

## The Taos Massacres: Creating a Historical Novel

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I learned of the siege of Turley's mill when I passed through New Mexico in 1985. A weatherworn plaque in a small cemetery in Taos told how a handful of men and women in Simeon Turley's mill had fought for their lives against a mob of Mexicans and Indians in January 1847. After a pitched battle lasting more than a day the mob overran the mill. The dead defenders lay buried in a common grave near the plaque I read.

The idea of a small group of men and women under siege intrigued me. I thought of writing a story about the incident called *Turley's Mill*. However, when I returned to my home in Wisconsin and read more about the incident I discovered that events leading up to the attack had been largely ignored, trivialized, even distorted. That wasn't fair to history! I grew excited about telling how the attack actually took root in America's invasion of New Mexico as part of the 1846-48 U.S.-Mexico War, an invasion that led to rebellion against American authority, murder in Taos, and the siege of Turley's mill.

But I held back in my writing. I didn't want to begin until I had a good command of the history, for if history is worth invoking in a piece of fiction it's worth invoking with as much integrity as we can bring. I fail to understand why some writers feel free to ignore or even to change history just to tell a story. To me the challenge of writing a historical novel is to write a good story using good history. By good history I mean what is generally accepted as a fair representation of the past, based on a careful consideration of the evidence.

To get command of the history I returned to New Mexico to read for hours in the University of New Mexico library in Albuquerque. Traveling north, I revisited Taos, a visit much enriched by my early reading. Home again, I began accumulating secondary source materials. I ordered maps and poured over them. In Wisconsin's own State Historical Society library I discovered a wealth of information on the history of the American West.

I soon saw that getting command of the history wouldn't be easy. As a sideshow of the U.S.-Mexico War, the American invasion of New Mexico has never garnered much attention. Bits and pieces of information about the invasion and subsequent rebellion lie scattered in books and articles and reports and diaries and letters (the raw stuff, I suppose, of writing history). Reportage at the time was jingoistic, racist, contradictory, and often inaccessible (*i.e.* the Mexican and Pueblo Indian points of view). Present-day accounts seem to draw on the same timeworn sources, often uncritically; few writers seem interested in going beyond the clichés of popular history. In response to one of my inquiries a scholar specializing in the period noted: "Taos massacre could indeed use a new look." This academic regretted that my look would be novelistic rather than scholarly.

I continued my research, building a cast of historical characters and a chronology of events. I took a third and then a fourth trip west. I retraced the famous Santa Fe Trail and

visited Bent's Fort, an important link in the story of the invasion. I tracked down unmarked battlefields in New Mexico. I pondered the still-visible ruins of Turley's mill. In the comfort of my car I retraced the 150-mile flight to safety that one ill-clad survivor made afoot in that fateful January's bitter cold. All this time I fretted about being able to write with cultural sensitivity. How could I, a white American male from the Midwest, write about Mexicans and Indians? How could I even portray white Americans of 150 years ago? I didn't want to create a caricature of the West. I wanted to be authentic!

Names presented a problem. The nine men besieged in Turley's mill included John *Albert* and *Albert* Turbush, Peter *Joseph* and *Joseph* Marshall, *William* Austin and *William* Hatfield. How would I keep these historical characters straight for the reader? I especially agonized over using the white man's name for an Indian, a man they called "Big Nigger." For a long time that was the only name I could discover, even drawing a blank with an inquiry to his Delaware Tribe in Oklahoma. (When I finally stumbled across his Delaware name in a letter written by an Indian Agent I felt an immense burden lifted.)

Some seven years after I'd first read the plaque in the Taos cemetery I was finally ready to begin writing. But where to begin? The story I wanted to tell was like a large, uncut diamond. I knew a shining jewel lay within, but did I have the skill to bring it forth?

