

4-1-1972

The People of the Territory of New Mexico VS. The Santa Fe Ring

Philip J. Rasch

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

Rasch, Philip J.. "The People of the Territory of New Mexico VS. The Santa Fe Ring." *New Mexico Historical Review* 47, 2 (2021). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol47/iss2/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

THE PEOPLE OF THE TERRITORY OF NEW MEXICO
VS. THE SANTA FE RING

PHILIP J. RASCH

DURING the 1870's and 1880's the Territory of New Mexico was the setting for an almost interminable series of wars, feuds, and killings. To no small number of its inhabitants the shadowy specter of the Santa Fe Ring loomed large behind nearly every one of them. The very existence of such an organization was fervidly denied by the Santa Fe *New Mexican*,¹ itself widely viewed as the Ring's organ—but it is not likely that the citizens were wrong in every instance. Such a Ring appears to have existed. It seems to have had largely Republican and Masonic affiliations and to have been dedicated primarily to gaining political and economic control of the Territory with a view to the financial enhancement of its members. Such cabals leave no records behind them. What we know of it is based almost entirely on the testimony of its enemies, a situation which leaves the historian thoroughly unhappy but which he must perforce accept. In fairness to the members of the Santa Fe Ring, it must be conceded that their actions, as described in what follows, are as seen and interpreted by those who were most bitterly opposed to them.

Be that as it may, some of the principals were the same in both the Colfax and the Lincoln County troubles. The tactics which they used, or attempted to use, in the latter were so clearly foreshadowed by those employed in the former that it is not too much to say that the Lincoln County troubles cannot be fully understood unless one first understands the Colfax troubles.

Within the territories acquired from Mexico by the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were about 150 large

private grants. The treaty provided that the Mexicans should retain the property which they possessed in the Territory and "enjoy with respect to it guaranties equally ample as if the same belonged to citizens of the United States."² These terms were reaffirmed in 1860, when Congress specifically directed that in settling the Juan Bautista Vigil claim the courts should be governed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. To settle questions of ownership and disputed boundaries, Congress established the office of Surveyor General of the Territory of New Mexico. It was contemplated that he would investigate such cases and submit recommendations to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, who in turn would lay them before Congress. Congress thus reserved to itself the authority to make the decision in each individual case.

In practice this system quickly proved impossible of execution. Most of the owners of these grants were poor, ignorant of the English language, and unfamiliar with American legal procedure. The Surveyors General lacked the authority, staff, and training necessary for their duties. Inevitably, shrewd entrepreneurs saw an opportunity to take advantage of the situation.

The origin of the Santa Fe Ring appears to have been in the uniting of some of the leading politicians of New Mexico to secure control of old claims and then to obtain the Territorial and Congressional action necessary to have them declared valid. Prominent in this group were Delegate to Congress Stephen Benton Elkins; his business partner and former classmate at the University of Missouri, United States District Attorney Thomas Benton Catron; Chief Justice Joseph G. Palen; Chief Justice Henry L. Waldo; and Robert H. Longwill, probate judge of Colfax County.

On February 25, 1875, United States Senator Ferry "by request" introduced Bill S. No. 441, enabling claimants to lands within the limits of the Territory of New Mexico to institute proceedings to try the validity of their claims. This passed the Senate. Elkins then introduced House Bill No. 344, which provided that certain specified land claims should be confirmed, surveyed, and platted at the expense of the United States, and that no grant made later than August 18, 1824, should be patented for more

than eleven leagues of land for each original grantee. Certain perspicacious representatives objected that there was no need to confirm grants which were already guaranteed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, that there was no reason why the United States should pay for the survey of private property, that the provision to restrict the size of a grant which might have a perfectly valid title was a most peculiar one; and they questioned whether it was just and for the good of the Republic to require settlers to leave homes they had established on these vague grants. The bill was referred back to committee and eventually died there.

