

**Commemorating the 182nd Anniversary
of the birth of
EL PRESBYTERO ANTONIO JOSE MARTINEZ Y SANTISTEVAN**

One hundred and eight years after the death of Padre Antonio José Martínez, the question remains unanswered about this controversial figure: was he saint or devil? He remains an enigma to historians and scholars.

Today, there is much interest in the life of the padre by both writers and students, probably because of our more liberal thinking and perhaps because he fits so many different categories. Research material is limited; there is little available as a matter of record. The padre's many different traits, both good and bad, lead many of us to conclude that he was just a plain, sensitive man, concerned with social and religious problems, endowed with great intelligence and understanding. He was far ahead of his peers in both education and vision.

His influence as politician, man of letters and priest has far-reaching effects on both priests and laymen, in his time and even now. He exerted deep influence on the intellectual, moral and civic consciousness.

Padre Martínez was a true man of the soil, who knew the land and its demands on tile people who tilled it for a living. He was a farmer before he was anything else. His father, Don Antonio Severino Martínez, a hard working and influential man, had much land in the Taos valley which needed cultivating. Antonio José at the age of eleven did a man's work on the Hacienda.

The Presbyter, Don Antonio José Martínez was the eldest of six children, born to Don Antonio Severino Martínez and Marra del Carmel Santistevan on January 10, 1793 in Abiquiu, Department of New Mexico.

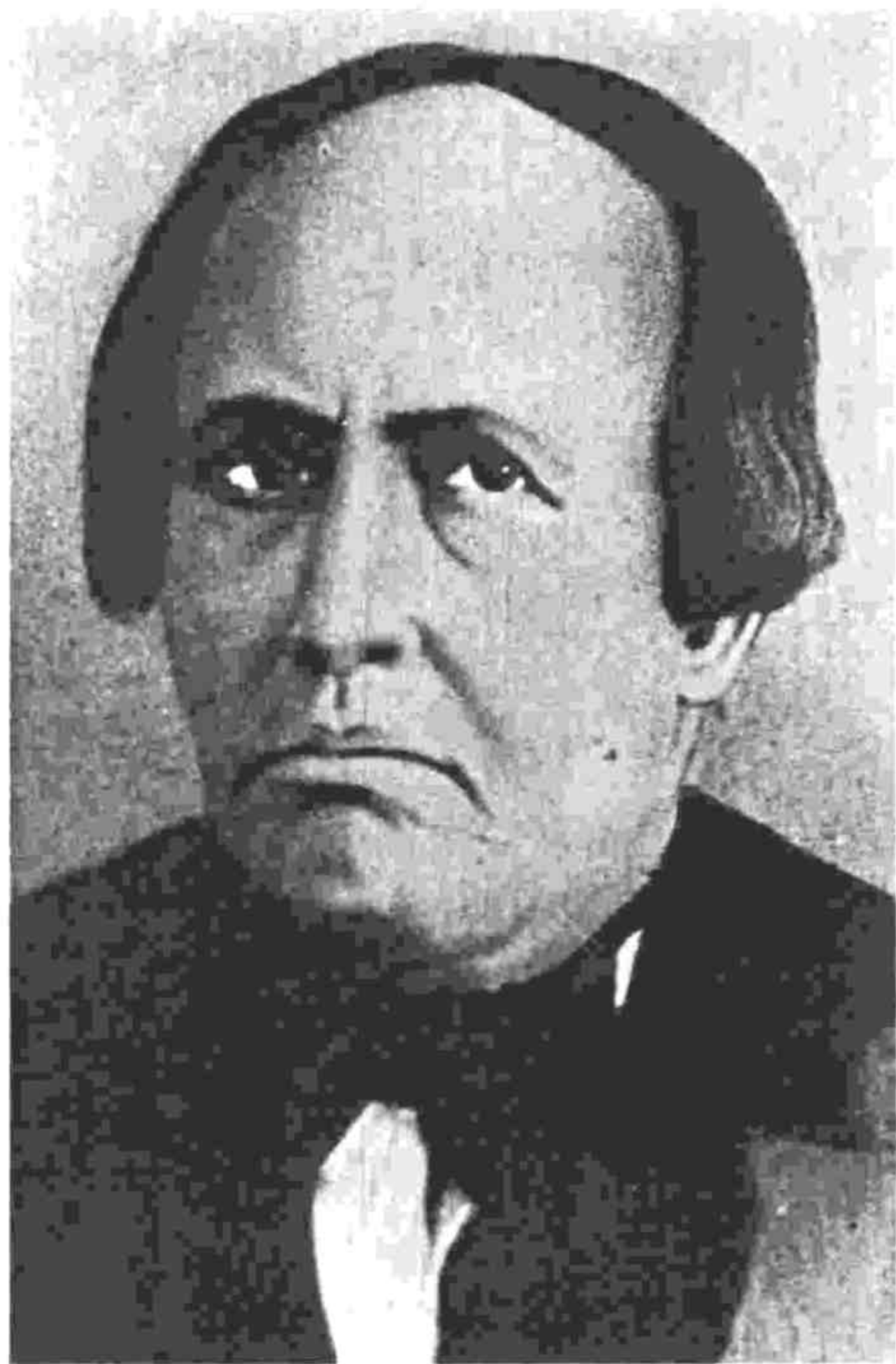
The family moved to Taos in 1804. Young Antonio José learned to work on the farm. What little leisure time he had, he spent in study, a continuation of his primary education under the tutorage of Don Geronimo Becerra in Abiquiú.

