The Hope for our New Mexican Hispano Culture

By Rozanne Chavez Hurst

Governor William Carr Lane's address to the New Mexico Territorial Legislature Assembly addresses the Castilian culture that was plainly evident in 1852. He advised the people to remember their ancestors and keep their traditions. On December 1, 1852, Lane said:

"I urge upon all (Hispano New Mexicans) to learn the English language and to adopt the customs of the United States that are suitable and proper for this country. But I do not advise them to change any of their beneficial or praiseworthy customs, nor do I advise them to forget their parent stock and the proud recollections that cluster around Castilian history. I do not advise them to disuse their beautiful language, to lay aside their dignified manners and punctilious attention to the proprieties of social life and I sincerely hope that the professed deference that is now paid to age will undergo no change..."

One hundred and forty six years later New Mexican Hispanics are trying hard to do just what he advised. We find in written history that the Hispanic Culture here in New Mexico is a rich and vibrant one. However, it is very unappreciated. Sadly no one but those who have hung on to it with a vengeance can appreciate the value of culture and tradition.

In the book <u>The Hispanics of New Mexico</u>, Maurilio Vigil states that "although the Hispanic heritage of New Mexico is undeniably present in these broader elements of the "New Mexico heritage", its continued importance depends upon the...New Mexico Hispanics who are the actual contemporary heirs of New Mexico's Hispanic heritage. The extent to which these people retain their attachments to the Hispanic culture, language, history and customs will eventually determine their survival as a unique ethnic community in the United States." Does this sound like a challenge to you? Here is the question we have to ask ourselves. What are we going to do about it?

There is a appalling lack of historical information, about New Mexican Hispanos, in our public school system. What there is, portrays our ancestors negatively. It becomes obvious when issues such as the requested Oñate Memorial come up. Ignorance abounds. Recent articles that have been published in the Alburquerque Journal and Tribune prove the point. There are facts that have been recently uncovered but have not yet been published.

Our own people don't know where they stand in Hispanic Society. When New Mexican Hispano's hear the phrase "Go back where you came from" it causes confusion. Why? Because New Mexico has been ours for over 400 years and our mother country is the United States. This really hit home for me when I was in second grade. One of my classmates quickly put our teacher in her place by informing her that his family had been in New Mexico for over 300 years. This of course was after she made the error of mistaking his origins. This is an example of what knowledge, about your cultural identity, can do for you.

Our ancestors deserve a place in the history books. The New Mexican Hispano involvement with the United States has been present for 150 years. Our ancestors have fought wars for the US, beginning with the Revolutionary War. The only way our history will be learned is if we make sure it happens. The New Mexican Hispanic Culture Preservation League can serve as a way of connecting and unifying New Mexican Hispanos. Only in this way can we accomplish our goal.

Send comments to: Rozanne Chavez Hurst



rhurst@hotmail.com