In January 1876 Elkins introduced H. O. 1021, which was the same bill as S. No. 441. It too apparently died in committee. At Santa Fe, however, the Territorial Legislature passed "An Act Relating to Partition of Real Estate and Other Purposes." This provided that when there was more than one claimant to a grant, any one of them could ask the district court to partition the property. If a fair division could not be made, as was often the case because of limited water, the entire property should be sold at public auction and the proceeds divided up among the various claimants.

In a petition addressed to the President opponents of the Ring charged that this made it possible for a wealthy claimant to obtain the whole property by bidding only slightly higher than the bid submitted by a poor one, and to have part of his payment returned to him as his share of the proceeds.³ Persons opposed to the Ring declared that it proposed to use this bill and money furnished by Brigham Young to gain control of large properties which it would then sell to the Mormons, who were having trouble with the Gentiles in Utah and desired to emigrate from that territory. Passage of a bill granting New Mexico admission as a state immediately upon its adoption of a constitution would then enable the Mormons to control qualifications of voters and the manner of holding elections. With control of both the land and the officials, the Mormons would be in position to establish a virtually independent kingdom.⁴ A colony that John Chisum had settled in the vicinity of the Bottomless Lakes was looked upon as a forerunner

of extensive Mormon immigration into the Territory, and was viewed with great suspicion by the Ring's opponents.

The unsettled title to many of these land grants caused difficulties between the claimants of the grants and the American settlers flooding into the Territory, particularly in the case of the Beaubien and Miranda Grant, centering on Cimarron, capital of Colfax County. Secretary of the Interior Jacob D. Cox had ruled that Charles Beaubien and Guadalupe Miranda were entitled to 97,425 acres. This they refused to accept, claiming that they should receive 2,000,000 acres. The grant was sold to Lucien Maxwell, whose attorney was Elkins. On April 30, 1870, Maxwell sold out to the Maxwell Land Grant and Railway Company for \$1,350,000. Elkins thereupon became president of the company. The company applied for a patent covering the 2,000,000 acres, but the new Secretary of the Interior, Columbus Delano, referred them to Cox's decision. The Company refused to accept this, but the Commissioner of the General Land Office on January 28, 1874, instructed the Surveyor General of New Mexico to handle the grant as public lands. It was not until 1877 that the Surveyor General awarded a contract for a survey of the property to John T. Elkins, Stephen's brother, and Robert G. Marmon. Stephen, who had resigned as president of the Company, was one of the sureties for their completion bond. To no doubt his pleased surprise, the surveyors set the grant at 1,714,765 acres. On the basis of their work, Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz issued a patent for the entire acreage. His ruling was later confirmed by the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile the already large number of squatters on the grant had been joined by homesteaders who believed that Delano's decision had opened the greater portion of the grant to settlement. The company had carried on a vigorous action to dispossess all settlers. The latter had responded by forming a Squatters' Club to resist eviction. Among their number appear to have been several individuals fated to become well, but not necessarily favorably, known in the Territory: Clay Allison, David Crockett, George Coe, his cousin, Frank Coe, Ike Ellis, William L. Goodlett, and

others. These people would not have understood the neutralism so popular in certain quarters today. Of necessity every man had to stand up and be counted as "Grant" or "Anti-Grant."

On July 30, 1875, the Territory inaugurated a new and highly controversial governor, Samuel Beach Axtell. Axtell was born near Columbus, Ohio, on October 14, 1819. He attended Western Reserve College and was admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of the United States. In 1851 he went to California, where he spent three years as a placer miner. Upon the organization of Amador County he was elected district attorney, serving three terms. Axtell then moved to San Francisco, where he engaged in the practice of law. After serving in the 40th and 41st Congresses (1867-1871) as a Union Democrat, he switched his allegiance to the Republican party. Axtell apparently rendered certain personal services to President Ulysses S. Grant, for which he was rewarded on December 21, 1874, with an appointment as governor of the Territory of Utah.

