**Chapter 9: New Mexico under Mexican Rule**

The news arrived in Santa Fe on December 26, 1821. Spanish rule had ended. New Mexico was now part of a new nation called Mexico. Governor Facundo Melgares took the news to the leading citizens of Santa Fe. The governor told them to plan a celebration honoring the event.

The citizens set to work, but soon they realized they did not know how to celebrate independence. Who could help them? They turned to Thomas James, an American trader who had recently arrived from the United States. Surely James knew about these things. After all, the United States had been independent for 45 years. Indeed, James did have an idea. Set up a "liberty pole" in the plaza, he suggested, and then raise the flag of Mexico.

Men cut two tall pine trees and lashed them end to end as the "liberty pole." It stood over 70 feet tall. But one more problem remained. What did the new flag of Mexico look like? No one had seen it. The citizens of Santa Fe designed a flag of their own. It showed two clasped hands. This represented friendship for all people and nations. At dawn on January 6, 1822, James joined the governor in raising the flag over Santa Fe plaza. Then a cannon blast told the people the independence celebration would begin.

In this chapter you will learn about New Mexico during the period of Mexican rule. You will read about the arrival of Anglo-American traders and trappers. You will read about problems that caused New Mexicans to revolt against their governor in 1837. And you will read how New Mexicans faced outside threats in the 1840s. As you read, you will find information divided into the following sections:

**THE SANTA FE TRADE**

**THE FUR TRADE**

**CHURCH, GOVERNMENT, AND REVOLT**

**THE ARMIJO GOVERNMENT**

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**THE SANTA FE TRADE**

**New Mexico becomes a part of Mexico.** Spain ruled its American colonies for 300 years. At the heart of Spain's American empire was New Spain (present-day Mexico). New Mexico was part of New Spain.

In the 1810s people in New Spain revolted against Spanish rule. After years of fighting the people of New Spain were successful. The new nation of Mexico gained its freedom in September 1821. New Mexico became part of this new nation.

News of Mexican independence did not reach Santa Fe until weeks later. New Mexicans themselves had not revolted against Spain. But when the news did arrive, the governor told the people that the Spanish king no longer ruled New Mexico. On January 6, 1822, the people of Santa Fe greeted the news with ringing church bells, gunfire, music, and a formal ceremony. Then, they danced and celebrated late into the night.

New Mexicans seemed to welcome the news. With Spanish rule ended, they hoped to enjoy more freedom. They might now be able to trade with outsiders. Knowing the peoples' desire for outside goods, Mexican officials acted quickly. They set aside the laws against outside trade.

**Traders enter New Mexico.** The first person to profit from the new trade rules was Captain William Becknell. Becknell was from Franklin, Missouri. In 1821 he traveled onto the Great Plains. There he hoped to trade with the Indians for horses, mules, and other items.

During his travels Becknell met people from Santa Fe. They invited him into New Mexico. Becknell accepted the invitation. Still, he was surprised by the friendly welcome he received in Santa Fe. New Mexicans eagerly bought what he had to sell. They paid for these goods with silver coins.

Becknell then hurried back to Missouri with news of his trading success. Legal trade with Mexico could now take place. Within a year United States traders made clear their interest in this new trade. Starting in 1822, yearly trade caravans arrived in New Mexico. And Santa Fe quickly replaced Taos as New Mexico's main trading center.

**The Santa Fe Trail is established.** At first, the trade caravans had pack animals only. But by 1824 traders were using both wagons and pack animals to carry goods. Mostly from Missouri, the traders reached New Mexico by crossing plains and mountains. Some traders pushed on through New Mexico. They carried their trade from Santa Fe to Chihuahua along the Chihuahua Trail.

Everywhere they went the traders found people starved for outside goods. By the 1840s the yearly caravans heading for Santa Fe included many wagons. Each carried as much as 5,000 pounds of valuable goods. In 1843 alone goods brought into Santa Fe were worth about half a million dollars.

The wagons bound for Santa Fe traveled over what came to be known as the Santa Fe Trail. Look at the map on page 181. There, you can see the two routes this trail followed. The mountain branch crossed the plains to Bent's Fort (page 186). It entered New Mexico over Raton Pass. The Cimarron Cutoff crossed the plains into New Mexico through the present-day Oklahoma panhandle.

