

Patrocinio Barela and His Stations of the Cross

Born in Bisbee, Arizona around 1900, Patrocinio Barela was the son of an itinerant farmer and laborer named Manuel. Patrocinio's mother died when he was four, and his childhood was spent following his father as he worked at various jobs. They moved to Taos, where Manuel became known for introducing tamales to New Mexico, selling the new food and working as a *curandero*, or herbalist. Patrocinio left home at age twelve. Having had no schooling, he could not read or write. He began a life of wandering, covering the western states and working as a laborer and shepherd. He returned to Taos around 1930, met and married Remedios, a widow with four children. The Barelas had three more children, two sons and a daughter. They lived in her house in Cañon.

Soon after returning to Taos, a priest brought Barela a broken *bulto* (a three-dimensional figure of a saint) to be repaired. He had never carved before, and while repairing the saint he experienced a spiritual awakening and found his life's passion. Barela was not a churchgoing man, but developed a deeply felt personal faith. His compulsion to carve became a driving force. He would work as a laborer during the day, and carve late into the night in his "studio," a rough shed near their house. His wife and her family were suspicious of his carvings, not understanding their importance or meaning.

In his own style Barela depicted saints, biblical scenes, spiritual journeys, and the human condition. He did not consider himself a *santero* (maker of saints' images), since his subject matter ranged from saints to individuals engaged in struggles and human relationships. Some called Barela a modernist, comparing him to Picasso and Henry Moore. His work was also compared to African and Oceanic sculptures. Barela had no knowledge of these works, or any art styles beyond the traditional saints images found in Taos churches and *moradas* (houses of worship of the Confradia de Nuestra Padre Jesus Nazareno). He did, however, have a *Life* magazine in his studio with an article on Gauguin. He learned Bible verses from his children, who read the Bible to him.

During the Depression years he received a small stipend for his work from the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In 1936 an exhibit in New York at the Museum of Modern Art featured the work of many WPA artists and craftspeople. His eight pieces were lauded and he had a brief moment of national fame, being singled out as the "discovery of the year."

During the following years he created a large and complex body of work. No two pieces are alike. Many of his sculptures have stories, written by his children or friends. His work can now be seen in many museums across the country and in Taos at the Harwood Museum, the Millicent Rogers Museum, and the Martinez Hacienda, as well as on the walls of St. James Episcopal Church.



Station 9: Jesus falls a third time



Station 12: Jesus dies upon the cross

The Stations of the Cross at St. James were his last, great work. An Episcopal priest, Robert Kennaugh, commissioned the fourteen relief panels depicting Christ's journey toward his crucifixion for his church in Red River. Barela worked on the panels between 1962 and 1964, completing all but one, the eighth station. Leo Salazar, another carver created the missing panel. When Kennaugh left New Mexico, he gave the panels to St. James, and they were installed by his friends, Rich and Kay Dicus, who were also friends of Barela and members of St. James.



Station 13: Jesus is taken down from the cross



Station 14: Jesus is laid in the sepulchre

Patrocinio died tragically in a studio fire in 1964. His son Luis said, simply, "He was kind, and to me he was good." Barela had many friends. He is buried in Señora Dolores Cemeterio in Cañon.

Patrocinio Barela's work has influenced modern santeros. His grandsons, Carlos and Luis Barela, and their brother-in-law, Daniel Rael, all live and carve in Taos, continuing his legacy. His great grandchildren carve as well. His son Luis, a Korean war veteran, was honored with others who served during that conflict on May 30, 2008, by the Lions Club and the Town of Taos.

Station 1 : Jesus is condemned to death

Station 2: Jesus receives the cross

Station 3: Jesus falls the first time

Station 4: Jesus meets his blessed mother

Station 5: The cross is laid on Simon of Cyrene

Station 6: Saint Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Station 7: Jesus falls the second time

Station 8: The women of Jerusalem mourn for our Lord

Station 9: Jesus falls a third time

Station 10: Jesus is stripped of his garments

Station 11: Jess is nailed to the cross

Station 12: Jesus dies upon the cross

Station 13: Jesus is taken down from the cross

Station 14: Jesus is laid in the sepulchre