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JUAN MARTÍNEZ DE MONTOYA,
SETTLER AND CONQUISTADOR OF NEW MEXICO

By FRANCE V. SHOLES

IN A LETTER to the viceroy, dated August 24, 1607, Juan de Oñate resigned his commission as governor and captain general of New Mexico and stated that unless immediate action was taken to provide aid and reinforcements he would be obliged to permit the colonists to abandon the province. This dispatch and other reports were brought to Mexico City by Fray Lázaro Ximénez, who arrived in the viceregal capital toward the end of 1607. After consultation with members of the *audiencia*, Viceroy Velasco accepted Oñate's resignation and on February 27, 1608, named Captain Juan Martínez de Montoya, then serving in the province, to act as governor *ad interim* until a final decision was reached concerning the future of the colony. When Velasco's order was received in San Gabriel later in the year, the *cabildo* refused to accept Martínez as governor, alleging "that he was not a soldier and other reasons which they said were not convenient to mention in public." The *cabildo* asked Oñate to continue as governor, but he refused. Then, with the approval of Fray Francisco de Escobar, the commissary of the Franciscans, Oñate's son, Don Cristóbal, was appointed governor in a *cabildo abierto*. Don Cristóbal held office until the arrival of Don Pedro de Peralta about a year and a half later.¹

Who was this Juan Martínez de Montoya whom the *cabildo* of San Gabriel refused to accept as governor of New Mexico? What was the nature of his services in New Mexico prior to 1608. Is it true that he was not a soldier, as the *cabildo* alleged? Answers to these questions are found in documents which I had the opportunity to examine several

1. The documents on this episode are found in Archivo General de Indias (cited hereinafter as A.G.I.), México, leg. 27. See also G. P. Hammond, *Don Juan de Oñate and the Founding of New Mexico* (Santa Fé, 1927), pp. 172-178.

years ago.² These papers contain, among other things, a document executed at San Gabriel on October 6, 1606, in which Juan de Oñate certified Martínez' services in New Mexico up to that time, and a supplementary statement of services presented by Martínez before Cristóbal de Oñate on August 9, 1608.

The documents record that Juan Martínez de Montoya was born on January 11, 1561, at a place called Nabalagameña, two leagues from El Escorial in Spain. They do not provide information, however, as to the year in which he came to Mexico.

On August 28, 1599, Martínez enlisted in Mexico City as an alférez in one of the companies of the reinforcements then being organized for New Mexico. During the succeeding four months he used his personal funds to support other soldiers of the expedition, and on December 23, 1599, he was raised to the rank of captain. On January 2, 1600, he set out from Mexico City, taking recruits to the valley of San Bartolomé on the northern frontier, and in the following summer, during the inspection of the force, he was appointed a member of the war council. He arrived in New Mexico with the relief expedition in December, 1600.

With the arrival of the reinforcements Oñate was in a position to carry out his plan for an expedition to the eastern plains. On April 20, 1601, Martínez was named one of the captains of the army, and he gave a good account of himself in the battle with the Escanjaques at the Quivira settlements. He later participated in a punitive expedition which Oñate made against the Indians of Taos, and during this affair also he won a good reputation. No date is given for the entrada to the Taos area but it evidently occurred in 1602 or 1603.

In the latter part of 1603 or during the first half of 1604 Martínez accompanied a force, which also included

2. The documents mentioned above were owned by Maggs Bros. of London when I saw them. They had the following general title: *D. Juan Saez Maurigade, vecino de esta Corte, sobre que se incluya en la descendencia directa del Capitan D. Juan Martinez de Montoya, descubridor, conquistador y poblador que fue en las Americas y Gobernador del Nuevo Mexico.*

Fray Francisco de Velasco, "comisario apostólico," Fray Juan de Escalona, and Fray Francisco de Escobar,³ to the pueblo of Acoma. Here peaceful relations were established, temporarily at least, with the Indians, who had apparently remained hostile since 1599 when severe punishment had been imposed upon them for the death of Juan de Zaldívar and others in the autumn of 1598. From Acoma Father Velasco, with an escort of twelve soldiers commanded by Captain Jerónimo Márquez and including Martínez, went on to the Zuñi and Moqui districts, and thence to the land of the Cruzados, where veins of ore were found⁴ and reports of the South Sea were received.

