This Sampler from “A Lens on Texas” includes a deeper dive into several selected topics, offering examples of some of the interesting but lesser-known features about Texas history and Texas physiography that emerged from my research, and the level of detail included in presenting them in the book.

The Selected Topics chosen for this file include:

- The story of George McJunkin in Folsom New Mexico in 1908, how his findings changed North American archaeology, and how that quest for understanding the timing and extent of the “First Peoples” evolved to the more recent discovery of fossilized human footprints at White Sands.
- The “First Thanksgiving” in Texas, which preceded the Pilgrims by 23 years.
- The First Mission in Texas, and the amazing story of “The Lady in Blue” which led to its founding in 1632.
- How the first capital of Spanish Tejas came to be located in today’s Louisiana.
- How, following the victory at San Jacinto, the new Texas Republic (and later statehood) was able to accomplish in several decades what Spain and Mexico could not in the previous three centuries.
- The story of John Muesebach, the founding of Fredericksburg, and the most successful/longest standing treaty he forged with the Penateka Comanche Indians.
- Which town is really “The Oldest Town in Texas”?
- The physiography of Texas.
- The Rio Grande River: Its journey through the Big Bend area, the story of the amazing Clinton Baermann mural at Alpine’s Museum of the Big Bend, and the geologic history of how the Rio Grande was formed, making it the youngest of the large river systems in the United States.

A Lens on Texas

Volume I: The History – From the First Peoples through the Spanish Mission Period



Jerry Clark

The Event at Folsom that Changed North American Archeology
In the early 1900s, most scientists believed that humans had lived on the North American continent for only 4,000 years. That all changed after an auspicious natural disaster in 1908. My travels and my research for this book discovered two ordinary people, each of whom did something extraordinary, linked by this event.

On a 2020 road trip to explore and photograph "off the beaten path towns", I drove through one such town: Folsom, New Mexico. Located just 50 miles outside the Texas border, I stumbled onto an Historic Marker that spoke of the selfless bravery of telephone operator Sarah ("Sally") J. Rooke, "Heroine of the Dry Cimarron Flood". On the night of August 27, 1908, fourteen inches of rain fell from a late summer storm, producing a flash flood through the Dry Cimarron River pathway. In Folsom, switchboard operator Rooke received frantic calls of the flood coming her way, and, rather than flee to safety, she chose to stay at her post and warn as many of her 800 neighbors as she could. While she and 17 others perished that night, many were saved by her actions. Telephone operators around the country later collected dimes to create a memorial to Sally Rooke.

The flood changed the fate of Folsom forever. Once the largest stockyard west of Fort Worth, its population plunged (it now stands at less than 51). But due to this event, the name "Folsom" would come to be known forever for yet another reason: one of the greatest archaeological finds of North America.

The day after the Folsom flood, cowboy George McJunkin was out checking fences along nearby Wild Horse Arroyo. Born a slave near Midway, Texas in 1851, McJunkin became a free man after the Civil War and left Texas for northern New Mexico to seek work as a cowboy. He excelled at this work and in the early 1900s became the foreman of the Crowfoot Ranch near Folsom. On this fenceline check, he and a friend saw a new cut the flood had made into the arroyo, and found large bones of bison, but much bigger than any bison ever seen. A self-taught man with a keen interest in science, McJunkin persistently tried to get fossil experts to look at the site. But it wasn't until 1922, a few months after his death, that his findings were corroborated by some of the people he had previously contacted. And it wasn't until 1926-1927 that the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now the Denver Museum of Nature and Science) conducted formal excavations of the Folsom site. Their work revealed numerous bones from at least 30 extinct bison never before discovered, and dated the site to 11,000 years ago. More importantly, they found a stone spear point in situ in the soil in between the ribs of one of the bison, providing direct evidence that people were living there at or before that time, thousands of years earlier than had been previously believed. This finding set off a huge wave of interest in archeology in the Southwest and the Pleistocene period in general.[3]

Two years later, in 1929, Paleo-Indian archaeological remains at Blackwater Draw near Clovis, New Mexico, **just 15 miles west of the Texas border**, were discovered and dated back to 13,000 years ago, pre-dating Folsom. For several decades thereafter, a "Clovis-first" model was viewed as the earliest inhabitation in the Americas. Back-dating from this, scientists believed that the First Peoples migrated southward from Alaska through an ice-free land corridor that opened up around 13,500+ years ago at the end of the Last Glacial Maximum.

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[3] https://www.archaeologysouthwest.org/2015/02/23/george-mcjunkin-and-the-discovery-that-changed-american-archaeology/



Left: Tribute to Sally Rooke of Folsom, New Mexico who gave her life to warn others of the incoming Folsom flood of 1908.

Below: An abandoned general store on Folsom's main street as it stood in 2020.



However, as shown opposite, over the past 20+ years, several sites have been found in the Americas which pre-date Clovis, including:

* In South America, an archaeological site in **Monte Verde** in south-central Chile was recently dated to 14,200 years ago.
* **Oregon's Paisley Caves**, where fossilized human matter has been dated to 14,300 years ago, and at Rimrock Draw Rockshelter, which has evidence of use dating back 18,250 years ago.
* **The Meadowcroft Rockshelter in Pennsylvania,** where excavation began in the 1970s, has now been determined to have had a human history that may stretch back at least 16,000 years.
* **In Texas, at the Gault archaeological site** along the Buttermilk Creek near Florence, north of Austin, investigations from 1998 to 2015 found evidence **indicating that the earliest known modern human inhabitants of Texas date back to around 20,000 years ago** [4], making it one of the few archaeological sites in the Americas at which compelling evidence has been found for human occupation dating to before the appearance of the Clovis culture. The tools that were left behind include small projectile points, large bifaces, macro-blades, and basic flake tools, and demonstrate that people were living as hunter-gatherers in Texas between 16,000-20,000 years ago. **Also, at the Debra L. Friedkin site** along the banks of Buttermilk Creek, researchers in 2011 found thousands of stone tool fragments dating back 15,500 years beneath the Clovis layers.
* **The Page-Ladson site in the Florida Panhandle**, which shows human activity dated to 14,000 years ago.
* And, most recently (and most importantly), **fossilized footprints were found in 2009 at the edge of the ancient Lake Otero at White Sands National Park.** These footprints were finally radio-carbon dated in 2021 and 2023, and found by the U.S. Geologic Survey to be between 21,000 to 23,000 years old. **This is just 50 miles north of the Texas border.** [5]

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[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gault_(archaeological_site)
[5] https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adh5007

Archaeologists discovered 23,000-year-old fossilized footprints in White Sands National Park, New Mexico.
(Image credit: National Park Service)





Oldest Archaeological Sites in the Americas

Color coded by degree of authenticity.

From Life Science
Designed by John Strike

These discoveries not only challenged the long-standing “Clovis First” theory, but also pushed the known date of human presence in North America back several thousand years, suggesting that humans crossed the Land Bridge at least 23-25,000 years ago.

But how did they get past the Ice Sheet, which did not begin to retreat until thousands of years later? The most likely alternative route is by boat southward along the western coastline to ice-free land, and from there begin to populate North America. Although physical evidence of this is lacking (due to the ice sheets, this coastline extended farther west than today and is now submerged), scientists point to the known use of small boats elsewhere in the world during this time for such travel. This would also agree with the above timelines of archaeological findings, especially the recent dating of the fossilized human footprints at White Sands, New Mexico of 21-23,000 years old.

Clearly, the discovery and dating of the White Sands footprints and the Rimrock Draw Rockshelter stone tools and camel tooth fragments[6] are as important today as the Folsom and Clovis discoveries were almost 100 years earlier. Given the White Sands discovery is only 50 miles from the Texas border, it would clearly suggest that these First Peoples ventured into Texas at that time as well, **giving relevance to the White Sands photo shown earlier.** The photo also presents a cosmically interesting observation that the nearest of these stars in that photo are some 20,000 light-years away. In other words, light waves emanating from these stars at the same time these First Peoples left footprints at Lake Otero finally reached us when those same footprints were finally discovered 20,000 years later! Makes one pause for reflection, especially considering that 20,000 light years is about 120 quadrillion miles!

<u>Genetic Background</u>
As depicted on the right, genetic analyses have found that Ancient North Siberians and a group of East Asians paired up in Siberia, and it was a distinct branch of this population that first crossed the Bering Land Bridge to become the first Americans. This branch then produced our Ancestral Native Americans (ANA), whose descendants live on today.[7]

The ANA lineage then underwent several splits, suggesting that these people settled in different areas of North America with varying, and sometimes limited, gene flow between them. Also importantly, all genomic studies rule out the possibility that the First Peoples mixed with Europeans or Africans or any other population prior to 1492.

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[6] https://earthlymission.com/rimrock-draw-rockshelter-18000-year-old-oregon-earliest-known-site-of-human-habitation-north-america/
[7] Ref: Jennifer Raff, associate professor of anthropology at the University of Kansas and author of the book "Origin: A Genetic History of the Americas" (Twelve, 2022)



Migration routes of First Peoples



"Midland Minnie"
At time of discovery in 1953, believed to be oldest human remains found in the Americas in Midland Texas.
Currently dated (as shown on the plaque) to be 9,000 years old or more.

(Photo of historical marker from internet)

Section III. The Spanish Period in Texas: 1519 to 1821

The history of the Spanish Period in Texas begins in 1519 when Alvarez de Pineda became the first known European to explore and map the Texas coastline, and ends in 1821 when Mexican Independence was achieved. At its height in 1800, Spain controlled or had primary claim to the entire US Gulf Coast from Key West to Brownsville, and everything in the Lower 48 west of the Mississippi except for a disputed area of the Pacific Northwest. And that's in addition to all of Central America, most of the Caribbean, and much of South America. From a landholding position, and including its gold and silver operations in Mexico and South America, Spain was the New World's powerhouse. So much so that, as shown on the map at right, the Gulf was called the Gulf of Spain at the time.

As far as Texas goes, Spain held it all, and held this "ownership" of Texas for 300 years, longer than our own entire US history.

The post-Columbian history of the United States often gives a disproportionately small attention to the Spanish history in the Lower 48. Our early US history carries an "Upper-East-Coast Anglo-centric" emphasis. This is somewhat understandable – after all, that's where Philadelphia is, and the American Revolutionary War itself was a British thing: fought between the original 13 British colonies seeking independence from Great Britain. For the Spanish colonies in Tejas at the time, the events of the American Revolution meant a great deal less.

But to grasp how this emphasis permeates into one's perspective, consider something as fundamental as what we Americans call "The First Thanksgiving". This term first arose in the US in 1841 by a Boston historian and Unitarian minister who was publishing "Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers", in which he referred to the 1621 event with the Pilgrims and Wampanoag Indians at Plymouth, Massachusetts as "The First Thanksgiving".[1] The story of the Pilgrims continued to be popularized (e.g. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish"), and the idea of Thanksgiving as a national holiday as a means of encouraging national unity was continually advocated to successive Presidents by Sarah Josepha Hale (who also wrote "Mary Had a Little Lamb"). Finally, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the fourth Thursday in November of 1863 a national holiday, linking the idea of unity with the Plymouth story. That has been followed ever since. [2]

All very good. But our "Lower 48" history makes little if any mention of the September 8, 1565 Thanksgiving mass and feast by the Spaniards with local Indians in our oldest continuously inhabited city of St. Augustine Florida …. or the one in 1564 when French Huguenots (Calvinists like the Pilgrims) held a service of thanksgiving and feasted with the Timucuans to celebrate their June 1564 establishment of Fort Caroline along the St. Johns River in present-day Jacksonville …. or the one on April 30, 1598 when Spain's first colonizing group to Nuevo Mexico, having traversed the Chihuahuan desert the previous 5 days without food or water, reached the Rio Grande at San Elizario, Texas and gave thanks with a mass and feast with their fellow Tlaxcala Indians.

