

10-1-1941

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### Recommended Citation

Foreman, Grant. "Antoine Leroux, New Mexico Guide." *New Mexico Historical Review* 16, 4 ().  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol16/iss4/2>

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# NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW

VOL. XVI

OCTOBER, 1941

No. 4

## ANTOINE LEROUX, NEW MEXICO GUIDE

*By* GRANT FOREMAN

ANTOINE LEROUX was born of French Canadian parents who came to St. Louis at an early day. The dates which Leroux himself gave at different times show some discrepancy, but he seems to have been born in, or about, the year 1803.<sup>1</sup> At the age of nineteen, he was one of the young men who answered an advertisement of Sir William Henry Ashley; and he got his first acquaintance of the Far West as a member of the Ashley expedition of 1822. About two years later, perhaps by the summer of 1824, he arrived in Taos, New Mexico, and his written statement of March, 1853, shows that he regarded Taos as his home from the time of his marriage. This took place in November, 1833, as appears from the marriage register now in the Archiepiscopal Archive of Santa Fé.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that Leroux soon came to be regarded as

1. Since Ashley did not enter the fur trade until 1822, Leroux could not have been employed by him in 1820 as he wrote in the statement for Senator Benton in 1853. See below.

2. This marriage record is of such interest in several ways that its text is given in full at the close of Mr. Foreman's paper.

A tradition at Taos has it that Leroux, in later life, moved across the mountains into the Mora valley and died there. This was true of Antonio Ledoux (one of the witnesses at the marriage of Leroux). The land holding in "los valles de Santa Gertrudis de lo de Mora," attributed by Twitchell (*Spanish Archives*, I, 143, title 478) to Leroux, was really that of Ledoux. The burial record of the latter (Santa Fé, Archiepiscopal Archive, Book B-14, Mora, 1856-60), dated Nov. 16, 1859, shows that Ledoux was born in 1779 and was husband of Apolonia Lucero, resident of the plaza of Santa Gertrudis. Leroux's connection was in the Taos valley and is listed in Twitchell, *Spanish Archives*, I, 485, Private Land Claim No. 47.—editor.

an honored citizen of the Taos valley. This is indicated by the names of those who assisted at the marriage: Charles Bent, María Ignacia Jaramillo, Carlos Beaubien, Antonio Ledoux. Moreover, his marriage identified him with the prominent Vigil family, members of which had, in 1742, secured a land grant that took in the choicest part of the Taos valley—including the present village of Taos.<sup>3</sup> Acting as agent for the heirs, Leroux had the Santa Fé firm of Smith and Houghton<sup>4</sup> begin action for the confirming of the grant. Because of this connection, the claim is known in the records as the “Antoine Leroux Grant.”<sup>5</sup> Significant also is an interlude in his engagements as guide during the year 1849. It was in September, 1849, that nineteen delegates assembled in convention at Santa Fé to prepare a territorial plan of government for New Mexico and to elect a delegate to congress. Three of the nineteen were from Taos county: Cerán St. Vrain, Father Antonio José Martínez, and Antonio Leroux.<sup>6</sup>

Leroux was one of a class of famous mountain men, celebrated as a guide and scout, and spoken of with great respect by all who knew that class of men. An early biographer of Kit Carson credited Leroux with character and talents similar to those of his subject. The partisans and friends of these early residents of Taos were wont to compare them; but, the biographer says, “It is a just tribute of praise due to both of these brave men, to say that they did not sanction by word or deed either party to the controversy. They came to appreciate each other, and as friends even felt

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3. Santa Fé, U. S. Land Office, *Land Claims Record*, vol. II, 493-507, “Antoine Leroux Grant.” The original grant was made (Aug. 12, 1742) by Governor Gaspar Domingo de Mendoza on petition of Pedro Vigil de Santillana, Juan Bautista Vigil and Cristóval Vigil.

4. Probably Hugh N. Smith is meant. He had been appointed attorney general in 1846, while Joab Houghton had served as chief justice 1846-49.