Once in New Mexico both branches of the Santa Fe Trail ran (on the east side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The two branches met before the trail cut around the southern end of the mountains. The trail passed through San Miguel del Vado. It then entered Santa Fe from the southeast.

**The new trade has an effect on New Mexico.** Mexican officials had not known how much trade there would be. They soon knew. More and more traders arrived. They also knew that United States traders profited greatly. Once the trade had begun, Mexican officials could not stop it. But they did set rules. They did make traders fill out detailed papers. They taxed the goods brought into Mexican territory. Indeed, this tax provided most of the money to run the government in New Mexico. Over time, the Santa Fe trade changed life in New Mexico. It changed how New Mexicans lived.

First, the trade met the needs of New Mexicans. From the traders they could buy many items they needed. These included (1) cloth goods, including hats, gloves, handkerchiefs, and ribbons; (2) building materials, furniture, tools, silverware, glassware, dishes, candles, paints, paper, and ink; (3) foods, spices, medicines, and tobacco; (4) books and almanacs; and (5) wagons with metal-rimmed wheels. Many traders sold their wagons before returning home. From the traders New Mexicans also got their first printing press.

Second, the trade brought Anglo-Americans to New Mexico. It enabled them to control much of the economy. The United States government recognized the value of the Mexican trade. It spent money to improve the Santa Fe Trail. Traders from the United States got the largest profits from this trade.

**New Mexicans become successful traders.** Also profiting from the new trade were the Mexican citizens who actively traded for outside goods. Among the Mexican traders were many prominent New Mexicans. By 1839 these traders were using their own wagons to market United States goods in Santa Fe. José Chávez y Castillo and Antonio José Chávez were two of these traders.

Other Mexican traders carried the trade south from Santa Fe. They traded United States goods in Chihuahua, Durango, and other towns in northern Mexico. Among these traders were Governor Manuel Armijo, José and Juan Perea, and Ambrosio Armijo.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. How did New Mexico become a part of Mexico?

2. What action taken by Mexican officials changed the trade law?

3. In what ways did this new trade affect New Mexico?

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**THE FUR TRADE WORDS TO KNOW**

**The mountain men arrive in New Mexico.** As the Santa Fe trade grew, other outsiders showed interest in New Mexico. They looked to New Mexico for animal furs. Trappers had looked to New Mexico as early as 1805. In the 1820s their interest peaked. Hat makers in Paris, London, and New York wanted more and more beaver pelts. So, into the mountains of northern New Mexico moved the fur trappers. These trappers were called **mountain men.** Many mountain men were French Canadians. The rest were from the United States.

In most cases the mountain men worked in New Mexico illegally. They did not have permission to trap beaver in the area. An 1824 Mexican law said only residents of Mexico could trap beaver. However, the demand for furs was great. Mountain men willingly risked arrest to trap in New Mexico.

**Taos is the headquarters for the fur trade.** Taos was the village nearest the mountain waters where the beaver lived. As a result, Taos became the headquarters of the fur trade. Here, the mountain men gathered what supplies they could. They added these supplies to equipment brought from St. Louis.

Leaving Taos in the fall, the trappers camped in the mountains nearby. Of greatest danger to the trappers were Indians. The Indians fought to hold on to their hunting grounds. Mountain men also faced danger from grizzly bears. Many bears roamed the mountain forests. Whether alone or in small parties, the mountain men feared other trappers as well.

Mountain men spent the winter trapping beaver. One person could get as much as 400 pounds of beaver pelts in a single season. With the end of the season, the trappers moved back into Taos. There they faced a new danger. Mexican officials could arrest them for trapping illegally. They could have their entire catch taken away. However, the trappers were willing to take the risk.

**Outsiders control the fur trade.** Beginning in the 1820s, the fur trade lured many mountain men to Taos. Indeed, they became the largest single group of newcomers in Taos. Among the French Canadians were the Robidoux brothers, François Le Compte, and Carlos Beaubien. Those from the United States included Bill Williams and Thomas Fitzpatrick. But best known of all the trappers was Christopher (Kit) Carson.

Born in Kentucky, Kit Carson had arrived in New Mexico with a wagon train in 1826. He stayed on to become a trapper, hunter, and scout. In 1843 he married Josefa Jaramillo. Through this marriage Carson joined one of Taos's most prominent families. After this he was accepted into the Taos community.

