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The History of Seventeenth-Century New Mexico: Is It Time for New Interpretations?

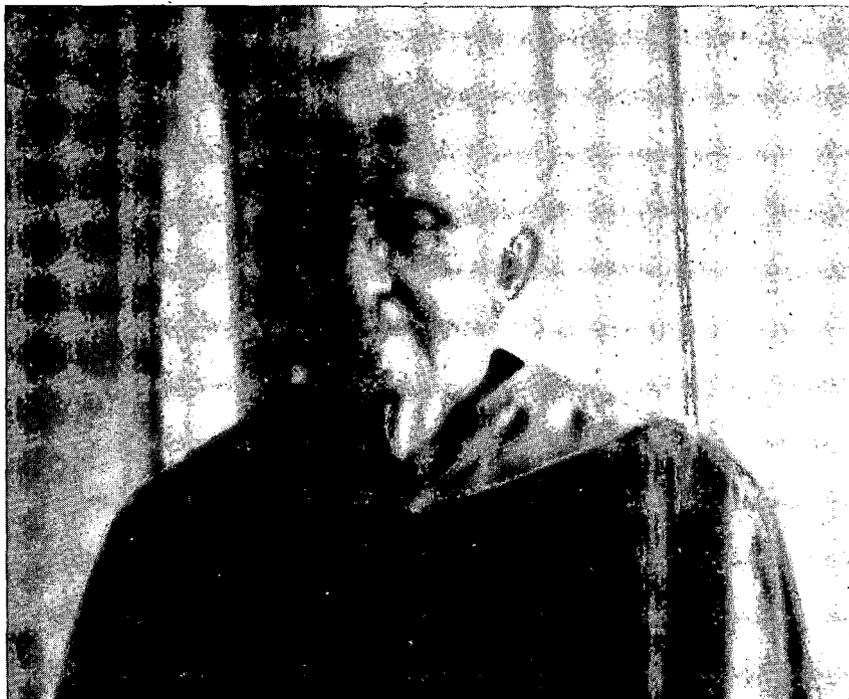
WILLIAM H. BROUGHTON

New Mexico has one of the oldest, most colorful, and continuously documented histories of any American state. Yet compared to a state like Massachusetts, New Mexico's history, particularly that of the colonial era, has received relatively little attention. The works of only a handful of scholars compose the historiography of Spanish New Mexico.¹ And if one focuses on the period following Oñate's *entrada* to the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, the name of only one scholar, France V. Scholes, predominates. Is continued reliance on Scholes sufficient, or are fresh interpretations of New Mexico's seventeenth century based on new scholarship in order?

Trained at Harvard, Scholes spent five decades at the University

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1. A list of both pioneer and modern scholars might include Hubert Howe Bancroft, Adolf F. and Fanny Bandelier, Ralph E. Twitchell, France V. Scholes, Herbert E. Bolton, George P. Hammond, Agapito Rey, Charles W. Hackett, José M. Espinosa, Lansing B. Bloom, Eleanor B. Adams, Fray Angelico Chavez, Oakah L. Jones, John Kessell, Joseph P. Sánchez, and, especially, Marc Simmons. Although admittedly incomplete, this list is minuscule compared to that of the scholars of colonial New England.



France V. Scholes, 1977. Photograph courtesy of Jake Spidle.

of New Mexico, writing, teaching, and as an administrator. His students number among the most distinguished scholars of the history of New Spain. Scholes' forte, however, was archival research and the collection of documents. He spent years in the archives of Spain and Mexico, examining, transcribing, and with his colleagues, Lansing B. Bloom and Eleanor B. Adams, photographing Spanish colonial documents. Largely as a result of their efforts, the library of the University of New Mexico contains in excess of one million pages of documents reproduced as photographs or on microfilm.

One of Scholes' major interests was the periphery of New Spain, especially the Yucatán and New Mexico regions. With Eleanor B. Adams and the brilliant Mexican scholar J. Ignacio Rubio Mañé, Scholes wrote several important works dealing with Yucatán.² It is for his writings

2. For example, see France V. Scholes, C. R. Menéndez, J. Ignacio Rubio Mañé, and E. B. Adams, *Documentos para la historia de Yucatán*, 3 vols. (Mérida: Compañía tipográfica Yucateca, 1936).

about seventeenth-century New Mexico, however, that Scholes is best known. He was a frequent contributor to the *New Mexico Historical Review*, publishing over thirty articles between 1928 and 1975, as well as several books based on those articles. His work was of such influence that he became known as *the* authority on seventeenth-century New Mexico, virtually overshadowing everyone else. Almost all current bibliographies still cite Scholes as the major, if not the only, authority for that period.

