

Colonial Governors, 1614–1625

By José García

This is the first article in an ongoing series on the colonial governors of New Mexico.

The governors cited below served King Felipe III of Spain during the period 1614 to 1625, appointed by Viceroy Diego Carrillo de Mendoza y Pimentel Marques de Gelves in Mexico City. The term of an appointment was in most cases for three to four years, while some governors served longer and others were appointed more than once. Some served with honorable distinction while others were less respected. Some were military men while others were career bureaucrats. In most cases they were dispatched out of Mexico City and returned when their successor arrived in Santa Fe.

Bernardino de Ceballos, 1614–1618

Adm. Bernardino de Ceballos was appointed colonial governor of New Mexico on Aug. 5, 1613, and was escorted to Santa Fe by 15 soldiers. Among them we find the names of Alonso Ramírez de Salazar, Francisco de Barrios, Francisco González Pita, Capitán Diego de Bañuelos, Francisco Zapata, Juan Rodríguez de Herrera, Gaspar Pérez, Tomás Ochoa and Alferez Juan de la Cruz, all of whom returned to Mexico City.

Ceballos' salary was 2,000 pesos, with 500 additional for the journey. His train included one covered wagon (*carreta fuerte*) with 11 mules. It would seem he traveled in style and security. Other than this, no other records for expenses have been discovered. France Scholes wrote in the *New Mexico Historical Review* that Ceballos arrived in Santa Fe in May 1614 and that his term ended on Dec. 21, 1618, upon the arrival of his successor, Juan de Eulate.

Scholes wrote that it might be of interest to students of the Southwest to know that at least three of the early governors of New Mexico were acquainted with Acapulco. Shortly after his retirement as governor of New Mexico, Pedro de Peralta was appointed *alcalde mayor* of the port of Acapulco. Bernardino de Ceballos was assigned from Acapulco, where his title was admiral; he retained this rank after accepting the appointment as governor of New Mexico. The other colonial governor was Felipe Sotelo Ossorio, who served during the period 1625–1630 and who will be covered in a later article.

Juan de Eulate, 1618–1625

Spanish officials appointed Juan de Eulate governor on March 1, 1617, but he did not arrive in Santa Fe until Dec. 11, 1618. In his earlier career as a military official, Eulate served in Flanders and in the New Spain *flotilla* (fleet). He has been portrayed as a petulant, tactless and irreverent soldier who displayed an open contempt for the church and its missionaries. He has also been described as having had an inflated notion of his own authority as a representative of the Spanish crown. By 1619, dissension between Eulate and Franciscan missionaries had reached such a state of contention that the viceroy, through the king of Spain, interceded. Strife between church and state had existed prior to Eulate's governorship, but a decree from the council in Mexico City had become necessary to bring order to the far-flung province of New Mexico.

Much of this animosity occurred between Eulate and Friar Esteban de Perea. The friar was a prominent figure in the ongoing friction between church and state, which had originally erupted during the governorship of Pedro de Peralta. Eulate's apparent lack of respect for the church and his assertion that he retained sole authority over the laymen of the province incensed the clergy. He was said to be unsympathetic and even hostile to the missionary enterprise, hindering building and repair work on churches and convents and undermining the authority of the missionaries over the Indians.

Eulate's defense of the Indians and his liberal policy concerning their culture and customs may not have been motivated by altruistic concerns—likely it was an attempt to ally with Native peoples so they would side with him in his disputes with religious authorities. He exploited Indians in other ways, forcing them to serve without pay, to work as burden bearers and slaves.

Friar Perea's continuous assault on Eulate through charges, denunciations and direct challenges were unsuccessful, and Perea was relieved of his duties in October 1621. Friar Miguel de Chavarría, Perea's successor, sought better relations with Gov. Eulate and other civil authorities. However, relations between Friar Chavarría and Friar Perea became embittered, and Perea reinvigorated his push to revile Eulate's governorship. Perea's efforts, along with Eulate's own irreverence, left many in the province suspicious of Eulate's faith, believing that he was essentially evil and an enemy of the Roman Catholic Church.

Perea's persistent attempts to discredit Eulate finally paid off when, in 1623, Friar Alonso de Benavides, who had experience in the Inquisition, was appointed to take over for



Illustration
by Arturo de Agüero

Friar Chavarría. With Benavides's powers in place as a prelate and an ecclesiastical judge, along with his role as commissary of the Holy Office, it was expected that this union of official ecclesiastical authority might help to defend the missions against the perceived hostility of civil authorities.

In December 1625, a caravan carrying Friar Benavides, 12 new friars and a replacement for Gov. Eulate arrived in New Mexico. By the fall of 1626 both Eulate and Friar Perea were on the return caravan to New Spain. In May 1627 civil authorities in Mexico arrested Eulate for having brought from New Mexico to New Spain a number of Indians to be sold as slaves, and for avoiding freight charges by transporting personal cargo on the caravan. Officials fined Eulate and forced him to pay the return trip to New Mexico for the Indians he had brought to Mexico.

Eulate would fade from history but his nemesis, Friar Perea, whose reports were well-received by his order and the Holy Office, was reassigned as custodian of the New Mexico missions and in 1629 replaced Friar Benavides as administrator of ecclesiastical affairs for the province.

Sources: Bloom, Lansing B. "The Royal Order of 1620." *New Mexico Historical Review* V, no. 3 (1930): 288–98. Hammond, George P., and Agapito, Rey. *Don Juan de Oñate: Colonizer of New Mexico, 1595–1628*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953.



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