**Chapter 8: Life in New Mexico's Hispanic Communities**

In 1804 Dr. Cristoval Larrañaga and eight nervous young boys started up the trail from Chihuahua to New Mexico. With them traveled the gift of life. They carried with them a way to prevent a person from getting the killer disease smallpox. This was the new cowpox vaccine.

As you have read, smallpox struck New Mexico often. And almost everyone got it at some time during his or her life. In 1796 English doctors found the secret of the cowpox vaccine. They learned that if one infected a child with pus from a fresh cow-pox sore, that child would get cowpox. This is a mild disease. However, a child who had cowpox would never get smallpox. The Spanish king wanted all his subjects given the new vaccine. But a problem remained. How could one get fresh cowpox vaccine from Spain to New Mexico?

Spanish doctors figured out a way. They found 26 orphans who wanted to go to New Spain. The doctors put these children on a ship for the long trip to the Americas. During the voyage doctors infected the orphans one at a time with cowpox. One at a time each child carried a fresh source of cowpox vaccine. In the same way orphans in New Spain carried the vaccine to Chihuahua. And

Dr. Larrañaga then brought it to New Mexico by infecting the sons of Santa Fe soldiers on the long walk home. Within weeks New Mexico children were protected from smallpox. Over time these efforts saved many lives. It improved the way New Mexicans lived.

In this chapter you will learn how New Mexicans lived on the frontier. You will read about how they lived their daily lives. You will also learn how they developed a special culture of their own. As you read, you will find information divided into the following sections:

**AN ISOLATED FRONTIER**

**LAND OWNERSHIP AND FARMING**

**DAILY LIVING**

**A NEW MEXICO CULTURE**

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**AN ISOLATED FRONTIER**

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**WORDS TO KNOW**

* **caste**
* **genízaro**
* **mestizo**
* **frontier area**
* **mulatto**
* **barter system**

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**Spanish settlers become native New Mexicans.** As you know, Don Diego de Vargas brought settlers to New Mexico in 1693. Some settlers were full-blooded Spaniards. Others were of mixed blood. People of mixed blood were called **castes. Mestizos** made up one group of castes. Spaniards and Indians had married following Spain's conquest of Mexico in 1521. The children of these marriages were called mestizos. Also present in Spanish communities were Blacks and **mulattoes.** Mulattoes were children born of Black and white parents.

So, people of mixed blood lived in New Mexico. As time passed, New Mexico's Spanish-speaking population became more and more mixed. It also became more and more a population of people born in New Mexico. And the number of people grew each year. Spanish settlers and other people in New Mexico intermarried and had children. These New Mexicans, in turn, married and had more children.

The colony's 1790 census, not including Indians, listed only 49 people born outside New Mexico. New Mexico's Spanish-speaking settlers had by 1790 become native New Mexicans.

Census figures for New Mexico in the 1700s listed only two groups of people. Listed first were "Spaniards and castes." It listed the second group simply as "Indians." The term Indians included the Pueblo, Navajo, Apache, Comanche, and Ute peoples. It also included people called ***genízaros.***The *genízaros* were Indians from tribes that did not usually live in New Mexico. Most were Indians held captive by other tribes and freed by Hispanic New Mexicans. They then took Spanish names and lived in Spanish settlements. Many of them worked as servants for those who had freed them.

**New Mexico has an open society.** New Mexico was also a **frontier area.** It was the farthest north settlement in the Spanish empire. There were no settlements beyond it. Life on the frontier was hard. Indian attacks made it dangerous as well. Men, no matter their social class, were expected to protect the settlements. So, on the New Mexico frontier, all people received similar treatment. A person's social class mattered less than it did, for example, in Mexico City.

In New Mexico both Spaniards and people of mixed blood could become officeholders. They could rise to high rank as soldiers. They could become landowners. Indeed, New Mexico's society was special. Its people of mixed blood could become important. It was also special because Hispanic New Mexicans accepted Indians into their communities. There the Indians worked at the same jobs as did the Spanish settlers. Some Indians even married Spaniards or castes.

