography of the Padre in 1904. Sanchez, and hundreds of other relatives and partisans of the Padre who had left the church during the tumultuous times, returned after the Missions that Italian Jesuit Father Donato M. Gasparri preached at Taos in 1869. Nevertheless, [the whole affair] left a wound in the side of the Catholic Church in New Mexico, which was long to heal, and the scar can yet be felt. To the Spanish American minority, however, the wholesale removal of the native clergy has been a tragedy, for it deprived them of their natural leaders capable of cushioning the shock of conquest for which as a group the Hispanos have never recovered. (E.K. Francis, “Padre Martinez-A New Mexican Myth,” *New Mexico Historical Review*, October 1956)

“Never is a long time,” as my father used to say. The French clergy that Bishop Lamy recruited have disappeared, and native Hispanic vocations significantly increased by the 1970s. Robert F. Sanchez became Archbishop of Santa Fe on July 25, 1974 (died in 2012), the feast of Santiago – Patron Sant of Hispanic America. Until 1970, there was not one Mexican American or Latin American bishop native to the United States. That changed when Archbishop Patrick Flores was ordained Cinco de Mayo 1970. Since then (as of 2012) there have been many bishops appointed to serve in the United States: three Archbishops (San Antonio, Los Angeles, Philadelphia), ten Bishops, and thirteen Auxiliary Bishops. As important as hierarchy may be, the real cypher of missionary success is the growth of Latino Catholics well served. In 1970, the claim that

“25% of the Catholic population in the United States is Latino/Hispanic” surprised many U.S. bishops. As a matter of fact, the Latino population has almost tripled since then, reaching over 60 million in the country, 18% of its total population. In some places such as the Archdioceses of New York and Los Angeles, Latinos make up more than half of the total Catholic population. Nevertheless, it remains a challenge to adequately serve that population. For various reasons, many have converted to other denominations. Lack of adequate service is one of those reasons.

As *Cura de Taos*, the Padre occasionally opened his pulpit to a Protestant preacher. In his later years, he liked to use the Anglican Prayer Book, and seems to have flirted with becoming an Episcopalian. Anglican Bishop Talbot visited the Padre at his home, but the Anglican hierarch insisted that Martinez regularize his relationship with Teodora Romero, mother of his children. Despite being censured by his church, Padre Martinez, nevertheless, held on to his Roman Catholic identity.

Willa Cather, according to her Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, put Padre Martinez writhing in hell. Her fictionalized account of the life of Bishop Lamy, whom she calls Bishop “Latour”, makes an ogre of Padre Martínez whom she calls by his proper name while making him a foil to her heroic bishop.

Msgr. Jerome Martinez, former rector of the Cathedral-Basilica of Santa Fe and a Canon Lawyer, has opined that the “excommunication of Padre Martinez was invalid because it lacked the formality of three canonical warnings.” Certainly, no saint, Padre Martinez died reconciled to God and His Church through the ministrations of Padre Lucero, a former student of the Padre and pastor of neighboring parish in Arroyo Hondo. Lucero confessed, absolved, and anointed the Padre upon his death bed. It is common Catholic teaching that anyone who consciously and conscientiously celebrates these sacraments, popularly known as “Last Rites” enters directly into heavenly glory.

A measure of the esteem in which Padre Martinez was held by the people of the villages of Taos, particularly the Penitente Brothers, is the fact that “more than 300 members of *La Fraternidad Piadosa de Condado de Taos* marched in his funeral procession in 1867.” (Weigle, 1976:49) When the Padre died, the Assembly of New Mexico inscribed the phrase “*La Honra de Su País*” as part of his epitaph on the tall marble tombstone. When in 2006 the more than life-sized bronze memorial of the Padre was installed at the Taos Plaza, the NM State legislature reprised the phrase to name the memorial “The Honor of His Homeland”. In his book *My Penitente Land*, Fray Angelico Chavez—dean of New Mexican historians—called Padre Martínez “New Mexico’s greatest son”.

It is my fervent hope that the restoration of the Duran Chapel, *la capilla de Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Talpa*, will presage a healing of divided families, a peaceful reconciliation between historically divided countries, and an end to rancor among people with divergent views on politics or religion. Tolerance and full acceptance of one another despite differences within families and among nations remains a dream deferred. Yet the practice of these virtues is certainly God’s will for us: “Love one another!” Through the intercession of Our Lady of Talpa, may the restored Chapel advance fulfillment of that velleity.

