

THE PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS in the Seventeenth Century

BY JOSÉ ANTONIO ESQUIBEL

In the months leading to the opening of the New Mexico History Museum in summer 2009, El Palacio devoted part of each of issue to exploring the state's history through the research and insights of curators, artists, collections managers, educators, and archaeologists. We called our series "A Place Like No Other: Stories from the New Mexico History Museum."

We began with the Palace of the Governors, today a key component of the New Mexico History Museum. Despite scant documentation of life in Santa Fe in the mid-seventeenth century, historian José Antonio Esquibel discovered numerous references preserved in the testimonies of witnesses or defendants in Inquisition cases as recorded by Inquisition officials. From these references, Esquibel gleaned something of the vibrant life in and around the Palace of the Governors from an era long past.

The correspondence reproduced on page 29 is Esquibel's translation of a very rare document that he uncovered in his research, a personal letter written by a prominent New Mexican to a family member in Mexico City seeking political intervention on behalf of two relatives arrested by the Inquisition. The letter was confiscated and censored (in passages indicated by underline) by Inquisition agents. The people mentioned in the letter are also referenced in the article. The photographs hail from a collection of the earliest known pictures taken in Santa Fe.

Palace of the Governors,
Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1868.
From a stereographic photo by
Nicholas Brown. Courtesy Palace
of the Governors Photo Archives
(NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 45819.



A Villa of Adobe Houses

In the mid-1600s, daily life in the Villa de Santa Fe centered about the *plaza principal*, also referred to as the *plaza real*, the royal plaza. To the east of the plaza, which apparently stretched as far as the modern day area of the Basilica of St. Francis, the main doors of the Franciscan Convento de la Limpia Concepción de Nuestra Señora de la Villa de Santa Fe faced the plaza. The nearby parish church was continuously in poor condition, and the interior decorations were described as lacking in comparison to some of the more richly decorated Pueblo churches. It was common to see animals in corrals around the church area. The main doors of the Casa de Cabildo, the town hall, faced the plaza, although there is yet no firm indication as to the precise location of this building. It may have been situated on the south side of the plaza, across from the Casas Reales de Palacio.

During this same time period, the Villa de Santa Fe consisted of only thirty small houses of adobe, nine of these belonging to widows and the rest to male heads of households, taxpaying citizens known as *vecinos*. Several houses belonged to members of the prominent Gómez Robledo family, including that of Captain Francisco Gómez Robledo located at one of the corners of the plaza real and which consisted of a main hall, three rooms, a patio, and a garden or small orchard. Toward the south, the Rancho Ribado of the Durán family was situated along the Santa Fe River. Across the Santa Fe River lay the *Barrio de San Miguel*, with a small chapel and nearby dwellings belonging mainly to various Indian citizens.

Some of the Indian residents were Apache, some were Pueblo Indians, and some were *Indios Mexicanos*, Indians from the Valley of Mexico. One of the main employers of local Indians may have been the *obraje*, the textile factory operated by Hernán Martín Serrano, himself a man who was part Spaniard and part Tano Indian. His *obraje* very likely produced products from wool, such as socks, shirts, pants, and dresses for local and long-distance trade. Of particular note is the fact that the primary tradesmen of Santa Fe were Indian men who earned a living as blacksmiths, carters, carpenters, wagon drivers, and masons, among other trades. Those Indian women who worked tended to be cooks and laundresses in the homes of *vecinos*, at the convento, or at the Casas Reales de Palacio.

A Center of Community Life

Of the principal structures within the Villa de Santa Fe, the Palace of the Governors, or the Casas Reales de Palacio as it was familiarly known, was apparently the largest, with as many as eighteen rooms of differing sizes utilized for a variety of purposes. Notable features of the Palacio structure included the outside parapets, a tower, and the *corredor grande de patio*, the large corridor of the courtyard. On any given day, numerous people moved about the Palacio with dutiful intent, preparing official documents, archiving papers, conducting politics, attending to the demands



of the governor, cleaning the numerous rooms, washing clothes and linens, stocking goods in storerooms, tending to the orchard, and preparing meals.

Amidst such hustle and bustle, imagine sitting in the Casas Reales de Palacio before an open window that faces the plaza on a clear, cool spring day in 1660. What sights and sounds might you see and hear? Perhaps you would be in the *pieza de estrado*, the drawing room, where Doña Teresa de Aguilera y Roche, the wife of Governor Don Bernardo López de Mendizábal, receives her guest. To one side of the room is Doña Teresa's writing desk. For some curious and unknown reason, she keeps the middle drawer of the desk locked and carefully guarded, never letting anyone but herself

Interior hallway in the Palace of the Governors, Santa Fe, New Mexico, February 14, 1893. Photo by Thomas J. Curran. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 46776.

Below: Probably Old Santa Fe Trail near Camino Lejo, Santa Fe, New Mexico, ca. 1886. Photo by Dana B. Chase. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 112209.





Above, left: Bandstand on the Plaza, Santa Fe, ca. 1886. Photo by J. R. Riddle. The sign in the photograph says, "Every ounce of this fruit was grown in Santa Fe County." Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 76049.

Above, right: Wedding portrait of unidentified bride and groom, New Mexico, 1912. Photo by Jesse Nusbaum. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 61806.

open that particular drawer. To another side of the room is Doña Teresa's altar with an image of Christ under a very high canopy, so high that a ladder is needed to clean the top of the canopy.

As you look out of a window, you see the cottonwood trees of the plaza offering shade to the passersby. The Indian woman, Ana Velasco, is casually walking through the plaza toward the Casas Reales de Palacio, where she works as a cook and laundress with others such as the Apache women, Jacinta.

