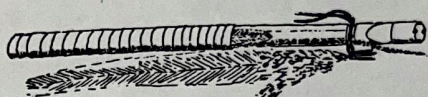


Brothers on the Fault Line

It is pitiful to view this immense area and the many ignorant people who inhabit those vast regions, all without knowledge of the Blood of Christ or of His Holy Faith.¹

—GASPAR PEREZ DE VILLAGRÁ, 1610



A MAJOR, THOUGH long dormant, geologic fault runs through the high country from Pecos in the south as far north as Picuris. Arrow-straight, it cracks the mountain bedrock for more than thirty-eight miles, and in the light of history, the fact that the fault connects those two particular places makes a bitter irony. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as both pueblos were pushed to the edge of oblivion, many of the people of both Pecos and Picuris must have felt that the world had indeed been rent by a giant crack and that they were falling into it.

The fate of the two pueblos was tied to the mountains. Each occupied a favored geographic position, a gap through the mountains that placed it at the nexus of the wild, buffalo-filled plains and the settled, agricultural Rio Grande Valley. There were few such gaps, and so the pueblos that controlled them were natural trading centers. Pecos, especially, grew rich from the lively exchange of Pueblo pottery and corn for the hides, meat, and tallow brought in by Plains Apaches.² The double exposure of the frontier pueblos, however, could turn to double liability as the pressures of both worlds bore down upon them. Caught between the raiding of plains nomads and the harsh hand of Spanish rule, the frontier pueblos struggled to survive, and they did not always succeed.

The balance they had achieved with their environment prior to the arrival of the Spanish now slipped out of their control. Spanish horses in the possession of the plains tribes gave the pueblos' enemies a tactical advantage. European diseases, against which they were biologically defenseless, decimated their populations.³ During the seventeenth century the Tompiro pueblos, which lay south of the Sangres on the actual plains, perished entirely; Galisteo, also on the frontier, was abandoned twice during the eighteenth century, the last time for good; and Pecos, once mighty, was reduced to a band of seventeen refugees who trudged away from the ruined pueblo in 1838, never to return. Picuris, which also was abandoned for a time, barely survived the years of tumult, and of all the pueblos of the eastern frontier only Taos, which also guarded a mountain pass of importance, endured the first two centuries of European occupation with anything like its original strength and vitality.

At the time of the Spanish Entrada in 1540 Pecos and Picuris were unsurpassed in the Pueblo world for their power and size.⁴ Their buildings were four and five stories tall, as Taos is today; each boasted a population of nearly two thousand. Picuris lay in a mountain valley at the junction of two rivers, one of which led to a notch in the mountain divide that overlooked the splendid Mora Valley and the plains beyond. This pass, like the one at Taos, was steep, rugged, and often impassable because of winter snows, yet it afforded the Picuris and their trading partners a freedom of movement that most other pueblos lacked. The easiest passage to the plains, however, and that which connected most directly to the Spanish capital at Santa Fe, lay through Pecos. This pueblo perched atop a small mesa between the foot of the Sangres and the imposing, square-edged bulk of Glorieta or Rowe Mesa. (The mesa is so big, it is known by different names depending on the vantage from which it is viewed.) That the location was a strategic one has been attested by American roads as well as Spanish and Indian ones. The Santa Fe Trail passed within sight of the pueblo, and its ruts may still be traced across the small plain where trading parties of Apaches used to camp. The first railroad to enter New Mexico passed by the pueblo too, near enough that its proprietors erected a billboard to promote the by-then abandoned ruins as a tourist attraction.⁵

Today there is little at either Picuris, a struggling community of about a hundred people, or at Pecos, now only a ruin in the care of the National Park Service, to suggest how vital and grand those places

