

Media Matters
Reviews of All Novels
(in alphabetical order)

Apache Lance, Franciscan Cross

Reviews posted on Amazon.com:

Customer Reviews

★★★★☆ **Apache Lance**, January 7, 2006

Reviewer: [Anne K. Edwards](#) (Pennsylvania USA) - [See all my reviews](#)

Something different and something definitely worth reading. A tale of two people from the two cultures that dominated the American southwest at the time that Spain lay claim to it.

Ahuila, an Apache woman, comes into contact with the Franciscan monks who are working to establish new missions in her tribe's territory. She is drawn in particular to one called Fray Marcos because of his golden hair. Hiding her identity, she joins the group and watches him and bides her time. She plans to offer him as a sacrifice to her father's spirit.

Fray Marcos was a former member of a minor aristocratic family until he felt the call to serve God. Much against his family's wishes, he joined the Franciscans and was sent to serve in the Spanish territories in the New World. He notices Ahuila watching him and begins to worry about his own feelings. Such feelings can cause him to be forced out of his Brotherhood. This is a tale I wouldn't hesitate to recommend. It offers a look at several conflicts that would have occurred during this period between cultures and the individuals from those cultures. Talented author, Florence Byham Weinberg has created a wonderfully lifelike cast of characters with definite personalities who will pull you into their world and make you believe it could have happened exactly like this. I'm glad I had the chance to read it.

★★★★★ **Must Read for Southwest History Buffs**, January 1, 2006

Reviewer: [Kathleen Muldoon "Writing Instructor"](#) (Texas) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME™

Weinberg has written a fast paced story of the founding of three of San Antonio's historic missions. While the main characters are fictional, Weinberg's research is impeccable as applied to the setting and background for Apache Lance, Franciscan Cross. If you like learning history while at the same time being entertained, don't miss this novel by Florence Weinberg, a

rapidly rising star in San Antonio's literary community.

Posted at Barnes & Noble.com:

Apache Lance, Franciscan Cross

CUSTOMER REVIEWS

Number of Reviews: 1 Average Rating: ★★★★★

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Showing 1-1

A reviewer, August 7, 2006, ★★★★★

Riveting novel of historical fiction

'Apache Lance, Franciscan Cross' is riveting novel of historical fiction about a Franciscan Friar, Fray Marcos, and an Apache woman warrior, Ahuila. Set in the area of the San Antonio River in 1731, this tale of both the clash and attraction of two cultures is sure to transport its readers. Author Florence Weinberg is writing in her element, which includes a vast and studied background history of the American Southwest, particularly the San Antonio area. She has also taught and traveled in Canada, Germany, France and Spain, in addition to teaching French and Spanish at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, N. Y., and Trinity University in San Antonio. The complexity of the underlying cultures, both Native American, (multi tribal including Apache, Comanches, and others), and European (including French and Spanish influences), is fully explored in this well- researched historical novel. Characters are more than believable, there is a fascinating love story, and action is packed with portent. If you like historical novels, you will love 'Apache Lance, Franciscan Cross.' But even more, if you appreciate a fine historical novel built on absolutely faultless research, 'Apache Lance, Franciscan Cross' will draw you in as surely as a hummingbird is drawn to its blossom. This is a fine example of the genre, one of the best of its kind. In addition, the reading of this book will help to preserve Las Misiones, a group of four colonial era Spanish mission churches in San Antonio built during the 18th century. A portion of the proceeds from the purchase of the book go to Las Misiones Capital Campaign, led by Old Spanish Missions, Inc. to restore the churches of Mission San Jose, Mission Concepcion, Mission Espada, and Mission San Juan. A form for voluntary donations is found at the end of the book, or those who are interested may contact Las Misiones Capital Campaign, P.O. Box 28410, San Antonio, TX 78228.

-- Midwest Book Review

A long review of **Apache Lance, Franciscan Cross** was featured in *Books*, a Sunday feature of *The San Antonio Express-News*, November, 2008. You can read it here:

<http://www.florenceweinberg.com/Media/LanceReview.jpg>

Longs désirs: Louise Labé, Lyonnaise

"Florence Weinberg reconstructs Lyon's spiritual, cultural, literary, and economic life with painstaking attention, with gusto, refinement and credibility. We can call this interesting and original book whatever we want: fictional biography, love story, the history of a poetic passion. What is certain is that this novel is captivating, well-constructed, serious, at times brilliant, well-anchored historically in a period rendered with meticulous care, illuminated by characters brimming with life, power and passion. I can attest without fear of contradiction that in publishing this book, Editions Lyonnaises showed both flair and inspiration."
--Valeriu Stancu, Editor-in-Chief of Cronica, Revista de Cultura, a Romanian literary review, of June, 2004

Seven Cities of Mud

If all history were made to come alive as Weinberg has done with *The Seven Cities of Mud*, maybe a lot of folks wouldn't consider the subject so dry and boring. I've had history professors in the past who seemed to think it was their sole purpose in life to make history as *unappealing* as possible. Not so, Florence Weinberg.

Although one can certainly see that vast amounts of research has been done in order to accurately depict the story of this expedition, the author weaves those facts in such a way the reader scarcely realizes he or she is, in actuality, getting a big serving of 'history lesson' with a sprinkling of Spanish vocabulary on top.