All of these preceded Plymouth 1621, and by decades. Maybe Plymouth was "The Best Recognized Anglo Thanksgiving", but it certainly wasn't the "First". Regardless, over time, it is the celebration of this 1621 Thanksgiving event and the unity it represents that became perhaps the most popular holiday in the U.S. (Note: Canada has their own date as the second Monday of October, reflecting their own history).

That said, it can also be held as true that the "First Thanksgiving in Texas" was the one on April 30, 1598 in San Elizario. U.S. history and Texas history are in many ways just different. This is why "Texas History" is taught extensively in Texas schools. But even that can compress the 300 years of the Post-Columbian Spanish Period into just a couple lesson plans [3].

Lands Held or Claimed by Vice-Royalty of New Spain in 1800



In 1800, Spain was the dominant claim-holder to lands in not only what is today the "Lower 48", but also all of Central America and much of South America. Given its landholdings encircling the entire Gulf, this map shows it as the "Gulf of Spain".

The First Mission in Texas [15]
The first mission in today's Texas was established in 1632 near present-day San Angelo **(shown as #1 in the map opposite)**. It is believed to have been located near the confluence of the Concho River and the Colorado River, which was known as the Río San Clemente at that time. This Mission San Clemente was a follow-up effort to an initial 1629 missionary trip to the area **at the request of the Jumano Indians**, who claimed of visits from an apparition they called the "Lady in Blue". The Spanish Franciscans Fray Juan de Salas and Fray Diego León spent only a short time there in 1629, but were impressed with the religious knowledge of the Jumanos and the consistency of their story. They left to report back to their superior Fray Alonso de Benavides in Isleta, but promised to return. Fray Benavides then travelled to Agreda, Spain, where he became convinced of the "bilocation experiences" of a Spanish nun Sor Maria de Jesus de Agreda.

The missionaries then returned to the Jumanos in 1632 and built the first Mission San Clemente and began baptizing thousands of Jumanos. However, the mission was abandoned after several months because of its logistical remoteness from the Franciscan home base in New Mexico [16].

Later, in 1684, another San Clemente mission was located by leader Juan de Mendoza in the same general area **(also listed in the text for #1 on the Map of Missions, shown opposite)**. After several attacks by the Apache and the Salinero Indians, and without a presidio for protection, the Spaniards had to abandon the mission. Despite the desire of Mendoza and Father Nicolas Lopez to return and establish a permanent mission, the appearance of the La Salle expedition on the Texas coast in 1685 caused the Spanish government to concentrate its efforts in East Texas instead. A mission presence would not return to this area until Mission Santa Cruz de San Saba was established in 1757 near today's Menard (**#32** on the map).

Today, there is a small commemorative monument along the Concho River in the city of San Angelo, as well as a statue in honor of Sor Maria de Jesus de Agreda. **(See the following Sidebar "Lady in Blue" for this amazing story.)**

In addition to the San Clemente and San Saba Missions above, the **map shown opposite** shows the locations of the other missions the Spanish built in Texas. It shows several clusters of locations of these missions and presidios, and dates which parallel this sequence of Spanish activity:

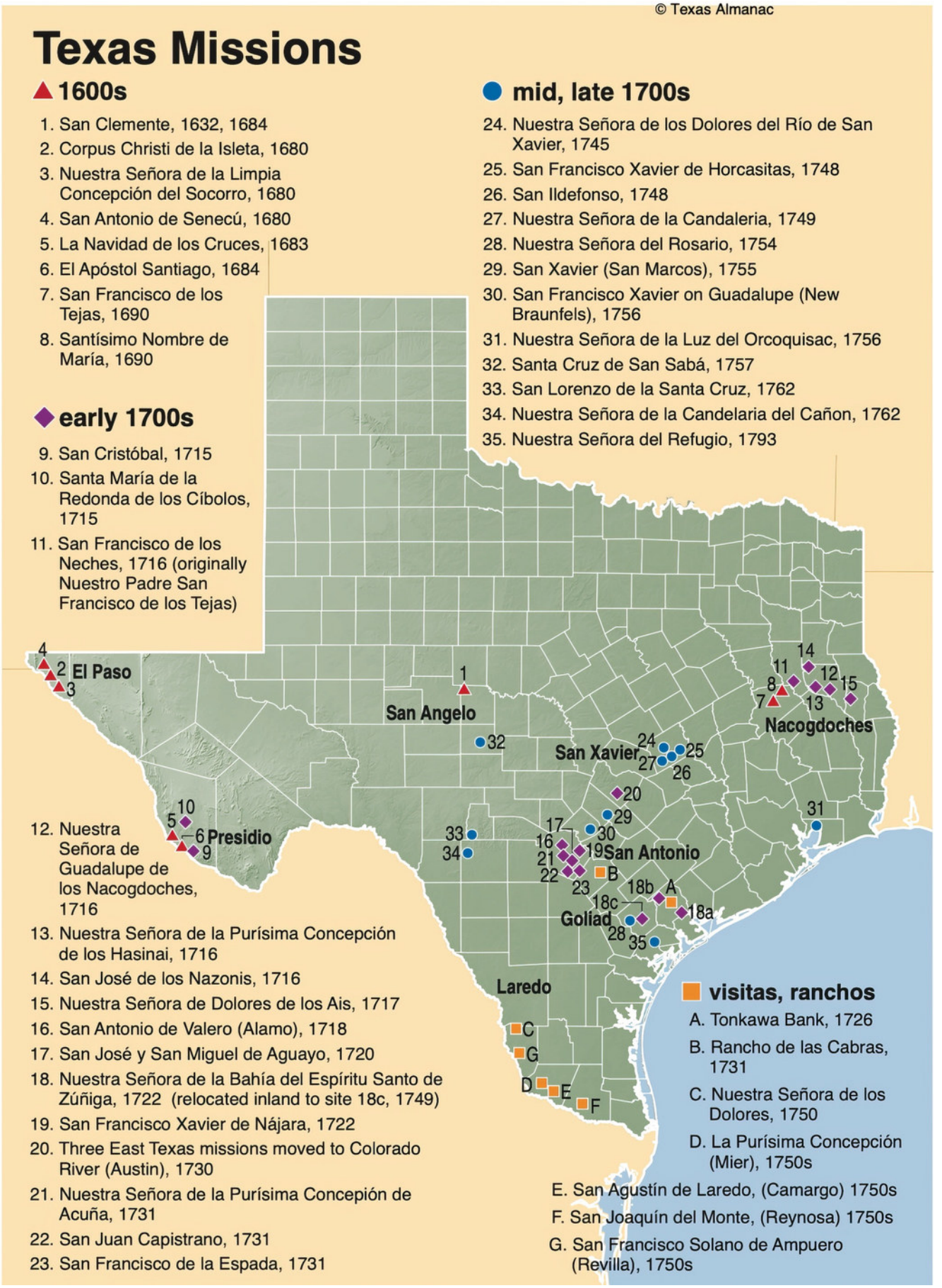
* 1682-1715: West Texas area around El Paso/Juarez and the Big Bend area near Presidio
* 1690-1716: East Texas area near Nacogdoches
* 1700: Near Piedra Negras, on the Mexico side of the Rio Grande, south of Eagle Pass, leading to a number of Visitas and Ranchos north of the river and south of Laredo
* 1718-1796: Central Texas area around San Antonio and extending southeast to the Gulf Coast as well as northwest to San Xavier (east of Austin)

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[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_colonization_of_the_Americas
[12] Ref: https://www.texasalmanac.com/articles/the-spanish-missions-in-texas
https://colfa.utsa.edu/car/missions/
[13] A convento (Spanish: a place to convene) in this sense is primarily the residence of the priests, but typically was a multi-purpose building that also had rooms for mission guests, and for offices, storage, kitchen/dining, and an infirmary
[14] https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/spanish-missions
[15] https://www.ncesc.com/geographic-faq/where-were-the-first-spanish-settlements-in-texas/
[16] https://www.texasalmanac.com/articles/the-spanish-missions-in-texas

Map of Texas Missions and Visitas, coded by date, beginning with the San Clemente Mission near San Angelo of 1632.
(from "The Texas Almanac)

A somewhat more complete listing including presidios and missions just outside the Texas border is provided later on page 122 (although it does not reference the 1632 date for the first San Angelo mission).



Sidebar

The Lady in Blue: Mystical Missionary of Texas [1] [2]

In one of the more remarkable events of "reverse-conversion", the Spanish came to believe that the Jumano Indian's claims of visits from an apparition they called the "Lady in Blue" was the Spanish nun and mystic Sor Maria de Jesus de Agreda (1602-1673). The amazing part of this is that Sor Maria never left Spain.

In the summer of 1629, about 12 Jumano Indians **from around today's San Angelo in west Texas and from the pueblo of Las Humanas (now known as the Gran Quivera of the Salinas Missions, shown in picture at right)** came to see the Spanish Franciscan friars at the town of Isleta, just south of modern-day Albuquerque, requesting a mission be built at their homeland and their people be baptized.

Groups of the Jumano from San Angelo and Salinas had been coming there since 1620, each time asking for missionaries to teach their as-yet-un-catechized nation the faith of Christ. The friars inquired exactly how they had learned so much, and over these nine years their claim that a mysterious "Woman in Blue" had been appearing among them and instructing them about God and the Christian religion. Each time the Jumanos visited the priests, they claimed to have been visited by "a woman like the one painted in the church (at the Tompiro Indian Gran Quivera "Salinas" mission) who spoke to each one [of the Jumano] in their own language saying that they should come to seek the priests to ask them to teach and baptize them, and to not be lazy." This woman was dressed..."as the woman in the painting but her face was not like the one at the church, but was a beautiful young girl". It was she, they said, who told them to come to this place and ask for Baptism and missions.

Although the friars were sympathetic to the Jumanos' need for missionaries, the tale about the Lady had been easily enough dismissed: there were no Spanish friars in that faraway region, let alone women.



Painting, Maria de Jesus de Agreda, aged 20, hanging in the Museum of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, Tepotzotlan, Mexico.
Ref: https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/agreda-maria-de-jesus-de

But this visit in 1629 struck a chord with Fr. Alonso de Benavides, the superior in charge of these missions. He had also just received an inquiry from Spain, where Sor Maria's confessor was asking of any evidence of her visiting the Jumano. Determined to get to the bottom of strange rumors that a Spanish nun was somehow being mystically transported to the Americas, he interviewed the Jumano themselves, who again pointed to a portrait of a nun and stated that the Lady in Blue, though younger in age, wore similar clothes.

