**Chapter 5: The Final Exploration and the Early Spanish Settlement of New Mexico**

In May 1598 a party of Spanish soldiers rode north through the New Mexico desert. Their leader, Don Juan de Oñate, had come to settle New Mexico. He and his men were looking for a trail to the Pueblo villages in the north. But first they had to survive a ride across 90 miles of barren desert. Water there was hard to find. The horses, men, and even their little dog all suffered from thirst. Some soldiers surely wondered if they would survive.

Late one day the dog wandered away. A bit later he returned. As one of the soldiers stooped to pet the animal, he saw its paws were wet! The dog had found water. Quickly the men followed the dog's tracks back to a small spring. Searching more, they found another spring. The joyous men drank their fill. Some drank until they became sick. The Spaniards named this site Perrillo Spring, in honor of their little dog. For many years this spring was among the few sources of water in what Spaniards would come to call the Jornada del Muerto, or "Journey of the Dead Man."

In this chapter you will learn about Spain's decision to settle New Mexico. You will read about explorers who renewed interest in the lands along the Rio Grande. You will learn how Oñate and his followers came to New Mexico and settled. You will also read about what the Spaniards found in their new homeland. As you read, you will find the chapter divided into the following sections:

* **NEW EXPEDITIONS TO THE NORTH**
* **NEW MEXICO'S FIRST SPANISH SETTLEMENT**
* **ONATE'S NEW MEXICO**
* **A ROYAL COLONY**

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**NEW EXPEDITIONS TO THE NORTH**

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**WORDS TO KNOW**

* **grant**

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**Spaniards dream of a "new" Mexico.** For almost 40 years after Coronado's expedition, no more Spaniards explored New Mexico. There were several reasons for this. For one thing, under a new Spanish law an explorer had to get the king's permission to enter new lands. Also, Spaniards found silver much closer than New Mexico. Mines and towns sprang up north and west of Mexico City. Following the miners were ranchers and farmers. As settlements pushed north, Spanish missionaries went too, spreading their faith.

The memory of Coronado faded. But it did not die. Some people still wondered about the lands to the north. There were, after all, people with souls living there. The Catholic Church wanted to save these souls. At the same time, the dream of finding more gold and silver remained alive. Maybe Coronado had simply looked in the wrong place, some thought. Perhaps there was a rich "new" Mexico somewhere to the north. As time passed, Spaniards came to call the northern lands "new Mexico." The name New Mexico stuck.

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**SPANISH EXPLORATION OF THE SOUTHWEST, 1534-94**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **EXPLORERS** | **TIME** | **AREA AND IMPORTANCE** |
| Cabeza de Vaca | 1534-36 | Crossed much of the southwestern United States: tales of journey led to search for seven cities of gold |
| Estevan and Fray Marcos de Niza | 1539 | Traveled northward to Zuni; Fray Marcos claimed to have seen Cíbola |
| Coronado | 1540-42 | Explored the Southwest, including New Mexico; found no riches; gained geographic knowledge |
| Rodríguez and Chamuscado | 1581-82 | Explored New Mexico; failed to establish a new mission field |
| Espejo and Beltran | 1582-83 | Explored New Mexico and Arizona; claimed to have seen a land of riches |
| Castaño de Sosa | 1590-91 | Tried to colonize New Mexico; arrested for not having a royal grant |
| Leyva | 1594-95 | Came to New Mexico looking for riches; party lured to plains where Spaniards died |

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**Fray Agustín visits the pueblos of New Mexico.** With this renewed interest in the northern lands, four expeditions got underway in the 1580s and 1590s. The first of these headed northward in 1581. Its leader, Fray Agustín Rodríguez, got permission to go to New Mexico from the viceroy. He had heard of villages along the Rio Grande with souls to save. He planned to expand the Catholic Church's work into this area. This area would, in other words, be a new missionary field.

Fray Agustín took along two priests, Fray Francisco López and Fray Juan de Santa Mária. Captain Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado took along nine soldiers to protect them. Traveling up the Rio Grande, they visited the pueblos along the river. They went northward to Taos Pueblo. To the west they visited Acoma and Zuni. To the east they crossed onto the plains and saw the buffalo.

