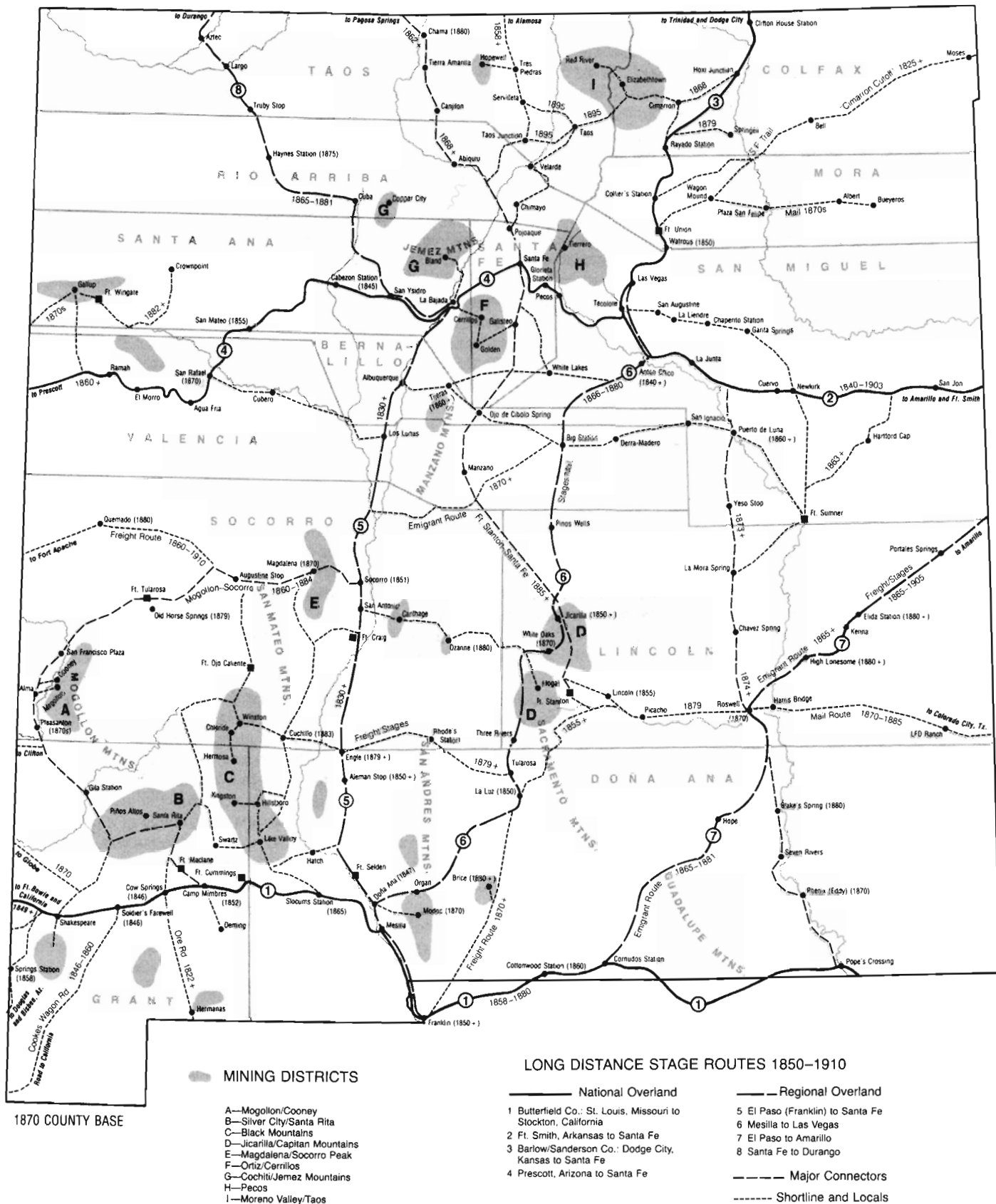
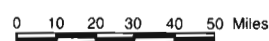


Mining and Stagecoaching, 1846-1912



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Dates represent periods of known use of stations or routes.



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The occupation of the Southwest by American troops during the second half of the nineteenth century provided some security for the isolated mining camps and for travelers covering long overland distances throughout the territory. A network of new transportation routes evolved, with the longer lines transecting New Mexico as passageways for emigrant wagon trains and overland stages or mail routes going from the Mississippi Basin to California. Santa Fe declined as a terminus on the route west, its role becoming more that of a way station along the road to rich gold fields and agricultural valleys near the Pacific Coast. As mining began to flourish in New Mexico, wagon roads and short-line stage routes interlaced the territory, connecting these new settlements with the major roadways and older settlements.