The new governor entered upon his duties on February 2, 1875. Almost immediately outraged citizens were demanding his removal on the grounds that he had issued a certificate of election as Delegate to Congress to George Q. Cannon, who was both an alien and a polygamist.⁵ Further, it was alleged that he had received 160 head of cattle as his share of the spoils of the infamous Mountain Meadows massacre. The sudden death of Marsh Giddings, governor of the Territory of New Mexico, afforded President Grant an opportunity to relieve the situation by transferring Axtell to that area. Later it was charged that the Santa Fe Ring had engineered his appointment. In his private notebook, Frank Warner Angel, a special agent of the Department of the Interior, later appraised him thus: "Conceited. Egotistical easily flattered tool unwittingly of the ring—goes off 'half-cocked.'"⁶

When news of his transfer reached Utah, the *Salt Lake Tribune* exclaimed

we have not yet heard of a single instance of regret at this parasite's removal. He came here trusted; he has betrayed that trust, and will

take his departure despised and disgraced. Although a Christian disposition would prompt us to be sorrowful for the misfortunes of our race, we cannot but rejoice at the interposition which causes the noxious weed to be transplanted to the soil of Mexico. We have our own welfare to look after, and feel truly thankful that God and the Powers that be at the Federal Capital have not entirely forsaken us.⁷

Axtell, however, requested a delay on the grounds that he was expecting his wife from Ohio. The *Tribune* charged that he actually spent this period in consultation with the Mormon leaders, during which time plans were made to transfer the Mormons to New Mexico. In apparent preparation for such a move, the Book of Mormon was translated into Spanish and the teaching of that language was instituted in the local schools.

Once established in Santa Fe Axtell was pleased to find that many of the dominant political figures of the Territory were individuals whom he had known in California. For the most part they had come to New Mexico with the California Column and had chosen to remain there after it had been disbanded. If not an actual Ring member, the new governor was certainly on intimate terms with men who were. Axtell promptly commenced a survey of the Territory and on September 8, 1875, wrote a long letter, signed "El Obispo," to the editor of the Salt Lake *Herald*, a Mormon organ. He gave an enthusiastic description of some 800,000 acres in the old Fort Bascom area owned by Wilson Wadingham, a well-known land grant speculator. He had, he said, gone to Taos, where he visited the famous Pueblos and

went into the subteranean council chambers of this wonderful people and interviewed them thoroughly upon the great question of the hour. All that I am permitted to reveal at present is that 'Barkis is thoroughly willin'.' Had it not been for the premature movement on Corrinne I have no doubt but that the extermination would have been consummated before Christmas.⁸

The "movement on Corrinne" was obviously a reference to a report that Brigham Young had aroused the Indians to destroy the town after he had put a curse on it. To the alarmed people of New Mexico the implications were clear: Axtell was a bishop in the Mormon church, and that organization was conspiring with the New Mexican Indians to exterminate the Gentiles and set up a Kingdom of Mormon in the Territory. Axtell unconvincingly protested that, "My letters were written for the entertainment of friends and for my own amusement, and had no religious, political or business significance, and were intended to accomplish no purpose."⁹ This feeble explanation failed to reassure the people; they found it difficult to conceive of their governor playing the fool to no purpose.

Spokesman for the Maxwell land grant settlers was F. J. Tolby,¹⁰ a Methodist circuit rider. Tolby openly quarreled with Joseph Palen, and was warned by him that he had better cease his criticisms of the Santa Fe Ring or leave the country. The warning was without effect. It had, however, not been issued in jest. On September 14, 1875, Tolby was found murdered on the Cimarron-Elizabethtown road, about twenty miles from Cimarron. He had threatened to denounce Longwill in the papers of the country and it was suspected that he and William R. Morley were the authors of some letters which had appeared in the *New York Sun*. Apparently they were actually written by Simeon Harrison Newman.¹¹ Perhaps even more to the point, Tolby had campaigned vigorously for Brooks of Arkansas for appointment as governor of the Territory at the time when the Ring was promoting Axtell for that post.¹²

On October 30 vigilantes seized Cruz Vega, a Cimarron constable. Under torture he confessed that he and Manuel Cardenas had been paid \$500 by Francisco "Pancho" Griego, a relative, deputy sheriff, and noted gunman, and Florence Donoghue (Donahue?) to commit the murder. The next morning Vega's body was found swinging from a telephone pole about three-quarters of a mile north of Ponil Creek and a mile and a half north of Cimarron.

