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El Camino Real: Commercial Trade Route to Santa Fe

Jodi R. Harrison

Western Oregon University, jharrison14@wou.edu

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El Camino Real de Tierra
Adentro: Comercial Trade
Route to Santa Fe

Western Oregon University

Primary Reader: Professor John Rector

Secondary Reader: Professor Elizabeth Swedo

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El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, the royal road of the interior land, is often simply referred to as *El Camino Real*, and is also known as the *Chihuahua trail*. To the New World Spanish, the *interior land* was the vast unchartered area of the North American continent which lie north of New Spain. Spanish explorers led by native guides established a trail that would later become an important trade route to Santa Fe. The trail served as the central trade route from the capital, Mexico City, to the northern interiors of New Spain for approximately two centuries. At the northern terminus of the trail rests one of the oldest permanent settlements in the continental United States, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Santa Fe was initially founded in 1610 and was the setting for various colonial activities until Mexican independence in 1821. Santa Fe's reliance on El Camino Real as the colony's sole trade route was crucial to their survival.

The importance of trade on El Camino Real in regard to the survival of the Santa Fe colony, is largely left out of the history of the American West. Santa Fe's ultimate survival was paradoxical and has been overlooked by scholars of the Mexican border regions. The prevailing barter system in eighteenth-century Santa Fe posed its own challenges, including the lack of currency and the merchant monopoly on trade goods, but in turn it supplemented colonial needs. From the Pueblo Revolt to multiple periods of famine and scarce mission funding, the hardships in keeping the settlement afloat posed unprecedented challenge. Ironically, if it were not for the expensive goods made available by traveling merchants, Santa Fe may have failed as a permanent settlement.

The key to the success of this remote mission colony was in the caravan trade over Santa Fe's El Camino Real. Agriculture production based on harsh native labor exploited through the *encomienda* system could not have sustained the Santa Fe colony alone, nor could the inconsistent government subsidies. Because native obedience and a supported colony were

among the top priorities of the Spanish mission outposts, trade became increasingly important for the colony's lasting survival. Colonists, mission clergy, and Pueblo natives all participated in Santa Fe's trade activity on El Camino Real.¹

This introduction to New Mexico's El Camino Real is followed by an overview of recent historiography on the subject. Before examining Santa Fe's colonial trade in depth, however, it is necessary to give a background on the settlement and a discussion of the initial reasons for the founding of Santa Fe by Juan de Oñate. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, El Camino Real was a means for exploring the northern interior of New Spain and a route for supplying newly settled areas. The Native American contributions in newly settled regions on El Camino Real before the eighteenth century were varied and included both navigational aid as well as agricultural production. Santa Fe's famous Pueblo Revolt in 1680 marks an important caveat in the transformation of Spanish-native relationships, shifting from a very oppressive situation for natives to something slightly more reciprocal in the subsequent century. The changing Spanish-native relationships also help to support trade in the colony which essentially was the key to the colony's survival.

A re-conquest of Santa Fe was launched only a decade later to serve as a place for missionizing the indigenous Pueblo groups. It is during the eighteenth century Franciscan era that trade systems fully develop to supplement the dwindling royal subsidies of the not so lucrative colony. It is during this era that El Camino Real became crucially important to Santa Fe's survival. An analysis of the eighteenth-century trade in Santa Fe will include a look at native produced exports such as woolen textiles. The Native American contribution to the trade

¹ Throughout the paper I will be using the term *Pueblos* to describe the sedentary indigenous groups of the New Mexico region. In more general statements I use the term Native American. I will use more specific names where a distinction is needed.

in Santa Fe is paramount. Virtually all of the exports used to pay for incoming commodities were produced by the Pueblo mission inhabitants.

Beginning from the capital at Mexico City, El Camino Real stretched approximately 1,600 miles into the Pueblo regions. The northern end of the trail winds alongside the Rio Grande River. This important trail served as Santa Fe's primary supply route to and from the northern frontier. As important as the goods and tangible supplies are the ideologies and culture that were also transported along the trail. Santa Fe became the northern most destination of El Camino Real as well as the result of lasting cultural impact.

There is no doubt that this ancient route was well used by indigenous people for purposes of trade and migration in pre-Columbian times. It was not until the seventeenth century that an official trail was established, but it was used earlier by gold hungry explorers like Francisco Vasquez Coronado and Juan de Oñate. Often credited as being among the first to blaze the trail north, Coronado and Oñate could not have done it without the help of native guides who knew the land, and the trail along the only great river that waters it. The evidence for pre-Columbian trade in the region is sporadic and poses some challenge in analyzing native relationships before European arrival. The use of indigenous people for navigation, however, has been well documented by numerous Spanish explorers, including Diego Vargas.² This reveals, at the least, that the same routes were more or less used by natives long before the Spanish arrival.

Founded in 1610 by Spanish explorer Juan de Oñate, Santa Fe marked the trail's end, and eventually the choice region for Franciscan missionaries to carry out their work. Throughout the seventeenth century several native villages scattered along the El Camino Real developed into small towns. Native villages turned mining towns, like Zacatecas and Durango, served as

² Vargas is the first post-revolt governor of Santa Fe. His reconquest to the Santa Fe region will be discussed later in the paper.

potential stops, and in some cases were starting points along the road to Santa Fe. At the onset of the Oñate expedition in the sixteenth century most of the mining towns were still in the early stages of development.³ The towns would, however come to be important outposts for merchants traveling El Camino Real. By the eighteenth-century Chihuahua came to be the largest of mining towns north of the capital, hence the alternate trail name *Chihuahua trail*.

Shortly after the Pueblo Revolt in 1680, the colony took on a fully religious purpose and became an important missionary site. Although Santa Fe did not yield the volume of precious metals equivalent to the jackpots of Zacatecas, the Franciscan missionary fever drew ambitious Spaniards to the scarcely habitable region. The agriculture of the *encomienda* system provided much of the mission colony's nourishment.⁴ Additionally, artisan crafts produced by mission natives were often exchanged for other necessities to support the mission colony. Nearly everything else for the missions was obtained through merchant trade.

The eighteenth-century mission era marks the point when El Camino Real went from the nomad's trail north to a regularly used trade and supply route to the Santa Fe mission. To say this trade route was important or even imperative to the residence of Santa Fe would be an understatement. The trail was their very lifeline. For the entirety of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, any and every commodity used in the region traveled via El Camino Real.

