

7-1-1978

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### Recommended Citation

Ellis, Richard N.. "The Rio Grande Press—Contributor to Southwestern History." *New Mexico Historical Review* 53, 3 (2021). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol53/iss3/6>

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## THE RIO GRANDE PRESS—CONTRIBUTOR TO SOUTHWESTERN HISTORY

RICHARD N. ELLIS, *Book Review Editor*

THE TINY VILLAGE of Glorieta, New Mexico, located along Interstate Highway 25 east of Santa Fe and situated on the route of the old Santa Fe trail, is the home of the Rio Grande Press operated by Robert B. McCoy and John Strachan. Although often overlooked by New Mexicans, this small publishing house is familiar to librarians and book purchasers around the country for reprinting more than one hundred titles pertaining to New Mexico and the greater Southwest.

Rio Grande Press was founded in 1962 by Robert B. McCoy, who had been executive director of the book department of *Popular Mechanics* magazine in Chicago. When the Hearst Company, which had purchased the magazine, decided to move to New York, McCoy resigned, did some consulting, and joined Meredith Publishing Company where he met John Strachan, a former school teacher. McCoy also founded Rio Grande Press, although he remained with Meredith until the press became a going concern.

McCoy had visited New Mexico for the first time in 1957 while researching a story on the Penitentes and fell in love with the region. He returned frequently and during a visit in 1964 met Marc Simmons, then a doctoral candidate at the University of New Mexico with a devotion to New Mexico history. Two years later Simmons wrote McCoy and Strachan about the availability of four school buildings, one each in Lamy, Cerrillos, Galisteo, and Glorieta that were up for auction. The building at Glorieta was the only one with a clear title and a working water system, and in 1967 the successful high bidder, Rio Grande Press, moved

0028-6206/78/0700-0271\$00.40/0

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into the weather-worn and vandalized building, bringing Rio Grande Press from Chicago to the vicinity of the river that provided its name.

Rio Grande Press is strictly a reprint publisher, although unsolicited manuscripts are received almost weekly. The only exception to this rule was *Changing Ways of Southwestern Indians*, which was published for the Santa Fe Corral of the Westerners. When McCoy began the operation in 1962 he contacted the New Mexico Historical Society, seeking its collaboration in selecting titles on New Mexico history for reprinting but received no response. Therefore he chose titles himself and continues to make the final selection, although today scholars recommend many titles. In the beginning, also, the press had difficulty convincing scholars to write introductions; that, too, has changed. Over the years individuals such as David Weber, Marc Simmons, Bernard Fontana, Donald Cutter, Mike Mathes, Thomas Hinton, and others have contributed scholarly introductions.

Having chosen the title "Rio Grande Classics" to identify with the Southwest, McCoy and Strachan began "to rescue old books." Where possible they add a scholarly introduction, a new index, new maps, new illustrations, and related documents that did not appear in the original book. For example, *Republic of Texas* by Anson Jones, last president of the Republic, includes a substantial number of important documents photographed from the Texas archives; *The Tarahumara* by Bennett and Zingg includes 385 new color photographs taken by a missionary who has worked with the tribe for the past twenty years. The addition of new material is one of the most unique and distinctive features of Rio Grande Press publications.

Titles reprinted by the Rio Grande Press cover a wide range of subject matter, but there are also several broad topics in which a number of books have been published. These include Indian arts and crafts, ethnography and ethnohistory, the Spanish period, early travel accounts, and local history. The Rio Grande Press also has done more to reprint Mexican War materials than perhaps any other publisher and their titles in this area include Ralph E. Twitchell's *Military Occupation of New Mexico*, *Doniphan's Expedition*, and *A Complete History of the Mexican War, Its Causes*,

*Conduct and Consequences* by Nathan Brooks, which was first published in 1849. A number of their titles are classics while others are important to scholars. Some of the more important titles published by the press are *On the Border with Crook* and *Medicine Men of the Apache* by John Bourke, *Life Among the Apaches* by John Cremony, *The Zuni Indians* by Matilda Stevenson, *Unknown Mexico* by Carl Lumholtz, *Life in the Far West* by George Ruxton, *A History of Ancient Mexico* by Bernardo Sahagun, *Fernando Cortes, His Five Letters of Relation to Emperor Charles V*, trans. by Francis A. MacNutt, and *Vanished Arizona* by Martha Summerhayes. Recent titles of interest include *In Red Man's Land* by Francis Leupp, *Spanish Institutions of the Southwest* by Frank Blackmar, *The Tarahumara: An Indian Tribe of Northern Mexico* by Wendell Bennett and Robert Zingg, and *Spanish Mission Churches of New Mexico* by L. Bradford Prince.

At the time the operation began there were several small reprint houses that published limited editions for collectors. Since that time some large reprint companies entered the field, some of which published titles on the Southwest, but because they reprinted facsimile editions and charged high prices they presented minimal competition to the Rio Grande Press. McCoy and Strachan have been fairly successful in avoiding dramatic price increases despite rising production costs because of labor and increases in wages and the price of paper. Prices on some of their books are not greater than they were in 1962. Although a few Rio Grande Press titles have also appeared in paperback editions under the imprimatur of other publishers, this, too, has presented little competition because they aim at a different market.

McCoy and Strachan feel that they have found a special niche in the publishing business because big companies cannot afford to print small numbers of a given title and small companies are limited by their resources. In general about 40 percent of Rio Grande Press sales go to libraries, 40 percent to bookstores and 20 percent to individual mail orders. Their books are sold throughout the United States and in more than twenty foreign countries.

Of 117 titles, only eight have been solid failures. Some have been spectacular successes. *Black Range Tales*, for example, has sold some 15,000 copies, but the greatest success was *Turquois* by

Joseph Pogue. Coverage of this book in an *Arizona Highways* issue on turquoise brought huge and unexpected sales. Strachan remembers one day when orders for \$8,000 worth of this title were received and that the task of simply meeting the demand for this single book prevented the publication of additional titles during 1974 and 1975.

Despite a great success such as the turquoise book, McCoy and Strachan explain that they really don't make much money; certainly they do not make as much as they did in their former jobs. But after a decade and a half in the business they still find it exciting. It has been a "great adventure" and a "labor of love." Profits from good sellers are utilized to print other books. "We've got the sense of having done something that will carry into the years after we are gone," McCoy explains. "These books will be used long after we are gone."

Of the 117 publications by the Rio Grande Press the majority relate directly to New Mexico and the greater Southwest. If many New Mexicans have failed to appreciate the contribution of the press, the *New Mexico Historical Review* has been equally negligent. During the past fifteen years this journal failed to review any Rio Grande Classics, although other regional and national historical publications have followed an opposite policy. To atone for these omissions, recent and forthcoming Rio Grande Classics will be reviewed in future issues of this publication, beginning in this issue.