What they found excited the priests. They believed the Indians were ready to be converted to Christianity. Fray Juan left the others to carry this news back to New Spain. Fearing the priest would bring back more Spaniards, Pueblo Indians followed and killed him. Even so, Fray Agustín and Fray Francisco decided to remain at Tiguex. But the Indians killed them soon after the soldiers had left. The soldiers returned to New Spain in April 1582. They told of what they had seen. They told about the priests they had left behind.

**The Espejo expedition enters New Mexico.** Fray Bernardino Beltrán heard the story of the priests in New Mexico. He wished to know their fate. He wondered if they had converted the Indians. With permission from the viceroy, Beltrán headed north in November 1582. Joining him were Antonio de Espejo and 14 soldiers. When they arrived at the Pueblo villages, they learned the sad truth. The priests were dead.

Espejo then set out to explore the land. He hoped to find mines and what he heard was "a lake of gold." Espejo and his men found neither, but their search took them westward into present-day Arizona. There they found copper and some silver.

Back in New Spain Espejo told a good story. His story grew more and more colorful in the telling. It was a story of riches. It was a story that increased interest in New Mexico.

**Castaño de Sosa tries to settle New Mexico.** The expeditions in 1581 and 1582 got the attention of Spain's ruler. In 1583 King Philip II issued a royal law. This law told the viceroy of New Spain to find someone to settle New Mexico. In addition, this person would oversee the Indians' conversion to the Catholic faith.

But before the official settlement of New Mexico could take place, two other groups entered New Mexico. The first was the group led by Gaspar Castaño de Sosa. He decided in 1590 to settle New Mexico on his own. Castaño planned to settle New Mexico even though he had no direct **grant** from the king to do so. A grant meant that the king gave his permission for a person to settle new lands. Reasoning that many Spaniards had crossed New Mexico and that it was no longer "new" land, Castaño felt free to act.

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**Pecos Pueblo**

Pecos Pueblo was once the largest and strongest village in New Mexico. Early Spanish explorers found a four-storied fortress. They also found 2,000 people. Called "Cicuye" by the natives, Pecos had been founded around A. D. 1300. It was the farthest east of all the pueblos. And besides Jemez, it was the only other pueblo that spoke Towa.

Pecos Pueblo prospered. Spaniards found the Indians to be very good farmers. Pecos also profited from its location. It stood at the gateway between the eastern plains and the Rio Grande Valley. Pueblo buffalo hunters passed through Pecos. Plains Indians traded at Pecos.

Spanish explorers stopped at Pecos. Its location became both a benefit and a curse.

With the coming of the Spaniards, Pecos began a slow decline. Its population fell. By 1694 only 736 people remained at Pecos. This number dropped to 58 by 1820. Major outbreaks of measles and smallpox killed many. Others died during attacks by Apaches and Comanches.

In 1838 the last 17 Pecos Indians abandoned their home. They moved west, going to live with their fellow Towas at Jemez. In time the Jemez and Pecos peoples became one. In 1919 Cota Pecos, the last survivor of the pueblo, died at Jemez.

Pecos Pueblo almost vanished. Neglected adobe walls cracked and crumbled. Only then did archaeologists begin to study the site. Today Pecos has new life. It is a National Historical Park with many visitors each year.

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In July 1590 he headed northward. Joining him were 170 people, including women and children. By December Castaño arrived at Pecos Pueblo. (See Special Interest Feature.) From there he set out to explore the Rio Grande pueblos.

**Castaño is punished.** Castaño's actions angered the viceroy. He sent fifty soldiers to New Mexico to arrest the colonists in March 1591. Castaño returned to Mexico City in chains. There he stood trial.

The government charged Castaño with taking over land inhabited by friendly people. It charged him with raising an army. It charged him with trying to settle New Mexico without a direct grant from the king to do so. Found guilty, the court exiled him to the Far East.

Castaño and his party had nonetheless made history. Carts had carried the goods of these Spaniards through what is today New Mexico. They were the first wheeled vehicles to cross what would one day be a part of the American Southwest.