Griego had only recently stood trial on a charge of killing three United States soldiers; the Santa Fe Ring was popularly credited with having arranged to have him cleared. He now began making loud threats against certain citizens of Cimarron. For his temerity he was permanently silenced by Allison, a close friend of Tolby's, on November 1, 1875, after he had allegedly tried to force a fight on the latter.

Cardenas was seized at Elizabethtown on November 5. After signing an affidavit implicating Griego, Donoghue, Longwill, and Melvin W. Mills in the murder of Tolby, he was taken to Cimarron. Brought before Justice Samuel S. Trauer on November 10, he was committed to jail to await the action of the Grand Jury. While en route from the courthouse to the jail, his guards were overpowered by persons unknown and the prisoner was shot through the head.

Warrants were issued by Justice Trauer for the other parties implicated by Cardenas. Mills and Donoghue were promptly arrested, but Longwill eluded a determined pursuit by Allison, his brother John, and Peter Burlinson and reached Fort Union in safety. At his request the commanding officer dispatched a detachment of troops to Cimarron. En route the party encountered Special Deputy Sheriff John Allison and Burlinson. The troops refused to permit them to execute their warrants for the arrest of Longwill, but also declined to honor the latter's demands that the two men be taken into custody. Longwill thereupon returned to the fort and then drove to Santa Fe, hotly but futilely pursued by the sheriff of San Miguel County and a posse. Mills, a member of the Territorial Legislature, was discharged for lack of evidence, and eventually the charges against Donoghue and Longwill were quietly dropped.

Morley also had his share of troubles. As vice president of the Maxwell Land Grant Company and an editor (with Will D. Dawson and Frank Springer) of the *Cimarron News and Press*, he managed to antagonize both the squatters and the Santa Fe Ring. Part of the difficulty seems to have been that the three editors had differing views. Since the editorials were unsigned, the

community often found difficulty in matching the words with the writer. In any event the Santa Fe Ring struck first. In July 1875 the postmaster of Cimarron, a personal enemy of Morley, charged that the latter's wife, Ada McPherson Morley, had robbed the mails by removing from the post office a letter which had been dropped in the box by a member of her family. The sender of the letter had made no complaint and Mrs. Morley denied having taken it. However, U.S. District Attorney Thomas Catron made no secret of his intention to use the case to strike at Morley.¹³ An indictment was issued against the lady in Santa Fe, although Longwill hinted that it would be quashed if Morley would cease his attacks on Elkins.

She was, however, never arrested. One melodramatic account has it that late in January 1876 Clay Allison, Joe Curtis, and presumably other men, supposedly at the behest of the squatters, dumped the *News'* press into the river and vandalized the paper's office. Returning to the scene the following morning, Allison found Mrs. Morley in tears. "Now see what you've done," she flung at him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." "Are you Mrs. Morley?" stammered the embarrassed gunman. "Well, go buy yourself another printing press. I don't fight women." With that he pressed a roll of greenbacks into her hand.

When a move was made to arrest her on the postal indictment, Allison gave a solemn warning: "Bring that woman to trial and not a man will come out of the courtroom alive."¹⁴ For want of a prosecutor the case never came to trial. Perhaps a more likely version is that Catron requested Marshal John Pratt to defer action because the lady was pregnant, and Postmaster McCulloch finally persuaded him to drop the charges.

