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Cover—Flamenco dancers Vicente Romero and Maria Benitez were captured during a dramatic moment in a performance at El Nido, near Santa Fe, by a frequent *New Mexico* contributor, Michael Mouchette. For more on Vicente's art, see our story on page 39.

From your editors . . .



NATHANIEL ALEXANDER OWINGS

controversial John Hancock Building in Chicago.

Owings was chairman of President Kennedy's Council for the Redesign of Pennsylvania Avenue and of President Johnson's Temporary Commission on Pennsylvania Avenue. He was chairman, for more than three years, of the Chicago Planning Commission and is a member of the National Advisory Board to the Secretary of Interior on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments.

Recently, he was appointed by Governor Cargo to chair an ad hoc committee to study the feasibility of establishing New Mexico's first officially designated historic highway—The High Road To Taos.



FRANK WATERS

Nathaniel Alexander Owings' credentials are formidable. He founded the architectural firm, with Louis Skidmore, of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in 1936. Under his direction, the firm has completed such monuments to contemporary architecture as the Lever Brothers and Chase Manhattan buildings in New York, the Crown Zellerbach and Alcoa buildings in San Francisco, the Quantas Hotel in Australia and, like many of Owings' structures, the somewhat-

Owings and his wife Margaret were prime movers in the preservation of California's Big Sur. Last year, Harper & Row published *The American Aesthetic*, Owings' personal and highly relevant statement on our environment. The noted architect and his wife maintain a vacation home in Pojoaque, north of Santa Fe.

"If I were a sculptor," wrote *Taos News* columnist Mabel Kuykendall, "I would make a marble head of **Frank Waters** with the chiseled face of a honed-down saint, a tortured, loving man. I would try to capture the deep grooves alongside his rather

Mail Bag	Inside Cover
Acoma Faces the Future	4
Sky City: venerable and venerated, by Frank Waters	
Everything's Turned On This Summer in New Mexico	12
High Men on the Totem Pole at Latir Lakes	14
By Ray Newton	
What's Cooking? Trout	18
By Eleanor Washburn	
Las Trampas:	
They survived the trap, by Tony Hillerman	20
A photographic essay, by Scott Wilson	24
A past resurrected, by Nathaniel Alexander Owings	30
Flamenco's Vicente Romero	36
Departments	
¿Qué Pasa, Amigo?	38
Sun Dial	46
Trip of the Month	47
Campus of museums, by Betty Woods	
Southwestern Bookshelf	48
In Our Next Issue	Inside Cover

stern mouth, his heavy quizzical brows, his faunlike ears.

"But if I were a painter, I would concentrate on his brownness, the direct look of his eyes which are filled with compassion for the lowly and for all the elements that make the earth and its resident creatures, and the slenderness of his form. I think I would paint him against an adobe wall. That wall would look as brown as the earth he loves, warm as his sympathies, firm as his condemnation of social ills. He would be wearing a red plaid shirt and light tan trousers. He would be holding an eagle feather in his hand, he would be gazing meditatively at this Indian symbol."

Frank Waters the mystic. Frank Waters the author of nearly a score of books including the *Book of the Hopi*, *The Man Who Killed the Deer*, *The Woman at Otowi Crossing*, *Masked Gods*, *People of the Valley*. Incredibly, Frank Waters' article on venerable Acoma Pueblo marks his first appearance in *New Mexico*. We hope it won't be his last.

We've had hundreds of complimentary letters, and some not so, on our new format. We enjoy reading them. It's a good indication of the temper of our readers. But the thing that makes us most happy is the number of new friends for *New Mexico* we've gained in recent months. A steady rise in circulation is the goal of every editor, an astronomical one sends the editorial offices into mild euphoria. Since a year ago May, our mailings have increased from 51,000 to a present all-time record of 65,000. Most of this gain has come since the first of the year. Concurrently, our newsstand sales have increased to over 17,000 an issue, a leap from 10,000 of last May. Including the huge press run on our big Christmas issue, *New Mexico's* average sales run close to 100,000.

