Governor Cuervo and the Beginnings of Albuquerque: Another Look

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On April 23, 1706, some seventy years before the American Revolution, Governor Francisco Cuervo y Valdés of New Mexico sat at a writing table in the dimly lit halls of his mud palace on the Santa Fe plaza. He was composing a formal document to his sovereign in Spain and to the viceroy in Mexico City, attesting to the creation of a new town. Deftly he wrote, "I certify to the king, our lord, and to the most excellent señor viceroy... That I founded a villa on the banks and in the valley of the Rio del Norte in a good place as regards land, water, pasture, and firewood... I gave it as patron titular saint the glorious apostle of the Indies, Señor Francisco Xavier, and called and named it the villa of Alburquerque."1

With a hint of pride in his words, Governor Cuervo went on to relate the progress that had been made to date. Thirty-five families, he asserted, had already taken up residence in the town, comprising 252 adults and children. A spacious church had been completed, and a house for the priest was well underway. A start had been made on the casas reales, that is the government buildings for local officials. The settlers had finished their houses, which were provided with corrals for livestock. Irrigation ditches were open and running. Crops were sown. The town was now in good order, well-arranged, and all had been achieved without any expense to the Royal Treasury. This last implied that the people themselves had borne the entire costs for the town's founding.

The governor wished to emphasize the legality of his actions. Therefore, he declared that he had followed the procedures prescribed for the establishment of new municipalities as set forth in the royal laws contained in the Recopilación, the law book that...
governed the conduct of colonial officials. Having said that, and having added a note attesting to the refounding of the Pueblo of Galisteo, which had been abandoned during the turbulence of the Pueblo revolt and reconquest, Francisco Cuervo y Valdés affixed his signature to the paper, had it witnessed by his secretary, and sealed it with an impression of his coat of arms.2

The governor’s words contained in this formal document of certification are straightforward and clear enough: he founded the villa of Albuquerque in 1706, he provided his superiors certain details about the number of settlers and the buildings then under construction or already completed, and he stated that the project had been carried out in strict conformity with the law. The legal code, which he referred to as the Recopilación, was the celebrated Recopilación de las Leyes de Indias, Spain’s monumental compilation of laws covering practically all aspects of colonial government and public life. One section dealt specifically with the procedures and requirements for creation of new towns.

According to that code, a minimum of thirty family heads was necessary to charter a villa. The site chosen should have good water, arable land, and some timber, if possible. The town received four square leagues of land, measured with a cord. At its center, space was to be marked off for a plaza, a church, and government buildings. As soon as streets were laid out, each family should be given a lot for a house and assigned farm plots in severalty. After living upon the lots and improving the farmland for a specified number of years, residents obtained final title. Portions of the town grant, not distributed to citizens, were reserved as commons (ejidos) available to all for pasturing, wood gathering, or rock quarrying. Further, a villa was to have an elected council (cabildo) with jurisdiction over executive and judicial affairs of the municipality.3 These major provisions, and other minor ones, were all designed to provide Spanish colonial towns with an orderly form of government.

Three days after certifying to the founding of Albuquerque, Governor Cuervo wrote a letter to the Viceroy, Francisco Fernández de la Cueva, Duke of Alburquerque.4 In it he provided background information about the new villa which had not been included in the earlier notice of certification. Motivated by a
desire to see New Mexico expand and prosper, Governor Cuervo said that he had issued orders for the placing of a villa on the river below Bernalillo and Alameda. In advance of actual settlement, he had sent one of his subordinates, General Juan de Ulibarri, to scout the area and find a suitable site. The spot Ulibarri selected possessed the necessary tillable land, water, pasture, and firewood, as the law required. It had other natural advantages, too, which though left unmentioned by Cuervo in his letter to the viceroy, could scarcely have escaped notice. For one, the center of the proposed villa was situated on ground slightly elevated above the surrounding bottom lands affording some protection from periodic flooding by the Rio Grande, or Rio del Norte as the governor called it. For another, the geographical position of the town appeared ideal as far as the practical needs of the future settlers were concerned. It lay astride the Camino Real, a good ford on the river existed nearby to the west, and a dozen miles due eastward yawned the mouth of the Cañon de Carnué (Tijeras Canyon), a pass giving access to the plains beyond the Sandia Mountains.