This reconnaissance was followed by Oñate's entrada to the Gulf of California in 1604-1605. At this time, however, Martínez remained in San Gabriel serving as a member of the war council in the villa.⁵ Although Martínez did not accompany Oñate to the South Sea, he gave five horses for the expedition.

In 1605 he served as *alcalde ordinario* of San Gabriel, winning approval for the manner in which he administered justice during the period when Oñate was absent in New Spain.⁶ In the autumn of the following year (1606) the

3. Escalona had been commissary, or local prelate, of the Franciscans in New Mexico from 1600 to the coming of a new group of friars with Escobar in 1603. According to Torquemada (*Monarchia Indiana*, ed. 1723, vol. 1, p. 678) Escobar was appointed commissary to succeed Escalona, but with the provision that Velasco, who accompanied Escalona to New Mexico in 1600, should serve for a year before Escobar took office. It is interesting to note, therefore, that this arrangement was carried out. Later in the year 1604 Escobar evidently entered upon his duties as commissary, for he held the title at the time of Oñate's expedition to the South Sea, which set out from provincial headquarters in October.

4. Before Oñate set out on the expedition to the South Sea he sent reports to the viceroy and samples of ore "taken from mines that have been discovered." In a letter to the king, dated March 31, 1605, Viceroy Montesclaros stated that the ore had been assayed and that the best contained one-eighth copper, "without a trace of silver." These ores probably came from the veins discovered during the preliminary expedition of Velasco and his companions to the west which preceded the main entrada to the Gulf of California.

5. A document of 1604 executed during Oñate's absence indicates that Martínez de Montoya also held the title of secretary of war and government at this time. Archivo General de la Nación, México, Provincias Internas, tomo 34, exp. 1.

6. After his return from the Gulf of California, Oñate set out for New Spain to make a report to the viceroy. Arriving in San Bartolomé in August, 1605, he sent a letter to the viceroy seeking permission to continue the journey to Mexico City. The viceroy somewhat reluctantly granted permission, but for some reason Oñate returned to New Mexico without waiting for the viceroy's reply. A.G.I., México, leg. 26.

maestre de campo, Vicente de Zaldívar, who had returned to New Mexico after an absence of some four years,⁷ made an expedition to the sea, evidently to follow up Oñate's discovery of 1604-1605. No details are available for this journey.⁸ Martínez gave four horses for the expedition, but remained in San Gabriel as part of a force to protect the church and royal standard in that settlement.

We also learn that prior to October 6, 1606, when Oñate certified the services of Martínez, the latter had taken part in campaigns against the Apaches, that he had been granted an encomienda for three lives in one of the Jémez pueblos named Santiago, and that he had served as *consultor* and *asesor* of Fray Juan de Escalona. Finally, Oñate certified that Martínez was entitled to the rank of *hidalgo*, granted by a royal cédula of 1602 to persons who had served for five years in the conquest and pacification of New Mexico.

On August 9, 1608, Martínez appeared in Santo Domingo before Cristóbal de Oñate, then holding office as governor and captain general, and presented for certification a supplementary account of services performed subsequent to 1606. This was done evidently after receipt of the viceroy's nomination of Martínez as governor and the refusal of the *cabildo* to accept him in that post.