To our new friends and old alike go our thanks for your confidence in our new format and our promise to continue bringing you the finest *New Mexico* has to offer through professionally written articles and distinctive photography.

Kenneth Hardy

Las Trampas: They Survived the Trap

By Tony Hillerman

The drive from traffic-jammed Santa Fe to the quiet, weed-grown plaza of Las Trampas is a fifty-minute trip over forty-four miles of pavement. In that easy drive, a traveler in the proper mood can transport himself from the age of space to the Age of Faith. He can confront the question of why an old man left the relative comfort and safety of Santa Fe to found this isolated settlement more than two centuries ago. Perhaps he can find the answer in the monument the old man left behind him — the Church of San Jose de Gracia. If he does, he begins

understanding the Spanish colonial history of New Mexico.

Knowledge of the history of the church isn't necessary to appreciate its beauty. Architectural antiquarians rate it as one of the most perfect surviving examples of Spanish-colonial mission architecture. But its story — which is the story of Juan de Arguello — makes it all the more remarkable.

The year was 1751. In previous summers, Comanche war parties had ridden westward from the Buffalo Plains,



crossed the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at Palo Flechado Pass and conducted bloody raids in the Santa Cruz Valley. They had besieged a fortified rancho, killed its thirteen male defenders and carried away more than sixty women and children. Their raids around Picuris Pueblo had become so frequent that settlers in the Peñasco Valley had torn down their church and rebuilt it in a more defensible location. It occurred to authorities in Santa Fe that a village in the high valley of the Las Trampas River would, at least in theory, impede one route used

by the marauders crossing the Sangre de Cristos to loot and burn in the Santa Cruz Valley.

King Phillip V had granted much of this valley to Captain Sebastian Martin Serrano in 1712 as a reward for his exploits as an Indian fighter. While Serrano was a famous swordsman, by mid-century he was old and ready to leave the fighting to others. He gave land in the high valleys for a new settlement and Governor Velez Cachupin arranged an additional 46,000-acre royal grant to provide the community wood-cutting and graz-



ing lands.

In the context of the times, the grant must not have seemed particularly attractive. The 1750 census had shown the vast province of Nuevo Mexico contained only 4,200 *gentes de razon*, a "reasonable people" category which included Spanish, mestizo-Indians and Negroes. The shortage was not of land but of people to hold it against the Comanches. In view of its dangerous location, residents of 1750 Santa Fe must have detected an irony in the title of the Las Trampas grant. *Trampa*, in Spanish, means trap.

History does not record why Juan de Arguello was willing to occupy this trap. In 1751, he was seventy-four years old, well beyond the age when adventure is appealing. Yet he recruited eleven families and left the provincial capital — his home for some forty years — to start a new village and a new life on the mountain frontier.

Some of the men were sons-in-laws of Arguello. Others were descendants of Sebastian Rodriguez, an African who had been the drummer boy of Don Diego de Vargas when the famous captain-general recaptured Santa Fe from the Indians in 1691. We know only a little of these intrepid first families, but a look at their village in the context of their times tells something about them.

Today the Las Trampas Plaza has lost its shape. Missing are some of the adobe buildings that originally ringed it into the traditional hollow square of frontier defense. But enough is left to let the imagination recreate it as it was. When one does this, standing in the plaza and looking at the wooded hills which crowd the village, he can only wonder at the twelve men who built this outpost.

Their mission was quasimilitary — a barrier against the Comanches. Yet Spanish colonial policy frowned on firearms in the hands of civilians. They were armed only with bows, arrows and lances. The Comanches had matchlock pistols and rifles — weapons the Northern tribes obtained from the French and traded to the Plains Indians. (The Trampaseños tried to correct this imbalance in the arms race in an odd reversal of the expected on the frontier. They traded bridles, grain and knives to the Comanches for a pistol and five muskets to shoot Comanches with. But their petition to the governor for gunpowder is still in the archives with the word "denied" written in Spanish across its face.)

