

The Spanish Missions of Texas

In the 1670s and 1680s, French explorers from Canada visited the Mississippi Valley, and established contact with the different indigenous groups in the region. In the early 1680s La Salle followed the Mississippi River to its mouth, and returned in 1684 to establish a colony at the mouth of the river. The French failed to find the river mouth, and instead landed on the Texas coast and established Fort St. Louis. The colony failed because of the hostility of the Karankawas, the local indigenous group, as well as dissention within the French colony. In 1685, La Salle abandoned Fort St. Louis, and decided to walk back to Canada. One of the French colonists killed La Salle, but the survivors did reach Canada after a journey on foot that lasted a year.

The establishment of a rival European colony on the fringe of Mexico posed a potential threat to Spanish hegemony. The Mexico City government organized expeditions by land and sea to locate the French colony, and eventually found the abandoned Fort St. Louis. Even though the French had left, the Spanish government sent an expedition in 1690 to establish a presidio and mission among the Hasinai [Caddo] of the east Texas Piney Woods. The missions failed by 1693 because of the indifference of the Hasinai, and a drought and epidemic that the Hasinai shaman blamed on the Franciscan missionaries. In 1693, the Spanish abandoned the Texas missions.

The French returned to the Mississippi Valley, and in 1713 established an outpost at

Natchitoches in what today is western Louisiana. In 1716, with some prompting from the French, the Spanish established missions and a presidio among the Hasinai. In 1718, the Franciscans added a mission at San Antonio, halfway between the east Texas missions and the Rio Grande River. A major expedition mounted by the Marques de Aguayo in the early 1720s resulted in the establishment of new missions and presidios.

The Spanish colonization of Texas can be divided into two distinct periods, 1716-1763 and 1763-1821. During the first period the Spanish established a number of ephemeral or otherwise unsuccessful missions in response to real or perceived threats from the French in Louisiana. After France ceded Louisiana to Spain, Texas lost its importance as a buffer, and the Spanish retrenched by abandoning a number of missions and settlements. By 1800, the Spanish presence consisted of Nacagdoches and missions, presidios, and a town on the San Antonio River. One factor that influenced the development of Spanish Texas was warfare with hostile indigenous groups such as the Lipan Apaches and Comanches. Because of the threat of attack, the Franciscans had most missions built with defensive features such as towers.

Few missions survive as a reminder of a century of Spanish rule in Texas. Five are found along the San Antonio River in the city of the same name, and another two south at the modern town of Goliad. There are also non-mission structures in San Antonio and Nacagdoches.

The Five San Antonio Area Missions.

San Antonio de Valero, established in 1718. Better known as the Alamo, the scene of an important battle during the 1836 Texas revolution.



**San Jose y San Miguel de Aguayo,
established in 1720. The photo shows the
stone church completed in the 1780s.**



Another view of the church and convento or residence of the Franciscans.



Panoramic view of mission.



La Purisima Concepcion moved to the San Antonio area from east Texas in 1731. Church completed in the 1750s.



A view of the convento.



Painting on the ceiling of one room of the convento.



San Juan Capistrano, moved to the San Antonio area from east Texas in 1731.



Another view of San Juan Capistrano.



The church of San Francisco de la Espada, moved to San Antonio from east Texas in 1731.