Mining attracted immigrants to more places in New Mexico and gave temporary work to some of those who originally intended only to pass through. The discovery of rich ore veins and minerals in some mountainous sections of the territory created a gold-rush atmosphere; people swarmed over the landscape, which was soon pitted with prospectors' holes and shafts, or gouged out placer pits along alluvium deposits in streambeds. In many isolated areas where there were concentrations of the ore beds and of the people attempting to remove them, the Territory of New Mexico became dotted with new towns and mining camps bearing Anglo names.

Although the greatest mining activity occurred after the Civil War, prospectors' holes dating back into the eighteenth century peppered the hills of New Mexico. There is evidence of a number of obsidian, flint, chert, and turquoise quarries used by prehistoric Indians, particularly at Cerro Pedernal (Flint Hill) near Abiquiu and Mount Chalchihuitl (Turquoise Mountain) near Cerrillos. The pit at Cerrillos, which measured 130 ft deep and between 100 and 200 ft in diameter when discovered by the Spaniards, is probably the oldest mine in North America. The hills around Cerrillos produced much more than turquoise. During the eighteenth century (and

possibly prior to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680) the Spanish mine at Cerrillos, La Mina del Tiro, was producing gold, silver, and lead, which certainly qualifies it as one of the earliest North American metal mines. Copper was mined at Santa Rita in the Gila region as early as 1790.

One of the earliest gold rushes of the American West occurred in the 1820s at a site near Cerrillos called Old Placers (later named Dolores). These placer deposits in the Ortiz and San Pedro mountains were worked by as many as 3,000 miners, in a territory whose population at that time was fewer than 50,000. By 1850 there were mining camps in the Organ Mountains east of Mesilla and the Jicarilla Mountains northwest of Fort Stanton. Prospectors made several rich placer strikes in the Moreno Valley west of Cimarron in the 1860s, which led to a gold rush in the 1870s that created the boomtown of Elizabethtown. This chaotic settlement grew from 2,200 people in 1869 to around 7,200 in 1870, making it the largest town in the territory. Elizabethtown was designated the county seat of Colfax County when it was formed from Mora County in 1869.

The famous mining town of Pinos Altos evolved during the 1860s as gold was discovered by soldiers on patrol from nearby military posts and by miners returning from the gold fields of California. Most of the other gold fields of New Mexico, such as Nogal and White Oaks, were successful placer mines in the 1860s that expanded during the 1870s and 1880s as underground mining boomed. A significant discovery of silver and lead near the town of Magdalena (west of Socorro) increased the range of minerals that could profitably be mined in the Land of Cibola.

By the close of the 1870s the northern mining areas were undergoing a rapid decline; Elizabethtown was nearly a ghost town by 1880. Miners trickled to the southwest quarter of New Mexico, where mining towns boomed around the silver deposits discovered at Georgetown, Ralston, Chloride Flat (Silver City), Shakespeare, Mogollon, Cooney, Chloride, Kingston, and Lake Valley. These mining camps, including

Hillsboro and White Oaks with their significant gold discoveries and Kelly (south of Magdalena) with its continued lead mining, were the most active mineral production areas from the 1880s until well into the twentieth century. One of the richest silver ore bodies ever discovered was mined out of the Bridal Chamber at Lake Valley, where the ore was so pure it was cut from the seam instead of blasted. Kingston, in the Black Range district near Lake Valley, was the leading silver-producing area of the territory.

There were isolated gold strikes in the Rio Hondo and Red River areas of the north, and at Bland, in the canyons of the Cochiti mining district west of Santa Fe. There was also a resurgence of activity at Golden (Ortiz Mountains) and near Cerrillos, but most of these northern and central New Mexican sites played out after a decade or so of moderate production. All New Mexico mining operations were limited in scale by scarce and unpredictable water supplies. Mining is a large consumer of water and, as most of the state is devoid of surface runoff, many companies invested in the transportation of water to the areas of operation. The "big ditch" of Elizabethtown traversed more than 20 miles of rugged terrain in order to divert the Red River headwaters to the Moreno Valley placers. There was also a 13-mile ditch/aqueduct system from the San Pedro Mountains to the mines at Golden, which collapsed in its first year of operation. Few of these schemes were financially successful.