Once the site had been chosen, Cuervo explained that he made a public announcement throughout the province inviting citizens to join in creating the new community. Many families responded, he told the viceroy, bringing with them herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. For security, he detached a squad of ten soldiers from the Santa Fe presidio and sent it to escort the settlers while on the road and then to take up permanent guard duty at the villa. The troops, accompanied by their families, were led by Captain Martín Hurtado. Their presence played an important part in attracting participants to the endeavor, because, as the governor himself noted gravely, the country south of Bernalillo was alive with hostile Apaches. Even as few as ten soldiers stationed in the villa could offer considerable comfort to the Spanish colonists.

Thus far Governor Cuervo had provided the viceroy with simple information, but now he could not resist the temptation to make an optimistic forecast about his municipal creation. “I do not doubt, very excellent lord, that in a short time this will be the most prosperous Villa for its growth of cattle and abundance of grain, because of its great fertility and for [my] having given it, in spiritual and temporal things, the patron saints that I have chosen,
namely the ever glorious apostle of the Indies, San Francisco Xavier, and Your Excellency, with whose names the town has been entitled Villa de Alburquerque de San Francisco Xavier del Bosque." Clearly the governor was bucking for favor when he gave the viceroy's name to the new town.

In conclusion, Cuervo declared, "The Villa was sworn, taking into account the things ordered by his Majesty in his royal laws." By the word "sworn," he meant that the heads of households had taken an oath as charter citizens to live upon and improve lands allotted to them as a requirement for gaining final title of possession.

From the foregoing statements, it is clear Governor Cuervo intended to show that, through his own efforts, he had assembled a respectable number of colonists and chartered the new villa of Albuquerque; that he had ordered delineation of the outer boundaries of the community as well as the marking of a site for a plaza; and that he had caused a church and government offices to be built. Unfortunately, other evidence indicates that the ambitious governor, in his claims, strayed several degrees from the truth. Indeed, as a subsequent review of other documents will show, he uttered numerous half-truths and several outright falsehoods. Some doubt is, therefore, cast upon the traditional belief that Albuquerque was founded as a lawful Spanish municipality.

The subject is of more than academic interest. As child and heir of the Spanish colonial villa, the modern city of Albuquerque has on occasion asserted claim to land and water rights in the courts by reference to Hispanic law governing the community at its founding. Such a stand has always been predicated upon the position that Governor Cuervo, true to his word to the king and viceroy, conducted the formal proceedings and followed the steps as stipulated by the Recopilación which were needed to establish Albuquerque as a legal entity.

In 1881, at the beginning of the boom occasioned by arrival of the railroad, the city of Albuquerque placed a petition before the state Surveyor General asking that he survey a tract of four square leagues (roughly 17.2 square miles), centering upon the Old Town plaza, and then recommend to Congress that it place Albuquerque in possession. The claim was based solely upon the old Spanish
practice of granting four square leagues to each new villa. Although Governor Cuervo had never referred in existing documents to such a grant, it has always been supposed that one was made, owing to his sweeping assertion that he had hewed to the letter of the law as spelled out in the *Recopilación*.

The Surveyor General of New Mexico evidently assumed as much, for he acted favorably upon Albuquerque’s petition, surveyed the “imagined” four square leagues, and recommended it for confirmation by Congress. He was careful to explain to Washington, however, that, “No original documents constituting or creating the grant hereby are known to exist, and therefore no such document can be filed herewith.” What he supposed, as have most lawyers and historians since, was that the original grant papers, which Cuervo must have drawn up, had become lost over the years, but that unfortunate circumstance notwithstanding, Albuquerque was still entitled to its four leagues of land. The tough-minded Congressmen, though, were not swayed by such an argument, and eventually the city’s claim was disallowed.