**New Mexico's society is isolated.** Besides being a frontier area, New Mexico was also isolated. The main reason for this isolation was distance. New Mexico was far away from the other settled areas of New Spain. The Camino Real, or king's highway, connected New Mexico with New Spain. Santa Fe by this road was about 1,600 miles from Mexico City. Travel between Mexico City and Santa Fe could take months. The Camino Real was for a time the longest road in North America. And New Mexico was at the very end of it.

Other factors also added to this isolation. New Mexico lacked good roads. What roads there were ran across sandy or packed soil. New Mexico also lacked easy ways to move goods. New Mexicans had only horses and mules or carts pulled by oxen. Mail service was not regular either. It relied on trade caravans, mule trains, and special mail riders. Any messages or letters from the outside took months to reach New Mexicans.

**New Mexicans trade for outside goods.** Though isolated, New Mexicans did crave outside goods. The trade fair at Taos (page 150) brought in some goods. But this was not enough. A yearly trade fair in the city of Chihuahua helped. But the city was far away. Santa Fe and Chihuahua lay 40 days apart over the Chihuahua Trail. (This was the northern part of the Camino Real.) To reach the fair held in January, caravans with carts and pack mules left New Mexico in November.

Even at the fair, trade was limited. New Mexicans had little money to buy goods. Having little money, they used a **barter system.**

They traded goods for other goods. So, New Mexico's traders took with them Indian blankets, sheep, hides, piñon nuts, and El Paso wine. They traded these items for iron tools, clothes, shoes, chocolate, sugar, tobacco, liquor, paper, and a few books.

After 1800 New Mexico traders also opened the Old Spanish Trail. It ran from Santa Fe to Los Angeles, California. The trail followed a northern route across Utah. The traders thus avoided crossing the Colorado River where it was too deep. New Mexicans took sheep and woolen goods to California. They brought back mules, horses, and even some Chinese goods. By making these long trips, New Mexicans could ease their isolation and acquire outside goods.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. What did the 1790 census figures show about New Mexico's Spanish-speaking population?
2. How did New Mexico's existence as a frontier area help bring about an open society?
3. Besides Spaniards, what other groups of people lived in New Mexico's Spanish communities?
4. What did New Mexicans trade for in Chihuahua and California?

**LAND OWNERSHIP AND FARMING**

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**WORDS TO KNOW**

* **land grant**
* **acequia**
* **hacienda**
* **subsistence farming**
* **carreta**
* **hacendado**

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**Spanish settlers become landowners.** When Spanish settlers returned to New Mexico after the Pueblo Revolt, they again settled along the Rio Grande Valley. As the population grew, however, they needed more land to grow more food. But New Mexicans were not free to just move to new land and settle down. Spanish law said all the land first belonged to the king. The king could give away pieces of land to settlers. He could also allow someone else to give away land. Often this person was the governor. Pieces of land given to settlers were called **land grants.**

In New Mexico there were three kinds of land grants. Pueblo villages received Pueblo grants. These grants set the borders of the pueblos. One person or a family received private grants. These grants allowed the one person or a family to use the land. The person or family owned the grant as personal property. They could sell all or part of it if they so chose.

The community grant was the third type of grant. Governors gave community grants to groups of people. In community grants each family got a small plot of land. This was theirs for building a home and planting crops. Most of the grant, though, was common land. It belonged to everyone. It was not set aside for use by any one person or family. The settlers used the common land for grazing, for firewood, and for hunting. The common land could not be sold.

**Land grants have rules.** To receive a land grant, settlers had to follow certain rules. First, the local *alcalde,* or judge, would take them to the land. The settlers would walk across the land. They had to run their fingers through the soil. They then would shout, "Long live the King." They had to do this three times. If this was not done correctly, the land grant was not legal.

The settlers had to agree to other things as well. They had to live on the land. After four years the settlers would be given deeds to their small plots of land. These became the private property of the family. The family was then free to sell its plot if it so chose.

Spanish governors also used land grants as a way to defend New Mexico. The settlers agreed to defend the land. They had to be armed. Many at first had only bows and arrows for defense. Often the land grant would require them to have firearms within a few years. Only in this way could the settlers protect themselves from Indian attacks. Only in this way could land grants at such new places as Abiquiu and San Miguel del Vado survive.