At the age of nineteen (1812) he married María de la Luz Martínez of Abiquiú, who died a year later. A daughter, Luz, was born in this union and died in 1825.

After his wife's death Don Antonio continued to study at home but decided this was not enough. He was always searching and had a great desire to learn. Therefore, in 1817 with the blessings of his parents, he went to Durango, Mexico and entered the Tridentine Seminary of that city.

During his stay in the seminary he was a diligent student who excelled in many subjects, and was granted several scholarships. Among them was a *Beca Real*, Royal Scholarship, which served him until the end of his studies in 1823, when he returned to New Mexico as a newly ordained priest.

Father Antonio José Martínez counted among his professors, during his studies at Durango, many eminent and prominent men in the church and state. He was awarded high honors by these men who were his teachers in philosophy, logic, ethics, theology, canon law, and many other required subjects. Familiar with the classics, grammar, rhetoric, etc., he was an apt pupil. He advanced in these courses far ahead of his contemporaries. He took advantage of the great number of books in the school library and read constantly to satisfy his hunger for learning, for he was alive with intellectual curiosity.



*Father Antonio José Martínez y Santistevan, 1793-1867,
the first pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

He was ordained as a minor on March 16, 1821 by the Most Illustrious Bishop, Doctor Don Juan Francisco de Castañiza. On the following day he was made a sub-deacon, on December 22 of the same year, deacon, and on the tenth of February 1822, a presbyter. On the sixteenth day of February 1822, he was ordained a priest with all the privileges invested in the priesthood, and on the nineteenth of the same month he celebrated his first Mass.

In June 1822 he began to exercise his duties as a priest in Durango, Mexico where he remained until the following January, at which time he had returned to New Mexico, the home of his parents. He brought with him a solid education and desire to help his people. For a few months he took charge of the parish of Tomé. Later, in May 1826, he became curate of the Santo Tomas Parish in Abiquíu, the place of his birth. It appears that between the years of 1826 and 1833 Father Martínez had charge of Santo Tomás de Abiquíu and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Taos, with San Lorenzo de Picuris as a *visita* of Taos.

He resigned from the Santo Tomas, as it worked a hardship on the padre to administer to both parishes, one so far removed from the other (seven leagues). He also resigned from the parish of Picurís, which he had served from March 1829 to April 1831, when for sufficient cause his resignation was accepted. Father Martínez remained acting pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which was canonically established in 1834 by the bishop, the Most Illustrious Don José Antonio Laureano de Zubiria.

