

new mexico

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M. RIPPEL

HOLIDAY ISSUE

**Indian, Hispano, Anglo Traditions
Merge in Our Lights of Christmas**

**And a Bonus: The Comancheros —
New Mexico's Pirates of the Plains**

new mexico

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Cover — Christmas at Las Trampas, by *Morris Rip-
pel* (see below). *Las Trampas* is on the High Road to
Taos (N.M. 76) some 40 miles northeast of Santa Fe.
Its San José de Gracia is considered by many artists
and architects to be the finest remaining example of
Spanish Colonial churches in the Southwest (see "Las
Trampas," July/August 1970 issue).

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from your editor . . .

DICK SKRONDAHL, FAR WEST PHOTOGRAPHY



Morris Rippel, our cover artist, was born in Albuquerque in 1930. Graduated from the University of New Mexico in architecture. Rippel practiced here until 1967. Then he began devoting all his time to the fine arts.

Much of Rippel's subject matter is New Mexican architectural material: austere, sometimes lonely, always with emphasis on the strong light so prevalent in the Southwest. There is an air of timelessness and stillness to his work that's particularly suited to painting New Mexico in his distinct style. He paints almost exclusively in watercolor, which he feels relates best to his personality, temperament and the expression of his feelings.

Infrequently entering competition, Rippel had work selected for the 1971 American Watercolor Society's annual exhibition at the National Academy in New York City. His paintings are in the permanent collection of the Denver Art Museum and at galleries across the nation as well as in several hundred private collections. He was featured in the December 1972 issue of *American Artist*. He is represented by Sandra Wilson Galleries, Santa Fe.



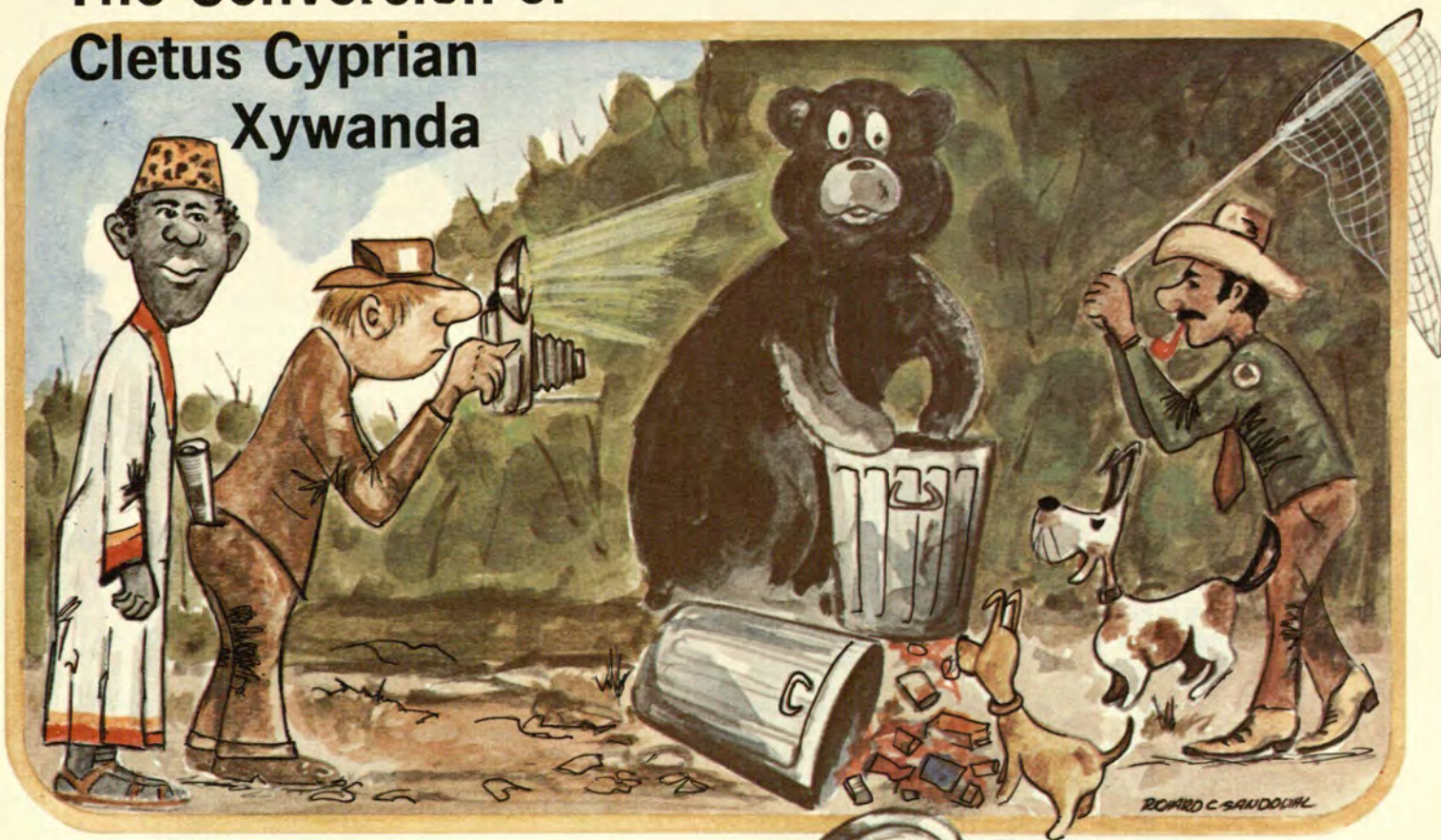
Santa Fe artist **William A. (Bill) Hughes** is responsible for the Comanche-Comanchero painting on pg. 24. Born in 1937, Bill studied at Cleveland's School of Applied Art and the University of Cincinnati's School of Applied Arts, the latter on a football scholarship.