Mexican soil, claiming the entirety of the new land in the names of his Spanish King, his Catholic Pope, and his Christian God, all of whom belonged to a space and time quite outside the Pueblo cosmos. The fate of Coronado and his small army is a dramatic lesson in the limits to the power of positive thinking. So convinced were they that great wealth lay in the northern wilderness that even after the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola turned out to be the mud and stone villages of Zuni, and even after the villages of the Rio Grande Valley proved to be equally destitute, Coronado and his men continued to chase their illusions across the buffalo plains to the squalid grass huts of the Wichita Indians in central Kansas.⁶ The image of these fierce soldiers of cross and crown riding into the treeless plains, accepting the counsel of treacherous guides, and possessing no maps or proof of any kind that the object of their search existed, except of course, for such evidence as they invented to convince themselves—it is an image of folly surpassing anything Don Quixote ever fantasized, and yet it is also an image full of serious meaning for the history of New Mexico. Avarice may account for the ultimate failure of the Coronado expedition, but avarice alone cannot explain its achievements. Coronado and his followers were proud men of a proud civilization, and they approached the task of conquest with a sense of cultural and religious mission. As much as anything, it was their abiding faith in their own greatness that sustained them in their extraordinary exploits, and many of those who followed them to New Mexico would possess that faith in equal measure.

Although Coronado found no golden cities, and the half dozen or so expeditions, authorized and unauthorized, that followed him ended in similar failure, the simple fact that the natives of the region lived in towns, even small and labyrinthine ones, indicated to the Spanish that the northern land possessed the potential both for wealth and for the spread of Spanish civilization. Quite unlike the half-naked Chichimecs who harassed Mexico's northern frontier, the Pueblos were *gente vestida*, clothed people:

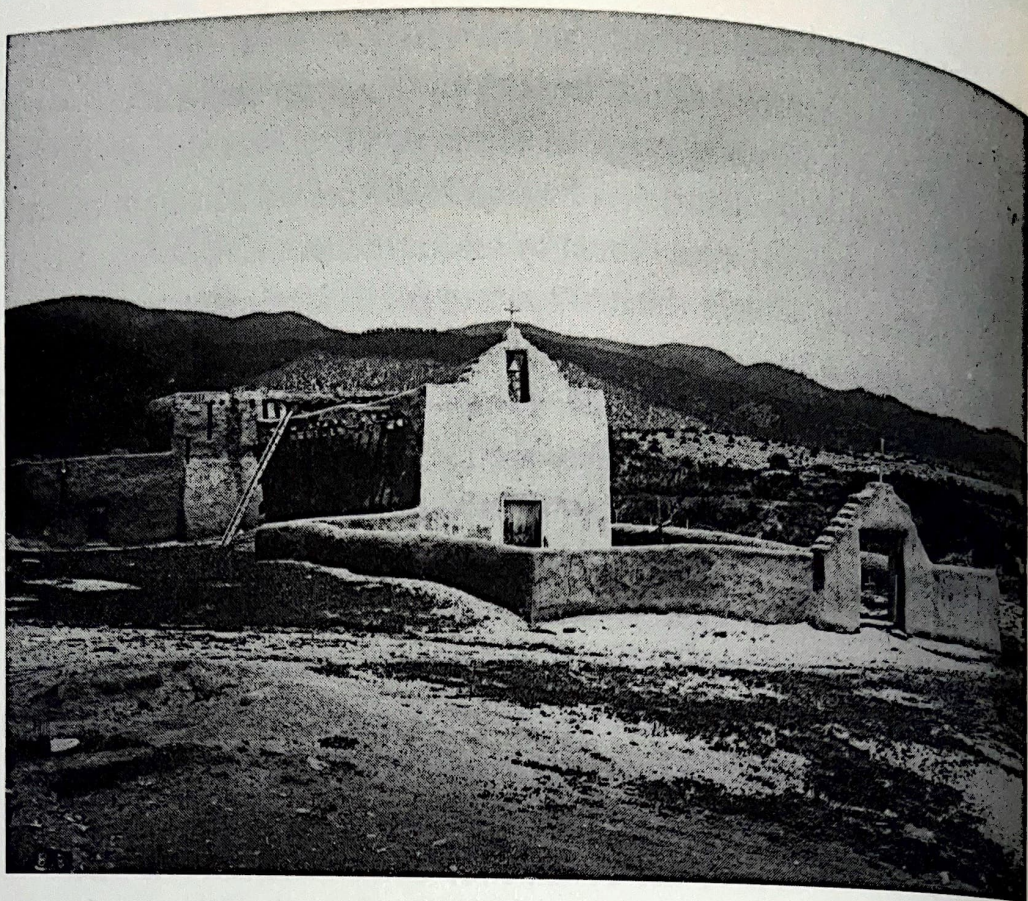
Most if not all the men wore cotton blankets and on top of these a buffalo hide. Some covered their privy parts with small cloths, very elegant and finely worked. The women wore . . . turkey-feather cloaks and many other novel things—all of which for barbarians is remarkable.⁷