Forty years after Coronado's fiasco up the Rio Grande, another entrada started out—the Chamuscado Expedition. Weinberg uses the historical accounts of this expedition to literally unmask several discrepancies hidden there. The result is a story of God's leading, greed, hatred, evilness, murder, and forgiveness.

The Seven Cities of Mud is a must for anyone with an interest in Spanish exploration in North America, but also recommended whole-heartedly for those who just have a hankering for an all-round good story.

—Leanna Sain, author of *The Gate to Nowhere*

I loved this book. It's not too hard to write about a period for which many original documents, such as newspapers exist. To write credibly about an event in the sixteenth century from only one surviving document is brilliant. The characters were well developed and believable, and the conflict between the priests, the soldiers, and the pueblo people was fascinating and explored thoroughly. Highly recommended.

—Ruth Rymer (San Francisco, CA)

WEINBERG, FLORENCE B.

Seven Cities of Mud

Twilight Times Books, ISBN: 978-1-933353-46-3

\$16.95 [Amazon](#)

Finalist 2008 New Mexico Book Awards

Historical fiction often treads a fine line. The best stories transport the reader to a different time and place so vividly that it's almost as if one has stepped through a time machine, all while providing an intriguing premise that stays true to the historical record. Less adeptly woven tales not only get many of the finer details wrong, but they tend to deviate from what actually occurred, the more radical departures stretching the suspension of disbelief to a breaking point. After reading Florence B. Weinberg's *Seven Cities of Mud*, it's a pleasure to say that her latest book belongs with the best of the genre.

The novel recreates the lesser known Spanish entrada into New Mexico that came to be called the Chamuscado-Rodríguez expedition. Intrigued by stories he had heard, Agustín Rodríguez, a Franciscan friar from a convent in San Bartolomé, personally appealed to the viceroy of New Spain to lead an expedition of holy men and soldiers to the northern frontier with the express purpose of converting the Pueblo peoples to Christianity. His request approved, Fray Rodríguez entreated two fellow friars (Francisco López and Juan de Santa María) to join his quest. As their protector, Fray Rodríguez selected Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado, who the friar promoted to captain. Chamuscado, in turn, chose eight additional men-at-arms from within his circle of influence to accompany the expedition. The group also included Indian servants and translators, as well as livestock and horses.

Leaving Santa Bárbara in 1581, the trek north starts off well enough, the men soon reaching the Rio Grande without incident. But the legend of Cibola, with its lure of gold and silver, remains firmly embedded in the minds of the soldiers. Hundreds of miles from civilization - and authority, secular interests quickly supersede the spiritual ones. Chamuscado forcefully assumes command, and the treasure hunt begins in earnest. Unfortunately, the men-at-arms' harsh treatment of the Pueblos along the way erodes the friar's original hopes of winning the people's trust. The remainder of the novel follows the expedition's timeline closely, and whether or not the reader already knows the final outcome, the friars' persistent struggle to overcome all manner of tribulations is a strong driving force of the story.

History also records that the explorers recruited an Indian guide from the Pueblos, though this individual's name remains a mystery, and thus begins Weinberg's deft interweaving of fact and fiction, with the insertion of Poli, a young woman from Puaray Pueblo. Recently widowed and stalked by a relentless suitor (Mákta) who she believes killed her husband, Poli eagerly volunteers to leave with the strangers. Over the course of the journey, she not only provides advice and healing, but becomes friends with assorted members of the group. Her pronunciation of words (Fran-cisco, Ga-lis-teo) and eventual understanding of Spanish is humorous and realistic. The growing relationship between her and Fray Francisco in particular is a testament to the respect that can develop between different cultures when the effort is actually made to interact and learn about one another. Mákta's scheming, on the other hand, eventually leads to disgrace among his own people. His escape from the Cage of Shame and subsequent search for the expedition to take revenge on Poli generates a good deal of suspense, as does his pivotal role in determining the friars' fate at the end of the story.

To mention any more of Weinberg's brilliant modifications would spoil some wonderful surprises. Needless to say, these instances both enrich the story and humanize the real life personages further.

The novel's attention to historical detail is impeccable. Using the Hopi as a springboard to portray the religion and customs of the peoples living along the Rio Grande, the author effectively captures the essence of Puebloan culture. It's especially noteworthy to see how Native American and Spanish religious beliefs are remarkably alike. Poli's response to Fray Rodríguez's explanation of the friar's mission sums up the similarities well: "Our people practice most of these things already. Taiowa [the sun god] is our Great God. He reigns over all creation and is master of life and death. So, why do you need to bring news we already know?" One wonders how the course of history might have been changed had the Spaniards not been so arrogant and domineering.

New Mexico's vistas are lovingly rendered, expressed in images only a native daughter would use. The desert, mesas, mountains, and plains thrum with vibrancy, even more open and pristine than they are today, and there's an overwhelming sense of having stumbled upon a shrine of great beauty and reverence. The descriptions of the Pueblos themselves, untouched by outside influence, are mesmerizing. It's a fun challenge to figure out some of the unnamed locations' identities.

The story is further supplemented by an historical appendix, a list of characters, a glossary of both Native American and Spanish terminology used in the narrative, and a bibliography for those wishing to delve further into the time period. With all these helpful resources, it's a little disappointing that there's no map to follow the expedition's route, but this is a small omission considering the meticulously researched whole. *Seven Cities of Mud* is a universal tale of adventure, intrigue, and tragedy that penetrates the misty veil of time and offers an invaluable look at the Spanish colonial era near the end of the 16th century. Though fiction, scholars and lay readers alike will find value in this compelling, masterfully written tale.

