



LA FONDA, Santa Fe, N. M., 1920, Rapp, Rapp and Henrickson, architects

ARCHITECTURE and the FRED HARVEY HOUSES

The Alvarado and La Fonda

by Dr. David Gebhard

"If then these essentials of utility, that is: adaptability to purpose and simplicity, be assured, beauty will not be slow to follow." So wrote Gustav Stickley in 1901 in the second issue of his newly founded magazine *The Craftsman*. By the turn of the century the ideal of simplicity had emerged as a paramount force in European and American architecture. The shift, of course, away from the visual turmoil of the Victorian decades of the mid and late nineteenth century had been gathering momentum since the 1880's. In American architecture the Shingle Style of H. H. Richardson, McKim, Meade and White and others stood in marked contrast to the cluttered forms of the normal Eastlake version of the Queen Anne cottage. The vision of simplicity in design was by no means restricted to the more experimental architectural movements at the turn of the century. The Neo Classic revival of McKim, Meade and White was itself a frank and open declaration of allegiance to the principle of clarity and restraint. Nor was simplicity an ideal only in architecture, for it appeared with equal force in the paintings of the time, in literature and even in music.

The desire to return to the simple life, to return in a sense to nature, was first expressed architecturally

in William Morris' Arts and Crafts movement, with its self-conscious emphasis on medieval European forms and craftsmanship. But the more *avant garde* architects and painters could not long be satisfied with this single source of inspiration. For these individuals the pristine purity of simplicity was to be found, not in their European heritage but in the art and architecture of primitive man — the art of Negro Africa, the art of the South Seas, and for America, the art of the American Indian. By the late nineteenth century the only American Indian groups which still possessed an active culture were those of the Southwest — especially those living in the Rio Grande Valley, at Zuni, and in the Hopi pueblos in northern Arizona. The architectural forms which had arisen in the American Southwest in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries — a blend of the Indian and provincial Spanish architecture from Mexico — had long held a fascination for the American from the eastern sections of the country. In the more openly eclectic world of the nineteenth century, it was only a short step from admiration of a past historic form to the desire to employ the form in a contemporary building. Exactly when the first structures were actually built which were based upon the amalgamated



ALVARADO HOTEL, Albuquerque, N. M., 1901-05. Charles F. Whittlesey, architect.

Spanish Colonial-Indian form is still uncertain. More likely than not such a building was probably realized in the East, rather than in the western United States. But certainly by the 1880's there was a conscious realization of the possibilities inherent in the Spanish-Indian forms which encouraged the erection of buildings in this style along the Pacific Coast of California. By the early 1890's there were a number of documented buildings designed in this mode. The San Francisco architect A. Page Brown produced a version in the California Building at the Chicago Worlds Fair of 1893, and there are numerous examples after this date. In California this concern with an "indigenous" architecture led first to a direct admiration and an attempt to imitate the Franciscan Mission architecture of the area. But the vocabulary of the Franciscan buildings soon appeared far too limited to the more sophisticated, urban architects and clients. After 1900 the Mission style was replaced by a full blown Spanish Colonial Revival — which, of course, was in no way purely Spanish, for it derived its details from Moorish, Italian and even southern French architecture. By the mid 1920's this Spanish Colonial Revival had become the regional style for California.

At the same time in New Mexico and especially in the cities of Santa Fe, Taos and Albuquerque, a new interest developed in their own primitive architectural forms. This interest was stimulated not by the mercantile, ranching, or farming group, nor by the Indians or Spanish Americans themselves, but by individuals who in essence were escaping to the Southwest from the pressures and the artificialities of urban life in the East. As early as 1905, one of the older buildings at the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque was remodeled in "the Spanish-Indian" tradition. In 1909 the historic Governors Palace in Santa Fe was stripped of most of

its Territorial detailing and was "restored" to what was thought to be its original design. In the teens the Spanish-Indian tradition, or as it was often called the "Pueblo" or "Santa Fe" Style came into its own. New student dormitories were built in this mode at the University in Albuquerque (designed by George W. Tight) and in Santa Fe the new Art Museum (1917) compiled together features from specific Spanish-Colonial churches and Indian pueblo buildings. In Taos and in Santa Fe an increased number of houses began to reflect this tradition; one of the earliest and most successful being that of Carlos Vierra in Santa Fe. In southern New Mexico Bertram Goodhue designed a new mining town, Tyrone, which brought together elements of the California Spanish Colonial and the Spanish-Indian tradition of New Mexico.

