

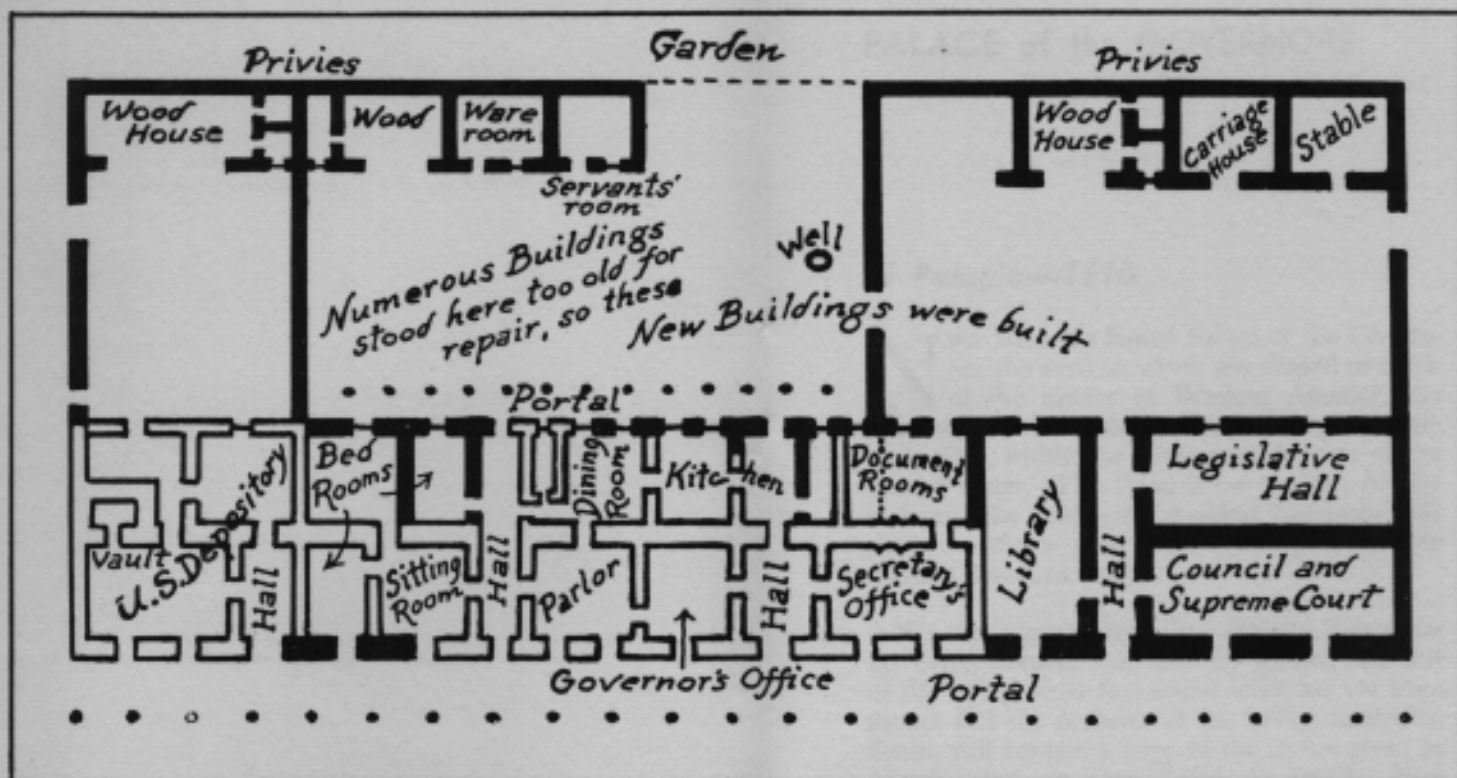
# *The Historic*

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## PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS



## Plan of the PALACE of the GOVERNORS

Plan of the Palace of the Governors showing use of rooms in September, 1868. Solid walls indicate repairs and new construction made 1867-1868. (From photostat of original in National Archives, filed with letter from Henry S. Martin, Special Agent, to the Secretary of the Treasury, January 16, 1869.)

## PALACE of the GOVERNORS

### *El Palacio—1610*

NEW MEXICO's famed Palace of the Governors, the anvil on which was shaped so much of the history of Western America, has been called "the oldest public building, continuously used, within the continental borders of the United States." This claim is too modest. Almost certainly, the Palace is the oldest European-built structure of any kind now standing within the nation's seaboard limits.