The existence of these remarkable barbarians took on special importance as the focus of the Spanish frontier shifted from conquest to mineral development. Finding no great cities north of the former Aztec empire, the Spanish sought riches instead in the ores of Mexico's mountains and undertook to extract them by means of Indian labor. Silver-rich Zacatecas, in 1548, became the first town of the new mining frontier, and others including Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí soon followed. Development of the mines was hampered, however, by the intractability of the wild Chichimec Indians.⁸ The more settled Indians of New Mexico, by contrast, promised greater productivity, and the abundance of mountains in the far north seemed a guarantee that plenty of ore might be found.

One of those who thought so was Don Juan de Oñate, who grew up on the northern Mexican frontier and was thoroughly familiar with mining, and also with the associated industries of slaving and stock raising. In hopes of building a lucrative new frontier in New Mexico he brought the first permanent Spanish colony north at his own expense in 1598 and settled it at the confluence of the Chama and the Rio Grande. Unfortunately, however, Oñate's colonists found no mines or riches of any kind. Instead they staved off starvation only by seizing the food stores of their Tewa neighbors. Within six months of the founding of the colony, rebellion broke out at Acoma, and Oñate responded to it with the utmost savagery, slaughtering scores of Acoma people and imposing on the survivors a punishment of amputation and slavery. The affairs of Spain's new northern outpost could not have begun less auspiciously, and the resolve of the colonists began to weaken.

Conditions grew so bad that many of the colonists talked of desertion, which is what, in fact, their unauthorized return to Mexico would have been. Unlike pioneers on the Anglo-American frontier, the Spanish colonists were not free to withdraw. By law they owed Oñate the same obedience a soldier owes his general. But they were hungry, their hopes for riches and glory were dashed, and they had no prospects, save that the undisguised hatred of the Indians promised further bloodshed. In 1601 while Oñate hunted treasure on the buffalo plains, a majority of the colonists fled down the Rio Grande toward home.⁹

Following the mass exodus of the colonists, the effort to colonize New Mexico probably should have been abandoned, and it would have been except that the Franciscan missionaries Oñate had taken to New Mexico were loath to give up so immense a territory that they alone



Mission, Picuris Pueblo. Photo by Adam Clark Vroman, 1899. Courtesy of Museum of New Mexico.

held the right to evangelize. Exaggerating their actual accomplishments at least tenfold, the Franciscans claimed to have baptized more than seven thousand heathens among the Pueblos.¹⁰ They entreated the Crown not to turn its back on these converts, and the Crown granted their wish. His majesty Philip III of Spain ordered that the colonization of New Mexico continue, even at royal expense. Oñate was recalled and his proprietary charter revoked.¹¹ Officious Don Pedro de Peralta rode north to assume the newly royal governorship of the foundering colony.

Peralta made his headquarters a respectful distance from the powerful Tewa pueblos of the Española Valley in a more peaceful and defensible location hard against the foot of the Sangres. Here he founded a new capital for New Mexico, la villa de Santa Fe. The Franciscans, meanwhile, established their headquarters twenty miles from the city of Holy Faith, at Santo Domingo Pueblo, and the physical separation of the two centers of authority was indicative of the grave divergence of affection and purpose that existed between the Two Majesties, the Pope and the King of Spain, who jointly ruled New Mexico. For seventy years,

until the successful rebellion of the Pueblos in 1680, the Franciscans and the colony's civil authorities struggled incessantly with each other. Peralta himself was excommunicated twice and ultimately imprisoned for his opposition to the friars.¹²

