John Gaw Meem was a young newcomer to Santa Fe following World War I to recover his health under the skillful care of Dr. Harry Mera at Sunmount Sanitarium. While there, his conviction grew that New Mexico, and Santa Fe in particular, had been bequeathed a great patrimony of cultural wealth from the age-old Pueblo Indian civilization and Hispanic Colonial society, especially in its architecture and in the settlement pattern of its ancient capital and villages. His entire life, and that of his companion, Faith, was permeated with a personal sense of trust obligation to that patrimony.

He was the pioneer, patient and persuasive, of the historic preservation movement in New Mexico long before historic preservation came to be regarded as a national responsibility. In the early 1920's he was the guiding force behind the Committee for the Preservation and Restoration of New Mexico Churches, providing the quiet eloquence which raised funds for the restoration and stabilization of several Colonial mission churches and the purchase of the Sanctuario del Potrero de Chimayo from private ownership and the donation of this gem to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. In 1926 he was one of the founders of the Old Santa Fe
Association, organized to preserve the historic fabric
and the unique character of Santa Fe. In 1960, with
Faith, he was a leader in the establishment of the
Historic Santa Fe Foundation to serve in a trust
capacity to acquire and save endangered properties.
The Pinckney R. Tully House, the Delgado Building
and El Zaguán are now owned by the Foundation,
thanks to the civic generosity of John and Faith. St.
John's College, the Santa Fe Preparatory School, and
who knows how many other institutions were made
possible by the Meems.

His own contribution consists in the scores of
buildings which he designed throughout the region,
and especially here in Santa Fe: graceful homes which
became part of the landscape and complemented, but
never assaulted it; public buildings, hospitals, schools
and university structures, sensitive to historical tradi-
tion, but also truly utilitarian. But this public-minded,
gentle, gifted man was also a person of steadfast faith.
Not only did he labor to restore the Colonial churches,
but some of his best buildings were those for worship.
It was no accident that in 1939 Archbishop Gerken
commissioned him to design Cristo Rey as a fitting
edifice to house the priceless treasure of the great 1760
rereredos. Churches were reverently planned for other
parishes and denominations, from Santa Maria de
Acoma at McCarty's to the First Presbyterian Church
in Taos. To those of us within this Household of the
Faith, John Gaw Meem, son of an Episcopal mis-
sionary priest to Brazil, has left his own special legacy.
Our St. John's Cathedral in Albuquerque is part of it.
To this simple stone church, built in 1882, he added
Palen Hall and the cloister to the east in the late
1920's. The chancel-sanctuary in which I am standing
was designed by John in 1953 in the best of historic
preservation philosophy. The building was expanded,
as was necessary, but its integrity was faithfully
preserved, both the integrity of the original 1882 struc-
ture and of the addition. Thus, John has increased our
particular patrimony - one which we gratefully and
freely share with this community of which he was
premier citizen for so many years.

I read to you the official release by the Honorable
Toney Anaya, Governor of New Mexico: "Santa Fe —
August 8 — Governor Toney Anaya has ordered that
all flags state-wide be lowered to half staff today to
mourn the death of prominent New Mexico architect
and Santa Fe resident John Gaw Meem."

Myra Ellen Jenkins

THE AGED MAN

The aged man sang in my dream.
I heard him sing
love of his long years,
love of the bright flame
that blazed up and consumed
his life's last remnant.
I heard the gathered song
pour from his wasted frame
and fill the room
and echo in the caverns of my heart.
Music became a fire
that fed itself on every mortal part
like flame on knotted wood.
How could an aged man find strength to sing
approaching his life's end?
In dream I went to him and knelt
and laid my face between his knees and wept
while that music rose within me like a sea
and my own heart grew resonant with fire.

for John Gaw Meem

Peggy Pond Church
October 1982

July-August 1983
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