I now recognized that the 1847 rebellion in Taos had been only the most recent in a long history of upheavals in that vast area once called *la nueva México*, a series of rebellions that had pitted Indians against Spaniards, Mexicans against Imperial Spain, New Mexicans against the Mexican central government, Texans against Mexicans, and Mexicans against Americans. I'd already decided to deepen my telling of the 1847 uprising by showing that the rebellions almost always represented a struggle for self-determination and control of the land. I'd also begun imagining a mill wheel going round and round as a symbol of the cycles of revolution and revenge and the changing fortunes of so many characters. In addition I'd found an epigraph I liked by the Renaissance dramatist, John Heywood: "Much water goeth by the mill that the miller knoweth not of." Not only did the metaphor resonate with my working title of *Turley's Mill*, it also seemed to capture the irony of an Everyman like Simeon Turley caught up in the turbulence of political upheaval. A seemingly apolitical man who went about his daily business oblivious to fateful events unfolding around him, Simeon Turley was everybody's good neighbor, a friendly miller who tried to get along. As the epigraph suggests, Turley (and most other Americans) never saw the rebellion coming, victims of their deep-seated racism and cultural insensitivity and political myopia. When I learned that vigilantes had massacred a peaceful group of Mormons in a mill a few years earlier, I decided to incorporate the story of that massacre to resonate with the theme of innocents in a mill caught up in political violence.

After much backing and forthing I decided to begin telling my story *ad ovum*. In fact, I started *ad conceptum*, with a rather elegiac introduction in which I explained that the story of the invasion and rebellion had been ignored, that I thought the story important, and that I intended my account to be fair to those whom history had given short shrift. I also

included a "Note on Language" to explain why I was making everybody speak general American. In retrospect I now see that as a diamond-cutter I lacked confidence.

Like my introduction, the first chapter was elegiac. It featured the Delaware Indian, En-di-ond, reflecting on his life while situated above a great gorge on the Arkansas River (the Royal Gorge). There I introduced the first of the cycle motifs - the waters of the Arkansas River rushing down to the Mississippi and then to the sea, there to be transformed and returned as rain and snow to the "sacred mountain" in the distance (present-day Pike's Peak). In this chapter I wanted to introduce En-di-ond, to establish his humanity, and to show that the pressures of westward expansion were longstanding and destructive.

With that beginning, I wrote some 250 pages, developing the full story of the invasion of New Mexico by Colonel Stephen Kearny's Army of the West, providing background for the ongoing squabbles with Mexico, and introducing many historical figures. Even minor figures. I saw my duty as a writer of serious historical fiction to save such minor figures from historical oblivion. And after 250 pages I still hadn't gotten to the rebellion!

I was taking a break from my writing when I had a major insight - I was making the same mistake with this story I'd made with an earlier historical saga. I was writing a great-big-fat-literary-historically-accurate tomb that probably wouldn't see the light of day. Why put my heart into writing if no one will ever read it? I wanted the story of the rebellion read! I wanted the full story published!

To reach the heart of my story more quickly I decided to structure the novel more dramatically. I'd begin *in medias res*, like the then-popular *Son of the Morning Star*, an account of Custer's battle at the Little Bighorn. I'd develop the story as something of a mystery: who gets killed, and how, and why? I threw out everything I'd written - the introduction, the note on language, my first 250 pages. More than a dozen characters disappeared, some of whom I'd liked, such as Major George Howard (who hurried from Washington, D.C. to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas bringing Colonel Kearny's invasion orders from President Polk), young Susan Magoffin (the first white woman to traverse the Santa Fe Trail), the "five Marias" (Mexican wives of Americans who'd settled in Taos), a Dragoon captain named Benjamin Moore (who'd be killed within the year in distant California), Diego Archuleta (a Mexican Hotspur), and a composite young, stuttering Mormon soldier sexually obsessed with his uncle's equally young wife. Others too. *Requiescat in pace.*

I began afresh: one of Simeon Turley's employees, Charley Autobees, meets an American riding hell bent for Santa Fe and learns that a mob in Taos had murdered the American governor that morning. From that opening I'd follow the actual chronology of events and introduce relevant history with flashbacks and campfire stories. I still intended to give as many historical figures their due as I could, especially those who were killed and so were never able to tell their own stories.