The conflict between church and state, which frequently verged on civil war, had its source in the colony's poverty. New Mexico possessed only one resource of any value, and that was the energy of its native people. Both the Franciscans, whose lofty aspirations included the building of innumerable churches, chapels, and other mission facilities, and the various governors and their lieutenants, who had come to New Mexico to enrich themselves, desired to exploit it. The resultant burden of work on the Pueblos was immense, as the experience of Pecos Pueblo attests. Between 1621 and 1625 the natives there were compelled to build a monumental fortress of a church, 40 feet wide, 40 feet high, and 145 feet long. Its walls, which were reinforced with massive buttresses, stood on 9-foot-wide foundations and consumed an astronomical 300,000 adobe bricks, all of which were made by the beleaguered natives. When finished, the church was a magnificent, if bizarre, architectural achievement: "a sixteenth century Mexican fortress-church in the medieval tradition, rendered in adobe at the ends of the earth."¹³

In spite of their exhaustion from building the church, the Pecos were also obliged to pay exorbitant tribute to the civil authorities. Twice a year a valuable haul of hides, tanned skins, piñon nuts, and native cotton weavings was extorted from the natives, much of it later shipped south to Chihuahua, where it sold for a profitable sum.¹⁴ The natives scarcely had time to plant and cultivate their corn, but in addition to the economic hardships imposed by the Spanish, the Pecos and other Pueblos also had to bear the repression of their traditional religion. In the Pueblo world view there was no heaven and no hell. Life was sanctioned and understood as focusing entirely on its present materialization—on community, on the weather, on crops, on successes of love, health, and war. If these un-Christian understandings were but dimly perceived by the friars, the feathers and dances and stone idols that went with them were not. With the same intolerance that had led their predecessors to demolish the temples of the Aztecs, the New Mexico Franciscans raided kivas, forbade ceremonial dances, destroyed sacred masks and fetishes, and required—under threat of corporal punishment—regular observance of the Christian sacraments.¹⁵

The Franciscans were checked in their zeal only by the studied uncooperation of the Spanish governors of New Mexico and by the resistance of the Pueblos themselves. Picuris was especially troublesome. Because of sustained hostility to the Franciscan stationed at the pueblo, including several attempts on his life, the Picuris mission was abandoned for about four years beginning in 1624. At that time Fray Alonso de Benavides, the *custos* (superior) of the New Mexico Franciscans, vented his frustration with the Picuris by labeling them "the most indomitable and treacherous people of this whole kingdom."¹⁶ The Picuris, however, appear to have had some competition in that department, for in 1632 the Hopis killed the missionary stationed with them, and seven years later the Taos Indians killed theirs.

Full-scale revolution was a real possibility in New Mexico throughout the seventeenth century, but while the Spanish representatives of church and state were tireless in blaming each other for the colony's instability, neither side undertook to find a peaceful solution. Instead the military forces of the colony kept the Pueblos in line by responding to rebellious behavior with swift and sanguinary punishment. Twenty-nine suspected rebels were hanged in Jemez Pueblo in 1647, and three years later, after an abortive revolt by the Jemez, Keres, and southern Tiwa, nine more incorrigibles were hanged and many others sold into slavery. The Spanish position in New Mexico grew still more precarious when a terrible drought descended on the colony in 1666 and lasted five years. The colony ran so short of food that the Spanish were reduced to roasting and eating the hides that were the principal furnishings of their simple homes. The Pueblos, of course, fared much worse; hundreds of them "perished of hunger, lying dead along the roads, in the ravines, and in their hovels."¹⁷

The Pueblos reasonably interpreted the drought as a sign that the Spaniards' religion did not ensure the orderly and fruitful progression of the seasons as they believed theirs had done. Furthermore, the Spaniards' promises of military protection proved worthless; outlying Navajo and Apache bands, who lately had acquired use of the horse and who suffered equally from drought and food shortage, stepped up their attacks against the colony.