Intrigued, he sent two missionaries back with them to the Jumano's central camping ground, located near the San Clemente (now Colorado) river near today's San Angelo. They found the people very knowledgeable of the faith, and baptized over 2,000 of them in the first weeks. Benavides composed an account of what happened, then set off for Spain to investigate further. There he learned that it was a Sister Maria of the convent of the Immaculate Conception in Agreda. Under obedience, she was directed to reveal these hidden aspects of her interior life, and she also described details of the country, the different peoples of the region, and personal characteristics of individuals that could only have been known by someone who had been there.[3] Benavides left the meeting completely convinced.

After Fra Benavides told Sor Maria of his contacts with the Jumanos, she then said: "My work with my beloved Jumanos is finished." Benavides himself would later say that "I call God to witness that my esteem for her holiness has been increased more by the noble qualities which I discern in her than by all the miracles which she has wrought in America." The Franciscans built their first mission in Texas, Mission San Clemente, at the site of the Jumano village in 1632.

Ruins of Salinas Mission Gran Quivera and pueblo Las Humanas, located 27 miles south of Mountainair, and 90 miles southeast of Isleta Pueblo, NM.

This picture shows the cruciform ruins of the church walls, the extensive block living quarters of the Tompiro Indians, and several kivas.

Picture by JClark from a 2025 visit.



But first, fast-backward to the beginning. Maria Fernandez Coronel was born on April 2, 1602 in the pueblito de Ágreda. She was born to Catholic parents of noble rank. Barely beyond her toddler years, Maria showed an unusual devotion to a life of prayer and piety.

When she was ten, she already wanted to join a convent. When she was 12, her parents finally blessed her wish to join the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Tarazona. At age 18, Maria took her vows and became Maria de Jesus – Mary of Jesus de Ágreda. The habit of her order was a dark cobalt blue. Now a nun, she spent more time than ever alone in prayer. Maria's religious devotions intensified. She said God had given her a divine gift where through meditation she could appear to God's children in faraway lands and teach them about Jesus.

While in a trance at her convent in Ágreda, Spain, she claimed to be spiritually present in Nuevo Mexico and other areas of what is now the American Southwest, Mexico and Tejas. Sor María reported visiting the Jumano Indians, urging them to go to the Spanish missions and request that a missionary accompany them back to their pueblos and villages. Between 1620 and 1623, Sister Mary reported that she was often "transported by the aid of the angels" to settlements of a people called Jumanos. The abbess reported many further visits until 1629, all while she physically remained in the monastery at Ágreda. These were the same years the Jumano Indians claimed that the "Woman in Blue" had come among them, teaching them of the faith, and then instructing them to go to Isleta and seek baptism and a mission for their people. Such events are considered **bilocations**,[4] where a person is, or seems to be, in two places at the same time.

Later, the ecclesiastical authorities investigated her and found her mystical gifts to be authentic. An expanded report was presented to Pope Urban VIII in 1634. Maria de Jesus de Agreda died on May 24th, 1665. Less than ten years after her death, she was declared Venerable by Pope Clement X, in honor of her "heroic life of virtue". Interestingly, after her death in 1685, her body was exhumed and the casket opened in 1909 and again in 1989, and was found to be incorrupt (had not deteriorated), some say as a sign of her sanctity, and is now resting in view in her convent in Spain.

She left behind numerous writings, including her spiritual book: *The Mystical City of God*,[5] which she claimed was in large part dictated to her by the Blessed Virgin Mary. The work has the imprimatur of several Popes and Bishops and appeals primarily to those who believe in private revelation and the sanctity of Mary.

To this day, the Venerable Mary of Jesus of Agreda is held as one of the founders of the Catholic faith in the state of Texas – despite her apparently never having left her convent. San Angelo has a statue of her to commemorate her many visits bringing the message of Christianity to the Jumanos who lived there. And many locals continue to cherish a legend that when she said farewell to the Indians for the last time and faded away beyond the hills, she left the area blanketed in deep blue flowers – the color of her robe – the Texas bluebonnet.

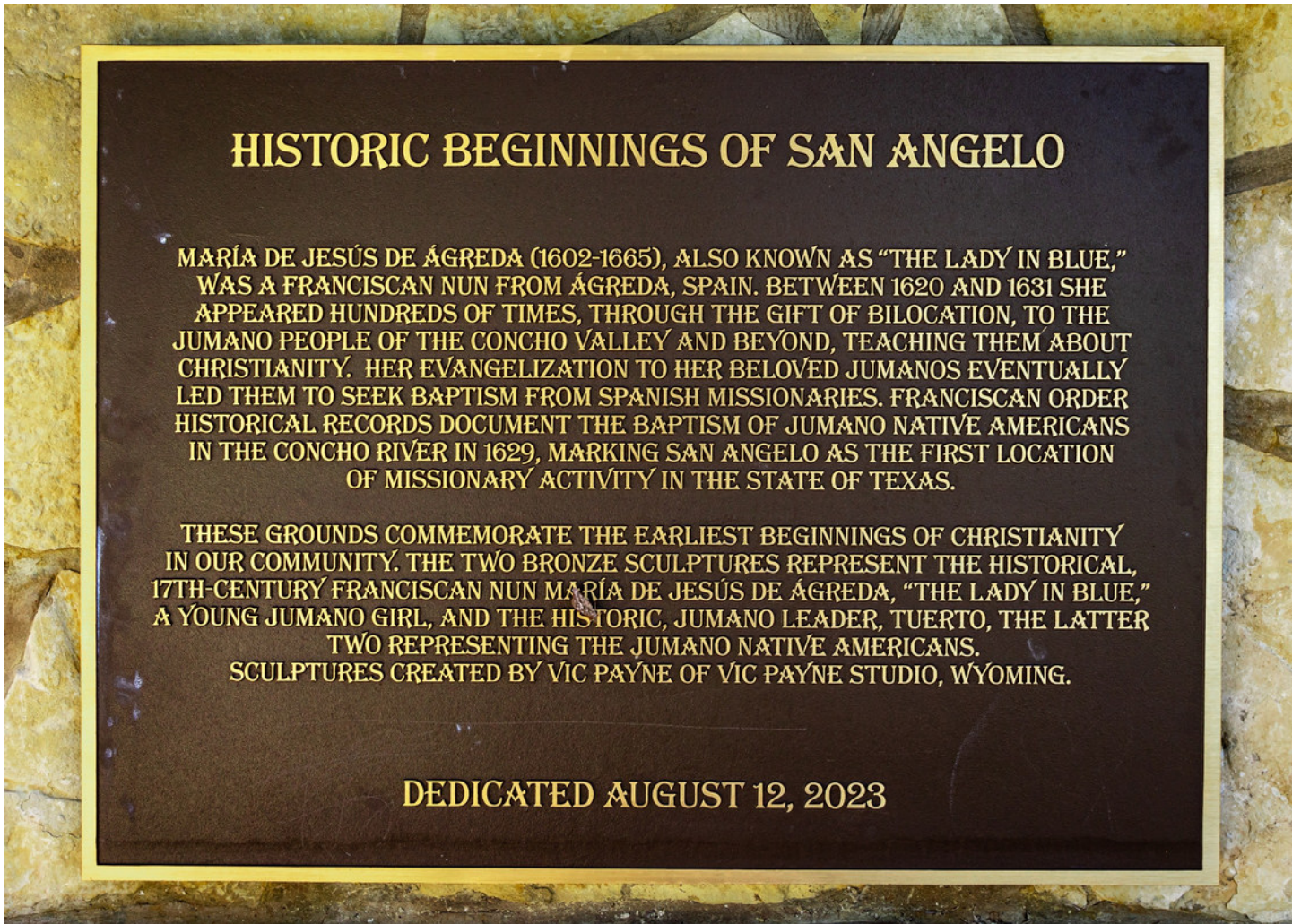
Skeptics question the Indians' motives, suggesting they may have wanted Spanish protection from other tribes, or that their “elementary foreknowledge” (as skeptics say) of Christianity could have been acquired over contacts with the Spanish. But these points do not address the other side of the world, where an 18-year-old nun who never left the convent came to possess knowledge of details about the Jumanos and continued to do so in real time between 1620 and 1629. Whether believer or skeptic, all agree on certain points, beginning with the fact that the Indians requested instruction, and that the same tale was told on both sides of the Atlantic at the same time.

Coincidence? Or mystical revelation?

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[1] https://fssp.com/the-lady-in-blue-mystical-missionary-of-texas/
https://www.nps.gov/sapu/learn/historyculture/maria-de-agreda.htm
[2] https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/trans-p/peoples/jumano.html
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_of_Jesus_of_Ágreda
https://www.texasstandard.org/stories/the-legend-of-the-lady-in-blue/
[3] https://www.texasalmanac.com/articles/the-lady-in-blue
Fray Benavides wrote about her story of bilocation to the tribes of the Southwest:
"The first time she went was in the year 1620. She had continued ever since ... She gave me all their signs and [declared] she had been with them. She knows Captain Tuerto (the one-eye captain) very well, having given me his personal characteristics and that of all the others. She herself sent the messengers from Quivira [the Jumano village on the Plains] to call the missionaries."
[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilocation **Christianity has had several reports of miraculous bilocations.** Among the earliest is the apparition of Our Lady of the Pillar, an alleged appearance of the Virgin Mary in Caesaraugusta, Spain, to Apostle James the Greater in the year 40 AD, at a time when she is believed to have been still alive and living in Jerusalem. Several other Christian figures are also said to have experienced bilocation, such as Anthony of Padua, Francis Xavier, Alphonsus Liguori, and Padre Pio.
[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mystical_City_of_God

Plaque in Bart DeWitt Park (named after the founder of San Angelo) along the Conchos River near downtown San Angelo, commemorating the Lady in Blue and the inception of the first missionary activity in Texas.







Sculptures in San Angelo, Texas (by Wyoming artist Vic Payne)

Left: Maria de Jesus de Agreda handing a crucifix to young Jumano girl
Right: Jumano Leader Tuerto
(Pictures from my 2025 visit to San Angelo)

The First Capital of Spanish Tejas: Los Adaes, 1729 to 1773



Rendering of Presidio de los Adaes near Robeline, Louisiana.

The Governors House is the larger structure in the middle with the columns. Soldiers barracks are in front and the presidio chapel is shown with the cross.

(Image from Louisiana's Los Adaes State Historic Site website.)

As a side note, **Governor Aguayo** was also responsible for attempting to expand the colonization in Texas. In 1722, he recommended steps to settle 400 families between San Antonio and the East Texas missions, with one-half of the settlers to be recruited from Galicia Spain, the Canary Islands, and Havana; and the other half to be composed of loyal Tlaxcalán Indians. Unfortunately for Spain, aside from the Tlaxcalan Indians already in Tejas, **only 15 families (55 people) from the Canary Islands were resettled into Tejas in 1731.** The inability to broadly colonize would prove an important factor in Spain's loss of control over Tejas.

