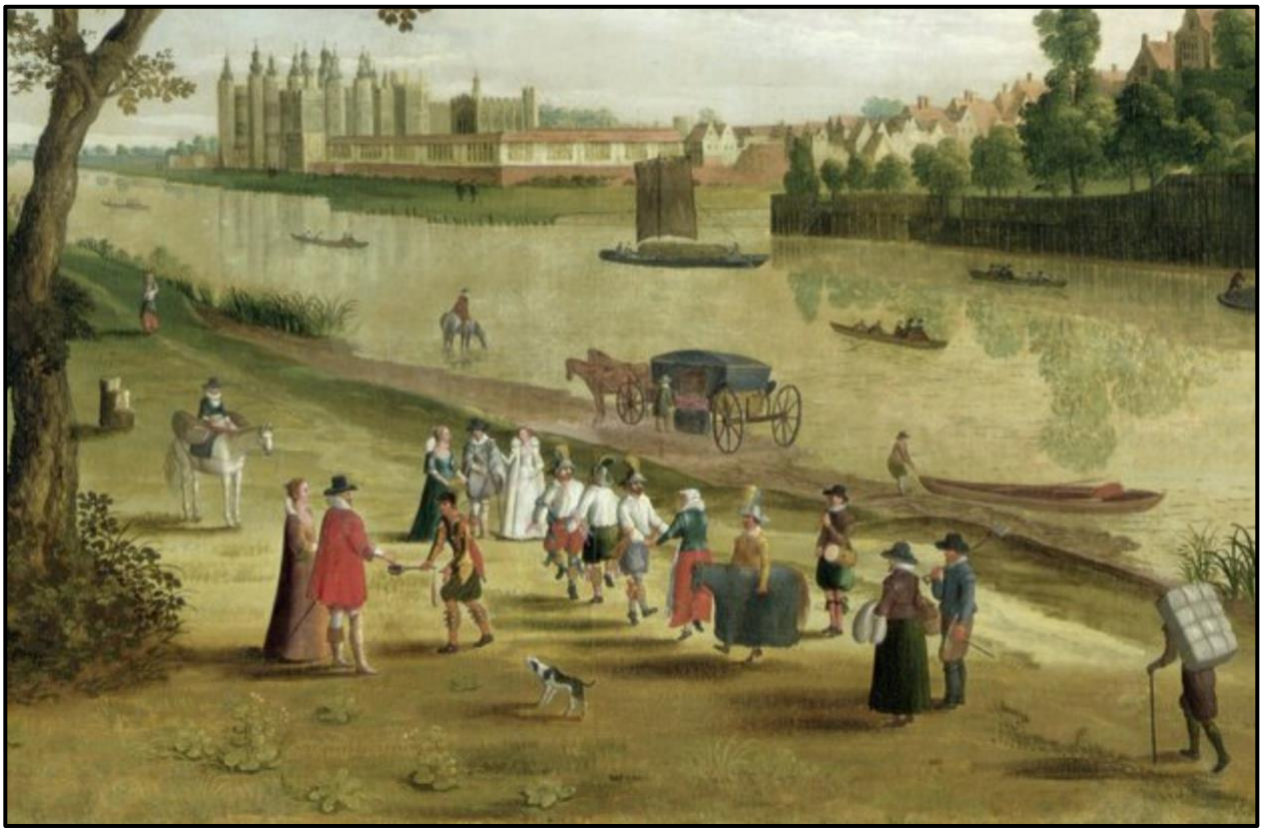
The Hobby-Horse, Santiago, and San Diego in the Jemez

The term hobby-horse has multiple meanings. For a long time, I have referred to my learning and writing about the history of the Jemez Mountains as a "hobby-horse," meaning an obsessive pastime. However, the original meaning of hobby-horse is a pretend horse used in traditional dances. Almost everyone remembers riding a stick horse as a child. This is the most ancient type of hobby-horse, originally made from a horse's skull mounted on a stick. More elaborate hobby-horses evolved in Europe during the Middle Ages, most notably the "tourney-style." This and other styles of the hobby horse are still used today in folk dances in England, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, and other European countries.[1]

