

Santa Fe Legend #2

POPE c1640-1692

The only successful Native American revolt in North America was led by Popé and other Pueblo leaders. Little is known about this medicine man who orchestrated and executed the revolt. His name was Popé (poh-pay') and it is believed he was originally from San Juan Pueblo, though he moved to the nearby Pueblo of Taos in the 1670's. The revolt was a well-planned and coordinated attack on the Spanish by men from almost all the pueblos in the state. The Spanish were forced to withdraw from the territory of New Mexico and they did not return for twelve years.

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, the Pueblo people knew a mostly peaceful life amid the vast lands and of New Mexico. The land provided enough food for immediate use and their habit was to store food for times when the harvests were not so abundant.

Life for the Pueblo people was forever changed with the arrival of the Spanish settlers in the late 1500's. Relations with the Spanish generally began with mutual suspicion, but also with the civil exchange of food, medicine and other goods. As the Spanish influence grew, strange new diseases, accidentally brought by the Spanish, swept through the land killing many.

In 1598, when Onate first explored the area, there were over 100 pueblos. By 1680, only 43 remained as functioning villages. The Spaniards' imposition of the *encomienda* system put additional pressure on the people as it forced Pueblo families to donate food crops every year to support the Spanish missions, military and civilians. The *repartimiento* system was similar; except, instead of food, the Pueblo people were forced to work in Spanish households and fields for little to no pay.

In an effort to stop the Kachina dances, Padre Alonzo de Posada, ordered the Spanish priests to destroy all Kachina masks. He felt that the dances and beliefs in the "old ways" kept the Indians from embracing Catholicism. In 1675, Governor Juan Francisco Trevino rounded up 47 Indians and charged them with witchcraft, or sorcery, a charge frequently used for those creating unrest among the tribes. Popé was among this group. Of the 47 people put on trial, three were found guilty and hanged. The remainder were publicly flogged and humiliated on the Santa Fe Plaza. They were eventually set free when a large number of Pueblo people converged on the Plaza demanding their release.

This action made it evident that the Spaniards were vulnerable to large numbers of protestors and Popé quickly realized that the way to defeat the Spaniards was with a large-scale revolt. Collectively, the Pueblos had over 8,000 warriors compared with the less than 200 arms-bearing Spanish colonists.

Popé conferred with other Pueblo leaders and they planned the revolt that they hoped would eliminate Spanish and Christian cultural practices. The plan was a simple one, but timing was of the essence. The plan was to storm into the churches and kill the priests if they would not willingly leave the area. They would then kill the soldiers and any Spanish officials in their village, before they marched into Santa Fe to kill or drive the Spaniards out of New Mexico. The revolt was planned for August 13, 1680 and it

was agreed that the leaders in each Pueblo would await messengers who would carry a knotted strip of tanned hide. The number of knots in the hide represented the number of days remaining before the attack. Every day the village chiefs would untie one knot and when all the knots were untied the Pueblos would attack.

The practice continued until August 9 when it was learned that the messengers had been captured and it was feared that they would tell of the planned revolt. Timing was now critical and Popé knew they had to quickly take action if they were to be successful. Warriors immediately invaded the homes of the priests and the Spanish mayor and other Spanish officials in each village. Pueblo warriors killed every priest and soldier in their villages then moved on to Santa Fe.

The Indians raided Santa Fe on August 13. The Spaniards in the town sought refuge at the Governor's Palace but the water supply was soon cut off, creating great hardship for those inside the Palace. The church was set on fire, as were the doors of the palace. The natives were caught off guard when a troupe of Spanish soldiers marched outside the palace and attacked. The ensuing struggle resulted in many casualties for the Indians.

The Indians regrouped and retaliated. The Spanish were outnumbered and had no choice but to retreat back inside the Palace. On August 21, the revolt ended as the Spaniards agreed to leave and headed south, down the Rio Grande Valley towards Mexico. The Spanish left Santa Fe with several carts containing their belongings and several hundred animals. Their journey ended when they reached the Spanish settlement in El Paso. The Teypana people had not joined in the revolt and they retreated with the Spanish to El Paso. They never returned to the area and their descendants still live in Socorro del Sur in Texas. Over 400 Spaniards had been killed during the revolt, including 21 missionaries/priests.

After over 80 years of Spanish rule, the Pueblo villages began returning to customary pueblo life, although some Spanish influences still remained. Popé tried to force all such influences from Pueblo life, but the pueblo people considered many of his edicts excessive and, over time, he lost his leadership role.

During the next ten years the Spaniards made three unsuccessful attempts to re-conquer the Rio Grande Valley. It was not until 1692, less than a year after Popé's death, that Don Diego de Vargas finally led the Spanish back to Santa Fe. By this time, the Pueblo coalition had crumbled. Several years of devastating drought had weakened the Pueblo resolve, and the Navajo, Apache and Ute tribes were increasingly attacking the Pueblos. De Vargas promised a pardon to all the Pueblo people if they did not fight his army and they agreed to accept the return of the Spanish.

The efforts of Popé and the other Pueblo members were not in vain, however. The agreement allowed the Pueblos greater freedom to practice their own religions; there were fewer demands for food and labor; and the Spaniards even armed them to defend their village lands against other tribes. Although Popé might never have agreed to such conciliation between the Pueblos and the Spanish, the revolt succeeded in winning some basic rights for the Pueblo people. His actions created the conditions for the continued existence of both the Pueblos and the Spanish in the American Southwest.

Cliff Fragua, a Jemez Pueblo sculptor, created a 7-foot statue of Popé, the legendary leader of the successful 1680 Pueblo revolt against the Spanish. Members of the New Mexico Statuary Hall Commission selected Fragua to create the piece that stands, along with 96 other statues from all 50 states, in the National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol in Washington DC. Fragua created the piece from a 7.5 ton block of Tennessee pink marble in his Singing Stone Studio at Jemez Pueblo.

The statue of Popé is the earliest historical figure depicted, the only one celebrating Pueblo culture, and New Mexico artist Cliff Fragua was the first American Indian to sculpt a figure for the National Statuary Hall. Congress established this Hall on July 2, 1864.

The sculpture depicts many symbolic items: the knotted cord used to determine when the revolt against the Spanish would begin, a bear fetish symbolizes the center of the Pueblo world-their religion, a pot symbolizes the Pueblo culture, a necklace is a constant reminder of where life began, and on his back are the scars from the whipping that he received from Spanish officials.