[Fr. Juan Romero was born in Taos, ordained in 1964 for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles where he grew up since the age of four. He served in several California parishes from Santa Barbara to Orange County and was pastor of three. He twice served on the national level in special ministry: 1972-1976 as executive director of the Mexican American priests’ association PADRES based in San Antonio, and 1984-1985 as national coordinator of the *Tercer Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastors* sponsored by the US Conference of Bishops and based in Washington, DC. He is retired from administration, resides in Palm Springs where he serves as a “supply priest” for the Diocese of San Bernardino. He recently marked sixty years as a priest.]

“CERAN ST. VRAIN: A Gentleman Of The Frontier”

Written by Francis T. Cheetham

We inherited from the English our language and that great system of jurisprudence, known as the common Law; but we are, in a measure indebted to the French for our liberty. They gave both money and men to aid us in our struggle for independence. One of the household words handed down to us from the Revolutionary War, is the name of the Marquis de Lafayette. Nor can we say that our aid from the French ended at Yorktown. When George Rogers Clark and his little pioneer army won for us the Northwest Territory, we acquired as appurtenant thereto, all the trade and enterprise built up and maintained by its inhabitants, which were largely of French extraction. This stimulated a pressure in that direction which with a constant stream of emigration into the country south of the Ohio River, brought about the development of the Mississippi and its tributaries as a great trade route. This in turn raised the question of the free navigation of that river beyond the limits of our domain. Spain had resented our aggression and intrigued against us. But the fortunes of War favored us. Napoleon Bonaparte forced Spain to give up Louisiana, but seeing that he could not hold it against the superior naval power of the British, he readily listened to the overtures of our Masonic Brother, Robert Livingston, then Minister to his Court. A tentative bargain was struck and the First Counsel held his fastest frigate 48 hours, while Bro. Livingston penned that famous dispatch which culminated in the one of the largest transactions in real estate ever consummated. From that day on we were destined to become a great nation. The newly acquired territory had for a generation been politically Spanish, but it had ever remained socially and religiously French. Again, we profited by the acquisition of the trade of the Chouteaus and other enterprising traders of the newly acquired territory, which had already been developed and was fast reaching out towards those portions of the Spanish dominions known as Mexico. As a natural result of this trade, thriving post had already been established at Kaskaskia, St Genevieve and St Louis.

The light of Masonry had found its way into these settlements. The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania had issued its dispensations, constituting Lodges as follows: Western Star Lodge No. 107 at



Kaskaskia, in 1806; Louisiana Lodge No. 109 at St Genevieve in 1807; and St Louis Lodge No. 111 at St Louis in 1808. Among the membership in these lodges we find such names as Pierre Chouteau and Bertholomew Berthold, the founders of the great American Fur Company, and Stephen F. Austin, the “father of Texas”; in St Louis Lodge No. 111, we note among the members, the names of Meriweather Lewis, former private secretary to President Jefferson and General William Clarke, the men who blazed the first trail to the Pacific.

In the midst of this background, the hero of this sketch, was born at or near, St Louis about the year 1797. His father and uncle had fled from France during the dark days of the French Revolution, they having been the heirs of a nobleman.

The father of Ceran St Vrain, settled on the Bellafountain Road, just out of what was then St Louis, and erected a fort. This was then and until after Ceran’s birth, Spanish territory. Of his early years little is

known. It is altogether probable, that while a mere boy, he ventured out into the wilderness and on to the plains, with the fur traders of his time.