5. Action was started May 21, 1857, but was delayed by a protest of the Taos Indians. They withdrew their protest in September 1861 after receiving a deed for land which they claimed; and a few days later (Oct. 5, 1861) U. S. Surveyor General A. P. Wilbar recommended confirmation of the Leroux grant; congressional approval was dated March 3, 1869.

6. Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, ii, 269, note.

elated, the one at the success of the other and vice versa . . . Their ranches were located in the same valley and in the same town where, having lived together as fast friends in life, they found their last resting place in the same graveyard."<sup>7</sup> At least the last statement is a mistake, as we shall see; but it is an interesting fact that their associates made such a comparison between Carson and Leroux.

During the Mexican War, Leroux was a faithful and efficient guide for army officers, notably for Col. Philip St. George Cooke while, in 1846, he was taking his Mormon Battalion from Santa Fé to California. Cooke acknowledged his services in terms of high praise, and spoke of him as the most sensible and experienced of guides.<sup>8</sup>

Leroux was the leader of the company of scouts attached to an expedition made by Company G of the First Dragoons, under Lieut. Joseph H. Whittlesey, that marched from Taos in March, 1849, against the Utes. During the next October, he and Kit Carson guided Maj. William N. Grier in a fruitless pursuit of the Indians who, at Point of Rocks, east of Taos, had captured Mrs. J. M. White and daughter of Virginia, after killing her husband and other members of their party.<sup>9</sup>

Leroux served as guide for Capt. Lorenzo Sitgreaves during his exploring tour from Zuñi to the Colorado River and California in 1851, and contributed much to the success of the expedition.<sup>10</sup> In San Diego in the following April, desiring to return home, he offered his services to John R. Bartlett who was engaged in surveying the Mexican boundary. Bartlett says he gladly accepted the services of the "celebrated guide" to get him through to New Mexico, and

7. Dewitt C. Peters, *Kit Carson's Life and Adventures* (Hartford, Conn., 1874), p. 388.

8. House Executive Document No. 41, 30th Congress, 1st session, "Notes of a Military Reconnoissance," p. 416, Report of Philip St. George Cooke.

9. Blanche C. Grant, *When Old Trails Were New: the Story of Taos* (New York, 1934), pp. 158-9.

10. Report of an Expedition down the Zuñi and Colorado Rivers by Capt. L. Sitgreaves, Corps of Topographical Engineers (Washington, 1854), 32nd Congress, 2nd session, Senate Executive Document No. 59.

turned his outfit to him to organize and manage.<sup>11</sup> When they arrived at the Maricopa village on the Gila River, Bartlett says, "Leroux found a chief named Blanco who headed the Maricopa Indians in a fight in 1827 with a party of hunters and trappers from New Mexico, including Leroux, who barely escaped with their lives."<sup>12</sup>

The year 1853 was a busy one for Leroux. Senator Thomas H. Benton, though he had not been returned to congress, was immensely interested in promoting the proposed Central Railroad route from St. Louis to California. Because of the absence of Senator Benton and his son-in-law, Colonel Frémont, from congress, and also because of the divergent interest of Secretary of War Jeff Davis, attention had been attracted to the Memphis or southern route to such an extent that in congressional consideration it had acquired a great advantage over the central route. But the recent authorization by congress for examination and surveys of routes to California seemed to promise adequate consideration of the central route. Senator Benton, relying greatly on the explorations of Frémont, contributed many letters to the press in which he quoted Frémont and other explorers to demonstrate the advantage of this route through the present Colorado.

In support of Senator Benton's efforts, Leroux apparently had been induced to visit Washington, to contribute his information to the subject. His efforts took the form of an interesting account, obviously prepared at the instance of Senator Benton, which reads as follows:

At the request of Col. Benton, I, Antoine Leroux, native of St. Louis, of Missouri, and now an inhabitant of Taos, in New Mexico, do make the following statement in relation to the Pass at the head of the valley of the Del Norte, and of the country on each side of that Pass; and also, as to the best

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11. John R. Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents Connected with the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission* (New York, 1854), I, p. 206.