**The last group enters New Mexico before its settlement.** In 1593 a fourth group entered New Mexico. This would be the last expedition before New Mexico's official settlement. Its leader was Captain Francisco Leyva de Bonilla. Leyva's motives were not the same as Castaño's. Leyva did not want to settle New Mexico. Rather, the age-old dream of wealth drew him northward.

Leyva and his men had been chasing Indian raiders in northern New Spain. Finding themselves near New Mexico, they rode north. The men traveled up the Rio Grande to San Ildefonso. There they moved in with the Indians for several months. To get rid of their unwanted guests, the Indians there did what others before them had done. They tricked Leyva into leaving by telling him of riches elsewhere.

The Indians told the story of rich cities on the plains to the east. In other words, they retold the old story of Quivira. Leyva fell for the trick. He and his men headed east. On the plains the Spaniards in the group met their deaths, most at the hands of Indians. Their journey ended in 1594, perhaps near where Coronado had ended his travels.

The story of New Mexico's settlement belongs in the next section. This section has been about the Spanish explorations of New Mexico in the late 1500s. These explorations had brought many people into the region. They had helped make popular the belief that New Mexico was worthy of Spanish settlement.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. What was the purpose of the Fray Agustín expedition, and what happened to the priests?

2. Why did Espejo and Beltrán head northward, and what story did Espejo tell upon his return to New Spain?

3. What did the royal law of 1583 say about New Mexico?

4. What did Castaño de Sosa hope to do, and what became of him?

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**NEW MEXICO'S FIRST SPANISH SETTLEMENT**

**Oñate is chosen to settle New Mexico.** You may recall that in 1583 the Spanish king had issued a royal law (page 100). He had told New Spain's viceroy to find someone to settle New Mexico. The viceroy chose Don Juan de Oñate. Oñate had a military background. He had spent 20 years as a soldier. He had fought those Indians who had resisted Spain's advances northward from Mexico City.

Also, Oñate came from a rich, upper class family. He had been born in 1552 in New Spain. His birthplace was Zacatecas, a city in the silver-mining district northwest of Mexico City. His father had become rich from the silver mines located nearby.

Don Juan de Oñate in time married into a wealthy and powerful family. His wife, Doña Isabel Cortés Tolosa, was a descendant of both Hernando Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, and the Aztec emperor Moctezuma.

**Oñate prepares for the settlement of New Mexico.** In 1597 Oñate got his grant for the colony from the viceroy. Along with this grant he received the titles of governor and captain general of New Mexico. He also received the right to give out land to the settlers.

Oñate could not have undertaken the settlement of New Mexico had he not been wealthy. He had to agree to pay for the expedition. He was to pay the expenses of the soldiers and the families. He was to buy the supplies and the livestock. The government only paid the expenses of those who were to convert Indians to Christianity. In other words, the first duty of Oñate's party was to spread the Catholic faith.

Besides settling New Mexico and saving souls, Oñate had other duties to Spain. He was to map the coasts and harbors of New Mexico. The Spaniards still believed that the Pacific Ocean was near the land they had earlier explored. Oñate was also to search for an all-water passage through the Americas. And he was also ordered to find and arrest Leyva de Bonilla and his men.

**Oñate heads north.** Oñate and his party set out from Santa Barbara in New Spain on January 26, 1598. In the party were about 400 men. Of these, 130 took along wives and children. There were 129 soldiers. In the group as well were 10 Franciscan friars. Two-fifths of these people had been born in Spain. Nearly one-third had been born in New Spain. The rest came from places either not known or located elsewhere in Europe or America. The expedition also brought along 7,000 head of livestock. These included oxen, cattle, horses, mules, and sheep. Food, clothing, and tools for farming and mining filled 83 carts. On the march, from front to rear, the column of people and animals stretched over two miles.

With Oñate traveled New Mexico's first historian. This was Gaspar Pérez de Villagrá. In 1610 in Spain he published A *History of New Mexico.* This book told the story of the hard march northward to New Mexico. It recounted the first months of Oñate's colony. Villagrá's history would be the first ever published about what would become part of the United States. Much of what we know about Oñate comes from this book.

