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Thomas Lafayette Popejoy - Biography

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THOMAS LAFAYETTE POPEJOY

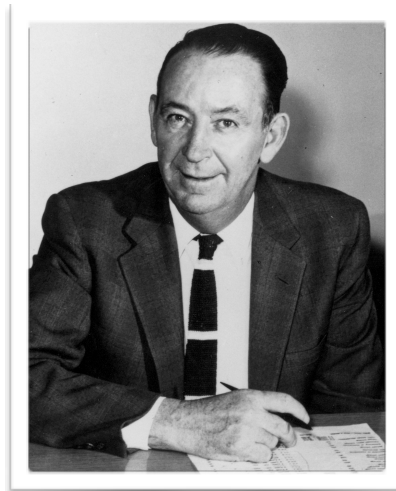
9th University President

Served 1948 - 1968

Born Ranch near Raton, NM

December 2, 1902

Appointed in January 1948 on the same day J. Philip Wernette was notified his contract would not be renewed, Tom Popejoy officially took office July 1, 1948 – the first native New Mexican to hold the position of president of UNM.



Education

Popejoy graduated from UNM with a bachelor's degree in economics in 1925. After taking some courses at the University of Illinois and the University of California-Berkley, he then finished his graduate work at UNM, earning a master's degree in economics in 1929.

Career

In 1925 Popejoy was hired as an instructor in the UNM Economics Department, and he worked his way up in the academic ranks for eight years until he was an associate professor. For some of this time he was also the athletic business manager. He suc-

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ceeded Frank D. Reeve as secretary of the Alumni Association in 1930. In 1937, he was appointed comptroller of the university, then later served as assistant to the president to both Zimmerman and Wernette. During the World War II years, Popejoy was also acting registrar. His career at the university was interrupted when he took brief leaves to work with the National Youth Administration and the Office of Price Control during WWII. From 1940 to 1944, he also served on several occasions as acting president when Zimmerman was ill.

University Activities

Enrollment jumped from 4,495 students in fall 1948 to more than 14,000 at the time of Popejoy's retirement in 1968.

One of Popejoy's first acts as president was to appoint a Committee on University Aims and Objectives. This committee advised that UNM could serve the citizens of the state by carrying out four objectives: (1) providing general education so students could develop their personal aspirations and attain a liberal-arts education; (2) providing special and professional education in scholarly or technical fields; (3) emphasizing faculty scholarship and research to make contributions to learning; and (4) offering adult education and general cultural programs to enrich the lives of New Mexicans. These principles were the road map for Popejoy's administration.

Federal agencies such as the Atomic Energy Commission and the National Science Foundation initiated outside-sponsored research in 1951, with grants totaling slightly more than \$100,000.

In 1955, the School of Nursing was the first of many professional schools added to the UNM academic program. Formal efforts to start the nursing program began in

1950 with a meeting between nursing leaders and UNM faculty members, who recognized the need for a second program in the state. In 1952, a survey was conducted that recommended a four-year bachelor's degree program at UNM. The legislature approved a \$60,000 line item in the spring of 1955 to initiate the nursing program.

The University College was organized in 1956 to replace the General College. Under the new plan, all entering freshmen at UNM would begin in the University College and one or two years later transfer to a degree-granting college. A terminal two-year associate degree program was also available. It was hoped that the University College would facilitate the recognition of particularly gifted students who might be drawn into an honors program.

In 1956, a Graduate Center was established in Los Alamos by cooperative arrangement with the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, where UNM had been offering some graduate work since 1947. Biology, physics, and chemistry courses were in high demand as many employees of the laboratory aspired to earn doctorates while continuing their work. Using outstanding scientists at the laboratory as faculty was also attractive, while the availability of the scientific laboratories and state-of-the-art equipment expanded opportunities for significant research. Added prestige came from the fact that Los Alamos had the reputation of having the highest ratio of PhDs per capita in the world, while Albuquerque could claim to have the highest PhD ratio per capita for a major city.

Another outreach program initiated in that era was the founding of KNME-TV in 1958. It was organized in cooperation with the Albuquerque Public Schools and the state Department of Education as the first public educational television station in the state.

A two-part dental program, one for dental assistants and one for dental hygienists, was initiated in 1961. Housed in renovated barracks, the programs were equipped to give practical training to students in addition to classroom work. A grant from the U.S. Department of Public Health supported the program, a part of the UNM College of Pharmacy. The first class of eighteen dental hygienists graduated in June 1963.

UNM students began lobbying Congress to establish a Peace Corps training center on campus. It took four tries, but in 1962 the university was designated the nation's first training center for Latin America. Training was conducted for thirteen weeks on campus and at UNM's D.H. Lawrence Ranch. Students could receive up to fifteen hours of academic credit. Between 1962 and 1967, eighteen hundred volunteers were trained in Spanish, community development, and world affairs, with field exercises in construction and recreation.