The issue came up again in 1959, but this time in relation to water rights. The city became involved in a dispute with the state over use of waters in the surrounding Rio Grande basin. It claimed that under Spanish law the villa of Albuquerque was conceded all the water necessary for its growth and development and that since the modern city was the legal heir of the villa, its right in this regard remained unimpaired. The New Mexico Supreme Court finally decided against the city on the basis of other legal points. Yet what is significant here is that much of Albuquerque’s stand rested upon the popular assumption that in the year 1706 Governor Francisco Cuervo y Valdés officially established a valid community according to the laws of Spain.8

It is now possible to clarify, in some measure, the incidents attendant upon Albuquerque’s beginnings, particularly the actions of Governor Cuervo. But since serious gaps still exist in the documentary record, our picture, though revised and brought into sharper focus, remains disappointingly fuzzy around the edges. Keeping that fact in mind, we can begin by taking a close look at what was going on in New Mexico, and especially in the Middle Rio Grande Valley, during the years immediately prior to 1706.
When Governor Diego de Vargas died at Bernalillo in April 1704, his second in command Juan Paéz Hurtado, a native of Andalucia and a staunch soldier, took charge of the province. At once he notified the viceroy, the Duke of Alburquerque, of Vargas's passing, and then he set about holding things together until a replacement could be named.

Paéz Hurtado had no easy task, for New Mexico was in a state of extraordinary disarray. Predatory bands of Apache and Navajo stalked the small Spanish settlements and ranches, and nothing the few score soldiers were able to do seemed to stem their constant attacks. Those same soldiers, in whose hands defense of the frontier lay, suffered from lack of provisions, a shortage of horses, inadequate pay, and low morale. Compounding the Indian problem, some of the western Pueblos still refused to submit to Spanish rule. The Zuni, after first pledging loyalty, had changed their minds and abandoning their pueblo fled to a neighboring mesa top where they remained until a Spanish priest talked them down in 1705. The Hopi, still farther west, continued defiant and, indeed, would persist as a thorn in the side of Spanish governors throughout the remainder of the colonial period.

The settler folk who had come with Vargas in 1693 and others who arrived in a thin but steady trickle in succeeding years had not fared well. Government support in the form of provisions and tools sustained them initially, while they commenced to rebuild the province, but such aid was drastically curtailed in 1698 when officials of the royal treasury in Mexico City arbitrarily decided that New Mexicans should have made enough headway by then to go it alone. The loss of material backing unluckily coincided with the beginning of a severe drought which stretched without relief from 1698 to 1704. Streams evaporated, scorched pastureland was grazed over and became ankle-deep in dust. Crops withered and produced at harvest scarcely enough seed for the next planting. Livestock wasted away. And hunger became a grim spectre stalking the colonists. The stars, it seemed, were aligned against them.9

The miserable economic conditions led inevitably to social discord. Petty controversies split the populace into squabbling factions and produced so much poisoned air that many embittered persons threatened to pull stakes and return to El Paso.
It was this atmosphere of despair and gloom which Francisco Cuervo y Valdés found when he arrived at Santa Fe on March 10, 1705, to take over the reins of government. He had received his appointment to office directly from the viceroy, on condition that the king approve. But since such approval might be months in coming, owing to the slowness of trans-Atlantic mail service, Cuervo had hastened on to New Mexico to begin at once putting affairs there in order. Until confirmed in office, he would be merely the provisional governor. That temporary status perhaps explains his strenuous efforts to make a good showing during the first months after his arrival.  

Cuervo was well fitted by background and experience to follow in the footsteps of the lamented Governor Vargas. A native of Santa María de Grado in the province of Asturias, northern Spain, his family was evidently of the nobility, for noble lineage was one of the requirements for membership in the military order of Santiago, to which Cuervo was elected sometime after 1698.  