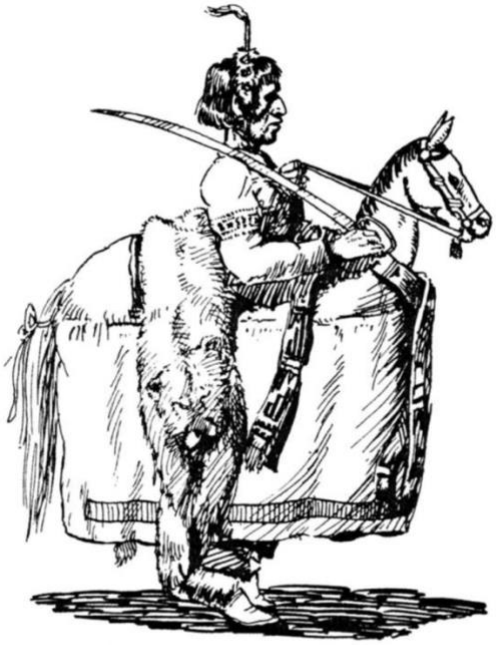


A tourney-style hobby-horse along the Thames River in England, performing in the ancient "Morris Dance." The painting is titled "Thames at Richmond, with the Old Royal Palace," unknown artist, dated about 1620.

Along with real horses, the hobby horse traveled with Spanish colonists across the ocean to the New World. Although nearly forgotten at times in Europe,[2] the hobby-horse has been kept alive and performed to this day during certain dances in the pueblos of New Mexico. Several versions of the hobby-horse appear in seasonal dances in at least eight

pueblos, including at Jemez Pueblo (Walatowa) during the Feast Days of Percingula (August 2) and San Diego (November 12).[3]

Historians and anthropologists call this "syncretism," a blending or fusion of different religions and cultures that creates something new.[4] The meaning of the hobby-horse varies from one pueblo to another and from one dance to another. Generally, the hobby-horse symbolizes the arrival of the Spaniards and their horses in the Southwest, and it is sometimes an impersonation of a saint. Saint James, or Santiago, is a common example. He is the patron saint of Spain, soldiers, and horsemen, and the 1690s Reconquista of New Mexico. His image of a sword-wielding warrior mounted on a white stallion, and the war cry "Santiago! Santiago!" have been invoked by Spanish soldiers in battle for centuries, including during conflicts with the pueblos in New Mexico. (I will return to this part of the story later.)



1. Hobby-horse (impersonation of a saint) at San Felipe Pueblo. From Leslie A. White, "Impersonation of Saints Among the Pueblos," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 27 (1942), 561; courtesy of the Michigan Academy.

Despite this history, sometime after the Reconquista of the 1690s, some pueblos in New Mexico adopted Santiago as their benefactor and as a hobby-horse character in certain dances. This syncretism was probably related to new policies of Catholic priests after the Reconquest that encouraged a blending of Christian and Puebloan traditions, myths, and rituals. Another example of syncretism are the Matachines dances in pueblos and hispano villages, portraying a fusion of Montezuma and pueblo legends, and European-Christian traditions. Hobby-horses also sometimes appear at Matachines dances, which are usually held in early January.

A Santiago hobby-horse at San Felipe Pueblo in 1942 is depicted in a drawing, above left (from Leslie White). The hobby-horse riders that I have seen had veils over their heads.

These descriptions from Walatowa are from Luke Lyon:[5]

"In 1972, 1975, and 1977, one hobby-horse appeared with the Pecos Bull. This hobby has a turquoise-coloured horse's head and rump, with the left flank having the same theta brand as the Pecos Bull. The caparison is white, decorated with Indian symbols embroidered with yarn. The rider wears a similarly decorated white jacket, a black veil, and a turquoise-

coloured crown. The hobby- horse is accompanied by two masked clowns they wear cowboy chaps and boots and carry long cattle whips. A snare drummer beats a factory-made drum, using two distinct rhythms. . . In 1976, 1978, 1979, and 1980, two hobby-horses were in the Pecos Bull ceremony, one with a brown rump and head and the other with a black rump and head. Both had a stick-figure brand on the left flank. Metal tinklers dangled above the eyes and below the mouth of the horse's head, simulating Spanish bridle ornaments used to keep flies from bothering the horses. The riders wore black coats, hats, and veils. Two masked figures, one wearing the mask with the butterfly design and the other wearing the mask with the horse-head design, accompanied the brown hobby-horse; the two masked figures with corn-plant and turquoise-coloured animal designs on the masks followed the black hobby-horse. The brown and black hobbies are associated with the Squash and Turquoise moieties, respectively."