A variety of both primary and secondary sources help to support the following analysis. Although sources from the colonial period have their limitations, a variety of primary sources survive that help historians of New Mexico to discern the use of the trail to the Spanish frontier.

³ Juan de Oñate's family were among the early residents of Zacatecas. As neighboring towns developed the commercial economy of Zacatecas grew. Many of the merchants who traveled to Santa Fe in the 18th century did so from Zacatecas.

⁴ Encomiendas were grants for slave labor awarded by the Crown to important officials. Men were often given hundreds of acres of land and a specific number of laborers. The *Encomenderos* were responsible for making sure natives were sufficient workers, Christianized, and that they give back by paying a communal tribute by laboring the land. This was common practice in Spanish conquests. The system was mostly abolished by mid eighteenth century.

El Camino Real was not named during the time of exploration and therefore is referred to in a multitude of contexts within primary documents. Diary entries are one such example; those documenting the re-conquest following the Pueblo Revolt, reference geographic markers and navigation points of the trail. Likewise, documented requests for supplies and military support from the capital support the idea that El Camino Real was an important supply route without directly saying so.

Primary sources include a 1696 diary entry by Diego de Vargas, in which he describes the routes taken in pursuit of enemy natives.⁵ Additionally useful, are military rolls documenting provisions by Captain Juan Hurtado recorded in 1715.⁶ Letters from Governor Juan Domingo de Bustamante dated 1724 and addressed to the fiscal department in the capital, request permission and supplies to expand missions.⁷ The combination of these sources reveal the varied Native American contributions to the colony. The sources also reveal the absence of particular commodities as well as minimal government funding for the colony.

Diego Vargas is remembered as the first governor of New Mexico during the re-conquest and for leading a successful campaign pursuing native enemies. In his diary he provides a description of the terrain, routes, and navigational hardships that challenged his troop during the pursuit of the enemy. For example, the loss of numerous cattle due to the unexpected winter climate. He also describes a conversation with one Native American who provided him with

⁵ Diego de Vargas, *Governor Vargas Diary of his Campaign in Pursuit of the Rebellious Picuries, 1696*. In *After Coronado: Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico, 1696-1727*, Trans. Alfred Barnaby Thomas, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1966) 53-59.

⁶ Juan Paez Hurtado, *Hurtado's Review of Forces and Equipment, Picuries Pueblo 1715*. In *After Coronado: Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico, 1696-1727*, Trans. Alfred Barnaby Thomas, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1966) 89-93

⁷ Juan Domingo de Bustamante, *To Casa Fuerte*, Santa Fe, January 10, 1724. In *After Coronado: Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico, 1696-1727*. Trans. Alfred Barnaby Thomas, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966)

directions. Vargas describes another who guides him for the entire pursuit. His success in navigating the area was clearly owed to his native escorts.

Captain Juan Hurtado must have faced many of the same challenges as Vargas, but unfortunately left behind only bureaucratic documentation. Hurtado recorded his military by rank and he listed the volunteer natives separately. More relevant to this research, however, is Hurtado's documentation of the arms and provisions that each man carried, as well as their lack of certain equipment. Hurtado documents native volunteers as having possibly made a general contribution of jackets and blankets, but no personal supplies are recorded. The lists reveal an interesting, and possibly intentional, juxtaposition since the native groups possessed the very supplies that many Spanish soldiers were lacking.

Only a decade later, the letters written to royal officials by Governor Bustamante reveal the growth of the settlement going into the eighteenth century with the foundation of other mission outposts in the Santa Fe region. His letters describe policies and procedures as well as progress in converting and instructing native populations. The letters also request the essential funding and supplies needed to build and expand the missions. These supplies would have likely had to be sent from the capital some 1,600 miles away.

The description of pre-Columbian trade provided by Bernardino Sahagun's translation of Aztec text, known as the *Florentine Codex*, serves as a window into the ancient customs of natives in the Latin America.⁸ Sahagun's ninth volume translation of *The History of New Spain* records the dealings of "the merchants" for which this volume is named. Aztec merchants traveled extensively within the region of central Mexico. They sold things like precious stones, tropical bird feathers, and jewelry. Additionally, the Aztec merchants served as spies, scouts, and

⁸ FR. Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex, General History of the Things of New Spain. Vol 9.* Trans. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J.O. Anderson, (The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1959)

even diplomats among neighboring regions. The Florentine Codex provides some ambiguous information on pre-existing travel routes prior to Spanish exploration and does not talk directly about travel to the New Mexico region. The codex paints a picture, however, of the extensive travel for merchants of the time. Aztec merchants apparently traveled great distances in both north and south directions for trade. Even though the source does not specifically talk about the region of what is now New Mexico, natives of the North share enough similarities in culture with those in the central regions of Mexico that there is little doubt about the existence of pre-Columbian exchanges and use of shared trade routes.

This combination of primary source material with recent secondary scholarship provide the framework for the following essay. Study of these primary sources in the context of El Camino Real and its specific contribution to Spanish frontier zones remained mostly ignored until the mid-twentieth century. It really was not until the 1920s that historians began to look seriously at the Spanish frontier zones as a significant component of North American history and culture. Even then, the study of Spanish settlements in North America tended to be grouped together as one topic, and the foundational dynamics of individual settlements tended to be largely left out. The first serious look at the El Camino Real in the context of social history in the frontier zones came in the 1950s.

Twentieth-century historian Max L Moorhead remains a respected authority on the El Camino Real. The latest edition of his book was published in 1995, although the original edition of *New Mexico's Royal Road* was written in 1954, his contribution on the subject is matched by few other historians.⁹ His book provides the full scope on what is known of the Spanish use of the trail with a focus on Spanish commerce and trade. At the onset of Moorhead's studies in the

⁹ Max Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road, Trade and Travel on Chihuahua Trail*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958)

1950s his research aimed to reveal that commercial activity in the region was more complex than earlier historians had realized. Additionally, he writes on the evolution of trade in the Santa Fe region as the Anglo-American trade route *Santa Fe Trail* emerged in the early nineteenth century. At that time, Santa Fe evolved from a largely barter economy to a moneyed economy. The first several chapters of Moorhead's book are most relevant to this research as they focus primarily on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which almost no currency circulated in the mission-run frontier zones.

