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Santa Fe Fiesta parade, East San Francisco Street, Santa Fe, New Mexico, ca 1925-45

Letting our freak flags fly

City's dwellers embrace 'different' label

BY EMILY DRABANSKI

Santa Fe ranks second in having America's "Strangest People," say *Travel & Leisure* magazine readers — lagging just a bit behind New Orleans. Those same readers rank Santa Fe No. 1 for "Cultural Getaway," "Independent Boutiques," "Home Décor and Design Stores" and "Peace and Quiet."

While the merits of the individual rankings can be debated, the results do reflect some of the initiatives that led to Santa Fe being nicknamed the "City Different" not long after New Mexico became a state in 1912.

Chris Wilson, J.B. Jackson Professor of Cultural Landscape Studies in the University of New Mexico School of Architecture and Planning, wrote extensively about that period in his groundbreaking book, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition*. In that work, Wilson examines how cultural leaders in the years following statehood shaped both the look and image of the capital city — a campaign that ultimately led to the development of Santa Fe as an international tourism destination. He also adds sobering insight into the impact of the tourism boom and the proliferation of ethnic stereotypes that resulted in cultural strife and social displacement among the city's Native American and Hispanic residents.

"I think that the state's centennial is a good time to reflect on the past and to look at the future," Wilson said during a recent interview.

In *New Mexico's Quest for Statehood, 1846-1912*, historian Robert W. Larson detailed the political wrangling that came into play during New Mexico's six-decade-struggle for statehood, such as Texas' claim of northeastern New Mexico, the Civil War controversy over whether New Mexico would be a free state or slave state, and the maneuvers of various individuals who fought to keep New Mexico a territory for their own gain. One of the uglier recurring obstacles to statehood that Larson's book recounts was a prejudice against Spanish-speaking people who were very different from the majority of Anglo pioneers settling the Western frontier.

"There was a prejudice [against] Spanish speakers who were also Catholics," Wilson said. "It was a different language, religion and — because of [the territory's] ties to Mexico, there also were fears about the people's allegiance. Up until statehood, the kind of American xenophobic take on New Mexico was strong, and it's the one that local leaders had to fight against. And then, once statehood is achieved, Santa Fe in particular realizes that tourism is a way to turn the local economy around."

Image control

During this period, many Anglos — among them archaeologists and artists — came to Santa Fe to flee the straight-laced ways of the East and became quite enamored of



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Construction of new portal, Palace of the Governors, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1913

both the Hispano residents and the Native peoples. "They really liked the more relaxed lifestyle that they found in Santa Fe," Wilson said.

Some of these newcomers had read the dispatches of Charles F. Lummis in the *Los Angeles Times* (circa 1884) as he crossed the deserts of the Southwest, extolling the virtues of the people and the landscape. "Though my conscience was Puritan, my whole imagination and sympathy and feeling were Latin," Lummis wrote. Lummis would write five books and then serve as editor of *The Land of Sunshine* magazine (renamed *Out West* in 1902) from 1894 to 1909. These publications often presented a romanticized — and, by today's standards, somewhat stereotypical — version of the region's people and scenic beauty.

Adding to the area's allure were the marketing campaigns of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad from the 1890s to the 1930s. Under the direction of William H. Simpson from 1900 to 1933, writers, artists and photographers were paid or given train tickets to help promote the AT&SF route in brochures, articles and advertisements.

The artist Gerald Cassidy originally came to Albuquerque to recover from tuberculosis in 1890, moving to Santa Fe in 1912. His paintings of the landscape and Pueblo people reached a national audience because of the support of the railroad. Eanger Irving Couse, one of the founders of the Taos Society of Artists, had his paintings of Taos Pueblo people widely distributed, particularly on the railroad's calendars.

Molding a city style

When New Mexico became a state on January 6, 1912, Santa Fe — the state's capital — was a city of about 5,000 people. Yet by that point, Wilson said, the city had seen about 30 years of economic decline.

Arthur Seligman (then mayor of Santa Fe) appointed archaeologist Edgar Lee Hewitt, director of the Museum of New Mexico and School of American Archeology (later School of American Research), and Sylvanus Morley, archaeologist and museum staff member, to the city's planning board in the spring of 1912. Harry H. Dorman, who ran a real estate company and insurance business and served as the secretary-treasurer of *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, headed the committee.

Unable to hire a city planner, Dorman sent letters to leaders in large cities soliciting advice. Many of the answers reflected the era's national City Beautiful Movement, which placed an emphasis on the beautification of parks and the building of stately museums, such as those developed for the 1898 Chicago Exhibition. It was an effort to limit the imprint of industrialism while encouraging homogeneity within cultural urban centers.

Santa Fe's city planning board developed a plan but could not afford to embrace the prevailing Beaux Arts classicism that favored enormous public buildings with towering pillars and ornate decoration. "They realized they could not afford marble for public



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Railroad depot, Santa Fe, New Mexico, ca 1912

buildings but wanted a unified style," Wilson said. Board member Morley also objected to radical changes that would destroy "our most priceless possession, an individuality, which raises us above hundreds of other American cities."

Wilson notes that Santa Fe was not only the smallest community with a City Beautiful plan but also that it broke new ground by combining the standard emphasis on architectural homogeneity with local revival style based on a study of the city's old architecture. "Architectural image became central to stimulating tourism and reversing economic decline," Wilson said.

The city planning board's 1912 plan emphasized the promotional value of preserving adobe buildings and the long, low style of houses through tax incentives and regulation along the city's oldest streets. Much of that look is still retained today in what is loosely termed "Santa Fe Style."

Within the next few years, Wilson said, the city and Museum of New Mexico began promoting Santa Fe as the City Different, distinguishing their efforts from the national City Beautiful movement.

¡Viva la difference!

Today, the City Different designation often includes a free-spirited sense of "anything goes" that also has its roots in the decades before and after statehood.

"The attitude was almost 'What happened in Santa Fe stayed in Santa Fe,'" Wilson said with a chuckle. "It was part of developing a new American lifestyle that definitely was more relaxed than the rigid ways back east. You had the influence of people like Lummis, whose writings were bringing in people from Southern California. And then Santa Fe had its ongoing development of its art colony. From about 1916 on, you had artists from Greenwich Village coming out on the train — often spending the entire summer in Santa Fe. And then more of those people began staying."

While Wilson has raised concerns about the consequences of the tourism boom, he's optimistic about the future. Today the city has developed creative tourism initiatives that give visitors a more authentic experience.

"I think the centennial is important," he said. "We need to look back, but we also need to think about the future and sustainability of our communities."

To learn more

The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition by Chris Wilson, The University of New Mexico Press, 1997

New Mexico's Quest for Statehood, 1846-1912 by Robert W. Larson, The University of New Mexico Press, 1968