

GOVERNOR DON FELIPE DE NEVE

A chronological note of Felipe de Neve and his Governorship of the Californias.

By LINDLEY BYNUM



ELIPE DE NEVE arrived in Mexico in 1764 or 1765. In a letter written at Monterey June 1777, he said that he had not seen his family in Seville since the former date.¹ There are notes of his having been at Patzcuaro and Uruapán in 1776 on a recruiting mission; in the one place being beset by a mob and in the other his visit being accompanied by riots.² From 1766 to 1774, he was Major of a regiment of cavalry at Querétaro and for seven years of this period he administered the colleges of Zacatecas.³ Whatever his duties were he must have discharged them well for, in a letter from Viceroy Bucareli to Julian Arriaga, dated December 27, 1774, he is commended and announced as the acting governor of the Californias.⁴ He took office at Loreto, March 4, 1775.

Affairs of both Lower and Upper California were badly involved. On the peninsula, Governor Barri had given offense to the Dominicans and had to be removed, creating a vacancy to be filled by de Neve. The northern province was in no better condition. Rivera y Moncada, governor of Alta California, was quarreling with the Franciscans and was dilatory in matters pertaining to the development of the country under his jurisdiction. Neve, following Barri in the south, was beginning to have difficulties with the missionaries when, on April 1776 an order was issued to change the seat of government of the two Californias from Loreto to Monterey.

Such a change was not immediately effected. Orders were sent de Neve in July. A letter of July 8 from Galvez to Bucareli urges haste.⁵ There now follows a correspondence between Bucarely and de Neve regarding the needs of the upper province. On December 25, the Viceroy issued his final instructions to de Neve in a letter of 27 paragraphs.

¹ Bancroft, *History of California*, Vol. I, p. 310.

² Priestley, *Jose de Galvez*, p. 227.

³ Bancroft, *History of California*, Vol. I, p. 310.

⁴ Chapman, *Catalogue of Materials in the Archivo General de Indias for the History of the Pacific Coast*, p. 369.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

Important among these instructions was the suggestions that he examine the country with a view to founding pueblos.

The new governor came overland to inspect the existing establishments and to acquaint himself with the Territory. Upon his arrival and the receipt of information from the presidio and missions farther north, he sent five reports to the Viceroy, dated February 18, 25, and 26. These reports, one of which is here translated, tell of the condition of the foundations and list articles of clothing and equipment needed at each presidio. He also recommends an increase of soldiers to strengthen the Spanish position with respect to the native population.

In April, Neve went north to inspect the Presidio and mission of San Francisco and the mission of Santa Clara.⁶ In June he issued several more reports. One of these recounts the recent happenings of Alta California, another states the need of three establishments along the Santa Barbara channel and makes recommendations for their founding. A third report is of some length and gives a careful description of all the water courses, springs and arroyos along the Camino Real. In it he recommends the site for the city of Los Angeles:

The habitable spots which border the Camino Real from San Diego to Monterey with sufficient proportion of waters for developing cultivation are the river Santa Ana at 28 leagues from San Diego, has abundant water and it is not difficult to draw it out as it proves, at seven leagues is the river San Gabriel with much water and lands for large planting, and to raise water not proven very difficult. One league distant from the Mission of this name, which does not use its waters because they obtain abundant and sufficient water for lands from the various springs which flow at the foot of the mountains.

At 3 leagues from the Mission is the river of Porsincula [sic] with much water easy of access for both banks and beautiful lands in which we can make use of all.⁷

⁶ Palou, *Noticias de la Nueva California*, Vol. IV, p. 201. Palou, *Historical Memoirs of New California*. Trans. by H. E. Bolton, Vol. IV, p. 163.

⁷ Mexico, *Archivo General*. Tomo 121.

Later, in the same report, is the following:

Attentive to all and to the urgency there is to encourage all the labor possible, in these new establishments, I did not observe in these [lands] more than four places of which I can recommend to advantage, and these are the rivers of Santa Ana, San Gabriel, the Porsincula, and Guadalupe, the first three at short distances of the Mission of San Gabriel, the last near that of Santa Clara; I did not observe any other places so that if your Excellency will order recruited forty or sixty men of the fields and experienced farmers in order to people the mentioned places, or better divide them into two, which will be the river of Santa Clara and that of Porsincula.

De Neve did not, however, confine his activities to the writing of reports. They were needed to formulate policies and to arouse the necessary action in Mexico City but during the time between letters he utilized the materials at hand for the strengthening of the establishments and for their future growth. In November, acting without orders, he founded the city of San José de Guadalupe. For settlers he used 15 families from the presidios of Monterey and San Francisco, comprising discharged soldiers and idle people from the Anza expedition of 1776. He reported this action on April 15, 1778 and referred to his letter of the preceding June in which he had recommended both the site of San José and of the future Los Angeles. In May he tendered his resignation.