Scholes' work will be the chief source material this article will use to judge whether his domination of the historiography is still appropriate. Not only his articles but also some of the notes, manuscripts, drafts, transcriptions, and photocopies contained in the collection of his personal papers presently in the library of the University of New Mexico are of interest.³ It is important to keep in mind that the accuracy of Scholes' work is not being challenged. The question is simply whether different concepts of seventeenth-century New Mexico can be attained by looking at old material from a new perspective. Concomitant with this goal is a critical examination of Scholes' interpretations and terminology.

Most noteworthy to the scholar is Scholes' interpretation of seventeenth-century New Mexican society as a continuous struggle between a corrupt and avaricious civil government and a merciful and beneficent Church. This theme, found throughout his works, is the subject of one of his most important articles, "Church and State in New Mexico, 1610-1650."⁴ Two examples from that work illustrate how Scholes portrayed the colonial governors of New Mexico as evil and greedy straw men for the faithful friars to resist and defeat in the interest of protecting the exploited Indians: "Friar Peinado was a saintly person thoroughly devoted to the task of saving souls, and under his inspiring leadership as prelate notable progress was made . . .," while on the other hand Governor Juan de Eulate "was a petulant, tactless, irreverent soldier whose actions were inspired by open contempt for the church. . . . Like most of the governors of New Mexico in the

3. The collection of Scholes' private papers held by the University of New Mexico has been partially catalogued as an undertaking of the Spanish Colonial Research Center, a joint project of the National Park Service and the University of New Mexico. In referring to specific documents from the Scholes collection in this article, the index reference number assigned by the cataloguing project will be used for identification. The numbers refer to box, folder, document, and pages within the document.

4. France V. Scholes, "Church and State in New Mexico, 1610-1650," *New Mexico Historical Review* 11 (January 1936), 9-76; (April 1936), 145-78; (July 1936), 283-94; (October 1936), 297-349; and *New Mexico Historical Review* 12 (January 1937), 78-106.

seventeenth century, he regarded his appointment as an opportunity for personal profit."⁵ In another work Scholes claimed that "[Governor Bernard López de Mendizábal], like all his predecessors, was inspired by consuming self-interest" [emphasis mine].⁶

To the reader of Scholes' works it is clear that he chose to interpret seventeenth-century New Mexican history as rooted in conflict between the Spanish colonial government and the Church. He also chose to view the colonial governors and their aides as self-serving exploiters of the Indians, almost as bandits who spent their terms in office pillaging the helpless province while ignoring the needs of government. In doing so, Scholes came down solidly and not very subtly on the side of the Franciscan friars, whom he saw as devout clergymen, honestly concerned about the welfare of the Indians. But was Scholes justified in taking such a biased position?

In the copies of Spanish documents relating to the establishment of the government of Nuevo México found in Scholes' private papers, it becomes manifest that the settlement of New Mexico was not a haphazard affair, but one carefully and formally executed under the existing Ordinances for New Discoveries.⁷ Both don Juan de Oñate and his successor, don Pedro de Peralta, were under specific instructions to found settlements, appoint officials, grant lands, assess taxes, and do all the things necessary to establish permanent government. Don Pedro was ordered to found the village that ultimately became Santa Fe, to elect four *regidores* and two *alcaldes ordinarios*, and to have the *cabildo* elect an *alguacil* and an *escribano* of the *cabildo*. As governor, don Pedro was to have *sole authority* over the Indians with authority to collect tribute and to *encomendar* the Indians.⁸

It is evident that the government of New Mexico was meant to be properly and legally organized as an extension of the viceregal government of New Spain. The governor had wide civil, military, and juridical powers, and as a representative of the viceroy, the vice patron of the king for ecclesiastical matters, the governor was also responsible for church matters. It was certainly not the sort of ad hoc government that one associates with the American frontier. The governors' powers were specific, not arbitrary as Scholes implies. Scholes often repeats one of the most common complaints of the friars: that the civil au-