--Reading New Mexico

6/09 Reviewed by David J. Corwell, author of *Legacy of the Quedana* in *Cloaked In Shadow*

SEVEN CITIES OF MUD

By Florence B. Weinberg

Twilight Times Books

www.twilighttimesbooks.com

260 pages, paperback, \$16.95

Seven Cities of Mud dramatizes the collision between the Pueblo Indians and Spanish explorers and missionaries in 16th-century New Mexico. This tumultuous period comes to life through the stories of Franciscan Fray Agustín, a Spanish missionary on a quest to convert the Pueblo Indians to Christianity, and Poli, a Pueblo widow who becomes his guide. Still in search of the wealth once promised by the fabled Seven Cities of Gold sought by Coronado—and not content to accept the seven cities of mud that actually existed—the Spanish soldiers take charge and conflict ensues, with tragic consequences. Anyone with an interest in the Spanish exploration of this area and the resulting clash of cultures will enjoy this plot-driven novel. Author Florence B.

Weinberg is a native New Mexican from Alamogordo who currently lives in San Antonio, Texas. *Seven Cities of Mud* was a Historical Fiction finalist for the 2008 New Mexico Book Awards. –Ashley M. Biggers, “Book Briefs” in *Diversions*, May 2009.

Sonora Moonlight

Into the Light of Day

A review of *Sonora Moonlight* by Florence Weinberg

In Florence Weinberg's *Sonora Moonlight*, Father Ygnacio Pfefferkorn must solve a brutal murder as he struggles with a severe bout of malaria and with his duties at Guevavi, a Sonora Desert mission of the mid-eighteenth century. For those who love historical fiction, this is a must-read. Weinberg does not describe the past; she recreates it with vivid details about plant and animal life, missionaries and pioneers, and Native American medicine. To read this book is to time-travel to the initial intersection of European and Native American lives, where the barbaric and the civilized are discovered in surprising places.

Sonora Moonlight is an apt title. In moonlight, things are only partly visible, a perfect metaphor for a good mystery. But also, the soft hues of the night bring our innermost thoughts and feelings to the surface, especially those thoughts and feelings we try so hard to repress. Perhaps this is the greatest strength of Weinberg's book. In Pfefferkorn, she has not created a priest or a detective, but a man, one who finds himself disturbingly drawn to a young Irish woman, Patricia O'Meara, and to a Pima medicine man, Jehvo. Furthermore, Pfefferkorn's meditations provide interesting insights about a man who is deeply honest when trying to understand his community, his faith, and himself.

How does Pfefferkorn reconcile his physical, intellectual, and spiritual desires? How does he maintain his faith when he is drawn to the magical ways of the medicine man? And how does he fulfill his missionary duties while he journeys through the Sonora Desert in search of a murderer? To find out, read Weinberg's book as she brings these mysteries of moonlight into the broad light of day.

—Diana Lopez, author of *Sofia's Saints* and *Confetti Girl*.

Sonora Moonlight

Review by Ralph Freedman, PhD

Sonora Moonlight is a brilliant novel that begins and ends like a murder mystery, but in between explores complex human relationships in the face of spiritual crises and conflicts. It is the story of the rise and fall of a Jesuit mission in the Sonora Dessert and its devoted pastor, Father Ygnacio Pfefferkorn, S. J., who assumes the role of detective.

The story begins with the arrival of Father Ygnacio at Guevavi Mission in Sonora Province. He is desperately ill with malaria and will be nursed back to health by the powerful Upper Pima (Tohono O'odham) Indian medicine man Jevho, assisted by the third major character, beautiful young Patricia O'Meara, daughter of the Irish immigrant settler Patrick O'Meara and his Pima wife Hohoi.

Jevho and Father Ygnacio are locked in a spiritual battle for the souls of the Pima population of the mission, a confrontation as well as a bonding. When the murder is discovered, the Indians are immediately suspected and it becomes part of Father Ygnacio's mission to protect them. The solution to the murder thus becomes deeply intertwined with the battle between the protagonists for the souls of the Indian population.

It is this conflict between two worthy spiritual antagonists that raises this book above the level of the usual detective novel, exploring its limits without losing the suspense of the mystery that is its subject. Father Ygnacio discovers the murderer, but Patricia, torn between two

forbidden loves: the "pagan" healer Jevho and the Christian missionary, is forced to choose between the two cultures that created her, European and Indian.

In attempting a synthesis between the Pima religion and Christianity, Father Ygnacio arouses the suspicions and disapproval of his own superiors, since, in seeking to convert his Pima flock, he cuts many corners, while Jevho succeeds in drawing the Indians of the Mission back to his own world.

This fascinating work of history and imagination probes important facets of the Spanish conquest of the Americas in its spiritual and its practical dimensions.

