

*Mexican lands in the West became part of the United States.*

## The New Mexico Territory

SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.3, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.G.2.2, SS.8.G.4.4, LA.8.1.6.2

### *How did the Santa Fe Trail benefit the New Mexico Territory?*

In the early 1800s, the land called New Mexico was a vast region between the Texas and California territories. It included all of the land that is now the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. Native Americans had lived in the area for thousands of years. Spanish conquistadors, or soldiers, arrived in the late 1500s. They made the region part of Spain's American colonies. In 1610 the Spanish founded the settlement of Santa Fe. Spanish missionaries soon followed the conquistadors into the area.

Mexico—including New Mexico—won its independence from Spain in 1821. Before that time, the Spanish had tried to keep Americans away from Santa Fe. They feared that Americans would want to take over the area. The new Mexican government, however, welcomed American traders. Mexico hoped trade would boost the economy.

William Becknell, the first American trader to reach Santa Fe, arrived in 1821. Becknell's route came to be known as the Santa Fe Trail. It was a big improvement over the trails that existed in the dry and rugged area at that time. As Becknell wrote: "I avoided the so much dreaded sand hills, where adventurers have frequently been forced to drink the blood of their mules, to allay [relieve] their thirst."

The Santa Fe Trail started near Independence, Missouri, which was then on the western edge of the United States. It crossed the prairies to the Arkansas River. It followed the river west toward the Rocky Mountains before turning south. The trail was mostly flat, and Becknell used wagons to transport his goods.

Other Americans soon followed Becknell. The Santa Fe Trail became a busy trade route. As trade with New Mexico increased, Americans began settling in the area. Some began to believe that acquiring New Mexico was part of American Manifest Destiny.

**Describing** How did William Becknell influence the American settlement of New Mexico?

## California's Spanish Culture

SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.3, SS.8.A.4.4, SS.8.A.4.8, LA.8.1.6.1, LA.8.1.6.3

### *How did the culture of California develop?*

Spanish explorers and missionaries from Mexico settled California in the 1700s. Captain Gaspar de Portolá and Father Junípero Serra (hoo • NIP • uh • roh SEHR • uh) began a chain of missions that eventually extended from San Diego to Sonoma.

The missions aimed to convert Native Americans to Christianity and the Spanish way of life. Native Americans learned to farm, and they worked at weaving and other crafts. American mountain man Jedediah Smith described the missions as "large farming and [cattle-ranching] establishments."

After Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, California became a Mexican state. Mexicans bought mission lands and set up huge ranches, or **ranchos**. Native Americans worked the land in return for food and shelter. **Rancheros**—ranch owners—treated Native Americans almost like slaves.

In the 1840s, more Americans reached California. John C. Frémont, an army officer, wrote of the region's mild climate and vast natural **resources**. Americans began to talk about adding California to the Union. They argued that the nation would then be safely bordered by the Pacific Ocean rather than by a foreign country. Shippers also hoped to build seaports on the Pacific coast for trade with East Asia.

**Explaining** Why did Americans want to make California part of the United States?

## Conflict Begins

SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.3, SS.8.A.4.8

### *Why did war break out between the United States and Mexico?*

President James K. Polk was determined to get the California and New Mexico territories from Mexico. After Mexico refused to sell the lands, Polk planned to gain them through war. To **justify** a war, Polk hoped to get Mexico to strike first.

Relations between the two countries were not friendly. The two nations disagreed about where the Texas-Mexico border was. The United States said that the Rio Grande formed the border. Mexico claimed that the border lay along the Nueces (nu • AY • sehs) River, 150 miles (241 km) farther north.

Polk sent a representative, John Slidell, to Mexico to propose a deal. Slidell could offer \$30 million for California and New Mexico as long as Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as the Texas border. The United States would also pay what Mexico owed to American citizens. Mexican leaders refused to discuss the offer. They announced that they intended to reclaim Texas for Mexico.

To bring pressure, Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to lead U.S. forces into the disputed area on the Rio Grande. To Mexican leaders, Taylor's action was an invasion of their country. On April 25, 1846, Mexican troops attacked Taylor's forces. President Polk told Congress that Mexico had "invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil." On May 13, Congress passed a declaration of war against Mexico.

### A War Plan

Polk planned to defeat Mexico by accomplishing three goals. First, the United States would drive Mexican forces out of Texas. Second, it would seize New Mexico and California. Finally, American forces would advance into Mexico and capture the capital, Mexico City.

By 1847, Zachary Taylor had accomplished the first goal. His army had captured all the important towns in the border area between Mexico and Texas. General Stephen Kearney made progress toward the second goal by marching his troops down the Santa Fe Trail. They captured New Mexico's capital, Santa Fe, in 1846 after the Mexican governor fled. Kearney then turned toward California.

### California Uprising

Even before war with Mexico officially began, American settlers in northern California had begun an uprising. They were encouraged by American general John C. Frémont. The settlers had little trouble overcoming the weak official Mexican presence in the territory. On June 14, 1846, the Americans declared California independent. They renamed it the Bear Flag Republic. The name came from the flag the rebels had made for their new nation.

The Bear Flag Republic did not exist for long. Within a month, American warships arrived at the ports of San Francisco and San Diego to claim the republic for the United States.

Mexico still refused to surrender, even though it had lost New Mexico, California, and Texas. President Polk sent General Winfield Scott and his troops to attack Mexico City. They landed in the port of Veracruz and captured it after three weeks of fighting. They still needed to travel 300 miles (483 km) to Mexico City, fighting Mexican troops along the way.

Finally, in September 1847, six months after Scott's forces landed in Veracruz, they captured Mexico's capital. Polk's plan for the war had succeeded.

### Peace Terms

Defeated on February 2, 1848, Mexico's leaders signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (GWAH • duh • loop he • DAHL • goh). Mexico gave the United States more than 500,000 square miles (1,295,000 sq. km) of territory—what are now the states of California, Nevada, and Utah, as well as most of Arizona and New Mexico and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as its border with Texas. In return, the United States paid Mexico \$15 million and assumed \$3.25 million in debts Mexico owed American citizens.

With Oregon and the former Mexican territories under the American flag, the dream of Manifest Destiny had been realized. The question of whether the new lands should allow slavery, however, would lead the country toward another bloody conflict.

**Describing** What did America gain from the Mexican War?

#### Connections to **TODAY**

##### The California Bear Flag

The state flag of California today is based on the bear flag created during the Bear Flag Revolt in 1846.

## LESSON 3 REVIEW

### Review Vocabulary

1. Describe the settlements established by the Spanish and by Mexicans in California using the following words.

**a.** rancho **b.** rancho

LA.8.1.6.1

## Answer the Guiding Questions

**2. Specifying** What was the main purpose of the Santa Fe Trail?

SS.8.A.4.1

**3. Explaining** Why did Americans want to acquire California?

SS.8.A.4.1

**4. Identifying** What was the source of the conflict between the United States and Mexico before they went to war?

SS.8.A.4.1

**5. Analyzing** Describe how trade contributed to United States territorial growth.

SS.8.G.4.4

**6. PERSONAL WRITING** Write a brief national anthem for the Bear Flag Republic. Include details meant to inspire pride among its citizens.

SS.8.A.4.1