

Life in the Missions

Some settlers lived in the towns and presidios of Texas, but it was mostly the missions that helped New Spain grow. At first people in the missions worked hard just to survive. In time, however, the missions became the center of many settlements in New Spain.

Prayer and Work

The day started early at the Spanish missions. Bells rang at sunrise to call everyone together for prayers. After prayers, the Native Americans went to religious classes. Then they had breakfast. After breakfast the workday began.

At noon the mission bells rang again to signal lunchtime. Maize, squash, beans, and beef made up a typical lunch meal. Usually, a rest period followed lunch. Then everyone went back to work until sunset. At sunset the bells called everyone together for a short rest and more prayers. A dinner of maize and fish often marked the end of the day.

During the workday, missionaries taught carpentry, iron-working, and other skills to Indian men. Indian women learned skills such as candle making, soap making, and weaving. Some Indians worked on nearby mission ranches and farms.

At mission ranches some Indians tended cattle, sheep, goats, and other animals. Some mission ranches also raised horses. Spanish settlers depended on the ranches for meat, milk, cheese, leather, and other goods.



Settlers also depended on mission farms. At many farms, ditches were dug to nearby rivers or streams to bring water to the crops. Some farmers around San Antonio and in other parts of Texas still use these ditches for irrigation.

Because of the skills the Indians learned and then put to use, some missions became self-sufficient, or able to make everything that was needed.

Missions not able to become self-sufficient had to depend on goods from Mexico or Spain.



Native American irrigation ditches

Native Americans and the Missions

Spanish missionaries wanted to make Native Americans part of the Spanish community. To do this, they encouraged Native Americans to live at the missions. Some chose to live in the missions to avoid fighting with other Indian groups. Others came because their food supply was scarce.

Native Americans also looked to the missions for medical help. Diseases such as smallpox and measles had been unknown in North America before Europeans brought them over by accident. By the late 1700s many Indians had died from these diseases.

To stay at some missions, Native Americans had to follow strict rules. They were expected to give up their religious beliefs and become Catholic. They could not wear tribal clothing or hold Native American religious ceremonies.

Many Native Americans could not get used to mission life. Some were nomads and had never settled in one place. The Spanish also made Native Americans work long hours at the missions. The work could be dangerous or dull. Sometimes Native Americans were treated badly by missionaries and presidio soldiers.



Native Americans working in a Spanish Mission

Many Native Americans fought to keep their own cultures. They tried to resist, or act against, the Spanish. When the Indians resisted, they were often punished by the Spanish. Some Native Americans fought back or started revolts against the missionaries. A revolt is an action against people in charge.

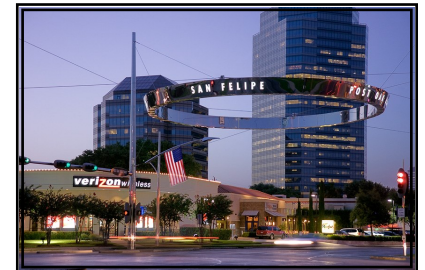
Spanish Heritage in Texas

Fewer than 30 Spanish missions were built in Texas, but they helped shape the culture of Texas today. The Spanish heritage can be found everywhere in the state. Heritage is a way of life, a custom, or a belief that has come from the past and continues today.

Missions, presidios, and other early Spanish settlements can be found throughout Texas. Most of these places are now historical sites or state parks.

The first schools in Texas were at the Spanish missions. The ranches that the Spanish started helped the city of San Antonio and other towns in southern Texas to grow.

Many people in Texas speak and write the Spanish language. The names of many Texas river, cities, and landforms show the importance of the Spanish settlement of Texas.



Many street signs in Texas show that Spanish Heritage is important in our state.



Many missions in Texas are tourists spots today.



The name of the Guadalupe River, and this state park, showcases the Spanish influences in Texas.