

Presbyterians in the Jemez

By Tom Swetnam

The oldest church in Jemez Springs is the Mission de San Jose at Gúsewa, now in ruins, built between 1621 and 1626 (Jemez Historic Site). Due to Navajo, Ute, and Apache raiding this Catholic church was probably abandoned by the Franciscan friars before 1650. The next oldest church in Jemez Springs is the Presbyterian church, dedicated in 1881. Last year was its 140th year anniversary. How did a Protestant church establish here in this remote village of long-time Spanish and Catholic origins? There are multiple historical reasons.

Following the Civil War, Presbyterian missionaries began to establish churches and mission schools in towns and small villages in New Mexico. The Menaul School in Albuquerque, for example, was a leader in the Presbyterian mission school movement in New Mexico. Many New Mexicans had fought for the Union during the War, and by the 1870s some of their children had been educated in Presbyterian mission schools in New Mexico, or in the East where they were exposed to Protestantism. Their education included access to Spanish and English-translated versions of the Bible they could read. These changes prompted some families to leave the Catholic Church and join the Presbyterians, at least temporarily.

Another reason for the spread of Presbyterianism in New Mexico was a Catholic schism that developed after the Americans arrived in 1846. Conflicts arose between native, New Mexico-born Catholic priests and recently appointed prelates and priests from France. In 1851, the new Bishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy (later Archbishop) began trying to suppress the Penitentes, and he imposed mandatory tithing and other unpopular policies. Willa Cather portrays aspects of the Catholic schism in her famous novel "Death Comes for the Archbishop." In Cather's fictionalized account Lamy and the French priests he appointed are portrayed favorably, but a character named "Padre Martinez" of Taos is thoroughly corrupt. In reality, the

French Archbishop and his appointees were often condescending and offensive in their attitudes towards old Spanish-New Mexico culture. And the actual Father Antonio José Martínez of Taos was a visionary reformer. It is true that Padre Martinez was a controversial character for decades in New Mexico politics, but he was also a champion of the Penitente Brotherhood, an advocate of co-education, and he was progressive in other ways that defied Lamy's orders and policies. For his troubles, he was excommunicated by Lamy. After Padre Martinez died, one of his sons (natural from before he was ordained, or adopted is not known), joined the Presbyterians in Taos and was made an Elder in 1872.

Several Presbyterian missionaries and families found their way to the Jemez Valley in the 1870s to 1890s. The Reverend John Milton Shields, his wife Emily, and their two sons traveled from Pennsylvania to Jemez Pueblo in the spring of 1878. Rev. Shields was a Civil War veteran and a medical doctor. The people of Jemez Pueblo had suffered greatly from a smallpox epidemic during the 1870s, and so a physician was welcomed. Emily died at Jemez of an illness in November 1878. Rev. Shields then married another missionary from Pennsylvania, Isabella Leech, who had arrived at Jemez in 1879; they had eight children from that marriage.

In 1881, Francisco Perea moved with his large family to Jemez Springs, where he managed the newly built Stone Hotel; that building is now part of the Bodhi Mandala compound. He was also the village postmaster from 1894 to 1905. Francisco's connection to the Presbyterians was personal and familial: he and his immediate family were Presbyterians, and his brother José Ynez Perea was the first ordained Presbyterian minister of Spanish descent in New Mexico. José Ynez was involved in establishing the Jemez Pueblo mission with Rev. Shields in 1878, and in the building and dedication of the church and mission school in Jemez Springs in 1881.

Francisco Perea, you might

recall from previous articles in this space, was a son of a wealthy and politically influential family of Bernalillo. He had been a Union Army Colonel in the Civil War, a Territorial Representative in Washington DC, and a friend of Abraham Lincoln. The Stone Hotel and Bathhouse in Jemez Springs were built and owned by Mariano S. Otero, a wealthy businessman, sheep rancher, and politician. Francisco's uncle, José Leandro Perea Sr., owned a mortgage on the Baca Location in 1875, and by 1899 Mariano Otero had purchased the entire "Baca" (these lands are now the Valles Caldera National Preserve.) The Otero and Perea families were connected by both business and marriage; Francisco's first wife, Dolores, was Mariano's sister, and Mariano had married a Perea cousin. The Oteros also lived for a while in Jemez Springs after 1882. Their house

was probably the original part of the building now owned by Jemez Pueblo that was occupied after 1947 by an order of Catholic nuns, the "Handmaids of the Precious Blood."

Another Presbyterian missionary from Pennsylvania, Mary Stright, arrived in 1880 to assist in the mission at Jemez Pueblo, and at the new church and school in Jemez Springs. She married the long-time, Jemez Pueblo government agent John Miller, and they moved to Jemez Springs where they built a large home across the road from the old Catholic church ruins at Gúsewa. Rev. Shields and his family also moved to Jemez Springs and were next-door neighbors to the Millers. One of the Shields' daughters, Helen, married John Amos Adams, who was a surveyor for the US. Forest Service in the early 1900s. The Shields/Adams descendants have

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owned homes in the Valley since then.