On the evening of the Cardenas murder the citizens held a mass meeting, with Oscar Patrick McMains, a hot-headed, unsaintly printer, who was a Methodist circuit rider in his spare time, as chairman. Mathew Lynch, J. W. Lacy, Burlinson, and S. A. Brown were elected vice presidents. Frank Springer was chosen secretary. Clay Allison was nominated a vice president, but asked that his name be withdrawn. The meeting adopted a series of resolutions

proclaiming the citizens' desire to maintain law and order, condemning mob violence, expressing the opinion that Vega and Cardenas were simply tools of other parties, and criticizing the authorities at Fort Union for refusing to surrender Longwill and for unnecessarily sending troops to Cimarron at his request.¹⁵

The vigilantes who lynched Vega had allegedly been led by McMains. To get him within reach, McMains had offered him a job picking corn on his ranch on the Ponil. Now safely in Santa Fe, Mills obtained indictments against Allison and McMains. The latter was found guilty in the fifth degree and fined \$300. The verdict contained a technical error and the case was eventually dismissed in April 1878. In view of his obvious connection with the affair and the very minor penalty inflicted, the judge and jurors must have been surprised to learn that the New Jersey Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and three bishops of that faith demanded an investigation on the grounds that his trial represented Roman Catholic persecution of a Methodist missionary! A minor mystery is why they addressed their demand to Secretary of the Navy R. W. Thompson.

Axtell proved an apt tool of the Ringmasters. Troops, he said, had been requested from Fort Union simply to assist the civil authorities in making arrests and for no other reason. Alleging that mob violence made it impossible to enforce the laws in Colfax County, on February 14, 1876, he approved a Ring-sponsored Legislative Act which provided that the Grand Jury in Taos County should be charged with inquiring into offenses in Colfax County. Cimarron and Taos were fifty-five miles apart. The two counties were separated by a range of mountains whose lowest pass was nine thousand feet high and which in the spring, when court was held, was difficult and dangerous to travel.

The editor of the Santa Fe *Weekly New Mexican* wrote:

This legislation was demanded by reason of the lawlessness and anarchy that it is well known has existed in that county for several years . . . a terror has been created which has subverted all power

and rendered the community helpless, in the maintainance of law and order. . . .The question is whether the desperadoes or the law abiding people are to rule.¹⁶

Angel was of a contrary opinion. This act, he reported, was a gross injury and injustice to the people of Colfax County.¹⁷ The citizens of Colfax contended that the real reason for it was to enable the Ring to deprive them of their ability to resist its schemes. They protested that the juries in Taos County were made up of Mexicans under the control of Pedro Sanchez, a Longwill henchman, and that they harassed by means of indictments all who had taken an active part in the search for the Tolby murderers or opposed their schemes in any way.

A number of the leading citizens sent Axtell an invitation to visit the county and see for himself that all was peaceful. The governor made no acknowledgment of their invitation, but on February 21 he removed O. K. Chittenden from his position as sheriff of Colfax County on the grounds that he had failed to file the bond required by law, and appointed Isaiah Rinehart, a Longwill-Elkins partisan. It was not until January 1878 that the Legislature passed an act restoring the courts to Colfax County.

The whole episode foreshadowed the governor's actions in Lincoln County. During the troubles there the Santa Fe Ring was to be accused of attempting to annex Lincoln County to Doña Ana County for judicial purposes in exactly the same way.¹⁸ John Copeland was removed as sheriff for failure to file a bond, and a Murphy-Dolan-Riley partisan was appointed—all of which must have been more than mere coincidence.