In its early development the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad had embraced a simplified version of the Spanish-Mission — Spanish Colonial and Spanish Indian — for many of its railway stations in New Mexico, Arizona and California. The station at Albuquerque was built as early as 1902, that at Carlsbad and at Raton in 1904. The famous Fred Harvey houses which were often directly associated with the railroad stations expressed the same theme. In 1908, Las Chavez Hotel was built at Vaughn and in 1900, the Kansas City architect, Louis Curtiss, closely reflected the Pueblo architectural theme in the small El Oriz Hotel at Lamy. (see *N.M.A.* vol. 4, July-Aug., 1962, "Architecture and the Fred Harvey Houses, pp. 11-17.)

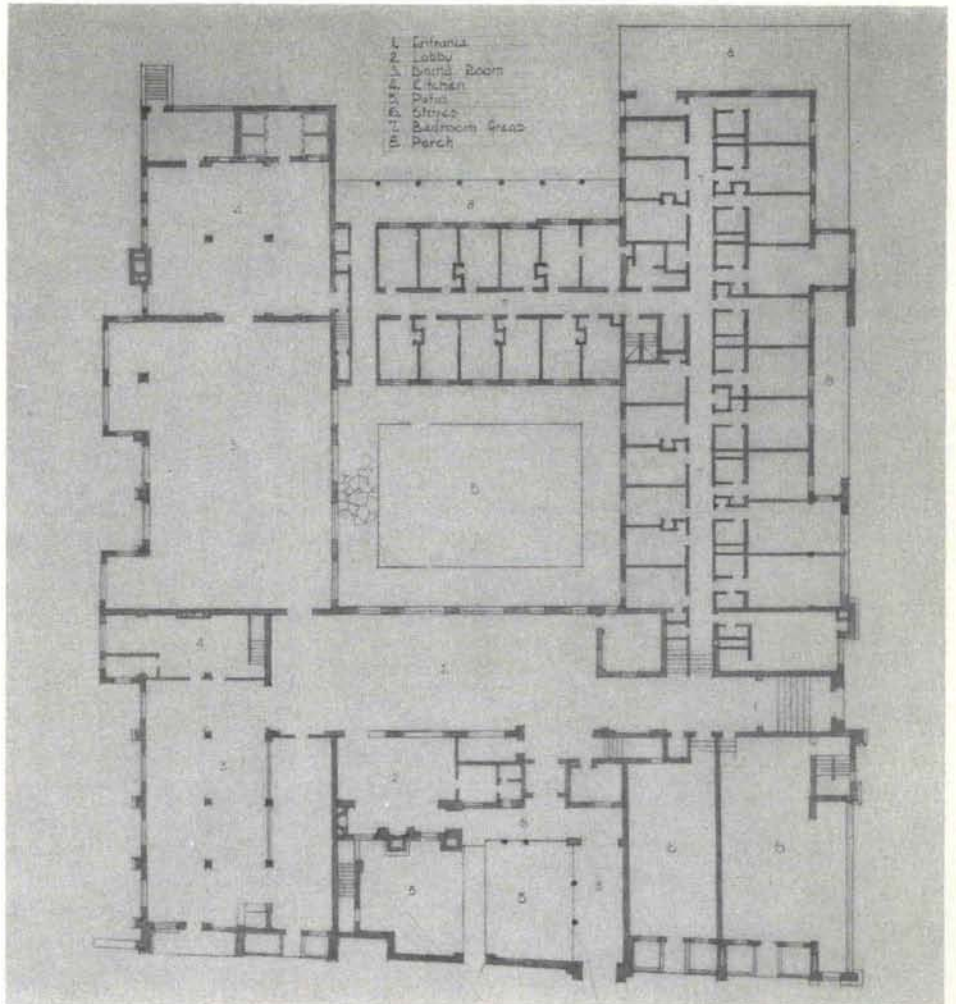
However, the widest known of the Fred Harvey houses were those constructed at Albuquerque, the "Alvarado," and at Santa Fe, "La Fonda." These two structures mirror the changes which occurred in the Style in New Mexico between its earlier and later phases. The Alvarado was designed in 1901 by Charles F. Whit-