Being "reasonable people," the Trampaseños must have known their tiny settlement could not be defended if Comanches emerged from the surrounding hill. They must have known that their role in the defense of the Santa Cruz Valley was nothing more or less than sacri-

ficial. They were a dozen farmers. The Comanches were professional warrior-hunters, described later by a Prussian military observer with the U. S. Army as "the best light cavalry in the world." If one considers this as he looks around him at the village, he begins to understand how the remarkable church which graces its plaza came to be built.

San Jose de Gracia is not, technically speaking, a church. In the definition of the times, it is a "lay chapel." Bishop Pedro Tamaron of the See of Durango noted that, while on a visit to the Northern Frontier in 1760, a delegation from Las Trampas "approached us and begged us to be pleased to concede our license so that they might build there a chapel with the title and advocation of Lord Saint Joseph of Grace." The bishop granted the license, remarking that the Trampaseños had to walk nine miles over roads infested with Comanches to reach the church at the Picuris Indian Pueblo.

He made clear in the license that the villagers must promise to be solely responsible for maintaining their chapel "with all possible seemliness and cleanliness." The promise is still kept 210 years later. Construction was started in a year in which young George Washington was raising horses in the British colony of Virginia. For Arguello and his farmers the job took twenty years.

We know something of this remarkable construction project because, in 1928, the reports of the now-famous Fray Francisco Dominguez were discovered among bundles of forgotten material in the Mexican National Library. Fray Dominguez — a Franciscan priest — had been sent in 1776 from Mexico City to inspect the Spanish borderlands. About the time English colonists were signing their Declaration of Independence from the English crown, Dominguez reached Picuris Pueblo. Arguello heard of it, and made the nine-mile walk over the Sangre de Cristo ridges to see the visiting inspector and invite him to Las Trampas. The account of his subsequent visit was published by the University of New Mexico Press in 1956 in *The Missions of New Mexico, 1776*.

"This chapel has been built by alms from the whole kingdom, for the citizens of this place have begged throughout it. The chief promoter in all this has been one Juan Arguello who is more than 80 years old and this man asked me for alms for said chapel during my visitation of Picuris. And since I have nothing, I gave him that, with many thanks for his devotion."

Other records indicate that Fray Dominguez was inaccurate on two counts. Arguello was at least ninety-eight years old (he died at 112) and the settlers had little better luck begging alms in the rest of the kingdom than they did from him. Total donations seem to have amounted to nine pesos, six reales — about enough to buy a dozen simple bronze candleholders at 1776 frontier prices. In fact, the Trampaseños financed their famous church by assessing themselves the "first fruits" of their crops and livestock. Under this system, one-sixth of all that the

A native Oklahoman now thoroughly New Mexican, TONY HILLERMAN is chairman of the University of New Mexico's Journalism Department. Harper & Row has just published a suspense novel of his, *The Blessing Way*, set on the Navajo Reservation.

village produced was set aside to furnish and equip the chapel. The burden must have been heavy. Judging the Fray Dominguez account, Las Trampas was almost as poor in 1776 as it is in 1970.

"These settlers do not live in ranchos but in a plaza like a neighborhood house," the priest wrote. "For the most part they are a ragged lot, but there are three or four who have enough to get along after a fashion. The following includes them all: Sixty-three families with 279 persons."

In its first sixteen years, Juan Arguello's dozen families had grown to sixty-three. But in the two centuries since, the village has shrunk. Now thirty-four families own the tiny Las Trampas farms and many of them don't live in the village.

