

ción in Santa Fe, disclosed that “she observed the Law of Moses with exquisite rites and ceremonies.” Because of her very young age (which was not specified in his account), Fray Miguel could not offer her absolution. Nor did he report her family’s heresy to any of the authorities, “because [the Inquisition] was five hundred leagues [1,300 miles] distant, and there was no minister of the Holy Tribunal here.”³⁶ This story was related in the testimony of a colleague of Fray Miguel, Fray Nicolas de Villar, before local agents of the Mexican Inquisition in 1661, five years after the girl had confessed. It has importance not only because it indicates that Judaism was being practiced in seventeenth-century New Mexico, but, more significantly, because it shows that such observances appear to have been common knowledge. Moreover, despite his awareness of this heresy, neither the Franciscan clergyman nor his superiors took any action to suppress it. What became of the unnamed daughter is not known. Manuel Jorge appears to have returned to Parral by the early 1660s, but his cousin Antonio remained in New Mexico, served as a military officer, and married Gertrudis Baca. Their descendants were to play significant roles in the history of Santa Fe and Río Abajo over the next four centuries.

Awareness of a Jewish family background appears not to have presented a barrier even to advancement within the Franciscan order. Fray Estevan de Perea, who participated in the church–state struggle in the early decades of the seventeenth century, served as the first custodian of the Franciscans in New Mexico, holding that position from 1616 to 1621 and, again, from 1629 to 1631. If there was any investigation into Fray Estevan’s genealogy in advance of his first term, its records appear not to have been preserved in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City. The second time around, however, the Mexican Inquisition conducted a comprehensive inquiry into the *limpieza de sangre* of the prelate. According to the documents gathered from agents of the Holy Office in Spain and Portugal, Perea was born in the town of Villanueva del Fresno, located just on the Spanish side of the border with Portugal, about halfway between Badajóz and the southern Mediterranean coast. Both of his parents, however, were Portuguese, his paternal side from Beja and maternal side from the small town of Motrinos, just across the border from Villanueva del Fresno, in the vicinity of Monsaráz.³⁷ So many Jews had settled in this area—not only the normal mix of merchants and bankers, but also farmers and distributors of land—that the region was known by the thirteenth century as the Vale de Judeo (Valley of the Jew).³⁸

One of the investigations, conducted by the inquisitors of Llerena,