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Old Las Vegas: Hispanic Memories from the New Mexico  
Meadowlands (review)

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Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 110, Number 1, July 2006,  
pp. 144-145 (Review)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2006.0022>



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Secrest to concentrate more on Murrieta than he perhaps had planned. Curiously enough, Secrest decides to close the book—a biography on Harry Love—by devoting several pages to a woman who purported herself to be Murrieta's widow.

What the book lacks in written sources pertaining to Love, it does to some extent make up for in other ways. Secrest provides the reader with many maps and illustrations—mostly of California, with a few relating to Texas. Also, Secrest appears to be quite knowledgeable of the regions that he discusses. Thus, while *The Man from the Rio Grande* fails to emerge Harry Love from the looming shadow of Joaquin Murrieta, it is successful in conveying an American West that is beautiful, violent, and unrefined.

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DINO BRYANT

*Old Las Vegas: Hispanic Memories from the New Mexico Meadowlands.* By Nasario García. (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005. Pp. 318. ISBN 0896725391. \$34.95, cloth.)

Nasario García is the preeminent editor and translator of oral histories of rural New Mexicans. He has made it his life's work to preserve the experiences of the *viejitos* (old ones) and often references his own childhood in Ojo del Padre, New Mexico. He wistfully states, "Each time a *viejito* or *viejita* dies, a portion of our cultural and linguistic soul is interred with them." García has compiled their stories in several volumes since 1992, including voices of grandparents, his father, Hispanic men and women, and a compilation of their *chistes* (jokes). Joining this body of work are these voices of the *viejitos* of Las Vegas, New Mexico, in San Miguel County.

*Las vegas* means the meadows, and the city by the same name is sixty miles due east of Santa Fe. It is a 123-year-old town that has 918 buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. It was a stopover for explorer Coronado; the traders on the Santa Fe Trail; the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad; and a magnet for famous ne'er-do-wells like Billy the Kid and Jesse James.

Twenty voices remember the lifestyle of the last generation of sheepherders, ranchers, homesteaders, and villagers. They speak with nostalgia and humor about relatives, education, witchcraft, religion, and politics. They have names of another era: Filemón, Cesaría, Isabel (a man), and more. The elders' accounts have the flavor of a grandparent musing about one thing or another on the porch on a hot summer night. They talk of poverty, pranks, and evil spirits. They had little or no education and rarely traveled farther than Colorado or Texas. Yet they were made of tougher stuff than those of us who have lived softer lives with more possessions and less injustice. And funnier.

The book is bilingual with a glossary comparing English, Spanish, and colloquialisms. The last chapter is "Folk Sayings and Riddles," and I end this review with an *adivinanza* by teacher Elba C. de Baca:

A tiny little box

As white as can be

Everyone knows how to open it  
 But no one knows how to close it.  
 What is it?

*Santa Fe, New Mexico*

CYNTHIA GREEN

*The Alabados of New Mexico.* Translated and edited by Thomas J. Steele, S. J. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. Pp. 416. Foreword, preface, illustrations, bibliography, index, first lines and titles. ISBN 0826329675. \$49.95, cloth.)

Thomas J. Steele, S. J., collected approximately 1,300 *alabados*, or hymns of praise, from 140 different songbooks, in his study of the religious music of the New Mexican *penitentes*. Citing the immense impact of the penitentes on the Catholicism of New Mexico, he set out to catalog and explain their music. The result is an extensive, annotated and translated selection of 126 sets of lyrics to *alabados*, *alabanzas* and other sung prayers, organized thematically by topics such as “the Christ Child and His Family,” “the Sacrament of the Eucharist,” and “Alabanzas to Mary.” The collection is preceded by background information on the sources of the alabados, Franciscan spirituality, Catholicism in colonial and nineteenth-century New Mexico, the alabados as poetry, and music and musicians. Each group of alabado texts is briefly introduced and then documented with footnotes that highlight differences in lyrics or emphasis among the various texts Steele searched.

Steele argues that the alabados were the thread that held colonial New Mexico together—a major factor in community formation among early settlers moving north from Mexico, indigenous peoples of the Puebloan region, and the mestizo farmers and ranchers who populated New Spain’s far northern reaches. Although the importance of late medieval spirituality on the spiritual development of colonial New Mexico is noted, Steele does not significantly add to discussion about the origin and spread of the alabado. Instead, he refers the reader to Richard Stark’s 1983 essay “Notes on a Search for Antecedents of New Mexican Alabado Music” (in *Hispanic Arts and Ethnohistory in the Southwest*, edited by Marta Weigle, Ancient City Press, 1983). He notes the influence of Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús, famous for his work in Texas, particularly his evangelization through song. However, because the major purpose of the work is to catalog alabados sung today in New Mexico, this is not a focus of the work.

The comparison of alabado texts is thorough and extremely detailed, noting rhyme schemes, meter, and rhythm. In the introductions to each set of lyrics, Steele explains references to biblical stories, works of medieval spirituality, and church doctrine. These descriptions provide the reader with a much greater understanding of the alabado authors’ understandings of Christian theology, as well as the messages they were attempting to convey to a wider audience, who would have learned the songs by hearing and singing them. The work would benefit from a conclusion analyzing the impact of European and Mexican influences, as