

Spain Responds to a French Threat

Why It Matters Now

Spanish and French cultures have strongly influenced Texan culture.

TERMS & NAMES

Alonso de León, San Francisco de los Tejas, **presidio**, Ramón expedition, San Antonio de Valero

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify important events, issues, and individuals related to the establishment of Catholic missions in Texas.
2. Identify important events, issues, and individuals related to European colonization of Texas.
3. Explain why the date 1718 is important to Texas history.

MAIN IDEA

Fierce rivals, Spain and France both wanted to claim Texas. Spain controlled the lands to the west. France controlled the lands to the east. Each country would have to establish permanent settlements in Texas to keep its rival out.

WHAT Would You Do?

Write your response to *Interact with History* in your *Texas Notebook*.



INTERACT WITH HISTORY

Imagine that you have been sent to establish a settlement in an area that your country wants to claim. After interviewing inhabitants of the area, you find the remains of an earlier colony. Upon your return, you are asked whether you think your own country should establish settlements in the same area. How would you respond?

The Race to Claim Texas

For France and Spain, two of the most powerful countries in Europe in the late 1600s, the race was on for control of Texas. Texas lay between Spanish Mexico and French Louisiana, and neither country had yet colonized the area. Both countries knew that their claims to the region would continue to be challenged until they permanently occupied the land. From the late 1600s through most of the 1700s, Spain moved to secure its claim to Texas.

Until the late 1600s, Spaniards had been busy settling parts of Mexico and New Mexico. However, after Spanish officials found out that La Salle had established Fort St. Louis for the French, they sent expeditions to Texas—by sea and by land. The goal was to find and destroy La Salle's fort. In June of 1686 Alonso de León and an expedition party set off for Texas. They searched along the Rio Grande. De León traveled as far east as the Neches River, but he still found no sign of the French. Finally, on April 22, 1689, during his fourth land expedition, de León found Fort St. Louis abandoned and lying in ruins. Nearby the Spanish found the bodies of three French settlers, which they buried.



Alonso de León

As Alonso de León traveled through the land, he also named several rivers, including the Nueces, Medina, and Hondo Rivers. In addition, de León established the first East Texas mission, San Francisco de los Tejas.

● **Why do you think de León gave the rivers names?**





TEXAS VOICES

We went to look and found all the houses sacked, the boxes all broken, and the bottle cases also, the other furnishings that the settlers had had; more than 200 books (it seemed) in the French language, broken, and the pages thrown in the patios were rotten. We discerned that the aggressors of these dead had taken all that they had outside the houses, and divided it, and that which was of no use to them they destroyed.

General Alonso de León, journal, April 22, 1689

After destroying the remains of the fort, de León explored the region known today as East Texas. He visited with several Caddoes, whom he called the Tejas. He found the soil fertile, the climate good, and the native peoples friendly. Father Damián Massanet (mass•ah•NEH), who traveled with de León, visited with the Caddo chiefs and interpreted their friendliness as eagerness to become Catholics.

Spain Begins Building Missions

The viceroy of New Spain was encouraged by de León’s favorable report of the land and Father Massanet’s request to convert the Caddoes to the Catholic religion. He approved the colonization of Texas. De León and Massanet were asked to return to East Texas to found a mission.

In 1690 de León and Massanet set out with several priests and about 100 soldiers to colonize the “land of the Tejas.” Shortly after their arrival, the priests celebrated mass in the first mission in East Texas, Mission San Francisco de los Tejas. A second mission, Santísimo Nombre de María, was founded that same year a few miles away on the Neches River. After several Native Texans and a priest became ill and died, the Santa María, as it was known, was abandoned. Still,