At last in 1680 the Pueblos achieved the unity that had long eluded them, and they rose up together and drove the 2,500 Spaniards of the colony back to old Mexico, killing some 400, including nearly all the Franciscans. Under the charismatic leadership of Popé, a medicine man



Pecos Mission ruins, September 3, 1880. These ruins are the remains of a church built in 1705 and subsequent years on the site of the much larger mission that the Pecos destroyed in 1680. Photo by George C. Bennett.
Courtesy of Museum of New Mexico.

from Ohkay Owingeh, the Pueblos methodically destroyed every church and hacienda, every remnant of Spanish culture in New Mexico. The great church at Pecos was sacked and put to the torch, and the colossal walls were thrown down brick by brick.

Aside from one abortive expedition in 1681, no effort was made to reconquer the lost territory for a dozen years. The Pueblos, meanwhile, remained loosely confederated, although old enmities gradually eroded the sense of brotherhood that the rebellion had produced. By the time Don Diego de Vargas headed north in 1692 to wrest New Mexico from Pueblo control, the rifts between the Pueblos were big enough for Vargas to march his army through.

At first virtually all the Pueblos submitted to Vargas peacefully, but their resistance increased as the process of recolonization proceeded. Vargas soon learned that the Pecos were his invaluable allies, as they repeatedly warned of plots against him and provided him with supplies and reinforcements. The Picuris, meanwhile, had returned to their "indomitable and treacherous" ways.

The Picuris rebelled in 1694 and avoided punishment by hiding in the mountains. They returned to their pueblo making peaceful protestations to the Spanish authorities, and then rebelled again in 1696, along with most of the other northern pueblos. Twenty-one colonists and five

missionaries were killed, but the revolt soon foundered for lack of support from Pecos and other pueblos. Vargas, at the head of an army that included many Indian auxiliaries, marched north to punish the rebels, and, expecting no mercy from him, the Picuris fled to the plains.

Vargas caught up with their rear guard somewhere east of the Mora Valley and succeeded in killing a number of men and capturing eighty-four women and children. The rest of the fugitive pueblo escaped, in company with Apache allies and friends, and Vargas returned to Santa Fe by way of Pecos through a driving, week-long blizzard. Once there, he divided the captives as slaves among the soldiers and colonists who had assisted him, noting that enslaving instead of killing them was an act of considerable compassion, considering "their desertion of our holy religion and their royal vassalage."¹⁸

The fate of the Picuris who escaped Vargas's punitive expedition is less well known. Some of them gradually filtered back to their mountain home on the Rio Pueblo, but the vast majority continued north and east across the plains to a place called El Cuartelejo, where they settled with a tribe of Apaches who lived in scattered rancherias. Apparently some of the Picuris refugees were unhappy with their new situation, for word repeatedly reached Santa Fe over the ensuing years that the Cuartelejo Apaches were using them cruelly and they wished to come home. As a result, in 1706 *Sargento mayor* Juan de Ulibarrí, the chief official of the Pecos district, led an expedition to El Cuartelejo, which lay in either western Kansas or east-central Colorado, to ransom the Picuris and bring them back.¹⁹ Ulibarrí's expedition added greatly to Spanish knowledge of the lands and tribes beyond the northeastern frontier, but only sixty-two Picuris returned with him to Santa Fe.²⁰ Presumably many others either were held by Apache groups Ulibarrí did not contact or preferred life on the plains to life under Spanish rule and elected to remain with the Apaches.

Forty years earlier Fray Agustín de Vetancurt had reported three thousand persons living at Picuris, but now with the addition of the refugees, the population of the pueblos was still less than four hundred.²¹ Even allowing for considerable exaggeration by Vetancurt, the decline is astonishing. Certainly European diseases had taken their toll (although the worst epidemic of the seventeenth century, which killed more than a tenth of all the Pueblos, took place in 1640, before the Vetancurt count).²² Certainly too, the bloodshed of the 1680 rebellion had reduced numbers somewhat, and so had the hardship and violence

of the flight to the plains, but none of the events of the period 1666–1706 seem adequate to account for so terrible a loss of population in terms of mortality alone.