In Max Harris' 1994 paper "The Arrival of the Europeans: Folk Dramatizations of Conquest and Conversion in New Mexico," he quotes Joe Sando, the Hemish historian:

"Joe Sando confirms the continued popularity of the hobby-horses. "Today," he wrote in 1992, most of the pueblos still commemorate the arrival of Coronado's party, portraying him on their feast days as a figure on a dancing horse, holding a sword in his right hand. Another figure plays the snare drum, and the horseman dances to the tune of the drum. In some villages, the horseman is called 'Santiago,' who appears to have been the conquistador's patron saint. Thus do the Pueblo people . . . gain a wry revenge upon their persecutors."[6]

By "wry revenge" here, I suspect that Sando is referring to a sometimes-humorous mocking of Spaniards and Euro-Americans in the antics of hobby-horses and their attending characters during dances.[7] In other cases, the hobby-horse Santiago impersonation conveys a blessing upon horses and the pueblo. In this way, Santiago is transformed from foe to friend.

Researchers have summarized the adoption of Santiago as follows:

"In many Pueblo villages Santiago, the Horse Saint, became and continues to be one of the most important saints, regarded as the guardian of all Pueblo livestock and crops (Parsons 1939:966). According to Simmons (1991:22), "In Spain [Santiago's] attributes as warrior and national patron had overshadowed his less publicized role as protector of agriculture and ranching. But that was precisely the function of St. James that appealed most strongly to the great masses of rural Indians."[8]

Santiago is recognized by a feast day held by some pueblos on July 25th, and the connection to horses and horsemen is played out (or used to be) in the Corrida del Gallo, the "rooster pull," during that day, or during the Feast Day of San Juan on June 24th. (Richard Baxter Townshend described and photographed a rooster pull at Walatowa in 1903, as I recounted in a recent book chapter.[9]) In this game, a live rooster is buried in a pit, with only its head exposed, and young men riding horseback try to pull it from the ground. After one horseman succeeds, the others attempt to steal the rooster from him, resulting in a "tug of war." Eventually, the rooster is pulled apart, and the game starts over. In general, this event serves to showcase the skills of pueblo horsemen, and the bloodletting of the rooster was considered a blessing.[10]

Santiago and his supernatural presence during battles feature in legends of New Mexico. The Spanish told an apocryphal tale about the 1598 Battle of Acoma. According to this story, some pueblo survivors "asserted without being asked, that in the heat of the battle they had seen someone on a white horse, dressed in white, a red emblem on his breast, and a spear in his hand. This was ascertained because, after they [the Indians] had been taken prisoner, they did not see among us that particular captain.[11]

Interestingly, early Spanish documents indicate that in 1606, Juan de Oñate granted the pueblo of "Santiago de Jemez" an encomienda for three generations. This refers to a system whereby Spanish colonists could exact tribute from the tribes. But Matt Liebmann says it is unclear which Jemez village Oñate was referring to at that time, and other historical evidence suggests the encomienda system was not effectively established in the Jemez valley in the early 1600s. In any case, this points to the enduring ambiguity of the Santiago versus San Diego names in the Jemez.[12]

The placenames of San Diego in the Jemez Mountains are well known and established in documentary history. This name was given to at least two of the mission churches built in the Jemez Valley – San Diego del Montes (near the junction of the Guadalupe and Jemez Rivers) and San Diego de la Congregración at present-day Walatowa. This name was also applied to the large canyon containing the Jemez River, and the Spanish land grant of 1798 – Cañon de San Diego. The saint, San Diego, was also known as Didacus of Alcalá. He was renowned for his missionary works in the Canary Islands, and he was a patron saint of the Franciscan laity. Given his canonization in 1588, he was undoubtedly a familiar and venerated figure among the Spanish missionaries and colonizers of New Mexico in the late 1590s.

