

OLD MISSIONS AND THE SPANISH SETTLEMENTS

SAN ANTONIO SETTLEMENTS

Numerous improper dates are published in connection with San Antonio's settlement and development. The old records are in a foreign language, incomplete and scattered over several continents. Some missions were moved several times. Naturally crude structures were first built. The present stone buildings required many years in preparation and construction. The dates of the first buildings and the beginning and completion of the present buildings are not easily stated. The following is a careful statement from the best authorities and the Old Spanish Trail research files. In the interest of accurate statement the Old Spanish Trail Headquarters will appreciate any authentic information.

FIRST SETTLEMENTS

FORT—Presidio of San Antonio de Bexar established . . . 1718
MISSION—San Antonio de Valero (Alamo) established . . . 1718
There is a record (not verified) that a garrison or fort was here in 1698. This is possible for the missions and military were in northeast Texas (Nacogdoches district) beginning 1699 and also beginning 1699 on the Rio Grande at the crossing of the trail (El Camino Real) thru San Antonio to northeast Texas. If there was a garrison in 1698 it was not continuous. San Antonio began with the permanent settlement in 1718.

TOWNSITE—Villa of San Fernando de Bexar founded . . . 1731
FOUR OTHER MISSIONS were established southward along the San Antonio River. San Jose, founded 1720. Concepcion, San Juan and Espada removed from the Nacogdoches district in northeast Texas and re-established on the San Antonio River in 1731.

The Nacogdoches district was close to the French frontier; mission settlements were continued there as outposts. The French outpost was Natchitoches, Louisiana. San Antonio became the military, mission and commercial base of New Spain. The same year, 1718, the French sent men from Mobile to found New Orleans as their permanent base of operations. San Antonio was known as San Fernando and as Bexar for many years. The name Alamo was not applied to the mission until after 1800.

SAN ANTONIO CONSTRUCTION RECORDS

Mission reports made in 1745 and 1762 help with data. The stone church for the mission San Antonio de Valero was begun in 1744. The report of 1762 says the tower and sacristy had fallen and a married stone church of harmonious architecture was being built. Concepcion church was half completed according to the 1745 report; the 1762 report shows it completed. San Juan in 1762 had a temporary apartment twenty-five varas (69.4 ft.) long; in 1745 the buildings were thatched.

The report of 1745 says a stone church for Espada was in progress, the sacristy being completed; the 1762 report again says the church was in progress. San Jose was not begun until 1768. A record of 1778 says "it was the finest mission in all New Spain." This church approached the majesty of a cathedral; its village had the strength of a castle. San Jose was under the College of Guadalupe de Zacatecas; the four other missions were under the College of Santa Cruz de Queretaro—reports and records therefore are different.

The present Cathedral of San Fernando stands at the center of the old village, its iron cross the center of all surveys and the zero point of the old highways, its plaza the clearing house of travel and commerce. The sanctuary of the present building is the original church and dates from 1744; the body of the church was built 1868 and improved in later years.

Of the large areas of land formerly belonging to the missions only a few acres remain around the buildings. The mission structures, church, monastery, cells, porter's lodge, refectory, kitchen, offices, workshops, granary and stone walls were planned to make an enclosure for protection. The Indians did not take kindly to mission life. It is a tribute to the leadership of the padres that such structures, farms, herds and communal establishments were achieved.

PRESENT CONDITIONS SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS

Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepcion de Acuña re-established 1731. The present building, a stone structure next to San Jose in beauty and character, is well preserved and open to visitors daily. St. John's Seminary, built 1920, adjoins this mission. St. Peter's Orphanage for boys, opposite the mission.

San Jose y de San Miguel Aguayo founded 1720. Now a partial ruin. Regular services every Sunday morning in the sacristy. Open to visitors daily.

One mile south of San Jose in the Mission Burial Park may be seen the dam and aqueduct (acequia) built nearly two centuries ago to irrigate the mission lands. It winds around the hills for four miles; a stone viaduct carries it over a ravine; today it still irrigates below Espada Mission.

San Juan de Capistrano re-established 1731. The present is a remodeled building. Services every Sunday morning. No custodian. Irrigation aqueduct some three miles long of this old mission still flowing and irrigating lands.

San Francisco de la Espada re-established 1731. Now a partial ruin. Services every Sunday and some week days. Sisters conduct a school.