In March 1876 District Attorney Benjamin Stevens appeared on the scene, announcing that he was on his way east and had stopped over for a rest. After talking to some of the citizens, he professed to be convinced that they had been much misrepresented. He volunteered to return to Santa Fe, present their case to His Excellency the Governor, and urge that he accept their invitation to visit the county. Actually Stevens went only to Fort Union, remained there

a few days, and then returned to Cimarron. A day later Troop L, 9th Cavalry, under Captain Francis Moore, clattered into town. Unfortunately, their appearance in Cimarron led to a senseless act of violence which contradicted the citizens' protestations that all was quiet. On March 24 David Crockett, Henry Goodman, and Gus Hefron had a drunken altercation with some of the troopers at Schwencke's saloon and threats were exchanged. About nine o'clock that evening three colored privates, George Small, John Hanson, and Anthony Harvey, were drinking at the St. James Hotel. As they were leaving the barroom, Crockett and his friends entered. Apparently a collision occurred in the doorway, rough words were uttered, one of the soldiers made a move as if to seize Crockett, and all concerned went for their weapons. Fifteen or twenty shots were fired. All three of the soldiers were killed. No inquest was held. The presence of the troops appears to have been objectionable to the citizens and they pointedly rendered no aid in the Army's investigation.

Late in September Crockett and Hefron returned to the village and ran the town for two days. On the night of the thirtieth Sheriff Rinehart, Deputy Sheriff Joseph Holbrook, and John McCullough killed Crockett and wounded Hefron. The latter was captured and jailed, but escaped on October 31 and seems to have disappeared from the area.¹⁹

Meanwhile Stevens had not been idle. Calling a few bitter enemies of the Santa Fe Ring to one side, he "confidentially" showed them the following telegram from the governor:

Do not let it be known that I shall be in Cimarron on Saturdays coach. Body guard all right.

The troopers, Stevens explained, were the body guard. Since the governor would expect to be met by those who had extended the invitation, he urged that Allison, Springer, Morley, Porter, and others who had invited Axtell to visit their city should be present, but that otherwise the matter should be kept quiet in order to avoid a crowd collecting.

Unfortunately for Axtell's plan, Stevens proved unable to hold his liquor. During the evening a letter was removed from his pocket and found to read as follows:

Dear Ben.—The second telegram delivered to you at Fort Union, directed to Cimarron, was intended to leak, but the operator here says he cannot raise the Cimarron office. If I was expected, our friends would probably be on hand as the guard is only a government escort. I do not think your definite business is suspected. Wade informed Hatch that he had been ready all the time to assist you, but could not find that you wanted to do it. Hatch says their opinion is that you weakened and do not want to arrest the man. Have your men placed to arrest him and to kill all the men who resist you or stand with those who do resist you. Our man signed the invitation with others who were at the meeting for me to visit Colfax Porter, Morley, Springer, *et al.* Now, if they expect me Saturday, they will be on hand. Send me letters by messengers, and do not hesitate at extreme measures. Your honor is at stake now, and a failure is fatal. If others resist or attempt murder bring them also. Hatch is excited and wishes, of course, to put all the blame on the civil officers. I am more anxious on your account than for any other reason. I clearly see that we have no friends in Colfax, and I have suspected all along that some of our pretended friends here were traitors. Yours etc., S. B. Axtell.²⁰

The term "our man" referred to Allison, who at the time was not under indictment, nor did he have any charge pending against him. The reason for Axtell's especial interest in the gunman may have been the Fine Ernest case. Ernest, a prominent cattleman, had notified a number of settlers on the Maxwell Land Grant that they were cultivating land which he had leased, and that they must vacate at once. He followed this up by driving three thousand head of cattle into their crops. The settlers had retaliated by shooting some of the animals, whereupon Ernest swore out warrants for the arrest of some twenty-five of the settlers.

The cases came to trial before Judge Palen, with Tom Catron as the prosecuting attorney. One postponement followed another,

while the farmers grew increasingly desperate. One Saturday afternoon Allison strolled into their camp and told them to be ready to leave the following Monday morning. Meeting Ernest on his way back to town, Allison told him to get the matter straightened out at once and get out of town. What pressure Allison brought on the courts is unknown, but on the following Monday the settlers were allowed to give bond and return to their homes.