We say "almost certainly." The old Palace has no dated cornerstone, and no written account of the laying of its first adobe brick has yet been found. But the Archives of the Indies, in Seville, Spain, still contain a copy of the orders given in March, 1609, to Don Pedro de Peralta, New Mexico's third Spanish governor, directing him to establish a new capital in the province and to have its officials "designate . . . one block of the streets for the erection of Royal Houses." In the spring of 1610, historians believe, the new *Villa de Santa Fe* was founded. The "Royal Houses" (*Casas Reales*)—residence of the governor, stronghold and arsenal, civic and military nub of the whole new little settlement—would have received priority over any other construction except, per-

haps, that of a temporary church. We can be reasonably sure that by the winter of 1610-11 Governor Peralta had a dirt roof over his head and stout adobe walls around him.

Fourteen hundred miles to the east, other Spaniards had founded St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565. After a first unsuccessful venture on Roanoke Island in 1585, Englishmen came back to Virginia in 1607 and built the little city of Jamestown. All other settlements on the nation's east coast, beginning with the New Amsterdam of the Dutch in 1614 and the English Pilgrim's Plymouth in 1620, were later than Santa Fe.

Today, of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century structures of St. Augustine, which were built of wood, nothing remains. All of Fort Raleigh now visible above ground on Roanoke Island is a reconstruction. Jamestown's first buildings, also wooden, have vanished. Even the very first Dutch or English-built structures in what are now New York and New England are completely gone.

But Santa Fe's adobe Palace—the first and now the last of Governor Peralta's "Royal Houses"—still stands.

Not much is known of its earliest decades. Archives in Europe and Mexico have yielded tantalizing hints about new apartments built by Peralta's successors in office, a room where Indians masked and robed themselves for dances in the Plaza (much to the disapproval of the churchmen, who were at odds with the govern-

ors, most of these years), drawing-rooms and dressing-rooms of the governors' wives, even a shop in the Palace where one thrifty governor eked out his royal salary by selling chocolate, shoes and hats to the citizens.

By 1680, the walled and fortified "Royal Houses" had grown large enough, we are told, to accommodate "more than a thousand persons, five thousand head of sheep and goats, four hundred horses and mules, and three hundred head of beef cattle, without crowding." All these settlers and their livestock, congregated from up-country and down, had urgent need of a fort that year. The long-suffering Pueblo Indians had revolted, slaughtering more than four hundred Spaniards in outlying villages, farms and missions, and descending in fury upon Santa Fe. Governor Otermín battled them in the Villa for eight days and flame-filled nights, until they diverted a ditch which supplied the Casas Reales with water—and by this ruse broke, temporarily, Spain's hold upon New Mexico. Out of the main gate of the fort, across Santa Fe's bloody Plaza and through the smoking ruins of the town, Otermín led his people south, to the safety of settlements below what is now El Paso, Texas. There they stayed for twelve years, while the Indians settled down in what their torches had left of Santa Fe.

They made a bonfire of the official archives, which is why we know so little about the pre-Revolt Palace. Copies of some documents had been sent to Mexico and Spain, but the New Mexican records there, too, have suffered from loot-

ing and fire over the centuries. If floor-plans of the early Casas Reales ever were drawn, they either went up in smoke in 1680 or later, or still await finding by some modern researcher luckier than his fellows thus far.

## **Reconquest**

When Governor and Captain-General Don Diego de Vargas brought his reconquistadores back to Santa Fe in 1692, he found the Casas Reales transformed to a high-walled pueblo, with a fortified main gateway opening on the Plaza and a tower at each of its four corners. It comprised, he said, "what was formerly the major portion of the Palace and Royal Houses of the governor," and he found it such an impregnable stronghold that to retake it on his second trip, a year later, he had to use the Indians' earlier stratagem of cutting off its water supply. And afterwards, bitterly, he accused his successor in office of allowing all those lofty walls and towers, which had given him so much trouble, to fall into ruin.

They were never rebuilt as he wanted them to be, for conditions had changed. Before 1680, the entire Casas compound, covering many acres north of Santa Fe's main plaza, had been at once a fortress, the seat of government, and the governor's residence. New Mexico then had no standing army; all the able-bodied male settlers were at the same time soldiers, subject to military call. They lived on their farms and in their

own houses in the Villa. But Vargas brought back with him a paid presidio troop, and its men needed barracks.

These were not completed until many years later, and then they stretched west from the Palace and north in two long rows, along the lines of present-day Grant and Washington Avenues, to what is now Federal Place. There they were joined by another row, east and west. The exteriors formed a wall enclosing a roomy parade-ground, corrals, storerooms and outbuildings—and in the southeast corner the smaller compound of the remaining old Casas Reales. This, a rectangle based on the long building on the Plaza which Vargas was the first to call *El Palacio Real*—the Royal Palace, included stables and guardrooms extending north from the ends of the Palace itself, two inner patios, kitchens and other service quarters, a coach-house and the governor's garden.