5. Scholes, "Church and State," 29, 146.

6. France V. Scholes, "Troublous Times in New Mexico, 1659-1670," *New Mexico Historical Review* 12 (April 1937), 162.

7. Scholes Collection, 7-13-5-1, 7-13-6-56, 7-13-7-10, and 7-13-28-22.

8. Scholes Collection, 7-13-19-7.

thorities "interfered" with the Indians. It is plain that the governors' instructions invested in them the precise authority to administer these matters, and in many respects it was the friars who were "interfering." Interestingly, Scholes never explains the *media anata* to his readers and the fact that the governors had to pay for their appointments to office. That they were *expected* to use their offices to recoup their expenses and to make a modest profit is nowhere to be found in Scholes' works.

The Church in New Mexico was as carefully structured as the civil government, if not more so. The main difference between New Mexico and the usual colonial experience was that there was no secular clergy in New Mexico during the seventeenth century. All members of the clergy were *padres* and *legos* (priests and brothers) belonging to the Order of Saint Francis and served under a rigorous constitution and code of laws that addressed all aspects of their lives.⁹ Although they were ostensibly under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Durango after 1620, they normally communicated directly with the superiors of their order or with the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City. It should be remembered that the Franciscans, while serving as the only representatives of the Spanish Church in New Mexico, served at the pleasure and the expense of the King of Spain, who was, in effect, the head of that Church.

The image, therefore, seems to be that of a colonial New Mexican government that was quite similar to the institutions in place in the rest of New Spain. If that is true, it means that there was no real separation between "church" and "state" in New Mexico because both were part of the same authoritative entity headed by the viceroy in the name of the king. As two renowned scholars, James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, have put it in discussing colonial Spanish America:

The entire official community, legal-governmental and ecclesiastic, showed the attributes of Spanish American society and was caught up in its workings. . . . Within this unity, there was no strong ecclesiastical-governmental dichotomy. . . . One type of opposition was endemic. The archbishop (in lesser centers the bishop), with his own court and circle, headed by a hierarchy and thus was the inevitable opposite pole of the viceroy (in lesser centers the governor). Persons alienated by the viceroy ran to the archbishop, and vice versa, and so it went through the centuries, regardless of the individuals involved. The constant minor friction ensuing was neither personal irritability nor church-state conflict.¹⁰

9. Scholes Collection, 7-2-1-6.

10. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 110-11.

There is no reason to assume that the assertions of Lockhart and Schwartz are not as applicable to New Mexico as to other regions of New Spain. This is especially true if one recognizes that the *Custodio* of the Franciscans in New Mexico had episcopal authority as well, thus satisfying exactly the bishop-versus-governor description.

If both civil and ecclesiastical government in New Mexico were formal and legitimate, following the pattern of the rest of New Spain, and if that model provided a built-in rivalry between the governor and the bishop of any given area, why would Scholes choose to become an advocate of the ecclesiastics and to denigrate the governors? One can never be certain of the answer, but a contributing factor, other than that his view reflects the scholarship of his day, might be found in the documents that he used.

One common strategy that the clergy used in the squabbles with the governors, as prevalent in Yucatán as in New Mexico, was to denounce them to the Holy Office of the Inquisition.¹¹ Although more often than not simply nuisances, the denunciations were legal processes that served to generate abundant quantities of documents, most of which were retained in archives where they still exist. On the other hand, many of the seventeenth-century records of New Mexico's governors and of the cabildo of Santa Fe were lost in 1680. This could mean that Scholes had far easier access to ecclesiastical than civil documents. That this might be so can be seen in Scholes' private papers, where documents generated by the Franciscans far outnumber civil documents in the files presumably used as sources for articles.

It seems reasonable that if a great deal of Scholes' source material was weighted against the governors, as the Franciscan documents most definitely were, then Scholes' writing might reflect that bias as well, especially since few other scholars were willing to challenge his interpretations. Regardless of the cause, scores of examples of Scholes' pro-Franciscan bent exist in his works, giving them a special flavor. The student who uses Scholes must be aware of this condition and make the necessary adjustments.