In 1826, we find him leading a party of trappers, in an expedition down through New Mexico, as far as the River Gila, for on August 29, 1826, Antonio Narbona, Governor of New Mexico, issued at Santa Fe, the following passport:

“For the present freely grant and secure passport to the foreigners, S.W. Williams and Seran Sambrano (Ceran St Vrain) who with thirty five men of the same nation, their servants, pass to the state of Sonora for private trade; by all authority of my subordinates, none are to offer any embarrassment on this march. (Pacific Ocean in History)

Narbona in his letter to the Governor of Sonora, written two days later, states that there were over a hundred men in the party. Of its personnel only eleven names are known, as follows: S.W. Williams, (sometimes shown as J. Williams) Ceran and Julian St Vrain, E. Bure, Alexander Branch, Louis Dalton, (?) Stone, John Rueland or Roles, (probably Rowland) Miguel Robidoux, (?) Pratt and Juaquin Joon, (Ewing Young). The latter afterwards a partner of Dr David Waldo. From a protest made by James

Baird to the Alcalde of El Paso it could also appear that there was over one hundred men in this expedition. This "protest" throws light upon the law and customs of the times, and is therefore set out as follows:

"For fourteen years, I have resided in the provinces, therein, according to the plan of Yguala, I entered upon the enjoyment of the rights of Mexican citizenship, devoting myself for some time to beaver hunting, in which occupation, I invested my small means with the purpose of forming a methodical expedition which might bring profit to me and to those fellow citizens, who would necessarily accompany me in the said expedition. I was moved to this project by the protection afforded by the laws to Mexican citizens in the employment of their faculties to their own advantage and which excluded by special decrees all foreigners from trapping and hunting, which they might undertake in the rivers and woods of the federation, especially that of beaver, since it is the most precious product which this territory produces. And although it is known to me that for a year and a half past they have clandestinely extracted a large quantity of peltry, exceeding \$100,000 in value, I have kept still, knowing that this exploration had been made by small parties; but now, being ready to set out on the expedition of which I have spoken, I have learned that with scandal and contempt for the Mexican nation a hundred-odd Anglo-Americans have introduced themselves in a body to hunt beaver in the possessions of this state and that of Sonora to which the Rio Gila belongs, and with such arrogance and haughtiness that they have openly said that in spite of the Mexicans, they all hunt beaver wherever they please; to protect their expedition, they are carrying powder and balls, in consequence of which no one is able to restrain them. In view of these circumstances, I believe that it is a bounden duty of every citizen, who has the honor to belong to the great Mexican nation, to make it known to its superior government the extraordinary conduct which the foreigners observe in our possessions, which transgressions may be harmful, both on account of insult which they cast upon the nation by despising our laws and decrees as well as through the damage which they do the said nation by the extinction which inevitably will follow of a product so useful and so valuable. I ought to protest, as I do, that in making this report, I am not moved so much by personal interest as by the honor and general welfare of the nation to which I have heartily joined. In view of the foregoing, I beg that Your Excellency may make such provisions as you may deem proper, to the end that the national laws may be respected and that foreigners may be confined to the limits which the same laws permit them, and that we Mexicans may peacefully profit by the goods with which the merciful God has been pleased to enrich our soil."

James Baird was an American adventurer, who had led a filibustering expedition into Mexico in 1812, was arrested and thrown in jail, where he lay for nine or ten years. When he says he had the honor to be a citizen of that great nation, he was

probably not able to distinguish as to which was the greater honor, to serve a term in a prison or a legislature.

At any rate his protest was heard and promptly answered by the Mexican authorities. For the Governor of Chihuahua promptly sent back orders to the alcaldes at El Paso and Tucson and the comandante at Santa Fe, to investigate and report concerning this expedition as to the numbers, passports, places visited and destination. The Alcalde at El Paso reported back that the party was hunting in Sonora, had not been seen elsewhere that year, but that on previous years they had hunted all along the Rio Grande, without molestation of the part of officials. He also added that they talked in an insolent manner.

Gov. Narbona had no more than granted the passports to Williams and St Vrain, and pocketed their money, when he wrote to the Governor of Sonora warning him that the Americans were going there on a secret hunting trip, "to the known injury of our public treasury, in infraction of our laws." It is only reasonable to suppose that the passport fees never reached the public treasury. He also protested to the authorities at the seat of the general government, asking for more cavalry and saying that it was with great difficulty that he maintained ten men at Taos.

At about this time, or possibly earlier, Ceran St Vrain became associated with William Bent who it appears had erected the first stockade on the Arkansas above Pueblo. Later they erected the second near the mouth of the Las Animas or Purgatoire river and commenced the erection of the more formidable fort afterwards known as Bent's Fort, as already noted; Charles Bent having also in the meantime, become identified with the enterprise.

