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Gerald Theisen*

Education in Mexican New Mexico (1821-1846)

It was only for a generation that Mexico held sovereignty over the area of New Mexico (1821-46). Independence from Spain had come painlessly for New Mexicans, since distance separated the area from any military conflict. In fact, the Spanish governor, Facundo Melgares, led the independence celebration and stayed on in his office for several months after independence became a reality. During such a short time many institutions in New Mexico continued relatively unchanged from the Hispanic period. For example, there were no innovations in farming or ranching; indeed, the daily lives of most New Mexicans continued as they had under the previus Spanish government. However, there were dramatic changes in other areas. Almost immediately trade opened up between Santa Fe and Missouri --a trade which radically changed both attitudes and the economic structure of New Mexico. As might be imagined, the resulting commercial dealings tied many New Mexicans to the United States rather than to Mexico.

In 1837 New Mexico experienced a dramatic revolt against Mexican authority. Although the major uprising only lasted a few weeks during August and September, importante issues of village autonomy and of taxation were raised. Before it was put down, Governor Albino Pérez was dead, as was José Gonzáles, the culturally Hispanic Indian leader of the rebels. No less dramatic was the invasion of the Texans in 1841, when 170 of the enemy were captured wandering in eastern New Mexico and then were sent in custody to central Mexico to become a focus of antagonism until their release in 1842. This invasion was rivaled only by the dramatic entry of Stephen Watts Kearney into Santa Fe in August of 1846. As in the case of most institutions within New Mexico, education had developed slowly in the centuries since European colonization. The sixteenth century was noteworthy not only for the establishment of Hispanic settlements in the face of resentment and even revolt by indigenous peoples, but also for the Christianization and education of the Pueblo Indians, albeit to a limited degree. As Hispanic society developed in New Mexico, the emphasis gradually shifted, and the Franciscan friars began to emphasize ministering to the Hispanic colonists over their original dedication to educating and Christianizing the Pueblo Indian people. Indeed, in the second quarter of the eighteenth century a special Visitor, Fray Juan Miquel Menchero, called for a return to the enthusiasm of the "Old Fathers", especially regarding an emphasis on schools for the Pueblo Indians.[1] Unfortunately, the mission schools continued to decline into the nineteenth century when the missions were eventually secularized. However, it was not only the Pueblo Indians who lacked schools; the Hispanic settlers also suffered under an inadequate eduacational system. In 1812 New Mexico's representative to the Cortes in Spain, Don Pedro Bautista Pino, characterized in part what had been the educational situation for the Hispanic citizens of New Mexico under the colony: "The benefit of primary letters is given only to the children of those who are able to contribute to the salary of the

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[1] Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe (hereafter AASF), Loose Documents, 1731, no. 1.

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school teacher".[2] Not only had publicly supported education been non-existent under Spain, burt also what New Mexican teachers there were, on the whole, had poorer academic preparation than did teachers in other parts of Spain's empire.

Once independence came to Mexico, the new government in Mexico City was anxious to establish schools throughout the Republic. Such an effort would not only serve the need to prepare citizens for their future careers, but it might also imbue in the students a liberal republican enthusiasm and support for the new government. Thethree initial schools established in New Mexico during this period were in the villas of Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Santa Cruz de la Cañada; they were financed by donations, with mandatory attendance by the local children.[3] Staffing these schools with educated teachers was very difficult. The system had been so poor under the Spaniards that there were few qualified New Mexicans. In Santa Fe a military officer from central Mexico doubled as a teacher when he was available. In Santa Cruz de la Cañada, north of Santa Fe, the local teacher was Trinidad Barceló, who had only recently moved into New Mexico. Fortunately his sister was the operator of a successful gambling salon in Santa Fe and apparently helped him financially when his inadequate salary ran short.[4] Coming from Sonora he was enthusiastically patriotic toward the new Republic. This is clear from a set of rules which he proposed for his school in Santa Cruz de la Cañada: one of his goals was to instruct the thirty students to respect the "glorious Mexican Republic". The young teacher was a man of surprising knowledge considering the remoteness of his locale. He spoke of the Lancasterian system of education in 1827, when it was still a comaratively recent development. At this time an official Lancasterian school had been established in Chihuahua City under the direction of Antonio Cipriano Irigoyen, a New Mexico-born priest. It would seem plausible that there might have been some contact between the new teacher, Barceló, and cura Irigoyen. Nonetheless, there were no New Mexican schools among those listed as offically-endorsed Lancasterian schools in the first years of the young Republic.[5] This was despite activity in New Mexico at the end of the 1820's to institute the Lancasterian system, presumably owing both to shortage of qualified teachers and to a scarcity of funds available for public education. Even though a teacher was presumably appointed, "to establish a school based on this plan", efforts appear to have been unsuccessful both at this time and later in the 1840's.[6]