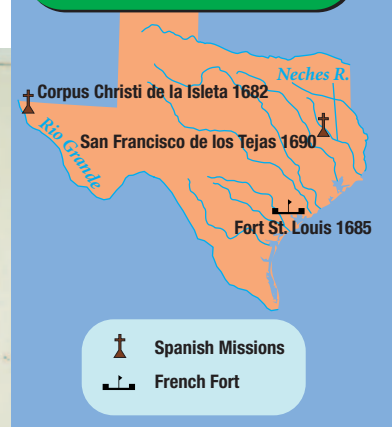


LOCATION

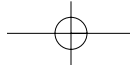
The first missions faced many problems. First, they were established at the far edge of the Mexican frontier. It could take months to travel from the missions all the way to Mexico City for news and supplies. Also, because the missions were located in the forested areas of East Texas, hundreds of trees had to be cleared for crops. The native peoples were not willing to work hard for strangers, and few people from central Mexico were willing to leave their homes for a difficult life in a distant land.

● **Why did Spain locate missions in this area?**

Early Spanish Missions, 1682–1690



◀ When the Spaniards arrived in East Texas, they drew a map of a Caddo village and fields along a river. The Caddo grass houses shown on the map could be quite large, housing several families. ● **In what ways was the Caddo village probably different from other Native Texan communities the Spaniards saw?**



THEN & NOW

MISSION SAN FRANCISCO DE LOS TEJAS

Since its founding in 1690, Mission San Francisco de los Tejas has changed locations and/or names five times. San Francisco de los Tejas is considered to be the first Spanish mission in East Texas and was constructed near the present-day town of Weches. After two or three years, the mission was abandoned and burned. In 1716 Domingo Ramón moved the mission to Bowles Creek and reestablished it as Nuestro Padre San Francisco de los Tejas.

In 1719 a small French invasion known as the “Chicken War” caused Spain to abandon the mission again. Two years later, it was moved to near present-day Alto and renamed San Francisco de los Neches. In 1730 part of the mission was abandoned, and the rest was moved to the Colorado River in Central Texas. For once, the mission did not change names.

However, one year later, it was moved to its final location on the San Antonio River and renamed Mission San Francisco de la Espada. Today, Espada and three other missions make up the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. More than a million people visit the park each year. ● **In all, Mission San Francisco de los Tejas has had four names. What do all of these names have in common?**



Reconstruction of the original San Francisco de los Tejas



Today, renamed San Francisco de la Espada, in San Antonio

the Spaniards believed that the Caddoes’ friendliness and their trade network with other native groups would help spread the Catholic religion and secure Texas for Spain.

All appeared well at their first mission, and de León and Massanet returned to Mexico City to obtain supplies and government support. The viceroy of Spain sent Domingo Terán de los Ríos to build eight more missions in Texas. Terán de los Ríos was also told to explore the country and to look for any French explorers in the area. He was named governor of the new Spanish province of Tejas.

Spain’s First Missions Fail

In 1691 Terán de los Ríos and Father Massanet explored East Texas and visited a number of Caddoan villages. They also paid a visit to San Francisco de los Tejas. What they found was a mission in crisis. Crops had failed due to a drought, and disease had killed many Native Texans. As a result, some of the Native Texans in the area had become hostile. Also, most of the native peoples were not interested in giving up their way of life to help the priests clear land for crops or working to support the mission. As a result, supplies ran low. It soon became clear to Spanish officials and Father Massanet that the project could not succeed without a constant flow of supplies.

Multicultural Connections

Native Groups and Mission Life

Mission life was quite different from the life most Native Texans knew. They were expected to live inside the high mission walls instead of roaming freely throughout the land. Also, the friars in the mission taught about their strange new god in Spanish—a language that most native peoples did not understand. ● **What do you think the missionaries could have done to make mission life appeal more to Native Texans?**



On October 25, 1693, Spain ended its first attempt to settle Texas. The missions had suffered many problems and had lost the support of the local people. Also, the French no longer appeared to be a threat in Texas. Deciding that the costs outweighed the benefits, Spain abandoned its Texas missions.

