

Episode 17 - (Chapter 6) San Antonio and Goliad

Welcome to another chapter of The Hidden History of Texas.

In the earlier chapters, I mentioned a couple of early Texas settlements, San Augustin, and Nacogdoches and some of the issues settlers faced when they moved to Texas from the United States. In this chapter, I want to discuss another of the early settlements San Antonio. San Antonio was established in the 1700s and played an important role both in the development of Texas and the hostilities that would take place both in the 1820s and then again during the fighting of the 1830s.

San Antonio is perhaps my favorite city in all of Texas. It has a rich history, and its heritage is built upon a melding of multiple cultures over the centuries. The roots were planted around 1691 when Domingo Terán de los Ríos lead an expedition through the region. He was on his way to the Nacogdoches and on June 13, which is the Feast Day of Portuguese Franciscan friar Saint Anthony of Padua named the San Antonio River. At that time there was an Indian settlement there, which the Spanish called Yanaguana. In the area were a series of Indian trails which developed into a system of roads that ultimately became one of, if not the, main trade route from South to East Texas. In 1709, The Espinosa-Olivares-Aguirre expedition explored that region that was to become San Antonio and named a newly discovered source of water the San Pedro Spring. It wasn't long before the government and the church realized the benefits that could be found in the area and

On the first of May in 1718, Franciscan Antonio de San Buenaventura y Olivares established San Antonio de Valero, the first of five missions to be located along the San Antonio River. Five days later on the 5th, Martín de Alarcón, governor of the province of Texas, founded San Antonio de Béxar Presidio. The early community consisted of both military and civilians, as well as the mission Indians. The land containing San Pedro Springs, which was recognized as a vital source of water, was declared by the Spanish crown in 1729 to be public land. This makes San Pedro Springs Park one of the oldest municipal parks in the United States.

In 1731 immigrants from the Canary Islands formed the villa of San Fernando de Béxar and established the first regularly-organized civil government in Texas. This group is recognized these days with a section of downtown San Antonio, known as La Villita, which recreates the buildings and streets of the original settlement. San Antonio de Béxar became the capital of Spanish Texas in 1773 and over the next years continued to grow. The population was mostly comprised of Europeans, mestizos, Indians, and castas (racial/ethnic groupings). There were persons of mixed race, mostly identified as mulatto, which included individuals of American Indian/mestizo and American Indian/Black descent. There were also a portion of the population that were Afro-Mexicans. These were people of African descent who were part of the Hispanic population of New Spain, and they included both free Blacks and a small number of slaves.

As the world headed into the 19th century San Antonio played a major role in events that would eventually take place and change the lives of people living in Texas, Mexico, and the United States. I've already talked about how San Antonio found itself at a crossroads of conflict. How increased resentment against Spanish rule and in favor of Mexican independence had simmered under the surface ever since Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's 1810 call for Mexico's independence from Spain and the subsequent Casas Revolt took place in San Antonio in 1811. How in 1813 republican forces of the Gutiérrez-Magee expedition defeated Spanish royalists at the battle of Rosillo nine miles southeast of the city.

That army was known as the Republican Army of the North, and it consisted of Anglos, Tejanos, Indians, Spanish army deserters, and former royalists, and they captured San Antonio on April 1, 1813. On April 6, 1813, they declared independence as a republic under their "Green Flag" banner. Now the Mexican government sent a force to retake San Antonio and how in August the republican force of about 1,400, in the effort to spare the city, marched south to face Joaquín de Arredondo and his army. That army included the young officer Antonio López de Santa Anna. The resulting battle of Medina in present-day Atascosa County on August 18, crushed the rebellion in the bloodiest battle ever fought in Texas.

During this Mexican period, San Antonio lost its status as a provincial capital.

Texas was joined to neighboring Coahuila and the seat of government moved to far

off Saltillo. San Antonio did serve as the seat of government for the Department of Texas until the early 1830s, when the state legislature created the departments of Texas and Brazos in response to population growth in Texas. In the immediate aftermath of Mexican independence, San Antonio was the political center of the province, and its citizens actively lobbied for American immigration to support regional economic growth and Indian defense. This would eventually lead to more tensions that by the mid-1830s would explode into more armed conflict.

There is one other early settlement that I want to talk about, Goliad or La Bahía as it was originally named. While it doesn't have the notoriety that San Antonio does, it played an important role in the late 18th century and also the early 19th. The settlement was established in 1749, when José de Escandón recommended moving Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga Mission and its royal protector, Nuestra Señora de Loreto de La Bahía del Espíritu Santo Presidio (Presidio La Bahía), from the Guadalupe River to a site named Santa Dorotea. Which was on the San Antonio river, and as a result a new presidio, La Bahía, was built on a hill near the river, because sand, limestone, and timber were abundant. Around the presidio grew the settlement of La Bahía, and on the opposite bank stood Mission Espíritu Santo.

The fort supplied soldiers to the army of Bernardo de Gálvez in the American colonists' war against the British between 1779 and 1782, it also garrisoned Spanish troops throughout the 1810–21 Mexican war of independence, and after 1812 was part of four separate attempts to establish Texas independence. In the longest siege in American military history, the Gutiérrez-Magee expedition captured La Bahía and held it for the first "Republic of Texas" from November 1812 until February 1813. In June 1817 Henry Perry and forty companions tried to capture the presidio but were repulsed. James Long, who surprised the occupying garrison in 1821 and met with little resistance, was unseated by deception after three days when 700 Spanish Royalist troops arrived from San Antonio.

In 1829 Rafael Antonio Manchola, a La Bahía resident was elected to the Coahuila (CO WEE LA) and Texas state legislature, petitioned the governor to change the town's name to Goliad, which is an anagram of the name of the father of Mexican Independence, Father Hidalgo. On February 4, 1829, La Bahía became Villa de Goliad. At the time, the town had a number of stone houses belonging to wealthy citizens. In one of these, on March 24, 1829, was born Ignacio Seguín Zaragoza, who was to become one of Mexico's greatest military heroes. In 1834 a cholera epidemic nearly destroyed the settlement, but it survived.

That'll do it for this chapter and this volume. The next volume of the Hidden History of Texas will cover the 1830s until 1845. Independence from Mexico, to a Republic, to a State.

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>