

## Significant Explorers



# Texas

## 4 Studies Weekly

OUR STATE

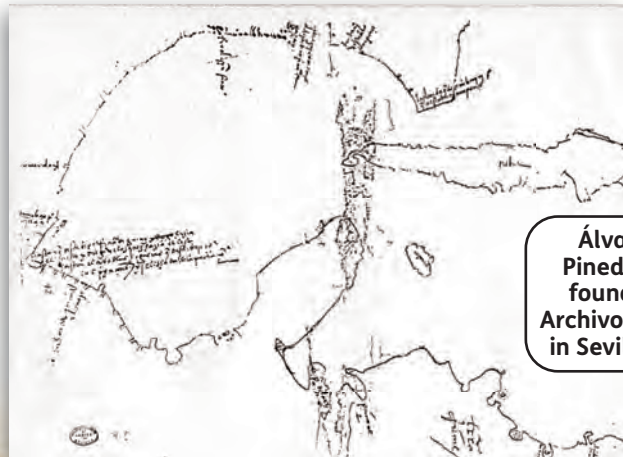
### Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda

Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda was a Spanish explorer. He is credited as the first European to map the coast of Texas. During the early 1500s, Europeans knew little about North America's coastline. Piñeda's expedition provided new knowledge about the Gulf of Mexico. He also explored the rivers around it. The first known map of the Gulf Coast was created during his journey.

Little is known about Piñeda's early life. In 1519, the governor of Jamaica, Francisco Garay, sent Piñeda to explore the Gulf Coast. Other Spanish explorers had been to areas along the Gulf of Mexico. Juan Ponce de León had mapped much of Florida's coast. Diego Velázquez had sent scouts to what is now Mexico. Garay asked Piñeda to investigate the area between the two. He wanted to find a route to the Pacific Ocean from the Gulf of Mexico.

Piñeda led four ships and 270 men on the journey. They traveled from Mexico to Florida. He became the first European to explore all of Texas's Gulf Coast. Piñeda described several places we recognize today. The large river he named the Río del Espíritu Santo was likely the Mississippi River. Before his expedition, Spanish explorers thought Florida was an island. Piñeda proved that was not true.

Some of Piñeda's ships were damaged during his expedition. Piñeda and his men traveled up the Río del Espíritu Santo and docked in a suitable area to repair their ships. There, he and his men encountered as many as 40 American Indian villages constructed by various tribes. After his ships were repaired, they sailed to Jamaica for supplies. Piñeda and some of his men remained. They settled in what is now present-day Mexico. Before the ships returned, members of the local Huastec tribe attacked the settlement and killed Piñeda.



Álvares de Piñeda's map found in the Archivo de Indias in Sevilla, Spain

### Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca

Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca was born in Spain in the late 1400s. He joined the Spanish military. During that time, he distinguished himself. His reputation earned him the chance to serve in an expedition. Pánfilo de Narváez, another Spanish explorer, wanted to cross the Atlantic. He planned to claim the territory along the Gulf Coast for Spain.



In 1527, Narváez sailed from Spain. He took around 600 men aboard five ships. Cabeza de Vaca served as his first lieutenant and treasurer. Narváez had been granted the land between Florida and the Río de las Palmas in Mexico. This included the entire coastline of present-day Texas.

Spanish explorers had already started exploring the Gulf Coast. However, much of the coastline remained poorly mapped. It was easy to become lost. The expedition traveled to Cuba and then Florida. There, Narváez went ashore with about half of his men, including Cabeza de Vaca.

Narváez thought they were within walking distance of the Río de las Palmas. They were actually over a thousand miles away. The overland journey was treacherous. The men faced lack of food and hostile interactions with American Indian tribes. Narváez's ships sailed the coast looking for the members of the expedition. When they could not find them, the ships returned to Cuba.

For Cabeza de Vaca, this began a years-long ordeal. The men made rafts and sailed along the shoreline. Many of the rafts were lost at sea. Narváez was among those who died. About a dozen survivors landed on an island near present-day Houston. For years, Cabeza de Vaca survived illness and enslavement by American Indian tribes. Eventually, he and the last two members of the expedition arrived in Mexico City.