This document reveals that in 1608 Martínez again held office as *alcalde ordinario* in San Gabriel. During 1606-1607 he had served twice as captain of a force sent out against marauding Apaches, and on another occasion in this same period he took part in an expedition led by Cristóbal de Oñate against Apaches who had been bold enough to attack San Gabriel. Sometime during the year 1607-1608, while the colony was waiting for the viceroy's reply to Oñate's resignation, Martínez had also helped to discover some mines at a place called San Buenaventura. We also learn that he had participated in the burning of some idols,

7. Zaldívar returned to New Spain with two friars and a group of soldiers sent out in 1605.

8. In his letter of resignation of August 24, 1607, Oñate referred to the "great news, confirmed last year, of the wealth and greatness of the interior country," and of which he said he was sending a report to the viceroy. This may relate to Zaldívar's expedition of 1606. A.G.I., México, leg. 26.

indicating that the friars were already beginning their active campaigns against Pueblo religion.

But the most interesting data recorded for the year 1607-1608 are brief references to a place called Santa Fé and statements indicating that some sort of post or settlement was being established there. In December, 1608, when messengers brought new reports to the viceroy, the latter was informed of plans to establish a new villa and provincial capital; and in his instructions to Pedro de Peralta, the new royal governor appointed in 1609, Velasco stipulated that Peralta's first duty should be "la fundación y población de la villa que se pretende."⁹ In 1610 Peralta officially founded the villa of Santa Fé, in accordance with this instruction.¹⁰ It would appear, however, that the beginnings of settlement there occurred as early as 1608 and that at such time the site was already known as Santa Fé.

On August 10, 1608, Cristóbal de Oñate certified Martínez' supplementary statement of services. At the same time he also granted him permission to leave New Mexico as part of the escort of Fray Lázaro Ximénez and Fray Isidro Ordóñez who were taking the reports to the viceroy.

The foregoing review of Martínez's activities in New Mexico indicates that the statement that he was not a soldier, made by the *cabildo* in 1608 and given as one of the reasons for refusing to accept him as governor, was not true. On the contrary, he had actively participated in the military affairs of the province and he had evidently enjoyed the confidence of the elder Oñate.

As for the other reasons alleged by the *cabildo* in defense of their action and which they deemed inexpedient to make public, we have no inkling whatever. It would appear, however, that the *cabildo* desired to keep the governorship in the Oñate family as long as possible. Whether or not this desire was inspired in any way by Juan de Oñate himself, it is impossible to say. His letter of resignation of August 24, 1607, seems to indicate that he was com-

9. The instructions of Peralta have been published in the NEW MEX. HIST. REV., IV (1929), pp. 178-187.

10. Cf. L. B. Bloom, "When was Santa Fé founded?" in *ibid.*, IV, 188-194.

pletely discouraged by the failure of the viceroy and Crown to grant his requests in the matter of extensive aid for New Mexico and that he wished to be free of further responsibility for a venture in which he had spent his fortune.

He may have hoped, however, that by resigning he could force the Crown to assume financial support of the province and that at the same time it would reward his services by appointing him or his son as royal governor. In such case, he may have exerted influence on the *cabildo* to reject Martínez as governor in 1608. But having sent in his resignation, it would hardly be proper or expedient at such time to resume office, as the *cabildo* requested. The election of his son would, however, keep the governorship in the family until the viceroy and Crown reached a formal decision about the future of New Mexico.

But all this is pure speculation and may well have no justification. Whatever Oñate's real motives may have been, the viceroy accepted his resignation at face value, and in 1609 he appointed Pedro de Peralta as royal governor. At the same time he sent orders for Oñate and his son to leave New Mexico within three months after Peralta's arrival. On his return to New Spain, Oñate was subjected to *residencia* proceedings and in 1614 sentence was pronounced imposing various penalties for offenses committed during his term of office.

The decision of Martínez to leave New Mexico in 1608 was undoubtedly prompted by the action of the *cabildo* in denying him the governorship and by a desire to present a statement of his services to the viceroy, perhaps in the hope of receiving some reward elsewhere. He never returned to New Mexico. The record of his services summarized in this brief paper clarifies the career of one of the founders of New Mexico and adds a few new facts, notably the details about the beginnings of Santa Fé, to our knowledge of the Oñate period.