Not until the 1590s did Spain pursue settlement north of Mexico, when Juan de Oñate led 600 men across the Rio Grande River and “founded” a colony by seizing an Indian pueblo to serve as its capital. After several years of surviving in scattered and ill-provisioned settlements, while Oñate led futile searches for gold and silver and provoked the Indians to warfare with his demands for food and submission, most of the settlers returned to Mexico, forcing the issue of whether to abandon the colony.

1608, July 2. Council of the Indies to King Philip III of Spain.

Since your majesty realized how unfruitful it would be to continue the discovery and pacification of New Mexico (which was granted under contract to Don Juan de Oñate) because all of that land is of little value, and because the aim of Don Juan and of those who joined him in the enterprise was its prolongation for their private aims, your majesty therefore ordered the Marquis of Montesclaros, by a cedula of June 17, 1606, to halt that discovery as soon as he received the message and not to proceed any farther, to recall Don Juan de Oñate with skill and tact under some plausible pretext, and after his return to detain him in Mexico and disband the people who had taken part in the discovery. . . .

. . . the viceroy . . . learned of the small number of souls that had been saved thus far and the meager hopes for the future since not only had the

natives shown little inclination for the law of the gospel but the friars had no more desire to learn the numerous languages that were used among so few people; he learned also of the difficulty or even impossibility of maintaining any expansion and the great cost it would require because of the poor quality and poverty of the land, its great distance from Mexico (from which supplies would have to come) — it must be some six hundred leagues to the interior of the land, without any gold or silver mines or anything to attract Spanish settlers.

In view of these and many other reasons, it seems to the viceroy and to some of the judges of the audiencia with whom he discussed the matter in a special meeting that the New Mexico expedition should be abandoned and that the Indians who had been baptized, who would not number more than four hundred, be removed from the land. This number is very meager, indeed, for ten or eleven years of labor and expense. This action will put an end to the great costs to the royal treasury, both now and later, costs which will always increase.

In case there are neither friars nor laymen who will remain voluntarily in the land, and the Indians refuse to leave of their own accord, but will have to be taken out by force, the viceroy should consult with the said persons as to whether it would be better to leave the natives in their land, the Spaniards urging them when they leave to live or die in the faith that they have embraced, or whether it would be more desirable to take them away even if by force so that they would not run the risk of losing their faith. This business is left in the viceroy’s hands in order that after he has studied it and conferred with the said persons, he may do what he considers best for the service of God and your majesty.

Consistent with these two considerations, then, your majesty will at once determine and command what might better serve and befit your service and the service of God, our Lord.

Gonçalo Méndez de Canço

1607, 26 January. Junta de Guerra [Committee on War], Council of the Indies.

Sirs:

From the copy of a decision which the Council of War has sent to this Junta, it seems that on the 16th October last year it gave a report to Your Majesty that it had gathered from certain information that a merchant from Plymouth [England] had said that as some ships were going to look for a passage to the north-west to the East Indies and Japan in 1605 they hit the coast of Florida in an area of very good land peopled by Indians who were so civilized and well off that they thought it would be an excellent idea to take some of them to England; they were there in Plymouth, and the talk was that a great fleet was going to be fitted out [for the spring] to take everything that would be needed for Englishmen to go and live in that land with their wives and children; and although the Council was sure that this was wrong, and that the area they call Florida is in fact the land called Virginia, further to the north, they still thought that it was worth investigating this, and so, as fas as this is concerned, there seems to be no reason that
1609, January 29. Order of the Viceroy of Mexico, Luis de Velasco.

. . . in consideration of the present state of affairs in that land and of the people there who have been converted to the faith . . . there should be a governor and fifty settlers, equipped with the necessary arms for defense, each one of whom should be compensated in accordance with his quality and services; that the Indians who may be allotted in accordance with the instructions which the governor has for this purpose should be assigned without injury to those given in encomienda by Governor Don Juan de Oñate by virtue of his contract; and since, according to the information available about the settlers in that land, who number about sixty persons, only thirty are capable of bearing arms, the judges decided, in order that the number of fifty soldiers may be complete, to recruit twelve soldiers, two more or less, as his excellency may determine, with the usual salary, paid for one year. . . .