Bill was a semipro wide receiver, truck driver and heavy equipment wrangler, then drifted back into art: as an outdoor sign painter, art director for a West Coast publisher, independent graphics consultant in Los Angeles. The call of personal painting drew him to New Mexico — with its stark colors, vast vistas and faces lined with character — which he interprets with both vigor and sensitivity.

Hughes, one of the few cash award winners at the Museum of New Mexico's 1973 Biennial, attributes much of his success to his charming wife Olga. He has illustrated articles on black cowboy-scholar McJunkin and lady gambler La Tules for *New Mexico*. He is represented by Blair Galleries, Santa Fe.

Walter Briggs

The Conversion of Cletus Cyprian Xywanda



By Tony Hillerman

Biographers of Santa Fe, with the notable exception of the late Oliver La Farge, have been inclined to talk of her in terms of externals. They describe narrow, aimless streets; the softness of adobe buildings, lilacs and the long, red sunsets which flood the cranky old city with gaudy colors. All this is there. The City of the Holy Faith has been growing in its spectacular and impractical mountain setting since 1610 and it shows both its age and its Spanish Colonial origins.

But the real essence of Santa Fe is invisible and can't be communicated through adjectives. It has something to do with the best of the women's clubs formally naming itself "The Stitch and Bitch," something to do with the good-natured insolence of Plaza shoeshine boys, and something to do with the cynical civic attitude toward growth and progress—which Santa Feans view with no more enthusiasm than a milking goat has for cold hands. It has something to do with lethargy and with tolerance (symptoms, perhaps, of old age). Most of all, it has something to do with people.

Therefore, I will turn to Cletus Cyprian Xywanda, who had a clear eye for people, and highly unusual qualifications for judging the city. He also had a way with words. Ask a

Santa Fean why he calls his town "The City Different" and the answer requires several thousand words (half pride, half irritation). Xywanda managed to sum up this differentness in a single terse sentence. But to appreciate the aptness of his words, one needs to know something of the man and the circumstances.

Xywanda is a member of the Ibibio tribe, a citizen of Nigeria. He was then a subeditor of the *Lagos Morning Defender*—a periodical of considerable political clout in the coastal (Biafran) section of his African homeland. He came to Santa Fe one cold October Saturday under the sponsorship of the U.S. Information Agency to work as a guest observer-reporter on *The New Mexican*.

With this "emerging nation" background, Mr. Xywanda was not a man to be charmed—as American visitors usually are—by Santa Fe's surface features. No one had explained to him that Santa Fe is quaint (that useful adjective which covers so many civic sins). There was no appeal for him in the city's baffling labyrinth street system, or its mud buildings, or its appearance of having sprung from the earth—like fungus—innocent of foresight. After all, Lagos streets have mudholes equally deep, and buildings (in less attractive parts of the city) equally ramshackle, and it had

developed with the same disdain of urban planning.