The New Mexico Historical Review became a wholly UNM publication in 1963.

Popejoy was one of the founders of the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, which made it possible for students from western states to receive, at resident tuition, training in professional schools of other western states if the home state had no such program. He was also the first president of the Association of Rocky Mountain Universities, an organization formed to conduct cooperative scientific research projects. He served as president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges as well.

Popejoy often said that he regarded the establishment of the UNM School of Medicine in 1964 as one of the highlights of his career as president. Under his administration the groundwork was laid for the school's development in later years as a state, regional, and national center for medical research, education, and patient care. Lead-

ers in the educational and medical communities believed a medical school within the state was essential if New Mexico was to meet the growing demands for health education, care, and research. Popejoy decided to ask first for a two-year medical school, where students would complete their classroom work before going to a hospital or other facility for clinical training. With the faculty, administration, and governing board in line and the backing of the state medical society, Popejoy turned his attention to the legislature, which eventually appropriated \$25,000.

The first medical facilities were not much. The university bought an old Seven-Up bottling plant and the Exeter-Tonella Mortuary, and later added space in temporary buildings for the library. In 1962 word came that Congress did not approve a bill to fund medical schools, but within months New Mexico's U.S. Senator Clinton P. Anderson announced a National Institutes of Health grant for construction. The estimated cost for construction was \$3.74 million, which was to be covered by the federal grant, Kellogg Foundation funds, some university funds, and smaller grants.

Arrangements were with the trustees of the Bernalillo County-Indian Hospital, which bordered the campus, and the Veterans Administration Hospital for the School of Medicine to assume responsibility for their intern and residency programs. The Bernalillo County-Indian Hospital was renamed Bernalillo County Medical Center in 1968, and a year later the university assumed operational control. The name was changed to University Hospital in 1979.

The first UNM Medical School class, consisting of twenty-four students chosen from more than two hundred applicants, began the program in the fall semester of 1964. The curriculum included anatomy, biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, pathology, pharmacology, clinical laboratory medicine, introduction to clinical medicine,

history-taking, and physical diagnosis. Within two years, the program at UNM became a full-fledged, four-year MD degree.

The year 1964 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the legislation founding of UNM.

Early in 1949 the Board of Regents authorized twenty small faculty apartments to be located on what is now Lomas Boulevard, east of Yale. They were occupied on October 24, 1949, and later became married student housing, then offices.

Jonson Gallery was the first art gallery on the campus. It housed living and studio space for painter Raymond Jonson and his wife, as well as exhibition space for his paintings. Jonson and his wife financed it with friends from Santa Fe with the understanding that when he and his wife died, the structure would become university property. The gallery was completed in 1949.

Also in 1949, Hugh B. and Helen Woodward established the Sandia Foundation to which they donated the bulk of their estates. Net income was distributed to UNM and Dickinson College as well as various charitable foundations. Years later, Woodward Hall was named for the couple.

A general classroom building was approved in May 1950, and the project was completed in June 1951. It was named for former Arts and Sciences Dean Lynn B. Mitchell.

At the August 1951 regents meeting, the new chemistry building was named for Professor John D. Clark.

The Law School building, the first Bratton Hall, was completed in October 1952. This was converted to house the Department of Economics when the Law School was moved to the North Campus in 1971.

In July 1954, ground was broken for a small astronomical observatory on what would be called North Campus. Nearby, Bernalillo County-Indian Hospital, adjacent to university land on the north side of Lomas Boulevard, was completed in August and opened on October 15, 1954.

Two contracts for construction of the women's dorm were approved on May 16, 1955, and the completion date was set for the fall semester of 1956. The east wing was named Hokona-Zia and the west wing was called Hokona-Zuni.

Plans for the new gymnasium were near completion so bids could be taken in November 1955. The plan called for eighty-two hundred seats in the basketball arena, a swimming pool, lockers for more than twenty-four hundred students, four handball courts, and a wrestling room. There were also to be offices, shower and locker rooms, and a training room. The gymnasium that was still under construction in May 1957 was named for Roy W. Johnson. The first basketball game in Johnson Center Gymnasium was played on December 6, 1957.

A remodeling of the President's House in 1955 included adding about a thousand square feet to the living room, enlarging the kitchen and garage, installing new kitchen equipment, completely rewiring the house, and installing air conditioning.

In October 1955, the State Highway Department, after eight years in the laboratory building on the northeast corner of the campus, decided to move the operation to Santa Fe. The regents agreed to purchase the building to provide a home for

government-sponsored research. It later became the Computer and Information Resources and Technology Building.

Frieda Lawrence, the writer's widow, bequeathed the D.H. Lawrence Ranch north of Taos to the university in 1956. University conferences, retreats, workshops, and classes were held at Lawrence Ranch for many years. In 1960 the D.H. Lawrence Fellowship was established to provide a writer or artist with a summer's residence at the ranch.