Also, no one was supposed to settle land that the Indians lived on and farmed. Under Spanish law such land belonged to the Indians. In addition, settlers were not to graze livestock so close to Indian lands that Indian crops were damaged. However, Spanish settlers at times violated this law. They sometimes trespassed on Indian lands.

**Most New Mexicans are farmers.** Owning land was important because farming was New Mexico's main occupation. Most New Mexicans were small farmers. The farmers called their small farms "ranchos." In many areas they built their homes close together. This allowed them to help one another if the Indians attacked.

The small farmers of New Mexico practiced **subsistence farming.** This means they grew crops mainly to feed their own families. They grew corn, wheat, beans, chile, other vegetables, and some fruits. They grew cotton as well. They made cotton and wool into blankets and clothes.

**The tools are simple.** New Mexico's farmers had little metal. So, they mainly used wooden tools. They made their plows, for example, from short tree trunks. They left a large branch attached to the trunk. This would serve as the plow's handle. At the sharpened end of the plow, farmers fastened metal. In this way they made the point of the plow. The plow itself was tied to a pole that spanned the horns of two oxen. The oxen, of course, pulled the plow.

Farmers also made wooden hoes and shovels. They used wood to make home furniture and utensils for the kitchen. Indeed, since metal was scarce, the men did almost all their work in wood. They built wooden carts called **carretas.** (See Special Interest Feature.) They even built small flour mills using local stone and wood. These mills had no metal parts. The farmers placed the mills in irrigation ditches, where they were driven by the flowing water. The grinding stones ground wheat into flour.

**Farmers irrigate their crops.** Both men and women worked at farming. Joined by their children, they planted the seeds, weeded the fields, and harvested the crops. Men did the heavy work. For example, they did the plowing. In addition, men did the work on their irrigation system. New Mexico's Spanish farmers needed irrigation as much as Pueblo farmers did.

The men dug and cleaned their irrigation ditches. The Spaniards called their ditches **acequias.** From New Mexico's rivers the acequias carried water to the communities along the rivers. The acequias that carried water from the Rio Grande to the fields around Albuquerque were wide. They were so wide that small bridges crossed them. Men also did the actual irrigating of the fields.

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**THE CARRETA**

The carreta was a two-wheeled wooden cart or wagon. Made by Spaniards, the carreta had early played a role in New Mexico's history. Both Castaño de Sosa in 1590 and Don Juan de Oñate in 1598 had brought these carts into New Mexico. Indeed, Oñate and the first Spanish settlers had brought along 83 carts. Thirty-two carretas had carried the supplies to the missions during New Mexico's great missionary period. They had been part of the royal supply caravan that arrived in New Mexico every three years.

In the 1700s and early 1800s, the carreta was New Mexico's only vehicle. From the beginning the only materials used in making carretas were wood and leather. Spanish settlers had little metal. This meant they used wooden pegs and leather thongs rather than nails to assemble the carts. In the place of metal-rimmed wheels, they had to use wooden wheels.

In making the floor bed of some carretas, cart makers used pine planks or pine planks and leather. For other carts they used thick slabs of cottonwood cut from tree trunks. Floor beds measured about I foot thick, 4 feet long, and **2 1/2** feet wide. The cart makers bored holes through the pine planks or cottonwood slabs. Through these holes they inserted pine axles on which they placed cottonwood wheels. The wheels measured 4 feet in diameter.

Once the floor beds were finished, the cart makers built up the sides with light-weight poles. They fastened wooden tongues to the cart fronts. The carts were then ready for use. They were pulled by oxen.

Most carretas were owned by traders. Carretas also hauled grain. For the most part they were used for long trips. They jolted and lurched along narrow and rough trails. Now and then, they got stuck in mud and sand.

Carretas made a horrible noise as they screeched along on wooden wheels that were never oiled well enough. Still, the carretas were a marvel of construction. They met the needs of a people who had no other way of hauling heavy loads.

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**Other New Mexicans develop different ways of living.** Not all New Mexicans were small farmers. Some raised livestock, such as sheep and cattle. Others worked as skilled craftspeople. These included carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, and weavers. Still others lived in New Mexico villages as servants. More than half these servants were Indians.

