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THE YEAR OF DECISION

By WILLIAM A. KELEHER

For a full hundred years now New Mexico has been a part of the United States of America, not an important part perhaps, but it can be said with sincerity that New Mexico has contributed in its own small way since 1846 to help build a great and cohesive nation. The New Mexico of a century ago was indeed a part of the genuine western frontier. Under Spanish and Mexican rule, the province of New Mexico was governed by laws that were enacted in Durango, in Mexico City, and in Spain. Geographically New Mexico was isolated, hemmed in by towering mountains. Transportation was extremely difficult. There was only occasional communication with either Mexico or the American States. Tribes of wild Indians, notably the Navahos, Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas and Utes, roamed over New Mexico pretty much at will. The inhabitants suffered greatly in loss of life and property from depredations by Indian tribes. New Mexico was and is a long distance from navigable streams and salt water.

Even today New Mexico has many things in common with the Mother Country of Mexico, not shared by any other state of the Union. Geographically we are Mexico's next-door neighbor. Our soil was once Mexican soil. Our cultural background is fundamentally based on Spanish and Mexican life developed over hundreds of years. The language spoken by many of our people is the national language of Mexico.

This occasion is a memorable one in the history of the State of New Mexico, and of the American nation. The people of our country are thinking today as never before in terms of internationalism, as opposed to nationalism. They have an interest and a sense of personal concern never before manifested.—Because the people of America are now directing their thoughts toward international horizons, this

occasion and the program prepared for its celebration are timely and justified. We would, however, be doing a disservice to the nation and to ourselves if we seized upon this occasion as one for a review of the glories of American achievement of a century ago. We would exhibit bad taste and poor manners if we attempted today to praise unduly the military successes of a hundred years ago. Certainly it would not be appropriate to say a single disparaging word about the efforts of the Mexican Republic to prevent seizure of its territory, nor to criticize the attempts of its leadership of that day to maintain the honor and dignity of their nation.

Fortunately an excellent relationship exists today between the government of the United States of America and the Republic of Mexico, a relationship perhaps never before in the history of the two nations so cordial and sincere. Our good neighbor policy, so long planned and nurtured by men of good will of both nations, has accomplished much in the field of foreign affairs in Mexico and the United States. That policy holds great promise for present and future harmony and understanding. We hear frequent mention of a subject called intellectual coöperation between our country and Mexico. The words, "intellectual coöperation," introduced of recent years into the vocabulary and terminology of both the English and Spanish languages, are today used to describe and define the honest and able efforts made by and between the diplomatic representatives of the two countries to achieve mutual trust and helpful understanding, certainly worthy and desirable objectives. A most recent practical demonstration of this spirit of intellectual coöperation has been exhibited in the harmony and mutual help apparent in the two countries during World War II.

Viewing the relationship between the two countries in retrospect, it may be said that no fair-minded student of history can sincerely argue that we of the United States of America have been free from blame in times past in attempting, because of superior strength, to impose our will on that of our neighbor to the south. We must plead guilty

of having meddled in her affairs, when it seemed to serve our purpose, from either a political or a diplomatic standpoint, and in attempting, perhaps in entire good faith, to interfere with her way of life in the conduct of administrative affairs, on the theory that we knew better than Mexico the things that were for her own best interest. As early as 1825, Joel R. Poinsett, acting under instructions from Henry Clay, went to Mexico as the representative of the United States, and began negotiations looking toward the purchase of a great slice of northern Mexico, certainly conduct which was an affront to that nation. Poinsett's name is kept alive and remembered today by the red flower that appears each year about Christmas time, while his work as a diplomat is recalled only by those interested in history.

During the presidency of Benito Juarez, that great Mexican leader, our government, on March 6, 1860, authorized the appearance off Vera Cruz of the battleship Saratoga. Our naval forces there participated in Mexican affairs to an extent which certainly would not be tolerated under the good neighbor policy of our day. American Marines were landed in Vera Cruz in 1914 by order of President Woodrow Wilson, and permitted to intervene in an incident which grew out of the ousting of General Victoriano Huerta, believed to have been responsible for the assassination of President Madero. As a result of that intervention a number of Americans and Mexicans lost their lives. All of these incidents, and others which might be mentioned, are now fortunately a thing of the past, forgotten and forgiven. Because of the eventual satisfactory solution of difficulties which in former times produced strained relations, and because of present cordial relations, it is believed that even the most zealous Mexican citizen would not object to the celebration in Santa Fe today of the centennial of the American Occupation, even if that celebration may perhaps recall for Mexico unpleasant and unhappy memories.