On June 9, 1959, UNM regents and the Albuquerque Board of Education agreed to an acre-for-acre land swap that would give the university enough space for a football stadium, married student housing, and research facilities on the east and west sides of University Boulevard that would be called South Campus.

November 14, 1959 was a red-letter day as the new Student Union Building was dedicated in an elaborate ceremony.

Earlier in September 1959, the regents decided that since Zimmerman Field would no longer be used for football after the new stadium was completed, they would name the library for the former President Zimmerman. The old stadium building and field continued in use for intramural sports until 1969.

At that same meeting, representatives of the Alumni Association asked the regents to call for bids on the Alumni Memorial Chapel. The regents agreed, and the site was selected, located between the old Student Union Building and the Administration Building. The Alumni Association raised \$76,300, and Popejoy said the university would loan the balance, \$8,565. The building was dedicated on February 28, 1962.

University of New Mexico Presidents

The General Development Plan, also known as the Warnecke Plan, was presented to the regents in January 1960. It projected an enrollment of twenty-five thousand and an increase of 1.6 million square feet for the Central Campus, which was to be used primarily for academic functions, with Zimmerman Library as the core. The plan also established the Campus Planning Committee.

Popejoy now had visions of a new football stadium on the South Campus. He proposed using money from land sales to finance a thirty-thousand-seat stadium, and the regents approved the project in February 1960. By September 17, 1960, the stadium and football field were ready for the opening game with the National University of Mexico.

In their meeting of November 11, 1961, the regents approved remodeling the old Student Union Building for the Department of Anthropology and the Anthropology Museum. The board also authorized bidding for construction of the College of Education complex and phase one of the Fine Arts Center. By 1963, the first phase of the Fine Arts Center was completed and occupied; formal dedications occurred in October 1964. As the university celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary in 1964, the new facilities for the College of Education were ready for dedication.

In January 1963, Popejoy announced that the Research Park would be located on the South Campus. It was not until June 1965 that the first tenant was approved, the Dikewood Corporation, which dealt with operations research and systems analysis.

The mounting pressure on the UNM campus for planning, designing, reviewing bids, awarding contracts, and supervising construction finally led to the establishment of the Office of University Architect in 1963, with Van Dorn Hooker as the first university architect.

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1964 also saw the first major exhibition in the university's new Art Museum, which would emphasize prints and photographs, as well as track the offerings of the art and art history programs and would be affiliated with the Tamarind Institute of Lithography.

In October 1965, the state Board of Finance approved a university revenue bond issue to finance a basketball arena, which was ready for the Lobos' opening game against Abilene Christian College on December 1, 1966, an Olympic swimming pool, new dormitories and dining hall, new KNME-TV studios, a utility package, and landscaping. That same month, regents approved a contract for the Basic Medical Sciences Building, which was dedicated on November 18, 1967. In 1966, they approved a lease-purchase arrangement for an existing store building on the southwest corner of Central and Stanford to house the Architecture Department.

At a rotary club meeting in April 1966, Popejoy unveiled plans for a vastly expanded Medical School with \$150 million of new buildings. That same year, an extension to the library was added.

The concert hall under construction in the Fine Arts Center was named for Popejoy and was dedicated in October 1966 with a performance by the Utah Symphony Orchestra.

Also in 1966, plans were approved for an addition to the Biology Building, which was dedicated on November 10, 1967, the construction of a building for the College of Business Administration, construction of an Engineering Center, and the building of a new dormitory complex. This was later named Laguna-DeVargas, with La Posada as the dining hall.

University of New Mexico Presidents

The regents began 1967 by approving designs for a new building for the Law School and plans for the University College and Student Health Center, which was completed in June 1968.

The university had offered extension courses in Gallup as early as 1957, and by the mid-1960s community leaders were lobbying for a two-year college. The first classes were offered in September 1967 at Gallup High School. In 1969, Bert Cresto donated six acres south of town. The Gallup Lions Club provided a building on the site, Lions Hall, the campus's first building. Clair Gurley and his wife later gave fifty-two adjoining acres.

In the fall of 1963, the football team beat the University of Arizona for the second of three conference championships.

In the spring of 1964, the basketball team tied Arizona State University for the first-ever conference crown and was runner-up in the National Invitational Tournament finals.

Between 1960 and 1965, UNM football, basketball, golf, and track and field combined for eleven championships. Basketball ignited what was called Lobomania.

Popejoy said he did not want to wear out his welcome and announced plans for his retirement. On December 14, 1967, the Board of Regents announced that Ferrel Heady had been selected to succeed Popejoy and would take office on July 1, 1968.

After his retirement, Popejoy was plagued by failing health, and he died in the Bernalillo County Medical Center on October 24, 1975 at the age of seventy-two.

Thomas Lafayette Popejoy

Excerpt from William E. Davis' Miracle on the Mesa.

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