Besides mountain men, the fur trade also brought businessmen. Chief among them were two Anglo-Americans. These were brothers Charles and William Bent. Joining them were two men of French descent. These were brothers Ceran and Marcellin St. Vrain. Together these four men in the late 1820s formed their own company. They called it Bent, St. Vrain and Company.

**Bent's Fort is built.** The company soon began work on a fort near present-day La Junta, Colorado. They built the fort just outside Mexican territory. This was so fur trappers would not have to fear arrest in Taos. Bent's Fort was completed in 1832. Built of adobe bricks made by workers from Taos, it was secure against Indian attack. By the end of the 1840s, the fort was the center of the southern fur trade. Trappers bought their supplies there. Both trappers and Indians brought their furs to the fort.

Over time Bent, St. Vrain and Company handled other business as well. The company traded Mexican blankets to the Plains Indians. It shipped buffalo hides to St. Louis. It caught and sold wild horses. It owned a store in Taos. It opened a branch store in Santa Fe. A company mill in Taos supplied flour to the area's residents.

With New Mexico open to outsiders, newcomers continued to arrive. Among them were more Anglo-American traders, trappers, and businessmen. In other words, outsiders were in New Mexico to stay. They changed the area's society. They married into local families. They changed New Mexico's economy. For trade New Mexicans began to look toward the United States, not Mexico. Thus the traders' arrival began to break down New Mexico's isolation from the outside world.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. Who were the mountain men, and what attracted them to New Mexico?

2. What did Mexican law say about trapping?

3. How did Bent, St. Vrain and Company control the southern fur trade?

4. What business operations did these and other newcomers carry on in New Mexico?

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**CHURCH, GOVERNMENT, AND REVOLT**

**New Mexico remains a frontier area.** Mexican rule did not make life easy for New Mexicans. New Mexico remained a frontier area. Its people still lived far from settled areas in Mexico. Frontier life remained both hard and dangerous. Indian raids continued. And, as always, there were too few soldiers to protect the people.

Also because of distance, Mexico's government had only loose control over New Mexico. This left New Mexicans pretty much on their own. At the same time, the Catholic Church sent few priests to serve New Mexico. From 1760 to 1833 no bishop came north from Durango to visit the area. As a result, New Mexico's church leaders were left on their own. By 1826 only five priests served New Mexico's Hispanic villages. As a result, New Mexicans felt neglected by Mexico. They also knew that, if things were to improve, they would have to do it themselves.

**Father Martínez works for the people.** One of the few priests in New Mexico was Father Antonio José Martínez. Born in Abiquiu in 1793, Martínez went to Durango ] in 1817 and studied to become a priest. Father Martínez returned to New Mexico in 1825 and settled in Taos. There he set to work to improve life for New Mexicans. He founded a school.

 He taught many of New Mexico's future leaders. Twenty of his students later became priests. Others served in the government. The Taos priest even bought New Mexico's first printing press. In the 1830s he used it to print school-books that he had written. These were the first books printed in New Mexico. Respect for the priest grew. Martínez even became a member of the New Mexico assembly. This group advised New Mexico's governors.

As a leader he wrote and spoke for the people. He warned New Mexicans that Anglo-Americans would bring many changes to their land. In one case he tied this in with the future of the buffalo. At Bent's Fort the Plains Indians got guns from the American traders. They used to these guns to kill buffalo only for their hides, not for their meat. Martínez warned that one day there would be no more page of the buffalo. Indeed, his fear came true. By 1846 New Mexico hunters first book had to travel 250 miles to find the buffalo. Often the hunters printed in returned with little or no meat.

**New Mexicans run their own government.** Mexico usually paid little attention to government in New Mexico. After 1822 the main official in New Mexico was called the ***jefe político.***This means "political chief." The *jefe político* carried out the laws. He was like the governor in Spanish times. Therefore, historians refer to the political chiefs as governors.

Most governors appointed during the Mexican period were New Mexicans. Mexico usually left them alone to rule and protect New Mexico as they saw fit. Protecting New Mexico remained hard. Mexico sent fewer than 100 soldiers to Santa Fe. And some of these did not even have guns. New Mexicans did most of the Indian fighting. And they were not paid for this. In exchange for fighting Indians, though, New Mexicans paid no taxes.