Cabeza de Vaca spent years traveling the land that became Texas. His writings are considered the first historical accounts of the area. His descriptions of the American Indian tribes and their lands were incredibly popular. They were published more than once before his death in 1559.



## Francisco Vásquez de Coronado

Francisco Vásquez de Coronado was born in Spain in 1510. The second son in a noble family, he did not inherit his family's riches. Despite this, he had a good education and made important connections in Spanish society. This allowed him to move to New Spain, or present-day Mexico. There, he began working in the government. He became governor of New Galicia, a province in New Spain.

Like many others, Coronado heard stories of mythical riches in the Americas. Earlier explorers, like Cabeza de Vaca, told stories about cities of gold. Coronado had become quite rich. He had also married the daughter of a wealthy family. Wanting to claim the mythical riches for Spain, he accepted a mission to search for them.

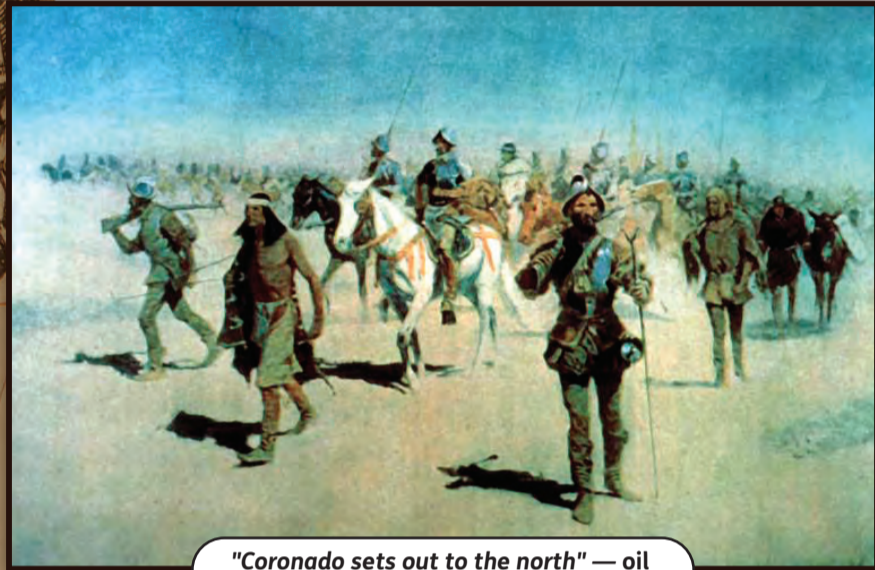
In 1540, Coronado left on his expedition. He

commanded 300 Spanish soldiers. They traveled through what are now Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. He also brought about 1,000 American Indians, as well as horses, cattle, and other livestock. Coronado was searching for the Seven Cities of Cibola. This mythical location was said to contain large quantities of gold and silver.

The expedition encountered various American Indian tribes. One party also found the Grand Canyon. However, they did not find gold. This only made Coronado more determined. Desperate to discover the riches of this new land, he accepted help from an American Indian named El Turco. El Turco told stories of the city of Quivira, filled with gold and silver.

The Coronado expedition marched through what is now the Texas panhandle. Coronado became the first known European to explore Palo Duro Canyon, near Amarillo. They also traveled through present-day Oklahoma and Kansas. Despite his promises, El Turco's stories were untrue. They did not find a city of gold. Instead, they found hunters, farmers, and traders of the Wichita people.

Coronado returned to New Spain in 1542. He did not find the riches he pursued. The true value of Coronado's expedition was in the account of his travels. His report to the King of Spain added new knowledge to the Spanish understanding of the land and its peoples.



"Coronado sets out to the north" — oil painting by Frederic Remington.

## Luis de Moscoso de Alvarado

Luis de Moscoso de Alvarado was born in Spain in 1505. He used his family connections to find opportunities across the Atlantic. The Spanish empire was expanding into North and South America. His uncle, Pedro de Alvarado, was an important explorer. He brought Moscoso to the Spanish colony in Peru.