However, this first attempt to occupy Texas was not a total failure. The Spaniards had learned much about Texas and its native groups. Spain realized that it would have to establish settlements and provide military support if it wanted to occupy Texas permanently.

The French Return

For the next 20 years, Spain put little effort into colonizing Texas. However, when the French decided to return to the area, Spain became interested again. In 1699 France built a trading post at Biloxi, in present-day Mississippi. Three years later, it built another at Mobile, in present-day Alabama. From these two bases, the French established a presence in the region, developing trade relationships with Native Americans.

Realizing that the French were drawing nearer, one Spaniard decided to make a rather bold request. Father Francisco Hidalgo, who had been at Mission San Francisco de los Tejas, was concerned about the baptized Native Texans in that area. Without the missions, the Native Texans had no priest nearby and no church to attend. He was disappointed when officials in Mexico City denied his request to start another East Texas mission. In 1713 Father Hidalgo sent a letter to Lamothe Cadillac, the French governor of Louisiana. In it, he asked that French Catholic priests be sent to provide religious services to the local native groups. Hidalgo did not tell the Spanish government that he was making this request.



TRADING PARTNERS

France was eager to move into East Texas. However, after the failure of La Salle's colony, the French were interested mainly in trade. Also, they did not establish missions as the Spaniards did. The French usually got along well with Native Texans. They did not attempt to change the Native Texans' way of life. They often learned the native languages. The French traded items such as guns and blankets. In exchange, they often received valuable furs and skins.

- ▼ France was interested in trading with the Native Americans to obtain items such as furs and skins. ● Why were the Spanish concerned about French traders?





TEXAS
TIDBITS

NACOGDOCHES VERSUS NATCHITOCHES

Legend has it that a Native Texan from the Nacogdoche band of the Caddoes named both Nacogdoches, Texas, and Natchitoches, Louisiana. According to the legend, a chief sent out his twin sons from the group's home on the Sabine River. One son was sent three days to the west. The other son was sent three days to the east. The settlement in the west was named Nacogdoches, which is the Spanish spelling for the Nacogdoche group. The settlement in the east was named Natchitoches, which is the French spelling for the same group.

presidio *a military post or fortified settlement in an area under Spanish control*

- ▼ Domingo Ramón established Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña. ● **How many other missions were established by the Ramón expedition?**



Governor Cadillac saw Hidalgo's letter as an invitation for the French to visit Spanish territory. In 1714 he sent Louis Juchereau de St. Denis (ZHU•shuh•row deh sayn duh•NEE) across the Rio Grande to Mission San Juan Bautista, where Father Hidalgo was living.

An Unlikely Partnership

The Spanish government was alarmed by St. Denis's presence. He not only had crossed into Spanish territory without permission but also had arrived at Mission San Juan Bautista with a large supply of goods to trade with the Spanish colonists. Both of these actions were against Spanish law.