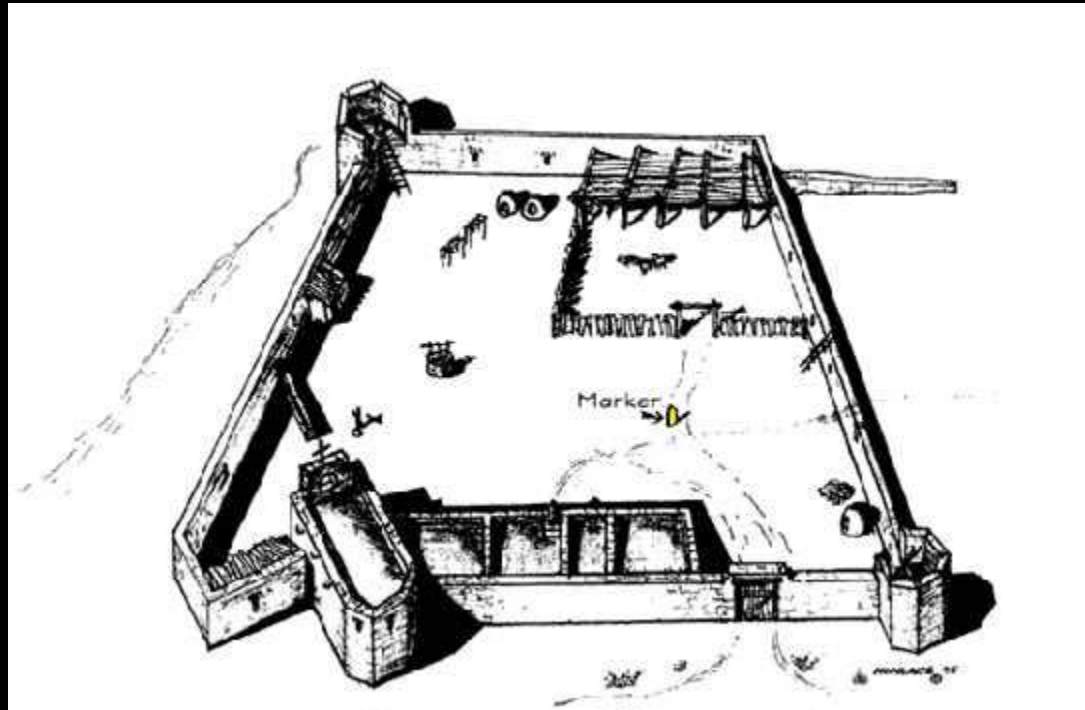


Robert H. Jackson

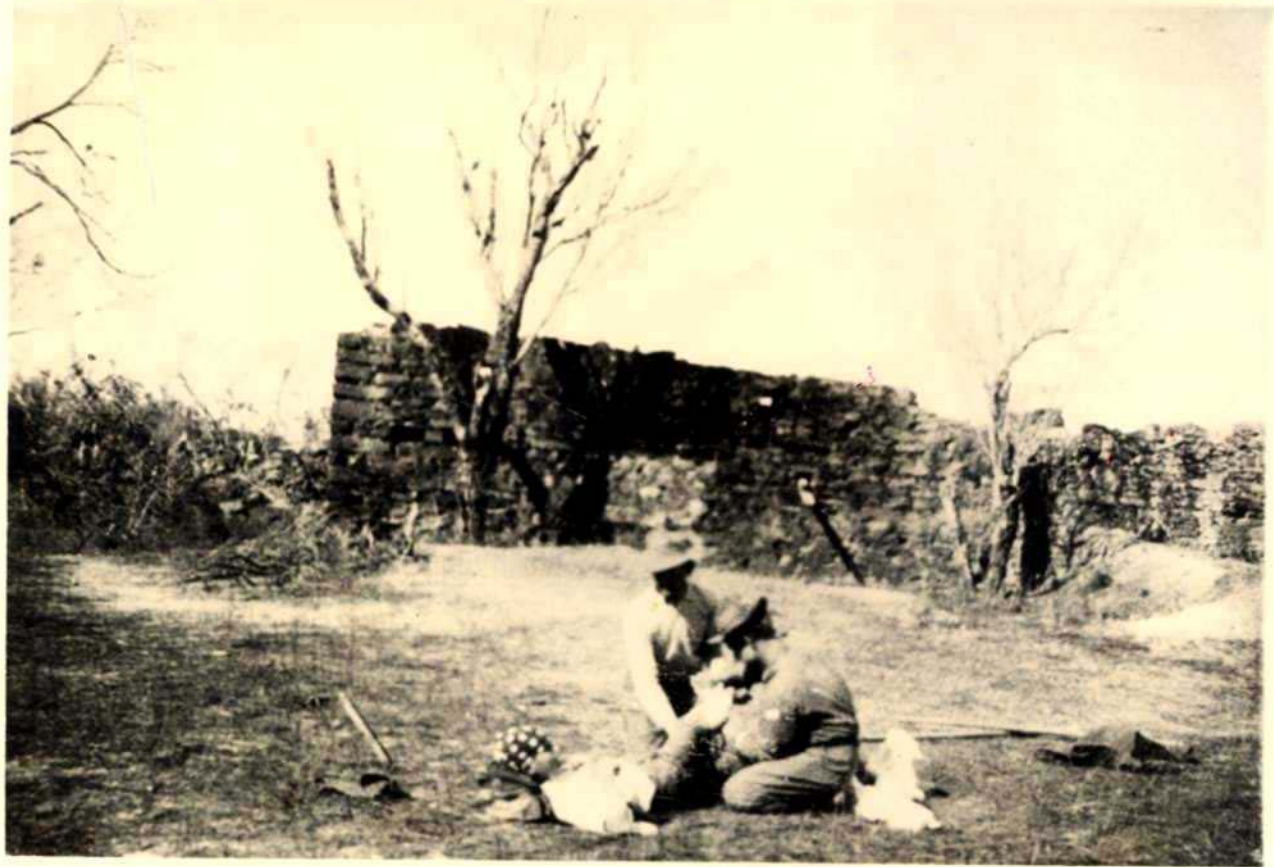
Ruins of Indian housing at San Francisco.