[WEINBERG, FLORENCE BYHAM](#)

Sonora Moonlight

Twilight Times Books, ISBN: 978-1-60619-114-9

\$16.95 [Amazon](#)

Sonora Moonlight contains my two essential elements for a good read – a plausible story with believable characters. Throw in an interesting setting, either in location or history and I'm hooked. Sonora Moonlight hits the trifecta. Set in the desert in what is now the New Mexico-Arizona border lands, Sonora Moonlight presents an historically-based yet fictionalized account of Jesuit missionary activities in the 18th century. The novel is centered on the missionary career of Father Ignaz (Ygnacio) Pfefferkorn, S.J. Faced with the not entirely spiritual attentions of an attractive half-breed young woman who nurses him back to health, Father Ygnacio must walk a fine line between his duty to Christian charity and his vow of priestly celibacy. Ministering to the needs of his small band of Native converts at the mission, Father Ygnacio befriends a Pima medicine man. Initially more interested in converting the medicine man to Catholicism, Father Ygnacio eventually develops profound respect for the Pima beliefs, much to the dismay and anger of his Jesuit superiors.

When an Anglo rancher is murdered not far from the mission, a crime blamed on the Indians, Father Ygnacio vows to catch the killer, even when the priest's own life is threatened repeatedly as he draws closer and closer to unraveling layers of betrayals and generations of secrets.

Sonora Moonlight explores the complexities of post-contact relations between Europeans and Native Americans, but does so by focusing on the complex relationships and interdependencies amongst a small group of people. Each group stands on the edge of unimaginable changes, pulled in competing directions. Weinberg has given us a spell binding as well as informative read.

6/9 Reviewed by Victoria Erhart for *Reading New Mexico*



Sonora Moonlight

by [Florence B. Weinberg](#)

Twilight Times Books

reviewed by Terry Lacy

"Don't ruin Father Ygnacio," she said, drawing herself up and glaring into his eyes. 'Don't give him tequila.'"

In *Sonora Moonlight*, the reader follows the activities of a missionary priest in the New World. Set in the 18th century Old West, the story is a

well-focused glimpse into a time one hundred years before the cowboys arrived.

Father Ygnacio Pfefferkorn is trying to find the killer of a local rancher, who was half-crucified and beheaded, and puts his own life in peril during his investigation. Cured from malaria by the local medicine man and aided by the beautiful half-Pima, half-Irish Patricia, Pfefferkorn leads us into the novel's strongest point—the unveiling of the local cultures that dominated the area at the time. The painstaking research that went into the writing of this book is evident, and thank goodness, not delivered as dry facts but woven into the work in a seamless fashion. Weinberg delivers small and subtle facts relating to the local Pimas, the Apaches, and the Europeans with ease, giving the reader a glimpse into times and cultures long forgotten.

The well-balanced language is neither overly poetic nor harshly sparse, providing a lulling and comfortable flow that puts readers at ease, allowing them to follow a good story at a comfortable pace. If you love historical fiction or ever wondered about the times when the Spanish conquered the Americas, this is a must-read. And don't overlook the recipes in the back.

U.S Review of Books

🏰 **The Magnificent Man in the Moonlight of Sonora**, April 4, 2009

By [Ruth Rymer](#) (San Francisco, CA) –

Father Ygnacio Pfefferkorn leaps out of the pages of the novel, *Sonora Moonlight*, into a magnificent performance despite his weakened physical condition from malaria. Assigned to a new mission, Guevavi, his job is to maintain the Faith of folks already members of the Church and seek additional converts. In pursuing the latter, he tries in vain to work with a local religious leader to accommodate the differences and similarities between Catholicism and the established religion of the area. In the meantime, a few Europeans, morally adrift in this foreign land have found themselves in a lot of trouble: intermarriage, adultery, assault, and murder. Despite several attempts on his life, Father Ygnacio survives, solves the murder and straightens out some strange relationships. The overriding theme throughout the book is the struggle of a moderate--against a doctrinaire hierarchy. Unique and fascinating.

SONORA MOONLIGHT

Florence B. Weinberg

Twilight Times, 2009

\$16.95. pb, 250pp, 9781606191149

In the 18th century, Spanish missionaries struggle to convert and educate the Native American population of Sonora, Northwest New Spain (Mexico). Father Ygnacio Pfefferkorn, a historical Jesuit missionary, finds himself assigned to the faltering mission at Guevavi, replacing an alcoholic priest who let the mission fall into disrepair, ravaged both by the harsh environment and frequent Apache raids.

Pfefferkorn's obstacles seem insurmountable; he is suffering from malaria; the mission is falling down around him; and many of the peaceful Pima Indians at the mission have been scared away by the Apaches, or have been lured away from Christianity by the enigmatic and charismatic medicine man Jevho. Add to those problems the Irish ranchers in the area that seem to be, on the surface, welcoming and supportive, yet could also be harboring some secret, and Pfefferkorn finds that he will need all the strength, both personal and spiritual, that he can muster to make the mission a success.

When Patrick O'Meara discovers the horribly mutilated body of his brother Michael in the desert, killed in a macabre crucifixion fashion, Pfefferkorn becomes a detective as he tries to discover who killed O'Meara and why. Could the killer be one of the Irish ranchers? The Apaches? Jevho the medicine man, or worse, one of the padre's own Pima converts? He finds his own life, as well as the life of the mission in jeopardy until he can find the answer.

Weinberg tells an exciting and engrossing story of the old Southwest, loaded with geographical and historical details, many of them based upon her childhood experiences growing up in New Mexico's ranching country only a few miles from the Mescalero Apache reservation. A finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award, this novel is a must-read for anyone with a passion for Southwest history and culture.