Trinidad Barceló was as devout a supporter of Catholicism as he was a fervent republica. Indeed, he believed that the apostolic Roman Catholic religion must be guarded and protected, and he insisted that "God and the Patria be served with spiritual and temporal humility".[7] For moral instruction, the young teacher used a Spanish catechism by "padre Ripalda" which had been written by a sixteenth-century Jesuit. It was originally published in Spain, but nevertheless continued in regular use throughout Latin America after independence. Understandably, texts such as this, published before Mexican independence, make no reference to the Mexican nation, and even those published immediately after independence usually did not deal with Mexico specifically. It is not until after mid-century that Mexican nationalism is discussed to any significant degree intextbooks. Nevertheless, books used in schools

[2]H.Bailey Carroll and J. Villasana Haggard, editors and translators", The Exposición of Don Pedro Bautista Pino, 1812", in *Three New Mexico Chronicles* (Albuquerque, 1942), p. 94.

[3]Lansing Bloom, "New Mexico under Mexican Administration", *Old Santa Fe*, 1 (1914), p. 238.

[4]It was from this position in Santa Cruz that he wrote to Governor Manuel Armijo about legal irregularities of the local cabildo. Barceló stressed the necessity of adhering to the laws governing the new Mexican nation, even if there were Spanish laws still in effect; letter of Trinidad Barceló, January 1, 1829, Governors' Papers, State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico (hereafter SRCA).

[5]See *Reglamento de la compañía Lancasteriana de México* (Mexico City, 1842).

[6]See Dan Tyler, "The Mexican Teacher", *Red River Valley Historical Review*, 1 (1974), p. 218, for a discussion of this point.

[7]See Trinidad Barceló's preamble and rules for education reprinted in Gerald Theisen, editor, "Opinions on the Newly Independent Mexican Nation", *Revista de Historia de América*, No. 72 (1971), pp. 484-96.

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did refer in general terms to the positive value of such concepts as "patriotism".[8] Barceló was not only concerned with abstrat goals in his teaching; he was also concerned with the more mundane regulations for the operation of his classroom. For example, in a formally proposed set of teaching regulations, he insisted that students arrive for school with clean hands and face in order not to "dirty the texbooks".[9] In the next few years the demand for public education grew in New Mexico. By 1832 three more communities added public schools --Taos, Belén, and San Miguel del Vado. However, this expansion suffered from the continued scarcity of qualified teachers. In his official 1832 report, the legal advisor (*asesor*) for New Mexcio wrote: "The results of primary instruction are not noticeable; this misfortune being due in part to the neglect, laziness and ignorance of many schoolmasters, and due likewise to the lack of zeal on the part of the authorities".[10]

In the fall of 1833 educational policy for the Mexican nation would chage dramatically when Santa Anna turned over the direction of the government to his Liberal vice-president, Valentín Gómez Farías. For a variety of reasons Gómez Farías and Congress worked against Church influence in education, and in a series of laws a plan for comprehensive public education was begun. Reforms in education did not apply to states, but only to the Federal District and territories. Obviously the focus of the reforms was upon Mexico City, but there was the potential for considerable impact in the territory of New Mexico. However, the time was too short; by the summer of 1834 Gómez Farías' experiment in education was reversed due to congressional opposition. Faced with a declining amount of money in the school fund and with a change in national policy, the public schools in New Mexico were closed in the fall of 1834. Parents now had no choice but to send their children to private schools, as had been done before the public school experiment. This is similar to the situation in other parts of Mexico following upon the collapse of Gómez Farías' reforms.