LA FONDA, Santa Fe, N. M., view from southwest.

LA FONDA, Santa Fe, N. M., view of lobby before remodeling





La FONDA, plan before remodeling

LA FONDA, Santa Fe, N. M., a bedroom suite.



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tlesey of Chicago. Its working drawings, however, were prepared by the architectural department of the Santa Fe Railroad and the building was completed in 1905. The hotel was planned in conjunction with an adjoining restaurant, gift shop and the railroad depot and offices. These separate functions were joined together in the design by arched arcades which surround much of the ground floor of the building. The wall surfaces of the building were covered with rough stucco and were kept simple and uncluttered. Historical and ornamental features were restricted to the upper parts of the building and certain of the interior areas. On the upper sections were located projecting parapets, towers and the like which obviously had been derived from such California Missions as the San Diego de Alcala, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Rey de Francia. Thus as a design the Alvarado represents a continuation of the early Mission Revival of California. Only in an incidental and broad sense does it reflect the local version of the Spanish-Indian Revival of New Mexico.

On the other hand, La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe entails a forceful, fully developed statement of the Spanish-Indian Style of New Mexico. By 1920, when it was designed, the Spanish-Indian was well on its way to becoming the dominant style in New Mexico. The architects of the building were the firm of T. H. Rapp, W. M. Rapp and A. C. Henrickson. This same firm was to build a number of successful buildings in this style — the Trinidad Country Club, at Trinidad, Colorado, The Sunmount Sanitarium at Santa Fe, etc.

The site of La Fonda Hotel had previously been occupied by the Exchange Hotel, a single story building, which had, at least in part, been constructed before the mid 1850's. Like its predecessor La Fonda organized itself around an interior courtyard. In the newer structure adobe was replaced by walls of reinforced concrete and tile which were battered inward in many places, and its surface was covered by a roughly applied cement stucco. Open towers, wood balconies, a succession of terraces, and rows of projecting vegas provided an irregular and picturesque silhouette to