He arrived in the New World in the year 1678 and proceeded to Sonora (which included much of present-day southern Arizona) where he took up duties as an infantry captain. Three years later, he became lieutenant-governor of the province. Thereafter, he served in succession as the military governor of the provinces of Nuevo León and Coahuila, which lay immediately to the south of Texas. It was his skillful performance in the handling of those offices and his wide knowledge of frontier affairs that led the Duke of Alburquerque to name him to the governorship of New Mexico late in 1704.  

Once in Santa Fe, Cuervo made a hasty survey of local conditions and discovered excellent grounds for apprehension. The depth of his dismay is evident in words he addressed to the king. “I have never seen so much want, misery, and backwardness in my life,” he wrote His Majesty. “I suspect this land was better off before the Spaniards came.” Such a candid admission indicates that the new governor was something of a realist.  

Since military defense was one of his prime concerns, Cuervo undertook a quick inspection of the one hundred regular troops attached to the Santa Fe presidio. Then he called for a general muster of the citizens’ militia. Because of the constant danger from hostile Indians, all able-bodied men were enrolled in militia
companies. Under orders of the governor, those from the towns of Santa Cruz de la Cañada and Bernalillo marched to the capital for a review and inspection. The Bernalillo contingent, the military records note, was led by three captains: Fernando de Chávez, Diego de Montoya, and Manuel Baca. All were destined to play a prominent role in the early history of Albuquerque.  

With a coldly professional eye, Governor Cuervo tallied up his forces, both regular and volunteer, and determined that their number was far too small to defend his broad domain. He fired off a letter to Mexico City asking for reinforcements, but as he may well have anticipated, the economy-minded viceroy simply pigeonholed the request. No more soldiers were to be forthcoming. The governor’s next move was to take the troops already quartered in Santa Fe and spread them out on the frontier. He hoped that by patrolling the danger zones with small squads, the Apaches and other tribes could be stopped from running roughshod over the New Mexican settlements. To that end, temporary detachments were stationed at the pueblos of Santa Clara, Cochiti, Jemez, Laguna, Acoma, and Zuni.

As part of a broad policy to gain cooperation of the Pueblo Indians, Cuervo toured their villages, spoke to the leaders in conciliatory terms, and obtained promises of aid in the continuing war against the Apache. From those meetings, he drew a high opinion of the Pueblo people, referring to them as handsome in appearance and industrious by nature. The Indians, for their part, responded favorably to the governor’s overtures. Indeed, they came to regard him as something of a savior, or so he tried to convince the king. By letter, Cuervo declared immodestly that Pueblo spokesmen who gathered at Santa Fe in January 1706 voluntarily composed a document urging that “Don Francisco Cuervo y Valdés be continued and maintained in this administration for such time as is His Majesty’s will. . . .”  

The implication is plain. Worried over his pending confirmation, the governor had contrived an endorsement from the Indians in a bid to polish his image and win approval from the crown. Something of the same motive, in part, was behind Cuervo’s move to create a new villa in the Bosque de Doña Luisa. Certainly, he exaggerated on paper the dimensions of the project and his role in its initiation, as we shall see shortly.
Actually, interest in founding a villa somewhere in the Middle Valley of the Rio Grande had existed long before Cuervo y Valdés assumed the governorship. The idea first surfaced in 1662 when Governor Peñalosa made an unsuccessful attempt to promote a town in that area. The matter came up again after the revolt and reconquest. The municipal council of Santa Fe in 1698 called upon the governor to establish a villa in the Rio Abajo, but once more, nothing was done.

While officialdom may have been guilty of heel dragging with regard to organizing a formal villa, the same could not be said for individual Spanish colonists who were eager to develop the potentially rich agricultural lands of the Middle Valley. Some of them, as mentioned earlier, had peeled off from Vargas's returning column in 1693 and reoccupied portions of the valley, especially the Bernalillo district. Over the next several years, Governor Vargas made a number of land grants to persons who desired farms in the country between Alameda and the swamps of Mejía. One of those grants, issued in the summer of 1704, went to Luis García, who reclaimed the estate of his grandfather, the former lieutenant-governor, Alonso García.

