

## History

# The Jemez Revolt of 1623

by Matthew J. Barbour  
Manager, Jemez Historic Site

In 1623, the Jemez revolted against the Spanish. As part of this revolt, they burned the Mission of San Jose de los Jemez and abandoned the surrounding pueblo of Giusewa, roughly translated as “Pueblo at the Sulphur Place” or “Pueblo at the Hot Place.” Today, this location is preserved as Jemez Historic Site.

At the time of the 1623 Jemez Revolt, Giusewa was among the largest – if not the largest – pueblo village in the Jemez Mountains. It sprawled over 18 acres at the confluence of the Jemez River and Church Canyon (Oak Canyon) Creek. It is presumed to have been a trading mecca for the Jemez People and may have served as a production center for Jemez Black on White pottery. Exactly how many people lived at the site is unknown. Franciscans boast that prior to the revolt of 1623, roughly 6,566 Jemez were baptized. It is possible hundreds, if not thousands, of those “converts” were settled at Giusewa.

Looming on the hillside above the village was the Mission of San Jose de los Jemez. Founded by Fray Geronimo de Zarate Salmeron in 1621, this structure stood as high as four stories in many places. It included a church, sacristy, kitchen, storerooms, animal pens, and a possible smithy. Completely walled off from the surrounding village, it was one of the biggest and most elaborate Franciscan missions built in New Mexico. Yet it burned only two years after construction.

Exactly what caused the Jemez to revolt in 1623 is unknown. Local lore of the Jemez people tells of Salmeron requiring the Jemez of the surrounding villages to attend Sunday mass at Giusewa. This included the large farming center, known as Amoxiumqua or “Old Anthill Place,” atop Virgin Mesa. The people of Amoxiumqua did as instructed, utilizing hiking sticks to make the steep descent into the valley. Upon reaching the church, they discarded the sticks and entered. The priest saw this as a sign of submission before God and allowed the pile to build as a means of demonstrating the sway he had over his flock. Weeks passed and

the pile grew. When the moment was right, the Jemez set the pile of walking sticks on fire and the mission burned.

Others have attributed the burning of the church to the Navajo. However, this may be a conflation of the Jemez conspiracy with the Apache in the 1640s. Under this telling, Navajo warriors incited more troublesome elements within Jemez society to attack the mission. Together, the two groups fled to the Dinetah – an area in and around present day Navajo Reservoir – to hole up in their pueblitos, or fortified strongholds. Archaeologically, this interpretation does have some merit. Large quantities of Jemez Black on White pottery are often found on these early Navajo pueblitos, suggesting at the very least contact, if not cohabitation, of the two peoples within these defensive structures.

Regardless, San Jose Mission was abandoned and the Jemez went into revolt against both the priests and the Spanish. Spanish officials characterized this as a civil war among the Jemez people. However, there is no evidence at Giusewa to suggest non-Christian Jemez attacked the Christian tribal members. Only the church was burned, indicating the target of Jemez aggression was the Franciscan priests, not the village of Giusewa. It is possible the “converts” at Giusewa participated in the uprising or, at the very least, did not defend the priests against their non-Christian brethren. Spanish suzerainty over the Jemez Mountains collapsed.

Reconquest of the Jemez fell upon Spanish residents residing in Santa Fe and the surrounding area. Many of these men were located in the Galisteo Basin and what was then called the Sandia Jurisdiction (which included the Bernalillo area). Among them was *Encomendero* Don Pedro Duran y Chaves, who owned a large hacienda, through his wife Dona Isabel de Bohorquez (Baca), at Arroyo del Tunque near San Felipe Pueblo.

Duran y Chaves was a military man first appearing in the New Mexico archives exacting the Governor’s tribute at Taos Pueblo in 1613. By 1623, he had risen to the rank of *Sargento Mayor*, or major. By the end of the uprising,



**SESHUKWA PUEBLO** was abandoned at or near the time of the 1623 Jemez Revolt.

in 1626, he was *Maestre de Campo*, second to only the Governor in the military affairs of New Mexico, and his land grant extended from San Felipe Pueblo to Atrisco in the south valley of present day Albuquerque. Among the many Native peoples who paid him tribute were those of the Jemez Mountains.

Exactly what occurred during the reconquest is unclear. It appears that Tano, Tewa and Keres Indian auxiliaries participated in most of the fighting with Spanish horsemen and gunners providing support. Several Jemez villages were likely abandoned during the conflict. Based on the absence, or near absence, of Glaze F pottery, Amoxiumqua (Old Anthill Place or Virgin Mesa Ruin), Kwastiyukwa (The Giant’s Footprint or Holiday Mesa Ruin), and Seshukwa (Eagle’s Nest or San Juan Mesa Ruin) were presumably among those deserted.

In the wake of the conflict, the Jemez people were rounded up, forced to resettle Giusewa, and build the new pueblo of Walatowa (present day Jemez Pueblo). At Giusewa, the Franciscan Martín de Arvide reactivated San Jose de

los Jemez Mission. At Walatowa, he founded San Diego de la Congregacion. If Spanish estimates are to be believed, more than 3,000 Jemez lost their lives in the uprising, which occurred over the course of three years.

As with many early Native American uprisings in New Mexico, little is known of the Jemez Revolt of 1623. However, events such as these have great importance in our understanding of 17th Century Native American and European interactions in New Mexico. In terms of the Jemez, the 1623 Revolt cost the lives of many more people than the more famous Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

This later revolt on August 10, 1680, unified the Pueblo peoples and resulted in the removal of the Spanish from the northern parts of New Mexico Province for more than a decade. However, it did not occur in a vacuum. Rather it represents one in a line of many actions by Pueblo peoples to resist Spanish rule and Catholicism. Despite the many unknown details, the Jemez Revolt of 1623 should not be forgotten.