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The Alabados of New Mexico (review)

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Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 110, Number 1, July 2006,
pp. 145-146 (Review)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2006.0025>

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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

well as indigenous ideas and local practices, on the alabado texts. Such a conclusion might also elaborate on Steele's contention that these songs are "a . . . cultural DNA, a spiritual, social, and psychological genetic code that directs people's lives. Singing them was a major force in keeping New Mexico in the Spanish empire, in the Roman Catholic church, and in the cultural realm of Spain and New Spain" (p. 4). That said, this is an invaluable resource and the collection will undoubtedly be significant for historians of religion and culture in nineteenth- and twentieth-century New Mexico.

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KRISTIN DUTCHER MANN

The Train Stops Here: New Mexico's Railway Legacy. By Marci L. Riskin. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. Pp. 156. Acknowledgments, photographs, maps, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN 082333060. \$39.95, cloth. ISBN 082633309. \$24.95, paper.)

Like other Western states, New Mexico was formed and shaped by the railroads (and it continues to be, as any driver along Interstate 10, passing and being passed by freight trains, can testify). *The Train Stops Here* is a brief introduction to New Mexico's railroad infrastructure—the fruit of competition among the Santa Fe, Denver and Rio Grande, and Southern Pacific systems—followed by a catalogue of the surprisingly large number of railway structures still standing in New Mexico. A specialist in adapting and reusing historic structures, Riskin clearly intends her book to motivate New Mexico communities to restore and find uses for the many railway depots that still dot the state.

Riskin's introduction provides an overview of the various kinds of railcars that ran on New Mexico's iron roads, and of the steam, and later diesel, engines, that pulled them. She explains how track was built and unbuilt, enabling the reader to spot the signs of former railway lines in existing sloped berms and roadbeds. Focusing on the Santa Fe system, she details each of the remaining railway depots—and each community of any size along the railway line seemed to have one. While most of them were built according to a set of prefabricated plans, many of them have architectural eccentricities. The boom-and-bust nature of the New Mexico economy, and the failure to find water in some places, meant that some were deserted earlier than others and thus still wear the earliest Santa Fe railroad paint schemes.

In addition to chronicling the appearance of the depots, from their Coffeyville, Kansas, brick patios to their freight doors and paint jobs, Riskin discusses the way in which these buildings have been reused by their local communities. Despite their architectural distinctiveness, only a few depots, like those in Chama, Las Cruces, Columbus, and Hatch, have been recycled as museums. In a testament to the propensity of rural New Mexicans to reuse and make do, many depots and buildings have been moved from their original sites and become private homes. Although few communities have found good uses for their depots, and many are falling apart, the reaction in Clovis to the attempt by railroad officials to remove a beloved "Santa Fe—Be Safe" sign shows that many consider these historic odds