Efforts were soon made to re-establish public education in New Mexico. In the summer of 1836 Governor Albino Pérez, recently arrived from central Mexico, drew up a plan aimed to re-organize the educational system in Santa Fe. The governor saw the situation within the territorial capital as especially acute:

> Running the streets are children who ought to be receiving the education so necessary at the fitting and proper age; youths of evil disposition, abandoned to laziness and licentiousness; practicing vices, useless aims which only serve to corrupt, like the plague, the city that tolerates and feeds them; and above all, what are the results? Robbery, immorality, poverty, desertion, and the most humiliating shame of the city, which if it were cared for by its municipal authorities, should be the enviable example of others composing a most interesting part of the Mexican Nation.[11]

In Pérez' plans the public schools were to be supported by the families of the students rather than by government funds. Poor families were to pay "in products of the soil", and orphans to be taught gratis. Children were to be required to attend primary school between the ages of five and twelve, and after twelve were to be taught a trade in the homes of artisans. Should any family not comply, fines were to be assessed, and provisions were made for the imprisonment of repeated offenders or for those who could not pay the initial fine of one to five pesos (doubled for repeat

[8] For example, the sixty-page *Cartilla social* by José Gómez de la Cortina was originally published in Mexico City in 1833 and went through eight editions by mid-century. It does not discuss Mexico, but does mention obligations of members of society, as well as various forms of civil government.

[9] Theisen, ed., "Opinions on the Newly Independent Mexican Nation", pp. 492-93. Tyler (see note 6) reprints and translates a longer version of Barceló's rules in his article.

[10] Antonio Barreiro, "Ojeada sobre Nuevo-México", Lansing B. Bloom, editor and translator, *New Mexico Historical Review*, 3 (1928). Barreiro did have praise for one school teacher, Guadalupe Miranda, who first ran a private school and then took over the public school in Santa Fe in 1832.

[11] Text reprinted in Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1911) vol. 2, pp. 57-59.

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offenses). Students who refused to learn a trade would be considered vagrants and brought before the court for trial and sentencing. The town council of Santa Fe put this ambitious plan into effect in August of 1836, establishing three schools instead of the recommended two. But in the summer of 1837, Governor Pérez was killed during the New Mexican revolt for more local autonomy, and his system of public education thus never had the opportunity to develop.

There were many private schools of uneven quality in New Mexcio during these years. Francisco Perea attended several ofthese as a student in the mid 1830's, and his reminiscences of these experiences give a picture of the size and activities of some of these establishments. During the winter of 1836-37, he attended classes in Bernalillo in the home of Professor José Gutíerrez. There were only three or four other students in attendance. The next winter he and several other boys were taught in Santa Fe at the home of a Captain Sena, who had come from Mexico earlier with the dragoons. When the captain was away compaigning against the insurgents during the 1837 revolt, his wife saw to the recitations of the students. Other small private schools similar to these two were under the supervision of the local town councils and subject to Mexican government regulation, but in spite of this many were inferior, suffering mostly from the lack of trained teachers.[12] Curiously, in 1840 Bishop Zubir from Durango sent a circular directing that private schools run by foreigners be investigated. He was concerned that religion should be taught in the schools, as once again this was the policy of the Mexican government. His concern may have been justified elsewhere in the diocese, but apparently no "outsiders" were operating schools in New Mexico.[13]

While Bishop Zubiria was unnecessarily concerned that New Mexico's remoteness would allow an erosion of the importance of religion, it was precisely this remoteness which contributed to the scarcity of qualified teachers in the area. Surely, the result was a less literate population in this northern province than existed in more central Mexico. For example, one cholar has estimated that perhaps only "three or four women" during the 1821-46 period in New Mexico were able to sign their names and these "had been raised" in other parts of Mexico, where more women were educated.[14] Notwithstanding such distinctions, David J. Weber, in his recent book on the Mexican period in the southwest, discusses just this issue of literacy, concluding that a surprisingly large number of New Mexicans were literate, ranging from one-fourth to one-half of the population. He bases this generalization on contemporary Anglo estimates which were most likely exaggerated. Weber argues that New Mexican literacy compared favorably to that in central Mexico or U.S. frontier states during the same period. Certainly, this contradicts contemporary New Mexican criticism of the quality of local education by such Hispanic residents as Barreiro.[15]

Often students either did not live close enough to a school or their parents could not afford to send them. Children in Taos were fortunate: Father Antonio José Martínez conducted a relatively large private school there open to both boys and girls from 1826 to 1856. It was unusual that young girls were admitted as they were often only taught the necessary household skills in their own homes. The parish priest instructed all his pupils in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and was apparently never overly concerned with the collection of fees. He purchased a printing press which had been brought over the Santa Fe trail and, among other items, he printed books to be used by the students in his school.[16] Father Martínez also had occasion to extend his instruction to prepare young men to enter the diocesan seminary in Durango, Mexico.

