

## Facundo Melgares

(1775 – ??)



**Facundo Melgares**, born into an aristocratic family at Villa Caravaca, Spain, 1775, received an education and entered the Royal Army as a lieutenant. He came to New Spain in 1803 to serve in the frontier army at the Presidio de Carrizal south of El Paso. There he led successful expeditions against the Apaches. In 1806 Lieutenant Melgares was sent to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to lead an expedition onto the Great Plains to meet with Plains Indians and turn back explorers from the United States. He left Santa Fe on June 15, 1806, with 105 presidio soldiers, 400 New Mexican militia, 100 Indian allies, and 2,000 horses and mules. They followed the Red River, meeting with Comanches, and headed north to meet with the Pawnees. One mile southeast of where the marker in the above photo is placed (west of Larned in Pawnee County, KS), Melgares left 240 of his men and more than 1,000 horses and mules encamped while he took the rest of his command to meet the Pawnees in present Nebraska. Two weeks later the entire army headed back to Santa Fe, arriving there October

1, 1806. Zebulon Montgomery Pike visited the same Pawnee village a few weeks later and followed the tracks of Melgares's army into present Colorado. Pike and 13 soldiers were later arrested by Spanish troops and were taken to Santa Fe and Chihuahua. During the 2 months Pike was detained, he was accompanied by Lieutenant Melgares. The men became close friends, and Melgares provided Pike with invaluable information about New Spain, which Pike reported in his published journals in 1820. This information stimulated attempts by U.S. citizens to open trade with New Mexico, which were not successful until Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821. When William Becknell, the "father of the Santa Fe Trail," reached New Mexico in November 1821, he was welcomed in Santa Fe by New Mexico Governor Facundo Melgares, who deserves to be known as the "grandfather of the Santa Fe Trail." Pike described Melgares, whom he called "our friend" as "a man of immense fortune, and generous in its disposal, almost to profusion, possessed a liberal education, high sense of honor, and a disposition formed for military enterprise." Unfortunately, no records have been located about Melgares after his term as governor, 1818 -1822.