

## Settlers Monument

The “Settlers Monument” was designed by Santa Fe architect Bernabe Romero, and created by sculptress Donna Quasthoff in 2002. This bronze sculpture memorializes the 400th anniversary of the first European settlers, and the Spanish colonist of 1598, Juan de Oñate.

On June 21, 2003 a metal plaque was placed to mark the commemoration and monument’s placement in the grassy area, north of the Cathedral Basilica.

The plaque reads:

SANTA FE CATHEDRAL PARK AND MONUMENT  
a gift to the citizenry of Santa Fe and the state of New  
Mexico commemorating the first European settlers of  
New Mexico—the Spanish colonists of 1598.

“The year 1598 marked the 400th anniversary of the arrival in New Mexico of about 560 valiant men, women and children to establish one of the earliest permanent European settlements in the United States. Their leader and first governor, Don Juan de Oñate, led this intrepid band north over hundreds of desolate, dangerous miles to the green valleys of northern New Mexico. It was there the colonists established themselves by introducing European crops and the first horses, sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys and poultry – thereby establishing European culture and technology in the United States, where they had not previously existed.

With the settlers came the Franciscan priests and brothers who ministered to the colonists and to the native inhabitants of the region. It was this unswerving devotion to their faith and to their families that consoled and inspired those settlers and their descendants to endure and prevail over 400 years of isolation, abandonment, hardship and cultural challenges. It is to those heroic precursors that our community joins in raising this monument to our forefathers continuing contributions to the history, culture and values of today's America. May they serve as an inspiration to all who pass this way.”

## Doctrine of Discovery

In 1823, a series of decisions made by the United States Supreme Court, Chief Justice John Marshall in the legal case *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, which explained the way in which colonial powers laid claim to newly discovered lands in what is referred to as “The Doctrine of Discovery.” A series of papal bulls, constructed during the 15th and early 16th century, established a relationship between the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church. The goal of the Spanish was laying claim to any land that was not inhabited by Christians was available to be “discovered”, claimed, and exploited.

## Cities of Gold

Spanish explorers were sent to the New World in search of the Seven Cities of Cibola which they heard had a wealth of gold and other treasures. In 1539, Friar Marcos de Niza, reported to Spanish officials in Mexico City that he’d seen one of the legendary cities of Cibola in what is now the Pueblo of Zuni located in New Mexico. The Spanish crown funded a larger expedition with more military in 1541, led by Francisco Vazquez de Coronado, but only found an adobe pueblo village.

Friar Niza may have seen what looks like small flakes of gold on the outside of the adobe building which is likely to be mica silicate crystals, which resemble silver and gold, and is often found within the sandstone across the Southwest. Large expanses of land, claimed as conquered territory, and indigenous labor were the only treasures that Spain could claim.

Franciscan missionaries that were sent to Mexico, Texcoco, and Tlaxcala in 1523, had the goal of converting the indigenous to Catholicism. The Franciscans were architects and engineers who constructed churches, taught children to read and write, and trained adults in trades such as carpentry and ceramics. During the mid-1550s, Franciscan friars wrote to the Spanish government requesting expansion of their missions to more territories north of Mexico.

### Juan de Oñate

Juan de Oñate was born to wealthy parents, circa 1550 in Zacatecas, Mexico. He married Isabel de Tolosa Cortés Moctezuma, a descendant of the famous conquistador Hernán Cortés, and the Aztec emperor Moctezuma. In his early twenties, Oñate led military campaigns against the Chichimec Indians, prospected for silver, and aided in the establishment of missions within the northern region of New Spain.

On September 21, 1595, King Philip II of Spain awarded Oñate a contract, granting Oñate's request to conquer and govern New Mexico. After many delays, Oñate's expedition began in January 1598. He made a formal declaration of Spanish possession of New Mexico on April 30, 1598, then crossed the Rio Grande at El Paso, in May 1598.

During the expedition, Oñate made contact with many Pueblos villages situated along the Rio Grande. A headquarters colony was built at the confluence at Chama River near what is now known as Okay Owingeh, formerly known as the Pueblo of San Juan. From the settlement established at San Juan, excursions were sent in all directions in search of the fabled Cities of Gold. Over time, Oñate's forces dwindled from settler desertion, which was the result of disillusionment at the failure to find riches, and Oñate's orders to execute several leaders of a mutiny.