While in Durango, Mexico Antonio José Martínez must have been deeply impressed by the state of affairs in the government. The greed, suppression, the injustice of those in the government's offices, the contradictory laws and agrarian reform which was the order of the day - all this must have influenced him greatly. This was a time of independence, revolution and liberal ideas. These turbulent and confusing times probably gave birth to the padre's theories of justice, civil rights and religious freedom. These ideas bore fruit in his native New Mexico, and many times served him as a cudgel against enemies in both church and state, sometimes to his own detriment.

In 1826 after he became settled in Taos, Father Martínez established a school in his home for boys and girls. He employed teachers who taught various subjects. but he himself taught the young men who had a desire to study for the priesthood. Several boys who later went to Mexico to the seminary were students in the padre's school. Other prominent men of New Mexico received their education in that first school in Taos. One was Don José Antonio Otero, one of the first judges of the Supreme Court, named by General Kearny; another was Don Jose Manuel Gallegos, also a controversial figure of that time, and many others.

In connection with his college in Taos, he established a printing press in 1835, the first in New Mexico and the first west of the Missouri River. The paper published was called *El Crepusculo de la Libertad*. By his own words it was published "to clip the wings of my opponents." No copies of this famous paper exist today. He also printed a multitude of catechisms and texts for his students. The press was used to print the first code issued by General Kearny after the American occupation.

In politics as well as in the church he was a compelling figure and aroused interest and controversy, both as a private citizen and a priest. He was also a kind, understanding and charitable man when he chose to be.

In 1830-31 and again in 1836, Father Martinez was Deputy of the Assembly of

the Department of New Mexico under the Mexican Government. In this capacity his ability as a legislator and his love for his country gained him the respect and admiration of his colleagues.

When the challenge of government came, he gave his allegiance to the new government and was among other prominent Mexican citizens who favored annexation of the Territory of New Mexico to the United States.

Under the new government Father Martínez continued his civic activities, for he was always concerned with the people's problems. At this time social problems had increased a hundredfold, due to the change in government. New laws which were put into effect were confusing to a people who did not understand the language or the culture of their conquerors.

The padre distinguished himself in December 1847 during the first Legislative Assembly in Santa Fe under a military government. As a Senator at that assembly, he was chosen president of the Legislative Council.

His political involvement made him many enemies, especially among some of the Americans in office and the foreign element in the church. They resented this man who was intelligent, well-versed in many subjects and who was far better educated than most of them.

One can imagine the situation in which the padre found himself, limited in his command of the English language, but knowledgeable in every aspect of government, civil and canon law with first hand experience in the social problems of his country, yet unable to fully exercise his abilities. All this did not deter him from retaliating with his lethal pen and persuasive speech, gaining the esteem and devotion of his people.

For the same reasons, Father Martínez was falsely accused of being one of the instigators of the revolt of 1847 against the American Government, and of the assassination of Governor Bent. Some historians point accusing fingers at him but nothing has ever been found to verify this accusation, even though many incidents occurred at that time which could have a bearing on the horrible death of Governor Bent and others.

Don Carlos Bent and the presbyter, Don Antonio José Martínez, were bitter enemies, attested by Governor Bent's letters to the American Consul, Don Manuel Alvarez, written before the revolt. One has only to read these letters to feel the hatred that existed between the two.

One cannot ignore the fact that on the day of Bent's assassination, the families of the Americans who had perished at the hands of the insurgents, and the families of those who were absent from the village were given refuge in the home of the padre.

When Colonel Sterling Price and his troops arrived in Taos after the revolt, he was lodged in the home of Padre Martinez. After the surrender at the pueblo, the business of court martial and prosecuting of the insurgents by Colonel Price was carried on in the priest's home, so the accusing finger which pointed to him as "guilty" vindicated him at the same time.

The padre and other men in New Mexico were called "traitors" and "revolutionaries" by some historians. Other historians state that these men were justified in their actions since they had accepted American citizenship under duress, and were not traitors. These men considered themselves Mexican citizens at heart, fighting for their honor and homeland, but they found themselves under the dominion of an American military

government that was entirely repugnant to them.