--John Kachuba, *Historical Novels Review*, 50, November 2009.

Sonora Wind

“Florence Weinberg blends religious and political history in this fast-paced historical mystery novel. Colorful and precise landscape description; a blend of real, historical people and fictional characters, all carefully drawn, and intriguing portrayals of Indians tribes makes Sonora Wind a gripping read.

--Ralph Freedman, author of Hermann Hesse, Prilgrim of Crisis and Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke.

The Storks of La Caridad

San Antonio Express-News

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2005

Murder rocks the monastery Author blends fiction, history in mystery

By Steve Bennett

EXPRESS-NEWS BOOK EDITOR

Father Ygnacio Pferkon must catch a killer to save his own life. Two monks at Nuestra Señora de la Caridad have been murdered, the monastery's charter has been stolen, and it's up to the Jesuit priest to uncover who's behind the deaths before the shadowy figure strikes again—most likely at Don Ygnacio himself.

Murder mysteries rarely explore the monastic life. A crime-solving *priest*, for goodness' sake?

But that's exactly what San Antonio author Florence Weinberg has created in her series of mysteries based on the life of Ignaz Pfefferkorn (Don Ygnacio Pferkon), who was born in Germany in 1725, entered the Society of Jesus, served in Mexican monasteries [*sic!*: *missions*] and was arrested and expelled along with his Jesuit missionary colleagues by the order of Spanish King Carlos III in 1767.

In the latest thriller—the first two were set in the Sonora Desert—Don Ygnacio is being held under benevolent house arrest at the monastery called La Caridad in Spain, having been held prisoner by the Spanish government for eight years. He has endured repeated interrogation and beatings by the authorities, who believe he knows the whereabouts of Mexican gold, so the sojourn at La Caridad is heaven-sent.

Weinberg, a retired professor of French and Spanish at Trinity University, brings her expertise on 18th-century Spain to bear in her excellent new novel, "The Storks of La Caridad," which will be published by Twilight Times Books in May. Mystery fans can get a sneak preview of the book today, when Weinberg signs advance copies at the Twig Book Shop.

"La Caridad" works on two levels. First, it's a rollicking mystery, full of plot twists based on real events, interesting characters modeled after historical figures and more than its share of red herrings, mostly invented by Weinberg. Second, it's a scholarly re-creation of 18th century Spain, from the dress to the architecture to the food, thoroughly researched and seamlessly written. And let's just say that Weinberg knows her Spanish Inquisition and her colonial Catholicism.

"One of my biggest concerns was that the book be historically accurate as well as a good mystery read," Weinberg says. "I was a professor of French Renaissance literature and Spanish and French language for many years, so I know the period very well and have done a lot of research on the Jesuits during that period. I spent three summers in Spain trying to find out what happened to this man (Pfefferkorn). I found remarkably little, but enough to write the books."

Author Florence Weinberg signs copies of "The Storks of La Caridad" from 5-7 p.m. today at the Twig Book Shop, 5005 Broadway. A reading is set for 6 p.m. Call (210) 826-6411 for more information.

Four stars!

Ignaz Pfefferkorn, a Jesuit missionary from the Sonora Desert region in what is now Mexico and Arizona where he served for eleven years, was swept up in the Expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and is being held because the Spanish Crown believes Ignaz (Ygnacio) knows where "the gold of Sonora" is hidden.

But Ignaz doesn't know of any gold and he is at once relieved and mystified when he is sent to the monastery of Our Lady of La Caridad. Although still a prisoner, he is treated like any one of the monks, he has his own cell, but the door doesn't lock and he is given plenty to eat. There are no beatings and no interrogations.

When one of the monks is murdered, thrown from the belltower, suspicion falls on Ignaz as the newcomer. But Brother Gelasio was one of the few friends Ignaz had made; Why would he murder him? And who would want to murder the soft spoken monk? And why is Father Leopoldo's sister so keen to seduce Ignaz? Does she really like him as she says, or has her brother put her up to it? And why?

It is obvious to Ignaz and the abbot that the murderer had to be one of the monks, but which one and why? Ignaz must find out who it is before the murderer strikes again.

A well crafted mystery, unusually written in the first person, but in this instance it works well. The reader becomes Ignaz, feels his worries, his concerns over his imprisonment and suffers with him through his recurring bouts of malaria.

The tension builds up gradually, hints are dropped early on as to why the murders might occur, but twists and turns are revealed as the story progresses. With vivid descriptions of the monastic life and Ignaz's work in the gardens, which don't slow the action down, rather they show the contrast of the life that is easily shattered by a murderer in their midst.

Because the story is written from Ignaz's point of view, the reader only knows what secrets are revealed when Ignaz discovers them, which is excellent. I love mysteries where you have to figure out what is going on at the same time as the protagonist. Leaves you guessing until the end.

With a wealth of historical detail and a plot that just gets twistier with each page, the book is a welcome addition to the library of any mystery fan.

Reviewed by Annette Gisby, author of **Drowning Rapunzel** and **Shadows of the Rose** for *Twisted Tales*.

The Storks of La Caridad soars with a suspenseful plot set in a fascinating sliver of history!

Father Ygnacio Pfefferkorn is a Jesuit and a prisoner. While serving as a missionary in the Sonora Desert region in northern Mexico, he was caught in the Expulsion of all Jesuits in 1767.