When told by a proud local matron that Canyon Road, Santa Fe's most artsy and illogical thoroughfare, had originally been a footpath used by Indians, Xywanda replied that Ogbomosh (the town of his nativity) had the same sort of problem but, with the help of a surveying crew and a bulldozer, was correcting it.

In a word, Xywanda's first impression of "The City Different" was resoundingly negative.

It was worsened by two factors. First, Xywanda had come to Santa Fe via New York—where he had spent several days sight-seeing. He had been impressed by Manhattan, which, as he put it, "glittered and roared," and he made endless comparisons between Mayor Lindsay's Fun City and Santa Fe. Second, there was the bear affair.

As luck had it, a Santa Fe National Forest bear had picked the eve of Xywanda's arrival for a pre-hibernation garbage can raid. The bear had dawdled past the dawn. He had been spotted by some little girls en route to Acequia Madre grade school, who chased the beast into a garage and shut the door behind him. The city editor sent Xywanda along with a reporter-photographer to witness the efforts of the Game and Fish Depart-

ment to evict the animal from the city limits.

Had Xywanda been from London, Paris or Rome, this episode might have amused him. But Xywanda was from the fringes of the Niger Basin rain forests. Wild animals in towns are also a problem in Nigeria, but the better towns are bringing it under control. The bear-in-the-garage reinforced Xywanda's suspicion that Santa Fe lacked sophistication.

Before his visit was over, there were other incidents. A housewife opened a closet door and was set upon by a raccoon which had been inadvertently imprisoned. A nearsighted visitor from Cleveland, babysitting with her grandchildren one night, assaulted a dog with a broom after it turned over a garbage can. To her amazement the dog scrambled up a backyard elm. Her son-in-law sought to settle her nerves by explaining that the animal she had attacked was not a dog, which can't climb trees even in Santa Fe, but a bear, but she flew back to Cleveland the next day. And that fall prairie dog colonies moved into the St. Michael's College athletic field, into a city park and into the Casa Alegre residential area. A college sprinter stepped into a prairie dog hole which had appeared overnight in the track and was disabled for the season. This caused the track coach to set out poison, which caused a local matriarch who likes animals to appear at the scene with a pistol, which—according to police reports—she fired into the ground until her ammunition was exhausted. This seems to have frightened away both the coach and the prairie dogs, since nothing more was heard of the incident. But back to Xywanda.

It was traditional in those days that about midnight Saturday, when the Sunday newspaper was coming off the press, the newsroom crew would retire to Frank's Lounge to celebrate the completion of the week. Mr. Xywanda joined the group, but not the celebration. He sat silently on his barstool, his cheetah-skin fez pulled low on his forehead and his expression morose. Finally he posed a question.

Why, he wondered, had the U.S. Department of State elected to send him to Santa Fe? While he hoped no offense would be taken from his remarks, it did seem odd, he said, that he, a subeditor of the *Morning Defender*, was sent to such a small community to observe the American press and American society. Why had not the State Department left him in New York? That city seemed well supplied with larger newspapers and seemed, in the regrettably short time he was allowed there, a metropolis

of great interest.

While Mr. Xywanda phrased these questions politely, it developed that he suspected his trip from New York to New Mexico had been a trip into exile and reflected an official lack of respect on the part of the United States of America for the Republic of Nigeria. He sought reassurance. Instead (Frank's Lounge being what it was) he produced an argument.

Frank's Lounge, it should be noted here, was in those days a watering place favored by a social set called "the sweatshirt crowd." It occupied an ancient and dingy adobe on Palace Avenue a short block from Burro Alley. Some months after the evening here described, its entire west wall collapsed in a cloud of red dust, crushing the furnishings under tons of adobe blocks and tarpaper roofing—happily while the premises were vacant. Had the wall fallen on Saturday night, the City of the Holy Faith would have lost the flower of its manhood and most of its journalists as well. Frank and his crew moved next door into the new Palace Bar following the collapse, but his old clientele was never at ease amid the rococo comforts and cleanliness offered here, the new place soon became infested with lawyers, and the old debating society dispersed.