Rumors and accusations were rampant on both the American and Mexican sides. It was recalled that Padre Martínez had been chaplain in Armijo's army during the 1837 uprising, and that his brother, Pascual Bailon Martínez, had been a captain in the Mexican Army under General Armijo. All these denunciations, as well as those by some of the clergy, the padre took in his stride. He never tried to justify any of his actions as a private citizen or a priest. But with his pen he placed before his accusers examples of how such charges had been dealt with by God in the Old and the New Testament, and how prelates and great men were chastised at the beginning of Christianity. It is doubtful that his antagonists understood his writings. They did know, however, that even though they disagreed with him violently, the padre knew what he was talking about, and they knew that he was above them in intellect, education and vision.

It is natural for a man to defend himself in the midst of scandalous rumors and accusations. The padre never made any apologies for his deeds, He lived his private life quite openly and as he saw fit. The nearest that he ever came to apologizing was in his Last Will and Testament where he stated: "...and my body shall descend calmly into the silence of the grave, and my soul will ascend and face the Divine Tribunal with the full knowledge and satisfaction that I did all within my power to elevate the minds of my fellow citizens. ...my conscience is at peace, God knows this to be the truth. If some of my fellow citizens and neighbors complain that I have offended them, perhaps it was an unintentional error in my part, and not from the heart, and because of human frailty."

On July 27, 1867 he died quietly after forty-two years of spiritual administration and a tempestuous political life.

Father Antonio José Martínez was considered a great son of New Mexico. Only now, a hundred and some years after his death, is his greatness being felt and appreciated. He speaks to us today. Could it be because the country now, as then, is in the same turmoil and the changes in the church have caused chaos to some that do not understand them?

PADRE MARTINEZ LANE

On April 3, 1990, Vicente Martinez proposed to the Town of Taos to change the Street Name of Padre Lane to Padre Martinez Lane. He proposed this as a matter of the importance of having a street dedicated to his memory.

With the acknowledgment of dedicated streets to different memories at that time, were streets such as: Kit Carson Road (a national forest and a electric co-op). Bent Street, Scheurich Lane, Calle Juan Largo and etc, there was not a street in all of Taos dedicated to the memory of Padre Martinez. The street Padre Lane, was very vague in that no one, except the Taoseños, knew WHAT Padre is referred to, i.e, Padre Martinez.

Historical record of this street (lane) is very rich. The Padre Martinez residence (108 Padre Lane) was built in 1804 and the original boundaries of the property included: the sisters' convent on the north (Don Fernando Street); on the west the Manzanares Arroyo (Manzanares Street,); Ranchitos Road on the South; and a public road on the east (Padre Lane). This information was from abstract and title search.

Many activities took place within these boundaries: On November 1826. the establishment of the first co-educational primary school; On July 1833 the establishment of a college preparatory Latin school for prospective native New Mexican seminarians who learned Latin Grammar and Moral Theology. Thirty students were later ordained. In 1835 the first printing press was established, *EL CREPUSCULO DE LA LIBERTAD* was the first newspaper published. Also published were grammar books for the school and Civil Law books. During the Governor Bent Massacre during the revolt of 1847-48, the home was offered as refuge to women and children and other Anglos who were the target of the insurrection.

Personal accomplishments of Padre Martínez in addition to being the first Pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Taos and an expert in Canon Law include the following; 1826, Pastor of Taos; He was elected Territorial Representative and served as deputy of the Assembly in 1830, 1831, 1836, 1837, 1845 and 1846. In December 1847 his name headed a formal petition seeking annexation of New Mexico to the United States. In October 1848 he presided over the convention to organize and establish New Mexico as a United States Territory. He presided at the Constitutional Convention of 1850 and served as President of the Council of the first Legislative Assembly in 1851. He served as a member of the Legislative Council in 1852.

Padre Martinez died on July 27, 1867. The Legislative Council issued a proclamation calling Padre Martinez "THE HONOR OF HIS COUNTRY" OR "EL HONOR DE SU PAIZ", (Born 1-17-1793 ; Died 7-27-1867)

In conclusion, with the claim of such a rich political, educational and religious heritage the street is now named **Padre Martínez Lane**.