The author accurately explains this unusual and political move, which in turn serves as the backdrop of the book.

Although the Society of the Jesuits was suppressed by a decree from the Pope, there were a lot of individual thoughts about this Order. While for the most part, fellow clergy were suspicious of the Jesuits, there was also a great deal of interest concerning the possibility of them keeping secret the location of gold and silver mines in the Sonora Desert. There was so much interest in fact, that the Crown imprisoned them to reveal that secret.

Father Ygnacio endured eight years of prison and abuse, and was brought to the Caridad Monastery in Spain to continue his incarceration. While there, he becomes involved in a political battle, which leads to two murders. In an ironic twist, the abbot enlists his help in solving these murders. Readers will wonder if Ygnacio, the prisoner, can free the monastery of the bonds of deceit that threaten its very existence.

Brilliantly written and thoroughly researched, this book explores the complexities and contradictions of the Church during this time period. While the religious orders seemed to operate in their own world, worldly influences penetrate and propel them to actions that seem at odds with their mission of living a holy and separate life. The political struggles in the monastery ring with realism, as do the actions of the characters. The age-old struggle between good and evil is evident, but the division between the two is muddied by ulterior motives.

Solving the murders requires careful and thoughtful reading. The motive for the murders is intriguingly hidden among misguided loyalties and faulty thinking. In fact, this book is a stunning portrayal of contrasts. From having murders in a monastery, to a prisoner setting them free with the truth, readers will appreciate the disparity, as well as the clear and logical flow of the story.

Reviewed by Joyce Handzo for *In the Library Reviews*

The Storks of La Caridad by Florence B. Weinberg (Twilight Times Books, Kingsport TN. ISBN 1-933353-21-X, trade paper. 234 pp. \$18.50, 2005)

Gruesome murders, cowed monks wielding daggers and a temptress in satin all swirl through the plot of this well-crafted historical mystery. The storks of the title are a decorative flourish in an extraordinary setting, the Spanish monastery of Nuestra Señora de La Caridad. Author Florence Weinberg presents, in evocative and thoroughly researched detail, life in a small religious community circumscribed by ancient walls and venerated traditions; in the 18th century, a period of upheaval in church politics, La Caridad is caught up in a local version of the wider power struggle.

Abbot Dom Gregorio is resisting efforts by his bishop, Cuadrillero, to strip the monastery of traditional tithes a death blow for La Caridad. But Dom Gregorio possesses a secret weapon, an ancient charter he hopes will block the bishop.

Into the imbroglia stumbles a gaunt captive, ex-Jesuit Ignaz Pfefferkorn, pulled from his missionary work in Sonora, New Spain, when his Order was accused of treason against the

Spanish Crown and disbanded. Filling in the sparse details known of the real Pfefferkorn's life after New Spain, Weinberg portrays him as persecuted by the Spanish civil authorities for years, then remanded to La Caridad to be held indefinitely as an ecclesiastical prisoner.

Pfefferkorn, a native of Mannheim in the Rhineland, is a man of culture whose devotion to the maligned Society of Jesus is undiminished. He arrives at La Caridad in despair and ill health. The abbot treats him with decency while the monks divide along the political fault line. The abbot's loyalists accept Ygnacio Pferkon, as they call him, while those who feel obliged to obey the bishop disdain the new man.

La Caridad's all-important charter disappears, then one of the pro-bishop monks is killed in a fall from the bell-tower. Soon another dies under strange circumstances.

Aside from the suspenseful plot set in a fascinating time and place, what makes this book a rewarding read are the engrossing characters, chief among them Father Ygnacio. Weinberg's brooding protagonist battles manfully with his demons, struggling to overcome bitterness at the unjust suffering inflicted on his Order and himself, and to use his considerable inner resources to benefit those at La Caridad who show him kindness. Temptations aplenty test his pious resolve, including the Bishop's sly offer of escape from Spain and further prosecution.

Driven figures drive events at La Caridad, and Weinberg rivets the reader right up to the end. But at that crucial point her tale of the uprooted Jesuit and embattled monastery breaks off abruptly, leaving many plot strands dangling. Will La Caridad survive or succumb? Since this is her third novel to feature Ignaz Pfefferkorn, the reader can always hope the author will produce a sequel and finally reveal all.

—Nancy Evans for *Southwest Book Views*, Autumn 2005, p. 20

Reviews posted on amazon.com:

★★★★★ **Only the Storks Know**, November 27, 2005

Reviewer: [Terrence Lauerman "The taco"](#) (De Pere, WI) - [See all my reviews](#)

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The Storks of La Caridad

by

Dr. Florence B. Weinberg

Twilight Times Books

Kingsport, Tennessee, 2004

Book Review and Historical Commentary

by

Br. Terrence Lauerman, O. Praem.

General Introduction:

Not many historically based novels could be expected to have their setting in a Premonstratensian (Norbertine) abbey, particularly an abbey of the historically renegade and currently defunct Spanish Circary. However, that is precisely what Dr. Florence B. Weinberg of San Antonio has done in her new historically inspired novel, *The Storks of La*

Caridad. Her novel deals with the period of the suppression of the Society of Jesus in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the trials and tribulations of a Jesuit priest who ended up in detention with the Norbertine community at Nuestra Señora de La Caridad in Spain.