The pueblo of Alameda itself, which had been burned by the Spaniards in the aftermath of the Pueblo Revolt, remained untenanted until 1702 when missionaries gathered about fifty stray Tiwas and rebuilt the village. This population, however, was evidently too small to maintain a viable community, and six years later, the Indians moved downstream and joined Isleta Pueblo. That left the abundant and fertile farmland, stretching south from Bernalillo, available to Spanish citizens who might wish to apply for grants.

One nucleus of settlement, predating the founding of Albuquerque, was the village of Atrisco, located on the west bank of the river and facing the site of the future villa. At least by 1703, the place was recognized as a community even though in form it was no more than a collection of farms. Lacking any municipal organization, Atrisco was attached for administrative purposes first to Bernalillo and, then after 1706, to Albuquerque. Throughout the remainder of the colonial period, the village was a satellite of its larger neighbor, and in fact was often spoken of as “Atrisco de Albuquerque.”
Tenth Duke of Alburquerque. During his term as Viceroy of New Spain the Villa de Alburquerque was founded. Courtesy of T. M. Pearce.
One thing is clear then: a number of Spanish property holdings existed on both sides of the Rio Grande well before Governor Cuervo certified to the king and viceroy in the spring of 1706 that he had founded the Villa of Alburquerque. But in spite of that start, there had been no great rush of settlers from elsewhere in New Mexico to claim a share of the plentiful cropland and pasture available in the region. The vulnerability of the valley to Indian attack offered the major stumbling block to expansion of settlement. That problem, Cuervo hoped to alleviate by stationing the detachment of ten soldiers at the new villa. Their presence plainly proved to be a key factor in luring colonists to Alburquerque.

Information surrounding the actual formation of the villa, including the ceremonial taking of possession and distribution of lands to residents, is very thin. Most writers have tried to reconstruct a picture of the event by reference to procedures set down in Spanish law and to ceremonies, described at a later date, for the founding of other New Mexico towns. There would seem to be justification for such guessing because Governor Cuervo, as noted, did give the king flat assurance that in establishing Alburquerque he followed the laws as set down in the *Recopilación*.

In a remote area, such as New Mexico, however, some flexibility in application of the laws seems to have been permitted. General Vargas, for example, upon creating the villa of Santa Cruz in 1695, placed it under an appointed alcalde mayor, who also had the title of militia captain, rather than under the usual elective municipal council, or cabildo. As he pointed out, he gave the town "this style and form of government because of its being on the frontier." In addition, he specifically decreed that Santa Fe, the first villa of the province, should alone have the privilege of operating under a municipal council. The precedent established by that order as well as Alburquerque's status as a frontier community, perhaps explain why Governor Cuervo in chartering his new villa in 1706 provided it with an alcalde mayor rather than a cabildo.

A native born New Mexican, forty-six year old Captain Martín Hurtado, was the man Governor Cuervo selected to serve as the first alcalde mayor of the Villa of Alburquerque, as well as the commander of the ten man military squad to be garrisoned there.
To Hurtado must go credit for partitioning lands among charter members of the villa, which he did during January 1706, and for conducting the founding ceremony on the following February 7. We would like to believe that the assembled populace gathered at the spot selected for a plaza, participated in the marking off of streets and town lots, and helped designate the sites for a church and soldiers’ quarters. They would also have followed behind Captain Hurtado while the town’s lawful four square leagues were measured and marked. In conformity with ancient Spanish custom, they would have pulled up grass, thrown rocks in the air, and shouted, “long live the king!”, symbolic acts associated with the taking possession of new lands. Later, some of the colonists recorded that they had sworn an oath, which confirms that some kind of formal proceedings took place. But whether the four leagues were actually surveyed and whether plaza, streets, lots, and commons were marked is open to question.22