Historian David J Weber is currently considered a top authority on the history of Spanish frontier regions. His work has influenced much of the recent study on Spanish frontier zones, including historian of New Mexico, Gabrielle Palmer. In recent decades Weber has written extensively on Spanish settlements in North America. Weber introduces his book *The Spanish Frontier* by stating that it "explains Spain's impact on the lives, institutions, and environments of native peoples of North America and the impact of North America on the lives and institutions of those Spaniards who explored and settled what has now become the United States."¹⁰ This statement is especially true in New Mexico. Weber also examines relationships between Franciscans and converted natives. He talks additionally about the fickle Spanish-French relationships in the region. Intermittent trade between French and Spanish settlements existed only through desperation and was usually prohibited. His interpretation argues that groups among natives and Europeans reciprocally drove the colonial practices of each other. An earlier work by Weber on the Spanish fur trade supports similar ideals, explaining how the Spanish quickly picked up on an already existing Native American hide trade.¹¹ The Spanish asserted

¹⁰ David J Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 5.

¹¹ David J Weber, *Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the far Southwest*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968)

their control over much of the trade altering pre-existing networks among natives. Weber's interpretation of the Spanish-native relationships in New Mexico are a key component to this research. The changing Euro-native relationships helped to drive more systematic trade activity in Santa Fe.

In contrast to David Weber, Collin Calloway is a historian who focuses on Native American dealings in earlier pre-contact periods. He examines the ethnohistory of Native American groups and writes about the specific methodologies of trade, travel, migration and intermarriage among native peoples. The focus of his study is the constant change and complexity of native amalgamations and exchanges before European contact, as well as how such practices dramatically and permanently changed with the intrusion of Europeans. Calloway's interpretation of native response to European intrusions help to set the stage for analyzing early trade methods in the western regions. *One Vast Winter Count* provides the analysis of the trade fairs held in the Pueblo regions before and after Spanish arrival.¹² Interruption of this trade largely led to the early native revolts in New Mexico.

Santa Fe's local public histories provide insight on the early innerworkings of New Mexico and its first colony. A Bureau of Land Management (BLM) publication for their heritage site on El Camino Real provides a wealth of relevant information for this project. In this publication Historians Gabrielle Palmer and Stephen L. Fosberg compiled a multitude of essays by scholars in fields ranging from frontier exploration, Native American revolts, fur trapping, silver, southwestern native art, and frontier trading.¹³ References within the publication include those from frontier historians Moorhead and Weber, as well as numerous primary source letters,

¹² Collin Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West Before Lewis and Clark*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003)

¹³ Gabriele Palmer and Stephen L Fosberg, *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* (New Mexico: Bureau of Land Management, 1999)

diary entries, and a range of archeological excavations. The BLM publication talks specifically about commodities needed in the colony as well as those produced within the colony, providing a well-rounded study on El Camino Real, and thus providing further scholarly consensus to support the arguments in the following paper.

An additional archeological survey published in 2004 provides a physical description of the route and what little remains.¹⁴ Key discoveries in this survey include the changing locations of the settlement at the pass (El Paso).¹⁵ Due to the seasonal swelling of the Rio Grande the north end of El Camino Real did not have a stationary existence. Locations of merchant and military encampments along the trail varied. These encampments changed depending on the river, terrain, the season, and regional native responses. These patterns help to explain a physical understanding of the route as well as why certain locations were chosen regular stops, encampments, and even colonization.

Additional scholarship on the trail's purpose from an archeological and geographic standpoint are provided by authors Douglas Preston¹⁶ and Bjor Sletto.¹⁷ Preston provides us with a modern understanding of the topography and physical aspects of the route. Sletto likewise reveals the physical hardships of the route in his article and argues that the rough travel was worth it for monopolizing merchants. In addition to hardships experienced in such a remote location, recent scholars seem to stress the hardship in traveling to the Santa Fe location as well.

The topography along this great route is varied. As one travels north from Mexico City, the high plains descend and merge into a valley with peaks in either direction. The most

¹⁴ Edward Staski, "An Archeological Survey of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro Las Cruces-El Paso" *International Journal of Archeology* 8, no. 4, (Dec 2004): 231-245.

¹⁵ Before it was a permeant settlement, *El Paso* simply meant a spot good for crossing the river.

¹⁶ Douglas Preston, "The granddaddy of the Nation's Trails Begins in Mexico" *Smithsonian*, 26, no. 8, (Nov 95): 140-149.

¹⁷ Bjor Sletto, "Two Way Corridor through History" *Americas* 48, no. 3, (1996)

strenuous part of the caravan journey certainly would have been the 1200 kilometers of Chihuahuan Desert. Surely, the caravan trips were planned around the seasons. Vast stretches of the journey are often without water, and the flora is scarcely edible. Travelers needed to pack as many possible necessities as could be carried to survive the harsh terrain of the trail.

Author Douglas Preston set out to travel the El Camino Real with his wife, partly driving and part of it on horseback.¹⁸ He reports such stops like the Aleman Ranch and whose resident provides interesting oral histories. Just over the New Mexican border Preston recalls his experience in the region of *Jornada Del Muerto.*, a portion of the high desert as one crosses over the modern-day border.¹⁹ He explains his spontaneous decision to follow a trail off course. Soon enough, Preston remembers, “We found ourselves in a vast dune field with no hope of continuing further. In front of us, the dunes rise hundreds of feet. The wind is blowing fiercely and plumes of sand curl off the tops of the dunes.”²⁰ Luckily for Preston and his wife they traveled this part of their journey in a four-wheel drive, and happily turned back to their intended course. The modern explorer learned however that to become lost or stranded on the trail back in the seventeenth century meant almost certain death, especially in the area aptly named *Jornada Del Muerto*. Certainly, the contemporary perspective on such travel does not exactly match that of the seventeenth century conquistador, but nevertheless should help to paint the scene of the frontier’s unforgiving terrain.

Exploration and First New Mexican Settlements:

Prior to Spanish arrival, trade fairs that were held among Pueblo peoples and tribes of the southern plains were becoming more systematic. According to Collin Calloway, one such trade

¹⁸ Preston, “The Granddaddy of the Nation’s Trails Begins in Mexico” 140-149.