12. *Ibid.* Evidently this trapping party did not go through to California, for it is not one of "the four times" mentioned below by Leroux.

road from Missouri to California. And first I tell how I got acquainted with the country.<sup>13</sup>

In the year 1820 when I was in my nineteenth year,<sup>14</sup> I joined Gen. Ashley and Major Henry in an expedition of hunting and trapping to the Upper Missouri and Rocky Mountains; and after near two years in that part I went to Taos, in New Mexico, and afterwards married there,<sup>15</sup> and have made it my home ever since; and from that place I carried on the business of a beaver trapper for about fifteen years, generally on the waters of the Great Colorado of the West; and have trapped the whole country, every river, creek, and branch from the Gila to the head of the Grand River fork of the Upper Colorado, and out to the Great Salt Lake, and on the waters of Wah Satch Mountain, and out to the Virgin River, and have been four times to California, and guide to a great many American officers employed in Mexico, and know the country from New Mexico to California.

At the head of the Valley of the Del Norte there is a broad pass about eight miles wide, called by the Utah Indians Coo-cha-tope, and by the Mexican Spaniards, El Puerto, and which signifies in both languages, the *Gap*, or the *Gate*; and has been known to the Spaniards ever since they settled in New Mexico, and by the Indians always. It is made by the *Sierra San Juan*, which comes up from the south on the west side of the Del Norte and *gives out there*; and by the *Sierra Blanca*, which comes in from the east like it was going to join the San Juan, but turns off north round the head of the Arkansas and towards the Three Parks, and is eight miles wide. Here between these two mountains is the pass<sup>16</sup> which goes out level from the valley of the Del Norte (and looking like a continuation of it), which leads to the upper waters of the Great Colorado of the West. The Del Norte does not head in this pass, but in the San Juan mountains, a little south of the pass where there

13. For a biographical account of Leroux see *Les Canadiens de L'Ouest* by Joseph Tassé (Montreal, 1878), 231 ff.

14. As noted above, the year here should read "1822." A still greater error appears in the record of a *carta de naturaleza* (naturalization paper) issued at Santa Fé on Sept. 17, 1830, to "Antonio Loruo," one of a group of French Canadians from St. Louis. With little doubt this was Antoine Leroux, but his age was given as "35"—which would place his birth in 1795.—editor.

15. Santa Fé, Archiepiscopal Archive, Book M-40, Marriages, Taos, 1823-45, ff. 4v-5r.

16. Cochetopa Pass of today.

is also a summer pass,<sup>17</sup> but none for the winter on account of the snow in it. There is a small creek in the pass<sup>18</sup> called by the same name, Coo-cha-tope, which comes out from the end of the San Juan and goes about eight miles east towards the Del Norte, but stops in a small lake, out of which a little stream gets to the Del Norte—which shows how level the country is. The pass is heavily timbered with large pine trees, and with piñon, and there may be some small oaks, but I am not certain. There is not much snow in this pass, and people go through all the winter; and when there is much snow on the mountains on the *Abiquiu* route (which is the old Spanish trail to California), the people of Taos go round this way and get into that trail in the forks of the Grand and Green rivers. There are trails through it, but after you get through there are many trails, some going to the Abiquiu road, and some up or down the country. This pass is laid down on a map I saw in the War Office made by Lieut. Parke and Mr. R. H. Kern, and is there named after me, because I gave Lieut. Parke information about it. It is the only map I have seen that shows that pass, and the best one I have seen in that part of the country, and with a little correction would be perfect. As for the country on each side of the pass, I will describe it, and on the east side first.

There is a large valley to the east, about 50 to 60 miles wide, and near 100 miles long, reaching from the Coo-cha-tope to the Taos settlements, at the Little Colorado.<sup>19</sup> The Del Norte runs through this valley, which is the widest and best valley in all New Mexico, and can hold more people than all New Mexico besides. It is all prairie except on the creeks, and on the river, and on the mountain sides, which are well wooded. It is a rich soil, and covered with good grass, and wooded on all the streams. The Spaniards called it El Valle de San Luís, and it was formerly famous for wild horses and buffaloes; and ever since Taos was settled by the Spaniards, the inhabitants drove their sheep and cattle there to winter. Before the Utah Indians became so bad, the stock, as many as 50,000 or 60,000 head of sheep and cattle have been driven there to winter, which they did well, feeding on the grass during the day, and sheltering in the woods about the shepherd's camp at night. Most of the winters, there is no snow along the foot of the mountain on the

17. Probably Spring Pass of today, Leroux Pass on the Parke Map.

18. Again speaking of Cochetopa Pass.

19. Red River of today, 20 miles north of Taos where the San Luís valley begins.

north side of this valley, being sheltered from the north, and open to the sun to the south.