1727 to 1774 – Downsizing East Tejas; Relocations to San Antonio; A New Capital; Return to Nacogdoches.[3]
Following the establishment of the new and stronger Presidio de los Adaes, the Spanish military close Presidio Dolores in 1727. In 1730–31, given the withdrawal of the local protective garrison, the church then transfers the supplies and official status of the following three "interior" East Texas missions (those farther from the Louisiana border), first temporarily to Austin, and then to the more promising San Antonio area to help found additional missions there.

* San Francisco de los Neches (#34), a legacy of the original 1690 San Francisco de los Tejas (#36, the first Tejas mission), was relocated and renamed **San Francisco de la Espada (#23)**.
* Mission Nuestra Senora de la Purisima Concepción de los Hasinai (#38) was relocated to become **Mission N. S. de la Purisima Concepción de Acuna (#20)**
* San Jose de los Nazonis (#37), was relocated and renamed **San Juan Capistrano (#22)**

All three of these Missions, along with Mission San Jose y San Miguel de Aguayo (#21) and the Alamo (previously Mission San Antonio de Valero, #18), now comprise the San Antonio Mission trail, a National Historic Park.

Across the next several years, the Spanish begin to more critically assess their situation in East Texas.

* The Caddoans are not a military threat, but are strong enough to help insulate the missions from other potential hostile groups. They are also an advanced civilization, and gain little from what the missions could offer. They have their own customs, beliefs and rituals which have served them well for hundreds of years. So, despite mostly cordial relations with them, the Franciscans are unsuccessful in their attempts to convert them to mission life and Christianity.

* The relations with the French at Natchitoches are for the most part cordial with cross support. Both Spanish Los Adaes and French Natchitoches are remote, and in many respects rely on each other. Los Adaes is far from the centers of governance and supply, connected only by the Camino Reals (Old Spanish Trails, or OSTs) which are really just paths through sometimes hostile Indian territory and swollen rivers and streams. The official requirement to procure supplies from just the Spanish centers is unreliable and forces the Spaniards at Los Adaes to trade locally with others, including the French.

After France loses the French and Indian War in 1763, it cedes Louisiana west of the Mississippi to Spain. A pivotal event, this eliminates the need for border defense in East Texas. To reduce crown expenses, Presidio de los Adaes is closed in 1773, as are the three remaining missions there (#39, 40 and 41, one of which was Mission Guadalupe de Nacogdoches).

Most importantly, San Antonio de Bexar was then named the Capital of Tejas in 1773.

All settlers, including 500 at Los Adaes, were uprooted on painfully short notice and ordered to be moved to San Antonio. Almost immediately, some of the them petitioned to return to eastern Texas, and some wanted to return to Los Adaes. In 1774, a group of over 350 led by **Antonio Gil Y'Barbo**[4] was allowed to settle on the Trinity River, where their community was called Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Bucareli. Attacks by Comanche Indians and epidemics caused the abandonment of Bucareli, and **in the spring of 1779, the group moved to the site of the former mission at Nacogdoches. Later that summer, Nacogdoches received designation from Spain as a pueblo. It has been occupied ever since.**

And so, with only a relatively brief period of 1723-1778 where it was unoccupied, Nacogdoches has remained a settlement and town since 1716, bolstering its claim as the "Oldest Town" in Tejas (i.e. Texas east of the Nueces).



Statue of Antonio Gil y Barbo, erected in Nacogdoches in the Plaza Principal, the main square in their historic downtown.

Leader of the Adaesenos' return to the area, his efforts to re-establish Nacogdoches were crucial in its development.

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Gery
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Texas
[3] https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/los-adaes
https://64parishes.org/entry/los-adaes
[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Gil_Y%27Barbo

By 1790, a census taken by Spain had set the Tejas population at 3,334 [2] **residing in Bexar (San Antonio), Nacogdoches, and Goliad. Adding in a generous amount for the rest of Texas (mainly El Paso, Presidio, and some early Rio Grande settlements), the total civil population would likely have been perhaps 8,000, maybe more including illegal squatters. All this excludes Native Indians not "registered" with missions. The Native American population in Texas by 1800 was estimated to be about 40,000, down from the estimated 300,000 that populated Texas when the Spaniards first arrived. So one might generously estimate that about 50,000 people lived in today's Texas in 1800.**

A similar situation held in the northern Provinces of Nuevo Mexico and Alto California: i.e., small "civil" population, and a much larger, albeit decimated, Native population. And in the "Louisiana Province", what little "civil" population existed was inherited from the French and concentrated in New Orleans.

So, in 1800, Spain had a big problem in the Lower 48: "Land rich and people poor". Of course, most of their claims here were lands controlled by Native Americans. But in the Lower 48, Spain had neither the time, the money, nor most importantly, the people to change that equation, leaving themselves open to incursions from the more populated United States.

By contrast, Spain's position was more viable in Central America, where they had a strong Spanish presence in charge of the major institutions, and a much larger indigenous population that had survived the disease cycles and had assimilated (or acquiesced) in many respects to critical aspects of Spanish culture, especially conversion to Catholicism. That said, there was growing unrest.

New Spain had a rigid caste system social structure, which placed the Peninsulares, Spaniards born in Spain (the Iberian Peninsula) at the top. Then came the Criollos, people of pure Spanish descent (same as the Peninsulares) except born in the Americas. They were often wealthy landowners and merchants (Criollos means Creoles, but different from what Creoles meant in the Caribbean). After the Criolles came the Mestizos, individuals of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage. And then, at the bottom, the Indios (Indigenous people) and the Mulattos (black or mixed black), all of whom were often exploited for the labor.

The Bourbon reforms of the late 1700s centralized even more power to the Peninsulares and reserved the best political jobs for them. Also, a new emphasis on weeding out illicit trading was coupled with a more efficient system of tax collecting. This increased revenue for the Crown, but it came at the expense of others' livelihoods. More generally, Criollos reacted angrily against the crown's preference for Peninsulares in administrative positions, and its support of the caste system and the Criollos' privileged status. After hundreds of years of proven service to Spain, the New-World-born elites who were still pure Spaniards felt that the Bourbons were now treating them like a recently conquered nation.[3] In addition, economic conditions swung with silver production and silver prices, creating additional problems.

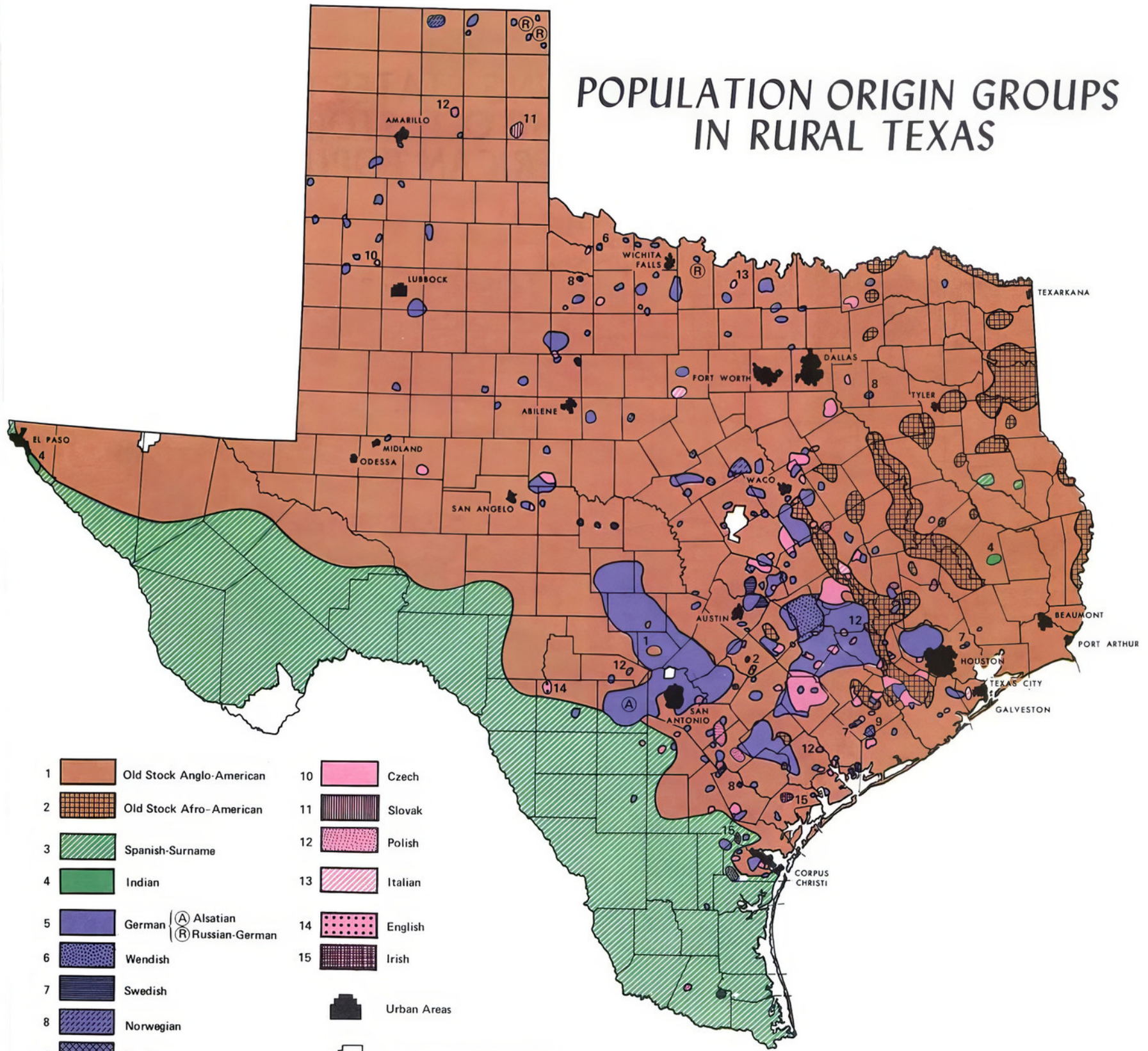
So while on paper Spain had the strongest geographic footprint in 1800, it was precarious. All of this unraveled in just the next 30 years. From 1800 to 1830, Spain would lose its entire position in the Americas except for Puerto Rico and Cuba, which were later ceded to the United States in 1898 after the Spanish-American War. By 1830, "New Spain" no longer exists.

This occurs in stages in quick succession: First in North America, then in South America, and then continuing in Mexico.

Stage I. In North America, a series of deals and Treaties result in Spain losing all of the Louisiana Territory, and all of Florida**:**

1. **October 1800 – In the secret Third Treaty of Ildefonso,** Spain agrees to return Louisiana to France [4] in exchange for control over Tuscany in Italy. It's conditional on France not reselling to a third party.
2. **1803 – The Louisiana Purchase.** Notwithstanding the above, Napoleon sells the land to the United States for $15 million, creating a new neighbor for Spain to negotiate borders with. With this purchase, President Thomas Jefferson doubles the size of the

POPULATION ORIGIN GROUPS IN RURAL TEXAS



Source: Terry G. Jordan, Map Supplement Number 13, *Annals of The Association of American Geographers*, Volume 60, Number 2, June 1970.