The *alcalde ordinario*, Captain Francisco de Anaya Almazán, the younger, carries a cache of papers, heading at a hurried pace in the direction of the Palacio in the company of the high sheriff, Captain

Juan de Mondragón. They meet up with the governor's secretary, Miguel de Noriega, just before approaching the Palacio, no doubt seeking an audience with Governor López de Mendizábal to discuss a combination of political, economic, and military matters.

Juan Utaca, an Indian and the town crier, makes his way purposefully across the plaza, returning to the Casas Reales de Palacio after having read aloud a recent royal edict and posted copies on the doors of the Casa de Cabildo and the parish church in addition to the doors of the Palacio.

Doña Catalina de Zamora is approaching the main entrance of the Casas Reales, no doubt to call upon her friend, Doña Teresa



Right: Patio (courtyard) of the Palace of Governors, ca. 1912. Photo by Jesse Nusbaum. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 61541.

de Aguilera y Roche, to sip chocolate and perhaps listen to Doña Teresa read from one of her books. The Palacio may have held a particular sense of significance for Doña Catalina since it was on the Palacio grounds that she and her husband, Captain Diego Pérez Romero, were married in 1641.

A Triple Wedding

The eighth day of April 1641 was a particularly festive day at the Casas Reales de Palacio. A triple wedding ceremony set the occasion for the gathering of residents to witness the union of three members of the Lucero de Godoy family with three members of the Romero-Robledo family. These families ranked high among the few prominent and politically influential kinship groups in New Mexico. The fact that the wedding ceremony was conducted on royal government property speaks to the level of their political influence.

Fray Juan de Vidaña of the Franciscan Order presided over the ceremony, administering the sacrament of matrimony to the three couples: Pedro Lucero de Godoy (b. 1600, Mexico City) and his second wife Doña Francisca Gómez Robledo, Juan Lucero de Godoy (Pedro's son) and Doña Luisa Romero, and Doña Catalina de Zamora (Pedro's daughter) and Diego Pérez Romero. Following the ceremonial words of the Catholic rite of matrimony, the three couple gave the responses for sealing their vows.

The triple wedding is one of numerous references to the Casas Reales de Palacio based on new research findings.

Among the official witnesses of this special occasion were Doña Josefa de Zamora, also a daughter of Pedro Lucero de Godoy, and her husband, Don Diego de Guadalajara. Although the specific details of the marriage ceremony and any festivities to celebrate the occasion are lacking from the historical record, we can imagine that relatives and friends were present and that such a celebration most likely involved the preparation and sharing of food. As late as 1662, several people recalled attending this event, which exemplifies the central role of the Casas Reales de Palacio in the lives of the residents of the Santa Fe.

The triple wedding is one of numerous references to the Casas Reales de Palacio based on new research findings. These findings identify at least eighteen rooms of the Casas Reales de Palacio for the period of 1659–1663, each ranging in size according to function, as indicated by the distinctive terms found in the records, such as *sala*, *aposento*, *cuarto*, and *pieza*. It is evident from the newly uncovered accounts that the Palace of the Governors was not merely a building for conducting the official business of royal government, it also served as a center for social, political, and economic activities of the residents of New Mexico. ■

About the author: José Antonio Esquibel researches and writes about the history of early New Mexico families. He has contributed to several anthologies on New Mexico history and has served as a research consultant for the Vargas Project (University of New Mexico) and El Camino Real Project.

To see Esquibel's sources for this story, and to read all stories in the series "A Place Like No Other," visit elpalacio.com.

Letter of Pedro Lucero de Godoy to a Nephew in Mexico City

October 4, 1662, Santa Fe

My Dear Nephew,

All hours of the day are cut short and do not allow me time to read your letters in accordance with the pleasure I take in receiving and reading them, as well as the letters from your brother, cousins, and others of our house. This is more so knowing from them of your good health and that of my brother, your father, and my nephews Juan and Nicolás, to whom I send my regards through you. My dear nephew, myself, your sister and all of your cousins remain with good health, thanks to God for granting us all he wishes; whose obligations we attend to with acceptance, notwithstanding the unpleasant and dangerous hardships that are accounted for very well.

Not wishing to bore you with the details through this correspondence, I want you to know I have sent everything I know about the situation in a letter to my brother, Bachiller Diego Lucero, giving an extensive account, and as such I am asking you to obtain all your influence and that of your friends for assistance. Because my supplication is not allowed directly to this tribunal, endeavor to inform those lords of this holy and righteous tribunal and the lord secret consulters. Tell them this, that the poor prisoners [Diego Pérez Romero and Francisco Gómez Robledo] are short of learning and have not left this realm, where they were born; the case having been opened against them for having said some things.

In conclusion, they do not know anymore and have not obtained anymore than serving God and our king in winning these provinces—they and their fathers and grandfathers—and you can serve by means of your help and that of your activities and livelihood. All is recorded for these lords in the inventory that is going with the embargoed papers, of which they have been advised by their procurator. And because I remain very well informed, and your aunt and my mother-in-law, who implore you on their behalf, know that one [of the prisoners] is my son-in-law and the other my brother-in-law. Do not rest much in order to prevail in all that can be done.

Doña Francisca [Gómez Robledo] is sending you a painted elkskin and some socks and gloves. She asks for your pardon for the small quantity of items, since the expense and fees do not give occasion for more to be sent. May God improve your hours and grant you many years, you to whom I entreat. I have entailed the aide of the señor fiscal who will arrive shortly. I am well informed of everything from there [Mexico City] and from Spain.

Written in Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 4, 1662.

I kiss your hand, your uncle who esteems and loves you greatly.

Pedro Lucero de Godoy