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Marc Simmons

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THE REFOUNDING OF SOCORRO, 1816

MARC SIMMONS

P.O. Box 51

Cerrillos, New Mexico 87010

In 1680, at the time of the great Pueblo Revolt, the Piro villages in the Socorro district were abandoned and their inhabitants moved south with the Spaniards, resettling in the vicinity of El Paso where they remained.

Following the reconquest of upper New Mexico in 1693, incoming colonists gradually occupied the good farming areas from Taos to Bernalillo. Albuquerque was founded in 1706, but settlement along the Rio Grande south of that point advanced slowly, mainly owing to the danger posed by hostile Apaches. Belen had its formal beginnings in 1740 when a group of citizens petitioned for a land grant there.

For a long while, Belen remained the southernmost Spanish outpost on the middle Rio Grande. Repeated efforts to claim some of the fertile farmlands that lay on the river below were frustrated by Apache attacks launched from the neighboring Ladrón and Manzano Mountains. Of added concern to the Spanish government was the fact that between Belen and El Paso del Norte, the *Camino Real* stretched almost 200 mi (320 km) through a desert wilderness. Along the way there was no community or fort that could serve as a rest stop and refuge for the numerous travelers who followed the road each year.

The King himself addressed the problem when, in 1772, he issued a set of Royal Regulations on Presidios designed to strengthen the military hold on the frontier of northern New Spain. Article 25, therein, reads in part: "With the idea of facilitating travel and communication to the said province of New Mexico, I decree and order the present governor and his successors to work to re-establish the ruined towns of Senecú, Socorro, Alamillo, and Sevilleta, which are situated along the Camino Real that runs to Santa Fe. . . ." (Brinckerhoff and Faulk, 1965, p. 63).

Farther along, the King makes clear that by taking this measure, he intends to reduce the distance between towns on New Mexico's principal highway. The four places named had formerly been major Piro pueblos, and their sites contained abandoned fields and, in some cases, usable irrigation ditches. Their resettlement would prove a decided boon to passing wagon caravans, affording them some protection and serving as a source for foodstuffs and other supplies.

Several problems combined, however, to frustrate the King's plan. Indian troubles, a shortage of troops available for garrison duty in the proposed new towns, and an unwillingness on the part of New Mexican farmers to colonize the dangerous and exposed Socorro Valley caused deferral of the settlement project until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In 1790 New Mexico's Governor Fernando de la Concha succeeded in making peace with several bands of Apaches in the southern part of the province. He persuaded them to take up residence at a site called Sabinal, about 8 mi (13 km) south of Belen. There, by 1793, some 300 Indians had congregated in two communities—one on each side of the Rio Grande. They lived in houses and tended farms that had been developed under Spanish supervision (Benes, 1965, pp. 72–73).

The provincial government hoped that the Sabinal community would appear so attractive that other Apache bands, still at war, would come in and make peace. The new establishment also represented a push in the right direction, an expansion southward, however slight, toward El Paso. Unfortunately, the entire experiment fell apart, for by the summer of 1794 Governor Concha had to acknowledge that most of the Apaches

had abandoned Sabinal and returned to their nomadic life (Worcester, 1949, p. 240).

All this while, the King's instruction of 1772, to refound the old Piro pueblos, was not forgotten. General Pedro de Nava, commandant of the northern frontier, referred to it in a letter addressed to Governor Fernando Chacón at Santa Fe, dated January 18, 1800 (Spanish Archives of New Mexico [SANM], I, 1171). Noting that Indian warfare had subsided and that a growing Spanish population was in need of lands, Nava directed the New Mexican governor "to proceed immediately to order the resettlement of the pueblo of Socorro, announcing it by official edict so that landless persons of all classes may join in the undertaking."

The commandant went into some detail describing what he wanted in the new community. A site was to be marked off for the church and a rectory, house lots and fields were to be partitioned among the settlers, streets laid out using a measuring cord, fences put up, and a four square league municipal grant designated.

Governor Chacón, moreover, was instructed to place a garrison at Socorro numbering fifteen to twenty men and commanded by either "an officer, a sergeant, or a corporal who enjoys his confidence and is of proven ability." Troops assigned to the garrison all had to be married and were required to have their families accompany them. A royal barracks was to be constructed for their quarters. Not only would these soldiers provide security, but, as General Nava pointedly noted, they could also see to it that the settlers built their homes properly, plowed and cultivated their lands, and dug *acequias* for irrigation, if the old ones could not be cleaned and repaired.