However, George Coe, Frank Coe, and Abe Saunders decided that opportunities for making money were better in Lincoln County and took their departure for that area about the first of March 1876. Apparently they were shortly followed by Ike Ellis and his family. With them they took a deep and abiding suspicion of the machinations of the Santa Fe Ring.²¹

In any event, the men named in Axtell's letter were careful not to be on hand on the following Saturday, so his plot ended in failure. A few days later the sheriff, accompanied by two Army officers and forty-five cavalymen, arrested Allison. Once they had him they did not know what to do with him, and a few hours later he walked away without hindrance.

About June 3, 1876, Allison appeared at the Vermejo stage station. He informed attorney William D. Lee that he had an appointment to meet the governor, but was suspicious of foul play and would wait at a store about half a mile away. When the coach arrived, Axtell, who was on his way to act as a judge at the Philadelphia Centennial, and his bosom companion, Wilson Waddingham, were aboard and inquired for Allison. When told he was at the store, they proceeded to that building and greeted him with extreme cordiality. The trio boarded the stage and rode to Trinidad together. Allegedly the two principals arrived at an agreement, as a result of which the gunman surrendered, stood trial on seven charges (three of them for first degree murder) before Judge Warren Bristol at Taos, was freed on all counts, and left the country.

Later Frank Springer demanded that the Governor explain his letter to Stevens. Axtell declared that there must be some mistake. When Springer asked that the mistake be pointed out, he requested

a copy of the letter so that he could see whether it was genuine. When this was furnished Axtell weakly explained that Stevens had a warrant issued by Judge Waldo for the arrest of a noted desperado, and that soldiers had been requested only because the sheriff had advised that he could not serve the writ—an explanation which Springer found “utterly unworthy of belief.”²²

In July 1877 Axtell arrived in Cimarron in company with Senator S. W. Dorsey, whom he was trying to interest in the purchase of the 500,000 acre Uña de Gato grant. The governor refused to interrupt his journey to have a meeting with the citizens, nor would he agree to meet with them later, stating that “he was fully advised about matters in that county and did not need further information.”²³

Allison had left the field but another implacable enemy had only begun to fight. The main outcome of the attack on Mrs. Morley seems to be that Mrs. Morley’s mother, Mrs. Mary E. McPherson, had taken up the crusade, devoting much of her time and slim resources to a single end: the removal of Axtell. In March 1877 Mrs. McPherson and W. B. Matchett were in Washington to submit to the Secretary of the Interior a long list of charges against the governor. They recited his transfer of the courts to Taos, his refusal to visit Colfax County and hear the representations of its citizens, his connection with the Santa Fe Ring, his plans for the settlement of Mormon immigrants, and his failure to support the owners of the Maxwell grant. On the basis of this evidence they requested his removal.²⁴

In his reply Axtell denied being a Mormon or preparing the way for an exodus of the Mormons from Utah to New Mexico. He also denied that he was a member of the Santa Fe Ring, and asserted that it did not exist. He defended the transfer of judicial functions to Taos, and stated that he was under no official obligation to visit any part of the Territory, nor was he provided with funds or means of transportation to do so.²⁵ A considerable number of citizens signed petitions or wrote letters in support of the governor. Among them were James J. Dolan, Judge Warren Bristol, whose

own removal had been demanded by the citizens of Grant County, and Lawrence G. Murphy, who added after his own signature, "The best Governor New Mexico has ever had."²⁶

No whit daunted, Mrs. McPherson returned to the fray in August, when she submitted directly to the President a document thirty-one pages long devoted to the presentation of evidence supporting her earlier charges.²⁷ By then the Lincoln County troubles were about to explode. Unimaginatively, Axtell tried to meet them with the same techniques that had caused so much bitterness in Colfax County. The results were disastrous to him. Largely as a result of Angel's recommendations, he was eventually removed from office and replaced by Lew Wallace.²⁸ With his departure the Santa Fe Ring lost much of its power in Colfax and Lincoln Counties.

