

# STATE GUIDE

## NEW MEXICO

by DAVID A. FRYXELL

**NEW MEXICO'S VENERABLE** city of Santa Fe is as old as historic Jamestown. In 1607, around the time those English colonists were unpacking in Virginia, Castillian-born Juan Martinez de Montoya established the first settlement where Santa Fe is now. Santa Fe wasn't officially founded until 1610, which still makes it the oldest capital city in the United States.

It's important to know where in that long and varied history your New Mexico ancestors' events fall, because most repositories catalog records by time period. Even records originally created by one agency, such as a county government, may now be housed elsewhere, for example, the state archives <[nmcpr.state.nm.us](http://nmcpr.state.nm.us)>. New Mexico divided up its counties over the years, too. For instance, Doña Ana County spun off Grant County, which in turn spawned Luna and Hidalgo counties. See <[publications.newberry.org/ahcbp](http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp)> to learn about county formation dates and names of parent counties. Then you're ready to dive into the deep well of New Mexico's past.

### COLONIAL-ERA RECORDS

New Mexico's European history began in 1536, when a small Spanish exploratory party reached the southern part of today's state and went home telling tales of the golden Seven Cities of Cibola. A search for those reputed riches brought Francisco Vásquez de Coronado around 1540. But the Spanish didn't come to stay until 1598, when Juan de Oñate traveled up the Rio Grande from present-day El Paso to establish San Juan de los Caballeros.

The area the Spaniards dubbed *Nuevo México* already had been long occupied, of course, by native groups.

the Sandia people's habitation dates back to 25,000 BC. Other Indian cultures arrived in turn, among them the Mogollon and the Anasazi.

In 1680, the Pueblo—a diverse group of several native cultures—rose up in a revolt that sent the Spanish fleeing. They didn't return until 1692, under Don Diego de Vargas, who thwarted a second Pueblo revolt in 1696. Next came the Apache, who also proved troublesome to European attempts at settling this rugged country.

If you have American Indian roots, see <[www.accessgenealogy.com/native-american](http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native-american)> for details on New Mexico tribes. Then check the Family History Library (FHL) <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)> for microfilmed Bureau of Indian Affairs records, which document births, deaths, marriages, divorces, land allotments, homesteads and schooling. You can use films at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, and check the FamilySearch website for digitized versions. Original records, spanning 1878 to 1944, are at the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) Denver regional facility <[archives.gov/denver](http://archives.gov/denver)>.

For roots in the Spanish and Mexican era, turn to colonial censuses taken between 1750 and 1845, all published by the New Mexico Genealogical Society (NMGS). The state archives has Spanish (1693 to 1821) and Mexican (1821 to 1845) land records. Ancestry has a variety of digitized records (1821 to 1846) from the state archives.

Long before New Mexico's government began keeping vital records, the Catholic church recorded births, baptisms, marriages and deaths. Records from the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, now at the state archives, extend to colonial