Things went well. I wrote with energy and conviction and felt heartened when a friend read about 75 pages and was complimentary. After a time I sent about 150 pages to my former agent for his reaction. I say "former" because after eight rejections by mainstream publishers of my great-big-fat-literary-historically-accurate tomb he asked to withdraw his representation. One editor who rejected the work wrote of historical novels, ". . . it's a bitch to get these taken seriously." Nonetheless, I hoped my agent would be enthusiastic about my new project.

He was not. Too many characters, few of them interesting, and the story jumped around too much.

I felt hurt and depressed, even a little angry. Didn't he see that *Turley's Mill* was compelling despite its flaws? that I was telling an important story? I growled about the East-coast elite.

After cooling off, however, I realized the truth of his observations. In making the story structurally dramatic I'd made it difficult to follow. As creator, I carry the characters and the story line in my head. The reader does not. The reader needs help. But I was unsure how to be helpful. I still wanted to keep the history right and to keep several story lines going. I still wanted to be "fair" in representing the past. Perhaps something would come to mind.

As for the characters - well, the story cannot carry the characters: the characters have to carry the story. (Now there was an insight for someone with a bachelor's and master's degree in English!) Perhaps it was time to abandon my intention of giving every Little Man and Little Woman his or her historical due and to focus on fewer, more fully developed characters. As a test I reworked the first 50 pages. I consigned several minor characters to anonymity and deferred the naming of others. How's that, dear Reader?

My changes seemed to work, but I wondered, was I compromising historical integrity by being ambiguous and using story-teller tricks? In moments of serious self-doubt I also wondered whether my treatment really should be scholarly. Might a straightforward scholarly history be less agonizing? But then again, how many non-academics get scholarly histories published?

Making my characters interesting was another matter. If I was unable to do that, maybe I shouldn't write. As the novelist Henry James observed, the only demand a reader can make on a writer is to be interesting, which I interpret to mean interesting characters in interesting situations. Well, I had the interesting situations. . . . I plowed ahead *in medias res*.

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Those little dashes above were one of my great discoveries. Such dashes enable me to

think both smaller and larger. Smaller because a chapter doesn't need to be a complete, unbroken narrative. Larger because several pieces separated by dashes can support a thematic chapter. But I digress. . . .

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One joy I take in writing is the process of imagining scenes. As a visual thinker I usually see just a single element of a new scene at first. Sometimes it is a setting, sometimes a face. Sometimes I see and hear someone speaking. Occasionally a fairly full-blown vision just pops up, an inspiration if you will. More rarely I hear a narrator. This story has several scenes I enjoyed in my imagination long before I began writing them: a staggering and incoherent American survivor of the siege, En-di-ond's purification rite in an icy stream, his encounter with Charley Autobees on the "sacred mountain" (which I'd moved some 200 miles south to the environs of the Taos pueblo!) The list is long. Over time, while I see with my inner eye and listen to the voices, a dramatic scene becomes sharper and richer and more detailed as something within me adds and modifies the details. All this before I write a word.

I also find the process of revising vastly entertaining. If the imagining part is visual, the revising part is mostly auditory. After struggling to get words down that mean approximately what I want to say, I read them aloud. Do they sound right? In my head I carry around large chunks of what I have written, and sometimes find myself like Virginia Woolf's Mr. Ramsay, stalking the grounds and suddenly blurting to no one in particular, "Some one had blundered!" The sounds and rhythms of the right words are wonderful!

The relationship of such imagined scenes to the historical integrity of my story gets to the heart of how I choose to approach historical fiction. First, given my self-imposed stricture of using good history ("a fair representation of the past, based on a careful consideration of the evidence") the framework of the story must be our best understanding of the events involved. As writer I must explain those historical events. On the other hand, my imagination is free to roam the interstices of history, where I do not alter what we know of the past.

