

# Colonial Governors

## 1656–1661

By José García

*This is the fourth article in an ongoing series devoted to the colonial governors of New Mexico.*

New Mexico's governors were normally appointed by the viceroy in Mexico, who represented the Spanish king. These appointments were made after consultation with other officials in Mexico City. The governors in this article were appointed by different viceroys and served under King Felipe IV during the period from 1656 to 1661. The term of an appointment was for three to four years in most cases, although some served longer and a few were appointed more than once. Some served with honorable distinction while others did not. Among them were military men and career bureaucrats. In most cases they were dispatched out of Mexico City and returned when their successor arrived in Santa Fe.

### Juan Manso de Contreras, 1656–1659

Sometime in the late 1640s or early 1650s, an unusual meeting took place in New Mexico. Present were Juan Manso; his older half-brother, Fray Tomás Manso; Juan's nephew, Pedro Manso de Valdez; and Fray Juan González. What made this gathering of Spaniards notable was that all of them had been born in the small Asturian town of Santa Eulalia de Luarda, a port on the Bay of Biscay, and that out of this little group of *paisanos* would come a bishop and a governor who would later distinguish himself as the epitome of a frontier entrepreneur.

Juan Manso began his career in New Spain working with his sibling in the New Mexico mission supply service, probably in 1652. Wagon trains formed the lifeline between the missions and the settlements of New Mexico and the northern trade centers in New Spain. Initially, agents acting for the viceroy purchased supplies and turned them over to the Franciscans for transport to New Mexico. This system resulted in goods of irregular quality and frequent interruptions in shipments north. In 1631, to improve the service, the Franciscans and the government formalized a contractual arrangement whereby the Franciscan procurator general purchased a standard list of products to be shipped to New Mexico, usually every three years.

Fours years after beginning work with the mission supply wagons, Manso secured a much loftier position. From 1656 to 1659 he

was governor of New Mexico, a period that is poorly understood because of the dearth of documentation available. After concluding his term of office, Manso lived for a time in Mexico City. In 1661, he departed the viceregal capital with a commission from the Inquisition to arrest his successor, Gov. Bernardo López de Mendizabal (1659–61). Manso completed this task in the spring of 1663 and relocated to Parral in Nueva Viscaya. From that year until his death in 1671, Manso served as administrator of the New Mexico mission supply wagons. At the same time he emerged as an important figure in the northern frontier's commercial center of Parral. Manso was appointed governor by Viceroy Francisco Fernández de La Cueva. This information is from an article by Rick Hendricks and Gerald J. Mandell that appeared in the July 2000 issue of the *New Mexico Historical Review*.

### Bernardo López de Mendizabal, 1659–1661

Bernardo López de Mendizabal was born about 1620 in the town of Chietla, to the east of Cuernavaca, in New Spain (Mexico). Initially intending to pursue a religious career, López attended Jesuit college in Puebla but finished his course of study at the nearly century-old university in Mexico City. This made him the best educated of New Mexico's governors during that era. With his education complete, López filled government posts in Nueva Granada, Cuba and New Spain, gradually ascending the bureaucratic ladder. While in Cartagena, he met and married Teresa de Aguilar y Roche.

In 1658 López was appointed by Viceroy Juan Leyva de la Cerda to succeed Juan Manso de Contreras as New Mexico's governor. López and his wife accompanied the Franciscan supply caravan from Mexico City to Santa Fe late in 1658. Also in the caravan was Fray Juan Ramírez, who had been serving as *procurador general*, or chief overseer, of the mission supply for the preceding two years.

López and Ramírez were quickly at each other's throats, and López voiced views that seemed decidedly anti-Franciscan. The key issues between the two concerned the limits of civil and religious jurisdiction and the deference each man owed the other.

As ammunition against the governor, Franciscans began keeping records of the habits of López and his wife that looked suspiciously non-Christian. Their reading and sleeping habits, their infrequent attendance at Mass and their occasional bathing on Fridays were all particularly noted.

In December 1661, an indictment of López on 33 counts of malfeasance during his tenure was handed down. No sooner



Illustration  
by Arturo  
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had López received that blow than his predecessor in the governor's office, Juan Manso, returned to New Mexico, now bearing the title of *alguacil mayor*, or chief constable, of the Inquisition. He brought with him a warrant for the arrest of both López and his wife by the Inquisition. The various charges brought against López by different factions brought a premature end to his administration when, in 1660, a new governor of the province of New Mexico, Diego de Peñalosa Briceño y Berdugo, was appointed.

Imprisoned by the Inquisition upon reaching the viceregal capital, López was already ill with an ailment that would kill him in a year and a half. The trials of the couple dragged on, as was not unusual. The hapless ex-governor died in September 1664, still a prisoner and accused of being a crypto-Jew. He was buried in unconsecrated ground in a corral near the prison. Three months later, his wife's trial was suspended and she was freed from confinement. Teresa de Aguilar y Roche pressed for exoneration of her husband, and after seven years, in April 1671, the Holy Office decided not to pursue its case against him. As a result, his body was exhumed and reburied at Santo Domingo Church, not far from the *zócalo*, or city center, in Mexico City.

*This information is from the Web site of New Mexico's state historian (nmstatehistorian.gov), where several sources are cited and much more information is available.*



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