

## *Pedro Perea*

### *1852–1906*

TERRITORIAL DELEGATE 1899–1901  
REPUBLICAN FROM NEW MEXICO

**P**edro Perea, a member of a prestigious New Mexican political family, followed in the footsteps of his cousin Francisco, who served as a Territorial Delegate in the 38th Congress (1863–1865), and in those of his brother-in-law, Mariano Otero, who served in the 46th Congress (1879–1881). Like many other 19th-century Delegates from New Mexico, Pedro Perea served a single term in Congress before returning to a prosperous business career in the territory. An obituary characterized him as “an uncompromising Republican, broad minded, careful and earnest in his desire to see New Mexico take her place in the front ranks of the sisterhood of States.”<sup>1</sup>

Perea was born in Bernalillo, Sandoval County, New Mexico—just north of Albuquerque—on April 22, 1852, to José Leandro and Dolores Chavis Perea. Perea’s father was a prominent merchant and a local politician; his mother managed the family home. Perea grew up in a wealthy household with eight siblings and three servants.<sup>2</sup> He attended St. Michael’s College in Santa Fe; Georgetown College in Washington, D.C.; and St. Louis University, where he earned a degree in 1871. Perea returned to New Mexico and he formed a merchandising business with his brother that specialized in farming and ranching.<sup>3</sup> Before formally entering politics, Perea used his status and influence to secure funding to expand the Santa Fe road.<sup>4</sup> Perea married Emelia Montoya, and the couple had one son, Abel.<sup>5</sup>

Perea’s formal political experience began when he was elected to New Mexico’s 27th Legislative Assembly (1886–1888) to represent Bernalillo County as a member of the territorial council. He served four two-year terms, three of them consecutive (1886–1892, 1894–1896), and focused on the territory’s financial and appropriations issues.<sup>6</sup> In 1890 Perea continued to pursue business opportunities while serving as a territorial councilman,

eventually becoming president of the Bank of Santa Fe from 1890 to 1894.<sup>7</sup> Perea’s political career was closely aligned with the Santa Fe Ring, a Republican faction that dominated politics in New Mexico for much of the post–Civil War era. Perea’s political patron was Thomas B. Catron, a powerful lawyer and landowner who had been an associate of Perea’s father’s in the 1870s and served as a Territorial Delegate in the 54th Congress (1895–1897). In 1896 Perea served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in St. Louis, where William McKinley was nominated as the party’s presidential candidate. One year later, Perea, with Catron’s support, was considered for a federal appointment as New Mexico’s governor along with 20 other candidates. The administration passed over Perea for Miguel Otero, Jr., the son of Territorial Delegate Miguel Otero, Sr., and a prominent party operative in his own right.<sup>8</sup> Members of the Ring objected not only to the administration’s choice of Miguel Otero for governor, but also to the actions of the sitting Delegate, Harvey Fergusson, who proposed statehood for New Mexico in the 55th Congress (1897–1899). Consequently the Ring rallied behind Perea’s bid for Delegate to oust Fergusson, which served as a check on Otero’s position, and helped maintain the Ring’s political influence in Washington and throughout the territory.<sup>9</sup> Perea, enthusiastically nominated by local Republicans, was endorsed as a “hard working, efficient ... and influential delegate, who will deserve and enjoy the good will and favorable opinion of his fellow members and the people of New Mexico.” Another endorsement said the “interests of New Mexico require that a protectionist be at the national capital to look after the ... territory, and Mr. Perea is that man.”<sup>10</sup> Perea ran on his business acumen and legislative experience, and as an advocate for New Mexico’s farmers, miners, and ranchers.<sup>11</sup>

During the election campaign, Perea’s ethnicity became





a dominant issue. According to pro-Perea sources, the Fergusson campaign would “attempt to raise the race question during the campaign and will endeavor to incite race passions and bitterness.” The goal was “to divide what is called the Mexican vote ... and then advise and induce the so-called American voters to cast their ballots for the Democratic candidate.” Pro-Republican newspapers responded by vigorously defending Perea’s reputation.<sup>12</sup> The topic of race was particularly divisive in the southeastern section of the territory known as Little Texas. A local Eddy County newspaper presented voters with a choice between “Pedro Perea, a full-blooded Mexican, and Hon. Harvey B. Fergusson, the best delegate New Mexico ever had in Congress.”<sup>13</sup> Perea’s supporters responded in an editorial that Perea was “a native of this territory, born in 1852, and his ancestors came to this country over 200 years ago and have been residents and leading citizens ... ever since.” Citing his education in U.S. schools in St. Louis, Washington, D.C., and Santa Fe, supporters stressed that Perea’s “father became an American citizen by absolute choice, in 1848.”<sup>14</sup>