Further uncertainty surrounds the actual number of charter citizens. The governor’s own declaration that there were thirty-five families with 252 people has generally been accepted by scholars. But Juan Candelaria, recollecting seventy years after the fact, stated that the villa got its start when twelve families from Bernalillo moved to the site, accompanied by the soldier escort which Governor Cuervo had assigned to them.23

A wholly different picture emerges from the records of an investigation into the governor’s activities which was conducted in 1712, after he had left office and returned to Mexico. At that time the king’s ministers, while reviewing documents in their archive, discovered discrepancies in some of the claims put forth by former governor Cuervo y Valdés of New Mexico. As a result, they prevailed upon the crown to issue a royal cédula, or decree, directing the current governor of the province, Juan Igancio Flores Mogollon, to open an official inquiry. Specifically, they wanted to know whether Albuquerque had been legally founded and whether the charter families had numbered thirty-five, as Cuervo maintained. They also asked that his claims to having created another villa north of Santa Fe, called Santa María de Grado, and having refounded the abandoned pueblos of Galisteo and Pojoaque with displaced Indians be examined.
At Santa Fe, Governor Flores Mogollon, upon receiving the king's cédula, appointed Vargas's old friend and subordinate, General Juan Paéz Hurtado, to carry out the investigation. The general spent several months traveling about the province taking depositions from citizens, and his findings, particularly as they relate to the beginnings of Albuquerque, are most illuminating.

Opening the judicial inquiry at the Villa of Alburquerque on October 21, 1712, Paéz Hurtado summoned witnesses and received their testimony "under the sign of the cross," that is, under oath. Here is the statement of Pedro Azencio López:

Question: Was he one of the founding citizens of the villa which was settled by order of Don Francisco Cuervo?
López: That was true. He had joined with his father, Pedro López, when the governor founded it.

Question: How many persons were in his family?
López: Five.

Question: Did he know the total number of founding families?
López: There were nineteen original families, plus the ten soldiers, with their women and children, who served as guard for the vicinity. The nineteen families at the time comprised 103 people, not counting dependents of the soldiers. Now they totaled 129 people.

Question: Had the said Don Francisco Cuervo provided them any government aid (ayuda de costa) at the founding?
López: He knew of none.

Question: Had the villa been established in proper form with streets and a plaza?
López: He and the other settlers had moved into the houses abandoned by the Spaniards in 1680, occupying the same estancias and farms. What was called the villa stretched for more than two and a half miles (one league) from the first house to the last.

Question: Were there now any families here beyond those settled by Don Francisco Cuervo?
López: Yes. Seven additional families with twenty-two people.

Pedro López then declared that he knew no more about the matter and was dismissed. A succession of other witnesses gave similar
testimony, in each case verifying López's population figures. From their statements, a few supplementary details can be gleaned. For example, Captain Fernando Durán y Chávez, long one of the leading men of the valley, was asked if Albuquerque had been lawfully formed with streets and a plaza, as His Majesty required. He responded that from the day of its founding, the villa had the same layout as it did then, with the residents living in homes built before 1680. They were scattered for a league from the first house of Baltasar Romero on the north [at modern Ranchos de Albuquerque] to the last house on the south, that of Pedro López [below Central Avenue]. All of this area, he noted, was heavily wooded (en mucha alameda). And, he reports that it was by the authority of Governor Cuervo that the pre-revolt estancias and farms were allotted to the new citizenry.