¹⁹ Translates, “journey of the dead” or “work of the dead”

²⁰ Preston, “The Granddaddy of the Nation’s Trails Begins in Mexico” 7.

fair was prominent in the Taos Pueblos of New Mexico.²¹ Taos is located slightly east of Santa Fe and was a choice location for trade between groups of the south and mid-west. Just before the arrival of Europeans to the New World, natives of the lower plains were flourishing in number and had strong connections with one another.

Likewise, the ancestral Pueblos of Chaco Canyon, more specially known as the Anasazi, traded extensively with neighboring groups. Archeological excavation has even turned up items that seem to have come from Mesoamerica, such as marine shells, and the feathers of parrots and macaws.²² The ancestral groups established routes throughout the New Mexico region and likely traded with groups in the Sonora region which may have had connections in lower Mesoamerica. Sahagan's Aztec record of merchant activity helps to put that connection into perspective, explaining that Aztec merchants traveled throughout Mesoamerica for trade with various groups.²³

The New Mexico region is usually known as an area where sedentary Pueblos have resided for many centuries, but it was also a region that had great trade activity among various nomadic native groups. This activity may have been appealing to new world explorers. The Taos region and Santa Fe are located directly east of the ancient dwellings at Chaco Canyon. Seventeenth century settlers resided in various Pueblo locations within the region. Additionally, Taos was chosen by Spanish Franciscans as one of the first New Mexican mission sites of the early seventeenth century. Although primary documentation for Pueblo Peoples is largely limited to archeology, it's clear that trade networks were well rooted in the southwest long before

²¹ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 158-159.

²² Suina, Kim. "Camino Real: Ancient Trade to Colonial Commerce" (<http://newmexicohistory.org>. Accessed June, 2018)

²³ Bernardino de Sahagan, *Florentine Codex*.

Spanish arrival. As the Spanish began to penetrate the frontier they were vigorously interrupting and undermining the economic trade patterns and complex networks of the Pueblo people.

Founder and first governor of Santa Fe, Juan de Oñate, departed from Zacatecas in March of 1598 with the assignment to further explore the frontiers of New Spain. From the mining town of Zacatecas, it took Oñate's party approximately four to five months to reach the northern New Mexico region. Prior to frontier exploration the Spanish utilized *el Camino de Plata*, also called *Camino de las Minas*, the road from the capital Mexico City to New Spain's lucrative mines.²⁴ As mining villages grew, a great merchant society developed. Merchants typically traveled as far north as Chihuahua, but eventually traveled further to Santa Fe. When Oñate set out, few other Spanish explorers had been beyond the northern mines. After Santa Fe was founded in 1610 merchant travelers were inevitably attracted to its prospects.

Once Santa Fe was founded, the usual Spanish *encomienda* system had initially prevailed. At the time, exploiting potential resources and native labor were the primary goals in the colony. The Spanish held out hope for many years that they may find precious metals in the northern frontier. Land grants were given to the leading men of the expedition, and natives were required to work on the lands as a means of paying their tributes. It was basically a system of conscripted labor. As the colony expanded native families were assigned strips of land to cultivate. The assigned strip would not have been necessarily close to their Pueblo dwellings and was not owned by the cultivator. Rather a portion of the harvest, and in some cases, most of the harvest was handed over to the Spanish administrators. Secondly, as new vassals of Spain, conversion to Catholicism was required for the Pueblo peoples. Many seemed enthusiastic about the religion, but it was not uncommon for natives to continue to practice their own customs. Such paganism was strictly forbidden by Spanish law. Although the Pueblos were very communal

²⁴ Translates, "road of silver" and "road of the mines" Many Spanish named roads and routes begin *Camino de...*

people, the strict religion and Spanish caste system was something they would never come to appreciate. The encomiendas in combination with strict religious expectations were nothing short of outright oppression.

Unfortunately for Oñate and his silver seeking companions, the Crown had reverted funding for the colony when it became evident that no precious metals or valuable resources could be extracted from the area.²⁵ Following the decision, no more military reinforcements or government subsidies would be scheduled to go north. This meant that a replenishment would only come their way at the will of the merchants from southern mining towns. This in turn meant increasing pressure on the natives to surrender every possible commodity. The Pueblo people were starving and exhausted. One Spaniard wrote to the viceroy explaining the need to seize blankets and resources by force “even when it is snowing, leaving the poor Indian women stark naked, holding their babies to their breasts.”²⁶ He justifies the confiscation by adding, “necessity has compelled us to do this to keep from starving to death.”²⁷ Although, the first incoming settlers had brought with them numerous head of livestock, military munitions, tools, wine, oil, beads for trading and other supplies, they quickly ran short.²⁸ They imagined they could farm food as the Pueblo natives had done for centuries. Harsh winters and drought summers proved their theory easier said than done. The natives were handing over nearly everything they produced to the Spanish authorities. They could not even keep enough to for their usual winter stores. This imbalance, with the addition of European disease, added greatly to native resentment against the Spanish.

²⁵ This seems to have started as a decrease in funding in the mid seventeenth century until eventually no government supplied caravan was being sent to Santa Fe.

²⁶ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 150.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 146.

The Acoma revolt of 1599 was a pre-cursor to the later and better-known Pueblo Revolt in 1680, but the catalysts seem to be quite similar. The people of Acoma Pueblo didn't hesitate to resist Spanish settlement and exploitation.²⁹ Juan de Oñate dealt with the Acomas by increasing the brutality against them. He inflicted many harsh punishments including amputation and death. Oñate likely wanted to make an example out of the Acoma warriors as a warning to other groups in the region.³⁰ Military personnel at his disposal was the sole reason Oñate was successful at subduing the Acomas. The same result would not be the case for the Pueblo Revolt some eighty years later.

When funding decreased, prior to the Pueblo revolt, so did military service and many unpaid workers and their families went back to the capital. The colony had already started to transform into a mission focused colony rather than the lucrative economic investment the Spanish had hoped for at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In short, by 1680 natives far outnumbered *peninsulares*.³¹ The same year a bad winter in the region was followed by extreme drought, turning existing hunger into full blown famine. The drought was so extensive that it impacted neighboring tribes including the Apaches, who had been banned from trading in the area. These neighboring groups conspired with the Pueblo people against the Spanish, and they launched an attack that lasted several days. They killed many of the colonists, and burned the town and its churches, completely destroying the Spanish settlement.