And a few New Mexicans were wealthy. These people controlled large amounts of land. They owned what they called **haciendas.** The hacienda was a large farm where both crops and livestock were raised.**Hacendados** (hacienda owners) hired workers to farm their land and to care for their livestock for them. The people regarded these wealthy New Mexicans as the leaders in their communities.

Wealthy New Mexicans tried to live the way Spaniards with money lived in New Spain. Their homes were still adobe, but they were larger and finer than most New Mexico homes. Their wealth made it possible for them to afford many fine things, such as silver knives and forks.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. What three types of land grants were given to people in New Mexico?

2. Who owned the common lands of a community land grant?

3. What did settlers have to do before a land grant finally belonged to them?

4. What crops did New Mexico's farmers grow?

5. How did the farmers bring water to their crops?

6. How were hacendados different from other New Mexicans?

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**DAILY LIVING**

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**WORDS TO KNOW**

* **horno**

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**New Mexicans live in adobe houses.** New Mexicans built their houses with adobe. Both men and the women were the house builders. Again they divided the tasks. The men did the heavy work. They began their work by making the adobe bricks. The men used their feet to blend the desired mixture of clay, sand, and straw.

The men then scooped this mixture into wooden molds that had no tops or bottoms. They next removed the molds from the newly formed adobes and left them outside to dry. The adobes usually were 10 inches wide, 18 inches long, and 5 inches thick. Each weighed about 50 pounds.

On a foundation of stones the men laid the adobes for the walls. To hold the bricks in place, they spread thick mud between each one. At the comers the men alternated the adobes, laying them first one way, then the other. When they had finished the walls, they laid vigas (wooden beams) across the width of the house.

The men then made the flat roofs. They first placed short, flat wooden boards across the beams. These pieces of wood formed the ceilings. The men next built up the roofs. On top of the wooden pieces, the men placed brush and a layer of adobe. They topped the roofs with eight or more inches of dirt.

The women added the finishing touches. They plastered the outside walls with clay plaster. Depending on the clay available, this plaster might be red, brown, or white. The women also plastered the houses on the inside. Using sheepskin pads, they spread a white or earth-colored mixture on the walls.

**The houses are plain.** Most New Mexican houses in the 1700s were small. Some were built around a patio or in an L shape. Some were built with rooms in a straight row. Each room opened to the outside. Seldom did rooms have connecting doorways.

Because their wooden doors were very heavy, the doorways were small. They usually measured only five feet in height. The wooden planks of the doors were fastened together with wooden pegs and goat hide glue. Holding the doors to the door frames were all-wood hinges.

The houses had few windows, and the windows were small. Early settlers hung animal skins across the window openings to keep out rain, snow, and wind-blown dust. Later settlers also made a crude type of window glass using layers of mica. The light inside the houses was dim.

The interiors of the homes were plain. There were earthen floors and by the 1800s some brick floors. To make their earthen floors hard, New Mexicans often soaked the ground with animal blood. Across the floors they spread animal hides and hand-woven woolen carpets.

Houses were heated by wood-burning, corner ' fireplaces. The house walls formed two sides of each fireplace and chimney. Shaped like a bell, the fireplace had a horseshoe-shaped opening.

A house often began with a single room. The family then added rooms to meet new needs or to shelter new family members. When a son married, he and his bride lived in a room added to his family's house. At times, families stopped living in certain rooms. These rooms then became storage rooms.

**Furnishings are simple.** Most New Mexicans had few furnishings inside their homes. The most common was the bench-like seat that ran along a wall. Most seats consisted of rolled-up bedding pushed up against the wall. Some seats were made of split logs or adobe and were a permanent part of the wall. Still other seats, made of wooden planks, were movable. In time, New Mexicans added backs to the seats and decorated them with carvings.

There were beds, but the beds of early settlers were not pieces of furniture. At night the family members simply unrolled their beds of sheepskin or buffalo hides and slept on the floor. During the day the rolled-up beds served as seats. There were also shelves for candles and other items.

There was little furniture because every room was for both living and sleeping. There was no separate room for dining. So, there was no need for dining room furniture. Even the kitchen was both a living and a sleeping room.

**Women do the cooking.** Hispanic New Mexicans ate a variety of foods. Some were native crops like corn. Others were foods brought by Spanish settlers. A main food was tortillas. Women made these from wheat or corn. Another main food was beans. Some meals consisted simply of tortillas and beans. To add flavor and spice to their meals, the settlers used chile peppers. Sometimes New Mexicans added meat, such as pork or mutton, to their diet.

