

July 6, 1950

Mr. John Morris
LDAIES HOME JOURNAL
R.K.O.Bldg.
Rockefeller Center
New York City, N.Y

Dear Mr. Morris:-

In the spring I had a visit from David Scherman, and in the course of our photographic conversation he suggested that when I had any material ready to send it to you. Since then, of-course, I have seen your excellent article.

I am sending you herewith a story which I hope will have some interest for you. It is the history and the very human feeling that runs throughout this annual event that has been of particular interest to me. As I am not a catholic, I have had Father Chavez check my script so that it is properly phrased from that point of view.

It has taken me several years to win the cooperation to make this sequence. These people are very camera shy. I finally prevailed upon Father Chavez to do one special picture in my book Rio Grande, River of Destiny, (Duell, Sloan & Pearce) and this year through his help I have been able to do what I send you here. The event is just over for this year and a week gone in processing the color films and making the prints. But as this is not necessarily spot news, I trust that this is quick enough.

I shall be very glad to have your opinion on this series, and hope that I may find a market for it.

Cordially

THE CONQUISTADORA PROCESSIONS
SANTA FE. NEW MEXICO

In Santa Fe, New Mexico, there is an annual event in veneration of the Virgin Mary, which has special historic and human appeal. This is a procession in honor of LA CONQUISTADORA, OUR LADY OF THE CONQUEST—a small statue of the Virgin, brought to Santa Fe in 1625 by Fray Alonso de Benavides. With hundreds of Spanish-Americans walking in procession, LA CONQUISTADORA is reverently carried through the streets of the old capital city to the Rosario Chapel built in her honor in 1704. Here the statue remains from the second Sunday after Trinity through the week as a Novena of Masses is said daily. The following Sunday a similar procession accompanies LA CONQUISTADORA back to her permanent shrine in the north chapel of the Cathedral of Saint Francis. This touching tribute, the OLDEST CHRISTIAN CEREMONY IN THE UNITED STATES, has been given for three hundred and twenty five years, and the devotion of the people to their historic statue increases with each passing decade.

In recent years a young priest, a direct descendant of the first settlers of New Mexico in 1598, has entered the diocese of New Mexico. Fray Angelico Chavez is a priest, a poet, an artist, and an historian. Through his interest many papers and documents long buried in the archives of the arch-diocese have been brought forth and studied. Among these, Father Chavez has found the factual history of LA CONQUISTADORA. Fifteen years after the founding of Santa Fe, (1610) the first capital of the ancient province of New Spain, Fray Benavides came to take his place in the establishment of the church. Four years after his long journey from Mexico City to this little known out-post, Benavides built a chapel where he enthroned this statue of the Virgin Mary. Among the old papers Father Chavez has found the receipt for the statue made out to Benavides, and also a list and description of the costumes she wore. A confraternity was formed around the statue and ever since those very early times there has been a mayordomo in charge, the people taking a direct and personal interest in the figure. In 1680 the Pueblo Indians made their historic united effort to drive the Spanish from their land. They attacked Santa Fe, killing twenty one friars and many civilians. A small group escaped, fleeing south to the present city of Juarez, Mexico, taking LA CONQUISTADORA with them. over the long difficult three hundred mile trip. In a chapel in the small town of San Lorenzo, near Juarez, LA CONQUISTADORA was enshrined, and cared for by her confraternity. Thirteen years later Don Diego de Vargas gathered his forces for the reconquest of Santa Fe, and again LA CONQUISTADORA traveled by ox car over the ancient Camino Real. On the journey General de Vargas made a vow that if the reconquest were successful, yearly homage would be paid to LA CONQUISTADORA. It was at this time that the yearly homage would be

at this time that the name was changed from OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY, to LA CONQUISTADORA, OUR LADY OF THE CONQUEST. There are a few gaps in the history of the statue. But Father Chavez has found the long list of people who served as mayordomos since 1664. The building of the special chapel at the site of the De Vargas encampment ~~was~~ not accomplished, however, until 1806. Since then the yearly procession has carried the statue to the Rosario Chapel, whereas previously, it occurred in the town.

So, while the Pilgrim Fathers were struggling to adapt and establish themselves in ~~New~~ England, in far away Santa Fe, this Catholic ceremony was an annual event. The feeling of tradition and emotion that is so reverently expressed in honor of LA CONQUISTADORA, is unique in the United States.