By the 1880s, coal was at a premium as fuel for railroad locomotives. The coalfields at Carthage (southeast of Socorro), which had been mined by soldiers from Fort Craig as early as 1860, were quickly turned into a railway mining complex. After 1880, mines in the Gallup, Cerrillos, and Raton areas dominated coal production for the major railroad companies, with smaller producers west of Chama and south of Cuba supplying smaller narrow-gauge railways. The bituminous seams produced good coking coal, which led to the rise of smelters in mining districts accessible to the railroads. Madrid, near

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Cerrillos, was one of the most unusual coal-mining communities in the world, producing anthracite and bituminous ores out of the same mine.

New Mexico became increasingly linked to the rest of the United States during the Territorial period. The Chihuahua and Santa Fe trails gave way to east-west transcontinental routes from Dodge City and Fort Smith, which converged near the territorial capitol. They then proceeded westward along the military road from Santa Fe to Fort Wingate (near Mount Taylor) before following the “ancient way” of the Spanish explorers from San Rafael to Zuni. The Butterfield overland stage route, which skirted the southern edge of the territory, secured the important mail contract from St. Louis to Stockton between 1857 and 1869. Overland stage systems such as the Butterfield carried many prominent people capable of paying for long-distance luxury passage. These travelers and the mail were frequently the prey of outlaws in such later romanticized places as Doubtful Canyon, the passageway into Arizona territory.

Many of the settlements along the national and regional overland stage routes were not established with a lasting purpose. Locations such as Cottonwood Station, Slocum's Station, Cabezon, Yeso, and many others were merely roadside inns with huge stables operated by the stage company for fresh teams of horses. Most of these junctions and mid-line stations were abandoned as soon as the main-line stages or freight wagons disappeared. Most of the overland systems contracted the roadwork to local entrepreneurs, who would frequently

supplement the contract by charging a user fee (toll) to noncompany users of the route. The roads used by the military in the interfort network were maintained by the U.S. Army. Local routes were sporadically maintained by the stage or freight company that used them, and many were open on a seasonal basis only. The connectors to the mining camps were primarily established as freight routes for ore wagons, and the mining companies provided minimum repair in order to provide access to the mines.

Stages operated over long-distance routes until 1880, when competition of the faster and more comfortable railroads put many companies out of business. Once the main lines of the railroads were established, the stages and hacks were still valuable as connectors between rail companies or as a feeder service from rail stations to the mining camps. As late as 1882, 38 stage lines were still operating in New Mexico. Lake Valley and Engle became important terminals for two stage lines into the Black Range mining towns. Coaches varied from deluxe overland stages to modified freight wagons with heavy springs. The equipment, as well as unpredictable road conditions, could usually assure the traveler of long hours of frustration and discomfort. It has been reported that it took as many as 13 days of constant traveling from Kansas City to reach Santa Fe on the overland stage. A one-way fare was as much as \$250. In the 1870s the stage from Mesilla to Silver City required a horseman to accompany it to the Rio Grande in order to check the ford. The most traveled route in the Territory, from Las Vegas to Santa Fe,

received the following review in 1875 in the *Las Vegas Gazette*.

The seventy-five miles of road between Las Vegas and Santa Fe can safely be set down as the worst known to the modern traveler. . . . The route is an old one. The greater portion of it has been a public thoroughfare for the last fifty years. . . . The succession of ruts and sunken places renders travel throughout the whole length disagreeable. . . . [It] is the worst road in the United States over which there is a daily stage.

American immigrants began entering the territory as early as the 1830s, following rather poorly defined routes over the Buffalo Plains of the northeast part of the Mexican territory. Their numbers increased dramatically after the Civil War thanks to U.S. cavalry protection on the routes and the military control of the Indians in the eastern plains and southern mountains. Whereas the earlier wagon trains crossed the northern area of the territory via the interfort route, around 1870 the convoys of immigrants shifted southward to the easier route across southern Arizona. The wagon trains were discontinued after the 1880s as the railroads began providing immigrant cars on freight trains that would haul an entire household (including livestock) to the western frontier. This immigrant rail-car system played a significant role near the end of the Territorial period in bringing to a close the operations of the massive cattle companies that occupied the rich grasslands of New Mexico.

Jerry L. Williams