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The German emigration to Texas began with the efforts of a true pioneer, **Friedrich Diercks, known in Texas under his alias, Johnann Friedrich Ernst.** He immigrated to America intending to settle in Missouri, but in New Orleans, learned of large land grants available in Stephen F. Austin's colony in Texas. Ernst applied for and in 1831 received a grant of more than 4,000 acres in partnership with Charles Fordtran that lay in the northwest corner of what is now Austin County (just east of Round Top in the Fayette County map). He wrote many lengthy letters to friends in Germany, describing a land with a winterless climate like that of Sicily. Through these "America letters" he influenced many other prospective migrants to follow him in a chain migration.

These first German settlements were in towns of Industry (1831) and Cat Spring (1834),[17] just off the map to the east of Fayetteville Fayette County was also then settled by many German immigrants in the mid 1830's. The map below shows many towns that carry the Germanic names settled in this county (as well as Czech names as will be discussed later). Ernst soon expanded his efforts, including helping settle German people in what is now Harris County. This included Jacob and Dorothea Schroeder, the first settlers in 1839 to what became my town of Hedwig Village, named after their grandson's wife, immigrant Hedwig Jankowski, who lived until 1983.



Map of Fayette County, Texas

SIDEBAR

The Fisher-Miller Land Grant, the Adelsverein, and John Muesebach.

In 1842, German immigrant Henry Francis Fisher in partnership with Burchard Miller received a grant of 3,878,000 acres between the Llano and Colorado Rivers, northeast of today's Fredericksburg. The grant required the settlement of 1,000 immigrant families of German, Dutch, Swiss, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian ancestry. However, the Fisher-Miller Grant was far from the coast and was so deep into Comanche territory that no surveyors were willing to outline the boundaries of individual tracts (a requirement before colonization could proceed). These and other unforeseen circumstances caused delays and extensions through the Texas Legislature.[1]

In December 1843, Fisher was appointed the Texas consul to Bremen Germany, and in March 1844, he left for Bremen to promote colonization. In Germany, he associated himself with the Adelsverein, which was short-form for "The Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas." (Over time, they also became known as the Mainzer Verein, the Texas-Verein, and the German Emigration Company.) The Adelsverein, led by Count Carl Frederick Christian of Castell, was formed by some 21 German noblemen for the purpose of encouraging and facilitating German emigration. In June 1844, Fisher sold a part-interest in his colonization contract (without disclosing the Comanche Territory issue), and was placed on the Adelsverein colonization committee.

For a fee of $240 per family, the Adelsverein promised willing emigrants transportation from Germany to Texas; wagons upon arrival to transport them and their belongings to colonizable land; a house; grains; implements to begin planting; and religious and educational needs. This sounded too good to be the true…. and it was.[2]

Fisher returned to Texas in August 1844 to make preparations for transporting and providing supplies for prospective settlers to the grant. The Adelsverein colonial committee included Commissioner General Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, who was assigned to implement the immigration process in Texas with Fisher. The first settlers recruited by the Adelsverein arrived in Galveston in July 1844. But Prince Carl Solms wanted a more isolated (German only) route to the interior, which he found at Indian Point. He named it Carlshafen (of course). It was later named Indianola [3]. The settlers then sailed there to disembark in December 1844 only to learn that the Fisher-Miller land grant had not yet been surveyed for occupation. Prince Carl then bought two leagues of land from Rafael and Maria Antonio Veramendi Garza for $1,110 near the Comal Springs, about halfway between Indianola and the lower portions of the F-M grant. It was there the first settlers forded the Guadalupe River on March 21, 1845, and founded New Braunfels.[4] None of the facilities promised were included. Prince Solms charged Fisher with negligence and was generally dissatisfied with his activities. Solms also had become so disillusioned with the process that earlier in 1844 he had asked the Vereins to remove him as Commissioner-General and appoint a successor.

Meanwhile, back in Germany in October 1844, John O. Meusebach had written to Count Castell and expressed interest in moving to Texas. Impressed, Count Castell replied and offered Meusebach to purchase a share in the Verein for $2,000, with an opportunity to replace Prince Solms as Commissioner-General. After negotiating a contract that included an allowance, a salary, profit share and land, Meusebach agreed. He arrived in Galveston in May 1845, where he learned of the Adelsverein's real situation. The finances were in disarray, and they did not have enough funds to meet their obligations to their colonists. Henry Fisher had not supplied transport and supplies for which the Verein advanced money, and Fisher had tried to poach their incoming immigrants.

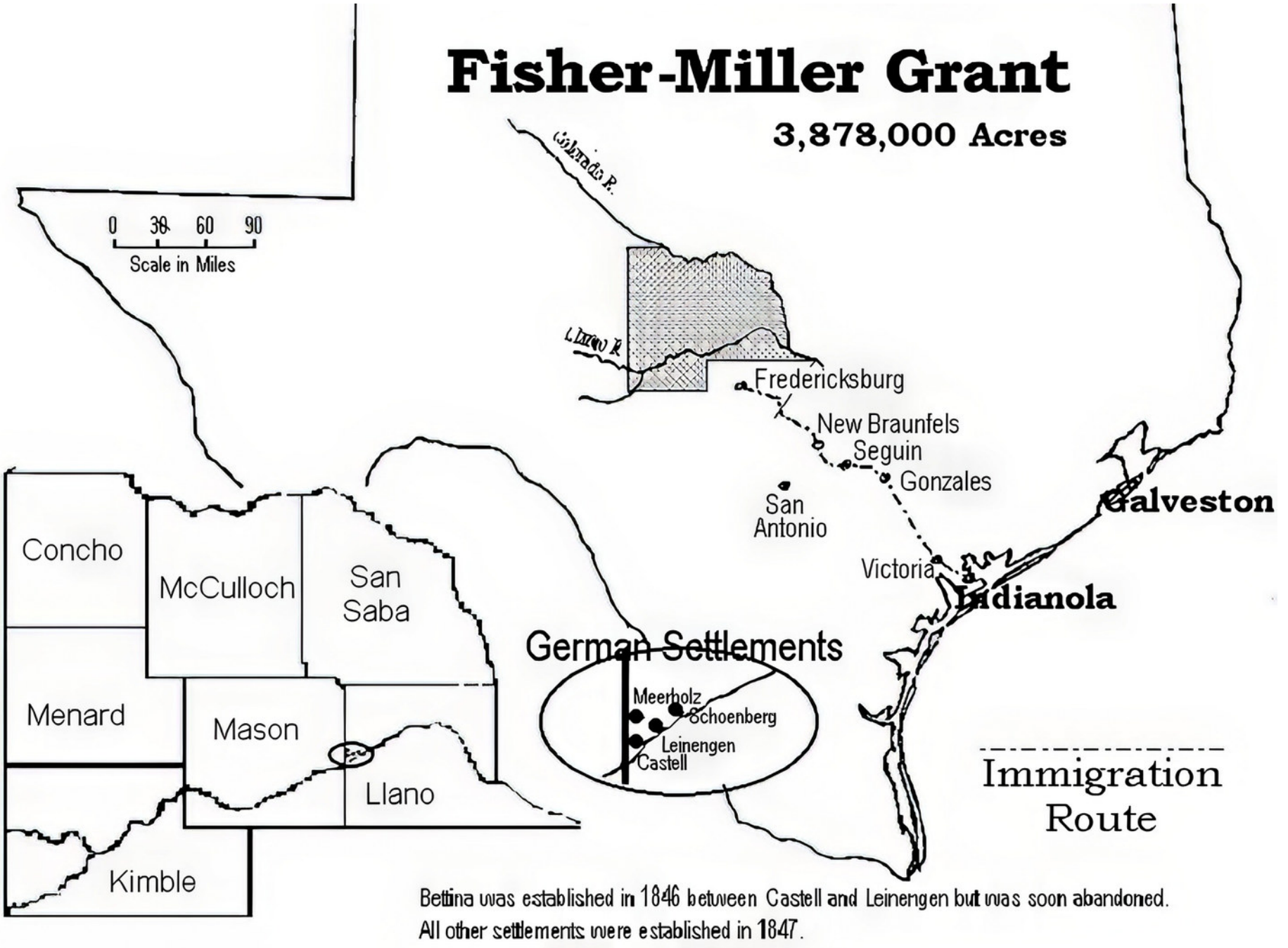
Prince Solms resigned and returned to Germany. Meusebach was made Commissioner-General in charge of the on-site colonization. Meusebach faced a monstrous job. He had to reconcile the financial accounts, hold creditors at bay, feed and house hundreds of immigrants with inadequate funds, transport new arrivals from Carlshafen to New Braunfels, and keep impatient settlers from revolting. He held the colony together, but it took all of his skills to do it.

On December 30, 1845, by means of an indenture with Meusebach, Fisher and Miller assigned their rights in the colonization contract for $5,000. Meusebach immediately appealed for more funding, but the Adelsverein funders and Count Castell, on the other side of the world and not fully understanding the situation, only slowly increased the line of credit.

In early 1846, Meusebach purchased land in the Hill Country just southeast of the F-M grant. He then led the first wagon train of 120 settlers from New Braunfels to found the town of Fredericksburg, named for Prince Frederick of Prussia, in May 1846.

Fisher-Miller Grant

3,878,000 Acres



Bettina was established in 1846 between Castell and Leinengen but was soon abandoned.
All other settlements were established in 1847.

As an aside, one of the colonists who settled in Fredericksburg with Meusebach was Karl Nimitz, Jr. who later changed his name to Charles Henry Nimitz. In 1852, Charles Nimitz built what locals referred to as the Steamboat Hotel because of the ship's bow front. The hotel is now the Admiral Nimitz Museum in honor of Charles Nimitz's grandson, **Chester William Nimitz,** the Fredericksburg native who became Admiral and Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet for the US Navy in World War II. The Museum is also the headquarters of the National Museum of the Pacific War.

Also in May 1846, Meusebach received a letter from Count Castell informing him another 4,304 immigrants were on their way to Texas. Meusebach had arranged with a freight company for transporting them inland after their arrival in Carlshafen in early fall. But just prior to their arrival the United States Army outbid them for use in the Mexican-American War. With the company unable to contract for transportation and lacking the funds to buy their own wagons and teams, the immigrants were stranded. Then the rains came, making logistics impossible to move at large scale. With no food or shelter, living in holes dug into the ground, hundreds died from disease or starvation. The living began to walk to their destinations. An epidemic of spinal meningitis broke out at Carlshafen and later spread with the immigrants to New Braunfels and Fredericksburg.[5] Over 1,000 of the 1846 immigrants died, and only 1,200 actually settled on the land secured by the Verein.[6] It was a debacle resulting from a circumstance of war, weather, disease and inadequate funding.

By 1847 the society was on the brink of bankruptcy and only managed to remain in business under Meusebach's efforts and a name change to The German Emigration Company. Though the Mainzer Adelsverein was a financial disaster, had mismanaged the initial arrivals of settlers, and had never fully achieved that goal of populating the initial Land Grant, they had brought over 7,000 immigrants during 1844 to 1847 **and had founded the towns of New Braunfels, Fredericksburg and other places** to form the western end of the German Belt.

But John Muesebach was not done.
The Fisher-Miller Land Grant was coming due to be forfeited in the fall, and it had yet to be surveyed as the land was in Penateka Comanche territory. Meusebach asked the state of Texas for help in negotiating with the Comanche but got no encouragement or assistance.