A few colonists were able to escape, along with a few loyal natives. They fled along the only route they knew to be safe. The colonists followed El Camino Real approximately 300

²⁹ Acoma Pueblo is located southwest of Santa Fe. Before Albuquerque was founded this entire region was considered part of *Santa Fe de Nuevo Mexico*.

³⁰ King Phillip of Spain banished Oñate from New Mexico for the atrocities against the natives. This however did not prevent future governors from treating natives poorly.

³¹ *Peninsulares* refer to people born on the Iberian Peninsula. The strict Spanish caste system even put American-born Europeans at a lower social ranking than those born in Europe, referring to them as *Creolos*. Next were mestizos, natives, and slaves.

miles south and camped just across the Rio Grande, a spot they knew as *The Pass*.³² El Paso was founded that year in 1680 and remained home to many of the previous Santa Fe colonists. Archeological evidence has proved that the original location of El Paso has changed due to yearly flooding.³³ El Paso later became an important stop along El Camino Real. Because El Paso was closer to the urban center of Chihuahua, importing provisions was easier, and more importantly did not involve crossing the river. The colony at El Paso did not seem to face as much challenge in receiving goods as they had in the more remote Santa Fe.

Spanish settlement in seventeenth century Santa Fe was likely not what the settlers had expected. Although top families were each given an *encomienda*, access to the same luxuries they had in New Spain was not possible. The first settlers were not prepared for the remote location, harsh weather, lack of resources, and certainly not the hostilities of indigenous people. Without regular caravan supply shipments, via El Camino Real, the colony was heavily dependent on native labor, which largely led to the native revolts they endured.



Figure 1. San Miguel Chapel in southern Santa Fe region was built around 1620 (exact date is unknown) The structure has been restored many times. The church stands today as the oldest church within the United States.

³² Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 36.

³³ Staski, "An Archeological Survey of El Camino Real"

Archeological evidence reveals that the refugee camp at the pass was actually several miles upriver from the modern location of El Paso.

Re-conquest and Renewed Purpose:

A mere ten years after the Pueblo Revolt the Spanish had a renewed interest in Santa Fe. The appeal this time was not potential resources but potential converts. The Franciscan fervor had begun to penetrate uncharted areas all along the Spanish frontier, including Florida and later California. The powerful monastic order convinced the Crown to once again fund the Santa Fe venture; this time solely as a mission province. Meanwhile the French had increased trading and hunting activity along the Gulf, which certainly helped to renew a competitive Spanish interest in the region. The Spanish empire could not risk losing their stronghold in their frontier zones. The renewed interest had both a religious purpose and a goal to stake a permanent claim to the land.

Vice-regal officials appointed Diego de Vargas to the authority of leading a religious reconquest into the Santa Fe pueblo country.³⁴ In 1692 Vargas was the first post-revolt governor of Santa Fe. It took his forces a few years to subdue the scattered Pueblo groups associated with the revolt. The task was accomplished without a significant amount of violence, since most of the natives surrendered once Spanish authorities caught up with them. The most challenging part of the task was navigating what was still very foreign land. With the exception of the main trail, El Camino Real, no Europeans had efficiently mapped the area. As Vargas reveals in his journal they relied fully on native navigational aids.

In an entry dated October 1696, Vargas records one such pursuit in that one captured native provided him with information about a party of Picuries, Teguas, and Thanos traveling together.³⁵ Among them were some of the fugitives involved in the revolt. Upon further inquiry,

³⁴ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 40.

³⁵ Diego de Vargas, *Governor Vargas Diary*, 54.

the native man revealed that the party took “the river road”³⁶ Vargas knew which direction the river was but was obviously unfamiliar with the route. He asked, “it is a good trail?” the native man responded, “it may be good on horseback up to the summit; that as far as that there are some hills, and afterwards it is good.”³⁷ It is clear that Vargas, like many other Spanish explorers, was very dependent on indigenous knowledge of the terrain. The entry goes on to record travel of several leagues and campsites as they remained close behind the fleeing natives. When the natives had finally been apprehended the military party and its prisoners found themselves at a much higher elevation. By now it was mid-November, and they were caught in constant snowstorms upon their return. Vargas recalls, “I, as well as the people ran great risk in going on foot because the snow was so deep. Everyday dawned upon many dead horses. Others benumbed and frozen, were almost gone. Even in the distance of four to five leagues we had lost more than two hundred horses and five mules.”³⁸ The Vargas party was clearly unfamiliar with the weather and climate of the higher elevations. Vargas and his party finally made it back to Santa Fe where they reinitiated the Pueblo fugitives as Catholics and vassals of Spain once again.

Prior to the re-conquest, Spanish explores had diligently used one track to and from Santa Fe. They relied heavily on the El Camino Real not only as a travel route, but as their main military and supply route. Vargas makes it clear that his army was in unfamiliar territory as they pursued enemies beyond the Santa Fe settlement.

In 1715 Juan Hurtado lead a similar military campaign against one group of raiding Apaches, since raids were an ongoing problem in New Mexican settlements as well as along the northern end of El Camino Real. Hurtado’s military force was joined by a group of volunteer settlers and over one hundred volunteer natives from Pecos, Taos, and other neighboring regions.

³⁶ Diego de Vargas, *Govenor Vargas Diary*, 54.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Diego de Vargas, *Govenor Vargas Diary*, 58.

Many sedentary Pueblo villages had suffered the raids as well, and seem to have been willing to join the Spanish in solving the issue. Since it was only two decades after the re-conquest to Santa Fe the colony was still vulnerable to outside hostilities.

Hurtado's document reveals the barriers faced at the time of re-colonization of Santa Fe, and the reliance on certain native groups. Hurtado carefully recorded the provisions, and lack thereof, for each soldier and volunteer militiaman. Every Spanish soldier seems to have been armed and in charge of multiple horses. He notes at least ten of his men however, "lacking leather Jacket"³⁹ Interestingly enough, the Native American volunteers are noted as having brought numerous leather jackets as well as blankets, and they are also armed. Hurtado does not record each Native American individual as having personal items like he does for the Spaniards, but rather records them by region and states that they are "with blankets, leather jackets and guns."⁴⁰ It can be assumed that the items brought by the natives might be a general contribution. It is difficult to say whether the items were truly up for donation, but Hurtado found the items noteworthy nevertheless. The document reveals an early post-revolt dependence on Native Americans for both military support and for probable supplies.