Are there interpretations other than Scholes' rather black-or-white explanation of seventeenth-century New Mexico? Using many of Scholes' own documents, it is possible to arrive at an interpretation that better corresponds with more recent scholarship. For example, from Scholes' data an argument can be made that the Spanish colonial government was fundamentally a fabric interwoven of its three main branches, the

11. For examples see Scholes Collection, 7-5-1-23, 7-11-1-33, 7-4-1-19, 7-7-1-15, 7-11-3-3, 7-6-1-38, 7-10-1-20, 7-15-5-6, and 7-15-7-24.

civil government, the Church, and the judiciary, and, like any weave, was dependent upon all three for its structural integrity. Although New Mexico's remote location tended to reduce its government to the basics needed on the frontier, the elemental requirements remained. In short, it is as difficult to accept a Church-versus-state conflict in New Mexico as in any other part of New Spain. What did exist in ample quantity in New Mexico, however, is rivalry between dominant individuals who possessed factional followings.

One reason for the factional nature of New Mexico's Church in the seventeenth century is that the clergy was composed entirely of members of the Order of Saint Francis; there was no secular clergy to mitigate the power and influence of the friars. It was almost inevitable that the Friars Minor of New Mexico would tend to assume the guise of a faction with the Padre Custodio at its head. And, if the custodio happened to be a strong, willful personality, such as padre fray Estevan de Perea, and if the governor was of a like nature, as was don Juan de Eulate, the stage is set for conflict. There is no need to make value judgments between these men, as Scholes was prone to do. Most of them, governors as well as prelates, were capable, experienced leaders, each with his own agenda and each loyal to his own faction.

It would be fascinating to have more documentary evidence concerning the settlers, for they were a faction in their own right, but an unfortunately silent one at this distance in time. One can, however, receive clues about the settlers from such oblique sources as denunciations and testimony taken before the Inquisition.¹² Such documents hint that factionalism among settlers constantly changed alliances with the governors and the Franciscans across time. These documents also suggest the existence of an economic common denominator that promoted dissension in seventeenth-century New Mexico. All—settlers, friars, and civil officials—were involved in enterprises that utilized land and Indian labor, and there is no reason to consider one party any more or any less "exploitive" than the others. It seems highly possible that the root cause of New Mexico's "troubulous times" was economic competition, probably in the form of conflict over the monopolization of Indian labor and grazing lands. Indeed, Scholes does give evidence of large-scale ownership of livestock by the friars and their involvement in a thriving export trade, somewhat tarnishing their mendicant image.¹³

The resulting picture of seventeenth-century New Mexico demonstrates more tints of gray and fewer portions of black or white. What

12. Scholes Collection, 7-11-1-33 and 7-10-1-20.

13. Scholes, "Troubulous Times," 66-67 and "Civil Government," 110.

begins to emerge is a portrait reminiscent of the rest of New Spain's periphery. One senses a society in which intercourse and interdependence existed, of necessity, between its segments. The *encomenderos* and the friars doubtless relied on each other as much as they were at variance with one another. The officials and the clerics probably cooperated more than they disagreed. Unfortunately, what has been written about that vital society too often conveys the flavor of contentiousness.

Criticism of Scholes' terminology can be seen as nitpicking, but it goes hand and glove with questioning his interpretations. Scholes regularly used terms in his writing that students of colonial New Mexico increasingly call into question today. For example, in "Civil Government and Society in New Mexico in the Seventeenth Century" he writes, "if there was any difference between Spaniards and Creoles in the beginning, it was rapidly wiped out, for the Spaniard had no chance in a community which received few recruits from the outside."¹⁴ Scholes seems to imply that some sort of rivalry may have existed between those settlers who were natives of Spain and those who were *criollos*, but that it was minimized because of the special conditions in New Mexico. In reality the documents give no hint of any such distinction in seventeenth-century New Mexico. All the settlers were simply Spanish. Scholes was not wrong in what he wrote, but his usage tends to suggest social conditions that probably did not exist.

Another term that Scholes used in a confusing way is *soldier* or *citizen-soldier*. At times he used it interchangeably with *encomendero*. *Soldier* is a term that should be examined in its original context, because Scholes' usage gave it more of a military nuance than is generally justified, particularly because a professional member of the military was relatively rare in early New Mexico. The confusion, one might suggest, may be in Scholes' literal translation of the word *soldado* that appears frequently in the documents. For example, one of the documents in Scholes' private papers is a transcription of the contract between the Crown and don Pedro Ponce de León for the pacification and settlement of New Mexico. The third item of the contract is don Pedro's offer to "raise and gather three-hundred *soldados* to cultivate the earth and raise livestock. . . ."¹⁵ Other documents also refer to "soldiers" as cultivators and herders. Clearly, the term *soldado* is not

14. France V. Scholes, "Civil Government and Society in New Mexico in the Seventeenth Century," *New Mexico Historical Review* 10 (April 1935), 97-98.