A long-time Presbyterian family with descendants still living in the Jemez Mountains are the Fentons. The Reverend Elijah Maclean Fenton, Sr. arrived in 1894 from Missouri. He and his wife Jessi owned land in Jemez Springs, but their main homestead was on the Rio Cebolla, near what is now Fenton Lake. They built a sturdy stone-walled house and raised a family there. Rev. Fenton presided at the Presbyterian church in Jemez Springs on many occasions. Their son E. M. (Mac) Fenton, Jr. was well known in the Valley in later years, as well as Mac's daughter, the late Mary Fenton Caldwell, and other descendants.

Also living on the Rio Cebolla were Juan and Juliana Sandoval and family. Juan and Juliana were baptized as Presbyterians in 1880, with Rev. Shields presiding, and José Ynez Perea was also present at the ceremony. Juliana's father and mother, Jose Francisco Archuleta and Maria Viviana Montoya Archuleta, were confirmed Presbyterians living in Jemez Springs. They donated the property that the Presbyterian church and cemetery are located on. Their son, and Juliana's brother, Emeterio ("Miterio") Archuleta was an Elder in the church. He was also a neighbor of the Millers and the Shields, on the lands south of Soda Dam to the old mission church ruins. Many of the Archuleta descendants live in Jemez Springs today.

The most colorful descriptions of people and places in the Valley during the 1870s and 1903 comes from Richard Baxter Townshend's "Tenderfoot Books." In 1903 Townshend visited the Millers, Pereas, and Archuletas in Jemez Springs. And at their invitation, he visited the Fentons on the Rio Cebolla. He also visited with the Sandovals

on that trip and took photographs. I will summarize Townshend's story of his Rio Cebolla visit with some of his photos in a future article.

The following are excerpts (in italics) from Townshend's 1903 "Letters from Jemez Hot Springs," written to his wife Dorothea, back in England. Townshend's Victorian Era, British-Anglo prejudices and predilections are evident in parts of his letters. He describes his impressions of the Presbyterians of the Jemez Hot Springs congregation. He expresses surprise at how much things have changed in the Valley since he was here as an adventurous young man in the wild west days of the 1870s. These feelings are familiar to those of us who lived here long ago in our youth, went away and then returned -- a mixture of nostalgia for the old and wonder at the new. As the novelist Thomas Wolfe said, "You can't go home again."

"When I had written my last to you about the old church and the San Diego Cañon, I went down with John to post it, and found that the post-master was at prayer-meeting! It seems they have a Presbyterian church here, and they use it, too, and several Mexicans have joined. Well, we turned into a store, and John smoked, and we chatted for an hour or so with the storekeeper and various Mexicans, and then sallied forth as prayers were over. And when I got into the post office who was the post-master but Colonel Francisco Perea! The man who said, 'Wait!,' the cousin [nephew?] who was opposed to Jose Leandro. He is poor! and lives here humbly with his family. He is old and dim-sighted, and it was only with some difficulty that he found your letter for me. But he knew me at once, and referred to old times, and I must go down and have a chat with him. It seems

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the Perea's have all lost their money somehow and gone scattered. --Wonderful. I'll find out more and tell you if I can get anything interesting. I suppose it is partly the influx of American competition.

Next day we all walked to the Presbyterian church in the blazing sun. Oh, I don't know how to express things at all. Here where I was a member of that somewhat semi-civilized community we have two churches, one Roman Catholic, one Presbyterian! And who are the Presbyterian elders? Colonel Francisco Perea (who said 'Wait!'), and Miterio Archuleta who helped me drive those steers to Santa Fe, and as a gay young spark then. I sat in a chair in a little white-washed barn sort of place, and Miterio came and gave me a hymn book in Spanish, and Mrs. Miller played the wheezy harmonium, and we made a joyful noise.

Well, I need not say much more. It used to be the Dark Ages. Flagellants, witches, and murderers! And now the hymn and old Dr.[Shields] preaching. It would take a Hardy to give the curious irony of it. I guess it had to be. I guess it's for the best. Yet if I could express the change in words, I'd make folks feel something!

I sat in chapel alongside Mrs. Miterio, old now, one-toothed, grizzled, parchment face. I remember her young, charming; would she say these days are better than those? Her face was non-committal; but she came all right to church, and her children and grandchildren. Valgame Dios! If I don't feel as if I was standing on my head!