Don Luis de Velasco. [Viceroy of Mexico]
Licentiate Don Pedro de Otalora.
Licentiate Diego Núñez Morquecho.
Doctor Juan Quesada de Figueroa.

1609, March 30. Instructions to Don Pedro de Peralta, Governor and Captain General of New Mexico, in place of Don Juan de Oñate, from Don Luis de Velasco, Viceroy of Mexico.

. . . He shall start from the City of Mexico as quickly as possible with the twelve soldiers and religious which he takes along to said provinces as protection . . .

He shall see that the horses and oxen shall be well cared for so they shall arrive in good condition for the reason that they are actually necessary for the purposes of agriculture which shall be started immediately on that land and they shall carry a quantity of tools and other necessary implements.

When he has arrived at said province he shall inform himself of the condition of said settlement of the Villa they claim [later Santa Fe] and shall order the same to be made there so people may begin to live there with some cleanliness and stability, in which he shall allow the citizens to elect four councilmen, and two ordinary alcaldes each year who shall try civil and criminal causes which may occur in said Villa and within five leagues around it . . . .

The said ordinary alcaldes and councilmen of said Villa may mark out for each resident two lots compels us to add to the decisions already taken, and the plans of the enemy are not thought to involve going to set foot in Florida, for this is a land where they could not stay.

Madrid, 26th January 1607.

The Count of Lemos The Licenciado
The Count of Puñonrostro Villagutierre
Don Bernardo de Velasco Don Francisco
The Marqués de San German Duarte
Estéban de Ibarra

[Note on the reverse side:] Everywhere people should be on the watch, for the enemy will not just have one plan in mind.

1611, May 5. Junta de Guerra [Committee on War], Council of the Indies, to King Philip III.

[The letter begins with a review of a 1609 reconnoitre voyage to Virginia to learn the extent of British settlement and to determine “with what measures and forces they can be driven from there and frustrated of their designs and punished.”]

My Lord:

. . . the governor [of Florida] says in his letter that it appears to him that the plan the English entertain, as far as he been able to learn, is to fortify themselves in the said bay of Jacán [Virginia] . . . , and to make an expedition into the land, taking for that purpose sufficient people, until they shall come to Nueva México, Nueva Galicia, and Vizcaya, and Ça catacas, which are in the same latitude, and to go across the land to the other sea at the west, since from that part of Florida great rivers go up into the land and from the other sea also it is known that others go up, not smaller, and that there is little distance from the one set of rivers to the other, and the enemy could go up through those of the east coast and go down through those of the west, and fortify themselves in the ports of that sea and there make ships and fleets and overrun the whole coast.
for house and garden and two suertes for vegetable garden and two more for vineyard and for an olive grove and four cavallerias of land, and for the irrigation thereof the necessary water, obliging them to live thereon ten years continuously without absenting themselves, if they should absent themselves for three months continuously without leave from the council or regiment they shall lose all and it shall be given to others.

Because I have been informed that the taxes imposed and collected from those natives are excessive causing them great vexation and trouble, the said governor is requested to attend to this in manner to suit himself proceeding in all justification and in discharge of the royal conscience.

I have been informed that the small population of that country is very scattered over it so that they are destitute of administration because very few reside in each place and are also too far to be helped and protected. And some people and nations are in proximity to the frontiers and country of the Apaches which is had a refuge for their enemies.

It is understood that that country is settled by various languages very difficult and barbarous which cause many inconveniences for the good administration and consolation of the ministers as well as of the natives. The said Governor is requested to act with great care consulting with the religious in such a manner so that the main things shall be to teach all the Indians and especially the children and ignorant persons so they may learn the Spanish language.

With the admonition that you should proceed with great care and mature consideration.

Don Luis de Velasco...

Don Diego de Ybarra
Don Diego Brochero
Don Fernando Giron
Licenciado Don Francisco Arias Maldonado
Doctor Bernardo de Olmedilla
Licenciado Don Francisco de Tejeda

Palace of the Governors, constructed in Santa Fe in 1610 as the new capital of Nueva Mexico, n.d.