15. Scholes Collection, 7-13-6-56.

always meant to signify an armed member of the military, but rather someone who is on contract and is paid a salary.

Perhaps the term soldier should not be used at all in describing early New Mexican society unless the individual is unquestionably a professional soldier. In the cases above, it would seem that the word settler might be a better translation. And, if one rereads Scholes and substitutes settler, militiaman, officer, or encomendero at the appropriate places in lieu of soldier or citizen-soldier, the meaning of the narrative changes and one receives a better understanding of what Scholes is describing. When he writes, for example, that "in general, the cabildo represented the soldier-citizen group, which was the dominant class in the community," we are not sure if he is referring to a military cadre or an economic elite.¹⁶ Adding to the confusion caused by his apparently interchangeable use of encomendero and soldier is the fact that he also intermixes the term *estanciero* with the others. Unfortunately he never defines *estanciero* as the holder of a grant of land, as opposed to the encomendero as the recipient of Indian tribute, so the uninitiated reader remains unaware of the importance of the distinction between the two terms.

Bothersome to students of the seventeenth century is Scholes' persistent use of the word *mission* to describe the religious institutions created by the Franciscan friars in New Mexico during that period. The mission as an institution has a very specific meaning in colonial Latin America and its attributes, especially that of "reducing" an indigenous population for the purposes of proselytizing, indoctrination, and instruction, simply do not apply to the New Mexican situation in the seventeenth century. The circumstances change in the eighteenth century and use of the term becomes as appropriate for New Mexico as for other parts of New Spain's northern frontier.

As further evidence of Scholes' misuse of the term, *misión* or *misionario* never appear in the documents he presumably used to help prepare his articles. Rather, *doctrina* and *doctrinero* are the designations employed by the friars and seem more appropriate, for the words carry the flavor of a parish church and more accurately reflect the reality of the seventeenth-century Franciscans in New Mexico. Likewise, *convento* is used when referring to a place or building, not mission church.¹⁷ It is understandable that Scholes used the popular term mission when

16. Scholes, "Civil Government," 95.

17. As in Scholes Collection, 7-6-1-38. The Convento de la Concepción del Pueblo de Quarac [Quarai] is mentioned, p. 12, and the Convento de San Francisco de Sandia, p. 18.

writing for a general audience in the 1930s and 1940s, but given the preciseness of the rest of his church-related terminology, this vagueness is unsettling, particularly because his usage has been followed by so many others.

The answer to the question posed at the outset of this article is yes, it is time that New Mexico's seventeenth century is reexamined. This is not to belittle Scholes' enormous accomplishments. He remains a giant and an innovator in New Mexico's historiography. His archival work alone staggers the imagination and he justly deserves his scholarly reputation. Scholes' work, however, should not be the final word. Too much remains unknown. New sources and methodologies have appeared since Scholes was active and new perspectives have opened vast unexplored fields of historical study. Not enough has been done to apply these to colonial New Mexico. Scholes' labor should under no circumstances be discarded, but new themes should be introduced to expand, clarify, and enhance the work already accomplished.

In keeping with the promotion of colonial New Mexico as a field of scholarly research, attention should be given to the magnificent collection of Spanish colonial documents in the University of New Mexico's library. The collection represents a rare resource, a scholarly treasure. Yet after a half century, it still remains uncatalogued and largely unknown. In addition, opportunities should be made for scholars, especially graduate students, to mine the potentially rich archival sources in Mexico, such as the archives of Parral, Durango, and Guadalajara, to name just a few. Indeed, if we accept that the colonial heritage of New Mexico is as fascinating and exciting as France Scholes knew it to be, we should do all that we can to encourage a revival of interest in its study. There is a story of a venerable professor, a recognized master in his field, who tells a graduate student to research elsewhere, for he had already "done it all." This, of course, could never be true, and clearly it could not be true of the history of New Mexico. Despite the fact that we have been fortunate in receiving the contributions of fine scholars who have broken the trail, it is not unreasonable to say that the study of the history of New Mexico is still in its infancy.