

# Colonial Governors — 1677–1683 —

By José García

*This is the seventh article in the ongoing series about the colonial governors of New Mexico.*

Governors were normally appointed by the viceroy in Mexico, who represented the Spanish king. The viceroy made these appointments after consulting with other officials in Mexico City. The term of an appointment was in most cases for three to four years, while some governors served longer and some were appointed more than once.

Some served with honorable distinction, while others were less respected. Some were military men; others were career bureaucrats. In most cases, they were dispatched out of Mexico City and returned when their successor arrived in Santa Fe.

The governor cited below was appointed by Payo Enríquez de Rivera, the archbishop of Mexico City during the reign of King Carlos II. The following information was obtained from the New Mexico State Historian's Web site.

## Antonio de Otermín, 1677–1683

The decades of the 1660s and 1670s were ones of looming catastrophe for the Spanish province of New Mexico. There had been repeated disputes between Franciscan clergy and royal governors over use of Indian labor, as well as conflicting attitudes toward native religious practice. Caught in the middle were the Pueblo people of the province, their beliefs alternately persecuted and condoned, and their labor and its products routinely appropriated by government officials and over-zealous missionaries. At the same time, the Hispanic community was riven by rancorous disputes and occasional violence, as partisan factions vied for preeminence.

The resulting widespread misery in New Mexico was exacerbated by unrelenting drought, the ravages of contagious disease and a surge in Apache raiding against all segments of the Spanish colony. The impact of this combination of circumstances reached its severest level during the 1670s. The crescendo of torment increased with the arrival in Santa Fe of a new governor, Juan Francisco Treviño, who served from 1675–1677. Under his administration, an unprecedented assault on Pueblo religious practice was launched. The governor ordered kivas, the Pueblo ceremonial rooms, destroyed, along with great quantities of native religious paraphernalia. In his first year in office, Treviño had 47 Pueblo religious leaders arrested and publicly whipped. Four

of them were then executed by hanging.

Pueblo reaction was swift and forceful. A large force of warriors surrounded the provincial capital of Santa Fe, while a party of 70 surreptitiously entered the town and broke into the governors' palace, taking Treviño prisoner. In exchange for his life, the governor released the remaining Pueblo religious leaders. The immediate crisis had been defused, but Pueblo anger and resentment remained undimmed. As later events would show, agitation and planning for a widespread Pueblo uprising against Spanish domination were underway almost immediately. One of the freed leaders was Popé, from San Juan Pueblo. He was said to be the principal force behind Pueblo plans to oust the Hispanic colonists.

It was into this situation of explosive possibilities that Don Antonio de Otermín arrived as Treviño's replacement in 1677. It is unknown how much Otermín knew about the precariousness of New Mexico before he assumed the governorship, but he did little to assuage the enmity that increasingly divided Hispanos and Pueblos.

On August 9, 1680, Otermín received word of an impending uprising. Leaders from the pueblos of the Galisteo Basin, who remained generally friendly to the Spanish authorities, had sent a message. They had been approached by two men from Tesuque with instructions for launching attacks on Spanish towns and Franciscan missions in three days' time. Upon receipt of that message, Otermín ordered his *maestre de campo*, Francisco Gómez Robledo, to apprehend the two messengers from Tesuque. Under subsequent questioning, the two men, Catua and Omtua, revealed what they knew about the planned uprising.

The capture and interrogation of the messengers put the colonists in Santa Fe on alert, but it also revealed to the Pueblo conspirators that they had been discovered. Governor Otermín immediately dispatched warnings to the missions, settlements and ranches throughout the province. But the Pueblo insurgents moved up their planned attacks. Thus, the governor's message of alarm had barely been sent when the Pueblos attacked. Only those colonists nearest to Santa Fe had time to flee to the capital for protection.

Upon receipt of the horrifying news from Lucero and Gómez, the governor dispatched Gómez Robledo to reconnoiter in force the region of the Tewa pueblos around the junction of the Río Grande and Chama rivers. On August 12, Gómez Robledo was back in the capital with the doleful news of at least 30 colonists and friars killed in the Tewa area alone. On the heels of that news came word of killings at many other places across the province. Otermín could be sure that an attack on even the populous town of Santa Fe was imminent.

By dawn of August 15, 1680, the population of Santa Fe had swollen to about 1,000 with the influx of refugees from outlying missions,

*Illustration by  
Arturo de Agüero.*

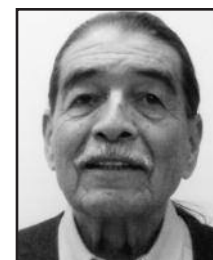


homes and settlements. Those nervous colonists found themselves surrounded by Pueblo war parties, some of whom could be seen gutting buildings in the Barrio de Analco, a largely Indian suburb across the Santa Fe River to the south of the capital proper. Otermín arranged a conference with Juan, a Pueblo leader from the Galisteo Basin. Juan offered only two choices: The Hispanic colonists could withdraw from New Mexico without further harm, or they would be annihilated by massive native force. The initial reaction of Otermín and his advisors was to stand and fight.

Otermín and his council finally concluded that their only hope for survival was to abandon Santa Fe and join other survivors of the uprising thought to be at Isleta Pueblo. The governor distributed his personal store of supplies to his fellow colonists before leading them in an escape en masse on August 21, 12 days after the uprising had begun. When they reached Isleta on September 3, they found that the other group of refugees had fled from there almost three weeks before.

After taking advice from the colonists and friars, Otermín directed that they all proceed south to El Paso and establish a secure settlement there before attempting to force reentry into the Pueblo world. Accordingly, the capital of New Mexico in exile was established at El Paso, and neighboring missions were set up for Pueblo allies who had fled south with the colonists. Security was far from universally felt among the refugees, and many left El Paso, although that was expressly forbidden. They traveled south to Parral and the interior of what is today Chihuahua, and west into Sonora, in search of a less precarious existence.

Seen as a weak and vacillating leader by many of the colonists at El Paso, Otermín finished out his term as governor, simply biding time. In August 1682, Otermín's replacement, Domingo Jironza Petris de Cruzate took over the reins of government, and Don Antonio faded from New Mexico history.



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