The Mexican authorities realizing that the firm of Bent & St Vrain were determined to provide market for manufactured goods at the very gate of their domain, deemed it best to let the traders in and pay duty, rather than to let their own citizens, purchase same across the border and smuggle them in. So we find that as early as 1830, the enterprising firm entered Santa Fe with goods as the following letter will show:

"San Fernando del Taos, Sept. 14, 1830:

Messrs B. Pratte & Co.

Gentlemen: It is with pleasure that I inform you of my last arrival at Santa Fe which was the 4th of August. We were met at Red River by General Biscara the customhouse officer and a few soldiers, the object in coming out so far to meet us was to prevent smuggling and it had the desired effect, there was a guard placed around our wagons until we entered Santa Fe, we had to pay full duties which amounts to about 60 per cent on cost. I was the first that put goods in the Customhouse and I opened immediately, but goods sold very slow, so slow that it was discouraging. I found that it was impossible to meet my payments if I continued retailing. I therefore thought it best to hole saile (wholesale) I have done so. I send you by Mr. Andru Carson and Lavoise Ruel one wagon, eleven mules one

horse and 653 skins of beaver, 961 lbs. nine hundred and sixty one pounds which you will have sold on my account. I do not wish the mules sold unless they sell for a good price.

I am with much respect,
your obit. servant,
Ceran St Vrain

From that time on he became more or less identified with the territory immediately south of the international boundary line and after the establishments of branch posts in Santa Fe and Taos, spent much time at those places. At the latter place he became interested in a flouring mill, by means of which flour was manufactured to supply the posts situated without the settlements. At times, however, we learn of his being in charge of affairs at the main fort.

In 1843, St Vrain, believing that the advance of civilization was westward, associated with him one Cornelio Vigil, a progressive resident of Taos in a petition for a grant of land situated immediately across the Arkansas river from Bent's Fort. The petition being translated is in part as follows:

“That desiring to encourage the agriculture of the country, to such a degree as to establish its flourishing condition, and finding ourselves with but little land to accomplish the object, we have examined and registered, with great care, the land embraced within the Huerfano, Pisipa and Cucheras Rivers, to their junction with the Arkansas and the Animas, and, finding fertile land for cultivation, and abundance of pasture and water, and all that is required for a flouring establishment, and for raising cattle, and being satisfied therewith, and certain that it is public land, we have not hesitated to apply to your Excellency, praying you to be pleased, by the act of justice, to grant to each one of us a tract of land in the above mentioned locality.”

The grant was accordingly made and the intent and purpose of procuring same, is disclosed by a deed subsequently made by the grantees to St Vrain's partner Charles Bent, which is as follows:

“The undersigned owners and possessors of the lands included from the waters of the Rio de las Animas and the Huerfano, within the boundaries designated in the act of possession, for the purpose of effecting and procuring means to settle those lands, for which purposes we have solicited and obtained the concession of the Government; and of our own free will, we cede to M. Charles Bent, and to his successors, the one sixth part of the land contained in our possession at said place, to which we hereby renounce all our rights, hereby obliging ourselves not to prescribe him in that which we hereby grant unto him; it being our voluntary act and deed, it being understood that we are to give to such families as may transport themselves to said place, lands free of charge, subject to the guarantees and benefits to each party, as may be agreed upon, in order to protect the

settlements to be formed and by this extrajudicial document, which we execute on this common paper, (there being none of the corresponding seal-/ we, thus, as our entire voluntary act, covenant; and this indenture shall be as valid as if it was duly authenticated; and, by the same we may be compelled to observe and comply therewith; and in testimony whereof, we sign this in Taos, on the 11th day of March, 1844.

(Signed) Cornelio Vigil
Ceran St Vrain

It will thus be readily seen that St Vrain and his associates contemplated the establishment of a colony, immediately opposite their fort, where the settlers would be subject to its influence and under the protection of its guns. While so-called statesmen in Washington are wrangling over questions purely political, these men were conducting a conquest of the Southwest, which, though not spectacular, was sure and effective. So that when the soldier was sent with gun in hand to conquer the country, he found that his mission had already been accomplished, by the industry of peace rather than war. When the flag was raised over the ancient capital of the Territory, not a shot was fired, except a salute to the power it represented.