The women did the cooking. They cooked many of the meals in the corner fireplace. When the weather was pleasant, they might cook over a fire built outside. Because metal was scarce, New Mexicans had few metal cooking pots. Most of the women only had a sheet of metal on which to cook their tortillas. Their cooking pots were made from clay.

The women got clay pots from the Pueblo Indians. They had pots for cooking, pots for carrying water, and pots for storing food. To meet other cooking and eating needs, the settlers made wooden utensils. The men carved spoons, stirring sticks, bowls, cheese presses, and bread-dough trays.

**Women do the baking.** The women did their baking in outdoor ovens they made themselves. These ovens, called **hornos,** were dome-shaped. A rounded opening served as the oven door.

The floor of the oven was smooth, and the inside was plastered with fire-resistant clay. A small hole at the top let the smoke out. Another small hole at the base of the oven let in the air needed for a good fire.

When ready to bake, the women built fires in the oven. They kept the fires burning until the oven walls had stored heat enough for baking. Once the fire had burned out, they removed the coals. They then slid the bread dough or other item to be baked into the oven. For this purpose they used long-handled wooden paddles.

**The clothing is colorful.** The settlers wore colorful clothing. The men commonly wore shirts and pants woven of cotton or wool. Some men also had leather shirts and pants. The pants were worn tight around the hips and were often open from the knee down.

As an outer garment men wore brightly colored woolen blankets. Worn in the style of ponchos, these blankets had an opening in the middle. They slid down over the wearers' heads and onto their shoulders.

On their heads the men wore wide-brimmed hats. On their feet they wore leather boots with hard soles and pointed toes. They wore their hair long and fastened it in a single braid. Beards and mustaches were fashionable.

Women's clothing came in two basic pieces. One, made of cotton, served as both a blouse and a slip. It had a low neckline and short sleeves and hung down to the ' knees. The other, made of heavy woven cloth, was a full, ankle-length skirt. Often red in color, this skirt had a sash that tied at the waist.

As an outer garment women wore a shawl. Made from colored cloth folded into a triangle, one type of shawl covered both the head and shoulders. In public women often shielded their faces by placing the shawl's right corner over their left shoulders. Another type of shawl was oblong.

On their feet women wore Pueblo-style moccasins or heel-less cotton slippers in the Spanish style. Or they went barefoot. If they had jewelry, they wore it. They most commonly wore their hair in long braids. Painted with red juice from *alegr* í *a* (coxcomb), their cheeks appeared rosy.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. What building materials did New Mexicans use for their homes?

2. Describe the furnishings of an adobe house.

3. What foods did New Mexicans eat?

4. What types of clothing did New Mexicans wear?

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**A NEW MEXICO CULTURE**

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**WORDS TO KNOW**

* **santo**
* **retablo**
* **santero**
* **bulto**

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**New Mexicans celebrate special occasions.** Spanish settlers brought their culture with them to New Mexico. One of their traditions was celebrating special occasions. This custom took root in New Mexico. Hispanic New Mexicans celebrated religious events. They would also celebrate the birth, death, or marriage of a member of Spain's royal family. At the same time, they developed new traditions of their own.

One such local tradition honored the reconquest of New Mexico. In 1693 Don Diego de Vargas returned a statue to Santa Fe from El Paso. This was a statue of Our Lady of the Rosary. He vowed that when he retook New Mexico, he would honor her in a yearly procession. He also vowed to build a chapel to house her statue.

Out of this grew what is called the Santa Fe fiesta. This celebration still occurs each year in September. Our Lady of the Rosary is still honored. Over the years, though, the statue has been called by different names. Hispanic New Mexicans had called it "La Conquistadora" in the 1600s. However, over time the name became linked to the reconquest. So, in the 1980s church officials made a request. They asked that people now call it "Our Lady of Peace." This was to remind New Mexico's peoples that today they live together in peace.

**New Mexicans develop their own folk art.** In Spain and New Spain it was a common practice to display images of saints in churches and homes. This tradition also took root in New Mexico. New Mexicans displayed images of saints known as **santos.** And after 1750 they created their own santos.