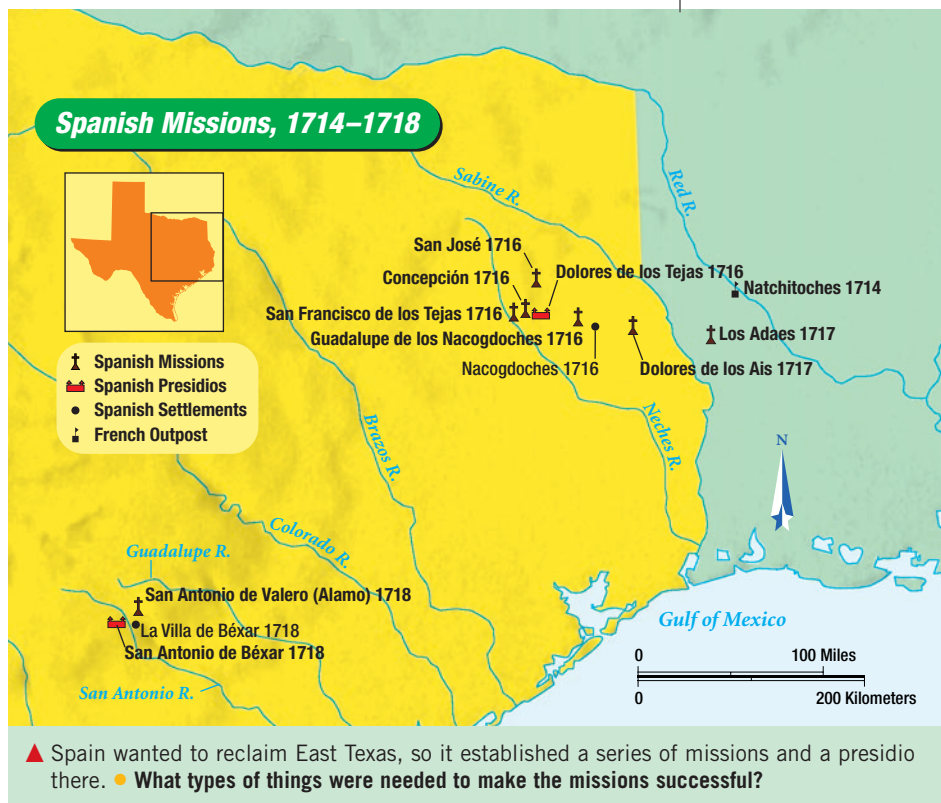
Upon his arrival at San Juan Bautista, St. Denis was arrested by the commander of the **presidio**, Diego Ramón. While he was in custody, St. Denis won Ramón's friendship and fell in love with his granddaughter, Manuela Sánchez. Nevertheless, St. Denis was sent to Mexico City to explain his presence in Texas. St. Denis pleaded his case to the Spanish viceroy. He explained that he was working with Father Hidalgo to help the native groups in East Texas. St. Denis assured the viceroy that France had no plans to build colonies in Spanish territory.

The viceroy set him free but strongly doubted that France would stay out of East Texas. To protect its claim on the region, Spain would have to establish a series of missions there. The viceroy commissioned Captain Domingo Ramón to lead an expedition. He appointed St. Denis to guide the group because of his knowledge of the land and his good relationship with the Native Texans. St. Denis also was allowed to marry Manuela before beginning his journey.

Spain Reclaims East Texas

The Ramón expedition left San Juan Bautista in June 1716 with 65 people, including soldiers, settlers, and priests. They also brought many cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. The group's first order of business was to reopen Mission San Francisco de los Tejas. The mission was reopened only a few miles from the original site. It was renamed San Francisco de los Tejas. By the end of 1716, the Ramón expedition had established six missions from the Neches River eastward to near Natchitoches (NAK•uh•tawsh), Louisiana. The group also built a presidio on the Neches River across from the San Francisco mission.

In order to succeed, the new missions would need a steady stream of supplies. Spain began looking for a suitable midpoint for supply caravans traveling from central Mexico to East Texas. Father Antonio de Buenaventura y Olivares was stationed at Mission San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande. He suggested that Spain should build the support post near the San Antonio River. He and Martín de Alarcón were given permission to establish the much-needed midpoint settlement.



On May 1, 1718, they established Mission San Antonio de Valero (vah•LAY•roh). Across the river from the mission, Alarcón established Presidio San Antonio de Béxar. About ten families settled around the presidio, calling the settlement La Villa (VEE•yuh) de Béxar. The settlement at San Antonio de Béxar would become the most important Spanish colony in Texas, and later the city of San Antonio. But Alarcón's work was not yet finished. From San Antonio de Béxar, he traveled eastward and established another mission at the former site of Fort St. Louis.