With the Palace now changed largely to a civil and domestic establishment, it entered into long years of complaints about leaky roofs, scanty furniture and missing door-keys, posted indignantly down to Mexico by its succession of royal governors. These changed to republican governors in 1822, when Mexico won its independence from Spain, and for the first time a large room in the Palace was fitted up as a meeting-hall of elected New Mexico Deputies. It was renamed a Council Hall in 1837, with a change in the form of government, and ten years later, with the United States flag flying over the Palace, it was made ready to house the first session of the Territorial House of Representatives.

The Palace was then half again as long as it is today, its west end being about where the southwest corner of the Museum's Fine Arts Building now stands. There was a tower at this end in which gunpowder had been stored, and near it were the jail and the Legislative Hall. These, in poor condition, were demolished in 1866, when Lincoln Avenue was opened from the Plaza to run north through the then Fort Marcy Military Reservation to the uncompleted Federal Building.

This loss of the western third of the Palace accounts for its former main hall, still running through the building from the Plaza to its inner patio, being off center. The hall undoubtedly was once a covered *zaguan*, through which horsemen and carriages could pass—the same exit, probably, through which Otermín led his despairing followers on that sad August day of 1680, starting their long flight to Mexico.

## U.S. Occupation

The 1860's and 70's saw many other "improvements" of the old Spanish building, by its U.S. Government occupants. The east end, which also had its tower, was largely rebuilt to form two new halls for the Legislature and a separate Territorial Library. Old outbuildings at the rear were torn down and replaced by a new set much closer to the Palace itself than the others had been, thus reducing the size of the inner patio by more than half. As late as 1880, the patio was completely bare of grass and bore only a single cottonwood tree.

The portal along the front, probably first built in the 1700's (there is no mention of one in Otermín's 1680 reports), was a plain affair of peeled logs and a dirt roof when General Stephen Kearny entered Santa Fe and occupied the Palace in August, 1846. It may have been given some thought by the new caretakers soon afterwards (a traveller in 1866 described it as an "American portico"), but it underwent a radical change in 1878. In that year it was replaced by a porch in true mid-Western Victorian style, with posts of milled lumber, painted white, neatly set off by a full-length balustrade on the roof. This, which in its proud designer's words "elicited many expressions of gratification and pleasure," survived until 1913, when the present portal in New Mexican Spanish style was built.

The records reveal that from time to time, during its long history, the Palace became so dilapidated that the incumbent governors—or their wives—refused to live in it, and found quarters elsewhere in Santa Fe. Except for its thirteen years as an Indian pueblo, however, and also for a brief two months in 1862 when Sibley's Confederates were in Santa Fe, it never ceased to be the official residence and office of the Spanish, Mexican and United States civil and military governors from 1610 to 1900, when New Mexico's second "new" capitol building was erected. All in all—actual, acting and *interim*, with several serving more than one term—these governors numbered:

Under Spanish rule, 1610 to 1822 .....	59
" Mexican rule, 1822 to 1846 .....	14
" United States rule, 1846 to 1900 ...	24



## ***Brief Chronology of the Palace***

- 1610... Built (probably) as the main structure of the "Royal Houses" in New Mexico's new capital.
- 1680... Occupied by the Pueblo Indians, after they had driven the Spaniards from Santa Fe.
- 1693... Reoccupied by the Spaniards.
- 1807... Lt. Zebulon Pike, U.S. Army, imprisoned in Palace jail.
- 1822... Mexican independence. The Palace no longer "Royal."
- 1837... José Gonzales, a Taos Indian, installed as governor during short-lived insurrection; soon afterwards executed.
- 1846... Occupied by General Stephen Watts Kearny, U.S. Army, on August 18th.
- 1862... Occupied for two months by invading Confederate army from Texas.
- 1866... West third of building, and old outbuildings at rear, demolished. Extensive remodeling during next few years.
- 1869... James L. Collins, U.S. Depository, found dead in office in west end of Palace, and safe robbed.
- 1870... Spanish and Mexican archives, in Palace since 1693, sold by Governor Pile as scrap paper.
- 1878-81... Governor Lew Wallace wrote large part of **Ben Hur** in Palace.
- 1900... Palace given up as Capitol, upon completion of new Capitol Building in Santa Fe. Used as private offices, Post Office.
- 1909... Palace became first unit of the newly formed Museum of New Mexico.
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