**Oñate claims New Mexico for Spain.** The march north was very hard. The settlers struggled for hundreds of miles through unsettled land. At times they were hungry and thirsty. All in all, the march to the Rio Grande took three months. A few miles below present-day El Paso, the party halted on April 30. Oñate prepared to claim New Mexico in the name of King Philip II of Spain. He ordered that a small chapel be built. After church services, Oñate laid claim to the "kingdoms and provinces" of New Mexico.

The rest of the day was one of celebration. The colonists watched a play written by one of Oñate's captains. The people rested and enjoyed a meal of the meat and fish that were plentiful along the river. This event has been since recognized as New Mexico's "first Thanksgiving."

**Oñate settles at San Juan.** Beyond El Paso Oñate went ahead of the main group. He searched for a trail for the rest of the settlers. You read about the 90 miles of desert, called the "Journey of the Dead Man," that they had to cross at the start of the chapter. Beyond the desert Oñate found the Piros Indians, who had much-needed food and water. The Spaniards named this place *Socorro.* Socorro is a Spanish word that means "help given in time of need."

Oñate then moved north along the Rio Grande to San Juan Pueblo, near present-day Española. San Juan was in a small valley. Nearby the Chama River flows into the Rio Grande. Here on July 11, 1598, Oñate made the first Spanish settlement in New Mexico. The governor named this settlement *San Juan de los Caballeros.* This means "San Juan of the gentlemen." This was how Oñate and his men saw themselves.

The main party of settlers at last reached San Juan in the middle of August. They were tired. They had been on the trail for six months and had covered over 600 miles since leaving Santa Barbara. But within two weeks the Spaniards had laid the foundation for a church. They began digging the irrigation ditches for their fields. Within six months they had moved across the river from San Juan to the west side of the Rio Grande. This move put some distance between them and the San Juan people. It gave them a site with room for expansion.

At the new site the Spaniards built their second settlement in New Mexico. They called this settlement San Gabriel. It would remain New Mexico's capital until 1610. Look at the map on page 106. There you can see the location of the first Spanish settlements in New Mexico. You can also see the route taken by Oñate.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. Why was Oñate chosen as the person to settle New Mexico?

2. Who and what did Oñate bring with him to New Mexico?

3. Where did the Spaniards make their first two settlements in New Mexico?

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**Oñate's NEW MEXICO**

**Oñate sets to work.** Getting the hundreds of settlers to San Juan had been a long, hard job. But for Oñate this was just the first of many tasks. He quickly set about meeting with Pueblo leaders, having them swear loyalty to Spain. He assigned missionaries to different pueblos. The San Juan Indians warned Oñate that winters in New Mexico were cold and harsh. So the governor sent 60 men to the eastern plains to hunt buffalo. He hoped this meat would help feed the people of San Juan. The Spaniards had arrived too late to plant many crops of their own.

Oñate also soon set out to explore the land. He would visit distant pueblos and have their leaders swear loyalty to Spain. He also would look for minerals of value. He hoped to find silver. After all, silver mines had made the Oñate family rich. His mines had paid for the expedition to New Mexico. Finding silver in New Mexico could pay him back that money.

Oñate first visited the villages east of the Manzano Mountains. Then he headed west. He planned to search for the Pacific Ocean, thought to be nearby. All along the way, the Indians seemed friendly. He saw no danger in making the journey. So the governor ordered Juan de Zaldívar, his nephew, to ride west with more men to join him. When he sent the order, Oñate had no idea what was about to happen.

**Acoma revolts.** Trouble was brewing at Acoma Pueblo. The Acomas opposed Spanish rule. They wanted the Spaniards to leave New Mexico. The Acomas lived in a "sky" village atop sheer walls several hundred feet high. The only paths to the top were toeholds dug into the sheer walls. The Acoma people must have felt safe from all other peoples.

In late 1598 the Acomas tested Spanish power. Juan de Zaldívar and his men stopped at the pueblo on their way west. Zaldívar and some men climbed to the sky village. There they hoped to trade for flour. Instead, the Acomas attacked. They killed 10 Spaniards, including Zaldívar. Another died jumping off the cliff. Three others survived by leaping onto sand dunes along the walls of the cliff.

