

CASIMIRO BARELA

When: 1847-1920

Where: Moved from New Mexico to Trinidad, and then to Barela, Colorado

Why Important: Barela served as a territorial legislator, helped write the Colorado Constitution, and represented Colorado as a senator for thirty-seven years.



La quinta en Rivera actual residencia del Senador Barela. View of the estate of Casimiro Barela in Rivera, Las Animas County, Colorado; shows house, sidewalks, and picket fence. 1911? Denver Public Library, Western History Collection. Call Number: X-13187.

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Casimiro was born in New Mexico in 1847. It was still part of Mexico at that time. One year later, at the end of the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848), New Mexico became a part of the United States. In 1867, Casimiro moved to Trinidad, Colorado. He published newspapers and raised sheep, cattle, and horses. He married Josefita Ortiz and they lived on his ranch.

Casimiro was elected Justice of the Peace in Trinidad when he was just twenty-two. He later served as County Assessor, Territory Representative, and County Sheriff for Las Animas. He also ran a blacksmith shop, a supply shop, and became postmaster. The town loved him so much that they renamed the town Barela, Colorado!

In 1875, Casimiro helped to write Colorado's State Constitution. He fought to ensure that the constitution was published in English, Spanish, and German, making him a hero to many. He became a senator in 1876.

Even though he was successful, Barela's life in Trinidad was not always happy. He and Josefita had nine children, but only Leonor, Juana, and Sofia lived. Then in 1883, Josefita died. Casimiro married Damiani Rivera and they adopted three children.

Casimiro Barela always worked hard to help people. He ran two Spanish-language newspapers. He supported women's right to vote, pushed for New Mexico statehood, and made Columbus Day a holiday in 1907.

In 1916, after thirty-seven years as senator, Barela lost the election. Later, Casimiro attended the inauguration of Mexico's President Obregon in 1920. Barela died later that year from pneumonia. Casimiro's image is one of sixteen stained glass portraits hanging inside the Denver State Capitol.