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## JOSÉ GONZALES, GENÍZARO GOVERNOR

*By* FRAY ANGELICO CHAVEZ

In 1837 there was a bloody native insurrection in New Mexico through which certain elements from the country north of Santa Fe took hold of the government, then a Department of the Mexican Republic, and installed their leader, José Gonzales, as Governor. This brief article does not concern itself with the gory details of the rebellion, or its causes, but seeks to establish the identity of Gonzales. Early writers down to Prince and Twitchell considered him an Indian, that is, one straight from pueblo life and customs, chiefly from contemporary accounts of his execution at the orders of General Manuel Armijo.<sup>1</sup> Since Gonzales came from the Taos area, the belief grew that he was a Taos Pueblo Indian, and since then writers of books and newspaper articles have painted him as a full-fledged Tigua, feathers and all, presiding at the Palace of the Governors.

My first doubt about such a picture was raised some years ago by a passage in the biographical section of Read's Spanish history of New Mexico, in which Don Rafael Chacón related his own father's description of Gonzales' execution; taking issue with Prince's statement that he was an Indian, Chacón stated that Gonzales came from a prominent New Mexican family, being a first cousin of Don Rafael Páez (Chacón's father-in-law) and grandfather of Don Rafael Romero of Mora. This passage was not carried over into the English edition.<sup>2</sup> As I well remembered the person of Mr. Romero from my boyhood days, and those of his already adult children, I could readily see that Gonzales could not have been an Indian, if this were true. At the same time I was mystified by Read's omission of this item in the English translation of his history.

To clarify the matter, unimportant but intriguing, I began collecting data on dozens of people named "José Gon-

1. Armijo supposedly said to Padre Martínez: "*Confiese a este genízaro para que le den cinco balazos.*" (Pedro Sánchez, *Memorias del Padre Antonio José Martínez*, Santa Fe, 1903, pp. 21-26.)

2. Benjamin M. Read, *Historia Ilustrada de Nuevo Mexico*, Santa Fe, 1911, p. 457. *Illustrated History of New Mexico*, Santa Fe, 1912.

zales" who lived in the north country around 1790-1837, and also on Chacón, Páez, and Romero contemporaries. Many such items were accumulated with the years, but none to solve the problem by the time my recent book on New Mexico families went to press, in which I included the following reserved comment: "According to the highly intelligent Chacón family of a generation ago, Gonzales was no Indian, but even if he had *genízaro* antecedents, he still was not the paint-and-feather Indian in the Governors' Palace which historical and fictional writers have described. Only a tedious and thorough exploration of the relationships mentioned could provide a clue to his true identity and ancestry."<sup>3</sup>

Very recently my attention was focused by accident on a nickname of Gonzales, which Pedro Sánchez mentioned in passing when describing his execution. After Padre Martínez heard his confession, "*El Angelito*" was shot five times according to Armijo's orders.<sup>4</sup> Sure that the nickname could not refer to any personal quality of his, I combed my notes for a "José Gonzales" with a middle name, and came upon plenty of material collected on a "*José Angel Gonzales.*" After correlating all such items, I knew that I had hit upon the identity of the insurgent governor.

On June 10, 1817, *José Angel Gonzales*, the son of José Santos Gonzales and María Martín, both *genízaros* of Taos, married María Josefa Fernández, orphan daughter of Mariano Fernández and María Rosa Leyba of Santa Barbara (present Peñasco). The marriage is registered both at Taos and Picuris, but the wedding most likely took place at the bride's mission at Picuris, there being no church at Santa Barbara in those days. Two recorded children of this marriage were Juan Ramos, baptized at Taos, March 5, 1818, and Juan Domingo, also at Taos, November 22, 1823.

Widowed of María Josefa Fernández, José Angel Gonzales, *vecino* and *originally*<sup>5</sup> of the Pueblo of Taos, married

3. *Origins of New Mexico Families in the Spanish Colonial Period*, Santa Fe, 1954, p. 317.

4. *Loc. cit.*

5. *Vecino* (neighbor) was a general term used for "settlers," Spanish or otherwise, as distinguished from Indians living in a Pueblo. That Gonzales is here referred to as *originario* of Taos Pueblo is explained further on by the fact that his mother was a Taos Indian.

María Ignacia Martín, widow of Juan Domingo Romero, a native of Taos Pueblo, April 21, 1834. This second wife was from Picuris mission (Picuris Indian, Spanish settler, *meztiza*, or *genízara*?), as we learn from Gonzales' third marriage. For this second wife must have died soon, since José de los Angeles Gonzales, 39 years old, widowed of Ignacia Martín of Picuris, and the son of José Santos Gonzales and María Martín, married María Ramona Bernal of Santa Cruz, December 15, 1835. She was the daughter of Simón Bernal and María Guillén, and the widow of José María Gutiérrez, all of Santa Cruz. I have run across no children of the second and third marriage. But here we see Gonzales' connections, close ones by marriage, with the Taos, Picuris (Santa Barbara, Trampas, Truchas, Córdoba) and Santa Cruz (also Chimayó) districts, which were the stage for the 1837 insurrection. Two years after this third marriage, José Gonzales made himself Governor of New Mexico through bloodshed, and died in the same manner.