As a further evidence of the constant purpose of these men to bring about the conquest of the Far West, for their country, it should not be forgotten that when, in the winter of 1842-3, Marcus Whitman and A. Lawrence Lovejoy made their famous mid-winter ride across the continent to save Oregon to the United States, about which so much controversy has raged among historians; every assistance possible was extended to them by these traders. And it fell the lot of Ceran St Vrain to render substantial aid to Whitman in getting across the plains, for, he, on learning of Whitman's desire to proceed, sent an express from the fort to their caravan, already on its way, to hold the same until Whitman could catch up.

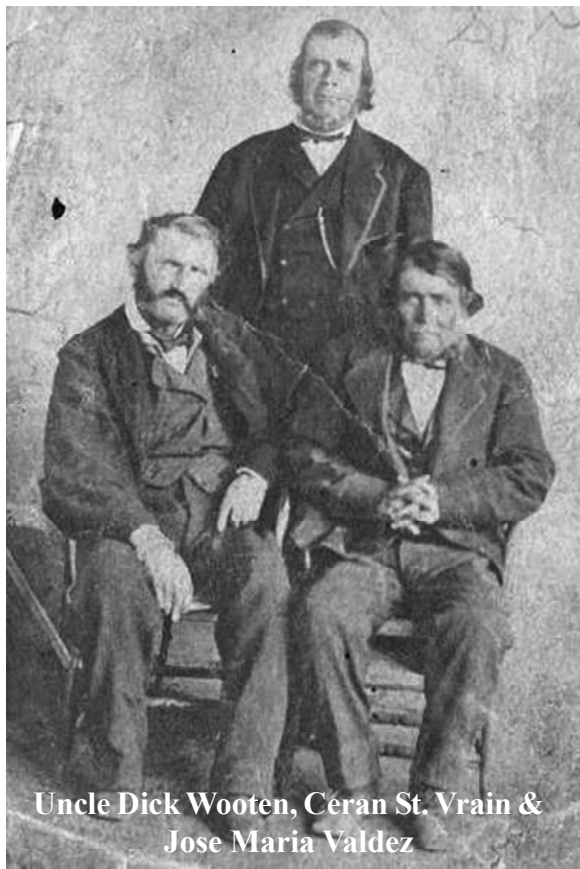
Upon the declaration of War with Mexico, St Vrain proceeded to St Louis to lay in a goodly supply of goods for the firm, which he well knew would be needed. On the 1st of September 1846, he left that city, with a cargo of goods for New Mexico. He was accompanied, among others, by a young lad of seventeen years, Lewis H. Garrard, who left behind a narrative of his thrilling experiences, in a book published in 1850, under the title of “Wah-To-Yah or the Taos Trail”. This book he dedicated to Ceran St Vrain in token of the many acts of kindness of that gentleman. St Vrain left Garrard at the Fort and proceeded on to Santa Fe with the merchandise. Soon after his arrival at that place, the Taos Insurrection broke out and Governor Bent was assassinated. St Vrain learning that his lifelong friend and partner had been so cruelly and foully slain, gathered together a company of mountain men, who aimed straight and feared no man. This he tendered with himself to Col. J. Sterling Price, the officer then in command of the American forces in New Mexico. The latter at once took the field. St Vrain was given a commission as Captain and

rendered gallant and meritorious service at La Cañada, Embudo and at the Taos Pueblo. At the latter place he came near losing his life in a personal encounter with the Indians. After the battle at that place, he served as interpreter during the trials of the conspirators. Afterwards he was tendered the office of Governor of the department, but this he declined.

After the restoration of order, Capt. St Vrain settled down in Taos, known at that time as Don Fernando de Taos, and engaged in business as a trader and miller. As he was well liked by all, his business prospered. In 1849, he was elected and served as a member of the Constitutional Convention, convened at Santa Fe, September of that year.