Conditions in the Pueblo world during the late seventeenth century were so chaotic that several pueblos were utterly abandoned. The Tano inhabitants of Galisteo and San Marcos, for instance, moved en masse to well-watered valleys near Chimayó in the Santa Cruz Valley, although the Spanish later evicted them and forced them to resettle Galisteo.²³ At Picuris the stimulus to leave was probably both political and environmental. The Apaches' steadily increasing use of the mountains, combined with the demands of the pueblo's large population, probably taxed the plant and animal resources of the area surrounding Picuris, significantly reducing the carrying capacity of the land.²⁴ Archaeological evidence indicates that the material wealth of the pueblo, as measured by the size, number, and condition of its buildings, had already begun to decline by 1600. Many Picuris people, given the added impetus of Spanish oppression, may well have sought new lives in the company of neighboring mountain Apaches and their plains cousins at Cuartelejo.

A further reason for the decline of the pueblo may have been



Threshing with goats, Picuris Pueblo. Photo by Ed Andrews, ca. 1905. Courtesy of Museum of New Mexico.

psychological. The long close association of Picuris and other pueblos with the Apaches (and principally with the tribe the Spanish would soon begin to call Jicarilla) had led the nomadic Apaches to adopt an increasingly sedentary way of life that featured pottery making, irrigation agriculture, and semipermanent adobe dwellings.²⁵ At the same time, some of the individualism and independence of the Apaches may have rubbed off on the Picuris, eroding their inherited ethos of conformity to the group. Thus, the Picuris may have been disposed to turn their backs on their pueblo and to take up the life of horse-borne hunters. Whatever the case, Picuris Pueblo never regained its former strength and vigor. From fewer than 400 following the Ulibarrí mission, the population of the pueblo continued to dwindle to 223 in 1776, and to 122 in 1864.²⁶ Today the resident population of the pueblo remains low.

The decline of Pecos, the other fault-line pueblo, took longer to accomplish, but was just as steady. With its population already halved by the stresses of a century of colonization, Pecos consisted of only about a thousand souls when Ulibarrí led his sixty-two repatriated Picuris through the pueblo in 1706. Pecos then was badly divided. One faction favored the restoration of Spanish authority, probably in hopes that increased civil order would strengthen the pueblo's control over the westward diffusion of trade from the plains. Leaders of this group had saved many Spaniards from slaughter in the 1680 rebellion by warning the governor several days in advance of the uprising. Many other Pecos people, however, opposed the Spanish fervently and participated in the bloody siege of Santa Fe. Now that the Spanish were reasserting their colonial authority, the two Pecos factions struggled desperately with each other for control of the pueblo.²⁷ Ultimately the pro-Spanish faction prevailed, and the victors swiftly murdered or executed most of the leaders of the opposition. Those who escaped followed in the footsteps of the Picuris and went to live with the Apaches. The pueblo they left behind, though weaker than ever, soon emerged as the Spaniards' strongest and most willing military ally.

At the time of the Reconquest, Pecos was able to muster four hundred armed warriors. They were among the most experienced and proficient fighters in the colony, and Vargas and his successors, holding out the promise of booty, enlisted them to serve as auxiliaries in virtually every military campaign that was mounted in the province through the

next fifty years.²⁸ The constant fighting, of course, steadily depleted the numbers of the troop. Worse, however, was the strain of defending Pecos Pueblo itself.

A new and more deadly enemy, the Comanches, had begun to make their presence felt. Linguistically and culturally related to the Utes, they had migrated from the Great Basin to the northern plains, and thence, pressured by musket-armed Pawnees and attracted by Spanish horses and trade goods, they made their way south to New Mexico, appearing first in Taos about 1705.²⁹ The Comanches soon upset the balance of power in and around the colony. They drove the Cuartelejo Apaches from their rancherias south to the Texas plains, where they acquired a new identity as the Llanero branch of the Jicarilla tribe. Other Jicarillas, a mountain branch called Olleros, were so harried by the Comanches that by about 1730 they sought the protection of Spanish arms, relocating their rancherias to Pot Creek (Rito de Olla) between Picuris and Taos and in the Rio Grande Valley near Velarde.³⁰ These "tame" Apaches earned their keep by serving the Spanish as scouts and auxiliaries, and they became Hispanicized to the extent that they sometimes appeared as plaintiffs before the Spanish courts.³¹

For the Pecos the advent of the Comanches was doubly unfortunate. First, their Apache trading partners were scattered in every direction. Second, for reasons that today are poorly understood but that may have had to do with the pueblo's long-standing friendship for the Apaches, several large Comanche bands resolved to wreak unending vengeance on Pecos and destroy it utterly. They nearly succeeded.

