



FIESTA MELODRAMA

Directed by Robyn Rikoon and Andy Primm | Produced by Santa Fe Playhouse

THE GRAND ERECTION

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain and a new era began. Under Spanish rule, foreigners were forbidden from settling in New Spain, but the opening of the Santa Fe Trail brought an influx of Americans, miners, merchants, furriers, and traders. Meanwhile the United States was growing ever larger, and in 1846 troops were sent into Mexican territory, ostensibly with an offer to purchase more land for the US. This incursion triggered the start of the Mexican-American War, which lasted almost two years and ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, granting the US acquisition of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and of course New Mexico.

Our heroes arrive in the past just after the US capture of Santa Fe. In August of 1846, General Stephen Kearny marched on Santa Fe with over 1500 men. Around 4000 armed New Mexican citizens assembled in Apache Canyon ready to fight, but before the Americans arrived Governor Manuel Armijo told his men that those who wished to return home could do so. Some resisted the surrender, insisting they stay and defend their country, and in response Armijo aimed cannons at them and ordered them to stand down. Kearny marched into town, removed the flag of New Mexico (which he mistook for the national flag of Mexico) and hoisted the US flag above the plaza. Less than a week later, he left for California to continue the war, but not before he established the Kearny Code, based off a territorial document he happened to have in his saddlebags.

The circumstances around this capture of Santa Fe, in which “not a single shot was fired,” are hazy. Accounts differ, with Americans accounts alleging Armijo was party to bribery, private backroom deals, or plain cowardice. Historian Howard Roberts Lamar wrote: “As he paced the puncheon floors of the low adobe Palace of the Governors, Armijo himself was in a state of painful irresolution. The able but notoriously venal governor felt obliged to resist Kearny; yet he was also a businessman whose own fortune had been made from the Santa Fe trade” (60). Some report that he had spoken to friends, merchants and politicians, who convinced him that a fight against the United States was folly. As under the Spanish crown, the Mexican central government simply didn’t have the time or resources to support the citizens or infrastructure of New Mexico.

continued

142 E. De Vargas Street, Santa Fe, NM | 505.988.4262 | playhouse@santafeplayhouse.org



FIESTA MELODRAMA

Directed by Robyn Rikoon and Andy Primm | Produced by Santa Fe Playhouse

According to some historians, many New Mexican citizens were ambivalent about the US takeover. Life goes on. The culture clash, however, was undeniable. Take, for example, Santa Fe legend Doña María Gertrudis Barceló (“La Tules”). She was more than a barmaid; she was a successful frontier businesswoman, an accomplished gambler, antithetical to American views of a woman’s role in society. When she died she left a remarkable fortune of \$10,000 and multiple houses. Americans attributed her success to “loose habits” and “unbridled passions,” accused her of prostitution, and saw her business acumen as “degeneracy.” The accounts of her appearance are wildly different, some describing her as a wizened hag with false teeth and a wig, some as a remarkable beauty. One thing is true: Barceló knew how to adapt. She assisted the invading US army and even loaned them money to continue their occupation. She knew a winning hand when she saw one.

After the American annexation, New Mexico was ruled by an interim military government. In 1850 it became a territory, frequently vying for statehood in the following years and generally ignored by Washington, D.C. That decade, there were multiple petitions to divide New Mexico and Arizona north by south, spurned by “friction between Anglo settlements in Arizona and the predominantly Hispanic ones in New Mexico.” When the Civil War broke out in 1861, sick of being ignored by both governments, southern New Mexico declared itself Arizona, a Confederate state (which it remained until 1865).

The Civil War came to New Mexico in 1862, at Glorieta Pass, sometimes called “the Gettysburg of the West.” It’s listed as one of the ten most influential battles of the war. Union forces from Colorado met Confederates from Texas in Apache Canyon. The Confederacy won the two-day battle, but Union forces destroyed the rebels’ supply train and forced their retreat, securing New Mexico for the Union.

Further Reading

Lamar, Howard Roberts. *The Far Southwest: A Territorial History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970.

Ruíz, Vicki; Virginia Sánchez Korrol. *Latinas in the United States : a historical encyclopedia*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2006.

-Isabel Madley, Dramaturg

142 E. De Vargas Street, Santa Fe, NM | 505.988.4262 | playhouse@santafeplayhouse.org