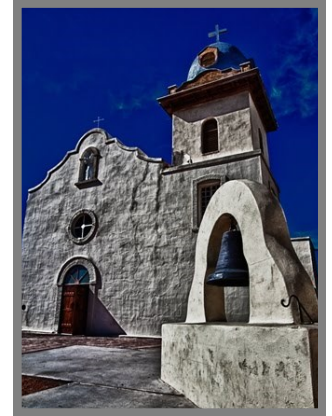


Missions, Presidios, and Early Towns

Even though Fort St. Louis had been destroyed, the fact that there had been a French colony in Texas worried the Spanish. To hold on to their claims, the Spanish began their own settlements north of the Rio Grande. In the late 1600s and early 1700s, they built missions, or religious settlements, in that area. To protect the missions, the Spanish constructed forts. Later, Spanish settlers started the first towns in Texas.

The Missions

In 1682 the Spanish built their first mission in what is now Texas near El Paso. The mission was called Ysleta. Eight years later the Spanish built a mission in eastern Texas, near the present-day town of Weches. By 1750, there were more than 20 Spanish missions in Texas.



Ysleta

The missions were run by Catholic priests. The priests were missionaries, or people who teach their religion to others. The Spanish built most of their missions near Indian villages. The missionaries hoped to convert Native Americans to the Catholic religion. At the missions, many Native Americans saw Europeans for the first time.

Most missions were surrounded by walls for protection. Inside the walls were houses, workplaces, a school, and a church. The missionaries taught Native Americans the Catholic religion, the Spanish language, and the Spanish ways of life.



What a typical Spanish Mission looked like

Most missions also had farms and ranches. The missionaries taught the Indians to farm in the European way and to care for cattle. Before the Spanish came, there had been no cattle or horses north of the Rio Grande for thousands of years. Some of the first vaqueros (vah*KAY*rohs), or cowhands, in Texas were Indians trained by Spanish people.

Presidios



Presidio La Bahia

Soldiers came with the missionaries to the lands north of the Rio Grande. The soldiers protected the people living in and near the missions. They built presidios (pray*SEE*dee*ohs), or forts, for protection.

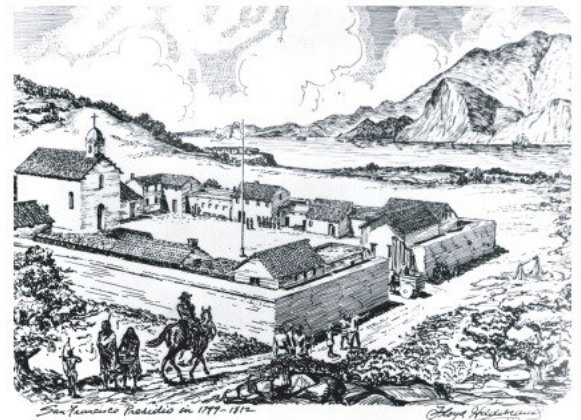


Example of a cannon in a presidio

Presidios were made mostly of wood, stone, or adobe. Around each presidio stood a wall, often in the shape of a square or a rectangle. The wall reached 10 feet (3m) high in places. Sometimes, soldiers placed cannons on top of the wall. Some presidios had small towers at the corners of the wall.

Most presidios had one main gate and sometimes a rear gate. These gates could be locked from the inside. Inside the presidio walls were many buildings. Some were houses for soldiers and their families. Others held weapons and supplies. Often a chapel, or small church, was one of the buildings.

Each presidio usually had a small number of soldiers. Their main job was to protect the Spanish settlements. They also delivered mail and supplies. Like the missions, the presidios helped the Spanish government control its lands north of the Rio Grande.



A typical Spanish Presidio



The back side of Presidio La Bahia

Early Towns

One of the best known early Spanish settlements in Texas was San Antonio de Bexar. It was started in 1718 as a mission and presidio. Later, the Spanish government built a town near the mission to attract settlers.

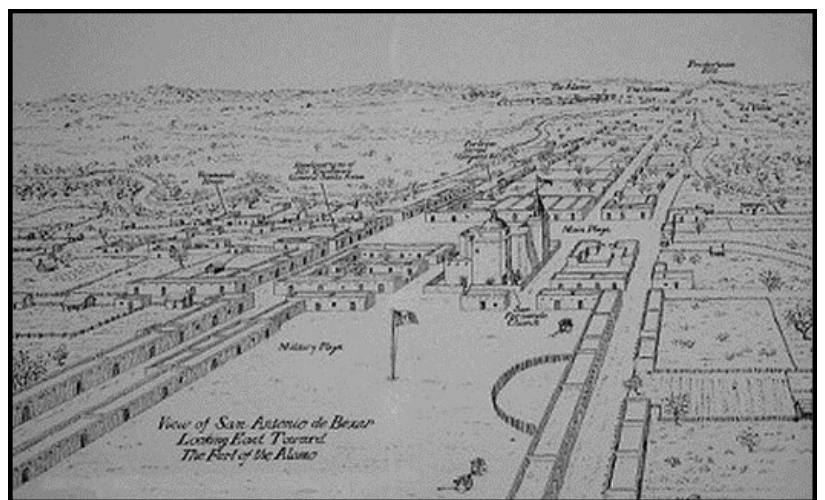
The plan for the town included a plaza, or town square, at its center.

The streets all met there. An irrigation system was also part of the town plan. It brought water from the San Antonio River to homes and crops.

The Spanish government offered free land, money and supplies to people who would live in the new town. Most of the settlers were mestizos, people whose ancestors were both Spanish and Indian. The settlers named the town Villa de San Fernando. It later became San Antonio.

Even with towns like San Antonio, Spanish settlement north of the Rio Grande was slow. Settlers often fought with Native Americans. Many Native American groups also battled each other. Few settlers wanted to live where they might be killed in an Indian War.

The early Spanish settlements faced other problems. Drought dried up many crops. Floods washed away other crops. Diseases killed large numbers of people. Despite these problems, most of the settlements survived.



Sketch of an early Texas town

After the mid-1700s, other people began receiving land in Texas from the Spanish government. Some of these settlers built ranchos-the Spanish word for "ranches." The first ranchos in Texas were set up in the valley of the Rio Grande. By the end of the 1700s, ranchos were at the center of the ranching industry in Texas.