All the missions apparently had their irrigating systems by 1745. No brief statement can describe the engineering, architectural, agricultural and industrial achievements of these large mission estates. Inventories of their products and herds are an amazing record. The buildings that still remain tell some of the story of the faith and works of those days. San Juan and Espada missions with their Mexican settlements, their old buildings around the square, their acequias and the irrigated farms near by help re-make the picture of those ancient, well-organized enterprises.

OTHER TEXAS MISSIONS

In 1685 La Salle with his French colonization expedition missed the mouth of the Mississippi River and landed on the southern shores of Texas. In 1689 the Spanish sent an expedition from Mexico to prevent the French establishing rights in this territory. Arriving at the French site in 1690 the Spaniards found the colony extinct and La Salle dead. The Spaniards continued northward and founded two missions north and east of the present Nacogdoches, 1690, one of them San Francisco de la Espada now at San Antonio.

A group of missions were planted 1699-1700 south side of the Rio Grande. Four new missions were established in the Nacogdoches district 1716-1717. A trail that became the historic Old San Antonio Road, Spain's Camino Real, developed from Mexico City past the Rio Grande group of missions and thru the present San Antonio to the Nacogdoches group.

1718 to 1745 were years of effort to strengthen the hold on present territory in Texas rather than for geographical expansion. The territory embraced laid generally between the Old San Antonio Road and eastward to Louisiana and the Gulf. The mission establishments necessitated garrisons or presidios conveniently near. Town colonies would spring up or were officially encouraged. Ranches extended where safety permitted.

In 1722 a mission was established on the Garcitas River near Lavaca Bay, the Espiritu Santo de Zuniga. In 1726 this mission and the presidio were removed to the Guadalupe River near the present Victoria; in 1749 moved again to San Antonio River near present Goliad. It became known as La Bahia. Fannin and his men were massacred there shortly after the fall of the Alamo.

1745 to 1762 was a period of expansion. Western Louisiana was ceded to Spain in 1762. Missions were established south side of the lower Rio Grande at Camargo and Reynosa in 1749; Revilla in 1760; Mier in 1763. On the San Antonio River near Goliad about 1700. W. of La Bahia the mission Nuestra Señora del Rosario was founded in 1764.

1746 to 1749 missions were established near the present Rockdale known as the San Xavier missions. They were abandoned in 1756 and the garrison and missionaries fell back to the San Marcos River; in 1757 they fell back again to the Guadalupe near New Braunfels. San Antonio was becoming the one safe and successful civil and mission center. At the same time, 1756-57, an inglorious attempt was made to establish a mission and colony near the mouth of the Trinity River (south of Liberty, Texas) as a guard against French encroachments. It lasted apparently until 1771. An unworthy location coupled with a tropical storm ended the life of the mission and presidio.

Silver to the northwest was discovered. This and the belief the Apaches would be converted and the northwest made safe resulted in a mission and garrison being established in 1757 on the San Saba River near the present Menard. The San Saba Trail developed from San Antonio thru the present Doerne and another from Mexico up the Nueces River. Two missions were established in 1762 on the Nueces above Uvalde, the San Lorenzo at El Canon and the Candelaria four or five leagues down stream. These missions and San Saba had a short and precarious existence. The Indians could not be converted or controlled. San Saba Mission was essentially destroyed by a massacre in 1758; the garrison was continued for 10 years. Candelaria lasted until 1765; San Lorenzo until 1769. The silver mines became the legendary Lost Mines of San Saba; the Indians did their work all too well. Spain had difficulty maintaining garrisons of any strength with all the outlying missions and their settlements.

CLOSING OUTLYING MISSIONS

Gradually the missions north of San Antonio failed and San Antonio absorbed the people as they fell back. Her mission structures remain in partial ruins and disclose to the people some of the most notable works of the Spaniards in the United States.

The outlying missions in eastern Texas were generally abandoned by 1772 or 1773. In 1772 the King issued new regulations for a better protected frontier. The order provided fifteen presidios (forts) forty leagues apart on an irregular line from Altar near the head of the Gulf of California on the west to La Bahia (Goliad) on the east, with San Antonio and Santa Fe as outposts northward.

After the Mexican War, 1846-47, the United States planted a chain of forts from San Antonio to San Diego establishing somewhat the same frontier to stop Indian raids into Mexico and to protect travel. The Old Spanish Trail today follows generally the same line.

