

FIRST AMERICAN MINT ASSAYER**By Ray Mansfield, NLG****From "Plus Ultra" Volume VI Number 55, February 1969**

After the destruction and capture of Tenochitlan, the principal city of Anahuac, the Spanish established a system of government for the rich lands that had been the Aztec Empire. The Vice-Royalty of New Spain came into being and under the Viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza, the first "Casa de Moneda" - - house of money - - in America was established.

The family of Francisco del Rincon was already in Mexico when the Viceroy arrived in 1535. Rincon, well trained in engraving and die sinking, new how to obtain the required fineness and purity of metals for the production of coins. For these and other reasons he was selected as the first assayer of the Mexico City mint.

Fortune smiled kindly on the family when a brother and a cousin assumed the positions of Foundry man and Foreman. Laws governing the Viceroy mints were intended to make this situation impossible. They prohibited more than one member of a family from holding an official title in the mint.

This presented no problem to the Rincon family. They had only leased their titles from the owners. These owners often lived in Spain and never so much as ever visited Mexico. This made it possible for the Francisco del Rincon to undermine the function of the mint.

After Rincon's first term (two years) his application for a renewal was refused. Ownership of the title changed and Pedro de Membrilla, the new owner, had Juan Gutierrez as his deputy. Rincon managed to obtain the office of Treasurer of the mint. On February 11, 1542, he also filled the office of die- sinker. Francisco del Rincon was not about to be deprived of control of the Mexico City mint.

The following year Rincon purchased the office of assayer. Pedro de la Membrilla later sued to recover ownership stating that the price was illegally low and that fraud and deceit has been employed by Rincon.

An investigation of the Mexican mint proved that Rincon had found many loopholes in mint regulations. Members of the same family did hold official status; Negro's, on the payroll as workers, were slaves owned by officials who claimed their wages; and dies had not been registered as required.

Records show that Francisco del Rincon held a number of offices at the Mexico City mint - - - Assayer, engraver, foundry man, Treasurer and die sinker. His cousin, Francisco, became assayer while Allonzo, brother to the first Francisco, began die sinker.