### FAST FACTS

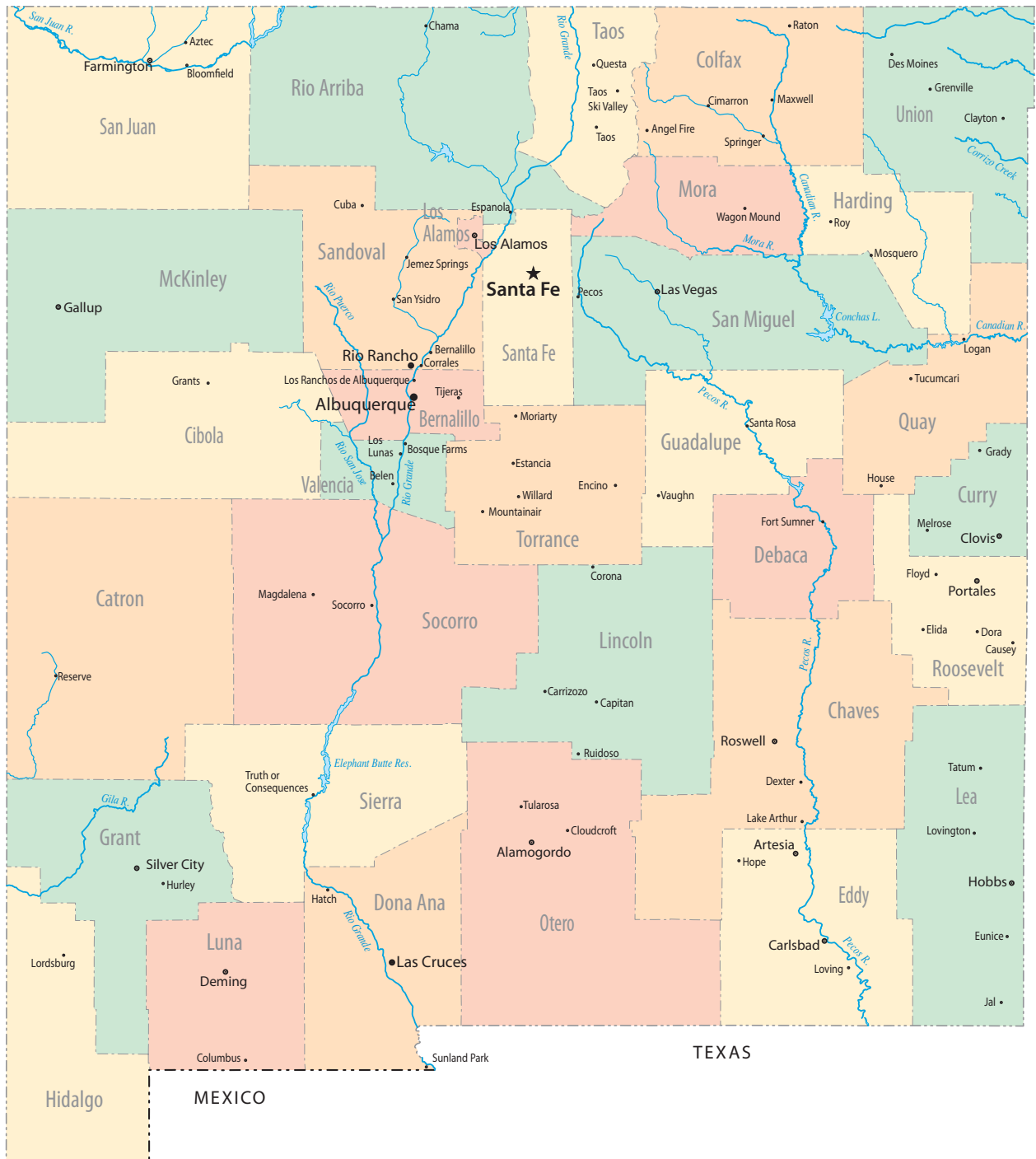
- ★ **Statehood:** 1912
- ★ **First federal census:** 1850
- ★ **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1920
- ★ **Statewide marriage records begin:** None; kept at county level
- ★ **State-land state**
- ★ **Counties:** 33
- ★ **Contact for vital records:** New Mexico Department of Health, Vital Records, Box 26110, Santa Fe, NM 87502, (505) 827-2338, <[vitalrecordsnm.org](http://vitalrecordsnm.org)>

# NEW MEXICO

COLORADO

OKLAHOMA

ARIZONA



TEXAS

## timeline

**1598**

Juan de Oñate claims what's now the Southwest United States for Spain.

**1610**

Don Pedro de Peralta makes Santa Fe the capital of Spanish New Mexico.

**1706**

Albuquerque is founded as a presidio (military garrison).

**1821**

William Becknell pioneers the Santa Fe Trail from Independence, Mo.

**1846**

United States annexes New Mexico during the Mexican-American War.

**1848**

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo grants most of New Mexico to the United States.