But on the night in question, Xywanda's remark stimulated a notable debate. Some agreed that New York was, in fact, more impressive than Santa Fe and that Xywanda had cause for disgruntlement. Another faction defended Santa Fe. The former noted that New York is larger and considerably taller (if memory serves, the point was made that only two Santa Fe buildings were high enough to offer the disconsolate any hope for a successful suicide leap) and much more lively. The latter countered that while the Empire State Building was indeed 98 stories taller than the Bokum Building, the view from the top of the Bokum was longer—because one atop the Empire was lucky if he could see—through the smog—the traffic jam at Macy's directly below. The former argued that Santa Fe hadn't managed in 350 years to rid itself of prairie dogs, and hadn't managed to secure railroad service even from the railroad which bears its name, and tended to misspell the names of streets on official signs, and was probably the largest city this side of New Guinea which still drank unfiltered lake water—its citizenry consoled by the hope that the algae which turns tap water green in the summer may contain vitamins.

The argument raged until the 2 a.m. closing time and covered a multitude of points of difference. New

York is younger and looks to the sea. Santa Fe is old and looks to the mountains. New York's voice is the busy roar of traffic. Santa Fe hears the wind in the cottonwoods and the bells of St. Catherine's Indian School. Even the birds were drawn into it (Santa Fe being overrun with bird-watchers). It was said that New York pigeons live nervously under the shadow of the falcons which roost in the cliffs of the city while Santa Fe pigeons lead sedentary lives protected by its squadrons of hawk-hating ravens. Xywanda listened alertly to all of this—his discontent turning to curiosity. No consensus was ever reached. Xywanda was left to find his own answer. And he did.

Six Saturdays later, Mr. Xywanda sat in the same bar. He had exchanged his workaday fez for a more formal camelskin model, since this was to be his going-away party.

It developed as parties tended to develop at Frank's. Mr. Xywanda proposed a toast to Free Nigeria, the city editor offered a drink to the Confusion of the Boers, Xywanda raised a glass to Jomo Kenyatta, the police reporter drank to the fertility of Ibo cattle. And so it went until, finally, Xywanda declared that all present should drain a glass—at his expense—to Santa Fe.

He knew now, he told us, why the Department of State had sent him to our city. He would tell us, but first he wanted us to know how he had reached his conclusion. He had noticed, he said, that drivers sometimes traveled north on Cienega Street, although the signs indicate it is a one-way thoroughfare for southbound traffic only. He had remembered that in New York all drivers had moved in the same direction on one-way streets and he had been told those doing otherwise would be dealt with severely. He had asked about this Santa Fe custom and had learned that here the driver is expected to proceed in the direction indicated by the arrow unless he believes his reason for doing otherwise is sufficient to risk being

TONY HILLERMAN, chairman of the University of New Mexico's Journalism Department, is author of three mystery novels, *The Blessing Way*, *Fly on the Wall* and *Dance Hall of the Dead* and a juvenile, *The Boy Who Made Dragonfly*. The events described in "The Conversion of Cletus Cyprian Xywanda" took place while Hillerman was editor of the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. The article is a chapter in a volume of Hillerman whimsy, *The Great Taos Bank Robbery and Other Indian Country Affairs*, being published this fall by the UNM Press at \$5.95. The bank robbery vignette and three other chapters also have appeared, in whole or part, in *New Mexico*: on Navajoland, the discovery of the "Folsom Man" site by a black scholar-cowboy and the historic Las Trampas church and village.

caught and scolded by the police. The danger of a head-on collision, he was told, was slight since motorists here enter one-way streets with full knowledge that they meet a non-conformist.

And then, Mr. Xywanda continued, there was the matter of his tribal robes. In New York, these had drawn attention, and some rude questioning about his place of origin.

"But in Santa Fe, people give me these." Mr. Xywanda reached under his white, red, yellow, green and magenta robe into the breast pocket of his business suit, extracted a collection of political campaign cards and fanned them on the table. They solicited his vote for the Republican nominees for sheriff, county clerk, land commissioner and governor and the Democratic candidates for 11 offices at stake in the forthcoming November elections. "They think I am a citizen," Mr. Xywanda said. "They see my robes but they think I am a Santa Fean." Mr. Xywanda looked at us to assure himself that we understood the implications of this. A less courteous man might have noted that Santa Feans are sometimes eccentric in their dress.

