EARLY EXPLORATIONS

1598. Don Juan de Oñate establishes San Juan de los Caballeros (near modern Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo), the first Spanish settlement in New Mexico.

1610. Don Pedro de Peralta founds Santa Fe, the new capital of New Mexico.

1765. Juan María Antonio Rivera leads two parties from New Mexico to explore southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah.

1774. Father Francisco Hermenegildo Garcés sets out from southern Arizona to explore a path to the California missions. He follows the Mojave River and reaches Mission San Gabriel.

1776. Franciscan priests, Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Francisco Silvestre Vélez de Escalante follow Rivera’s route to the Great Basin in western Utah.

1781. Spanish colonial establish El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles in California.

1821. Mexico gains independence from Spain.

1825. Antoine Robidoux builds Fort Uncompahgre (Fort Robidoux) near present-day Delta, Colorado, where Indians and traders bargained for goods.

1826. Jedediah S. Smith leads a small party of fur trappers westward from Cache Valley, Utah.

TRAIL MILESTONES

1829. Antonio Armijo leads the first trade caravan from Abiquiú to Los Angeles, opening the Old Spanish Trail.

1831. William Wolfskill and George C. Yount blaze a more northern route that ascends into central Utah before heading southwest into California.

1834. José Avieta and 125 men arrive at Los Angeles carrying 1,645 serapes, 314 blankets, and other woolen goods.

1837. José María Chávez and family settle in what became known as the Chávez Ravine in Los Angeles.

1839. José Antonio Salazar arrives in California at the head of a group of 75 men; Francisco Quintana carries domestic manufactures worth $78.25.

1841. Francisco Estevan Vigil arrives at Los Angeles and presents a passport and instructions describing the duties and responsibilities of a commander of a caravan.

1842. A party of 40 New Mexicans from Abiquiú settles at Agua Mansa and Politiana in California; Francisco Estevan Vigil and 194 men are issued passports carrying 4,150 California animals back to New Mexico.

1843. Juan Arce hauls merchandise worth $487.50.

1844. Francisco Rael carries domestic manufactures and sheep worth $1,748.

1846. The Mexican-American War begins.

1848. Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ends Mexican-American War; the Southwest becomes U.S. territory; California Gold Rush begins.

1849. Commercial caravans across the Old Spanish Trail largely cease as more direct transportation routes develop.

2002. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail is designated by Congress.

Earlier explorations provided essential knowledge about the lands and cultures between Santa Fe and Los Angeles. As trading opportunities opened up, traders sought the quickest and safest route.