## Santa Fe was officially founded in 1610, making it the oldest capital city in the United States.

days; FamilySearch has microfilmed them back to 1726 (run a place search of the online catalog for Santa Fe and look for a church records heading). See NMGS' online guide to locating these records at <[nmgs.org/e-research](http://nmgs.org/e-research)> (click on Finding Aids for Church Records). The society's published volumes of extracted church records include baptisms (from 1701), marriages (from 1726) and cemetery recordings.

### TERRITORIAL-ERA RECORDS

Legend has it a friendly Apache showed Spanish Lt. Col. Jose Manuel Carrasco the rich copper veins at Santa Rita del Co-bre, near today's Silver City, in 1799. A few years later, Zebulon Pike led an American expedition to New Mexico. Then in 1821, William Becknell blazed the Santa Fe Trail connecting New Mexico with Missouri, an occurrence that coincided with Mexico's independence from Spain. In 1828, the first major gold strike in the West occurred in the Ortiz Mountains south of Santa Fe.

Soldiers from the new nation of Texas invaded in 1841, unsuccessfully attempting to claim land east of the Rio Grande. After the outbreak of the Mexican-American War in 1846, however, US troops under Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny proved victorious, conquering Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war, awarding most of New Mexico to the United States and fixing the area's border at the Rio Grande and the Gila and Colorado rivers. The 1854 Gadsden Purchase added southwestern New Mexico and southern Arizona.

The Compromise of 1850 created New Mexico Territory, incorporating today's state plus southern Nevada and Arizona, which split off in 1863. During the Civil War, Mesilla was briefly the capital of the "Confederate Territory of Arizona." Confederate troops captured Santa Fe and Albuquerque and threatened to conquer the whole Southwest until the Union defeated him at Glorieta Pass. You can search indexes to

Civil War service records at the free FamilySearch (search results here link to record images at subscription website Fold3 <[fold3.com](http://fold3.com)>).

After the war, the arrivals of the telegraph around 1868 and the railroad in 1878, as well as the 1881 joining of the second transcontinental railroad at Deming, began to tame the rough-and-tumble territory. Miners and ranchers arrived; some of the ranchers battled in the turf wars known as the Lincoln County War, which made a legend of Billy the Kid.

### Road to the Past

The 1,600-mile *Camino Real* was a road from Mexico City north to San Juan Pueblo (now Ohkay Owingeh) in New Mexico. Spanish explorer Juan de Oñate y Salazar defined the part of the trail in what's now the United States—now called *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*—in 1598.

After crossing the Rio Grande, Oñate laid the foundation for 200 years of Spanish rule in the American Southwest with *La Toma* (The Taking), a ceremony in which he claimed Nueva México for Spain. The trail his expedition blazed served as an artery of commerce until the 1880s. Colonists and missionaries came from southern New Spain to towns along the Rio Grande, bringing horses, cattle, agricultural techniques, and cultural practices. For local Indians, the road also brought foreign language and religion, exploitative rule and even enslavement.

*El Rancho de las Golondrinas* ("The Ranch of the Swallows") <[golondrinas.org](http://golondrinas.org)>, a historic ranch just south of Santa Fe, was an important *paraje* or resting place for *Camino Real* sojourners. Now a living history museum, it shares the story of the trail and the Hispano heritage of New Mexico.

#### 1854

Gadsden Purchase expands New Mexico and completes the territory of the lower 48 United States.

#### 1881

Sheriff Pat Garrett shoots Billy the Kid at Fort Sumner.

#### 1886

After leading 39 Apache across the Southwest, Geronimo surrenders to Gen. Nelson A. Miles.

#### 1916

Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa raids the border town of Columbus.

#### 1945

US detonates the world's first atomic bomb near Alamogordo.

#### 1948

In *Trujillo v. Garley*, a federal court rules that American Indians have the right to vote in state elections.

