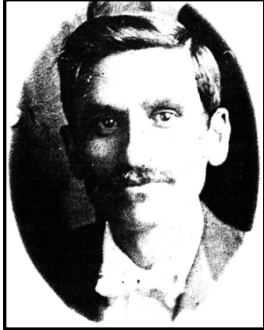


THE HISTORY OF AMBROZIO GONZALES AND A GAVEL



Ambrozio C. Gonzales was born in Alameda, Bernalillo County, New Mexico, on December 8, 1816. His parents moved to Peralta in 1818, where he grew up, got married, and spent most of his life. Young Ambrozio, like most boys of his time, had few educational opportunities, but he learned to read, write, and do basic arithmetic.

Reverend Ambrozio C. Gonzales converted to the Protestant faith around the year 1852 or 1853. In one of those years, Rev. E. C. Nicholson, the first Methodist missionary sent to New Mexico by the missionary board in New York to Santa Fe, visited Peralta. He spent two days and nights at Don Ambrozio's home, leaving him a Bible. Reverend Ambrozio once told the author of these memoirs that on the first night after receiving the Bible, he read the book of Genesis and part of the Gospel of John. It was a new book to him. He said:

"I went to bed late that night and woke up early in the morning with light and joy in my soul."

He said that from that moment on, he had been a Protestant.

Reverend D. D. Lore, a missionary who had returned from South America, visited New Mexico in 1855. He traveled south to Peralta and Socorro. In Peralta, he found a class of about six people, mainly formed by Don Ambrozio Gonzales and members of his family. Ambrozio was the apparent leader of the group. The doctor also visited a few other places in the south. He formed groups in Jarales and Socorro, then returned to New York.

Reverend Ambrozio lived to see his small group of six people grow—along with those who had died in the faith—and an even larger number who moved elsewhere, forming the core of other congregations. He became a fervent advocate of the Protestant faith, loved the church he chose, and remained always faithful to its doctrine, its disciples, and its ministry.

The pride of his life culminated in the building of a church and a school in his own town, and in seeing his children and those of his neighbors being educated in English and their native language, Spanish. For all this, he owed much to the heroic efforts of Reverend John Steele, who was a missionary in Peralta from 1873 to 1879 and did a great work.

The author of these memoirs first met this great man at his home in Peralta in October 1871 and had the privilege of writing to him probably at least fifty times after that. He always found him to be a true man. His small group of six had been on probation since 1855. They now numbered forty-two. He thought they had been on probation long enough—sixteen years—and received them all into full church membership, granted him a license to preach, and employed him in missionary work.

Brother Ambrozio was a man with a noble heart. Presumably, he remembered how much he had once hated Protestantism, and how little patience he had had with those who opposed him in his former Romanist beliefs, and that gave him great compassion for those who later opposed or even persecuted him.

There is a story of when Brother Ambrozio was invited to preach in a remote place, at a man's home. Neighbors gathered, and among them were some opponents who interrupted the meeting and made threats. These men were arrested by the homeowner himself—who at the time was a Roman Catholic. The case was about to be resolved against the guilty parties, but no one could be found to defend them. The father of one of them came to Ambrozio to ask him to defend his son.

Has anyone heard of such a thing? The persecuted defending the persecutor. Even so, he did it and managed to get them acquitted. Did he not, in doing so, imitate his Master, who intercedes for His enemies?

Reverend Ambrozio Gonzales, who was in charge of the Peralta circuit and a great support to Brother Chose, died on October 7 or 8 with full hope in a glorious immortality. In his final hour, he gathered his children around his bed and, beginning with the firstborn, like the ancient patriarchs, pronounced his final blessing on each one. About 300 people, including friends and neighbors, attended the funeral.

Six ministers officiated at his funeral, each with their own participation, before an audience of about three hundred people, of whom about two hundred were Roman Catholics. Two hundred people followed the procession to the grave.

He left behind an elderly wife, three married sons, and many relatives and friends who mourn his loss.

With the death of Reverend Ambrozio Gonzales, Spanish-language ministry in New Mexico, and especially in Peralta, lost a true and proven friend; the Protestant cause, a strong and fervent advocate; and the Methodist Episcopal Church, its oldest native preacher and one of its most heroic men.

Reverend Ambrozio C. Gonzales died at the age of sixty-eight, loved, respected, and mourned by all.

*Thomas Harwood, Superintendent
Mission of New Mexico*

WHERE DID AMBROZIO C. GONZALES END UP?

Cemeteries

Honeyfield Farm Cemetery
Valencia County
NMG, Vol VIII, No1, March 1969, page 8

Credit Source: Compiler Mrs. Janette Baughman

1. There is an abandoned cemetery in Peralta on the Honeyfield Farm. I believe it was formerly known as the Spanish Methodist cemetery. Rev. Ambrozio GONZALES, believed to be the first Mexican Protestant minister, is buried there. His tombstone says he was born Dec. 8, 1816 and died Oct. 7, 1884. The marker was broken and toppled, but is being kept for preservation at the Ernest Sichler, Sr. home in Los Lunas.