Thinking in terms of the building of a great free country, with no potential foe on land that spanned the continent from ocean to ocean, the leaders of our nation of a century and more ago, projected their thoughts many years into the

future. With their eyes focused on the international stage, they interpreted the things of their day in the light of things to come. They considered how the happenings of their times would affect future generations in their relationship to national solidarity.

Forty-five years after the American colonies had declared their independence of England, the people of Mexico, in 1821, declared their independence of Spain. In that year of 1821, the war of 1812, between England and the United States, had been over a scant six years. There was every indication in 1821 that England might and perhaps would attempt to acquire from Mexico, by purchase or conquest, the important California ports of San Francisco, Monterey and San Diego. We can adequately realize today the value of the decisions made by American leadership a hundred years and more ago to checkmate the designs of England. We can appreciate the value of their determination upon a policy which provided that no foreign power should be permitted to gain a foothold on this continent.

It would be interesting to explore the incidents which foreshadowed war with Mexico in 1846, to perhaps attempt to justify that war in the light of history. However, this is neither the time nor the occasion for such a discussion. We might say in passing, as a matter of interest because Texas is our neighbor to the south and to the east, that the course of events in Texas in 1835, and annexation of the Texas Republic by the United States ten years later, had a great deal to do with the actual beginning of the war of 1846, which ultimately meant invasion and conquest of New Mexico and California. During that critical period in our history the destiny of this nation was in the hands of men like Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, and other great statesmen and military leaders. It will help to orient ourselves historically if we recall that Abraham Lincoln was only thirty-seven years old in 1846, and that the Civil War of 1861 to 1865 was a decade and a half in the future.

As interesting as these sidelights of history might be, we have no time to pursue them. Our purpose on this

occasion is to recall some of the stirring events of the time when New Mexico became a part of the United States of America. We recall tonight that the American flag was first raised in this City of Santa Fe on August 18, 1846. We would like to recapture if possible some of the atmosphere of a romantic and most exciting period of the history of New Mexico.

We are happy to salute and to pay tribute today to the name and memory of Stephen Watts Kearny. He was the man who led the Army of Occupation into New Mexico. Fate and his superior officers assigned to him the part of playing the lead in the great, adventuresome drama of conquest of our own New Mexico. This distinguished leader of men was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1794, and died—perhaps an unhappy death—as the result of his clash with Fremont in California over rank and authority—in St. Louis, Missouri, on October 31, 1848. Kearny abandoned his studies at Columbia College in New York when eighteen years of age, to enlist in the American Army. He fought bravely against the British in the War of 1812. He soon demonstrated a great talent for leadership and outstanding ability in military affairs. Throughout his adult life, he manifested the greatest patriotism and love for his country. Chosen to lead the expedition to conquer New Mexico and California, he demonstrated ability in that perilous undertaking that won him acclaim that has not been dimmed in a full century of time.

Kentucky born Alexander W. Doniphan, a Missourian by adoption, enlisted hundreds of men in Missouri for service in Kearny's army. The advance outfit under the command of Colonel Kearny consisted of 1,658 men, sixteen pieces of ordnance, 12 six pounders, and 4 twelve-pound howitzers. Kearny and his soldiers left Fort Leavenworth on June 29, 1846. By July 2 his army of the west was on the trail headed for Santa Fe. Traveling through Council Grove, Bent's Fort, Cimarron Peak, down Raton Pass into New Mexico, the army, enduring much in a strange, uninhabited country infested with Indians, reached the Mora River on August 14, and Las Vegas on August 15.

Carrying out instructions given to him by the War Department, General Kearny mounted the roof top of an adobe house in Las Vegas to proclaim that he had taken the country on behalf of the United States of America. He gave assurance of protection of life and property, and promised religious freedom. By August 16 the American troops were at San Miguel, on the Pecos River. On the 17th they had reached the ruins of the Pecos Indian village.