The race-baiting tactic failed, and Perea beat Fergusson with a decisive 52 to 47 percent of the vote.<sup>15</sup> In an editorial postmortem, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* noted that Perea had accomplished the impossible and that his victory was “only the second time the Republicans have carried the territory since 1880.” The editorial also noted that Perea overcame a “popular Democratic candidate and a Democratic majority of 2,000 ... in a four weeks’ campaign.” One scholar concluded that Perea’s victory “reestablished the unquestioned political dominance of New Mexico’s Old Guard Republicans” over Fergusson and his Democratic supporters.<sup>16</sup>

Elected to the 56th Congress (1899–1901), Perea served on four committees: Post Office and Post Roads, Military Affairs, Private Land Claims, and Territories.<sup>17</sup> This assignment contrasted sharply with those of his predecessors; each had held a single seat that was pre-ordained for New Mexico Delegates since the 46th Congress (1879–1881): Coinage, Weights, and Measures.<sup>18</sup>

When Perea entered the House, New Mexico’s territorial apprenticeship had been in existence for 54 years. Like his

predecessor, Harvey Fergusson, Perea took an aggressive stand for New Mexican statehood. On the day he was sworn into the House, Perea submitted H.R. 57, a bill “to enable the people of New Mexico to form a constitution and state government.” Referred to the Committee on Territories, it languished and eventually died.<sup>19</sup> Perea also submitted bills for the establishment of roads and for agricultural interests and private bills for constituent needs. He convinced the federal government to restore Santa Fe’s border to its area prior to the U.S. occupation of New Mexico in 1846.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, Perea’s initiatives were crippled as a result of political infighting between Catron and Governor Otero; they broke down completely when Otero dismissed Perea’s term as useless and Perea accused Otero of actively working against him.<sup>21</sup> Perea did not run for re-election to the 57th Congress (1901–1903).<sup>22</sup>

When Perea returned to New Mexico, Governor Otero appointed him territorial insurance commissioner, a position he held until his death. Perea died of acute gastritis on January 11, 1906, in Bernalillo, New Mexico. He was 54.<sup>23</sup>

## FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, “Pedro Perea,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

## MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

**University of New Mexico, Center for Southwest Research** (Albuquerque). *Papers*: Thomas B. Catron Papers, 1692–1934, approximately 259 boxes. Perea is included among the correspondents.

*Papers*: Marion Dargan Papers, 1890–1943, 4.2 cubic feet. Subjects covered include Perea.

## NOTES

- 1 “Death Overtakes Peoples’ Leader,” 11 January 1906, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 1.
- 2 *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Population Schedule*, Alameda, Bernalillo, New Mexico Territory, Roll M653\_712, page 93, <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com> (accessed 6 January 2011). According to the census, José Leandro Perea owned real estate worth \$25,000 and personal property worth \$200,000.