This changed in 1835, however. Mexico's leaders began making new laws. These laws gave them more control over some areas. These included New Mexico, California, and Texas. In 1836 Anglo-Americans in Texas revolted against the laws. They fought for and won their independence from Mexico. They then formed the Republic of Texas. What would happen in New Mexico?

**Albino Pérez becomes governor.** Unrest did come to New Mexico. It took the form of a revolt. In 1835 Mexico sent a new governor to Santa Fe. This was Colonel Albino Pérez. New Mexicans disliked the governor for several reasons. First, he was not a native New Mexican. And he was an officer in the Mexican army. Second, Pérez had come to enforce Mexican laws in New Mexico. Earlier governors had ignored many of the laws. Third, the Mexican government imposed new taxes. It said everyone, including New Mexicans, would pay them.

New Mexicans learned of the new taxes in July 1837. The people blamed Governor Pérez. Rumors spread quickly. Some claimed the governor would take one third of all the people had. People in the Rio Arriba area north of Santa Fe were most angry. Their leaders met at La Cañada. There they issued a statement opposing the taxes. They also said they were against greater Mexican control of New Mexico. They then raised an army. They would fight the governor if they had to.

**The Revolt of 1837 begins.** Pérez soon learned of the rebellion. Thinking the rebels were weak, he headed for La Cañada with only 200 men. Most of these were local militia. Little did he know that most of his militia sided with the rebels. He hoped he could talk the rebels into going home. He believed he would not have to fight. On the morning of August 8, however, Pérez realized he was mistaken.

That day some 1,500 rebels blocked the road at Black Mesa near San Ildefonso Pueblo. Pérez prepared to talk to the rebels, but the time for talking had passed. The rebels opened fire. Pérez quickly saw his chance to end the revolt vanish when most of his militia switched sides and joined the rebels. Only 23 men went with Pérez as he retreated to Santa Fe.

That night Pérez and nine friends left Santa Fe. They headed south along the river road toward Albuquerque. They fled for their lives. But they never made it. Rebels blocked the road. Pérez and his friends now scattered, each trying to save his own life. Pérez gambled and turned back to Santa Fe. He still hoped to get away, but such was not the case. Chased by the rebels, Pérez could not escape. After a brave fight, he lay dead. His killers then cut off his head and took it to Santa Fe. One story says the rebels celebrated victory by using Pérez's head as a football.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. Describe the condition of the church in frontier New Mexico.

2. How did Father Martínez serve the people of New Mexico?

3. Why was Albino Pérez unpopular with many New Mexicans?

4. What caused the Revolt of 1837?

5. What happened to Governor Pérez during the revolt?

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**THE ARMIJO GOVERNMENT**

**The rebels appoint a new governor.** On August 10, 1837, leaders of the Revolt of 1837 gathered at Santa Fe. There they picked a new governor to replace the murdered Pérez. In his place they chose José Gonzales. He proved to be a poor choice. A farmer from Taos, Gonzales was not prepared to rule. An observer at the time wrote that "his only real talent was knowing how to kill buffalo." The very next day the rebels returned to their northern villages. Gonzales, with just a few advisors, remained in Santa Fe.

At this point the revolt began to fall apart. The rebels could not agree on what next to do. Many thought all laws would now be abolished. Others spoke of complete freedom from Mexico. Indeed, Governor Gonzales suggested becoming part of the United States. Rebels at Taos wanted to kill all those opposed to the revolt, including Father Martínez. They also threatened to destroy his church. But from La Cañada came the most startling news of all. Rebels there were planning to attack and rob the people south of Santa Fe.

The Hispanics south of Santa Fe had taken no part in the revolt. The violence and ideas of the rebels, however, alarmed them greatly. The rebel threat to attack and rob them finally forced them to act. The leaders of the Albuquerque area met and decided the revolt had to end.

**Armijo comes to power.** The Hispanic leaders of the Albuquerque area raised an army to put down the revolt. To lead this army they appointed Manuel Armijo. The commander had once been governor of New Mexico. Armijo, a respected rancher and Santa Fe trader, was also a militia officer. Like his neighbors, he feared the rebels. As a trader he had much to lose unless New Mexico was at peace.

Armijo led his army to Santa Fe. To the delight of the citizens there, he arrived on September 14. He entered the capital without a fight and quickly announced that he was now governor of New Mexico. He jailed some rebel leaders and let the rest, including José Gonzales, go home. Gonzales had agreed to recognize Armijo as governor. At first the rebels seemed to accept this change. After all, Armijo was a native New Mexican. He had been governor before, and the people knew him.