During the years, 1854-5 and 1856 the Ute and Apache Indians had given the people of New Mexico a great deal of trouble, waging a constant war on the unprotected settlements and even came near annihilating two companies of the First United States Dragoons in a fight in the Embudo Mountains near Taos. The warning of the late Governor Bent had been unheeded by the authorities in Washington. The promise of General Kearney to the inhabitants of New Mexico, that the new government would protect them from their ancient enemies, had been broken. The Civil and Military authorities in Santa Fe decided to take the matter into their own hands and put an end to these troubles. Volunteers were accordingly asked for Colonel Dewitte C. Peters, in his *Life of Kit Carson*, published in 1858, in speaking of this affair, says:

“The organization of the Mexican volunteers was made complete by the governor of the Territory, who selected as their leader Mr. Ceran St Vrain of Taos. This gentleman, although he had much important business which called his attention elsewhere, immediately expressed his willingness to accept the responsible position, which without solicitation, had been conferred upon him. The commission received by St Vrain gave him the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Without delay he set about the difficult and important work that lay before him, bringing to bear upon the details, that sound judgment, gentlemanly bearing and ready zeal, which had long characterized the man. He had the good fortune to secure the services of Lieutenant Creigg of the regular army, whom he appointed as one of his aides-de-camp. Having completed his staff and other arrangements to place his force upon a military basis, he was ready to take the field.



Uncle Dick Wooten, Ceran St. Vrain & Jose Maria Valdez

“The appointment of St Vrain as Commander of the Volunteers was hailed with delight throughout territory. His great experience in the mountains, his knowledge of the Indian mode of warfare, and the respect which the people, he was called upon to command, invariably paid him, seemed to convince every thinking mind that something more than usual was to be accomplished. They felt that the wrongs of their country would now be certainly redressed. The sequel will prove that the people were not doomed to disappointment.”

Lieut-Col. St Vrain thereupon reported to Col. T. T. Fontleroy who forthwith launched an expedition against the warlike savages. The command marched to Ft. Massachusetts, near the present station of Fr. Garland in Colorado, thence they pursued a westerly course to the head waters of

the Rio Grande, from thence they crossed the Saguache pass where they found the Indians encamped in a large village. They gave them battle and put them to flight, with heavy loss. Col. Fontleroy then divided his command, sending Col. St Vrain, with his battalion to the eastward across the main range of the Rockies, where the latter again encountered the fleeing fugitives and inflicted upon them a terrible punishment. Kit Carson who accompanied the expedition as scout, referring to it afterwards, in his personal narrative dictated to Col. Peters, in substance said: that if the operations of this voluntary organization had continued a few months longer, under Col. St Vrain's direction, there would never again have been any need for soldiers in the Southwest.

The term of service of this organization having expired, they were mustered out and disbanded. Col. St Vrain returned to his business at Taos, where he extended his operations in all directions. In the first issue of the Rocky Mountain News, published at Cherry Creek, Kansas Territory, now Denver, in 1859, we find an item announcing that Col. St Vrain had lately arrived at that place with a train load of flour from Taos.

Col. St Vrain, like many other sturdy men of the frontier, was prepared in his heart to become a Freemason, long before he had an opportunity to knock at the door of a lodge. All good Masons should be. He had been intimately acquainted and more or less associated with such Freemasons as Governor Charles Bent, James Kennerly, Dr David Waldo, Ferdinand and Lucien Maxwell and Col. Dodge, who had long been members of the order. Received the degrees in Montazuma Lodge No. 109, of the jurisdiction of Missouri, At Santa Fe.

It is now reasonably certain, that he, while on a business trip to St Louis, procured a warrant from the Grand Lodge of Missouri, for a Lodge to be constituted at Taos, to be known as Bent Lodge No. 204, in memory of the beloved Gov. Bent. The officers of the regularly chartered lodge being Dr. A.S. Ferris W.M., F. Maxwell S.W., Christopher Carson J.W., Col. St Vrain, Treasurer, Joseph Beuthaer Secretary, I.P. Ismay, S.D., F.W. Posthoff J.D., Solomon Beuthaer Asst. D.D.G.M. Peter Joseph, Tiler. Dr Cavanaugh and other brethren being present.