Those interstices can be very broad. For example, while there is anecdotal evidence that En-di-ond had a wife in the Tao's pueblo, there is no evidence that her father was named Sun Runner or that she was killed at Turley's mill or that En-di-ond undertook a purification rite in an icy stream to cleanse his heart of grief for her death. Those elements in my story are from my imagination. Neither is there direct evidence that En-di-ond and Charley Autobees knew each other, although it's likely they did. There is certainly no evidence they met after the battle at the Taos pueblo, the final battle of the rebellion. What we "know" about Charley's part after the fighting is no more than the following, written long after:

"A Carlos Ortiz also came in with Pablo Montoya as his prisoner, and now a court-

martial was held in the house of Padre Martinez. Montoya was found guilty and then was hanged on the plaza. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

According to one scholar, "Carlos Ortiz" was Charley Autobeas.

Nonetheless, armed with these historical "facts" I imagined a meeting between Charley Autobeas and En-di-ond after the battle at the Taos pueblo. That the meeting took place on the pueblo's "sacred mountain" and that it involved En-di-ond's horse and the capture of the rebel leader Pablo Montoya were the products of my imagination. Plausible? Yes. Factual? Only in the broadest sense. Did I distort what we know of history? Not that I'm aware. I extrapolated from what we "know." I added details to color the scene and make it thematic and dramatic. Is the scene reliable as history? No. But the story is, like written history itself, a work of the imagination that uses "good history" as its framework. I was operating in an interstice of history, just like a historian who qualifies a statement with "perhaps" or "probably" or "most likely." No harm, no foul. Yet by the time I finished writing this scene (which for me always involves draft after draft after draft) it had become absolutely real. That's the way it happened, honest!

Henry James also observed that "it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature," that literature takes root and blossoms in the soil of history.<sup>2</sup> After a year of writing *in medias res* I was concerned that *Turley's Mill* was going to be a pretty small blossom, a novella rather than a novel. With considerably less than 50,000 words I had invaded New Mexico and destroyed Turley's mill and gotten a survivor to safety and fought battles with the rebels near present-day La Cañada and Embudo and at the Taos pueblo and had reached the point of writing about the trial and punishment of the uprising's killers and ringleaders. I wanted to save the description of Simeon Turley's end for last, and for purposes of suspense I'd held off describing the initial murders in Taos. But after I took care of those matters I saw nowhere to go. What was the meaning of the story? I didn't know; I had trapped myself in history, which of course has no meaning if it is merely a telling of facts. Only with hindsight do we think we see patterns that someone like Winston Churchill characterizes in such titles as *The Gathering Storm* or *The End of an Era*. I felt quite stupid when I realized that after years of living with this story I was still unsure what the story was about. Descriptive, dramatic, thematic, yes. But what did it mean?

I wonder how many of my allotted days I've spent stewing about how to get a character from point A to point B when in the end it really doesn't matter, or how many hours I've spent reworking a troublesome paragraph that I end up throwing out, or how long I've pawed through books in search of a historical detail that really makes no difference to the meaning of a story? Too many, I'm afraid, and I come late to the business of writing fiction. I am learning, however. Now I try to bypass such problems and let some nether part of my brain find a solution. Such was the case with figuring out the meaning of my story.

Of the fifty-some books I now possess as reference material for the writing of this historical novel, Lewis Garrard's *Wah-to-yah and the Taos Trail* is the one I most marked up. This narrative of young Lewis's ten months in the West in the aftermath of the American invasion of New Mexico provides the best description we have of the mood in Taos after the rebellion was put down. But I don't like Lewis! Despite his occasional willingness to laugh at himself, I find him juvenile, opinionated, supercilious, pompous, racist, and brash - among other things! And although his sojourn in the west almost exactly coincided with the time frame of my story, I'd chosen to avoid him as a character. I'd used his narrative for information (for "good history") but that was all.

