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The Coronado Cuarto Centennial

By ERNA FERGUSSON

THE CORONADO CUARTO CENTENNIAL, first suggested as a single celebration in honor of the first white man who crossed New Mexico four hundred years ago, has evolved into a widespread, many-faceted affair such as was quite unforeseen. Many schemes, dear to members of the Commission according to their various temperaments and interests, have been lost or minimized in the working out. New plans have had to be made to meet changing conditions. Yet—given a commission composed of people of diverse backgrounds and fairly representative of the state's population, hampered by lack of money, beset by critics, faced with the need at last to conform to regulations laid down in Washington, getting off to a slow start and finally having to rush through at the end; given also New Mexico and the strong pull of its vivid human pattern and scenic magnificence; with this background, these people, these limitations, and these advantages—a far-sighted prophet might have forecast just about what the Coronado Cuarto Centennial has turned out to be.

The first problem was how to make the uninformed aware of Coronado and of his importance. One of hundreds of explorers whom Spain sent out from her first American capital at Mexico, he is not well known even there. And the United States, growing westward on a lengthening English apron string, has just begun to appreciate that some Americans are of Spanish blood. Coronado can be rightly judged only in the light of the splendid blaze of sixteenth-century Spain, and of the powerful impulse which carried its men, its faith, its language, and its pride of race through all the Americas and into the Orient. While its appearance in our Southwest was only one slender filament nearing the end of its reach, Coronado's young army, full of dash and

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courage, of faith in their religion and their civilization, staged one of the great adventurous exploits of history. And they were followed, through three centuries, by other conquerors and colonizers; brave men and women who spread the Spanish folk, their faith and their language so widely and rooted them so deeply that they modify the life of the entire Southwest even today.

How to make all this convincing, true, and alive to the senses of an audience most of whom would find it altogether new? It could, of course, be told in print. This has been done so effectively that most magazines of national circulation and hundreds of newspapers have noticed the Coronado Cuarto Centennial. But to attract people to New Mexico, to present the story as a living thing, some sort of dramatic presentation seemed the best way. Hence the Coronado Entradas. Nothing makeshift would do. The drama must be written with distinction, with truth to the high spirit of the Spanish conquerors; it must be presented on a scale large enough to suggest the enormous country Coronado covered, the number of men involved, the difficulties they overcame; and it must be staged with technical skill equal to the best. Only a few people in the United States could qualify for such a job. One of them, happily, is a citizen of New Mexico. Thomas Wood Stevens, acknowledged master of pageantry, wrote the script which is presented by a cast of hundreds, many mounted, all costumed, armored, and accoutred with absolute historical accuracy.

Such a spectacle could be presented many times in one place. But because this was an all-New Mexico celebration it seemed best to give all New Mexico a chance to see it. Other states became interested. Eventually the Coronado Entrada has developed into a movable affair to be struck and set up again not only in several New Mexico towns but throughout the Coronado country. It promises to run over also in 1941, the anniversary of Coronado's disappointing search for the Gran Quivira over on the Kansas plains.

But New Mexico, in spite of its splendid introduction,
has its simpler phases too. Most of us live in small towns, making a living from farms or herds or unimportant jobs; most of our towns did not care for anything as elaborate or as costly as the Coronado Entrada. Many of our people can claim no descent from the conquerors. New Mexico has been made, too, by later comers of many stocks with a history and traditions quite as interesting if not quite as picturesque as the story of the conquerors. A Cuarto Centennial which did not take account of all this would fail of its intent to be an all-New Mexican fiesta. Every town, however small, should have a chance to present its history, to stage its typical show—rodeo, fair, religious feast, or celebration of legendary hero. Folk festivals were proposed as the second phase of the Coronado Cuarto Centennial. New Mexico people accepted the idea with almost perfect unanimity; for we have a habit of making and enjoying our own fiestas. Hundreds of club, school, and church affairs have taken on a Coronado tinge. More than fifty small towns have received aid from the Cuarto Centennial Commission in putting on Coronado fiestas which vary from old Spanish morality plays to ballad contests, old fiddlers' tournaments, and revivals of forgotten dances. Generally these folk festivals are what has always been done. The effort has been to assist the townsfolk in making them better, in reviving old customs, and in advertising them for the benefit of visitors to New Mexico.

A curious problem was presented by our Indians. Of all the original Americans the Indians of New Mexico and Arizona have best retained their primitive customs; their ceremonies are of unexcelled beauty and of the impressiveness that comes of ancient forms reverently preserved. Nothing white men might suggest to Indians could be as worthy a contribution to a New Mexico program as what Indians do every year at their own time and in their own way. To list such dances as Indians are willing for visitors to see, to point visitors the way to see them, and to indicate the manners which make visitors welcome seemed all that the Coronado Cuarto Centennial Commission might do. In
only one case—the dedication of the Coronado Museum at Kuaua, near if not the actual place where Coronado wintered in 1540–41—have Indians been asked to do something in the white man's way. Even there the unveiling of copies of the original kiva murals will be done by Indians according to a ceremonial worked out by the Inter-Pueblo Council.

The Coronado Museum and others which have been given aid will stand as permanent contributions of the four hundredth anniversary. They also stand as evidences of New Mexico's growing awareness of her past. This year is as good a time as any to look back over the way we have come, to see ourselves in our many complications and conflicts, in the ways we are working out into a unified people proud of a long and difficult history. The evaluation of New Mexico's present in the light of her past takes several forms in the Cuarto Centennial. Not only relics of our past, but pictures of our present will be shown. An exhibition of paintings in the state museum at Santa Fe reflects the history of painting from the early 'nineties to the most modern schools. One at Gallup is limited to Indians: both pictures of Indians and about Indians. One at Albuquerque is a well-selected collection of the work of contemporary Southwestern artists. The unity of this show is that the paintings are of Southwestern scenes and types; its diversity is in the number of schools represented.

More ephemeral than museums and art shows, perhaps more enduring in their final importance, are the conferences of students and writers planned for August. Archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians; students of Hispanic letters and of the fine arts; and writers from the most serious to the most frivolous will meet to air their views, to hear and discuss each other's ideas, to demonstrate again that the most interesting international relations are on the intellectual fronts. Students and scholars from six Latin American countries—Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Guatemala, and Mexico—will meet here with others from many parts of the United States to discuss in Spanish and in English the
many problems common to all the Americas. Among these conferences will be one to honor Adolph Bandelier, the Swiss who knew all America so well and wrote of it so well and whose centennial coincides with the fourth centennial of Coronado.

The Coronado Cuarto Centennial will be longest remembered, perhaps, for its publications: eleven scholarly volumes which cover the whole period of Spain in New Mexico. Distinguished authorities from half a dozen universities have written new books, re-edited and translated old ones, and presented new material recently found in the archives of Rome and of Seville. Students will find them invaluable. And the casual observer will find there answers to the many questions that will occur to him after witnessing the Coronado Entrada.

Altogether this Coronado Cuarto Centennial, which nobody planned in its entirety, which has grown in that old human way through disappointment and adjustment, has come out as a celebration truly typical of New Mexico. One could not conceive of just this done anywhere else. Perhaps it will prove to be something that New Mexico can be proud of after all.