

Audio 5: French Interlopers

Becoming Texas Audio Guides

Heath K.: At this point in your tour, you have learned about the failed La Salle colony in Texas and seen one of the French colonist's boats, the previously sunk La Belle. Now, let's set some context. How much influence did the French have on Texas?

Although the French flag is one of six over Texas, the French never had any real political control or official claims. The French had always been more focused on trade making than any sort of settlement. They were often distracted by the problems in Europe, and didn't have the means for colonial ventures like other European countries during this time.

It took more than a century for the French to return to Texas. On March 2, 1836 Texas became its own country but the United States did not recognize The Republic of Texas until 1837. In 1841 laws were established allowing for colonization efforts because the population was too small for a nation. The Texans invited the French to bring colonists for a large land bonus. A wealthy French Bank owner, Henri Castro, took advantage of the law. He brought over 2,000 French Alsatians. The French settlement called Castroville was in west San Antonio and is still a functioning town with French heritage.

Aditi R.: The French used Native American lands in relatively less disruptive ways in comparison to other colonial powers. This played out in states other than Texas but seemed to be a pattern for development and settlement. One of the reasons is due to New France's economy revolving around the fur trade, instead of agriculture or mining. This means that the French did not have a use for the Native American land, resulting in a better relationship with them.

Another reason that the French use of Native American land was less was because of the slow rate of population spillover from France. This means that with fewer colonials, settlements did not pop up as rapidly. Though the French were Catholics, they were less pushy about this topic than the Spanish, who tried to completely erase the identity of the Native American people. While the French relocated certain Native American people, bullied some to fight their enemies, and used liquor to better profits, they had a basic racial acceptance of Native Americans. Overall the French often treated the Native Americans much better than the British, Spanish, and English, due to the fur trade, the slow rate of population spillover, and their acceptance of their culture and religion.

Proceed to the next exhibit to learn about how the Spanish expanded into East Texas after hearing about La Salle's expedition.