Author:

Dr. Weinberg, who is a retired professor of Spanish and French, taught for twenty-two years at St. John Fisher College in New York and for ten years at Trinity University in Texas. Her expertise and insights into 18th-century Spain and ecclesiastical intrigue are surely evident in her skillful writing which reflects a scholarly view of the religious culture of Spain in that era. She convincingly depicts the daily common life of Norbertines as seen in their food, drink, prayer, architecture, governance, etc.

Norbertine Context:

The historical setting for the novel is the Premonstratensian abbey of Nuestra Señora de la Caridad, founded on a site four kilometers southeast of modern-day Ciudad Rodrigo in northwestern Spain. The abbey was founded between 1165-1168 by Fernando II of Leon in gratitude for his military success in a campaign in Extremadura and for the services lent by the Norbertines. Historically, La Caridad was one of the richest Norbertine foundations in Spain, which perhaps explains why there were some financial and jurisdictional conflicts with the local diocese. Avaricious glances were cast from time to time at attractive Norbertine resources and dependent entities.

Due to a need for more space and some earthquake damage, La Caridad began to build an expanded church and living facilities in 1761, and construction continued for some years after that. By 1814, however, the abbey closed its doors as a functioning religious facility due to the ravages of the Napoleonic incursion. Nevertheless, the Norbertine community carried on in some fashion with triennial abbots being appointed until 1835. Unfortunately, by the mid 1830s, all religious communities were suppressed by the Liberal reform governments in Spain, inspired by the anticlerical thought flowing out of the French Revolution. By no later than 1842, the buildings and property of La Caridad were in private ownership. Yet its basic structure has remained intact to the present. The unused church, abbot's quarters, cloister garden, kitchen, and enclosing walls still stand; and they are maintained in good condition by the private owners. However, the cells in the upper cloister where the Norbertines resided are in a ruined state, perhaps due to vandalism by Napoleonic troops who pillaged the general area of Ciudad Rodrigo and billeted in the abbey.

As with all religious communities at the time of the nineteenth-century invasion, suppression, and "desamortización", all the moveable assets, documents, and furnishings of La Caridad were seized, relocated, destroyed, or sold to the highest bidder. Fortunately, a compendium of the abbey's records, the Becerro, was saved and is now housed in the archives of the Episcopal Palace in Ciudad Rodrigo. Likewise, a statue from the abbey depicting Our Lady of Charity found its way to the Cathedral of Ciudad Rodrigo where it can be venerated today. Valuable elements from other Spanish Norbertine abbeys also ended up in far-removed places. For instance, the rare stone tombs of the Counts of Urgel from Bellpuig de las Avellanas (Cataluña) were purchased by the Cloisters Museum in New York, and many capitals from the abbey of Aguilar de Campiño (Palencia) reside in the National Archeological Museum in Madrid. One of the most egregious (yet amusing) examples of this expropriation of Norbertine church property was the removal of the stone statue of St. Norbert from a dominant position on the facade of San Norberto in Madrid, only to be resculpted as a lion to grace a pedestal at the crossing of Arganzuela and Toledo Streets in another section of that capital city!

A few of the other sixteen Norbertine abbey structures in Spain fared better toward the end of the nineteenth century when some religious orders were reestablished and acquired suitable facilities before they deteriorated beyond repair. For instance, La Vid became an Augustinian monastery; and Bellpuig became a Marist novitiate and retreat house. Other Norbertine abbeys met the same fate as that of San Norberto in Madrid which was torn down stone by stone during the French Napoleonic invasions of the early nineteenth century. The French seem to have had a particular aversion to the Norbertines who were founded in Premontre, France.

Jesuit Context:

Following the example of the Portuguese in 1759 and the French in 1764, King Carlos III of Spain in 1767 suppressed the Jesuits in all of the Spanish Empire. All Jesuits were forced by the Spanish Crown to withdraw from ministry. Some entered some sort of detention while others were simply set adrift to find refuge wherever and however they could. Of the original fifty-one Jesuits arrested in the Sonora-Arizona region, there were only twenty-seven survivors of the death march through Mexico while on their way to imprisonment in Spain. The Jesuits were herded like cattle by Spanish soldiers on horseback wielding whips as they walked from Matape to Guyamas on the Gulf of California where they were corralled for a year. Then they were then taken by ship to San Blas where they were imprisoned for six months in a swampy area. The final march across Mexico via the capital ended up on the Atlantic coast at Vera Cruz where the survivors embarked for Cadiz, Spain. Their further confinement was designed to encourage them to reveal where they might have concealed gold or wealth in the mission territories as well as to protect imperial secrets from the enemies of the Spanish Empire.

Historical Characters:

Ignaz Pfefferkorn, one of the historical Jesuit missionaries who is the protagonist of the novel, was forced to withdraw from his mission in the Sonora Desert. Upon his arrival in Spain, he entered into punitive confinement for six years in a prison near Cadiz, Spain, before being sent for benevolent house arrest for two and a half years with the Norbertines at La Caridad. Ultimately, he was repatriated to his homeland in German territory. He was noted for musical skills playing the violin and for scholarly knowledge as a naturalist.

Other real historical figures woven into the fictional events of the novel are: Gregorio Cañada y Lobato, triennial abbot of La Caridad; Girónimo Gómez Flores, triennial abbot of San Norberto in Madrid; Cayetano Antonio Cuadrillero y Mota, bishop of Ciudad Rodrigo.