The royal road to Santa Fe became regularly used for trade by the early decades of the 1700s. Like the early explorers, merchants also took a great risk traveling through the high desert rampant with hostile raiders. A trade party often started with a caravan from the Mexico City and gained merchant followers along the way. Merchants preferred to go as a party or joined one already enroute to avoid raids that were often inflicted on smaller groups. To deviate from the familiar route, they knew, could be nothing short of a suicide. The trek was worth its trouble as Santa Fe continued to increase demands for imported commodities.

³⁹ Hurtado, *Hurtado's Review of Forces and Equipment, Picuries Pueblo 1715*, 91-93.

⁴⁰ Hurtado, *Hurtado's Review of Forces and Equipment, Picuries Pueblo 1715*, 93.

Despite consistent demand in Santa Fe, the mining town merchants could choose when to take the long trek up the Camino Real, for this reason exact times of trade were also very inconsistent. Nevertheless, the best times for travel were dependent on weather, and other accompanying merchants. For those traveling from Mexico City, they would not return for at least one year. A trip each way usually took at least six months.⁴¹ The trek was slightly more than half the distance that ancient camel caravans traveled for trans-Saharan trade. Likewise, the northern Mexico terrain was similar to the Sahara at various stages of the journey. Pack animals did not fare well in peak summer or winter months.

Although the renewed settlement in Santa Fe faced challenges in navigation as well as some native hostilities, the Franciscans and new settlers were successful at re-establishing the colony. The success of the colony is largely owed to native assistance and increasing merchant interest in the area. Trade of El Camino Real was not simply supplemental to royal subsidies but provided far more commodities and delivered more often than the government supply shipments.

Cross Cultural Relationships and the Complexities of Commerce:

Spanish-native relationships had multiple dynamics in eighteenth century Santa Fe. In addition to Catholic Franciscan and converted pupil, there had already been over a century of Spanish-native intermarriage. Many mestizo children identified with their indigenous matrilineal roots, others grew up in Spanish households. Additionally, some Native American groups sought protection in Santa Fe as the colony became more stable. All these social interlinks contributed to the successes of colonial trading in Santa Fe.

⁴¹ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 29.

Upon re-settlement of Santa Fe, extensive trading was not the plan, but government funded caravan shipments were once again set in place to travel El Camino Real annually to supply the mission province. Trips could be delayed due to weather or raiding. According to scholars of colonial Santa Fe, the annual subsidy could be delayed for several years at poor economic times.⁴² Theoretically a caravan shipment was supposed to go out approximately once every other year. Various items such as tools, paper and ink, boots, clothing, liquor, tobacco, sugar, and even chocolate were brought to the missions. Historian Max Moorhead points out that the caravan parties were “designed to provide only for the missions of New Mexico, but it constituted almost the sole means of communication and supply for the entire province during the seventeenth century.”⁴³ This was true for the duration of the eighteenth century as well, with the addition of increased trading on the side. The caravans were also utilized to carry mail, prisoners, and retiring officials to and from the capital.⁴⁴

In addition to farm goods, items like blankets and earthenware were produced by the Pueblo people. Natives also learned European trade skills such as carpentry and blacksmithing. Spanish frontier historian David Weber states that, “Franciscans depended almost entirely on native laborers to make missions work.”⁴⁵ Native labor activity was used to supplement the inconsistent caravan shipments for the growing colony. The items they produced were also used as valuable trade pieces to incoming merchants and for trade with other indigenous groups.

⁴² Moorhead, Weber, and Sletto all have slightly different explanations on the frequency which a caravan made a journey north. It seems the policy was to send a caravan at least once per year, but there is much evidence that it could not always be organized with efficiency. Moorhead cites a Spanish journal entry in which one man complains it had been seven years since a caravan had entered Santa Fe.

⁴³ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 32.

⁴⁴ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 35.

⁴⁵ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 78.

Tanned hides, and to a lesser extent fine furs, were other valuable trade commodities.⁴⁶ The Spanish had involved themselves in the vast indigenous network of hide trading since the before the Pueblo Revolt.⁴⁷ Moorhead references a rare surviving invoice from 1638 which records the sale of 2,000 yards of woolen fabric, over 400 blankets, leather jackets, painted buffalo hides, and antelope skins to a traveling merchant party.⁴⁸ The post-revolt mission colony of the 1700s reinitiated the similar trade systems based on native production. Hurtado's documentation of 1715, discussed earlier, also reveals the abundance of blankets and leather produced by natives of the area.⁴⁹ The Spanish did not initiate the trade items, but rather intervened and wholly exploited their value.

One of the principal indigenous customs exploited by the Spanish included textile production. Natives throughout the Rio Grande region had long produced textiles from cotton and yucca fibers.⁵⁰ Although only a few groups in the region are known to have cultivated cotton, nearly every tribe throughout the southwest, including Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Puebloan, among others, had produced blankets from cotton. Which suggests pre-Columbian trade of the raw materials among the regional groups. The traditional textile material started to change because of the introduction of wool by the Spanish. Settlers from before and after the Pueblo Revolt had driven numerous sheep herds to the region. Sheep's wool quickly became the preferred material over cotton for weaving, especially as the Spanish made demands for increased blanket production. Wool can be sheared at least twice per year, and cotton is

⁴⁶ Weber, *Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the far Southwest*, 15-16. Weber explains that unlike their French and English counterparts, the Spanish trade in furred pelts was not extensive before the 19th century, tanned hides of larger game, however, were a common trade item.

⁴⁷ David J Weber, *Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the far Southwest*.

⁴⁸ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 34.

⁴⁹ Hurtado, *Hurtado's Review of Forces and Equipment, Picuries Pueblo 1715*.

⁵⁰ Laurie D Webster, "The Economics of Pueblo Textile Production and Exchange in Colonial New Mexico" Chap. ten in, *Beyond Cloth and Cordage: Archeological Textile Research in the Americas*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000)

harvested only once. Additionally, wool is less time consuming to collect. Therefore, woolen blankets became a primary export from Santa Fe in the eighteenth century.⁵¹ Piles of woven blankets and carefully tanned hides were loaded onto pack mules and into wagons to journey El Camino Real with southbound merchants, many of which were headed for Chihuahua.