Frightened Spaniards Retreat

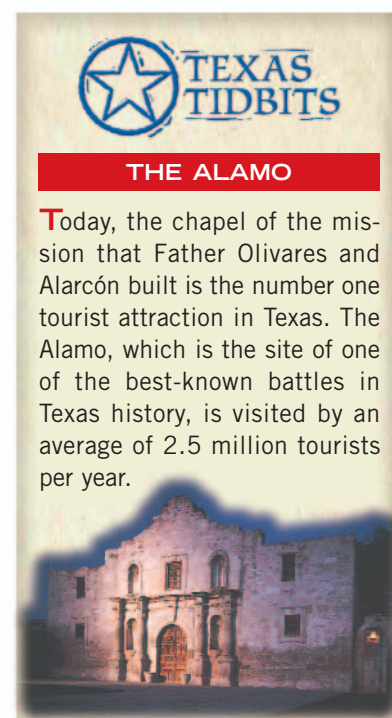
In East Texas the new missions were not very successful. Most Native Texans in the region had little use for the mission way of life. Accustomed to living freely and following their own rules, they refused to take orders from the priests or help with the daily chores at the missions. As a result, food and other supplies began to run low.

Meanwhile in Europe, France and Spain began to struggle over who would control the Mediterranean islands of Sicily and Sardinia. In 1719 war broke out between the two countries. When the French in Louisiana learned about the war, they turned to Lieutenant Philippe Blondel at the French post in Natchitoches. He and six soldiers were sent to capture the Spanish mission near present-day Nacogdoches.

The few priests and friars living at the mission were no match for Blondel and his men. The French soldiers looted the mission, taking livestock and other items of value. Blondel himself took a number of items, including several chickens that he tied to his saddle. When the lieutenant climbed into his saddle to leave, the chickens began squawking and flapping wildly. Blondel's horse reared up, throwing the officer to the ground. As the other soldiers scrambled to help their leader, some of



▲ The East Texas mission San José de los Nazonis, founded in 1716, was later moved to San Antonio and renamed San Juan Capistrano. Many of the East Texas missions were given names that the Spanish used for native groups in each area, such as the Tejas, Nazonis, Adaes, and Ais. • Why do you think the missions were named after native groups?





▲ This French map shows the enormous areas of the French and Spanish claims in North America. Note the detail showing Texas.

- What features of Texas are most noticeable on this map? Why were they important to show?

the Spaniards managed to escape. One of the friars was able to find his way to Presidio Dolores on the Neches River.

At the presidio, the friar greatly exaggerated the event. Instead of reporting seven French soldiers, he claimed that a large French force was invading Texas. As the news spread, families, missionaries, and soldiers in East Texas panicked. Even Captain Domingo Ramón began to worry. Realizing that he could never defend his people against a large military force, Ramón ordered all Spaniards to leave East Texas. In October of 1719, they retreated to La Villa at San Antonio de Béxar.

Without even trying, the French had run the Spaniards out of East Texas. The incident, which historians refer to as the “Chicken War,” proved that the Spaniards had a weak hold on East Texas. It also humiliated them in the eyes of many Native Texans. When the viceroy realized what had happened, he became more determined than ever to reclaim Texas.

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

Identify:

- Alonso de León
- presidio
- Ramón expedition

Organizing Information

Using a chart like the one shown, list the pros and cons of establishing Spanish missions in East Texas.

SHOULD SPAIN ESTABLISH MISSIONS IN EAST TEXAS?	
Pros	Cons

Which outweighs the other—the pros or cons?

Critical Thinking

1. Summarize Spain's first two attempts to establish Catholic missions in East Texas.
2. Why did the Spaniards' first two attempts at colonization fail?
3. What important mission was built in Texas in 1718? Why do you think this mission was important to Texas history?

Interact with History

Review your response to *Interact with History* in your Texas Notebook. After finding Fort St. Louis in ruins, Alonso de León reported to the viceroy that Spain should establish colonies in East Texas. What do you think was De León's reasoning? Was his decision wise? Explain.

ACTIVITY

Economics

Spain went to great expense and risked many colonists' lives to establish a presence in Texas. Debate whether or not you think Spain's losses were worth the benefits of controlling Texas.