When the, Civil War broke out, Col. St Vrain like Bro. Kit Carson, joined hands with the North, and very promptly tendered his services to his country. When the call for Volunteers came he helped to organize the First New Mexico Cavalry and was elected its first Colonel. Kit Carson was elected Lieut-Colonel. Bro. St Vrain was soon obliged, owing to ill health, to relinquish his command, with the consolation, however, that it would render a good account of itself. In this he was not disappointed. He continued to render valuable service to his country, by keeping his mills grinding and supplying the various military posts of the Southwest with flour and other means of subsistence.

About the close of the Civil War, in order to better conduct his business of furnishing supplies to the government, Col. St Vrain moved to Mora, which is near Fort Union, then the principal military base in the Southwest. Col. James F. Meline, who visited New Mexico, in 1866, in his hook entitled, Two Thousand Miles on Horseback, in speaking of the Colonel, says:

“Mora is the residence of Lieutenant-Colonel Ceran St Vrain, one of the most distinguished of the band of the early pioneer traders and trappers - Charles Bent, Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, Ferdinand & Lucien Maxwell who survives. Colonel St Vrain’s wealth in land is very great, and he owns under a Spanish grant, one tract of land a hundred miles square, bounded by the Snowy Range, the Rio de las Animas and the Arkansas. St Vrain was, with Kit Carson, found on the side of his country in the hour of trouble, and the influence of his high personal character, great popularity and immense wealth, in the scale of freedom against slavery.”

Here he spent most of his declining years. We learn from Albert D. Richardson, in his “Beyond The Mississippi” that after accumulating an ample fortune (he) went to New York City, with a determination of spending his days. But he found life there insupportable, and soon returned to New Mexico, vowing he would never leave it again.

His passing occurred October 28th 1870, concerning which the Daily New Mexican under date of October 29th said:

“COL. CERAN ST VRAIN”

“We received this morning by telegraph, from Fort Union, the painful intelligence, that Col. Ceran St Vrain of Mora, departed this life at six o’clock last night. Col. St Vrain came to New Mexico more than forty years ago and has since been one of its most highly and

respected and influential citizens ever since. Possessed of good education, fine natural abilities, the highest style of courtesy and very good energy and enterprise, he at once engaged in merchandizing and manufacturing, by the legitimate profits of which he has accumulated a handsome property. His upright dealing, fairness and courteous treatment of all with whom he came in contact won him hosts of friends, who will sincerely sorrow at his death.

Every enterprise leading to the improvement, of the country, received willing and earnest support and sympathy from him, and many hundreds of honest poor men have been by him furnished with the means to start again, and repair the misfortunes of the past. In every part of this territory there are men who will feel that in the death of Col. St Vrain, not only has the country lost one of its best citizens but that they have lost one of their truest and noblest personal friends.

To the friends of the deceased we tender our sincerest condolence and commend his virtues and enterprise to the imitation of his thousands of acquaintances in the Territory”

The Rocky Mountain News of Denver under date of Oct. 31, 1870, had this to say:

“Ft Union, Oct. 31, 1870.”

Col. St Vrain, the eldest pioneer of the Rocky Mountains died at his residence in Mora, at six o’clock the 28th. The funeral took place on Sunday the 30th and was attended by Gen. Gregg and nearly all the officers of Ft Union. Col. Starr of the 8th Cavalry With his troops acted as escort and the General and his staff as pall bearers. The regimental band furnished the music. He was buried by the Masons and as Col. of Volunteers with Military honor. Over 2000 people were present. The services were highly impressive.”

A monument engraved with Square & Compasses was erected over his grave. But the work of vandals has defaced and obliterated the emblems of Masonry.

Freemasons should take pride in paying a tribute of respect and love for this worthy brother, who was born a Spanish subject of French extraction and his loyalty to the country which adopted him, was the admiration of all who knew him.



Francis T. Cheetham (1873-1946), was an attorney who moved his family to Taos from Kansas in 1911 to practice law. He was also a published historian, writing many books and manuscripts on many historical figures, spotlighting Freemasons in the Southwest, especially New Mexico. Brother Cheetham served as Worshipful Master of Bent Lodge 42 in 1920. Francis, Edith and their four sons lived in the house which once belonged to Kit & Josefa Carson from about 1916 to 1928.