The final Santiago-San Diego story I will relate here involves the Battle of Astialakwa in 1694, when the Spanish and their allies under Don Diego de Vargas attacked the Hemish

and their allies on Guadalupe Mesa. According to a commonly told version of the legend, San Diego appeared at the moment that multiple Hemish warriors jumped from the cliffs of Guadalupe Mesa, rather than surrender to the Spanish conquistadors. The saint gently levitated them to the valley floor, as the story goes. Matt Liebmann explains the confusion about which saint this might have been in the original legend, as follows:

“Images of both San Diego (on the east side of the peñol) and the Virgin (on the west side) are said to be visible on the cliffs of the mesa today, and are still venerated by the contemporary people of Jemez (as well as the non-Native residents of the Jemez Valley). Confusingly, the image purported to represent San Diego (St. Didacus, patron of Franciscan laity) actually seems to be that of Santiago (St. James, patron of the Spanish empire, soldiers, and the reconquista). The likeness emblazoned on the side of the cliff (comprised of a series of cracks, variations in the color of the stone, and water stains) resembles a bearded man in profile standing above a distinctively equine shape. Colonial representations of Santiago commonly depicted him with a flowing white beard astride a magnificent steed (Simmons 1991 6:16-18); thus, the apparition on the peñol is probably more appropriately termed that of Santiago, not San Diego. Significantly, the battle at Astialakwa occurred just one day prior to the feast of Santiago (July 25) as well. "Doubtless, it was his patronage and intercession," opined [Don Diego de] Vargas, "since it was the eve of his glorious day, that played a large part in the triumph."[13]

The Santiago-San Diego image on the east wall of Guadalupe Mesa is quite visible when you know where to look. The flowing hair, beard, and robes are distinctly visible. To my eye, however, the shape of Santiago’s steed below him is vague. If I squint, I think I can make out the outlines of a tourney-style hobby horse, rather than a four-legged equine. Just as the meanings of the hobby-horse in ancient European and Hemish dances are variable and inscrutable to some observers, the shapes of saint and horse apparitions on canyon walls are in the eye of the beholder.

See photograph on next page.

The Santiago-San Diego mimetolith[14] on an east-facing cliff wall of Guadalupe Mesa.

Endnotes:

[1] For this essay I draw upon the following papers summarizing hobby-horse traditions in the old and new worlds, including specific focus on syncretism in pueblos of New Mexico: Alford, Violet. "The hobby horse and other animal masks." Folklore 79, no. 2 (1968): 122-134; Harris, Max. "The Arrival of the Europeans: Folk Dramatizations of Conquest and

Conversion in New Mexico." Comparative Drama 28, no. 1 (1994): 141-165; Kurath, Gertrude Prokosch. "Mexican Moriscas: A problem in dance acculturation." The journal of American folklore 62, no. 244 (1949): 87-106; Kurath, Gertrude P. "The Origin of the Pueblo Indian Matachines." El Palacio 64, no. 9 (1957): 10; Luke Lyon, Hobby-Horse Ceremonies in New Mexico and Great Britain, Folk Music Journal, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1981), pp. 117-145; Sanderson, Nia. "Horses Through Time: Galloping Through Native American Cultures." Sino-Platonic Papers: 69; Sweet, Jill D., and Karen E. Larson. "The horse, Santiago, and a ritual game: Pueblo Indian responses to three Spanish introductions." Western folklore 53, no. 1 (1994): 69-84.

[2] Shakespeare used the term “hobby-horse” in several plays, notably suggesting that the hobby-horse at the time of his writing (around 1600) was a nearly forgotten cultural icon. However, note the painting from the Thames in England in the essay showing a hobby-horse in a Morris dance, dated around 1620. Here’s a line from Hamlet: "For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot!"; Note also that ‘hobby-horse” was a central theme in the satirical novel “The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,” by Laurence Sterne, which was published in nine volumes between 1759 and 1767. The meaning of hobby-horse in the novel was an obsession or passion for various pursuits. The novel satirized various forms of these obsessions, including the pursuit of rationality and science.