While Fray Dominguez guessed wrong about the age of Juan Arguello, his description of the church of San Jose de Gracia and its setting remains almost exactly accurate. The crossbar that secured the front door in 1776 has been replaced by a Nineteenth-Century cast-iron lock, and the choir loft, then "still in the process of being made," has been in use since 1780. But there are still the twenty-five beams counted by Dominguez supporting the roof of the nave, and nineteen above the transept and nine above the sanctuary. The bell he described as "middle-sized" still hangs above the church front. And it still sings in a deep, rich voice. The pulpit that Dominguez described as "new, and badly made" still stands at the Gospel side of the sanctuary — a small octagon with carved wooden sides mounted on a pedestal hewn in corkscrew fashion from a ponderosa trunk. After almost 200 years of use it no longer looks new.

The asphalt ribbon of N.M. 76 was not, of course, part of Fray Dominguez' description. It crosses the little Rio de Las Trampas bridge, bends abruptly between the homes of Enriquez Lopez, Luis E. Vigil and Mrs. Francisco Leyba, crosses the west end of the plaza, squeezes past the churchyard and climbs abruptly and crookedly out of the valley. It crosses Las Trampas without seeming to intrude on the scene — a fact for which the action of concerned New Mexicans deserves credit.

Today the plaza is roughly outlined by an irregular array of residences on three sides and the front wall of the churchyard on the north. The plaza is bare earth, innocent of any attempt at landscaping. The houses which hedge it are adobe plastered with mud. Like all earthen structures, their age is unguessable. Most show signs of disrepair and some stand empty, a warning that Las Trampas is a dying village.

The doorway of the churchyard frames for the eye the front elevation of the church. Seen from here, the entrance of San Jose de Gracia seems to be flanked by two blunt towers. In fact, they are framed principally by the ends of the massive four-foot-thick side walls of the chapel. The front wall is recessed some three feet between them. Its plaster is painted white, contrasting starkly with earthen color of the walls.

Above the front entrance is the wooden exterior choir balcony and below this balcony the church bell hung for years on its heavy rope. The bell is called Refugio and traditionally its deep voice was raised only to announce solemn events and occasions.

It had a companion bell, called Gracia. Gracia's soprano voice rang out happier events — nuptials, feast days and the death of children too young for sin who attained Heaven without enduring the trials of earth. In 1909, someone cut the rope and stole Gracia. The villagers have not accumulated enough money for a replacement for Gracia, but in a 1967 restoration project, Refugio was restored to its bell tower — safe from casual thieves.

Inside the church the first impression is of cool, dim stillness. The sounds of the village — a dog barking somewhere and a rooster crowing — seep faintly through the high windows and there is the dim aroma of old incense and candle wax to tease the memory.

Everything around you is old and most of it is hand-made. The floor is rough, foot-wide planks laid in three-by-seven-foot sections (a size and shape familiar to grave diggers). The ceiling is formed by the peeled trunks of pines, darkened by two hundred years of candle smoke, and the only provisions for artificial lighting are crossed-plank chandeliers lined with candles.

Behind the communion rail, five steps lead to the small main altar. Behind it, a screen of wood, extending to the ceiling of the nave, bears painted scenes from medieval tradition, of Christ flanked by armed angels, of St. Dominic and St. Francis. To the right and left are smaller side altars, one topped by a painting of Santiago on his horse and the other by a faded representation of a crucified figure in the brown robes of a Franciscan friar. The high country is rich in blood of such martyrs. Forty-two members of the order were slain in their attempts to Christianize the Indians.

In all things in this church, there is an overpowering sense of antiquity. More than two centuries have passed since the villagers made their promise to build this church and maintain it. The few remaining families still take their turns as keeper of the key to the double front doors, serving one-month periods as janitors and helpful, unpaid guides for curious visitors.

The Church of San Jose de Gracia has twice been rescued in this century. Would that this could be true for many another historic church across New Mexico. For many, a fate is predictable. New Mexicans have seen it happen often enough to understand the transiency of adobe structures. First, the roof falls, the victim of leaks which rot its supporting vigas. The walls last longer. They collapse first above the windows and doorways, then melt slowly into mounds.

And one day these grass-covered mounds will be posterity's monument to the early Spaniards' trust in God. And the people of America will have lost another priceless part of their historic heritage. 