- 3 “Pedro Perea,” in Maurilio E. Vigil, ed., *Los Patrones: Profiles of Hispanic Political Leaders in New Mexico History* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980): 84–86; Carlos Brazil Ramirez, “The Hispanic Political Elite in Territorial New Mexico: A Study of Classical Colonialism,” Ph.D. diss., University of California–Santa Barbara, 1979: 306.
- 4 “Death Overtakes Peoples’ Leader”; “Distinguished New Mexican Closes Career,” 11 January 1906, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 1.
- 5 *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Population Schedule*, Bernalillo, Bernalillo, New Mexico, Roll 802, page 7A, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com> (accessed 6 January 2011).
- 6 Territory of New Mexico, *Report of the Secretary of the Territory, 1905–1906 and Legislative Manual 1907* (Albuquerque: Morning Journal, 1907): 170–173. For accounts of Perea’s work on the territorial council, see, for example, “Pedro Perea,” 20 October 1890, *The Daily New Mexican* (Santa Fe): 2; Mr. Perea’s Record as a Legislator,” 13 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2; “Friend of Albuquerque,” 18 October 1898, *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*: 2; “Our Next Delegate,” 19 October 1898, *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*: 2; “Hon. Pedro Perea, Republican Candidate for . . .,” 22 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2; “Mr. Perea’s Legislative Record,” 24 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2; “Perea and the Miners,” 2 November 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2.
- 7 “Pedro Perea,” *Los Patrones*: 84; Ramirez, “The Hispanic Political Elite in Territorial New Mexico”: 306–307.
- 8 Ramirez, “The Hispanic Political Elite in Territorial New Mexico”: 306–307; Ralph Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, vol. II (Cedar Rapids, IA: Torch Press, 1912): 523. According to Twitchell, the fact that Senator Stephen B. Elkins of West Virginia—a former New Mexico Delegate who favored Perea—failed to keep an appointment with McKinley and Secretary of the Interior Cornelius Newton Bliss helped Otero win the seat. In his memoirs, Miguel Otero, Jr., cites his longtime friendship with William McKinley as the primary reason for his appointment. See Miguel Otero, *My Nine Years as Governor of the Territory of New Mexico, 1897–1906* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940): 1–28.
- 9 Robert W. Larson, *New Mexico’s Quest for Statehood: 1846–1912* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968): 194–196.
- 10 For information about Perea’s nomination, see “Pedro Perea Nominated,” 1 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 4; and “County Republicans,” 30 September 1898, *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*: 1. For Perea’s endorsements, see “The Republican Nominee for Delegate,” 3 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2; and “A Practical Man Needed,” 8 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2.
- 11 “Hon. Pedro Perea, Republican Candidate for . . .”
- 12 “A Dangerous Game to Play,” 11 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2; for an example, see “An American Citizen,” 22 October 1898, *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*: 2. In “Campaign of Abuse,” 13 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2. An editor for the *New Mexican* wrote: Democrats “admit his ability, concede his honesty and that his public and private life is beyond criticism, but close each paragraph with sneers at his candidacy. They do not have the manhood to come out and give their real reason, which is racial prejudice. . . . They will not vote for any one unless he speaks the dialect of West Virginia with a limpid drawl.” For a colleague’s defense of Perea, see José D. Sena, “Hon. Pedro Perea’s Campaign,” 4 November 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2.
- 13 “Race Issue Talk,” 21 October 1898, *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*: 2. The article reports, “All over this territory the democrats are working the race prejudice racket for all it is worth.” See also “They Will Not Succeed,” 20 October 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2.
- 14 “An American Citizen,” 22 October 1898, *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*: 2.
- 15 Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History*: 543; Territory of New Mexico, *Report of the Secretary of the Territory, 1903–1904, and Legislative Manual, 1905* (Santa Fe: The New Mexican Printing Company, 1905): 48. Perea received 18,722 votes, and Fergusson received 16,659.
- 16 Calvin A. Roberts, “H. B. Fergusson, 1848–1915: New Mexico Spokesman for Political Reform,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 57, no. 3 (July 1982): 246–247; “Perea’s Election,” 11 November 1898, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 2. Roberts writes that the 1898 campaign was difficult for Fergusson: “Silver disappeared as a dominant issue, replaced by popular enthusiasm for the war with Spain, which benefited Republicans.” Also, Fergusson was blamed for his supporters’ race-baiting tactics.
- 17 Garrison Nelson et al., eds., *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1789–1946*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1994): 817.
- 18 Of Perea’s nine Hispanic predecessors in Congress in the 19th century, only three New Mexican Delegates (Mariano Otero, Tranquilino Luna, and Francisco Manzanaras) served on committees, as a result of changes to the House Rules in 1871 and 1880. They served on the Committee on Coins, Weights, and Measures, whose jurisdiction included the standardization of coin values, legislation related to mints and assay offices, and the creation of national standards for weights and measures. Manzanaras also served on the House Select Committee on the New Orleans Exposition. According to political scientist Charles Stewart III, the Committee on Coins, Weights, and Measures was ranked 53rd out of 69 committees in terms of its attractiveness to Members. Conversely, Perea’s committee assignments were very desirable (Military Affairs ranked 13th, Post Office and Post Roads ranked 14th, Private Land Claims ranked 25th, and Territories ranked 29th). For an analysis of committees’ attractiveness to Members during this period, see Charles Stewart III, “Committee Hierarchies in the Modernizing House, 1875–1947,” *American Journal of Political Science* 36, no. 4 (November 1992): 835–856; see especially Stewart’s table on “Committee Attractiveness,” pp. 845–846.



- 19 *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 1st sess. (4 December 1899): 10. Perea submitted this bill the day he was sworn into office. The bill was printed in “The New Mexico Statehood Bill,” 11 December 1899, *Santa Fe New Mexican*: 1.
- 20 *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 1st sess. (14 March 1900): 2884–2886. Perea provided legal documentation about the city’s original area to support his claims.
- 21 Larson, *New Mexico’s Quest for Statehood*: 196–197. Interestingly, Larson dismisses Perea’s tenure because he “was not a dynamic, forceful personality.” In making this assessment, Larson compares Perea’s efforts to those of his peers: Delegate John F. Wilson of Arizona, who submitted two statehood bills and was assisted by a companion bill sponsored by Senator Clarence Clark of Wisconsin; and Delegate Dennis Flynn of Oklahoma, who submitted three statehood bills. None of these bills became law.
- 22 *Congressional Record*, Index, 56th Cong., 1st sess.: 545; “Pedro Perea,” in *Los Patrones*: 85.
- 23 “Death Overtakes Peoples’ Leader.”



“PEDRO PEREA WILL BE THE  
NEXT DELEGATE TO CONGRESS.  
HE IS THE MAN NEEDED AT  
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*Santa Fe New Mexican*, October 11, 1898