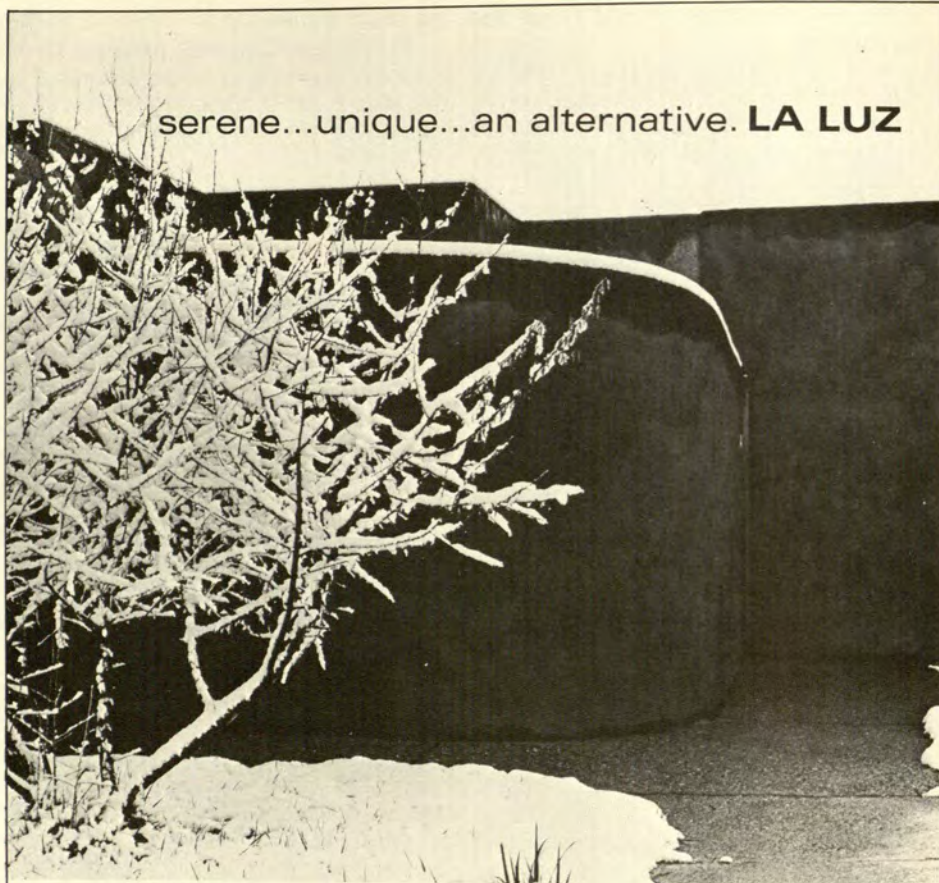
"There is also the man who pretends to be a policeman," Xywanda said. He referred to an elderly citizen who had purchased a police cap and whistle and who, when the weather was mild, sometimes directed traffic on the Plaza. Santa Feans were aware that this status was unofficial and since the whistle tooting and arm waving caused confusion only among tourists, the hobby was considered harmless.

"In New York," Xywanda said, "I think they would not let that man act like a policeman." He waited the polite moment for any sign of disagreement, received none, and went on.

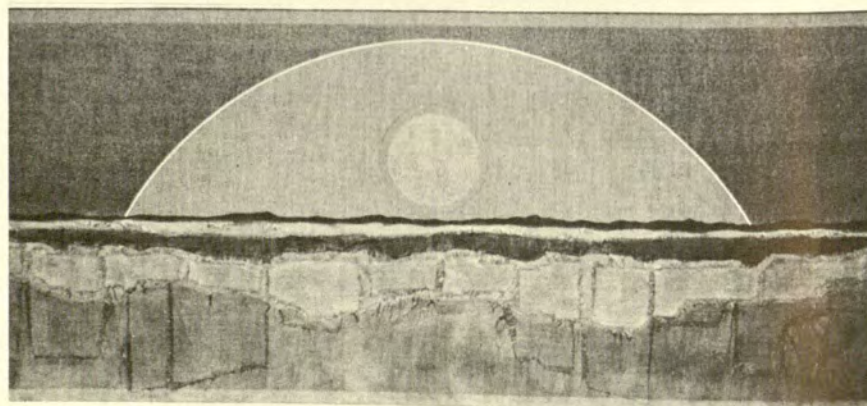
"Tomorrow I go back to New York and I see the people around me all with three buttons on the front of the coat and the middle button buttoned, and all walking on the proper side of the sidewalk and waiting when the street signal says wait and not smoking when the sign is prohibitive and I will say to the man at the U.S. Information Agency there that in New York society transcends and the man is submerged within it. But Santa Fe . . ." Here Xywanda paused, with the talent of the natural-born talker, for the moment of suspense to underline his point.

"But Santa Fe celebrates the individual!"

And that is exactly it. Santa Fe celebrates the individual.



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