

SIMMONS

Not To Be Missed

(Book review by Mark Simmons, PRIME TIME, April, 2001, p. 27)

A friend of mine who socially circulates told me the other day that some of the most avid readers of books on New Mexico history and culture are newcomers, those who have moved here within the last two years. One moment's thought convinced me her assessment was probably true. Old-timers often tend to take our history for granted, while recent arrivals, captivated by it, may plunge into a heavy reading program.

My own library of books on the subject was begun more than 50 years ago and I continue to add it to it. At minimum every literate New Mexican ought to own a handful of basic volumes on the state. I'm thinking of ready reference works that the average person will return to again and again. A good candidate for this basic list, one which I can heartily recommend, is Rubén Sálaz Márquez recent release *New Mexico: A Brief Multi-History*, self published by the author under the imprint of Cosmic House (\$39.95).

This is truly an amazing book, "monumental" one reviewer described it. I would classify it as "encyclopedic in scope," containing a wealth of New Mexico history. Essentially, the 675-page volume is a chronological outline of events, graced with numerous biographical profiles and heavily illustrated. It also includes a running timeline that ties in happenings outside a New Mexico. Sálaz Márquez tells me that after his retirement from 33 years of public-school teaching he decided to "learn the computer" at the urging of his sons. As an exercise in learning he assembled his

MULTI-HISTORY. "The actual writing took five years," he says, "but without the computer I probably would have needed another five." Anyone who has a particle of interest in our state's past will find his book a pleasure to browse through and difficult to put down. On almost every page I discovered some revelation that was new to me. Do you know who the Gorras Blancas (White Caps) were? What secret role did merchant James Magoffin play in the 1846 conquest of New Mexico? How did land grant fraud redirect the course of our history? What is a punche?

Behind the answers to such questions lie fascinating stories. The superb index allows readers to locate almost any topic or proper name connected to local history. Whether a lifelong resident or a recent arrival, thoughtful New Mexicans ought to consider adding this engaging and valuable book to their bedside tables. It is available in many area bookstores.