When he heard of the Acoma attack, Oñate wept for his men. He also knew he had to act. If the revolt spread, the whole colony could be lost. The governor talked with his captains, with priests, and with his soldiers. The decision was clear. The Acomas had to give up their revolt or face war. On January 12, 1599, Oñate sent Vicente Zaldívar, brother of Juan, and 70 men toward Acoma. They were to tell the Acomas to quit the revolt and hand over those who planned the attack. If they agreed, there would be no war. If they refused, Zaldívar had orders to attack the village in the sky.

**The Spaniards take Acoma.** Vicente Zaldívar arrived at Acoma on January 21. He told the Acomas to stop their revolt. He demanded they hand over the leaders of the revolt. The Acomas refused, shooting arrows at the Spaniards. The next day the Spaniards took action. Most of them attacked the main stairway up to the cliff. Meanwhile, Zaldívar and a small group climbed up the far side of the cliff. They gained a foothold on the top. But they had not yet won.

On the second day of the battle, the Spaniards hauled two bronze cannons up the cliff. They loaded each with 200 pieces of metal and fired. This decided the battle. After two days of fighting, the people of Acoma gave up. Hundreds of them lay dead. The Spaniards, on the other hand, had lost only one man.

Oñate put the Acoma survivors on trial at Santo Domingo. He appointed Captain Alonso Gomez Montesinos as defense attorney. Montesinos asked Oñate not to be too harsh with the Indians. Not all of them had taken part in the original act of revolt. Oñate found them all guilty. No Acoma, however, would face death. But he felt he needed to send a strong message to the pueblos. Revolt would be punished.

The governor ordered all Acomas over age 12 to serve the Spaniards for 20 years. Men over the age of 25 were to have part of a foot cut off. Sixty young girls were sent to Mexico City to work in convents. The sentence seemed harsh indeed. But some historians have since doubted it was fully carried out. They point out, for example, that by 1604 most Acomas had returned to the sky village and rebuilt their pueblo.

**Some settlers flee New Mexico.** At Christmas in 1600, more settlers and supplies arrived from New Spain. Now Oñate could do more exploring. The following June he led 80 men to the eastern plains. Like Coronado before him, he headed northeast to Quivira in present-day Kansas. The land he saw impressed him. The Indians had planted large fields of beans and corn. He counted thousands of souls to be saved. He heard of rich lands even farther on. As he returned home that fall, he dreamed of exploring beyond Quivira in the future.

During Oñate's absence most Spanish settlers left New Mexico. They had fled down the Rio Grande to New Spain. When the governor entered San Gabriel, he found the village almost empty. Only 25 soldiers and their families greeted him on his return.

Back in New Spain, those who fled gave their reasons to the viceroy. Many blamed hunger and the harsh climate. A common saying about New Mexico at the time was "Eight months of winter and four of hell!" Others feared another Indian attack. Still others complained that Oñate was too strict. Many described New Mexico as a poor land.

**Oñate explores westward.** Oñate remained in New Mexico. He asked for and received more priests. The missionary work had to continue. A few more soldiers arrived from New Spain. Except for a small revolt at Taos, the pueblos remained at peace.

In October 1604 Oñate went exploring again. This time he and 30 men headed west across Arizona. He was looking for the Pacific Ocean. He also hoped to find a water passage through the Americas. He followed the Colorado River to the Gulf of California. He mistook the gulf for the Pacific Ocean. In January 1605 he claimed the "ocean" in the name of the king.

The following year was a hard one for the Spanish settlers. Apaches and Navajos began raiding pueblos friendly to the Spaniards. They even attacked San Gabriel. Spanish raids against the Navajos and Apaches produced few results. Oñate knew he needed more men and supplies. And then the bad news arrived. No more men and supplies would be coming. The king would decide the future of New Mexico.

At this news Don Juan de Oñate wrote to the viceroy. He officially resigned as New Mexico's governor and captain general on August 24, 1607. The viceroy told him to stay in New Mexico until the king decided what would happen to the colony.

[Image: Oñate's carving at Inscription Rock near Grants reads: "Passed by here the Adelantado Don Juan de Oñate from the discovery of the Sea of the South, the 16th of April 1605."]