Determined not to fail, Meusebach led a party in January 1847 on his own to meet the Comanches and hope to make a treaty. Meusebach's move was risky (some said suicidal). Contact came on February 5, when Chief Ketemoczy and a small party of Comanche warriors (who had been watching from the hills), rode out to confront the Germans near the present-day town of Mason. When Ketemoczy asked interpreter Lorenzo de Rozas the name of his chief, Meusebach rode forward, introduced himself and convinced Ketemoczy of his friendly intentions.

So rather than war cries, Ketemoczy agreed to arrange a peace council with the Comanche leadership group in seven days, at the next full moon. In the interim, Meusebach explored the area. On February 18, the men reached the ruins of Presidio de San Saba, established by Spanish in 1757 near present-day Menard. Carved on the portals of the main entrance were names of previous visitors, including that of famed Alamo defender Jim Bowie. A few days later, they arrived at the Penateka Comanche camp of several hundred warriors plus women and children. Meusebach, an impressive six-foot-two redhead with reddish blond beard (which warranted the Indians to nickname him "Red Sun") rode in to the center to meet the three Comanche head chiefs Buffalo Hump, Santa Anna, and Old Owl.
Negotiations took place and on May 9, the Germans and the Penatekas signed a treaty in Fredericksburg. The Penatekas collected $3,000 worth of presents. The settlers and the Penatekas would both have unfettered access to the territory. The treaty promised mutual reports of wrongdoing. The Penatekas would allow the survey in return for a $1,000 payment. **The first settlement, Bettina, was established the same year, thereby securing the Land Grant. As a result, almost four million acres of land was opened to settlement. Four others, including Castell (which still exists today) were founded the year after.**

Overall, 3,488 certificates for land were issued to colonists. But because many had already settled outside the land grant area, the vast majority sold their certificates to other parties.

Despite minor infringements, the Penatekas and the German settlers upheld the peace treaty. Years later, in 1858, former Texas Ranger Jack Hays told Meusebach how astonished he was that the Penatekas were honoring the treaty. The Penatekas even helped German settlers when a cholera epidemic in Fredericksburg took the lives of three of every five settlers. Santa Anna and his men rode into town with bear meat and herbs to nourish settlers who were trying to regain their health. Santa Anna, unfortunately, contracted the illness as well and died. By late December 1849, he was one of the roughly 300 Penatekas who passed in the epidemic.



Above: Photograph of John Muesebach in the Gillespie County Historical Center in Fredericksburg. (Photo: Internet)



Right: The Old Steamboat Hotel, built by Charles Nimitz, grandfather to Admiral Chester Nimitz. The building is now the Admiral Nimitz Museum and National Museum of the Pacific War. (Photo JC)

At Fredericksburg's annual Founders Day, Comanches occasionally join in, showing they have not forgotten their German allies.

Perhaps one of the reasons the peace treaty was upheld in 1847 was because of Meusebach's attitude toward the Penatekas. During negotiations, he said to them, "My brother speaks of a barrier between the red men and the palefaces. I do not disdain my red brethren because their skin is darker, and I do not think more of the white people because their complexion is lighter."[7]

After selecting the site for Bettina, Muesebach resigned from the Adelsverein in July 1847. In 1851, he became a Senator for the Texas State legislature, representing Bexar, Medina and Comal counties, and later became a businessman in Fredericksburg.

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[1] At the outset, Fisher was able to bring 96 immigrants to Texas (although it is not clear where these people actually settled prior to 1844).
[2] https://texashighways.com/culture/people/a-relative-of-german-settlers-retraces-her-ancestors-arduous-path-to-the-texas-hill-country/
[3] "By the 1870s, Indianola had become a major port, and had grown into a bustling and glamorous city. But Indianola was ravaged by hurricanes in 1875 and 1886, and then abandoned. The former city sits underneath waist-deep water. When the waters are clear, you can see the foundation of the old courthouse about 50 feet offshore." https://texashighways.com/culture/people/a-relative-of-german-settlers-retraces-her-ancestors-arduous-path-to-the-texas-hill-country/
[4] https://historyinnewbraunfels.com/timeline/
[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indianola,_Texas
[6] https://shoreacres.wordpress.com/tag/immigration/
[7] https://truewestmagazine.com/article/the-unbroken-peace-treaty/

Summary:
A Lens on Texas: Volume II: The 1800s
From Mexico Rule to The Republic, Statehood and Early Development

In the span from 1820 to 1900, Texans accomplished in 80 years what Spain and Mexico could not in the previous 300: build a nation and become an economic powerhouse with additional potential just waiting to be untapped.

From a population of less than 10,000 in 1820, Texas grew to over 3 million by the end of the century. From being just a relatively poor and in many cases back-water destitute place to exist, Texas developed to become #1 in Cattle, Cotton, and Timber, and grew in stature and culture as a member of the United States.

The transformation was not without its challenges, sacrifices, and turmoil. A bloody fight for independence, ending at the Battle of San Jacinto, was waged against Mexico after repeated attempts to honor the terms of agreement. Mexico then soon found itself at war with the United States over the boundaries of the two nations. With statehood and boundaries settled and defensible, people flocked to Texas, including many immigrants who left their home countries in Europe to seek a better life in this new world.

But huge social hurdles remained.

* A significant portion of the Texas economy depended on slave labor. A Civil War was fought to begin establishing the right path. But that was just a start; it would take years for that promise to reflect the ideals promised. In the process, divisions in Texas were deep, involving not just racial divides, but also divides based on Union vs Confederacy and conscription avoidance.
* The Native Indian population was not included in the economic growth miracle that unfolded, and fought to retain claims to the land they had used for centuries. It was a fight they were bound to lose. In some respects, it is a repeated feature of human history; one they themselves practiced. But that said, it is nonetheless a stain of history for Texas, and a problem with how to integrate people whose way of life was at odds with the incoming overwhelming number of settlers from a different culture, a problem which had no easy discernible solution, ultimately ending in the use of force.
* And finally, there is the Tejano population themselves. While many sided with the new Anglo settlers and fought side by side in the war against Mexico, they struggled to find the political stature they once held. They still had centers of influence in San Antonio, the southern border, and the far west towns of El Paso and Presidio. But little in Austin or Houston.

Despite this, like a steamroller, Texas pushed forward. Some people who were not initially on the inside, like the German and Czech immigrants, forged a life for themselves and created their own sense of place. And they were successful in their own terms. To celebrate this, they built some of the most amazing places of worship and maintained their cultural identity while still becoming Texas citizens.

As to the towns of Texas themselves, it is fitting that this Volume II ended with a photo-essay on Texas County Courthouses. Many of these were built around the turn of the century and are a testimony to the success of these counties as they prospered enough to announce their civic stature and pride with these wonderful architectural masterpieces.

But in many respects, the best was yet to come, as Volume III will detail.

A Lens on Texas

Volume III: 1900 to 2025 – Transition to the Modern Age, Growth and Diversity



Jerry Clark

Volume III – Section 2

Photo-essays of the Big Cities, Small Towns, and a potpourri of cultural scenes across the state.

This Section 2 begins a bridge from the more chronologically-framed and text-driven history of Texas provided thus far, to a more theme-framed and photo-essay-driven perspective. That said, previous volumes did include Sidebars and Photo-Essays on the Spanish Missions, on certain cities and towns (e.g., Goliad, El Paso, Galveston and Presidio) that complemented the historical chronological narrative, and on the County Courthouses, the Painted Churches, and various other such topics.

This Section of Volume III builds on this material, providing more photo-essays on other cities and towns, and on the human cultural legacy expressed in various ways, large and small, across the state. Without repeating that already shown, this intent will display some other aspects of the Texas human endeavor that caught my eye and my camera lens.
(Note: Volume IV will focus on the Texas Landscape.)

To put that into perspective, consider my list of **"The Oldest Towns in Texas"** on the opposite page. This list is based on the many such lists which can be found on the internet. But all the lists apply certain qualifiers or filters. First and foremost, all are about towns that still exist today, and how long they were occupied. But by whom? If it were about continuous occupation by humans, several candidates such as Presidio or Alto, continuously occupied for well over 10,000 years, would rise to the top. But all these lists baseline their start with the first Anglo-European settlement. Given that not-so-minor qualifier, the next filters have to do with whether the clock starts when it became a "settlement", or when it became a formally incorporated "town", and whether it is still a town separate unto itself or has been subsumed by a larger town which later grew. And the next qualifier is whether it was "continuously occupied", and by that do we mean "continuously without interruption", or "continuous more or less"? The qualifiers are substantial, and are akin to the fine print behind "oldest churches" designation.

The Texas debate over "The Oldest" generally revolves around Ysleta, Socorro,, Presidio, and Nacogdoches. In my travels to all four, they all stake that claim. But, as shown on the opposite and summarized below, all but Socorro have issues:

* Ysleta & Socorro: Both missions established 1682 and continuously occupied. Ysleta preceded Socorro by days, and so it holds title to the oldest parish in Texas, with Socorro #2. But Ysleta was annexed by El Paso in 1955, and is no longer a separate town. Socorro has remained incorporated since 1871. So **Socorro is the oldest settlement that remains a town**.
* Presidio: A mission was established in 1683. It had significant periods of **off-and-on occupancy thereafter until 1759,** when a presidio was built which then allowed a settlement to grow.
* Nacogdoches: Not the oldest in Texas, **but likely the oldest in Tejas** (i.e., east Texas) Almost continuously occupied since its mission was established in 1716. The mission and the settlement were abandoned in 1773. **Settlers returned in 1779.**

From a continuity standpoint, the above pecking order makes the most sense. But if pure continuity is the determining factor, then San Antonio (1718) and Goliad (1749) would have to be interjected as #s 2 and 3 after Socorro.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for the "Oldest Continuously Occupied Town in Texas From the Date it Became a Town" is likely San Antonio. Founded in 1718 as both a Mission and a Spanish Villa (town) and occupied continuously thereafter, it has no countervailing qualifiers. As a result, this Section 2 includes an extended photo-essay on San Antonio, in my view the most historic and most unique large city in Texas. But before that (and having previously shown Sidebars on Socorro and Presidio), we will begin with a look at Nacogdoches, clearly one of the oldest historic towns in Texas, and one which has taken great pride in preserving and displaying its history to support its claim as "The Oldest Town".

The Oldest Towns in Texas

Here's my listing of the 26 oldest towns in Texas established after the arrival of the Spaniards, as gleaned from various references. They are ranked by the year from which they were continuously occupied, which span from 1682 to 1839. Exceptions are made for Presidio, Nacogdoches and Galveston, owing to the brevity of their interrupted occupancy.