From these declarations, it can be seen that the governor’s original account to the king and viceroy in 1706 varied rather widely from that of the witnesses interviewed by General Paez Hurtado. Not only that, the general learned in his continuing investigation that Cuervo had fraudulently claimed to have created a new villa above Santa Fe, naming it after his birthplace in Spain, Santa María de Grado. No such town, in fact, had been founded. Further, while the governor had actually resettled the pueblos of Galisteo and Pojoaque in the north, he grossly inflated the number of Indians involved. All this, Paez Hurtado entered into the formal record of his inquiry.24

As already indicated, Governor Cuervo y Valdés seemed to have been intent upon currying favor among his superiors. No doubt, it was that simple motive which led him to color the truth. To the Spanish mind, the founding of a villa carried immense prestige, and the governor beyond question wished to add that accolade to his name. An eighteenth century friar-scholar, Silvestre Vélez de Escalante, who composed a history of early New Mexico, wrote with biting sarcasm that Governor Cuervo, “eager to accumulate merits, falsified his reports.”25 It is difficult to disagree with that judgment.

But where does that leave us with regard to the status and early history of Albuquerque? Must all of Cuervo’s utterances on its founding be dismissed, or did he mix truth with fiction? Is it possi-
ble to draw any satisfactory conclusions on the matter at this late date?

Assimilating all currently available information, this much seems evident. Governor Cuervo, in writing to his superiors, portrayed himself as the architect of the new and glorious villa of Albuquerque. He erroneously claimed a founding population of thirty-five families, when in fact there were little more than half that number. Perhaps the governor pumped up the figure so that it would surpass, by a comfortable margin, the minimum requirement of thirty families as specified in the Recopilación. Very few of the other stipulations pertaining to new villas seem to have been met. Whatever was done, must have been performed in the most casual, haphazard manner. At the time of the judicial inquiry of 1712, none of the witnesses indicated that even the elementary task of designating a plaza and streets had been carried out. Nor did they make reference to the building of a church, although other contemporary documents affirm that one was in progress during the villa’s first years. Certainly, Governor Cuervo’s solemn assertion to the king in 1706 that a church was already completed must be viewed with skepticism.

What appears to have occurred is this: Upon learning that ten soldiers were to be stationed in the area, nineteen families migrated to the Albuquerque valley, probably coming in piece-meal fashion, that is, not in a body, and, upon arrival they were assigned individual land grants. Many of those, especially the twelve families Juan Candelaria mentions as coming from Bernalillo, were actually reclaiming properties that had belonged to their ancestors before the revolt of 1680. All households, so far as we can tell, received private grants of farm and ranch land. There is no evidence that any family was enrolled as a member of the four square league community grant alleged to have been made to the Villa of Alburquerque. As the settlers in 1712 made plain, Albuquerque was not the usual compact urban town one thought of in connection with the rank and title of a villa. Rather it was a mere collection of farms spread along the Rio Grande. From all reports, this pattern of dispersal continued throughout much of the century.

General Pedro de Rivera, for instance, while on a military in-
spection tour of New Mexico in 1726, passed through Albuquerque and observed that the majority of its population, made up of Spaniards, mestizos and mulattos, lived on scattered farms. In 1754, Father Manuel Trigo, traveling upriver from Isleta spoke of reaching the villa, "or I might say the site of the villa of Albuquerque, for the settlers, who inhabit it on Sunday, do not live there. They must stay on their farms to keep watch over their cornfields, which are planted at a very pretty place three leagues distant, called La Alameda." And finally as late as 1776, another priest, Fray Francisco Domínguez, spoke of the villa itself as consisting of only twenty-four houses located near the mission. "The rest of what is called Albuquerque," he wrote, "extends upstream to the north, and all of it is a settlement of farms on the meadows of the said river for the distance of a league."26 It bears mentioning that throughout the colonial years, New Mexico's other villas, Santa Fe and El Paso del Norte, and especially Santa Cruz de la Cañada, all showed similar characteristics of population dispersal and lack of genuine urbanism.

After a church was up and functioning, the Albuquerque citizenry evidently erected second homes, or "Sunday residences," on or near today's Old Town Plaza. Thereafter, for at least the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, the community retained this loose and informal aspect. Only gradually in later years did a body of permanent residents take root around an emerging plaza. But notwithstanding its uncharacteristic and extra-legal design, the town was known from 1706 onward as the Villa de Alburquerque, and no one appears to have challenged its right to use the prestigious title of "villa."