LAST TEXAS MISSION

West of La Bahia and near the junction of the Guadalupe and the San Antonio rivers the Mission Nuestra Señora del Refugio was established about 1790 and after 1791 located about 40 mi. south-westward. This was the last mission to be established in Texas although numerous evidences of Spanish and mission works are found in many places. Trails connected one center with another and the faithful padres tried to extend their works.

MISSIONS OF NEW MEXICO AND ARIZONA

While the Spanish works in the province of New Spain (Texas) were in progress other mission and colonization works were being developed in the province of New Mexico up the Rio Grande Valley from Paso del Norte to Santa Fe and others in the Santa Cruz Valley from the west coast of Mexico northward to Tucson, Arizona. The Texas works were initiated 1690; San Antonio 1718. Santa Fe dates probably 1699; El Paso 1659. The California missions were not begun until 1769 at San Diego. St. Augustine, Florida, was settled 1665.

Onate reached the Pass to the North (El Paso) with his colonization expedition in 1598 where he took formal possession of New Mexico in the name of the Spanish Crown then proceeded northward to the interesting house-building (pueblo) tribes of the Santa Fe country. Father Kino first visited the Santa Cruz Valley, Arizona.

in 1691 and the following year the Mission San Xavier south of Tucson was founded and presumably others of that great chain of fourteen missions were then initiated in the Indian villages southward.

EL PASO SETTLEMENTS

The great Indian rebellion directed against the Albuquerque-Santa Fe colonists was in 1689. The surviving colonists fell back to the Mission Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe at Paso del Norte where cattle and supplies sufficient for their needs were found. The international line and the present El Paso on the American side followed the Mexican War of 1846-47. The old Paso del Norte was the present Juarez. The old mission is now the church of Juarez. No settlement appears at the Pass following Onate's journey until 1659 when padres founded the Mission Guadalupe. Nine years later it is said the mission building, dwellings, cells and enclosures were completed. The missions everywhere developed thru irrigation works and soon stocked with large herds, grains and products. In 1680 report says the Mission Guadalupe had 9,000 cattle and about 14,000 sheep and goats. Mission inventories of this magnitude are common to all districts. No domestic animals were in America before the Spaniards came.

The New Mexico refugees stayed in the El Paso Valley around, it is believed, the present Juarez, Ysleta, Socorro and Cinecu. New Mexico was reconquered from this base. In later years the Mission Guadalupe mothered the missions of Cinecu, San Lorenzo, Ysleta and Socorro. The Spanish frontier post was at San Elizario. In 1767 the missions and the valley were shown to be prosperous.

If the Old Spanish Trail traveler of today will linger in this fruitful valley he will see settlements and works centuries old and the empire building still progressing as men troop in and apply their genius and industry. North of the Pass the traveler will see the old settlements of Mesilla, Las Cruces and Dona Ana now lively centers of extensive irrigation.

ARIZONA MISSIONS

Four missions were established in the Arizona country between Tucson and Nogales north of the present border, San Gabriel de Guayvini, San Cayetano de Calabasas, St. Gertrude de Tubac and San Xavier del Bac, and eleven others were south of Nogales and are often visited thru that city. The first visits of Father Kino to that country were in 1691, 1692, 1694, 1697 and 1699. Mission organizations were probably founded during this period but the great buildings that survive were of necessity the results of many years of preparation and work. Father Kino in a diary places the founding of San Xavier, 9 mi. south of Tucson, as 1692. The date or dates of the erection of the present church structure are not known. Indiana and disaster assailed this mission, an experience common to most of them. Much of it was preserved, other portions restored, it stands today on the desert sands in the service of its faith and is without question one of the greatest structures of the mission period.

Tumacacori Mission is 13 mi. north of Nogales. It grew or suffered as Indian peace or war prevailed; finally was almost destroyed. Today it is being restored and preserved as a National Monument.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The missions in California were begun in 1769, about the time the outlying missions in eastern Texas were falling back to San Antonio. Those of El Paso, New Mexico, old Mexico and Arizona were old when they started at California. Father Junipero the great California leader was first ordered to the disastrous mission project at Menard, Texas, and might have been a victim of the Apache tomahawks instead of the padres who died there.

This article does not treat of the mission works now south of the border. The old Spanish works in the United States were the northern outposts of the Spanish period. Southward the works were more numerous and many of the churches are still maintained. As Mexico becomes more accessible to the motorists this mission story will unfold and the broad extent of the accomplishments of the padres will become more apparent.