(Reference, one of several: 26 Oldest Cities in Texas: https://93qcountry.com/168737)

		Founded/ Settled	Continuous Since	
1	**Socorro/ Ysleta**	**1682**	**1682**	Missions Ysleta and Socorro founded by Pueblo Indians under Gov. de Otermin and Fr. Ayeta in 1682. Both began as mission communities, continuously occupied. Population estimated at 1,050 in the 1750s, of which some 750 were Indians. Only Socorro remains an incorporated town. Ysleta was annexed by El Paso in 1955.
2	**Presidio**	**1683**	**1759**	Spanish visited starting in 1535. First missions in 1683 at request of Jumano Chief Juan Sabeata. Abandoned at least twice, until 1759 when a presidio was built, which allowed a civil settlement to grow from small numbers.
3	**Nacogdoches**	**1716**	**1779**	Spain establishes Mission Guadalupe in 1716. Abandoned in 1773. Became a town in 1779 when settlers returned Population in 1792 was about 660 per report by Gil y Barbo.
4	**San Antonio**	**1718**	**1718**	**Mission Valero/Villa Bexar established by Gov. Alarcon and Fr. Olivares. Continuously occupied. Population 2,060 in 1777. Considered the political, military and cultural heart of early Spanish and Mexican Texas.**
5	Goliad	1749	1749	Presidio La Bahai and Mission Espiritu Santo moved here in 1749. La Bahai became Villa de Goliad in 1829. Most (but not all) left briefly after the Battle of San Jacinto. Town re-incorporated as Goliad in 1839.
6	Laredo	1755	1755	Villa de San Augustin de Laredo founded by Tomas Sanchez y Garza as settlement for ranching and trade.
7	San Elizario	1750s	1789	Juan de Onate led colonists through here in 1598. Hacienda de los Tiburcios became a settlement before 1760 with 165 people in 1765. Abandoned in the 1770s. When Spaniards moved a presidio there in 1789, it became a town. Continuously occupied thereafter. Became El Paso county seat from 1850-1873 with 1,200 people.
8.	Refugio	1795	1795	Mission established 1795, operated continuously. A village grew up around the mission as did many ranchos. Villa de Refugio officially established 1831. Population depleted during the Independence battle. The villa became a town in 1834 and incorporated by 1837. Tenuous existence thereafter, but continuous presence nonetheless.
9	**Galveston**	**1816**	**1825**	Pirates Louis-Michel Aury (1816) and then Jean Lafitte (1817) build a small colony as a raiding base. Settlement burned to the ground in 1821. Mexico re-establishes town in 1825, building a customs house in 1830.
10	Columbus	1821	1821	As part of the "Old 300" Benjamin Beason arrived in 1821 and helped found a settlement known as known as Beason's Crossing, where he operated a ferry to cross the Colorado River. A villa established then. Became the Town of Columbus, platted in 1837. Became seat of Colorado County with Classical Revival/ Italianate Courthouse built in 1890.
11	La Grange	1822	1822	First occupied by "Old 300" settlers in 1822. A fort built in 1828 and a small community developed. Town platted in 1837. Fayette County Seat.
12	Victoria	1824	1824	Martin De Leon establishes Victoria as part of his colony, one of the first Land Grants, preceding Stephen Austin.
13	Gonzales	1825	1825	Founded by Green DeWitt as capital of his colony. Burned down in 1836. Re-established soon after.
14	Columbia	1824	1826	Founded in 1824 (East) and 1826 (West), both as inland ports on the Brazos River.West Columbia, now known as Columbia, was the First Capital of the Republic of Texas, where Congress first met in 1836.
15	Matagorda	1827	1827	Established 1827 by Stephen Austin to protect incoming settlers. Became County Seat and big port in 1837.
16	Brazoria	1828	1828	Established by John Austin on land granted by Stephen Austin.
17	San Patricio	1830	1830	Founded as an Irish/Mexican community along the Nueces River. Is still a county seat. Battle fought here in 1836.
18	Industry	1831	1831	Founded by Friedrich Ernst who received a Land Grant. Known as "Cradle of German Settlement in Texas".
19	Bastrop	1832	1832	Considered by some as "Most Historic Small Town in Texas" with 131 buildings on National Register.
20	S. Augustine	1716	1832	Spain establishes Mission Dolores de los Ais in 1716. Abandoned in 1719. Re-established 1721. Abandoned 1773. Ais Hasinai (Caddo) Indians continuously occupy. **Town begins 1832.** Called "The Cradle of Texas".
21	Port Isabel		1830s	Located where TX Hwy 100 meets Laguna Madre, occupied off-&-on since late 1700s. A small community developed in the 1830s, with a post office established as Point Isabel in 1845.

22-26: Next Five: Houston (1836); Seguin (1838); Beaumont (1838); Austin (1839) and Corpus Christi (1839)

A Lens on Texas

Volume IV: The Landscapes



Jerry Clark

A Lens on Texas: Volume IV - The Landscapes

Introduction

Volumes I-III of this book focused on the human history of Texas, and the one thing that characterizes this period is the continual evolution and change throughout. This Volume IV will be about the one thing that remained virtually constant throughout: The Land.

But while the Land overall has been the same, the individual Landscapes of Texas are anything but; they vary greatly from place to place. Texas is among those few states that encompass such a tremendous variation in its physiography, allowing one to travel from one different world to another and another, all within the confines of the state's borders. Of course part of this is simply because Texas is big, 268,596 square miles big. Only Alaska is larger in square miles, and it commands that position by a lot, two and a half times larger than Texas with its 665,000 square miles. California (164,000), Montana (147,000) and New Mexico (122,000) round out the rest of the top 5 in areal extent, followed by Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Oregon and Wyoming. Together, these top 10 states comprise 1.9 million square miles, exactly half of the 50-state US total. One could say "The West is the Best".

Now to be fair, all of these states, and others, possess tremendous physiographic variety, but Texas is ... well, just different. Perhaps uniquely different. As Texas Parks & Wildlife states: "Our geographic location is a crossroads where eastern habitats meet western ones and southern subtropical habitats meet northern temperate ones. The annual rainfall can range from eight inches in the deserts of far west Texas to 56 inches per year in the swamps of east Texas."[1]

To expand on that in my own words, Texas bridges the variation from the lushly vegetated plantation-lands of Louisiana to the desert-dry New Mexico. It varies from its 367 miles of sea-level coastline to the rugged 8,000 foot mountains of the Guadalupe and the Chisos ranges. Across its various topographies, Texas contains a great avian variety, with its 668 species of birds second only to California's 706. It has swamps and alligators. It has a one-of-a-kind Caddo Lake. It has some of the flattest land in the country in west Texas, with town names like Levelland that mimic the terrain. It has forests of mesquite, and is one of the few places with abundant ocotillo. It has over 3,700 named rivers and streams (second to Alaska), many flowing out of the Balcones Escarpment as spring water. It has fields of bluebonnets and paintbrush that seem to go on forever.

Texas has 16 sites managed by the National Park Service, including two national parks, two national monuments, four national historic parks, a national seashore, and seven other national sites, including recreation areas, trails, preserves and memorials. In addition to these National Park Service sites, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department manages some 89 state parks and natural areas.

The list goes on. So many of the things above are unique to Texas, especially at scale.

This Volume IV will present photo-essays on my favorite and most interesting Texas Landscapes that I have photographed across the entire state, showcasing also the birds, flora, and fauna. Referencing the map on the right, the book will cross Texas, region by region, starting in Central Texas which includes the Hill Country and its neighboring plains to the southeast. In a counter-clockwise sequence, the sections then follow with the Gulf Coast, to Caddo Lake in the Piney Woods of Northeast Texas, then the North Texas Prairies and Panhandle Plains, and finally the Trans-Pecos/Big Bend area.

But first, we'll begin with an overview of what defines these regions of the state.

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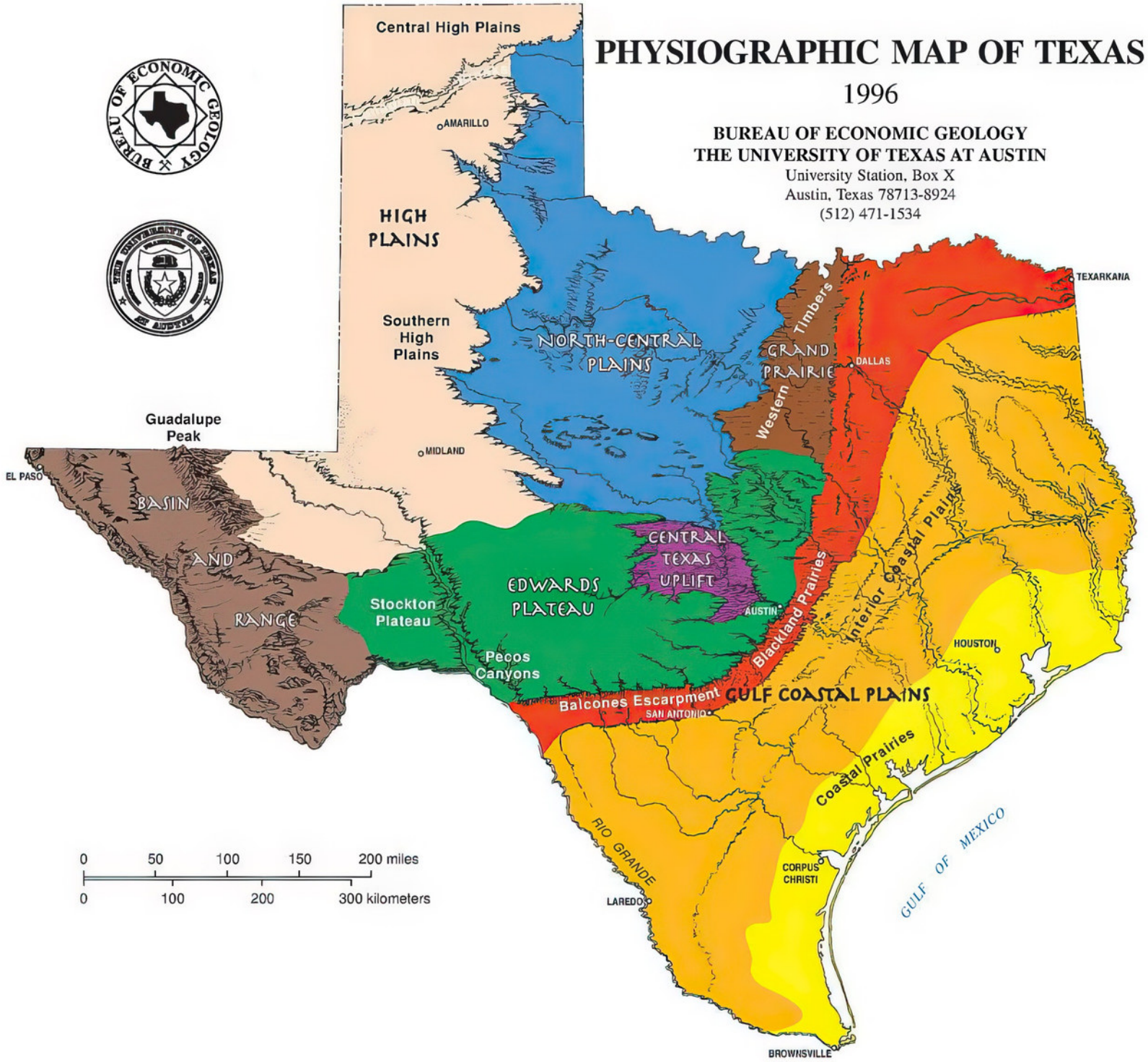
[1] https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/hunter-education/online-course/wildlife-conservation/texas-ecoregions