I was again taking a break from my writing when I had a second major insight. How could I have been so blind? Young Lewis had dedicated his book to a citizen-soldier named Ceran St. Vrain, one of my principal characters. The youth had also stayed at Bent's Fort and been acquainted with Narcisse Beaubien (murdered in the Taos uprising) and Elliott Lee (rescued from certain death by the Taos priest). He'd witnessed the trials of the rebels and had helped to hang the convicted. He'd heard an American soldier describe the storming of the pueblo and the soldier's murder of an imprisoned pueblo chief. Goodness! Lewis could provide a focal point for the meaning of *Turley's Mill*! He was a character who could grow! What did it matter that I didn't like him? I could poke fun at his foolishness! Almost immediately I saw him on the mezzanine of the Planters' Hotel in St. Louis on a sultry August morning in 1846. He was sitting at a small, ornate table, his quill moving easily across the hotel's creamy embossed stationary, a youth with a wan, boyish face....

Lewis was the key to unlocking the "literary" structure I was looking for. Swept up by romantic notions of adventure and discovery, this untested youth set forth on the Santa Fe trail on the heels of General Kearny's invading army. I saw him going into New Mexico as a *naif*, getting caught up in the gruesome aftermath of the rebellion, and returning home a wiser young man. Going out and coming back, a reinforcement of the cycle motif. My structure was no longer *in medias res*.

Happily, putting Lewis on the Santa Fe trail enabled me to salvage some of my *ad ovum* work. An *ad ovum* scene I'd written about young Susan Magoffin scratching her initials into Pawnee Rock on the Santa Fe Trail now became a scene in which Lewis encounters Narcisse Beaubien atop that same rock grieving over the American occupation of his New Mexico homeland. Such salvage was rarely as much as a paragraph, yet I felt good each time I could use something I'd earlier thrown out. All those hours of research and writing were not a complete waste!

Useful as Lewis was to theme and structure, I didn't want to make him a hero. To be true to his character as revealed in *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail* I couldn't make him more than he was. He reminded me of young Ernest Pontifex in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, blathering the last opinion he hears as his own, although it might be just opposite of the opinion he'd held a few minutes earlier.

Even with Lewis going west and returning home as the frame of my story I faced the problem of bringing *Turley's Mill* to a close. How was I to "shut up the box and the puppets" as William Makepeace Thackeray says in concluding *Vanity Fair*? By this time I knew I'd include an Afterword, in part to leave the reader with a historical perspective, but what would be my "literary" *denouement*. How would I reveal my message?

The American soldier's murder of the imprisoned pueblo chief and the soldier's ensuing escape from custody were much on my mind. Especially how comrade-soldiers and civilians alike had abetted this soldier in his escape. Here was historical fact! a cold-blooded murderer helped to avoid justice! Why? I'd also left the reader hanging regarding En-di-ond's fate, who'd fought on the side of the rebels in the battle at the Taos pueblo. Somehow I intuited that if I got young Lewis, Ceran St. Vrain (his mentor), the murderous soldier, and En-di-ond in the same place at the same time something was likely to happen.

Luckily, according to *Wah-to-yah and the Taos Trail*, Lewis and St. Vrain and the soldier did spend an evening together on the Santa Fe Trail, and I deduced that En-di-ond must have passed by about then when he returned to his tribe's reservation, then situated on the Kansas River. I'd found my interstice! The only "good history" we about this situation (and in my compulsion I need to protect) is from Lewis's narrative. He reports that St. Vrain pleaded with him to quit his precarious situation in which he was in constant danger from marauding Indians; St. Vrain wanted Lewis to join his wagon train bound for the States. Lewis turned him down. In my characterization of Lewis he does so in part because he realizes that he's been treated like an overgrown boy in his adventures and wants to assert his manhood and independence. That he made this assertion to St. Vrain at a short-lived outpost named Fort Mann (near present-day Dodge City) was truly serendipity.