An example of a later produced woolen blanket, or perhaps *Saltillo sarape*, is shown in figure two.⁵² The central diamond pattern design was typical and often adorned Pueblo pottery and basketry. The slightest use of what is possibly indigo blue can be seen in the center of the piece while cochineal red dominates much of the pattern throughout the blanket.⁵³ The minimal use of indigo blue may suggest something about its scarcity or high cost. Textile colors of ivory, black and even reddish-brown could come naturally from the wool. Other variations in color could be achieved by using organically made dyes. While the raw wool was already present in the colony, traders of El Camino Real likely provided weaving tools, looms, and perhaps some exotic dyes.⁵⁴ The high quality finished products served as valuable exports.⁵⁵



Figure 2.a and 2.b. Circa nineteenth century example of New Mexican woolen textile with traditional pattern.



⁵¹ Gabriele Palmer and Stephen L Fosberg, *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*, (New Mexico: Bureau of Land Management, 1999)

⁵² Saltillo Sarape is a garment to be worn, rather than a blanket. See image one.

⁵³ “Cochineal” refers to a dye made from insects throughout Latin American for many centuries. A synthetic version was created in the 1800s. I am unsure if the organic version is used within this example. Shades of red could also be achieved by using iron-rich soils, bark and roots. As for the indigo, and I am not certain that this is, it is probable that New Mexican artisans used the cultivated American variation. Regional variations also differ in shade and saturation.

⁵⁴ Gabriele Palmer and Stephen L Fosberg, *El Camino Real*, 141.

⁵⁵ Throughout New Spain there were textile labor factories known as *obrajes*. I did not find record of this system in New Mexico, but it is likely there was a similar system in place.

Even though local production was vital to sustaining the missions, many imported goods remained too expensive for colonists to purchase. New Mexican colonists, comprised by the mid-eighteenth century of a significant mestizo population, struggled to purchase commodities at a reasonable price. Pueblo production and government supply shipments were under the strict control of the Franciscans. Merchant activity had not been initially welcomed to the colony, but little enforcement was in place to control it, and out of necessity it eventually became very regular. With that said, it was typical in the New World that priorities of the church and that of the people were rarely synonymous. Wealthier colonists would purchase illicit goods from incoming merchants. Additionally, corrupt clerics would make money on the side by selling both subsidies and mission produced goods like textiles, hides, and earthen pots to incoming merchants.⁵⁶

The merchants who traveled alongside caravan parties sold the imports at more than ten times the value.⁵⁷ Santa Fe was so secluded from any neighboring towns that even the richest families went into debt to purchase simple provisions, as they had no place else obtain certain necessities.⁵⁸ Moorhead cites the case of one colonist that was eventually sued in 1749 because he had purchased “300 pesos worth of dry goods and silverware on credit” and the purchase apparently took more than eight years to be completely paid off.⁵⁹ It was not uncommon that merchants went back to Chihuahua with more items than they brought as a result of the bartering system, other times New Mexican colonists could purchase on credit. Bartering of material

⁵⁶ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 45. Any money received by officials in the colony typically went right back to traveling merchants and did not circulate in the colony.

⁵⁷ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 50.

⁵⁸ Commodities brought from Europe, via Manilla Galleons, had supplied New Spain since the 1500s, but supplied the northern interior to a much lesser extent. The demand for Chinese silks and porcelain as well as European cloth was low since the Pueblos could produce pottery and textiles at a much lower cost. Only the wealthiest colonists could afford the worldly products. The already high value of the items was incredibly inflated after shipping by sea and then hundreds of miles by land.

⁵⁹ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 49.

goods was a key method to buying and selling commerce in New Mexican colonies. Weber reminds us that, “The unfavorable trade balance drained New Mexico of currency so that a barter economy prevailed.”⁶⁰ Colonists of Santa Fe were almost never on the winning end of this barter system. Colonists sometimes sold more items than they exchanged for, and yet were usually still indebted to merchants.

When it came to cross-cultural trading in Santa Fe, Euro-native relationships could be both fickle and complex. The triangle of Spanish, French, and American Native trade relationships has many dynamics and illegal elements. Often out of sheer desperation for goods, New Mexican authorities would illegally engage in business with French traders. The French, who had colonial hardships of their own, put themselves at great risk coming into Spanish territory. The French risked imprisonment or having all their goods seized by the Spanish when crossing overland into the New Spain’s northern territory.⁶¹ Eventually, as Weber explains, “in remote New Mexico, Spain had cut off a trickle of French commerce and reduced New Mexico to its single lifeline -- *El Camino Real*.”⁶² The French presence in Spanish settlements had always been viewed as an economic threat, and therefor French-Spanish relationships could be very inconsistent.

What little power the natives did have over Spanish colonists was that their European rivalries could easily be exploited. Despite the opposition of the Spaniards, the French sold firearms and almost anything else to their native friends, as had been in practice since before the Pueblo Revolt. These complex relationships meant that the Spanish had to pacify Pueblo inhabitants and their neighbors to at least some degree to avoid the development of French-native alliances. After the Spanish had learned a valuable lesson from the Pueblo Revolt almost a

⁶⁰Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 88.

⁶¹ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 55.

⁶² Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 148.

century earlier, they encouraged Pueblo peoples to maintain some degree of trade with neighboring indigenous groups. However, Spanish authorities highly regulated trade between mission natives and other indigenous groups. Allowing trade between the Pueblo peoples and other natives also supplemented the missions during harder times and, as an added bonus, confirmed potential neighboring allies against the French.⁶³ This dynamic of colonial trade was yet another factor in Santa Fe's survival. Goods obtained, such as buffalo hides, could in turn be sold to merchants from Chihuahua.

As Santa Fe grew into a more stable colony in the eighteenth century, outside indigenous groups realized they could seek out protection from Spanish and Pueblo inhabitants. In a letter dated 1724 by Governor Bustamante he wrote to the capital explaining that some Apache chiefs had come to him seeking protection from hostile Comanche raids. He asserts,

“To escape them, they petitioned me to protect and defend them with the arms of his majesty. They promised to give him at once the required obedience, pleading that the sacrament of holy baptism be administered to them together with all those of their rancherias, and to come together to live in their Pueblos in the same form in which the Christian Indians in this kingdom dwell.”⁶⁴

Governor Bustamante explains to the Viceroy that the Apaches are willing to be baptized and devote themselves to the mission in exchange for protection.