[12] W.H.H. Allison, editor, "Colonel Francisco Perea", *Old Santa Fe*, 1, (1913), pp. 210-11.

[13] AASF, Books of Patentes, November, 1840, Pats. XIX, LXXI.

[14] See Janet LeCompte, "La Tules and the Americans", *Arizona and the West*, 20 (1978), p. 222.

[15] David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821 - 46: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque, 1982), pp. 230-34, 361.

[16] See Henry R. Wagner, "New Mexico Spanish Press", *NMHR*, 12 (1937), pp. 1-40; and the Pascual Martínez Papers, copies in the Coronado Room, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico (Albuquerque). Undoubtedly, very few girls attended.

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To these students he taught Latin grammar, religion, rhetoric, and other subjects such as moral theology and philosophy. His school was apparently well attemded, and those preparing for Holy Orders were very successful in their subsequent studies in Durango. Almost 30 such men were eventually ordained as priests to minister to their fellow New Mexicans.[17]

There were only limited opportunities for students to continue their education past an elementary level. A few, among them Toms Ortiz, enrolled in the national military academy at Chapultepec. Others also traveled south but not to Mexico City. Rather, their journey was over one thousand miles to study at the seminary in Durango, Mexico. A few received scholarships, but apparently most completed this study for the priesthood at their own expense. Included in the instruction were courses in canon law, morals, theology. In addition, these students would expand their experience of central Mexico. They returned often imbued with a greater patriotism for the Mexican republic. In fact, only six years before the U.S. invasion the governor of New Mexico commented that these priests were the only group he could trust in a society so separated from the central government.[18] Many in New Mexico had turned east after independence with theopening of the Santa Fe trail. Indeed, the economic pressures of this Santa Fe trade influenced educational goals for their families, and they began to look to the United States as a place to send their children for further educational study. A number of young men enrolled in the Jesuit "college" in Saint Louis, Missouri; among these were Miguel A. Otero, Francisco Perea and J. Francisco Chávez.[19] The differences between those young New Mexicans receiving advanced education in Durango and in Saint Louis illustrates a division within the New Mexican population as a whole. The priests considered themselves Mexican, and they were active and vocal in their opposition to the authority and values of those arrived from the United States. Not unexpectedly, the young men returned from Saint Louis to become political leaders of that segment of the population preferring to be considered Hispanic rather than Mexican. Curiously, an analogous situation is apparent in twentieth-century New Mexico.

Obviously, religion cannot be separated from education during the Mexican period in New Mexico. Oftenavailable texts were religious books, such as the catechism by "Padre Ripalda". Moreover, notwithstanding attempts by private individuals and political leaders, the most successful school was that established and run by a priest. Father Martínez' school in Taos not only prepared young men to study for the priesthood, but it also trained two generations of Taos children to read and write. Admittedly there was no educational "system" in New Mexico during the Mexican period, and in a very ral sense the confusion and false starts which plagued the establishment of a public educational system were reflective of changes of government and policy in Mexico City. However strongly families turned toward the United States encouraged by financial opportunities, public education did not come to New Mexico with U.S. sovereignty. Fearing that teachers might be Protestant missionaries, Catholic churchmen delayed public education in New Mexico until the end of the 19th century.

[17]See Cecil V. Romero, translator, "Apología of Presbyter Antonio J. Martínez", *NMHR*, 3 (1928), pp. 342-43. Interestingly, of those priests from New Mexico studying in Durango in 1846 not all chose to return to New Mexico when ordained. Some stayed to minister in the Mexican Republic rather than return to an area now under U.S. sovereignty.

[18]Letter of Governor Manuel Armijo, July 12, 1840, Governor's Papers, SRCA.

[19]The Jesuits operated a secondary school, a *colegio* to the New Mexicans; See Allison, ed., "Colonel Francisco Perea", pp. 212-213.

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