

Audio 3: Arrival of the Europeans

Becoming Texas Audio Guides

Avery S.: Europeans came to the land that is now the United States for each of their own reasons. Well, not quite all differently. The Spanish came for gold, just like the British would 79 years later. The French sailed to North and South America for trading posts and resources including gold. The first European colonizer to reach Texas was Alonso Alvarez de Piñeda. Spain had heard that there was news of gold and silver, so they sent soldiers to find it, and to achieve their goal of “God, glory, and gold.” Piñeda did not find these things in Texas but he did map the Gulf Coast.

The first encounters in the land that was to be Texas was when Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca washed up on the Texan shore close to what we now call Galveston in 1628. The Karankawan tribe found him and gave him hospitality, by feeding and giving him and his comrades shelter. Even though they nursed Cabeza de Vaca and his crew back to health, they would react in a very different way to other colonizers from both France and Spain later. This was after they had experienced harsh treatment from the colonizers. The Spanish ended up having a longer stay in Texas than the French colonizers. The French mostly came here to trade for furs. Some Native Americans tribes developed working relationships with the French through the mutual benefits of trading beaver furs for French goods.

Emily F.: As Europeans sailed over the Atlantic Ocean, they took with them plants, animals, and diseases that affected not only lives but landscapes on both sides of the ocean. This was called the Columbian Exchange, named for Christopher Columbus who made several trips back and forth from the Americas to Europe. The diseases traveled with breathtaking speed to the Native Americans who hadn't previously been exposed to them. If smallpox was severe among the colonizers, it was terrible to the Native Americans. Smallpox killed more Native Americans in the early centuries than any other disease or problem. It also was not unusual for half a tribe to be wiped out; on some occasions, the entire tribe perished.

Not only did diseases make their way over the ocean, but plants were transferred from Europe to the Americas and vice versa. New crops that came from the United States to Europe were maize, sweet potatoes, beans, squashes, peanuts, and more. These new crops changed how Europeans lived and farmed.

Move to the left side of this case to learn about the Spanish Conquistadors and their relationship with the Native Americans.