[3] An interesting account of a hobby-horse appearance at Walatowa is described by Lyon, page 122:
“A most notable hobby-horse performance took place during mass on 12 November 1977. The newly appointed archbishop of the Santa Fe diocese, Archbishop Roberto Sanchez, was a guest of Jemez Pueblo and was blessing the officers of the village and their canes of authority. Instead of remaining outside the church for the procession to form, the black hobby-horse pranced down the aisle and danced in front of the archbishop. A guest of mine, an Englishwoman, who was a World War Two war-bride of a US soldier, finally gathered her breath, 'Look, a 'Obby! And right in front of the archbishop, too!'”

[4] According to Gemini AI, regarding the etymology of “syncretism”: The word originates from the Greek term *synkrētismos* (συγκρητισμός), first attested in the 1st century AD in an essay by Plutarch. Plutarch used the term to describe the political act of different Cretan cities reconciling their differences and forming an alliance when faced with a common external enemy. The English word "syncretism" first appeared in the early 17th century, primarily in theological and religious contexts to discuss the blending or compromising of different religious beliefs. It was often used in a pejorative sense, implying the corruption of a "pure" faith.
It was only later that historians and anthropologists appropriated the term to refer to the intermixing of cultures and religions, such as the blending of indigenous beliefs with Christianity in colonial contexts. Today, it is widely used in these fields to describe cultural fusion in a neutral, descriptive way.

[5] Ibid, Lyon, 1981, pages 119-122.

[6] Ibid, Harris, 1994 page 155, quoting Joe S. Sando, Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History, Clear Light, Santa Fe, N.M (1992), pp. 51-52.

[7] Harris recounts a remarkable observance of a hobbyhorse, the Pecos Bull, and assorted characters at Walatowa in August 1993:
"... at the annual fiesta de Porcingula in Jemez Pueblo, I had seen the Pecos Bull Dance. As the fiesta Mass concluded, shortly after 10 a.m., a bull similar to that used in the Santo Domingo sandaro ceremony arrived outside the church. It was accompanied by a drummer; two abuelos (lit. grandfathers), each wearing a pale-faced, horned leather mask with a mustache and bushy eyebrows, and carrying a whip; about fifty men and boys in white face, some dressed as women but most wearing clothes associated with whites (jeans, T-shirts, an occasional hard hat, and a disproportionate number of Dallas Cowboys T-shirts and U.S. military fatigues); and **a saint on a hobby-horse** [emphasis mine]. Just as in earlier generations those who accompanied the bull imitated Spanish settlers, so now they imitated more recent armed intervention by whites. Some were "cowboys," wearing leather chaps or, in a nice visual pun, Dallas Cowboys T-shirts. Another had a note, which read "#001 Coca Cola Cowboy," pinned to his back. Others, making silent reference to the recent U.S. liberation of Kuwait, wore T-shirts that proclaimed, "Desert Storm" or "Support our Troops." There is, I suspect, a discreet and not very flattering comparison being drawn between the U.S. military and cowboys."

[8] Ibid, Sweet and Larson, 1994, page 78., and citing Parsons, Elsie Clews. 1939. Pueblo Indian Religion, Press.; Simmons, Marc. 1991. Santiago: Reality and Myth. In Santiago: Saint of Two Worlds, Marc Simmons, Donna Pierce, and Joan Myers, pp. 1-29. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico; Sweet and Larson, page 77, describe the connection between Santiago and the rooster pull, drawing from a Puebloan story recorded by Leslie White in 1942:
"Rooster pulls were directly associated with Santiago through a Pueblo story. In this tale Santiago kills his horse and the blood magically makes a multitude of horses for the Indians. Next he kills a rooster that also magically brings good luck and fertility to the Indians [the Puebloan story follows]: "His faithful horse tells Santiago, 'Now we are home. You are done with me. You must tie me up and stab me through the heart. The blood which will spurt forth will become horses for all the hano sicti (Indian people), and it will spread ianyi (beneficent supernatural power) over all the land.' Santiago tied his horse to a post in the center of the corral and stabbed him as directed. The horse died, but his blood made countless horses for all the people for all time to come. After the horse had been killed the rooster came up to Santiago. 'You must kill me, too,' he said, 'you are through with me now and you must tear me to pieces so that my blood and feathers will be spread and scattered all about. This will give ianyi and gawai'aiti (cultivated plants) and tsiyakatse (domesticated animals) to all the hano sicti.' Santiago killed the rooster as directed. [White 1942:264]"

[9] Townshend's chapter on his experience of the "Correr del Gallo," as he called it, at Walatowa in 1903, is contained in his book, Townshend Richard B. 1926. Last Memories of a Tenderfoot. Jane Lane The Bodley Head, London. Reprinted in 2010 by Kesinger Legacy Reprints. 270 pgs. Townshend also photographed this event. These remarkable photos include the rooster in the ground and the tug of war. They are located in the Pitt Rivers Museum photo archives, Oxford University. My recent book chapter on Correr del Gallo excerpts Townshend's story in its entirety.