The Spanish brought European domesticated animals such as cattle, chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, burros and horses to the region, which altered natural vegetation, introduced invasive species, pests and impacted the ecology of the soil. They also brought seeds of the plants they wanted to cultivate such as wheat, cantaloupe, watermelon, grapes, cabbage radishes, onions, tomatoes, and chile. From 1598 - 1848, fruit tree orchards of apple, apricot, cherry, peach, nectarine, pear, and plum flourished within the Rio Grande valley.

European diseases were also introduced to the native people that had no immunity which decimated thousands. The Spanish demanded corn, blankets, and labor from the Pueblos. Missionaries forced the Pueblo people to build churches, convert to Catholicism, and forbade Pueblo religious dances and practices. Ceremonial items and Pueblo kivas were also destroyed by the colonists. These policies and actions affected 21 distinct Puebloan groups, the Navajo, and the Apache; altering their land boundaries, societal pacts, traditional diet, religious practices, government and political system.

In an expedition to Zuni, December 1598, Spanish Captain Juan de Zaldívar and his soldiers stopped at the village of Acoma for provisions. The historical account of what transpired states, "While there, the Acomas accused one of Zaldívar's soldiers of stealing, and violating an Acoma woman. The Acomas proceeded to kill Zaldívar and nearly a dozen of his men, later claiming that the soldiers had demanded

excessive amounts of provisions. A Spanish punitive expedition ascended on Acoma resulting in a three-day battle. When the fighting ended, several hundred Indians were dead, and hundreds of surviving Acomas were held prisoner and taken to Santo Domingo Pueblo to stand trial. Oñate severely punished the people of Acoma. Men over twenty-five had one foot cut off and were sentenced to twenty years of personal servitude to the Spanish colonists; young men between the ages of twelve and twenty-five received twenty years of personal servitude; young women over twelve years of age were given twenty years of servitude; sixty young girls were sent to Mexico City to serve in the convents there, never to see their homeland again; and two Hopi men caught at the Acoma battle had their right hand cut off and were set free to spread the news of Spanish retribution.”<sup>3</sup>

Oñate resigned as governor of New Mexico in 1607, due to the financial crisis and the condition of the colony. He remained in Santa Fe until 1606, when King Philip III summoned Oñate to Mexico City where he stood trial for his crimes while serving as governor. In 1613, the Spanish government accused Oñate of several violations including the use of excessive force during the Acoma rebellion, the hanging of two Indians, the execution of mutineers and deserters, and lastly adultery. He was found guilty, fined, banned from Mexico City for four years, and banished from New Mexico forever. Oñate appealed many times to the Spanish government, and was eventually granted a reversal of his sentence in 1624; the king assigned him to the position of mining inspector. He died in Spain, in 1626.

#### Controversy of statues of Oñate

Oñate remains a controversial figure in New Mexican history. In 1991, a twelve-foot-high statue of Juan de Oñate, was placed a few miles north of Española, in the town of Alcalde. In January 1998, people protesting the 400th anniversary of Juan de Oñate’s arrival, cut the right foot off of a bronze statue with an electric saw. They left a note that read, “We took the liberty of removing Oñate’s right foot on behalf of our brothers and sisters of Acoma Pueblo...We see no glory in celebrating Oñate’s fourth centennial, and we do not want our faces rubbed in it.”

In 1997, the City of El Paso hired the sculptor John Sherrill Houser to create a sculpture of Oñate. Protests followed the City’s decision and two city council members retracted their support, however the project was funded at \$2,000,000 and took nearly nine years to complete one of the world’s tallest and heaviest statues at 34-foot-tall (10 m) statue, weighing eighteen tons. The statue represents Oñate as a soldier mounted on an Andalusian horse holding the La Toma declaration in his right hand. Controversy over the statue prior to its installation was the subject of the documentary film, *The Last Conquistador*, presented in 2008 as part of PBS’s P.O.V. television series. protested by groups such as the Acoma tribe during the development of the project as well as at the inauguration held in 2006. The statue was renamed "The Equestrian" in response to the protests, and its inauguration supported by segments of El Paso residents and some of the Hispanic community. The statue was vandalized in June, 2020.

During the summer of 2020, a movement to topple controversial monuments and remove statues that promoted slavery and genocidal practices, was seen across the United States and world-wide. In June, 2020 protests over the statue of Juan de Oñate, which was part of the La Jornada sculpture, resulted in a violence with one of the protesters shot. Nationwide demonstrations over past and present racial injustices and controversial monuments occurred during the Summer of 2020. The incident prompted the City of Albuquerque to remove its most controversial element, a sculpture of Juan de Oñate, and hid it in a storage facility.