On August 18, 1846, after a spectacular march of almost nine hundred miles in less than fifty days, General Stephen Watts Kearny, who had been promoted from Colonel to General in the field, with his entire command, entered Santa Fe, the capital of the province of New Mexico. On that day, August 18, 1846, General Kearny took peaceable and undisputed possession of New Mexico in the name of the government of the United States. The conquest was accomplished without the loss of a single man, or the shedding of one drop of blood. John Taylor Hughes, a young school-teacher-soldier with Doniphan, told the story of the conquest and his version of events has been accepted as historically accurate. Those of us who have been privileged to live in Santa Fe, or to visit this most gracious city on occasion, can close our eyes and almost visualize the happenings of a most exciting time in the history of this ancient capital one hundred years ago. The geography of the country today is identical with that of the days of the conquest. The place names of long ago, Mora, Las Vegas, San Miguel, San Jose, are familiar to all of us. The waters of the Pecos ran then pretty much in the banks they now occupy. We may even speculate that August 18, 1846, was a delightful August day, one of those long summer days for which Santa Fe is noted the world over. Thanks to the foresight of historic minded citizens, the Palace of the Governors has not been materially changed in the hundred years that have come and gone since General Kearny came on a very serious mission. The historic plaza has been preserved for posterity in its original place and setting. With Kearny's mounted soldiers advancing hourly closer and closer to Santa Fe on that historic day, things must have been tense indeed as the drama of invasion

unfolded. The Mexican troops had prepared for days to resist the invaders. Santa Fe was filled with rumors of impending events. The women and children had fled to places of safety in the mountains. For reasons much too involved to recall here, General Manuel Armijo, the Governor of New Mexico, failed to engage in the battle that was expected to be the high point of the resistance movement. In his diary of Tuesday, August 18, 1846, John Taylor Hughes jotted down many things of present historic interest:

General Armijo fled for fear of assassination by his own people. Country remarkably dry & sterile 5 or 6 miles before you get into the town, & covered by dwarf cedar—The day was cloudy until evening, when the sun broke out just as we entered Santa Fé. Gen. K. came in advance & entered the town with ten companies, in fine array & banners streaming in the breeze, behind them the Artillery, which halted on the hill, and the Volunteers under Col. Doniphan marched next in order through the various crooked streets of the town; their banners gaily flown to the breeze, while the batteries fired a salute of near 20 guns. The American flag was erected in the public square so as to wave over the Palace Royal or Gov. Armijo's Residence. We encamped on a perfectly bare spot of sand, after a travel of 29 miles, not having halted to eat a bite—the men were very hungry and much fatigued—the horses are almost perished to death—neither man nor horse had anything to eat; nor did they get anything until the next morning—some few got a piece of bread or cheese from the Spaniards.

In his diary for Wednesday, August 19, 1846, John Taylor Hughes reported:

Gen. K. took up his headquarters in the Palace . . . on the night of the 18th—the flag waved about the public square—at 9 a. m. I was invited to go down in town to hear Gen. K.'s speech to the Spaniards & to see them take the oath of allegiance to the Gov. of the U. S.

We all recall General Kearny's speech in Santa Fe, addressed to the people of New Mexico by authority of the government of the United States, of his declaration that he and his soldiers had come as friends to make New Mexico a part of the Republic of the United States; of his assurance of freedom of religion, of respect for property rights, of protection against the Indians. With pardonable pride, we may say here today that the promises General Kearny made a hundred years ago have been faithfully performed

by the government he represented. There were times in the Territory of New Mexico after 1846 when it seemed as if the United States considered New Mexico as a national step-child, but subsequent to statehood we may speak of those times in the past tense.