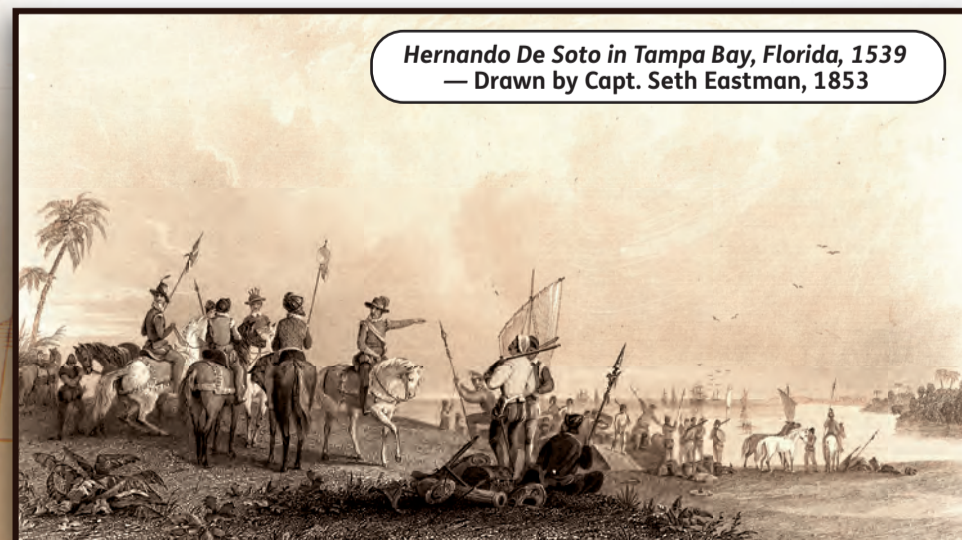
In Peru, Moscoso acquired a good deal of wealth. More importantly, he formed a friendship with Hernando de Soto. The two returned to Spain. They lived on the wealth they had gathered in Peru. Moscoso soon spent all his money. Stories of untold riches and cities of gold lured Moscoso back to the Spanish colonies. De Soto gave him that chance.

In 1538, de Soto planned an expedition to the Spanish colony of La Florida. This would later become the state of Florida. Moscoso captained one of the seven ships. When they arrived, de Soto gave Moscoso a command position. The

search for gold went poorly. All they found was resistance from the local American Indian tribes. The stresses of conflict caused de Soto's health to decline. He eventually died from illness.

Before his death, de Soto appointed Moscoso the new leader of the expedition. Moscoso led the group west. They traveled through present-day Mississippi. They hoped this route would eventually lead to the Spanish colony of New Spain, present-day Mexico. This soon brought them into what is now Texas. They journeyed to the Trinity River in East Texas before giving up. With no gold, they made plans to return to Mexico.

Moscoso led the men back to the Mississippi River. They gathered materials and resources needed to build several boats. They used these boats to navigate down the river, into the Gulf of Mexico. From there, they traveled along the coast. Five years after they left Spain, they arrived in Mexico. They returned no richer, having found no gold or silver. What they did was provide another early account of the people and geography of the North American continent.



Hernando De Soto in Tampa Bay, Florida, 1539 — Drawn by Capt. Seth Eastman, 1853

## Antonio de Espejo

Antonio de Espejo was born near Córdoba, Spain, at an unknown date. Like many Spanish men of his time, he sought wealth and fame in the Americas. This desire led him to the colony of New Spain with his brother, Pedro Muñoz. They arrived in 1571. The Espejos quickly became successful ranchers. They hired local American Indians and others as cowboys, or vaqueros. A conflict between the brothers and several vaqueros left one of the vaqueros dead. To avoid punishment, Espejo traveled to the northern Mexican frontier.

Though he avoided direct punishment, Espejo's lands were seized. This forced him to try restoring his standing with the government. His luck turned in 1582. The Rodríguez-Sánchez expedition returned from their journey. The survivors mentioned their concern for two Franciscan friars. The friars had stayed in New Mexico with American Indian tribes. They had founded a religious mission in a pueblo there.