The religious-image makers were called **santeros.** The santeros were local craftspeople at first. In later years they traveled from place to place to make and sell their santos. And the santos they made were of two different types.

One type of santo was a **retablo.** A retablo is a religious painting or carving made on a flat surface. Most commonly retablos are paintings on rectangular wooden boards.

The other type of santo was the **bulto.** Bultos are carved or sculptured images of a saint. They are wooden figures carved in the round from limbs of cottonwood or pine trees.

The retablos and bultos of early New Mexican santeros were unlike santos made anywhere else. Both retablos and bultos were painted to make the images look as real as possible. And the most vivid of all New Mexican santos was the crucifix. The crucifix is the portrayal of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The santeros showed Christ suffering on the cross. They revealed in Christ's face the feelings of both pain and forgiveness. Crucifixes and other New Mexican santos can be seen today in churches, museums, and fine-arts centers. They reflect the Hispanic tradition of displaying holy images.

Other traditions of Spanish culture were brought to New Mexico as well. And in time the people of New Mexico blended these traditions into what became their own cultural heritage. New Mexicans produced unique forms of drama and local folk plays with religious themes. They made distinctive musical instruments that they played at social events. They danced special dances. In short, they developed a New Mexico culture.

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**Some New Mexicans become Penitentes.**

Other local traditions that grew up also had a religious focus. After all, Spanish culture and the Catholic faith went together. Religion was important to those who lived in New Mexico's Spanish communities. However, in the 1700s New Mexicans faced a problem. Fewer and fewer priests served in New Mexico. Some areas had no priests at all.

Thus in some northern New Mexico mountain villages, a special brotherhood began to emerge. The members of this brotherhood, men only, were called Penitentes. They helped carry out the religious duties of the community. Men joined the brotherhood to seek forgiveness for their own sins.

**The Penitentes have special rituals.** The Penitentes sought forgiveness by experiencing both spiritual and physical pain. Spiritual pain was the focal point of their meetings. Physical pain was a part of each member's initiation into the brotherhood. It was also a part of Holy Week (Easter) activities. During Holy Week the members beat themselves with cactus or yucca whips. On Good Friday they chose one of their members to play the role of Christ.

They made their choice within a private chapel *(morada)* closed to all but the Penitentes. Inside this morada they reenacted the trial of Jesus according to the gospels. After the trial they held a procession to a hill marked as Calvary *(calvario).*

The person playing the role of Christ carried a man-size cross on his back. At one time the Penitentes tied this person to the cross and then stood the cross on end. They left the person on the cross until he was near death. Later in time, the Penitentes tied a large sculpture of Christ rather than a man to the cross. The Penitentes practiced their religion as they did because it met their needs. It met the needs of a deeply religious people isolated from a formal church.

The Penitentes also served a social function. They provided early welfare services. They aided the sick and the poor. The brotherhood comforted people whose relative or friend had died. In addition, this group became politically active. Through their service and political activities, the Penitentes gave unity to their communities.

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***SECTION REVIEW***

1. What special celebration grew from the reconquest of New Mexico?

2. What types of religious folk art grew up in New Mexico?

3. Why did Penitentes appear in some communities?

4. What contributions did the Penitentes make to their communities?

**Chapter Review**

**Words You Should Know --** Find each word in your reading and explain its meaning**.**

1. caste

2. mestizo

3. mulatto

4. genízaro

5. frontier area

6. barter system

7. land grant

8. subsistence farming

9. acequia

10. carreta

11. hacienda

12. hacendado

13. homo

14. santo

15. santero

16. retablo

17. bulto

**Places You Should Be Able to Locate -** Be able to locate these places on a map**.**

1. Santa Fe

2. Chihuahua Trail

3. Rio Grande

4. Abiquiu

5. San Miguel del Vado

**Facts You Should Remember -** Answer the following questions by recalling information presented in this chapter.

1. What kind of population and society grew up in New Mexico's Spanish communities as a result of New Mexico's frontier conditions?

2. How did New Mexicans trade with the outside world?

3. Why was the ownership of land important to New Mexico's settlers, and how could they get land?

4. How did the culture of Hispanic New Mexicans reflect a deep religious faith?