The people of Santa Fe have always been an accomplished and resourceful people, noted for their hospitality. They were as accomplished and resourceful a century ago as they are today. Their ability to handle a most difficult situation was never better demonstrated than by the diplomatic manner in which the leaders in the political world at Santa Fe bowed to the inevitable on August 18, 1846. They graciously accepted and made the best of a serious military and political crisis. Ralph Emerson Twitchell and L. Bradford Prince, eminent New Mexico historians, joined their knowledge of events to tell many years ago that story in the following words:

The advance of the American column arrived in sight of the city of Santa Fé at three o'clock in the afternoon of the 18th of August, 1846; by six o'clock the entire army was in the capital. The general and his staff, and other officers of the army, were received at the old Palace by Lieutenant Governor Vigil, assisted by about thirty representative citizens of the city. Refreshments were ordered served by Governor Vigil. . . .

There, in the Old Palace, sat the American general and his principal officers, the guests, enforced it is true, but still welcome, of all that was left of the men who had derived authority from the Mexican Republic; seated in a building, which, in historic interest, surpasses any other within the confines of the United States; built in the first years of the 17th century, and, down through all the succeeding years, until 1886, whether the country was under Spanish, Pueblo, Mexican or American control, it remained the seat of authority; whether the ruler was called viceroy, captain-general, political chief, department commander or governor and whether he presided over a kingdom, a province or a territory, the Old Palace has been his official residence.

Acting Governor Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, who had been left in charge of the provincial government by Governor Manuel Armijo, in responding to the speech of General Kearny, reflected the true sentiments of the people of Santa Fe at the time of the conquest:

Do not find it strange if there has been no manifestation of joy and enthusiasm in seeing this city occupied by your military forces.

To us the power of the Mexican Republic is dead. No matter what her condition, she was our mother. What child will not shed abundant tears at the tomb of his parents? I might indicate some of the causes for her misfortunes, but domestic troubles should not be made public. It is sufficient to say that civil war is the cursed source of that deadly poison which has spread over one of the greatest and grandest countries that has ever been created.

General Stephen Watts Kearny, in command of affairs in Santa Fe, acted with military speed and precision. He undertook the organization of a government for New Mexico, and had it completed by September 22, 1846. The Kearny code, written by Willard P. Hall, of Doniphan's troops, was adopted as the basic law of the new territory of New Mexico and remains so to this day. Within four months after Kearny had arrived in Santa Fe, New Mexico had become an important point of departure for new and far more extended expeditions, to the interior of Mexico, to the great ports of the Pacific Ocean in California.

Viewed in the light of the last hundred years, the conquest of New Mexico by the United States was an inevitable part of a policy known as "manifest destiny." The year of 1846 was indeed a year of decision for the United States of America. Our government was involved in difficulties with England over the Oregon question. Speed was of the utmost necessity if France and England were to be outwitted. Fortunately for the America of today, we had statesmen of vision and military men of courage and foresight in the America of one hundred and more years ago. Prompted by patriotic motives, they did not hesitate to act at a time when action meant the fulfillment of their dreams of empire. These men left a glorious inheritance for posterity, because of the skill with which they handled the conquest of New Mexico. It is only necessary to contrast the conquest of New Mexico in 1846 and the conquests by European powers of small nations in World War II, to demonstrate the greatness with which America handled a most difficult problem.

New Mexico is proud today of the magnificent progress that has been made by the descendants of those residents who were citizens of Mexico at the time of the conquest.

In dealing with its new citizens, the government of the United States undoubtedly adopted a short sighted policy. The newly created American citizens were permitted to shift for themselves, to learn the language, customs, laws, and habits of the American people without any assistance whatever from the conquering nation, a policy that was ruinous to many individuals, and to the inhabitants as a whole. Today's citizens of New Mexico, of Spanish and Mexican ancestry, having survived the ordeal thrust upon them, are thoroughly amalgamated as Americans, with no regrets because their ancestors a century ago accepted citizenship in a country offering great hope and promise for the future.

The name of Stephen Watts Kearny is recalled with sentiment and gratitude by the people of New Mexico today. General Kearny was a brave and honorable leader in New Mexico's first test under the Stars and Stripes. We can say today, as one of his close friends said when he died in St. Louis ninety-eight years ago, at the age of fifty-four years: "If ever there was a man whom I considered really chivalrous, in fact a *man* in all that noble term conveys, that national soldier and gentleman was Stephen Watts Kearny."