

Episode 16 - (Chapter 5) Nacogdoches and San Augustine Early Texas Settlements

Howdy folks, welcome to another chapter of The Hidden History of Texas.

In the latest episodes, I mentioned a couple of early Texas settlements, San Augustine, and Nacogdoches.. Today I want to concentrate on them because they were both very important to the settlement of Texas and they would play a role when Texas sought its independence from Mexico.

If you were coming into Texas from Louisiana you'll encounter San Augustine first and then if you continue west you'll land in Nacogdoches. The route between the two is referred to as El Camino Real (The King's Highway) and was one of, if not the, principal routes settlers took into Texas. The two communities have a history that actually goes back further than when the Europeans showed up. Both of these towns are on sites that were settled by native Americans hundreds of years before any European laid eyes on them.

In fact, the first Europeans to visit the San Augustine area were most likely members of the Moscoso expedition (a remnant of the De Soto group) in the early 1540s. When they arrived they undoubtedly encountered members of the Ayish tribe of the Hasinai Indians. There isn't a lot known about the Ayish and some historians believe they spoke a dialect of the Caddoan language that had diverged

from Caddo and other Caddoan languages in the distant past. Initially the Moscoso expedition recorded the people to be warlike and that they were buffalo hunters. They were left alone until about 140 years later when, in 1687, Frenchman Henri Joutel passed through the area as part of the failed colony established by La Salle on the Texas coast. There were other encounters with the tribe by Europeans in 1708 and 1713, but those encounters were primarily for the purpose of buying horses.

It wasn't until 1717 when Father Antonio Margil who was traveling to the area of Nacogdoches passed through, and he promised to return and build a mission. He did and Mission Delores was established later that year. In 1719 the mission was abandoned because of the threat of a French invasion. In 1721, the mission was reestablished on the site of modern San Augustine by the Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo. In 1727, Fathers Pedro Muñoz and Joseph Calahorra—both visitors to Mission Dolores—describe the Ayish as a “great nation” and relate that even though none were living at the mission, baptisms had been administered since 1717. The baptisms are described as *in articulo mortis*, or at the point of death—that is, just before death.

The mission was closed and in 1776, a French trader, Athanase De Mézières wrote that the people were almost extinct. The vast majority, much like many other native peoples had been wiped out by smallpox. Finally, in 1779 Anglos and

scattered remnants of the Kickapoo, Cherokee, Delaware, and Shawnee Indians immigrated from the southern states, particularly Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. Immigrated isn't exactly the phrase I'd use, it was much more of a forced relocation due to pressure from Southern whites and the government policy of taking their ancestral lands.

Among the early settlers, who called the area the Ayish Bayou District, (remember many of these Anglos had been living in Louisiana) were John Quinalty, Susanna Horton, Martha Lewes, Edmund Quirk, and Chichester Chaplin. Antonio Leal and his wife, Gertrudis de los Santos, settled at the site of San Augustine and built a small house with corrals to accommodate wild mustangs gathered by Leal and Philip Nolan for sale in Louisiana. In 1827, almost 50 years after Anglo settlement started and 100 years after the Spanish came in, Ayish Bayou residents elected municipal authorities. The problem with this was that the Mexican government had not officially recognized the district, so theoretically it did not exist as a town. That issue was resolved in 1832 when it did become a town under Mexican law, and the settlers there along with those in Nacogdoches proved to be a thorn in the side of the Mexican authorities and throughout the 1830s participated and helped to instigate the revolt against Texas.

While the San Augustine area was mostly uninhabited until the late 1700s, the same could not be said for Nacogdoches. Archeological finds in the area, show that

there were inhabitants in the area since around 1250 when the native peoples built lodges along Lanana and Bonita creeks. In 1687, the French sent an expedition headed by René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle. This was followed by Louis Juchereau de St. Denis being sent by the French governor Sieur Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac to establish trade with the Indians in Spanish Texas. This is one of the reasons the Spanish were so concerned with the French. They could see the possible encroachment on what they considered their territory by their enemies. St. Denis mapped out a trail from Nacogdoches to the Rio Grande, along part of the route later known as the Old San Antonio Road, and was briefly arrested by the Spanish.

In one of the more interesting twists in Texas history, in the summer of 1716 he accompanied Domingo Ramón back to East Texas to found Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Nacogdoches and five other missions. Because of the pressure from the French, in 1772 Viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa put forth the New Regulations for Presidios, which declared that all missions and settlers be recalled to San Antonio. The following year Governor Juan María Vicencio de Ripperdá sent soldiers to force the removal of all Spanish subjects to San Antonio. While the settlers did leave, not all of them were happy about it and Antonio Gil Ibarvo, from the Lobanillo Creek area southeast of Nacogdoches, became a leader of the settlers. He petitioned for the group to be allowed to return part of the way to

East Texas. His petition was successful and the group established a community named Bucareli on the banks of the Trinity River, where they remained for four years. In 1779 floods and Indian raids caused Ibarvo to lead them to the abandoned mission site at Nacogdoches where they established a community. Ibarvo was commissioned commander of the militia and magistrate of the pueblo of Nacogdoches, and the community had its first official recognition of civil status.

Nacogdoches became a gateway for trade, mostly illicit, with the French and later the Americans, from Natchitoches and New Orleans, Louisiana. And I have mentioned, played a role in the incitement and future Texas revolution. Early signs that there would be trouble is seen in actions such as, how during the 1790s the American mustanger and filibuster Philip Nolan often headquartered there. In 1812 filibusters Augustus Magee and Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara proclaimed Texas free from Spain while at Nacogdoches, and they published the first newspaper in Texas, the *Gaceta de Tejas*, before going on to meet defeat at the hands of Gen. Joaquín de Arredondo at the battle of Medina near San Antonio.

James Long and 300 followers occupied Nacogdoches in 1819 and again declared Texas independent of Spain. Now Long only remained in Nacogdoches a short time before attempting another expedition on the coast, which resulted in his death.

Due to its proximity to Louisiana and the United States, it is only natural that

Nacogdoches would play a role in the troubles that Spain faced from its Texas colony.

I think that'll do it for this episode, next time I'll take a look at two of the other early settlements in Texas and you'll begin to notice a pattern developing of some of the reasons for the revolution. These patterns are very clear, after the Anglos came to Texas.

So until then Remember for more information on the history of Texas, visit the Texas State Historical Association, there's a lot more to Texas history than most folks know or believe.

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<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/texas-in-the-age-of-mexican-independence>