The United States have established a military post in this valley, not far from the pass of El Sangre de Cristo, and about two hundred families have gone there to live, chiefly near the fort, and raised crops there last year, and now that they have protection, the valley will soon be all settled, and will be the biggest and best part of New Mexico. About three families more were preparing to move there. The post is called Fort Massachusetts.<sup>20</sup>

This valley has several passes through the Sierra Blanca into the prairie country, on the Upper Arkansas and Kansas, the best of which is called El Sangre de Cristo, at the head of the little streams called Cuchadas, which fall into the Huerfano, a small river falling into the Arkansas not far from Bent's Fort. It is a good pass, and Bent and St. Vrain's wagons have passed through it, and it is passable the worst of winters; for Col. Beale's dragoons passed through it the same winter, and nearly the same time, that Col. Frémont went through another pass further west. The distance through these passes is not more than five miles. This is the description of the country on the east side of Coo-cha-tope Pass.

On the west side of the pass the country opens out broad and good for settlement, and for roads, and is the best watered country I ever saw out to the Wah-satch Mountains and to *Las Vegas de Santa Clara*. After that the water and grass became scarce, and the land poor. It is called a desert, though travelers find camping grounds every night, and the great cavalcades of many thousand head of horses from California to New Mexico annually pass along it. After you go through the pass at the head of Del Norte, there are many trails bearing southwest toward the great Spanish trail by Abiquiu, which they join in the forks of the Grand River and Green River (forks of the Great Colorado of the West), where it is a great beaten road, easy to follow day or night. The country is wooded on the streams with prairies between, and streams every three or five miles, as the Great Colorado here gathers its head-waters from the Wah-satch and Rocky Mountain ranges, which are covered all over with snow in the winter, and have snow upon their tops in the summer, which sends down so much water, and cool, clear and good. And this is the case generally out to the Wah-satch Moun-

20. On Utah Creek, two miles north of Fort Garland. By "Col. Beale" in the next paragraph, Leroux means Lieut.-Col. Benj. Lloyd Beall.



tains and Las Vegas de Santa Clara—a distance of near five hundred miles from the head of Del Norte. Wagons can now travel this route to California, and have done it. In the year 1837, two families named Sloover and Pope, with their wagons and two Mexicans, went from Taos that way.

Col. Frémont was looking for Coo-cha-tope Pass in the winter of 1848-9, and was near enough to have seen it, if it had not been hid by the lapping of the mountains, when his guide led him off into the mountains, instead of keeping up the dry valley, which he wished to do, and which would have taken him through easy. It was the worst winter for snow, but he could travel all the time in the valleys and passes. I was below him on the waters of the Arkansas at the same time, acting as guide to Col. Beale, who was out after the Apache Indians with a detachment of dragoons, and we heard of him at the Pueblos. He went as high as Hard Scrabble, and got corn before he crossed into the valley of San Luís, and we got corn at the Greenhorn Pueblo on the San Carlos Creek, about 50 or 60 miles below him, and heard that he had passed along, and supposed that he had gone safe through, and knew no better till he got back to Taos, when I told him how near he had been to the place he was looking for. We passed with the dragoons through the Pass El Sangre de Cristo (Blood of Christ) and got through easy, and that was the dead of winter and the greatest snow we ever had.

There is a way also up the Arkansas to get to the waters of the Great Colorado. It is by Bent's Fort, by the Pueblos and Hard Scrabble (at all which places corn and vegetables are raised), and by Witham's fishery, and at the head of the river, leaving the Three Parks to the north. Horsemen and stock can go that way. Maxwell, of Taos, drove out between four and five thousand head of sheep and cattle last summer, intending to take them to California, but went to the Great Salt Lake and sold them there.