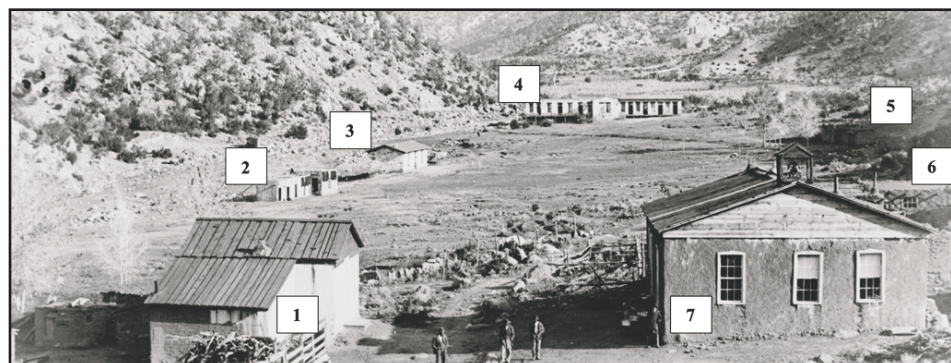
And John sat in front of me, shaved, and in clean shirt and a black coat, and the young Mexican population around looked bored or tolerant, or whichever it is, including two stalwart sons of Juan Sandoval. I tell you I thought things. For we didn't go to church much here thirty years ago-you'd see the young fellows put for the hills when the padre came; and now I wonder to myself, are the old men and the young men two nations? For it feels as if they were. Or does it mean that there is a real change and this little Dr. [Shields], grizzle-bearded, mild, spectacled sixty, who came out as a medical missionary and teacher to Jemez in 1878, talking bad Spanish through his nose about 'La Palabra de Dios,' represents a winning force? For all things here seem changed.

The men who were the well-to-do men of the Cañon de Jemez when I was here are mostly poor now. They had sheep on shares from the 'ricos' of the Rio Grande

and seemed to be doing well. Then John tells me there came a year when the pasture was bad in the low country where they used to winter their flocks while there was still good grazing in the mountains. And they moved up their flocks earlier than usual, about the beginning of April. Perhaps 100,000 sheep went in. And then the snow came down for three days and nights and lay three or four feet deep on the level and the sheep were smothered wholesale. Men who went in with 4,000 sheep came out with 1,400, and lucky at that. Those that survived barely paid back the original stocks to the 'ricos,' the great flock-masters, and these farmers who had most of them debts to pay and were liable for the balance if their herd did not fill the original bill, had to sell their little bits of land to clear themselves. So, it comes that when I ask after this man or the other, Andres Archuleta, Christoval Cassados, Clemente Cassados and even Juan Trujillo, who seemed himself to be even as one of the 'ricos,' I hear, 'Oh busted,' 'Living very poor in Nacimiento [Cuba],' 'Living in Albuquerque,' and the like...

But as for me, who thought this 'rincon,' this most out-of-the-way part of the world, would remain as it was? I can only say it makes me feel topsy-turvy. And that Presbyterian service this morning has put the finishing touch on it. ...

I like to see the old mountains again, though they are changed, for the washing of the rains has altered the valleys so that I would hardly have known them again. But still the air is there and the forest. But for me who remembers other things it's all different. For instance, poor old [Jose Francisco] Archuleta! How things have changed since I knew him! [I] Think of him in his lusty youth, running over these mountains in moccasins, bow and quiver at his back, slaying the wild deer and even mountain lions with his arrows... he killed four lions one day with arrows! Aye, and Navajos, too! And then in a mountain he found his two brave boys, waylaid, and killed by the Navajos in turn, and wept so that he went blind, and his horse brought him home. And then in his old age came the new days, and he saw the railway, of which he had only heard by report, and the coming of the Americans. Yes, I'd like to have seen him again, but I dare say he is better sleeping in quiet earth. But he was a grand old hunter, warrior, scout of the mountains, a true-bred son of the Conquistadores. Peace to his ashes."



View looking north in Jemez Springs in 1884. 1. Home of James Smith and Calletana Archuleta Smith (and previously the home of José Francisco Archuleta and Maria Viviana Montoya Archuleta); 2. Unknown home; 3. Otero Bathhouse; 4. Otero Stone Hotel; 5. Unknown home; 6. Home of Francisco Perea and his 2nd wife, Gabriela Montoya Perea (now the location of the Los Ojos Bar); 7. Presbyterian Church. In the far distance, the bell tower of the Mission de San Jose at Giusewa (Jemez Historic Site) is just visible. (The Canon of San Diego, Jemez Hot Springs / E.A. Bass, photographer. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95504638/>)

I, Connie Carroll, Wellness Counsellor, am very excited to be coming into Jemez Springs on the 3rd of November for a limited time to offer Quantum Biofeedback. Treatments can be face to face or remote. I am based in the south of England but am fortunate to have some time in my beloved New Mexico.

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Connie Carroll
Wellness Counsellor
Quantum Biofeedback Practitioner
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