[10] The rooster pull event is no longer held at pueblos and villages in New Mexico, or if it is, it is done secretly. Regarding the religious significance of Corrida (or Correr) de Gallo, and its rarity today, the eminent New Mexico historian Marc Simmons wrote this interesting summary in a Santa Fe New Mexican op-ed on November 15, 2013:

"In most cases, the rooster pull was conducted on the feast day of San Juan, that is, St. John the Baptist [June 24th]. An American official in Santa Fe in the 1850s, for example, wrote: "On the afternoon of St. John's Day the plaza is thronged with Caballeros riding to and fro and testing the stretching qualities of the chickens' necks."

In part, the rooster pull was regarded as a manly art, "a macho thing," in which youths showed off their riding skill in front of the ladies. But it also had a deeper, almost unconscious, religious meaning dating back to the pre-Christian pagan rites of Europe.

In ancient Spanish symbolism, drops of blood were closely identified with drops of water. The Sangre de Cristo (Blood of Christ) Mountains was where water rose and flowed into the valleys. The shedding of blood, as in the rooster pull, helped bring rain because the spattering of red drops was powerful magic.

Nor is it coincidence that the corrida de gallo was scheduled for the feast of St. John the Baptist. Remember, he is closely identified with water, since he baptized Christ and is regarded as patron of pure water. Also, like the rooster, he lost his head which must have been accompanied by a spattering of blood.

St. John's feast day falls on June 24, which in New Mexico is just about the beginning of the summer rainy season. Those rains in colonial days were essential to replenish the irrigation waters that started to grow short after the spring runoff of snow melt. So the rooster pull, closely tied to the bringing of rain, may have been more of a "religious event" than a sport.

The Pueblo Indians had something of the same notion. A resident of Acoma told an anthropologist that "rooster blood is good for rain." And at Santo Domingo Pueblo, a religious leader said of the *corrida de gallo:* "When the horses and men get sweaty, that is a prayer to God and the King for rain."

To the Indian mind, the beads of sweat represented raindrops and white, foamy lather on the animals symbolized clouds. Similarly, the splashing of rooster blood during the pull has the magical power to bring rain.

As I noted, this age-old custom has disappeared in most parts of New Mexico. The danger associated with it as well as the declining number of horses available to villagers provide a partial explanation.

But the late Dr. Aruthur L. Campa of the University of Denver also cited another reason. He claimed the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals waged a campaign against rooster pulls. As a result, the few that remain are performed quietly, without fanfare."

[11] Ibid, Sweet and Larson 1994, quoting Hammond and Rey 1953:427: Hammond, George P. and Agapito Rey. 1953. Don Juan De Oñate: Colonizer New Mexico, 1595-1628. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico.

[12] Matthew Liebmann. Revolt, An Archeological History of Pueblo Resistance and Revitalization in 17th Century New Mexico. The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, (2012) pages 33, and 222n5. In Liebmann's endnote for this, he offers the following reasonable and fascinating speculation: "I suspect that Santiago may have been another name for Giusewa (LA 679). In 1581the Rodriquez-Chamuscado expedition visited a valley they called Santiago, apparently referring to the upper Jemez Valley, a.k.a. San Diego Canyon (Hammond and Rey 1966:6-15, 86-87). If this is correct, it would make sense that they might refer to the entire canyon by the name of the first major settlement they encountered, when venturing up the valley, which would have been Giusewa."

[13] Ibid, Liebmann, 2012, page 204.

[14] From Gemini AI: A mimetolith is a natural geological feature, rock, or stone that resembles something else, such as a person, animal, plant, or manufactured item, due to natural processes like weathering and erosion. The resemblance is subjective and relies on the observer's perception, a phenomenon known as pareidolia.