Artists reconstruction of Rancho Las Cabras, of San Francisco mission.



Early 20th century photo of Las Cabras ruins.



Goliad area missions.

**Espiritu Santo mission established in 1722
and moved to its current location in 1749.**



Another view of Espiritu Santo mission.



Another view of Espiritu Santo mission.



Ruins of Rosario mission, established in 1754 and abandoned in 1807.



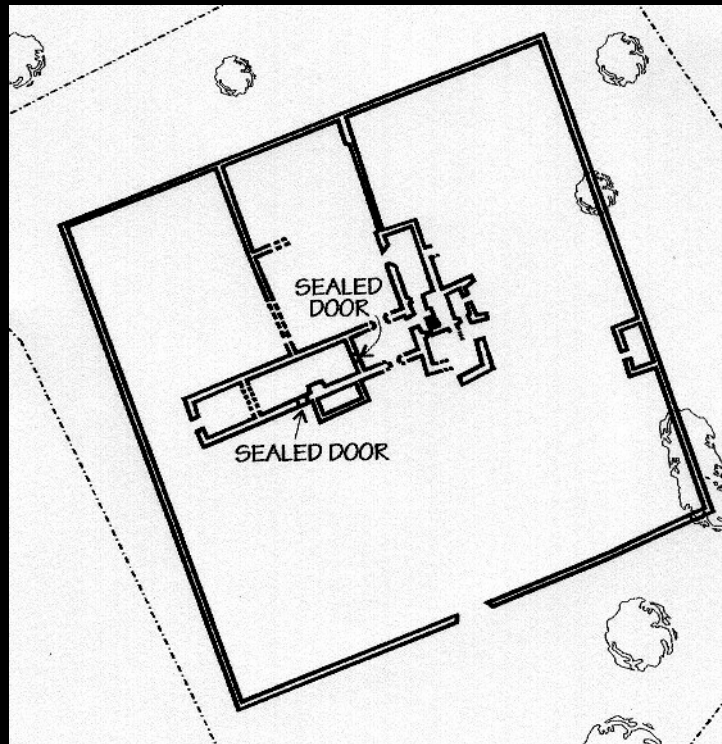
Another view of the ruins of Rosario mission.



Rosario mission ruins from the air.



Map of Rosario mission.



In the late 1750s, the Spanish made a first effort to reduce the Lipan Apache to missions. In 1758, a large force of hostile Indians destroyed San Saba mission, the mission established for the Apaches. Pictured are the ruins of the presidio established to protect San Saba mission.