**Armijo defeats the rebels.** The rebels did go home, but the revolt was not over. In January 1838 the rebels raised a new army. They declared they still supported Gonzales as governor. They said that the people had chosen Governor Gonzales. Armijo had taken the office against their will. His power challenged, Armijo had to act. He marched north to crush the rebels once and for all. On January 27, 1838, Armijo's men won the Battle of Pojoaque near La Cañada. Armijo then ordered captive rebel leaders, including Gonzales, executed.

The Revolt of 1837 ended. Law and order now returned to New Mexico. Grateful leaders in Mexico kept Armijo as governor. He would be governor for most of the next nine years. He had saved New Mexico for Mexico. And he would have to do it again.

**Texans invade New Mexico.** Soon after the Revolt of 1837 ended, New Mexicans faced another danger. This threat came from Texas. Texans had won their freedom from Mexico in 1836. The new Republic of Texas claimed the Rio Grande as its southern and western border. According to Texans, much of New Mexico belonged to them. Mexico and New Mexico did not accept this wild claim.

In the summer of 1841 a small army of 321 Texans approached New Mexico. These members of the Texas-Santa Fe expedition claimed they came to trade. But they also carried orders to take over Santa Fe if they were not opposed. The Texans never reached Santa Fe, however. The army got lost on the plains. It broke into several groups. Roving Indians stole their horses, and they ran short of food.

**Armijo captures the Texans.** Learning of the Texans' approach, Governor Armijo prepared to defend Santa Fe. He raised a small army, mounted his best mule, and led his men to the eastern plains. As groups of lost, hungry Texans wandered into New Mexico, the governor simply arrested them.

When he had them all, Armijo sent them on the long march to Mexico City. Tied together, the invaders suffered greatly on the march south. However, the following year Mexico released most of the Texans and returned them home.

New Mexicans would not soon forget the invasion, though. As for Armijo, one historian later wrote that in 1841 he again "became something of a national hero."

After 1841 the Texas danger remained. In 1843 Texans raided the New Mexico village of Mora. Shortly afterward Texans attacked New Mexicans on the Santa Fe Trail. When the fighting ended, some 23 New Mexicans lay dead. New Mexicans' fear of Texans grew. Indeed, for years mothers would warn their children, "If you are not good, I'll give you to the *Tejanos* [Texans] when they come back."

**Armijo makes land grants.** In the 1840s Governor Armijo knew New Mexico was in danger. Indian and Texan raids presented real threats. Fears of an invasion from the United States also grew. Armijo knew Mexico could not protect New Mexico. Mexico could not provide enough soldiers or guns for defense. New Mexicans would have to find a way to do it themselves.

Armijo turned to land grants as a way to protect New Mexico. Most grants went to American traders who had become Mexican citizens. These traders were also Armijo's friends. And he sometimes secretly kept part of a grant for himself. The large grants made by Armijo totaled over 16 million acres in the lands facing Texas and the United States. Sometimes the land grants were much larger than Mexican law allowed. Those who received land from Armijo promised to settle it and hold it against Indians and outside invaders. But this would take time. By 1846 it would prove to be too little too late.

***SECTION REVIEW***

1. How did the people of Albuquerque react to the actions and ideas of the rebels?

2. How did Manuel Armijo come to power?

3. What was the Texas-Santa Fe expedition, and what were its results?

4. How did Armijo handle land grants while he was in power?

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**Chapter Review Words You Should Know**

**Find each word in your reading and explain its meaning.**

1. mountain men

2. *jefe político*

**Places You Should Be Able to Locate**

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

1. Santa Fe

2. Santa Fe Trail

3. San Miguel del Vado

4. Taos

5. Bent's Fort

6. La Cañada

7. Albuquerque

**Facts You Should Remember**

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

1. How did New Mexicans react to the end of Spanish rule?

2. What changes did traders and trappers bring to New Mexico?

3. What conditions caused the Revolt of 1837?

4. How did Governor Armijo deal with outside threats to New Mexico?

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

1. William Becknell
2. Kit Carson
3. the Bents and the St. Vrains
4. Antonio José Martínez
5. Albino Pérez
6. José Gonzales
7. Manuel Armijo