

# Colonial Governors

## — 1661–1665 and 1671–1675 —

By José García

New Mexico's governors were normally appointed by the viceroy in Mexico. The viceroy represented the Spanish king, and these appointments were made after the viceroy consulted with other officials in Mexico City. The governors in this article, who served from 1661 to 1665 and 1665 to 1671, were appointed by two different viceroys and served King Felipe IV. 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 governors 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 could return when their successor arrived in Santa Fe.

### Diego Dionisio de Peñalosa Briceño y Berdugo (1661–1664)

Diego Dionisio de Peñalosa Briceño y Berdugo was born in Lima, Peru, in 1621, the son of *maestre de campo* Alonso Peñalosa Briceño y Berdugo. He was twice married before leaving Peru—to María Ramírez de Vargas, who bore him two sons, and, after her death, to Jacoba de los Ríos y Cabrera, whom he apparently deserted. He is said to have married a third time in France. In Peru, his early service as a local *alcalde* ended when charges of official misconduct were brought against him. He fled the country to avoid arrest, but his plans to go to Spain to appeal to the king were altered by a shipwreck. He went instead to Mexico, where he entered military service and advanced to become a regional lieutenant captain-general.

In 1660, Viceroy Juan de Leyva de la Cerda appointed him governor of New Mexico to succeed the controversial Bernardo López de Mendizábal. In Santa Fe, by mid-August 1661, Peñalosa proceeded to hold his predecessor's *residencia* and confiscate his property. "A mere adventurer with an eye for the main chance," as historian France Scholes has characterized him, he built a record of usurpation, fraud, and abuse of power.

Ultimately, however, he was caught in his own trap. Influenced by the *residencia*, the



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Arturo de Agüero.

Inquisition ordered López's arrest and the embargo of his property, which the new governor already had appropriated and was trying to sell for his own benefit. Casting blame on Alonso de Posada, the Franciscan custodian of the New Mexico missions, Peñalosa arrested the friar while ranting against the Inquisition and defying its authority. Posada, as a result, compiled a bill of particulars against the governor, citing his scheming to acquire López de Mendizábal's property, his arrest of the custodian and his promiscuity. The custodian charged also that the governor was given to obscene and irreverent speech and that he was guilty of cruel oppression of the Indians.

Peñalosa again fled to avoid the consequences of his actions. Before his successor arrived to take his *residencia*, he departed for Mexico City early in 1664. Posada's sworn testimony, however, followed him. In a trial that lasted from June 1665 to February 1668, he was found guilty of harboring a "seditious and scandalous" attitude toward the Inquisition, abasing its authority and pronouncing errors that were injurious to the church and the pope. His sentence included public humiliation, a fine and perpetual exile from New Spain and the West Indies. He also was excluded from ever holding political or military office again.

After sailing for Spain on December 11, 1668, Peñalosa paused at the Canary Islands and remained there until early 1670, when he boarded a ship for England. There he sought to interest King Charles II in an aggressive move against Santo Domingo or South America. The Spanish ambassador in England, Conde de Molina, tried unsuccessfully to seize

him secretly. By June 1671, Peñalosa had gone to Dunkirk for an audience with the French monarch, Louis XIV. He had taken up residence in Paris by 1673, calling himself Count of Peñalosa, and soon married a French woman. Successively, he offered four plans to Louis XIV for a strike against the Spanish colonies. He first proposed conquering the native provinces of Quivira and Teguayo, between New Mexico and the Mississippi River. Claiming to have explored those regions in 1662, he presented a spurious account of the expedition, which he attributed to Fray Nicolás de Freitas.

In January 1682, Peñalosa proposed establishing a colony at the mouth of the Río Grande as a base for conquering Nueva Vizcaya. His concept bore some resemblance to the proposal of René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, who in 1683 returned to France from America seeking support for settling near the mouth of the Mississippi. It has often been assumed that Peñalosa's scheme influenced La Salle's, yet the origin of La Salle's plan while he was still in America makes this extremely doubtful. La Salle's design evolved without his advice or assistance. In truth, Peñalosa's scheming, while briefly creating a stir, bore little fruit of any kind. He and La Salle both died in 1687, La Salle by assassination in the Texas wilderness and Peñalosa in Paris, presumably of natural causes. Misdirecting his talents and yielding to destructive tendencies, Peñalosa had inflicted wounds on Spain's New Mexico colony that never completely healed. This information is from the *Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas Online* ([www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/)).

### Juan Durán de Miranda (1664–1665 and 1671–1675)

Juan Durán de Miranda served two terms as governor of New Mexico. Both times he was appointed by Viceroy Antonio Sebastián de Toledo.

According to Scholes in the *New Mexico Historical Review*, in his first term Durán de Miranda had been deprived of office, arrested, imprisoned in the Casa del Cabildo and subjected to an "iniquitous *residencia*."

His second term must have been uneventful by colonial governors' standards, because not much is written about him. So perhaps he performed well; he left New Mexico in 1675.



José García was born in Rowe, N.M. He currently lives in Santa Fe and has a great interest in the colonial history of northern New Mexico.

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