Espejo saw this as an opportunity. He planned to restore his standing and do some good at the same time. He organized a small rescue party that became the Espejo Expedition. He hoped to find the men alive. He also felt that the journey would give him a chance to search for riches in an area

that had not been thoroughly explored. Espejo's route led out of Mexico and into Texas. By this time, Spanish expeditions had traveled through the territory for years. The American Indian tribes were becoming familiar with the Spanish. Many maintained friendly relationships with the colonists. Through these relationships, Espejo learned that the Franciscan friars had been killed. With the rescue mission a failure, Espejo

pressed on in search of riches. He never found the gold. However, he did return with news of silver mines in modern-day New Mexico and Arizona. His reports encouraged future Spanish exploration. This contributed to the colonization of the American West, including Texas. Espejo was never able to benefit from the silver he discovered. In 1585, he died of illness in Cuba on his way back to Spain.



French Map Of New Mexico, 1685 — by Vincenzo Coronelli and Jean Nicolas Du Tralage.

## Juan de Oñate

Juan de Oñate was born in northern Mexico. His family was wealthy and owned a silver mine. Oñate involved himself in expanding the Spanish empire. He searched the northern border of the colony for more silver. Local American Indian tribes opposed his efforts. The Spanish silver mines stripped land and resources from the native peoples. Oñate fought against the American Indian tribes. He also worked to establish missions in the area to spread Catholicism.

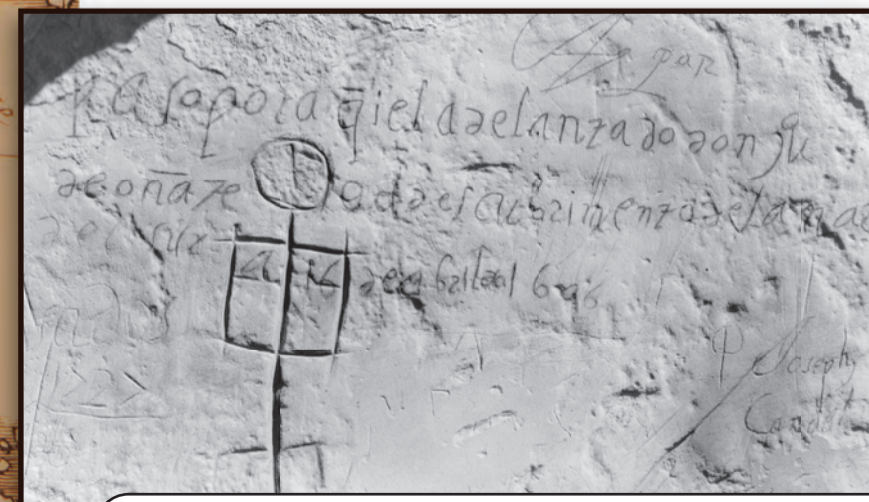
Around this time, King Phillip II of Spain decided he wanted to settle what is now New Mexico. He planned to expand the mission system and spread Catholicism into the new territory. Oñate was chosen to lead the expedition.

In 1598, Oñate set out with around 500 settlers to the area that is now New Mexico. They crossed the Rio Grande at El Paso del Norte. This crossing point would eventually become modern-day El Paso, Texas. Oñate claimed the land for Spain. He also demanded loyalty from the American Indian tribes in the region.

Loyalty meant paying taxes in the form of goods and food to the Spanish. The Acoma, a local tribe, rebelled against his demands. Oñate put down the rebellion and destroyed the Acoma village. Many tribal members were killed or enslaved by the Spanish.

The colony had many problems. The land was not good for farming. They never found the silver they expected to find there. In an attempt to salvage his expedition, Oñate led a party to Quivira, a native settlement said to contain vast riches. When they arrived, they found the stories to be false.

Oñate's settlement failed. Eventually, the Spanish government heard about his brutal treatment of the Acoma tribe. His actions broke Spanish laws that governed the treatment of American Indians. As part of his punishment, Oñate was forced to leave New Mexico. He lived the rest of his life in Spain. He died in 1626.



Inscription Rock, with message written in Spanish by Juan de Oñate as he was passing through what is now New Mexico in April 1605. English: "Passed by here the Governor Don Juan de Oñate from the discovery of the Sea of the South on the 26th of April 1605"



Mission and church at Acoma, c1905 — Curtis, Edward S., photographer