Tradiciones y Historias: “Las Cabanuelas”

by Michael Miller

The weather is important in our daily lives. It is serious business, and with the threat of climate change in our future, it may become a life and death experience as it was in the not so distant past. I recall that in the 1970’s, when I first began to document oral history it was particularly cold and wet with harsh winters in northern New Mexico. I was always amazed how well prepared and informed the elders that I interviewed were about the weather. Many of them did not own a television in those days, or they simply did not watch TV as we do today. But, they were always up to speed about the weather, because it was a matter of survival.



For centuries Nuevomexicanos have suffered the severities of weather in the Southwest. Extremes of snow and cold in the winter, decades of drought with little or no rain in the summer, and major flooding in the spring were commonplace. To deal with these difficult weather conditions, our ancestors developed a system of forecasting the weather that is still used today in many rural communities throughout the state. Known as *las cabanuelas* this traditional method of weather forecasting has a long and storied history.

I first learned about *las cabanuelas*, in detail, when Cleofus Vigil, a farmer, *mayordomo*, poet, and chronicler from San Cristobal, New Mexico came to speak to our students at UNM Northern Branch College in Santa Cruz in 1977. He shared his knowledge of traditional lifeways on land and water and the Nuevomexicano process of forecasting the weather. *Las cabanuelas* is the name given to the first twelve days of January. To work out a forecast for the year is a fascinating game. For 19th century New Mexicans, however, it was no game, but a matter of survival, for it told them whether to plow in March or wait until early April, whether to cut the hay in August or wait until September. It even told them if there would be a white Christmas. All of these calculations were figured in January.

To do a forecast you will need a new calendar for the current year and a pencil to record and analyze the first 24 days in January. Take the twelve days in January as representative of

each month of the year and record the weather on the calendar for that day. January 1, represents the entire month of January, the second represents February, and so forth. The process reverses on January 13, which represents December, January 14, represents November, the months reversing to day 24, so the second analogy double-checks the first one. If one day of forecast is good and the second day is bad, the month will see sporadic weather changes.

In 1995, I conducted an extensive interview with Estevan Arellano, a farmer, *mayordomo*, and writer from Embudo, New Mexico. Estevan told me this about *las cabanuelas*. “There was usually an elder in the region who could read *cabanuelas* accurately. People in the past, were very observant because understanding nature could mean the difference between a good harvest or a lean winter. In order to understand the *cabanuelas* properly the person had to know where the wind is coming from. They took into account the color of the sky when the sun was going down in the west. If the color of the sky was light pink, a pale yellow or grayish, it usually signified a change in the weather. But, if the sky was an intense blue, it signified heavy winds in the upper atmosphere,” he explained.

These are a few examples from Arellano’s contemporary research journal on traditional weather forecasting. “Llave del ano: January 1st. Since the wind blew all day from the north, this *cabanuelas* is considered very negative; therefore a bad year. January: Second of January-windy, moisture in the morning, represents a very dry *cabanuela*. February: 3rd of January-swift wind, towards noon wind shifted north, normal month.”

If you would like to record your own *cabanuelas* forecast remember to save the January, page on your calendar for your analysis. Also, remember this New Mexico *dicho* when making your calculations, *Febrero loco, marzo otro poco*. (February is unstable and March a bit too)

Michael Miller is a writer and poet from La Puebla, NM He is a long time member of TCHS and a contributor to: TAOS: A TOPICAL HISTORY.

**Lectures, Field Trips & Special Events
(Tentative Schedule)**

February 1st - 2 PM
ANNUAL MEETING OF TCHS

“Growing Up In Taos”
by Gustavo Cordova

March 1st - 2 PM
“Evolution of Hispanic Settlement - Estancia”
by Javier Sanchez

April 5th - 2 PM
Nuevo Mexico del Norte “San Francisco Church
Tour” by Guadalupe Tafoya

May 4th - 12 Noon
HONOREE LUNCHEON
Sagebrush Inn & Conference Center

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For more information call (575) 770-0681
or e-mail: cordova@taosnet.com



Taos County Historical Society
PO Box 2447 i Taos, NM 87571

The Taos County Historical Society was formed in 1952 for the purpose of "...preserving the history of the Taos area." This part of New Mexico has a fascinating history, full of people, events, stories and places.

If you are interested, we invite your participation in our field trips or lecture programs, or by supporting the Society by becoming a member.