During the remainder of the year, further progress was made. On August 10 Neve wrote that a wall around the presidio of Monterey had been completed the previous May. It was of rock 537 yards in length, 12 feet high and four feet thick. The brush structures had been replaced by 10 adobe houses, 21 by 24 feet and a barracks 136 by 16 feet nearing completion. A wall of adobe was being built at San Francisco but the rains of the early months of 1779 destroyed it. At San Diego, stone was gathered for a projected wall but was not immediately used.

In the letter of August 10, referred to above, de Neve stated that the missionaries were hindering the new establishment. He was now given the rank of Colonel and in Oc-

tober withdrew his resignation. December 30 he replied to a letter from Croix, asking for information regarding necessary changes in the existing regulations. This report, one of four dated December 29, 30, and 31, forms the basis for his reglamento which was to appear the following June. In it are criticisms and suggestions resulting from his many careful inspections and inventories. In it he treats of such things as soldiers' pay, equipment, the founding of missions and a presidio along the Santa Barbara channel, and the founding of new pueblos. These reports close the year.

De Neve's efforts do not diminish during the year 1779. On March 31 he reports a need for more domestic animals at the presidios, laborers, blacksmiths, and farmers. There are 6 reports dated April 3, giving a statement of forces and asking an increase for the presidios. Additional missionaries and effects are requested for the proposed channel establishments. One report, mentioning the proposed foundation of the pueblo on the Porciúncula, and asking that an assistant be appointed as inspector, is appended.

On June 1st, appears the reglamento or regulation which was to be the governing instrument during the remaining period of Spanish rule. These laws he sent to Mexico, putting them into effect provisionally, subject to the approval of the Comandante General. They were approved by him and sent to Spain where they received the sanction of Gálvez and the King who evidently accepted them without alteration or revision. They were printed in Mexico in 1784.

During the remainder of 1779 and part of 1780 occurred the trouble between de Neve and Junípero Serra over the latter's right to confirm. This right which was exercised by the Bishops had been, because of the great distance separating California from these dignitaries, granted to the Father President for a period of ten years. This special dispensation had been granted by the Pope and approved by the Council of the Indies. Upon Serra's exercising of this function, de Neve, as the representative of the Crown in California, asked to see the papers granting this special powers. Serra replied that they had been returned to Mexico, whereupon the governor

ordered him to cease his efforts until satisfactory evidence had been produced. There now followed months of waiting and of correspondence between Serra, Neve, Croix and the College of San Fernando in Mexico, at the end of which, the proper documents were produced and the governor satisfied.

For the rest of 1779 there are six reports, dated July 18, 19, which list the armament of the three presidios and the clothing, food and arms necessary for the presidios and the soldiers and settlers of the proposed channel foundations. A report of October says that the Manila galleon has failed to stop.

In December, Croix issued instructions to Rivera for the recruiting of settlers in Sinaloa and Sonora to found the presidio and missions of Santa Barbara and adjacent points and the proposed pueblo of Los Angeles. Thus was finally started the work upon which the governor had dwelt insistently from the time of his arrival in Alta California. The recruiting of the soldiers and pobladores, their transportation to California and subsequent founding of Los Angeles is treated at length elsewhere in this publication.

De Neve's efforts did not end, however, with the founding of the city. The year 1780 had seen much improvement in the Territory. A church had been completed at San Diego and San Francisco was acquiring buildings. The pueblo of San José was prospering and the missions had in some instances produced a surplus. The Yuma massacre occurred in July 1781, wiping out the establishments along the Colorado River as well as the soldier escort of the settlers, who had lingered to rest the animals. This event caused Neve to postpone the channel foundations but in March 1782 he issued instructions for the Comandante of Santa Barbara and with a party of soldiers and accompanied by Father Serra he started north. At the end of the first day's march he was reached by a courier with news which caused him to return to San Gabriel to confer with Fages who had arrived from Mexico. He was, therefore, not present at the founding of mission San Buenaventura on March 30, but returned to found the presidio of Santa Barbara, April 21.

On August 21, the governor, in company with Fages, left San Gabriel for the Colorado River to administer a tardy reprisal for the uprising of a year previous. In September, before they reached their destination, they were met by a messenger who bore the announcement that de Neve had been appointed Inspector General of the Frontier Provinces and Fages, the Governor of California. Accordingly, Fages returned to Monterey and de Neve left to take up his new duties, passing out of the province he had worked earnestly for since his arrival in 1777.

He received the Cross of the Order of San Carlos and was made a Brigadier General. In 1783 he succeeded Croix as Comandante General of the Frontier Provinces. He died November 3, 1784.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Felipe de Neve". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial 'F' and a decorative flourish at the end.