## TOOLKIT

## Websites

**New Mexico American History and Genealogy Project** <nmahgp.genealogyvillage.com>

**New Mexico GenWeb Project** <nmgenweb.us>

**New Mexico State Library Digital Collections**  
<nmstatelibrary.org/research-and-collections/collections/digital-archive>

**New Mexico's Digital Collections** <econtent.unm.edu>

**Rocky Mountain Online Archive** <rmoa.unm.edu>

## Publications

**Genealogical Resources in New Mexico**

by Karen Stein Daniel (NMGs)

**Historical Atlas of New Mexico** by Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Haase (University of Oklahoma Press)

**An Illustrated History of New Mexico** by Thomas E. Chavez (University Press of Colorado)

**New Mexico Newspapers: A Comprehensive Guide to Bibliographical Entries and Locations** by Pearce S. Grove (University of New Mexico Press)

**Northern New Spain: A Research Guide** by Thomas C. Barnes et. al. (University of Arizona Press)

## Archives &amp; Organizations

**Albuquerque Special Collections Library**

423 Central Ave. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87102,  
(505) 848-1376, <abqlibrary.org/specialcollections>

**Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico**

1701 4th St. SW, Albuquerque, NM 87102,  
(505) 833-4197, <hgrc-nm.org>

**National Archives at Denver**

17101 Huron St., Broomfield, CO 80023,  
(303) 604-4740, <archives.gov/denver>

**New Mexico Genealogical Society**

Box 27559, Albuquerque, NM 87125, <nmgss.org>

**New Mexico State Records Center and Archives**

1205 Camino Carlos Rey, Santa Fe, NM 87507,  
(505) 476-7902, <www.nmcpr.state.nm.us>

**New Mexico State University, Branson Library**

1305 Frenger Mall, Las Cruces, NM 88003,  
(575) 646-3839, <lib.nmsu.edu>

**University of New Mexico****Center for Southwest Research**

MSC05 3020, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, (505) 277-6451, <elibrary.unm.edu/cswr>

Seek pre-statehood New Mexicans in territorial censuses, which were taken as part of regular federal censuses beginning in 1850. You can find federal census records on FamilySearch, Ancestry <ancestry.com>, Findmypast <www.findmypast.com> and MyHeritage <www.myheritage.com>. Note the 1860 US census covered only the area south of the Gila River. A federally administered 1885 New Mexico census is available on FHL microfilm; an index is free on Ancestry. NMGS has published a substitute for the burned 1890 territorial census, *1890 New Mexico Tax Assessments*.

The New Mexico state archives holds a wide variety of records from territorial days, such as land grants, early probates and court papers. Its military records come from the Spanish and Mexican era, the Indian Wars and the Civil War. See <www.nmcpr.state.nm.us/archives/tracing-your-genealogy> for a genealogy guide. Albuquerque's Special Collections Library has land grants and county-level territorial records, and the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Public Library <abqlibrary.org> has an extensive collection of early newspapers. Territorial probate documents are with US judicial district court records at the National Archives research facility in Denver <archives.gov/denver>.

Many New Mexicans rode with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War. Find an index on Fold3 and a list in *History of New Mexico: Its Resources and People*, Vol. 1, digitized at Internet Archive <archive.org>. The FHL and the National Archives have microfilmed service records, and Rough Rider records are digitized in the latter's online catalog <catalog.archives.gov>.

## VITAL RECORDS

Statehood finally came for New Mexico in 1912. It was the last state in the Union to adopt statewide birth and death records—in 1920—but counties have generally kept marriage records since their inception. Birth records are restricted for 100 years and death records for 50 years, but you can search for vital information in the New Mexico Death Index Project (1899-1949) <usgwarchives.net/nm/nmdi.htm>, Western States Marriage Index <abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/search.cfm>, and various birth, marriage and death indexes at FamilySearch.

Counties may have kept birth and death records before the official 1920 start date; check with the county clerk in your ancestral county for information.

You'll likely end up wanting to visit New Mexico yourself. Who wouldn't want to spend time in a place called the Land of Enchantment? Before you go, be sure to peruse the Rocky Mountain Online Archive's <rmoa.unm.edu> collection of finding aids for New Mexico holdings at several primary repositories. Then get ready to be charmed—just keep in mind you're delving into a history as old as America itself. ●