Finally, Nava authorized Governor Chacón to dip into his special expense fund to purchase oxen, tools, and other things for some of the needy settlers, with the understanding that they repay the government within two years from the fruits of their harvests. And, Nava added, "the settlement of Socorro must keep this name together with that of the patron saint which it had originally" (that is, when it was a Piro pueblo).

In concluding, the commandant told New Mexico's governor to use these same instructions in re-establishing at an opportune time the remaining Piro sites which His Majesty, in 1772, had ordered refounded.

In light of the document just discussed, some modern writers (Kubler, 1940, p. 99, for example) have concluded that Socorro was, in fact, refounded in the year 1800. A careful survey of the Spanish Archives of New Mexico discloses, however, that such was not the case.

Under the date of March 31, 1800, Governor Chacón responded to his superior's earlier directive, explaining the circumstances that had forced him to make modifications in the settlement plan (SANM, I, 1155). "I began by carrying out the refounding of Alamillo, nine leagues below Sabinal," he wrote to Nava. "The site of Socorro, which Your Excellency ordered me to attend to first, is fifteen or sixteen leagues distant, and it appeared to me better not to jump that far at once."

Chacón went on to relate that he considered starting with another Piro site, Sevilleta, located between Sabinal and Alamillo. But after a hasty survey, he learned that flooding in that area had buried the old Indian irrigation ditches and it would cost too much in time and labor to restore them. Therefore, he decided to commence at Alamillo "where all can be placed in good order in the shortest possible time."

The governor issued his edict, summoning poor people from through-

out the province to enlist as settlers in the Alamillo project. None responded. Consequently, he resorted to force, calling out the troops and, in his words, "taking hold of day laborers, servants, gamblers, those living in concubinage, and other incorrigibles." Stiff resistance was met by the troops, particularly in Santa Fe, but notwithstanding, sixty-two families were rounded up and packed off to Alamillo on the far southern frontier. All were so impoverished that they had to be furnished with the basic necessities—tools, weapons, seed, and livestock.

The records are thin, but it seems that Chacón's ambitious plan to develop Alamillo quickly collapsed. That would not be surprising considering the character and quality of his settlers. By late summer of 1800, the governor evidently gave up on Alamillo and turned his attention once more to Sevilleta, upriver. There he had some new irrigation ditches prepared and a handful of pioneering souls took up residence (SANM, I, 1194). No evidence has come to light to indicate that this effort succeeded either. Although some residents remained in the area, definitive settlement is assumed to have been delayed until 1819, when the Sevilleta land grant was formally made (SANM, I, 214).

What has been said thus far serves to establish that well into the nineteenth century the King's mandate on the refounding of the four Piro towns had still not been carried out. Nevertheless, action was soon initiated by a new governor at Santa Fe, Alberto Maynez, which led to the occupation of Socorro by Spanish colonists.

On July 4, 1815, Maynez promulgated a decree calling upon New Mexicans of good character and who were in need of farmland to enter into a new venture (SANM, I, 1104). His measure, announced throughout the province, read in part: "The old agricultural lands of Socorro, known to the citizens of this province, and the pueblo of San Pascual, on account of their setting seem to invite settlement, and that may be accomplished next spring, from the end of February, by each of [New Mexico's] *alcaldes* presenting to me a memorandum or list of industrious citizens who have the tools and all the necessities for a new

settlement, and in their own best interest wish to establish themselves in the said localities."

San Pascual was another, smaller Piro pueblo site about 18 mi (29 km) south of Socorro and on the east bank of the Rio Grande, opposite the old pueblo of Senecú. In spite of the governor's pointed mention of San Pascual as a good potential site for colonization, no one then or later showed interest in settling there.

Such was not the case, however, with regard to Socorro. By late February, 1816, or shortly thereafter, seventy families had responded to the governor's appeal to refound a community on the original pueblo site. They were placed in possession of their lands by Bartolomé Baca, the *alcalde* of Belen, under whose jurisdiction Socorro was to remain for the rest of the colonial period.

The following year, on November 18, 1817, two of the Socorro settlers, Javier García and Anselmo Tafoya, speaking on behalf of their neighbors made an appeal to the governor at Santa Fe (SANM, I, 890). They informed him that appropriate grant papers, conveying title to their lands, had never been issued. And, they asked that this be done in the name of His Majesty. By that time, it is evident that Socorro was a well-established, if not a flourishing, community.

As this documentary record reveals, then, the founding of Socorro should properly be dated from the year 1816. Further study of archival sources will surely provide details about economic development and daily life in the early years of the town.

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