

Audio 6: Spanish Expansion and Missions

Becoming Texas Audio Guides

Sage G.: Before the Spanish and French colonists came to the land that is now the United States, they had a rocky relationship. It came to a head in 1635 when the Franco-Spanish War began in Europe and lasted 24 years. Meanwhile in the colonies, Texas lay between Spanish Mexico and French Louisiana. From the late 1600s through most of the 1700s, the Spanish tried to claim Texas. The Spanish hadn't really been that dedicated to colonizing Texas until the French started to explore East Texas. Then the Spanish really started to take notice of it and started building settlements called Missions.

Originally, the Spaniards were settling in Mexico and New Mexico, but when they heard about the French, they sent expeditions to Texas. They expected to destroy the French's Fort St. Louis, but instead they found the fort abandoned and three bodies of French settlers. Even though Fort St. Louis was no longer a threat, the Spanish wanted to settle the area to make sure the French didn't return. So they began to build missions. The French didn't really take much interest in Texas for a while, only returning to trade. They did not establish missions like the Spanish did.

Charlie W.: For more than a century, the first Christians to encounter the Native Americans were Spanish Catholics who set up missions. Missions were religious outposts made by Spanish priests, supported by the Spanish crown, whose goal was to teach the Native Americans their Catholic religious beliefs while spreading Spanish culture. The Spanish wanted to convert the Native Americans because they wanted them to be Spanish citizens and being a practicing Catholic was a requirement at the time. Conversion was important, but they largely wanted more citizens who could protect the territory from French invasion. In doing this, they didn't always treat the Native Americans fairly or respect their cultures or spiritual beliefs. However, different tribes had different relationships with the Spanish. The Comanche and Kiowa were largely hostile, for example. However, many Apache, needing food and protection, actually would stay in the missions during the winter months and leave during the warm months, much to the annoyance of the Spanish friars.

Missions were accompanied by presidios, which were fortified military settlements. Presidios were a way that the Spanish protected the missions. The presidios were meant to provide military support for the missions until the settlements could support themselves. The main purpose of the presidios was to protect the colonists from tribal attacks.

At times, violence erupted in the missions such as when the Pueblo tribe of New Mexico rebelled against Spanish missionaries. The Spanish governor of New Mexico had killed several Pueblo leaders and publicly whipped others in the tribe. In 1680, the Pueblo Revolt took place. Many Native Americans worked together with other Pueblo communities in the Santa Fe area to plan and enact an armed resistance against Spanish colonists. They successfully fought against the religious, economic, and political institutions that the Spanish were trying to force upon them.

Bullock Texas State History Museum

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