I used the situation to give Lewis something more to think about, however. In the final chapter he's a more seasoned but still somewhat foolish young man, given to regressions into juvenility, surviving in small part by luck and in large part by the goodwill of others. But Lewis is bright, and when he learns that the soldier's justification for murdering the imprisoned pueblo chief hangs on a flawed version of history, he is challenged both intellectually and morally. It is while Lewis is trying to sort this problem out that I bring En-di-ond's role to an end. Facing essentially the same issues that preoccupy Lewis, the Indian lies hidden a short distance away, pondering whether to kill the young white man in revenge for his many losses.

I wanted a subdued ending to this story. After so much bloodshed, what really had been accomplished? Fierce fighters on opposite sides in the conflict, both Ceran St. Vrain and En-di-ond are made wiser by their experiences. St. Vrain acknowledges his earlier shortsightedness about the effects of the American invasion on the people of New Mexico, and En-di-ond realizes that killing Lewis would accomplish nothing. That was *denouement* enough for me. As a final jab at a still-smug Lewis, however, I have En-di-ond launch a defiant arrow in his direction that frightens the youth. Shaken by the near miss of the arrow



and the retreating Indian's haunting cry of rage and sorrow, Lewis might have found motivation enough to pack up and head for the safety of home, which he reports he did just three days after he had staunchly resisted St. Vrain's impassioned pleas.

In this chapter I also wrote of St. Vrain's ruminations at the campfire at Fort Mann on that memorable evening. Here was a case where the words simply popped into my head. St. Vrain recalls that it had been just a year since he and Charles Bent, the now-dead governor, encountered a troop of U.S. Dragoons at this very campground and learned of the newly declared war with Mexico. In fact, historically it was almost a year to the day! Suddenly I realized I had the final piece of the structure! The beginning would not be young Lewis at the Planters' Hotel in St. Louis in August; it would be St. Vrain and Charles Bent meeting the Dragoons bringing news of war two months earlier, in June 1846! That was the real beginning, and although he'd be a fleeting figure, the murdered governor would now be a real person! That's how it *really* happened, and it would be a cycle of one year! I went back to my *ad ovum* version and pulled out a piece that became "The Messenger," my new first chapter. I was now approaching 75,000 words, a respectable length.

In the Afterword I wanted to conclude with a letter the American commanding officer in New Mexico wrote to his superiors shortly after the rebellion, a letter whose tone struck me as discouraged, weary, and frustrated. Unlike the "literary" *denouement* of *Turley's Mill*, which is somewhat hopeful in that En-di-ond chooses not to kill young Lewis, the historical reality is reflected in the officer's report of continued enmity and bloodshed in New Mexico. I also thought that part of my original elegiac introduction actually had a place in the Afterward, so I rescued it from the front of *ad ovum* to put in the back of *in medias res*, which of course was no longer *in medias res*.

And there the matter rested. I'd reconstructed a neglected piece of history from hundreds of bits and pieces and created a more complete story that didn't go much beyond what we know of either characters or events. Was it history or fiction? Would anybody ever see it? Would anybody care?

In truth the matter did not rest there. I gave my work to a friend for a critical reading, thinking of course that she'd catch a few typos and say it was a wonderful novel. She gave me back three pages of notes on character development and a manuscript heavily marked up with suggestions for structural changes. Character and structure again? Argh! Why don't I do something more useful!

My friend defined the problem in more detail than my former agent - still too much jumping from character to character and from present to past to present. Of course I immediately saw the merit of her suggestions. How could I have been so blind? In using young Lewis to create a frame for the story I hadn't really addressed the problems in the middle. I'd merely surrounded them.

