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### **300 ; SA Tricentennial ; Military; Pioneering Spanish influences abound; Sites, traditions reflect impact of Texas' early travelers**

*Scott Huddleston Staff Writer*

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The name "Texas," reflective of the state's origins, is derived from an old Spanish version of a word for "friend," used by the Caddo Indians, who lived, farmed and hunted in East Texas.

Spanish conquests at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521 and in the Mayan civilization of the Yucatán Peninsula from 1551 to 1697 marked the beginning of nearly 300 years of Spanish rule in Mexico. In the area that now is Texas, the arrival of Spanish explorer Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca in the 1520s, followed by others from Spain in the ensuing decades, would begin a long phase of early European colonization and political unrest. Cabeza de Vaca's *La Relación* ("The Account") was the first written description of the land and indigenous people of Texas and the Southwest.

Some consider the first Thanksgiving in North America to have occurred in the El Paso area, where conquistador Juan de Oñate's expedition celebrated with a feast and thanksgiving Mass in 1598 - 23 years before the feast in the Plymouth Colony of Massachusetts.

Some of the earliest occupied missions in Texas were established in the 1680s. Permanent Spanish occupation of Texas began in 1716.

The Spanish colonial mission system of New Spain relied on fortified settlements, known as presidios , and adjacent ranchos for raising livestock, to protect and provide for the native inhabitants of the land and convert them to Catholicism. Farm fields known as labores were used to grow cotton, corn, wheat and other staples.

**Ramón Vásquez**, executive director of the American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, said the mission frescoes, such as the "Eye of God" ceiling mural at Mission Concepción, sought to incorporate images of nature, which the indigenous people saw as sacred, with the iconography of the Catholic Church.

"Hunter-gatherers depended on the sky - the celestial elements, to know when the seasons were coming, when to move, when to go to this place here where the food's going to be, and how to make their way back," **Vásquez** said. "All of these elements were considered faces of God. The sun, the moon, the stars, all faces of God; they all meant something."

The church at Concepción was designed to incorporate a solar illumination effect for the annual Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in August, to help the Native Americans feel a connection to a cosmic order.

"Missions are failing across Texas, across Mexico, and the last thing Spain needs is more failed missions. So you do whatever you can to make sure you've got good obedient subjects," **Vásquez** added.

A system of trails, now nationally recognized as El Camino Real de los Tejas , often retraced Native American trade routes and was used by missionaries, settlers and others to travel between villages on the frontier. About 2,580 miles of trails, from the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass and Laredo to Natchitoches, Louisiana, were developed under Spanish rule, starting in the 1680s.

About the same time, the first acequias - water canals, carefully engineered with technology originally developed in the Middle East to provide above-ground supplies of fresh water - were built in Texas, starting with use by missionaries near El Paso. A few cities in the Southwest, including Del Rio and Santa Fe, New Mexico,

still have functioning acequias, the late archaeologist I. Wayne Cox noted in his 2005 book, "The Spanish Acequias of San Antonio."

"San Antonio is the nation's largest major city of Spanish origin that still clearly bears the mark of its original acequia system," Cox wrote. "These wandering waterways made the missions possible, predetermined the city's seemingly random first thoroughfares, dictated its settlement and growth patterns and affected the lifestyle of the community well into the 20th century, providing agricultural and landscape irrigation as well as drinking water."

According to historians, San Antonio's name dates to the arrival of a Spanish expedition on June 13, 1691 - the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua, who lived from 1195-1231 and preached to crowds across Europe. The 1718 establishment of the village of San Antonio de Béjar and original Mission San Antonio de Valero along San Pedro Creek, in what now is the northwestern edge of downtown, is considered by many to be the birth of the city, leading to establishment of a municipal government by Canary Islanders in 1731. The mission relocated to the east side of the river a short time later and after damage from a hurricane, moved to a third site in 1724, where it functioned for nearly 70 years before being secularized in 1793.

By 1800, the area that now is Texas had a settled population of about 5,000 people, mostly living in San Antonio, Goliad and other villages on the frontier. In 1803, La Segunda Compañía Volante de San Carlos de Parras, a company of Spanish lancers, began fortifying the former mission de Valero, converting it to military use. The company, from Alamo de Parras in Mexico, has been credited with giving the site its new name - the Alamo - and repurposing the mission, which would become the setting of the famed 1836 battle for Texas independence from Mexico.

Construction of a Spanish colonial-era lookout tower and gunpowder storage house about 1.5 miles east of the Alamo, possibly by the same company of cavalrymen, dates as early as 1807, according to known archival documents. The two structures were used to protect the Alamo and nearby village, and were later occupied by Mexican forces during the storied 13-day siege and battle in 1836. Although the two structures are believed to have been demolished some time after the Civil War, city officials announced in October 2016 the discovery of the base of a wall identifying the site in today's City Cemetery No. 2 on the East Side.

On Sept. 16, 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costillo's Grito de Dolores would start more than a decade of rebellion, with many Tejanos fighting for an independent Texas within a new republic of Mexico. The entry of Agustín de Iturbide's army in Mexico City on Sept. 27, 1821, marked the end of Spanish rule and began an era of colonization of Texas by settlers from Mexico and the United States.

[shuddleston@express-news.net](mailto:shuddleston@express-news.net)

Twitter: [@shuddlestonSA](https://twitter.com/shuddlestonSA)

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