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. Describe the conflict between the Acoma Indians and the Spaniards.

2. What reasons did some colonists give for fleeing from New Mexico?

3. Who did Oñate learn would decide the future of New Mexico?

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**A ROYAL COLONY**

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**WORDS TO KNOW**

* **royal**
* **colony**

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**New Mexico becomes a royal colony.** For a brief time the Spanish king thought about giving up on New Mexico. But then came word that the Franciscan friars were having some success. They could already count 8,000 Indian converts to Christianity. This news decided the future of New Mexico. On November 1, 1609, the king made New Mexico a **royal colony.**

As a royal colony, New Mexico would be under the direct control of Spain's rulers. They would pay all the expenses of the colony. They would decide its future. Henceforth, New Mexico would be a colony in which friars saved the souls of Indians. It would be a field for missionary work. The viceroy named Don Pedro de Peralta as governor of New Mexico.

**Oñate leaves New Mexico.** In 1610 Governor Peralta rode into San Gabriel. As ordered by the viceroy, Oñate now headed for New Spain. He left behind his home for the past 12 years. In Mexico City the viceroy put Oñate on trial. He charged Oñate with several crimes, including mistreating the Indians. Found guilty of some charges, Oñate was punished. He was fined and told never to return to New Mexico.

Like Coronado, Oñate probably never realized all he had begun. As with Coronado, historians have looked closely at New Mexico's first governor. They credit him with some important things. Oñate succeeded in founding Spanish New Mexico. The Christian missions he began would remain. His explorations expanded the knowledge of the Southwest. The livestock he brought laid the groundwork for future ranching.

Oñate's settlers also brought many new crops with them. These included grains such as wheat and barley. At the same time, the settlers introduced new fruits and vegetables. They planted chile, onions, tomatoes, radishes, cantaloupes, and watermelons, to name a few. The Pueblo peoples of New Mexico quickly started planting many of these crops.

**Santa Fe becomes the capital of New Mexico.** Shortly after his arrival, Governor Peralta removed the settlers from San Gabriel. He moved them to the site of the Spaniards' new capital. This was Santa Fe, which means "Holy Faith."

Peralta made the move to Santa Fe for several reasons.

(1) It was at the center of many of New Mexico's pueblos. Yet it was far enough from all the pueblos that land ownership would not be a problem.

(2) It was located along a stream. This stream, the Santa Fe River, carried water from the Sangre de Cristo ("Blood of Christ") Mountains.

 (3) The site was attractive. At 7,000 feet the air was clear and cool. The Sangre de Cristos provided the backdrop. The Jemez Mountains stood at the edge of the wide-open view to the west.

Santa Fe has remained the capital ever since. It would long remain the center of New Mexico's non-Indian population. It is today more than 390 years old. It is the oldest capital city in the present-day United States. Early Spanish settlers had had their troubles in New Mexico. Still, the Spaniards had settled in New Mexico. And in New Mexico they meant to stay.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. What was New Mexico's future as a royal colony expected to be?

2. Who was New Mexico's first royal governor?

3. What were the achievements of Oñate and his settlers? 4- Why was Santa Fe built on its present-day site?

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**Chapter Review Words You Should Know**

Find each word in your reading and explain its meaning.

1. grant

2. royal colony

**Places You Should Be Able to Locate**

Be able to locate these places on the maps in your book.

1. Santa Barbara

2. Socorro

3. San Juan

4. San Gabriel

5. Acoma Pueblo

6. Santa Fe

**Facts You Should Remember**

Answer the following questions by recalling information presented in this chapter.

1. How did the Spanish explorers of the late 1500s help advance the idea that New Mexico was a land worth settling?

2. What were the first three Spanish settlements in New Mexico, and where were they located?

3. Why did the king of Spain make New Mexico a royal colony?

4. Who are the following people, and why are they important?

a. Fray Agustín Rodríguez

b. Gaspar Castaño de Sosa

c. Francisco Leyva de Bonilla

d. Don Juan de Oñate

e. Gaspar Pérez de Villagrá

f. Juan and Vicente de Zaldívar

g. Don Pedro de Peralta