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## Albuquerque from the Past

By JAMES P. THRELKELD

**T**HE watchword of Albuquerque today is progress. To the stranger within our gates we boast, among other things, of our Veterans' Hospital, the new Post Office and Government building, the bathing beach, our new Country Club, our educational facilities, the Conservancy project, and of our steady increase in population. Atop several downtown buildings and in the windows of various realtors is the boastful prediction that the population of the city will be so many thousands in such and such a year. We retire at night with the sworn intent of bigger and better things for the city and for ourselves tomorrow. This progress idea seems to have originated in about 1880 with the coming of the Santa Fe Railroad, the shops, and much new blood from other sections of the States. New Albuquerque grew up almost over night alongside the tracks a distance of a mile from the center of the plaza in Old Town, and so rapid and zealous has been the subsequent growth that Old Albuquerque stands today almost surrounded, smothered, and forgotten.

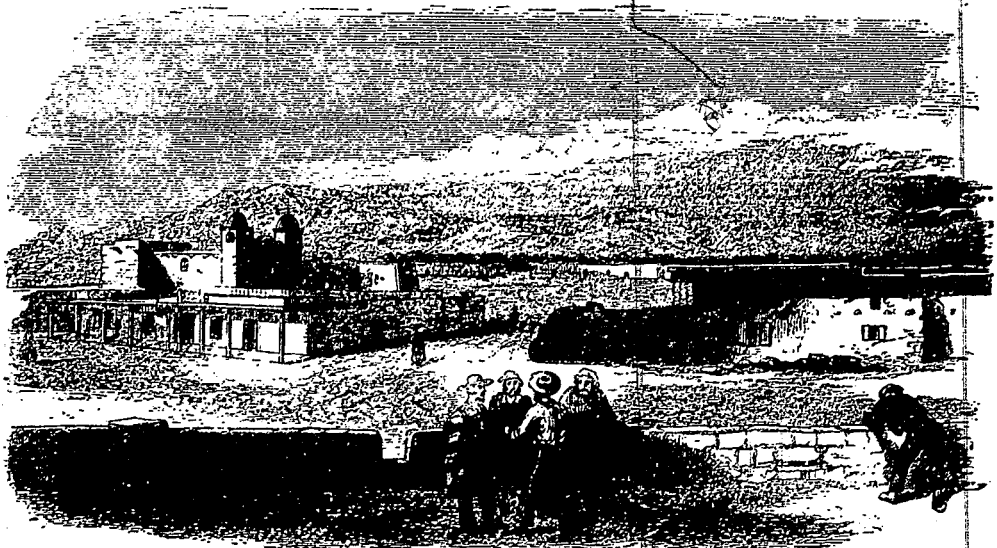
If you will obtain an abstract to some piece of property located in what is known as the lowlands, you will find a reference to the original Villa of Albuquerque Grant. The date of this is usually given as 1706. There is ample evidence that there was quite a settlement in the vicinity of Albuquerque before that date. It would appear that shortly after the settlement of Santa Fe by Peralta, settlers began to drift into the vicinity of Bernalillo and Albuquerque. They were attracted, not only by the plentitude of water and the adaptability of the land for irrigation, farming, and sheep raising, but also by the fact that the valley afforded the best natural trade route between Chihuahua and Santa Fe. With the evacuation of New Mexico in 1680, these settlers gave up their holdings and fled to Mexico. When

DeVargas came up the valley in 1692 to conquer and re-establish settlements in New Mexico, some of these original settlers must have taken up and rebuilt their abodes along the Rio Grande. In 1706 it is recorded that Governor Cuervo reported to the Viceroy of Mexico, the Duke of Albuquerque, that he had settled thirty families on the banks of the Rio Grande on four square leagues of land and had named the villa San Francisco de Alburquerque. Shortly after, upon an order from the Duke, the name was changed to San Felipe de Alburquerque in honor of King Philip of Spain. At just what time the additional "r" was dropped, or for what reason, I have not been able to discover. In support of the theory that there were settlers on the site of Albuquerque prior to 1706 there is in the Archives a petition under date of 1708 made by one Lorenzo de Carbajal to the chief alcalde and war captain of Albuquerque, Martin Hurtado, for a clear title to a plot of ground within the villa containing the ruins of an old house which had belonged to his father. In addition to this there was published in the *New Mexico Historical Review* of June, 1929, the "Noticias" of Juan Candelaria found a few years ago among some records in Mexico City. Juan was born in 1692 and was for a number of years a resident of the Villa of Albuquerque. He stated that the town was incorporated in 1706 and that twelve families and some soldiers from the garrison residing in the town of Bernallillo came to colonize it. So if Cuervo secured thirty families he must have found a number of them already living on the site of the villa.

