

THE SAN JOSE BELL At San Miguel Chapel

As legend has it, the Old San Jose Bell was cast in Andalusia, Spain, in the year 1356. The Moors had occupied Spain for some 800 years beginning in the 7th Century. For hundreds of years, the Spaniards, both Jews and Christians, fought for their independence. In 1356, so the legend goes, the citizens of Andalusia, determined to fight for their freedom prayed to St. Joseph for his intercession with Christ to be victorious over their enemies. They believed that by the mercy of God and the prayers to St. Joseph they won the day and gained their independence. In gratitude for their victory they brought their gold, silver and precious belongings to include them into a melting pot with other metals. With that, their liberty bell was cast and sounded the defeat of their Muslim captors for all to hear in their village - 136 years later, after the last town in Spain, Santa Fe gained its independence.

In 1492, the Old San Jose Bell was eventually sent to the New World as ballast in one of their ships. The Spanish Crown hoped it would return on its voyage home from the New World filled with gold. Thus, The Old San Jose Bell remained in Vera Cruz, Mexico, where it was put up for sale.

In medieval Spain, bells, such as this one would be cast in a cone-shaped hole dug into the earth and lined with tiles in the shape of an inverted bell. After the molten metal is poured into the hole, the trunk of an oak tree - carved in the bell shape - would be placed centrally to form its unique shape.

On the face of the San Jose Bell the inscription was made: "San Jose, pray for us, August 9 of 1356". The bell weighs 780 pounds and averages 3.5 inches thick.

According to the bell's story, it was from Vera Cruz, Mexico that Señora Loretta Ortiz de Santa Fe purchased it in 1812. It was then brought by cart to Santa Fe and placed in the courtyard of her hacienda (the current site of the Hilton Hotel), where it remained until the death of Don Antonio Jose Ortiz. In 1848, Don Simon Delgado obtained the property around San Miguel Chapel



as well as the Old Bell. He had a triple-tiered tower constructed and hoisted the great bell into the tower in about 1857, where it remained until 1872. A severe winter storm that year, along with a 4.5 earthquake caused the upper part of the tower to collapse bringing the Bell down with it. It remained in the cemetery in front of the chapel until it was brought inside in 1895.

100 YEAR OLD CONTROVERSY

The Old San Jose Bell has been a source of controversy for just over 100 years. In 1912, a Christian Brother named David published a visitor's guide telling the legend and history of the bell. By 1914, everyone knew about the ancient bell at San Miguel Chapel.

Living in the city of Santa Fe at the time were 2 gentlemen, one an attorney and the other a historian who did not believe Brother David's story and began to investigate. Both Benjamin Read and Colonel Twitchell, with no apparent lineage in Santa Fe, almost immediately claimed that the age of the bell was incorrect. When they went to the newspaper and published their accounts, they hoped Brother David would recant the date, 1356, and concede to their contention of 1856. This did not happen. Indeed, Brother David went to his deathbed holding to the truth of his conviction. Mr. Read and Mr. Twitchell would not give up their quest to discredit the history of the bell, believing an unnamed Christian Brother had snuck into the chapel and changed the date from an 8 to a 3.

They published a request that anyone in The Territory who was a live 48 years earlier and could remember anything about the bell to come

forward. Only 3 people did. One man who was only 6 at the time said he remembered seeing the bell being hoisted into place in the San Miguel tower. Something no one, not even Brother David would have contested after the Delgado family had bought the property. The 2nd witness was a woman who was only 7 at the time, who only claimed to have seen the bell then, but could not confirm the naysayer's claims. The 3rd and only other witness was an 85 year old man by the name of Clemente Ortiz. He claimed, as a young man of 37, to witness the casting of the bell.

If this testimony was indeed true, it's hard to explain why no one else in the territory could substantiate it. Nevertheless, there are those who accept the testimony of Clemente Ortiz and others who believe Brother David.

Brother Lester, former curator of San Miguel Chapel, related how in the 1870's there was a local priest who was famous for his retreats around the Arch-Diocese telling the original story of 1356. If this well-known priest at the time had concocted the legend, it is amazing that no one corrected him if the bell had only been cast 14 or so years earlier.

The small metal icons nailed to the frame are **MILAGROS**, "Miracles" in Spanish. Devotees bring these, with their own hammer and nail, and attach them to the frame as a prayer. Legend tells that if you ring the bell with the RUBBER MALLET provided, you will return to Santa Fe! And we hope you do!

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR THE 1356 DATE

1) As stated above, in 1914, Benjamin M. Read, who tried to discredit Brother David, claimed his first clue to the newer date of 1856 as the inscription on the San Jose Bell using Arabic numerals. - something he assumed were not used in medieval Spain. The Moors, who used Arabic numerals, had, occupied Spain since the 7th century and had introduced their use in Spanish society long before 1356. This would have made the use of Arabic numerals in Spain common and widespread by 1356.

2) A linguist expert from Europe said, regarding the Spanish inscription on the bell: "San Jose Rodas por Nosotros - Agosto 9 de 1356" the word for "pray" (Rodas) was used in medieval Spain and that the later Spanish settlers of New Mexico used the more current expression of Resar for the word "pray", suggesting the accuracy of the earlier date of 1356 not 1856.

3) The carving of the "Star of David" on the bell was no doubt inscribed by the maker of the bell wishing to secretly identify who cast it. This would make sense if the artist was a Crypto-Jew wishing to hide his identity for fear of persecution in ancient Spain of 1356, not the United States of 1856.

4) The crown at the top of the bell symbolizes the Spanish Crown which shows the origin of the bell as Medieval Spain of 1356, not the United States of 1856.

5) Upon close inspection of the disputed number on the bell, one will notice that the bottom of it flairs outward as in the number "3" not rounded at the bottom if it had been a number "8". Also, the only evidence of a chip on the bell is at the top of the number not the bottom, leaving that the number "3" is unscathed. This would lead on to observe and conclude that the date is 1356 not 1856.

6) Bells cast in 1856 were of a much finer quality than those cast in 1356. Note the United States Liberty Bell of 1776 and compare it to the San Jose Bell to see the difference. More evidence that The San Jose bell is much older - 1356.

7) There is evidence that The San Jose Bell was purchased, along with the Chapel itself, in 1848 by Don Simon Delgado - 8 years before 1856.