NOTES


IV, title VII, laws 1-12. The requirement of thirty families to found a villa was not a rigid one. San Antonio, Texas, was organized as a villa in 1731 with only sixteen families—Canary Islanders enlisted by the king to colonize New Spain's frontier. The enterprise was carefully superintended by the viceroy, and his instructions to the governor of Texas gave precise details as to the manner of forming a plaza, streets, residential lots, and commons. The viceroy also provided a map, plano de la población, to serve as a guide for forming the new villa. Lota M. Spell, ed. and trans., "The Grant and First Survey of the City of San Antonio," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 66 (July 1962):73-89.

4. The Spanish use of an extra "r" in Albuquerque was dropped, through Anglo American usage during the first half of the nineteenth century. An article in the Rio Abajo Weekly Press, July 7, 1863, contending that Albuquerque with a single "r" was the correct spelling in Spain, is erroneous.


7. Petition, March 8, 1892, Records of the Court of Private Land Claims, Microfilm Roll 34, State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe (SRCA). In this file see also the Plat of the City of Albuquerque Grant, showing the "imagined four square leagues."


10. Prior to the reconquest, New Mexico governors were appointed by the viceroy. But beginning with the term of Vargas, they received their appointments directly from the king. The viceroy then could make only provisional, or interim, appointments when a governor died in office or resigned. Ted J. Warner, "Don Félix Martinez and the Santa Fe Presidio, 1693-1730," NMHR 45 (October 1970):271.


13. Ralph Twitchell, Spanish Archives of New Mexico (SANM), 2 vols. (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1914), 2: doc. 110; Autos and muster roll, Santa Fe, April 1705, SRCA.


17. "Inventory of the Archives of the Cabildo of Santa Fe, 1715," SANM, I: doc. 1136. This grant and similar ones in the Middle Valley were probably not occupied until late 1705 or 1706.


22. That Captain Martin Hurtado, rather than Governor Cuervo, carried out the actual founding of Albuquerque is confirmed by a land grant document of March 9, 1707, addressed to Hurtado as alcalde mayor of the villa. It reads: "Lorenzo de Carabajal, a resident of this town of Albuquerque and San Javier, appears before you and asking that all privileges allowed by law be given him, says that . . . on the seventeenth day of the past year of 1706, the alcalde mayor assigned to me and gave me possession of the ruins of an old house which had belonged to my father [before the revolt], and you were also pleased to set off to me a small piece of farm land on the day that you made the partition of the lands of this villa to the citizens and new settlers by virtue of the royal authority which was given you for that purpose and for other purposes. . . ." Signed: Lorenzo de Carabajal. SANM, I: doc. 156, SRCA.

The founding date of February 7 is given by Juan Candelaria. However, the reliability of this and other statements of his concerning early Albuquerque has been questioned by Chavez, "The Albuquerque Story," p. 51. Candelaria also claimed that the villa occupied four leagues of land. Armijo, "Information Communicated by Juan Candelaria," p. 275. An undated document directed to Governor Cuervo by the soldiers at Albuquerque declares that the new villa was "certified" on February 23. Cited by Gallagher, "The Founding of Albuquerque," p. 3.

Fernando Durán y Chaves and Baltazar Romero, in a petition of 1708, referred to having left their homes at Bernalillo in 1706 and having gone to the new villa of Albuquerque where they were "impelled to take an oath and settle said villa." SANM, I: doc. 1205, SRCA.

23. Armijo, "Information Communicated by Juan Candelaria," p. 274. Names of the families are provided.

24. All of the preceding testimony, together with a copy of the king's original cédula and a viceregal order, are found in "Testimonio de unas diligencias," Santa Fe, 1712, Misc. SANM, Microfilm Roll 33, SRCA.