The laws of the Spanish government relative to the affairs of its colonies, found in the ordinances and decrees of Spain entitled "Recopilacion de Indias," grant to any settlement of not less than thirty white persons four square leagues of land. Since the Spanish league is comparable to two and one-half miles, the amount of land in the original grant was approximately 25 square miles or 17,631.06 acres.

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If you will go to the center of the plaza in Old Albuquerque and measure two and one-half miles toward each of the points of the compass, you will get some idea of the extent of the grant. If you can obtain a map of it you will find that it extended a mile and quarter to the east of the present location of the Santa Fe tracks and somewhat more than a mile to the west of the river.



PLAZA OF ALBUQUERQUE.

VIEW IN OLD ALBUQUERQUE IN THE LATE FIFTIES  
(From a wood engraving in "El Gringo" by W. W. H. Davis, 1857)

For almost two centuries before the first Santa Fe engine rolled down the valley, Albuquerque had been a town of some importance in the Rio Abajo. Lacking a Chamber of Commerce and a Boosters' Club, nobody seems to have had the jitters if the census figures for any period showed a decrease under those last on record. For years it was classified as one of the small towns of the state. A census taken in 1827 gave its population as 2,547. This same census gave the following figures for some of the other towns in the state: Santa Fe, 5,759; Taos, 3,606; San Juan, 2,915; Canada, 6,508. In fact Albuquerque had little to identify it from other towns to the north and to the south,

and whatever was typical of Albuquerque was also typical of the Rio Abajo from Bernalillo to Belen.

The settlers of New Mexico and of Albuquerque brought in with them from Mexico, sheep, cattle, goats, and horses; some few and very crude implements for farming; very little in the way of seeds, and practically no tools or furniture. The padres seem to have been the first husbandmen in the valley, putting in the first vineyard and orchards and encouraging their flocks to do likewise. These early Spanish were better herdsmen than farmers, and a number of them, after some years' residence in New Mexico, counted their sheep by the thousand. The Navajos were a constant scourge and danger to the little settlements along the Rio Grande, hiding in the approaches to the mountains and sallying forth periodically to rob, burn, and murder.

Prior to 1880 many travelers from the States made their way through this part of the Rio Abajo. There was little chance for lonesomeness on this route, for it was the main highway through New Mexico. On it were the carriages of the ricos bound for the capital. Ox-drawn carretas wended their tedious way north and south. Caravans of traders from Chihuahua and Santa Fe passed and re-passed. American traders, such as the Magoffins, hauled many wagon loads of merchandise through this valley annually. In the forties one might have encountered Governor Armijo on his way down from Santa Fe to visit his family at Albuquerque, accompanied by such a retinue of soldiers and retainers that it was necessary to build a barracks in Albuquerque to house them. Herds of sheep and goats spotted the landscape; droves of cattle were common, impelled to speed by slingshots in the hands of their drivers, and one could meet at most any season of the year a band of soldiers on horseback engaged in some punitive expedition against the Navajos.

The majority of these travelers kept diaries, that being the fashion of the day, and many of these accounts or diaries were published and had a wide circulation.