In the days before the horse came to New Mexico, Pecos had been militarily superior to its challengers, but now the isolated mesilla, with its corn and wheat fields stretching along the Rio Pecos a mile and a half away, was glaringly vulnerable to the swooping attacks of Comanche horsemen. Again and again workers stranded in the fields were cut down or kidnapped. The Apache bands who occasionally camped at the pueblo for mutual protection seemed only to elicit the greater wrath of the Comanches.³² The earthen breastworks that Governor Vélez Cachupín ordered built in 1750 and the small garrisons of troops that were sporadically stationed at the pueblo stemmed the Comanche tide only temporarily. The fields by the river were abandoned. Perilously short of food and bereft of trade now that the Comanches controlled the plains, the Pecos teetered on the brink of total

ruin. In 1776, as ambitious American colonists sweated under their wigs in Philadelphia, a Mexican cleric, Fray Atanasio Domínguez, counted a mere 269 individuals remaining at Pecos, coaxing the soil around their embattled mesilla to grow rain-watered crops, the fruits of which "do not last even to the beginning of a new year from the previous October, and hence these miserable wretches are tossed about like a ball in the hands of Fortune."³³

The decline into which Pecos had plunged cannot be attributed entirely to the Comanches. Epidemic diseases devastated the pueblo at fairly regular ten-year intervals, a particularly severe outbreak occurring in 1781 when smallpox claimed the lives of more than a quarter of the population of the colony. Evidently this outbreak of smallpox was the final blow for the neighboring Tano pueblo of Galisteo, which is not recorded as a living community after 1782.³⁴ Its survivors simply migrated down the Rio Galisteo to Santo Domingo to begin life anew.

Throughout the eighteenth century, people from Pecos had probably been doing the same kind of thing. They were among the most independent-minded people in the Pueblo world. Like the Picuris, they had long been exposed to the individualism of Apache culture; moreover, many of them possessed a skill that was in great demand all over the colony from Taos to Isleta. They were carpenters. Having been trained in the craft by Franciscans during the seventeenth century, they had been able to keep their skills even through the turbulence of the eighteenth. As late as 1776 Fray Domínguez, who found little else good to say about the pueblo, noted that most of the Pecos were good carpenters, and since at that time skills of any kind were in short supply in New Mexico, proficiency in woodworking implied a high degree of economic mobility.³⁵ Now that the pueblo was crumbling from without, those who could leave probably did, causing it to crumble still faster from within.

Even after the Comanche threat finally passed, the fortunes of the pueblo continued to decline. Trade in plains goods, instead of being restored to Pecos, followed the now peaceful Comanches onto the plains in the creaking two-wheeled carretas of Hispanic comancheros. At Pecos in 1815 no more than forty Indians remained.³⁶ As a tribe, they faced extinction. They survived as a community long enough to witness the vigorous expansion of Hispanic New Mexico's population and territory during the early nineteenth century. And they were still on watch

Wahu Toya, a Pecos survivor.
Photo by John K. Hillers, 1880.
Courtesy of Museum of New
Mexico.



at their embattled mesilla as canvas-covered wagons, driven by both American and Mexican plainsmen, trundled past Pecos en route to the markets and fandangos of Santa Fe. But by 1838, they reached the limit of their endurance. The last seventeen Pecos survivors abandoned their five-hundred-year-old home to the slow erosion of wind and rain and to more rapid destruction at the hands of scavenging travelers on the Santa Fe Trail. They bundled up their few belongings and trekked to Jemez Pueblo on the far side of the Rio Grande, which was the last place on earth where their language was spoken.³⁷