Some more research turned up José Gonzales' own birth as well as other pertinent data. His baptismal record, April 14, 1799, shows him as *José Angel, vecino*, the child of José Santos Gonzales and María Dominga Martín Listón. He was the fifth child among nine recorded children of José Santos Gonzales and his wife, who is variously written down as María Martín or María Listón, or both surnames combined. In some of these baptisms the parents are referred to as *vecinos* living at El Rancho (San Francisco del Rancho) in the valley of Taos. Their other children were: María Reyes de los Dolores (1790), José Francisco Maximo (1792), José Antonio (1794), a second José Antonio (1796), Francisca (1801), Tomás (1804), José Santiago (1806) and a third José Antonio (1808). The second last son married María Luján, an Indian of Taos Pueblo, on December 21, 1826.

Then I came upon the marriage of Gonzales' parents at Taos, June 18, 1788; José Santos Gonzales, son of José Antonio Gonzales, *coyote*, and Francisca \_\_\_\_\_, with María Listón, *india natural del pueblo* (Taos). Here we come upon the governor's complete racial background. His grandfather was a *coyote*. Whatever the meaning of this term in the rest

of Spanish Colonial America, in New Mexico at this time it meant the child of an Indian woman by a European-born father, or the child of a Spanish New Mexico woman by a European-born father. Every circumstance indicates that José Antonio Gonzales had been bought, rescued, or captured from the Plains Indians by some Spanish settler of Taos valley; being a *coyote* of this type, he most likely had a French father out on the plains. (Had his mother been a Plains Indian captive or a Taos Pueblo Indian, and his father a Spanish New Mexican, he would have been called a *mestizo* instead.) He then married a certain Francisca, whose identity we do not know, but who also was most likely a Plains Indian captive (Ute, Pawnee, Kiowa, etc.). Reared in Spanish homes as servants, the pair had not only taken Spanish names but had also adopted Spanish ways of living. Their children, in turn, would continue the same mode of life, speaking the Spanish language, since their parents had forgotten their native tongue, if captured young, or were of diverse tribes.

The term used for such folks was *genízaros*, not "janisaries" in the military use of the word, but a mixed non-Pueblo Indian people who followed Spanish ways. For this reason they often shared the term *vecinos* with the Spanish population, the latter being also recorded as *españoles*. Gonzales' father, José Santos, had married a Taos Indian, María Listón or Martín, but had taken her away from the Pueblo; hence she had entered the status of a *genízara* and was referred to as such with her husband when their later notorious son was first married in 1817.<sup>6</sup>

And so General Armijo was most correct in referring to José Gonzales, the "*Angelito*," as a *genízaro*. Earlier American writers who translated the word as "Indian" were also correct in the sense that Gonzales was seven-eighths Indian racially, though of different tribes; but they mislead others into picturing him as a Taos Pueblo Indian with long braids,

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6. All the foregoing birth and marriage data are taken from the mission registers in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. At present I am engaged in filing and codifying the archives with a complete catalogue and index in view for publication. This tedious project will take a year, perhaps much longer. In the meantime, *please do not write to me or the Chancery for any data, but kindly wait for the catalogue.*

war-paint, etc., whereas he actually belonged to a family living a Spanish way of life for three generations. From his close connections with Taos Pueblo, especially through his mother, we can assume that he was conversant with the North Tigua language. His arousing of various Pueblos to follow him in his bloody spree shows his influence, and also sympathies, with the indigenous inhabitants of New Mexico. Perhaps indicative of his Plains Indian background was the fact that he was chosen leader of the insurgents, as Sánchez mentions in the work cited, because he was a great bison hunter.

Those who translated *genízaro* as "half-breed" left an equally wrong impression, as the term was often used then and sometimes now for a "Mexican."

As for the mysterious passage in Read which started this inquiry of many years, Rafael Chacón was undoubtedly mistaken, and his statement was challenged and proven false before the English edition of Read's history went to press. Undoubtedly, he confused one of the many "José Gonzales" men of the Rio Arriba country, one related to his own folks, with the insurgent governor. For I found no connections at all between the family of José Angel Gonzales and the Páez or Romero relations of Rafael Chacón.

The upshot of the whole matter is that New Mexico did have an Indian Governor, even if by savage usurpation, in the same manner that Mexico had an Indian President in Benito Juárez. But neither of these two revolutionaries wore loin-clouts and war-bonnets.