These early records contain many references to the open-handed hospitality of the people of Albuquerque and of the contiguous territory. Three families of the ricos of those days, the Pereas, at Bernalillo; the Armijos, at Albuquerque; and the Chavez family at the end of the next day's ride down the river, are praised in numerous instances for the charming hospitality, their always open doors offered. In the homes of the pobres as well, the stranger was always welcome. Kendall, in his *Texan Santa Fe Expedition*, relating the sufferings of himself and the Texans in their march under heavy guard from San Miguel to Chihuahua, tells of the outspoken sympathy of the poorer classes in the Rio Abajo and of how the women clustered about the exhausted prisoners at every stop, offering them corn, pumpkins, grapes, and whatever edibles their homes afforded. If the traveler were a person of particular note, the padres located in the towns and the various pueblos frequently undertook the entertainment with great credit to themselves as hosts. The tables were laden with the various dishes indigenous to New Mexico, flanked by the main products of the valley, such as melons, fruit, and grapes, all to be washed down with a very superior quality of wines and brandy. While one traveler bewails the fact that there was no good wine in the valley because it was kept in vats and skins and drunk too soon after making, the majority proclaim the superiority of it and of the grape brandy to any they had consumed elsewhere. Col. J. F. Meline, who was a visitor in the sixties, found the wines so to his taste that he sent a bottle each of white and red wine to the Cincinnati Wine Growers Association requesting their judgment as to the quality. The white was given a grade of ninety and the red eighty-one. The president of the association wrote in part: "We judge wines by figures marked up to one hundred, which is the highest character of wine of any kind. Your bottle of white wine was marked ninety. Most of our Ohio wine

does not reach the excellence of the wine presented by you." In addition to food and drink, bailes were given on the slightest provocation, and more than once, when the guests were several males of particular prominence, the valley was searched for señoritas of beauty and charm who might lend superior grace and distinction to the event and additional pleasure to the guests.

In the literature being sent out today by our booster organizations to attract more people to Albuquerque, there are many claims advanced proving the superiority of this city, yet in these many pamphlets, letters, etc., I have never seen any reference made to the superior pulchritude of the local fair sex over those of other localities. Yet as early as 1845, due to the writings of Messrs. Pike and Kendall, Albuquerque was known far and wide for the beauty of its women. In 1807, Zebulon Pike, being taken as a political prisoner from Santa Fe to Mexico, was entertained at dinner here by Father Ambrosio Guerra. A portion of Pike's *Journals* relating to this dinner follows: "We were received by Father Ambrosio Guerra in a very flattering manner, and led into his hall. From thence, after taking some refreshments, we went into an inner apartment where he ordered his adopted children of the female sex to appear. They came in by turns, Indians of various nations, Spanish, French, and finally two young girls, whom from their complexion I conceived to be English. On perceiving I noticed them, he ordered the rest to retire, many of whom were beautiful, and directed those to sit down on the sofa beside me. Thus situated he told me that they had been taken to the East by the Tetuas and passed from one nation to another, until he purchased them, at that time infants; they could recollect neither their names nor language, but, concluding they were my countrywomen, he ordered them to embrace me as a mark of their friendship, to which they appeared nothing loath. We then sat down to dinner, which consisted of various dishes, excellent wines, and to crown

all, we were waited on by half a dozen of those beautiful girls, who, like Hebe at the feast of the Gods, converted our wine to nectar, and with their ambrosial breath shed incense on our cups." Kendall proved himself a more elaborate press agent; he was a newspaper man, when he wrote in the forties: "It was at Albuquerque that I saw a perfect specimen of female loveliness. The girl was poor, being dressed only in a chemise and a coarse woolen petticoat; yet there was an air of grace, a charm about her, that neither birth nor fortune can bestow. She was standing upon a mud wall, the taper fingers of her right hand supporting a large pumpkin upon her head, while her left was gracefully resting upon her hip. Her dark, full, and lustrous eyes, overarched with brows of pencilled regularity, and fringed with lashes of long and silken texture, beamed upon us full of tenderness and pity, while an unbidden tear of sorrow at our misfortunes was coursing down a cheek of the purest and richest olive. Her beautifully-curved lips, half open as if in pity and astonishment at a scene so uncommon, disclosed teeth of pearly dazzling whiteness. Innocence and the best feelings of our nature were playing in every lineament of that lovely face, and ever and anon, as some one of us more unfortunate than the rest would limp halting by, again her tears would gush from their fountains and illumine a countenance of purity. If

"Crystal tears from pity's eye  
Are the stars in heaven high,"

some of them fell that day from the poor village girl, drawn from their firmament to lighten the sorrows of those upon whom misfortune had laid her heavy hands. She could not have been more than fifteen; yet her loose and flowing dress, but half concealing a bust of surpassing beauty and loveliness, plainly disclosed that she was just entering womanhood. Her figure was faultless, and even the chisel of Praxiteles himself never modeled ankles of such pure and classic elegance." Taking into account the perversities of



human nature, we should be prepared for a statement by Colonel Meline: "I have only to remark that I also, twenty-five years later, on the same spot, saw the population of Albuquerque swarm out on a more attractive occasion; and if that young lady of the pumpkin, bare feet, taper fingers, hip, and all that sort of thing, left daughters resembling herself, I certainly did not see them."

