

## **Albuquerque is “Discovered” and Misspelled by the First United States Government Representative**



Zebulon Montgomery Pike was marked as a suspicious person from the moment he showed up in the Southwest. In the exhibit on the History of Albuquerque in the Center for Southwest Research in Zimmerman library, you can see a part of a letter sent by the governor of New Mexico, Don Joaquin Real Alencaster in 1806 to his soldiers in the northern part of the territory to be on the lookout for Pike.

Pike had been sent by the government of the United States to map and explore the western territories, and crossed the international border into sovereign Spanish territory in the San Luis Valley of what was then northern New Mexico. His men built an armed stockade there and raised the U.S. flag over it. Looking upon Pike as a trespasser and a spy, the New Mexico Spanish soldiers arrested him and his men and escorted them down to Chihuahua, Mexico, the headquarters of the Spanish military commandante.

As they passed through Albuquerque, Pike and his captors dined with the priest of the San Felipe de Neri church, and looked around at the community. One of the first tourists to Albuquerque, Pike later reported that the Spanish people of the community were exceedingly kind, generous and hard working.

The Spanish eventually released Pike and the published version of his trip “Exploratory Travels through the Western Territories, 1805-1807, by Order of the Government” is on display as part of the exhibit.

But Pike may have had a more lasting impact on the city he passed through than he intended. His map of the trip, on display in the exhibit, drops the letter “r” from Albuquerque and labels the friendly community, Albuquerque, the misspelling of its original name that persists today.

The History of Albuquerque exhibit will be on display at the Center for Southwest Research through mid-May as part of Albuquerque’s tricentennial celebration. The exhibit has historic documents, maps and artifacts from throughout the city’s 300 year history.