

THE CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION
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 the 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-American people walking in procession, LA CONQUISTADORA is reverently carried through the streets of the old capital city to the Rosario Chapel built in her honor. 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 outpost, 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 statue. 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 from Juarez to Santa Fe.

traveled by ox cart over the Camino Real. On the journey General DeVargas made a vow that if the reconquest were successful, yearly homage would be paid to LA CONQUISTADORA.

There are a few gaps in the recorded history of the statue, but one thing found by Father Chavez is the long list of people who served as mayordomos since 1664. This list contains many names well known in the early history of the state. The yearly processions have taken place within the city since the early times, but it was not until 1806, when the Rosario Chapel was built in honor of LA CONQUISTADORA, that the present form of the procession was established.

So, at the time that 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.

La Conquistadora Procession. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#5

On the Second Sunday after Trinity, following a vesper service, LA CONQUISTADORA emerges from the Cathedral, borne on a palenquin carried by four young girls.

La Conquistadora Procession. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#6

With lines forming on both sides of the statue, LA CONQUISTADORA is carried through the streets, past the ancient Palace of the Governors, the oldest public building in the United States.

#4.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#3.

Same caption as #1.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Santa Fe,

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION Lr

#2.

Same caption as #1.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

~~#7~~
Before the discovery of the description of LA CONQUISTADORA'S wardrobe, she was clothed in costumes fashioned by her attendants. Here, in 1946, she is hearing the Rosario Chapel in the outskirts of Santa Fe.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#8

~~#8~~
Many hundreds await the arrival of the procession in the cemetery of the Rosario Chapel.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#12.

Same caption as #11.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. LAURA GILPIN. Santa Fe.

13.

Same caption as #11.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

14.

The robes of LA CONQUISTADORA are changed by one of the younger generation during the days the statue remains at the Rosario Chapel.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#15.

On the following Sunday, hundreds come to the Vesper Service at the Rosario Chapel preceeding the procession which returns LA CONQUISTADORA to the Cathedral.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

16.

Same caption as #15.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#17.

Same caption as #15.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#18.

With many hundreds of people, almost all of Spanish origin, walking on before, LA CONQUISTADORA again takes her place near the end of the procession.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#19.

With priests (among them Father Angelico Chavez) and his Excellency Arch Bishop Edwin V. Byrne following LA CONQUISTADORA, the procession comes to an end.

is returned Ending *into its* *memorial mass*
FOLLOWING the Novena and the ~~final~~ service, LA CONQUISTADORA
~~again~~ ~~was~~ ~~placed~~ in the north chapel of the Cathedral,
the old chapel built in 1717 to which the Cathedral was
added by Bishop Lamy.

So comes to a close the oldest Christian ceremony in the United
States. The feeling of devotion, reverence and tradition which
permeates this ceremony is deeply moving to watch.

Which has been maintained for more than three centuries

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So comes to a close this ceremony, permeated with
a feeling of deep reverence, devotion & tradition, the
oldest Christian ceremony in the U.S. and La Conquistadora
is again placed ~~in~~ ^{rather} above the altar in the
old chapel of La Catedral

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#20.

Approaching the terrace of the Cathedral of Saint Francis in the heart of Santa Fe, is borne back to her chapel as the people of Santa Fe and a sprinkling of visitors watch her pass.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#21.

Same caption as #20.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#22.

La Conquistadora enters the Cathedral for the benediction.

LA CONQUISTADOR PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#10.

Native musicians, their plaintive notes accompanying the singing procession, reach the Rosario Chapel.

*Place in
Porter*

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#23.

So comes to a close this ceremony, the oldest Christian Ceremony in the United States, permeated with a feeling of deep reverence to the Virgin Mary and traditional devotion to her representation, LA CONQUISTADORA, and she is again placed above the altar in the old north chapel of the Cathedral.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#24.

Same caption as #23.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#25.

The wardrobe of LA CONQUISTADORA is kept in an old trunk, and all her garments are given scrupulous care by those in attendance.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe

#26.

Same caption as # 25.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Laura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#27.

Same caption as # 25

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION. Lura Gilpin, Santa Fe.

#28. Same caption as #25.

LA CONQUISTADORA PROCESSION
A photographic essay
by
Laura Gilpin.
Santa Fe, New Mexico.