A wagon can now go from Missouri to California through the Coo-cha-tope Pass, without crossing any mountain but the Sierra Blanca (and there have the choice of three good passes), and without crossing any swamp or large river, and nearly on a straight line all the way, only bearing a little south. And supplies of grain and cattle can be had from the Pueblos on the Upper Arkansas, and also from the Mexicans in the valley of the St. Louis, and also from the Mormons at *Ojo San José*, and at their settlement on the Nicollet river, and at Las Vegas de Santa Clara.

I have been from New Mexico to California four times, namely, the way I guided Col. Cook, the way I guided Capt. Sitgreaves, and the Salinas route, and the Abiquiu route, and of these four the one I guided Capt. Sitgreaves is, as I informed Mr. Seward,<sup>21</sup> the best and shortest from Santa Fé or Albuquerque; but from places farther north, and especially from Missouri, the Coo-cha-tope Pass is best and shortest, and has most water, grass, wood and good land on it; and has most snow, but not enough to prevent winter travelling; so that when there is much snow in the trail by Abiquiu, people from Taos go that way, as I have already said. The snow in that country is dry, and the moccasins that we wear do not get wet.

And being asked by Col. Benton to state the best way from Missouri to California, I answer: Start as the people now do, going to New Mexico, from the frontier of the State of Kansas or Independence, and for *summer* travelling go through the prairies up towards Bent's Fort, and up to the Huerfano to the Pass El Sangre de Cristo; then out by the Coo-che-tope Pass, following a trail to the great Spanish trail. The *winter* travel will be to start from the same point, but follow the Kansas River valley for the sake of the wood, and when that gives out, cross to the Arkansas, which is not far off, and level between, and follow that up for wood. The prairie is the way in the *summer*, but *winter* travelling must have the protection of woods and timber against snow-storm. And everything that I tell I can show, and would undertake to guide a party safe through with wagons now.

ANTOINE LEROUX

Senator Benton addressed a communication to the people of Missouri, incorporating Leroux's account which was published in the *Missouri Democrat*.<sup>22</sup>

When Leroux started on his return from Washington to Taos, he apparently travelled by way of St. Louis, and then by the Santa Fé Trail. Edward F. Beale was on his way from Independence to California in 1853, to assume his post as superintendent of Indian affairs, and, at a crossing of the Neosho River on the Santa Fé Trail on May 20, he over-

21. Evidently William H. Seward of Auburn, N. Y., at this time in the U. S. senate. Later, his interest in the Far West brought the purchase from Russia of Alaska, then called "Seward's Folly."—editor.

22. Copied in the New York *Daily Tribune*, March 16, 1853, p. 5, cols. 4-6.

took Leroux. Beale congratulated himself on his good fortune in securing the services of so experienced a guide. But Leroux seems to have been in charge of a train which he felt obliged to conduct safely over a few bad places along the route, and so was not able to join Beale at once; but he promised to overtake him in a short time.

However, when Beale arrived at Fort Atkinson, he found Leroux there under the care of the post surgeon, too ill to travel, and was obliged to proceed without him. Beale had a good deal of difficulty on his route, and in July he again called on Leroux at his home in Taos where he had recently arrived from Fort Atkinson; but again Leroux was unable to accompany him.

At this time, Capt. J. W. Gunnison, with his party organized to survey the middle railroad route on the 38th and 39th parallels, passed Fort Atkinson and Fort Bent; and subsequently, on August 13, he arrived in the vicinity of Fort Massachusetts near the more recent Fort Garland in Costilla County, Colorado. Here he sent Lieut. H. E. Beckwith and Lieut. Lawrence S. Baker to Taos, to secure the services of Leroux if possible. After a ride of over a hundred miles, they reached Taos, spoken of by Gunnison as the "headquarters of many of the most reliable and experienced of these mountain men."<sup>23</sup>