The La Jornada memorial, located in front of the Albuquerque History Museum, was created for the New Mexico Cuarto Centenario (the 400th anniversary of Oñate's 1598 settlement). The memorial was meant to be a tri-cultural collaboration between Hispanic, Anglo, and Tewa Pueblo Native American), with Reynaldo "Sonny" Rivera, Betty Sabo, and Nora Naranjo Morse. During the initial public input process, there was intense public criticism and controversy surrounding Oñate. A decision was then made to create two separate memorials. A series of bronze statues, that includes Oñate leading the first group of Spanish settlers into New Mexico, was created by Rivera and Sabo. Naranjo-Morse created a land art piece of a large dirt spiral representing the Native American perspective titled, "Numbe Whageh," which is a Tewa interpretation of "Our Center Place".

A year after the Albuquerque protest of La Joranda, in June 2021, the statue of Oñate remains absent and despite a community input process that lasted a month and was intended to help city leaders make a decision about the artwork's long-term fate, no such determination has been made. The City of Albuquerque's arts and culture director told the Albuquerque Journal that Mayor Tim Keller's administration is waiting for the City Council to conduct more public input sessions.

On June 15, 2020 the statue of Oñate in Alcalde, New Mexico was temporarily removed by Rio Arriba County workers at the direction of officials in order to protect it from damage or destruction, and placed in a safe location until a final decision on the statue's future is made.

In the early morning hours of June 18, 2020, a crane removed the Diego de Vargas statue from its concrete base in Cathedral Park, following an aborted attempt to remove the Plaza obelisk. Both the statue and Soldiers' Monument obelisk were at risk of damage and continued vandalism, and were to be removed to a protected location by order of Mayor Alan Webber.

While the Soldiers' Monument obelisk on the Plaza was pulled from its pedestal on Indigenous Peoples Day, October 12, 2020 after a three-day protest by Native American activists and their allies, the Diego de Vargas statue remains an ethical and controversial dilemma — its fate is currently being determined. Supporters of the statue's removal view its place in the city as public art that condones the actions of Diego de Vargas and is a celebration of conquest and genocide. Others view the statue as an expression of pride in their Spanish and Hispanic heritage.

#### Resources:

1. [Juan de Oñate – New Mexico History.org](#)
2. [Doctrine of Discovery](#)
3. Burkholder, Mark A., 1943- (2019). Colonial Latin America. Johnson, Lyman L. (Tenth ed.). New York. ISBN 978-0-19-064240-2
4. "Nación Genízara: Ethnogenesis, Place, and Identity in New Mexico". edited by Moises Gonzales, Enrique R. Lamadrid. UNM Press, 2019.
5. Morales, Francisco (2008). "The Native Encounter with Christianity: Franciscans and Nahuas in Sixteenth-Century Mexico". *The Americas*. 65 (2): 137–159.
6. Weigle, Marta; Frances, Levine (editor). *Telling New Mexico History*. Museum of New Mexico Press; Illustrated edition (February 16, 2009), Chapter 13: Spain in the New World, by Thomas E. Chavez; Chapter 14: Juan de Onate, Colonizer, Governor by Rick Hendricks.
7. [Statues Of Conquistador Juan De Oñate Come Down As New Mexico Wrestles With History: NPR](#)
8. [County Takes Down Oñate Monument | News | riograndesun.com](#)

9. [Onate's Foot Story \(ucsd.edu\)](http://ucsd.edu)
10. Romero, Simon (30 September 2017). "[Statue's Stolen Foot Reflects Divisions Over Symbols of Conquest](#)". *New York Times*. Retrieved 3 October 2017.
11. [Activists take aim at conquistador statues in New Mexico \(apnews.com\)](http://apnews.com)
12. Ginger Thompson. "[As a Sculpture Takes Shape in Mexico, Opposition Takes Shape in the U.S.](#)," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2002. Retrieved 2008-07-15.
13. [La Jornada and Numbe Whageh Form the Cuarto Centenario Memorial to Represent the Past and Present of Albuquerque: Two Memorials, Many Perspectives, One Monument.](#)
14. Matthew J. Martinez (August 2014). "[Remembering 400 Years of Exile](#)".
15. [The Last Conquistador | POV | PBS](#)
16. [The Equestrian' Don Juan de Oñate statue at El Paso airport vandalized](#)". 12 June 2020.
17. [One year after protest, fate of Oñate sculpture in limbo - Albuquerque Journal \(abqjournal.com\)](http://abqjournal.com)