In our daily lives we deal with disparate and disconnected information and activity that we sort out and reconstruct (with the luxury of hindsight) into coherent wholes - as memories, as stories, as history. I'd wanted *Turley's Mill* to reflect some of the uncertainty and confusion my characters must have experienced in trying to understand the rebellion - suddenly people were being killed and armed mobs were looting and burning and murdering. Why? There were no rebel-seized radio or TV stations making announcements. There were no daily newspapers. News traveled by foot and horseback across rugged country, mostly by word of mouth, in a polyglot of language and by rare, semi-literate letters. Rumor and misinformation were rife. Unfortunately, I'd gone too far down that road. I'd kept a pretty straight chronology on the development of the rebellion, but had skipped from character to character to show what they knew or assumed at such and such a time and why they did what they did. That might be all right for one or two characters, but I had too many people running around who didn't know what was going on. The result was confusion for the reader.

Again I restructured the story. This time I followed the fortunes of the men in Simeon Turley's mill from the beginning of the siege until they were either dead or tucked safely away. Then I went back in time and followed the Americans in Santa Fe from the time they learn about the rebellion until a makeshift force of Army regulars and civilian volunteers marched north to Taos and crushed it. Then I dealt with the aftermath. The story seemed much easier to follow. Why hadn't I thought of that earlier?

During this rewriting I had a third major insight. The murder of Americans in the Taos valley at the beginning of the rebellion is now known as "the Taos massacre." But another massacre took place just a few weeks later. After marching up from Santa Fe and fighting a pitched battle, American soldiers invested the north portion of the Taos pueblo. As a result, dozens of Indians and Mexicans fled the confines of the pueblo in an attempt to reach the safety of the mountains. A mounted company of citizen-soldiers rode them down and slaughtered them all. Not one was left alive. That second massacre near the Taos pueblo stronghold marked the end of the rebellion, a massacre scarcely mentioned in the literature, historical or otherwise. In a gesture towards a fair representation of the past I decided to change the name of my novel from *Turley's Mill* to emphasize the fact there were two massacres, not one. My story became *The Taos Massacres*.

Perhaps my strong desire to be historically accurate in creating a work of fiction is foolish. To keep things simple I end up compressing and obscuring anyway, so I have less historical integrity than I might like. Nonetheless, I take great pleasure in fitting together the pieces of a neglected puzzle. I am also motivated by this: if few people read historical fiction, still fewer read scholarly history, and if I can write a readable story that has historical integrity I feel I do a useful service.

I began by saying that my original idea for this story came from a visit to Taos in 1985. I remember a rather crude wooden plaque in an unkempt park near the town plaza. I can still picture the plaque - brown-stained wood and yellow-paint words that told of the siege of

Turley's mill. I remember looking up from the plaque to see the blue-black peaks of the Sangre de Cristos mountains and the impossible Taos sky. The text on the marker referenced the 1847 rebellion and noted that both men and women had been in Turley's mill. That's what I'd intended to write about - men and women under siege, a made-up story. When I returned to Taos to do more research a couple of years later the park had been cleaned up and the wooden plaque replaced by a fancy marker of etched metal. The text now contained no mention of women being involved. I stood baffled. Why had the women disappeared? They must have been there when the rebel horde descended on Turley's compound, at least Turley's wife and family and perhaps a servant girl or two. Maybe they were allowed safe passage. But just because the women disappeared from the plaque they need not disappear from history! I kept Turley's wife Rosita in my story.

From my earlier visit I also remembered seeing a large, showy headstone for the daughter of Charles Bent, the murdered American governor. A five-year-old at the time she witnessed her father's murder, she subsequently lived out her long life in Taos. I found her grave moved to a different part of the cemetery where she now reposed in a family plot along with her mother and brother. At least I'm quite sure her grave had been moved. I distinctly remember the headstone as standing in a different place. I may be wrong, of course. Time has a way of confusing the past. But that's the way I see it in my mind's eye. Just like *The Taos Massacres*.

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<sup>1</sup> Chavez, Fray Angelico, *But Time and Chance: The Story of Padre Martinez of Taos, 1793-1867* (Sunstone Press, 1981), p. 85

<sup>2</sup>James, Henry, *Hawthorne*, 1879.