There they succeeded in engaging Leroux, subject to a prior engagement with Lieut. A. W. Whipple for later in the fall; and after thirty hours of travel, on the 19th they arrived back at Gunnison's camp. Leroux joined them the next day, and the party set out under the direction of this guide, who agreed to accompany them as far as the Spanish Trail which intersected their route in the vicinity of the present Mora in Utah. They crossed the mountain range and descended the Gunnison River; but after passing the site of the present Grand Junction to about where is now the western boundary of Colorado, Leroux was obliged to leave

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23. House Document No. 91, vol. 2, Report of Lieut. E. G. Beckwith of the Route Explored by Capt. John W. Gunnison.

them, September 25, and return to Taos, a month before the unfortunate Gunnison and some of his companions were killed by the Indians near Sevier Lake. With three companions, travelling principally by night, and relying on his skill and knowledge of the country, Leroux successfully passed through the hostile bands of Indians, and reached his home in Taos in good season to keep his engagement with Whipple.

Lieutenant A. W. Whipple, in charge of the Pacific Railroad survey along the 35th parallel, arrived at Albuquerque early in October, 1853, where they remained about a month, making their preparations for continuing the journey west to the Pacific Ocean.

Here Whipple met Leroux whom he had engaged as guide for the remainder of the journey.<sup>24</sup> Leroux's services from this time on are described in considerable detail by Lieutenant Whipple in his report. It is obvious that Leroux was relied upon greatly by Whipple, who was much impressed with the judgment and knowledge of his guide.

Antoine Leroux died at Taos in the summer of 1861, two months before the land grant which was associated with his name received favorable action by the surveyor general in Santa Fé. The brief burial record states that on August 1, 1861, burial was given to the remains of "Antonio Leroux, husband of Juana Vigil, in the nave of the parish church."<sup>25</sup> In all the burials at Taos during a period of fifteen years, including for example that of Carlos Beau-bien, no one received such signal honor in his place of burial as did this old French guide and mountainman.

24. *Pacific Railway Survey Reports*, Vol. I, p. 22.

25. Santa Fé, Archiepiscopal Archive, Book B-42, Burials, Taos. 4/23/850-8/27/865, f. 453r. An interlineation by a later and very different hand is misleading.

MARRIAGE RECORD OF  
ANTONIO LEROUS AND JUANA CATARINA VIGIL

In this curacy of Taos on November 4 of the year 1833, I, the parish priest Don Antonio José Martínez, having obtained the matrimonial dispensation [required] for any stranger and transient for the benefit of Antonio Lerous, bachelor from North America, legitimate son of Antonio Lerous and Elena José, so that he may contract marriage with Juana Catarina Vigil, single, from the curacy of San Juan [de los Caballeros] in this Territory, legitimate daughter of Juan de Jesús Vigil and María Paula Baldes, residents of the precinct of San Fernandes: the said dispensation having been dated on October 6 just passed in the city of Santa Fé by the very Illustrious Bishop Don José Antonio Luriano de Subiría<sup>26</sup> [and] returned with the application which I sent, so that I might file it, as I did; and having admonished them (read the banns) on the 20th and 27th of the said October, which were the twenty-first and twenty-second Sundays in the order of Pentecost, and also on the first day of the present feast of All Saints, and since no kind of impediment appeared, and having read to them the said dispensation, following confession and communion, I married and blessed them *in facie Ecclesiae* (in due form of the Church). The *padrinos* (god-parents) were Charles Bent<sup>27</sup> and María Ignacia Jaramillo; attending witnesses were Don Carlos Beaubien<sup>28</sup> and Antonio Ledús, all residents of the *barrio* (ward or precinct) of San Fernandes, with the other [witnesses] who were present. The said *auto* (ceremony) was in the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a chapel of this parish; and for attestation I signed it.

Antonio José Martínez (rubric)

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26. Don José Antonio Laureano Zubiría, Bishop of Durango, was making an official visit and seems to have been in New Mexico for at least three months, July-October, of 1833.

27. The original reads "Carlos Vente," but there is no mistaking the famous Charles Bent, while the second *padrino* was later to be his wife.

28. Another name which helps to make this marriage record impressive. Beaubien was one of the most prominent and influential of the "foreigners" then in New Mexico. Comment has already been made (note 2 above) regarding Antonio Ledoux (Ledus).