



## PEDRO RIBERA-ORTEGA: A TRIBUTE

Some of you may not have known Pedro Ribera-Ortega but after you read about him, I am sure you will never forget him. I had met Pedro a few times and am supplementing this tribute with material about him from the Center for Southwest Research.

Ortega, who died in early January 2003, was a teacher, author, researcher, and activist - a devotee of New Mexico Spanish language, culture and history. Born in Santa Fe in 1931, he came from an old colonial family and had been actively involved in Santa Fe civic and religious events since junior high. He traced his family back 20 generations to Spain.

As a young man, Pedro used to complain to his mother about all the misinformation in books about the Spanish history of New Mexico. She said to him, "If you don't like it, then write your own books," and so he did.

Ortega spent his life fighting to protect and teach an accurate history of New Mexico and his beloved city of Santa Fe - which means Holy Faith - the oldest capitol city in America. He got a B.A. from the College of Santa Fe and taught Spanish, English, Latin and history at Santa Fe High School. He always encouraged Hispanics to learn their language and history to help them keep their heritage. He researched in the archives of Santa Fe, Spain and Mexico - re-reading and re-translating Spanish documents to get an accurate understanding of the history of New Mexico.

Ortega wrote books on Christmas traditions in Santa Fe, los Pastores, Spanish songs and La Conquistadora and published articles in The Santa Fe New Mexican, New Mexico Magazine and La Herencia del Norte. His lively and informative pieces covered a wide range of topics from faith processions, the Santa Fe Fiesta, the Caballeros de Vargas and La Conquistadora to New Mexico saints, evangelization, the Penitentes and Indians and Spanish horses.

Ortega wrote extensively about the statue of Our Lady of Peace - popularly known as La Conquistadora. This is the oldest image of the Virgin Mary in the United States and is enshrined in the Santa Fe Cathedral. The statue was brought up to Santa Fe in a caravan from New Spain in 1625, venerated in the city chapel and was rescued by the colonists when the Indians attacked the city in 1680. Ortega led the revival of devotion to La Conquistadora and helped bring back the practice of carrying her statue in processions during the Santa Fe Fiesta. For decades he was mayordomo or head steward of La Cofradia or confraternity that cares for the statue and retains its History.

He also helped organize the Caballeros de Vargas (the Knights of De Vargas), a group who re enacts and teaches about the Spanish re-entry into Santa Fe and the re-establishment of the New Mexico colony under Governor Don Diego De Vargas in 1693.

In 1693 Governor De Vargas brought the statue of Our Lady of Peace back to New Mexico with him and promised to hold an annual fiesta in her honor if he was able to recover the lost colony without bloodshed. Vargas, going on faith alone and without armor or an escort, took the statue of Mary into each of the rebellious pueblo villages. Upon seeing the unarmed man and the loving image of the Virgin with the Child Jesus, the Pueblo warriors made peace with Vargas and allowed the Spanish to return to New Mexico. The Caballeros de Vargas commemorate this event each year at the Santa Fe Fiesta, fulfilling the ancient promise made by the Governor to Mary. The Santa Fe Fiesta was a celebration of "Fun and Faith," as Pedro described it in an early pamphlet.

Ortega was also instrumental in raising the equestrian statue of Governor Don Pedro de Peralta in the capitol. Peralta founded Santa Fe in 1608. The statue is on the Paseo de Peralta.

One of the last projects Ortega worked on was the Cuarto Centenario Monument, which is in the park next to the Santa Fe Cathedral. This 18 foot - 4 tiered memorial salutes 400 years of Spanish achievement in New Mexico. It honors the men, women and children who pioneered New Mexico and the tools, learning, animals, foods and fruits they brought from Europe and shared with the native people. And - you guessed it - atop the column stands a statue of Pedro's beloved Conquistadora.

Ortega was unassuming and lived a simple life - loving his Faith, teaching and reading books above all else. Once when he was traveling with a friend in Spain he bought so many books he couldn't fit them into his suitcase. His friend noticed Pedro throwing out his clothes and asked him what he was doing. Pedro replied, " I don't have

room in my suitcase for my books, and my books are more important."

Ortega collected thousands of books. When he filled up his house in Santa Fe, he founded the **Ortega Research Center in Truchas** to hold the others. The Research Center provides educational material for those researching Spanish colonial history.

Ortega's love of history and willingness to teach and help others with their needs brought him several prestigious awards, including being named Adelantado (the first to lead the way) by the New Mexico Hispanic Culture Preservation League and the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. He was named one of Santa Fe's Living Treasures in 2001 for documenting the city's 400-year history.

Ortega had a calling card for himself, with the usual contact information plus a sketch of La Conquistadora. But his were not stiff and trimmed like most cards. When you asked for his card he pulled out the scissors and cut you one off a sheet of paper. I have one of Pedro's hand-cut "cards" and put it in the display. I shall treasure it always for it symbolizes what he was all about. Honor, truth and tradition were what mattered to him - not appearances.

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