Also buried there are Mr. and Mrs. Moses Ralph MIRABAL, but as I recall there may be no markers. Relatives of the couple still live in Peralta.

2. Another interesting Cemetery is one in El Cerro. I understand that during a period of conflict in the Catholic Church, some of the members broke away and started this cemetery themselves. It was many years ago and some of the old timers call it the Liberty Cemetery.

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Honeyfield

Cemeteries

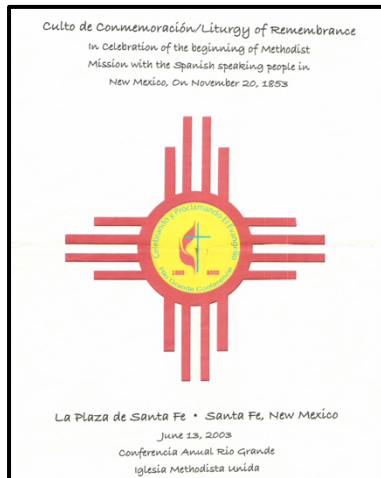
Honeyfield Farm Cemetery
Valencia County
NMG, Vol VIII, No1, March 1969, page 8

Credit Source: Compiler Mrs. Janette Baughman

“There is an abandoned cemetery in Peralta, on the Honeyfield farm. I believe it was formerly known as the Spanish-speaking Methodist Cemetery. The remains of Reverend Ambrozio González, considered the first Mexican Protestant minister, are there. His tombstone indicates that he was born on December 8, 1816, and died on October 7, 1884. The tombstone was broken and fallen, but is being preserved at the home of Ernest Sichler, Sr., located in Los Lunas, New Mexico”.



SOME YEARS LATER...



One hundred and fifty years after the ministry of Rev. Ambrosio Gonzales began—on June 13, 2003, to be exact—a Commemorative Worship Service was held to remember the beginnings of Methodism, specifically for Spanish-speaking people. This took place in the plaza of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The Bishop of the Rio Grande Conference of the United Methodist Church, Joel N. Martínez, with the help of Rev. Edgar Avitia Legarda, organized and led this celebration.

Rev. Avitia with his family, being a member of the Rio Grande Conference and a lover of Methodist history, was present and had been deeply inspired by the celebration.



On the return trip home from Santa Fe, New Mexico to El Paso, Texas, Rev. Avitia decided to take a different route. He wanted to locate the so-called Honeyfield Farm Cemetery — in Valencia County — in Peralta.

After several turns through the town and stopping to ask various residents of Peralta along the way, he finally located the Honeyfield Farm Cemetery. Not only did he find the neglected and abandoned cemetery, but he also found the place where Rev. Ambrosio Gonzales had been buried.

Under the shade of an almost-toppled tree, he found the broken and fallen gravestone of Lupita Adela Mirabal, who was buried in the same place – and that is how he found the grave of the Rev. Ambrosio Gonzales.

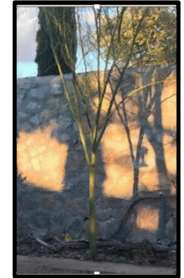


AND THE RESULT OF THAT DISCOVERY WAS...



Rev. Avitia felt so much joy from making that discovery that he could not leave empty-handed. So, he decided to take a dry branch from the tree that was shading the headstones, and he found a way to tie it to the roof of his car.

That's how they made their way back to El Paso, Texas—and that branch, propped up against a stone wall and behind a small tree, would rest in the Avitia family's garden for twenty years.



It wasn't until the spring of 2023 that Rev. Avitia's wife realized what purpose that branch could serve, now very dry. One day, when Pastor Luis Reza was visiting, Edgar showed him the branch and asked whether he thought it could be turned into a gavel. Luis responded that he would take it to a craftsman, Pastor Luis Pérez, who then said that in fact, he could make two gavels from that branch.

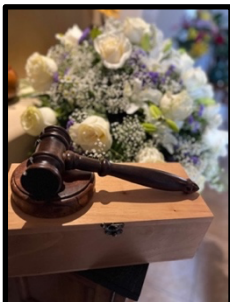
...THE FABRICATION OF THE GAVEL



Pastor Luis Pérez, along with his father, transformed that branch into two beautiful gavels—one for the bishop's office of the North Central Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Mexico A.R. (*CANCEN*), and the other for the bishop's office of the Rio Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in the United States.

Edgar wanted to link the two conferences. "They will be diplomatic tokens to foster a closer relationship."

The first gavel was presented to the office of Bishop Rodolfo Rivera de la Rosa during an event held by the *SEHIMM*, *CANCEN* Chapter, in Durango on a fine day in June 2023—just a few weeks before Rev. Edgar Avitia Legarda passed away.



The Gavel. Made from wood nourished by the ashes of Rev. Ambrosio C. Gonzales, a pioneer of the faith since 1853.