In this letter Bustamante is appealing to his superiors to establish an additional mission site at Jicarilla, a location northeast of Taos. He uses several paragraphs in his letter to emphasize the native desires to convert to Christianity. He concludes finally by stating that he will need to build fortification for at least fifty soldiers on site, as well as the “tools, ornaments, and the rest

⁶³ Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count*, 145-163. Collin Calloway is the expert on trade relations between Europeans and natives. The triangle of native-Spanish-French (and Sometimes English) alliances is more complex than can be stated in this study. However, one cannot speak of trade in the southwest without mentioning the relevance of these relationships.

⁶⁴ Juan Domingo de Bustamante, To Casa Fuerte, Santa Fe, January 10, 1724, 202.

of the jewels of the divine ritual, and provision for them for the period of one year until they harvest their crops.”⁶⁵ A military presidio often accompanied a mission location.

The *royal fiscal*, as the letter is titled, replied with approval and particular appreciation for their desire of Christian instruction, but the response letter states with regard to the presidio and provisions that, “Your excellency may be pleased to order that the governor go, with the least cost to the royal treasury, establish the presidio, with entire care, consideration, and economy, in the spot that may be considered most opportune and appropriate, putting in the soldiers who may be required.”⁶⁶ Clearly, the goal was not only to use the least amount of government resources to establish the mission, but to establish an entity that was economically beneficial for the colony. Since no precious metals came from the northern frontier, the northern missions were always a drain to the royal treasury. Bustamante emphasized the supposed desire the Apaches had to be baptized; in fact, most of the letter talks about this request. Whether or not this group of Apaches had actually agreed to a lifetime of Christianity and sedentary living cannot be known for certain. Their proclaimed obedience, however, was clearly the necessary means to acquire funding from the crown. As much as there are hints of reciprocity described in the letter, Bustamante may have been exploiting the protection request to secure additional funding for Santa Fe missions.

Since royal funding had been minimal for most of the colony’s existence, Santa Fe had to rely primarily on native production and trade from El Camino Real for more than two hundred years. According to Max Moorhead, by the latter part of the eighteenth century the crown was no longer opposed but welcomed merchant activity in the colony. Authorities could even provide a

⁶⁵ Juan Domingo de Bustamante, To Casa Fuerte, Santa Fe, January 10, 1724, 203.

⁶⁶ Reply of the Fiscal, Mexico, April 2nd, 1724. In *After Coronado: Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico, 1696-1727*. Translated by Alfred Barnaby Thomas, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966) 205.

sort of royal voucher to pay for supplies that were pre-approved by the fiscal department.⁶⁷ This may have been the case for Bustamante who requested approval for another mission site. The voucher system was not extremely lucrative for merchants since they only gained a five percent commission.⁶⁸ Likewise it would have been extremely inconvenient to rely on vouchers as payment for necessities needed right away when letters of approval would have taken months to receive. Even when royal funding was approved, obtaining commodities from merchants was still more efficient.

Clearly, the eighteenth-century missions could not have survived on government subsidies alone. It is only thanks to the combination of native labor and outside merchants that Santa Fe remained a permanent colony, although they struggled tremendously to do so. The colony did not experience relief from unfair pricing extremes until the early nineteenth century when ambitious Anglo-Americans pushed west for their own economic pursuits, selling merchandise at a lower cost than merchants from El Camino Real ever had.

By 1820 the French had ceded and sold parts of Louisiana territory, and the English colonies had become independent. The opening of the West made the way for the famous *Santa Fe Trail* from Missouri to Mexico. The Santa Fe Trail journeyed as far west as Santa Fe before turning south towards Mexico and connecting with El Camino Real. After more than one two years, El Camino Real would no longer be Santa Fe's sole route for commercial enterprise and economic survival.

⁶⁷ Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road*, 52.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Conclusions:

On the eve of Mexican independence in 1821, trade and commerce on El Camino Real was vastly different than it had been a century and half earlier. Bjor Sletto paints the scene by saying,

“Before Mexican independence, trade on the Camino Real had been restricted to Mexican and Spanish traders. Merchants in the city of Chihuahua, in particular, wanted to maintain their trade monopoly, which earned them outlandish profits and kept the population in New Mexico in perpetual debt.”⁶⁹

New Mexican colonists often did not have a choice but to purchase commodities on credit that they could hardly pay back, while clerical officials used native production for exchanges. Regardless of status, colonists in eighteenth century Santa Fe relied almost fully on trade from El Camino Real. The trade balance shifted significantly when Anglo-American merchants from Missouri began to penetrate the west in earnest.

The Native American contribution to Spanish frontier settlements cannot be overstated. From the onset of Spanish exploration, Native American guides were critically important. This was especially true for the mysterious northern frontier. Even during the re-conquest period in 1690, nearly one hundred years after Santa Fe was first founded, Diego Vargas depended considerably on native navigation in and around the region. And although the Spanish brought with them numerous heads of sheep and cattle, the colony also depended greatly on native agriculture. Skilled artisans also crafted an array of goods to meet the demands of the Spanish.

It should not be concluded that Santa Fe was wholly debilitated by the limited availability of economic opportunity in the region, because it is by the same token that the Spanish mission province survived at all. If it were not for the willingness of merchants to travel between 700-1500 miles of mountainous desert to buy and sell goods, Santa Fe would have certainly met

⁶⁹ Sletto, “Two Way Corridor” 10.

another fate. The Native American contributions more than supplemented for royal funding, and served as the primary means for purchasing commercial goods from merchants. Very little money circulated in New Mexico before the nineteenth century, causing the missions towns to create a trade economy dependent on the traffic of El Camino Real.

The importance of El Camino Real is more than just a commercial route but a cultural legacy in Mexican border regions of the American Southwest. The Hispanicized culture still prides itself on artisan crafts, and a market for locally produced goods continues to flourish in the region. Numerous hand-made blankets, ceramics, and jewelry that were once the necessary means to survival celebrate the amalgamation of cultures. Today the terminus of El Camino Real in New Mexico is a national historic landmark. More than a mere trail, the *Royal Road* is remembered as a lifeline that once provided the only means of nourishment outside of local agriculture, as well as the only means of communication with the outside world for more than two centuries.



Image 3. Trade party arriving in Santa Fe. Photographed in the 1870s. The caravan arrival of earlier centuries most certainly would have presented a similar scene.



Image 4. Map provided by U.S. National Park Service.

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