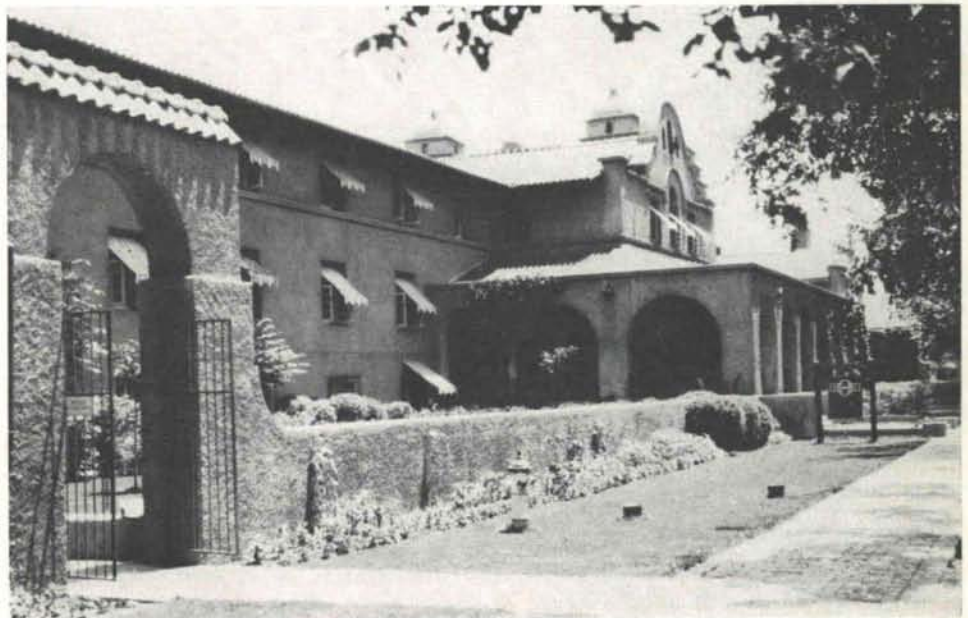


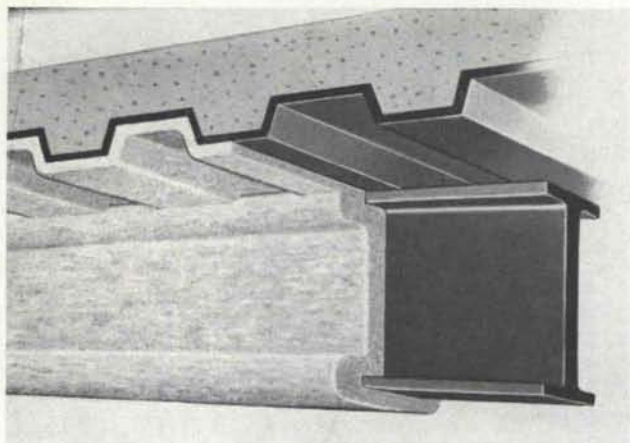
ALVARADO HOTEL, fireplace in dining room.

the structure. The lower section of the hotel facing the Plaza of Santa Fe tends to be somewhat confused in its variety of surface and in its detail. But this defect is certainly balanced by its direct reference to human scale and the way in which a visitor is led into the building through an enclosed entrance courtyard. The handling of the rear, six story section of the hotel is unquestionably the most satisfactory part of the building. In this section the architects were not as self-conscious in their imitation of past forms. Although there is a certain tendency in the building to express a massive, heavy sculptural bulk, its dominant feeling is really that of a group of thinly skinned volumetric forms very sensitively handled.

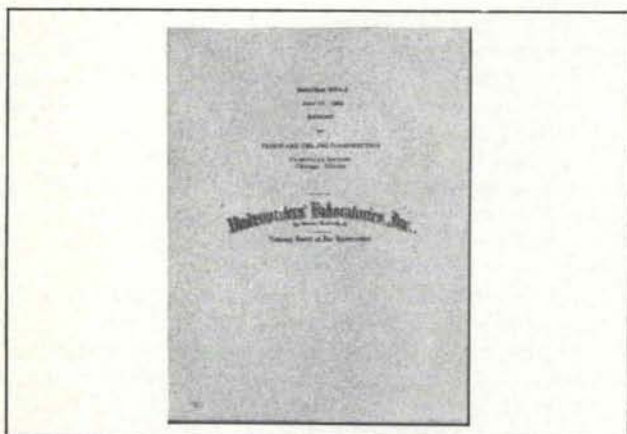
Of the two Harvey houses, the design of La Fonda probably appeals to us the more, for the simple reason that it is more clear and direct in its architectural expression than the Alvarado Hotel. Both structures though, represent important landmarks in the development of New Mexico architecture. They are traditional

ALVARADO HOTEL, Albuquerque, N. M., west elevation.





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in the true meaning of the term, in that they entail a forceful visual statement most closely representing the times in which they were built. —David Gebhard

Bibliographical Note:

For general reading on the subject of the Mission Revival, the Spanish Colonial Revival and the Spanish-Indian Revival, Part 6 of Trent E. Sanford's *The Architecture of the Southwest* (New York, 1950) is still the classic source. Of equal interest is Harold Kirker's *California's Architectural Frontier* (San Marino, 1960), especially Chapter 6, "The Discovery of the Past." As part of our current reassessment of the eclectic architecture of these years there is an article by Jonathan Lane, "The Period House of the 1920's," published in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, (December, 1961, pp. 169-179). During the decades

from 1900 through 1930 numerous articles were published on the Spanish-Indian architecture of New Mexico. The magazine, *El Palacio* (published by the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe) contains many illustrations of these buildings. The January, 1937 issue of *El Palacio* (Vol. XLII, Nos. 1-3), contains a long and interesting article on "A History of the Museum of New Mexico," by Hester Jones. Of the many articles published in such magazines as *Sunset*, *Arts and Decoration*, *Overland*, *Art and Archaeology*, and the *Architectural Record*, mention might be made of two articles by Rose Henderson, "A Primitive Bases for Modern Architecture," (*Architectural Record*, August, 1923, pp. 189-196); and "The Spanish-Indian Tradition in Interior Decoration," (*Architectural Record*, February, 1924, pp. 195-202). Also of interest is an article by Carlos Vierra, "New Mexico Architecture," (*Art and Archaeology*, January, 1918, pp. 37-49).



A Bostonian Looks at Albuquerque and the Alvarado Hotel in 1906

Interesting excerpts of a letter written in 1906 and published in the January 1906 issue of the *Out West Magazine* were recently reprinted by Howard Bryan in his column "Off the Beaten Path", October 22 issue of the *Albuquerque Tribune*. Mr. Bryan's attention had been called to the material by Mr. James Fife of Sandia Park who had run across the article in the University Library.

As a coda to Mr. Gebhard's article on the Alvarado, the reader may find this early appraisal of the hotel of interest. We appreciate Mr. Bryan's and Mr. Fife's permission to reprint part of the *Tribune* article.

The illustrated article, entitled "A Bostonian Finds a New Home," consists of a long letter which the writer, identified only as Jim sent to his wife in Boston, telling her that he had decided to settle in Albuquerque and urging her to come and bring the children.

The letter, as it was published in the magazine, was dated Albuquerque, Nov. 2, 1906. In it, the Bostonian told his wife all the reasons why he had selected Albuquerque for their home.

Having arrived in Albuquerque on the Santa Fe "Flyer," he began his letter by describing the depot area:

"A very large hotel called the Alvarado adjoins the depot here. These are of the old Moorish architecture, and, with their quaint arches, towers and facades, form absolutely the most attractive group of buildings I have seen since I left Boston."

Albuquerque had nearly 16 churches, he said, some of them costing upwards of \$20,000 — while one even had a \$5,000 pipe organ.

The Albuquerque public schools system was well adapted to its purpose, he continued, with a central school and four ward school buildings.

"The University of New Mexico is located here, and not only has a preparatory department and a nor-

mal course, but offers a full college education, either classical or scientific," he wrote. "The number of pupils is only about 150, yet the college spirit is admirable . . ."

The writer said he was especially impressed with the cleanliness of Albuquerque streets, the great number and extent of brick and cement sidewalks, the beautifully kept lawns and the abundance of flowers.

The business district of the city was quite metropolitan in appearance, he added, with wholesale and retail houses carrying extensive and varied stocks, "and strictly up to date."

About 1,000 men were employed at the Santa Fe Shops, he said, while the American Lumber Co., employing 1,200 men, operated a large sawmill and a sash and door factory near the city.

"It is said that the population of the city is about 15,000" he continued. "I presume this is an exaggeration, but there is so much life and activity, and so much accomplished, that I was inclined to place the number of inhabitants even higher than that estimate."

He said the Elks had a "tasty opera house," recently completed at a cost of \$75,000, and said that the Sisters of Charity Hospital "is certainly a delightful place in which to be sick."

He told his wife that the city had good water and sewage systems, telephone, electric lights and gas and a well maintained electric street car line. The Albuquerque Public Library had 3,000 volumes, he said.

The climate came in for praise, too:

"Rarely, I am told, does a day pass without some hours of sunshine. Statistics show that on an average, three hundred and fifty days in the year are clear."

Optimistically, the Bostonian wrote:

"The banks show a deposit of over five million dollars, and it shall be my object during the next few years to have a considerable portion of that wealth transferred to my private account."