For approximately thirty years after the American occupation, Albuquerque assumed some importance as a military post. The army depots which were located here gave employment to many inhabitants. The number of the troops varied with the urgency of the times, and while it was usually regarded as a two-company post, there were located here at one time or another, some eight hundred men. Numerous campaigns against the Navajos were directed from Albuquerque. During the Civil war when the Confederates under Sibley advanced up the Rio Grande, the army stores were hastily loaded on wagons and removed to Santa Fe. When the Confederate forces arrived at Albuquerque, Rafael and Manuel Armijo, wealthy merchants, boldly avowed sympathy with the Confederate cause and placed \$200,000 worth of goods at the disposal of the Confederate forces. Sibley had in his possession eight small cannon which had been captured in a brush with Union forces in Texas, and when he retreated from Albuquerque, he buried them close to the west side of the plaza. Years later these were dug up; several were given to the local post of the G. A. R. and may now be found in Robinson Park. After the stinging defeat at Apache Canyon, Sibley and his men retreated down the Rio Abajo, had a slight skirmish with the Union forces in the vicinity of Albuquerque; and then proceeded to Peralta, where an artillery duel of several days' duration was engaged in. Sibley's forces finally escaped under cover of darkness and a terrific sandstorm, leaving in the valley of the Rio Grande below Alber-

que the recollection of more cannonading than it had ever heard before or shall possibly ever hear again.

W. W. H. Davis, visiting Albuquerque in 1854, gives in *El Gringo* a short description of the appearance of the town, followed by some comparisons and some observations of certain conditions that somehow almost a century later have a strangely familiar ring. We quote as follows: "The town is irregularly laid out and badly built. In the center is a plaza of some two or three acres in extent, and into which the principal streets lead. The houses are generally grouped about without order; and the best are but indifferent mud buildings, some of the more humble ones being partly in ruins. As a place of residence it is far less pleasant than Santa Fe. At some seasons of the year high winds prevail, when the sun is almost obscured by the clouds of fine dust that is whirled through the air, and which finds an entrance into the houses through every nook and cranny. Then there are flies and mosquitoes, which swarm in and out of doors in untold millions, which neither day or night allow man or beast to live in peace. The weather is oppressively warm in the summer season. The water used for all purposes comes from the river, and is so muddy that you cannot see the face in it until it shall have settled several hours."

Modern methods have removed most of the conditions that Davis criticized. Our deep wells, water plants, and reservoirs furnish us with some of the purest water in the world. The Conservancy project and our garbage disposal have almost eradicated the breeding places of flies and mosquitoes. Well-built houses, parks, and paved streets are so matter of fact that we hardly speak of them. The wind still blows, but the sand grows less and less before the encroachments of lawns and shrubbery. Over the trail where once the valiant Coronado led his beplumed and armoured band in the quest of that will o' the wisp, gold, where the redoubtable De Vargas rode at the head of a

few hundred against thousands, where many strange pageants of travel have occurred throughout several centuries, there are two never-ceasing lines of motor cars, one going north and the other south. Slowing down now and then in order to thread their way through a small town or village, they zoom away into the distance in a mad race with our hoydenish spirit of progress. And the bones of the early Spaniards rot along the roadside and occasionally the river in satiric mood casts a skull out upon the banks.

## Highway 85

*By* TELFAIR HENDON

The trail crunched by wagon wheels, where heavy oxen  
Plodded weary miles in days and days and days,  
Is now

A blackened ribbon  
Where sleek parabolas  
suck—  
miles  
per  
hour  
In restless runs for time . . . .