Story Line:

Upon a skeleton of factual dates, people, and events, the author superimposed a fictional mystery relating the murder of two Norbertines involved in a community debate concerning the efforts of the local bishop to take over the parish of Robledillo de Gata. The parish was accredited to La Caridad and represented a source of financial income for the community. Surprisingly, the abbot engaged the help of the intellectually gifted Jesuit internee, Ignaz Pfefferkorn, to find out the identity and motives of those in the community responsible for the murders and the theft of a fictional charter granting the abbey perpetual control of the surrounding lands and parishes, including the dependent parish in question.

A basic issue of the unfolding mystery story is whether the Jesuit guest can piece together the events in the world inside the troubled Norbertine community in order to understand the situation before he becomes a third murder victim. The wise and free storks inhabiting the abbey bell tower observe and understand all the troubling events in the abbey. Can a caged bird such as Pfefferkorn come to understand the abbey intrigues as well as the wise and informed storks?

Personal Involvement:

Some months ago, I had the pleasure of communicating with Dr. Weinberg concerning some possible archival resources for discovering the facts concerning Norbertine history in Spain. Having done some Norbertine archival work in Spain and having visited some of the sites of former Norbertine abbeys there during my graduate studies in Spain, I was quite interested in facilitating her work. Although many of the archival fonts proved disappointing in many cases, she was able to discover enough information to compete her work. One of the basic notions about the Spanish Norbertines during the Counter Reformation is reflected in the novel. The rejection of the canonical white habit of the Order and the adoption of a monastic black one for the Spanish Circary is seen in the garb of the community at La Caridad. Philip II and the specially approved Jeronymite visitators who reformed the Order didn't want Norbertines to be linked to or confused with anything going on in heretical North Europe, even to the extent of what the Norbertine habit might be.

Although not reflected in the novel, the triennial abbots who floated around from abbey to abbey every three years in Spain could have added an interesting historical element to the plot of *The Storks of La Caridad*. These peripatetic leaders surely represented unique evidence of the flux in abbatial leadership in the reformed Spanish Premonstratensian abbeys of yesteryear. Were their wanderings perhaps a source of weakness in dealing with local bishops and bureaucrats in Madrid? Maybe only the storks who inhabited the bell tower of La Caridad know if this could be true.

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★★★★★ **Before all the technology and forensics there was...**, July 9, 2005

Reviewer: [N. Frank "Joggernot"](#) (Carlsbad, NM) - [See all my reviews](#)

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thinking. Jesuit Ignaz Pfefferkorn wants to live the life he has chosen, but he is good at solving murders. Without even fingerprinting Pfefferkorn must look at the evidence, talk with people, and come to an understanding of what really happened. The evidence is trampled and overlooked. People don't tell the whole truth. Yet Pfefferkorn is able, through much effort to learn the motives and solve the murder. Twists and turns and a final twist make this well worth reading. Ignaz Pfefferkorn really existed and really was rounded up by the Church and placed in prison. This makes the story more believable and complete. There are two other Pfefferkorn mysteries by Florence Weinberg that are set in northern Mexico rather than in Spain.

★★★★★ **Oh, Brother!**, July 8, 2005

Reviewer: [Alain Falasse](#) (Maine, USA) - [See all my reviews](#)

We are used to amateur detectives who, between a cup o' tea at Scotland Yard and a glass of sherry on the Orient Express, find out that the butler did it in the pantry with a bronze statue. These detectives are classic, borderline conservative, without life of their own and, heaven forbid! sexuality. Enter Ignaz Pfefferkorn, a man bearing a name easier to sneeze than pronounce, who, prisoner of his story and History, solves a mystery in a Spanish monastery of the late 18th century. By the way, he is a (good looking) priest and a Jesuit. So, sexuality? Well, do not hold your breath but our man has feelings. On top of this, he really existed and most characters and events in the book are historical. Florence Weinberg

respectfully has filled the voids to let Pfefferkorn live for us, guide us and interest us in the meanders of that era. You may still not solve the mystery of faith after reading this book, but you certainly will have faith in mystery.

"The Storks of La Caridad" is Professor Emerita Florence Weinberg's third historical mystery featuring Father Ygnacio Pfefferkorn, a detective priest character based on an actual historical Jesuit missionary who was forcibly removed from his Sonora Desert mission around 1767 to be imprisoned for 6 years near Cadiz, Spain before being sent to La Caridad and the Norbertines for two years. Weinberg's painstaking research and rich historical detail of an obscure but bloody epoch in church and secular Spanish American history provide a flawless framework for this intriguing tale of bloody survival and a martyr's forgiveness. All notes ring true in the world of Father Ygnacio, but how do they lead to the solution of two murders and the supposed theft of an ancient charter to the monastery in time to preserve Ygnacio's threatened mortal existence? The storks of La Caridad are the natural historians and observers of the intrigues of the abbey. Can Father Ygnacio possibly follow their example and find his way through the maze of danger, before his limited venue as endangered holy sleuth literally expires? "The Storks of La Caridad" is beautifully written, as well as meticulously researched. It will grip its readers, shock them, and confound them. Along the way, much valuable and accurate history will be painlessly assimilated. Perhaps this is the art of historical mystery writing at its best. "The Storks of La Caridad" is a must-read!

The Midwest Book Review