Panhandle
Plains
Prairies
& Lakes
Piney
Woods
Big Bend
Hill Country
Gulf
Coast
South
Texas Plains

PHYSIOGRAPHIC MAP OF TEXAS

1996

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PROVINCE	MAX. ELEV. (ft)	MIN. ELEV. (ft)	TOPOGRAPHY	GEOLOGIC STRUCTURE	BEDROCK TYPES
Gulf Coastal Plains					
Coastal Prairies	300	0	Nearly flat prairie, <1 ft/mi to Gulf	Nearly flat strata	Deltaic sands and muds
Interior Coastal Plains	800	300	Parallel ridges (questas) and valleys	Beds tilted toward Gulf	Unconsolidated sands and muds
Blackland Prairies	1000	450	Low rolling terrain	Beds tilted south and east	Chalks and marls
Grand Prairie	1250	450	Low stairstep hills west; plains east	Strata dip east	Calcareous east; sandy west
Edwards Plateau					
Principal	3000	450	Flat upper surface with box canyons	Beds dip south; normal faulted	Limestones and dolomites
Pecos Canyons	2000	1200	Steep-walled canyons		Limestones and dolomites
Stockton Plateau	4200	1700	Mesa-formed terrain; highs to west	Unfaulted, near-horizontal beds	Carbonates and alluvial sediments
Central Texas Uplift	2000	800	Knobby plain; surrounded by questas	Centripetal dips, strongly faulted	Granites; metamorphics; sediments
North-Central Plains	3000	900	Low north-south ridges (questas)	West dip; minor faults	Limestones; sandstones; shales
High Plains					
Central	4750	2900	Flat prairies slope east and south	Slight dips east and south	Eolian silts and fine sands
Canadian Breaks	3800	2350	Highly dissected; local solution valleys		
Southern	3800	2200	Flat; many playas; local dune fields		
Basin and Range	8750	1700	North-south mountains and basins	Some complex folding and faulting	Igneous; metamorphics; sediments

As shown on the map at left, the Pecos River joins the Rio Grande just west of the Amistad Reservoir. The pictures on this page were taken from the Hwy 90 bridge over the river, the tallest river bridge in Texas, about a mile upstream from the junction.

This area is also where ancient rock art at Seminole Canyon State Park and the Witte Museum's White Shaman Preserve are located, as previously shown in Volume I of this book.

As discussed later, prior to the full formation of the Rio Grande several hundred thousand years ago, the Pecos River was the dominant drainage path out of New Mexico into Texas and down to the Gulf of Mexico.





The Rio Grande's Journey Through the Big Bend Area

The Big Bend region is named after a prominent bend in the Rio Grande River at Mariscal Canyon inside the National Park where the river makes an abrupt turn from southeast to almost due north. From a regional perspective though, the area is much broader, and can be thought of as the inverse "hump" on the map of Texas southeast of El Paso. Somewhere near Porvenir (upriver from Candelaria/Ruidosa), the river makes a decisive shift to flow almost due south, then turns southeasterly around Presidio. It continues that way until the turn at Mariscal, where it continues north ... until somewhere below Sanderson (50 miles east of Marathon), the river returns to an easterly flow. It later resumes its southeast flow after Langtry, near the junction with the Pecos River. The northern edge of this broadly defined area, from Porvenir to Sanderson, is about 200 miles long, most of which is on US Hwy 90 from Marfa to Alpine to Marathon to Sanderson.

The heart of the Big Bend is of course Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park. The area from Study Butte/Terlingua to Lajitas, and from there along The River Road to Presidio is also quite popular. But it extends even outside these park boundaries, going up to Alpine.

It encompasses a unique landscape characterized by rugged terrain, desert ecosystems, and mountain ranges. This region is a treasure trove of natural beauty, history, and biodiversity, making it a significant area for both conservation and outdoor recreation.



The Clinton Baermann Mural

This beautiful oil on canvas mural, painted by artist Clinton Baermann, hangs in the Museum of the Big Bend (MoBB) in Alpine on the campus of Sul Ross State University. The mural is very large – 82 inches high by 270 inches wide – and covers an entire wall.

The MoBB website* says that the mural used to be inside a used furniture store in Williamson County. The store was scheduled for demolition, but the mural was rescued by Texas Judge Billy Ray Stubblefield of Georgetown. Years later he donated it to MoBB where it was beautifully restored and installed in 2023. The mural is unnamed, but is said to depict the Sierra Viejo area along the Rio Grande, upriver from Presidio and Candelaria.
(JC: This is likely near the old US town of Porvenir. Right across the river is the Mexican town of Presidio de Pilares, where Spaniards built a presidio in 1774. Perhaps the "Pilares" (pillars) got its name referring to the way the southern edge of the Viejo Mountains straddles the river at this point.)

Regardless, the area is near the beginning of what defines the broader "Big Bend" area, making the MoBB an appropriate home for the mural.
The MoBB museum is a gem on all things historical in Big Bend, and is a "must-visit" place to gain a deeper understanding of the area. It was named the Best Small Town Museum by USA Today's 2024 Readers' Choice Award.

Photo of mural by J Clark
* Ref: https://www.sulross.edu/restored-baermann-mural-on-display-for-this-weekends-grand-opening-of-the-mccoy-building-at-museum-of-the-big-bend/



Trans-Pecos/Big Bend Region: A Tale of Three Rivers [1]

The Rio Grande is the fourth longest river in the United States at 1,896 miles, with its headwaters in the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado. As the topographic map on the far right shows, its two largest tributaries are Mexico's **Rio Conchos,** with its headwaters in the Sierra Madre Occidental, and the **Pecos River** that begins in the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains and drains eastern New Mexico and West Texas. **Both of these now-tributaries preceded the arrival of the Rio Grande at their current junction** and played a hugely important role in forming the pathway for the later-arriving Rio Grande. In particular, the Pecos was the dominant river and drainage path in Texas prior to the arrival of the Rio Grande, running all the way from its headwaters in northern New Mexico to its entry point in West Texas south of Carlsbad, and then down to Amistad and from there to the Gulf of Mexico.

So, while the Rio Grande is the fourth-longest river, it is the youngest of the major river systems in the US. Here's how it happened.

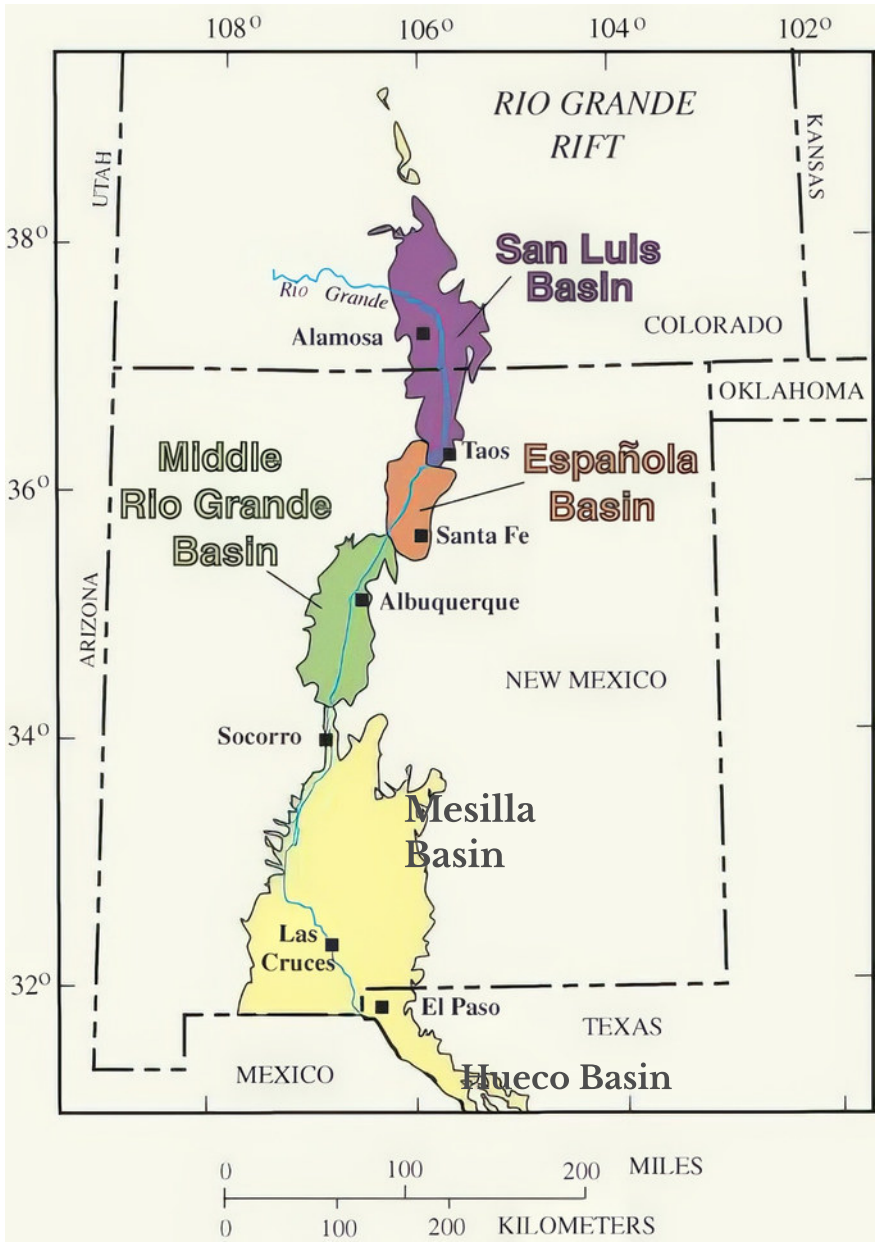
The Rio Grande first owes its existence to a powerful tectonic phenomenon known as the **Rio Grande Rift.** But the Rift didn't allow the river to form overnight. The evolution of the Rio Grande is a multi-million-year story, one that geologists continue to decipher. During the Basin and Range development that began some 30 million years ago (mya), the western continent was stretched by tectonic forces, producing fault blocks that created a series of up-tilted mountain ranges and down-thrown basins. The Rio Grande Rift running from Colorado to West Texas is a localized example of this, with the Taos Gorge its most obvious current expression. The map on the right shows these basins, beginning with the San Luis Basin in southern Colorado, continuing with a series of basins in New Mexico: the Espanola Basin, and the Middle Rio Grande and Mesilla Basins (and their sub-basins, not shown on this map). Southeast of El Paso in Texas also lies the Hueco Basin, which extends toward Presidio.

Initially these basins were disconnected from each other, each enclosed by mountains and other higher ground. As a result, water that drained in was trapped, especially as the active Rift kept widening and deepening the basins. When the Rift's activity slowed down about 10-15 mya, streams that drained into these basins could then fill them with sediment, allowing the water levels to rise and eventually breach and erode the rim and spill over to the next one. A period of progressive integration followed, beginning with the Espanola Basin. Streams from the southern Rockies joined some 13 million years ago to flow past present-day Taos and Santa Fe, but that "paleo-Rio Grande" ended in a lake, south of Albuquerque. Over the millenia, that lake breached and emptied southward to Socorro, New Mexico, to collect in that lake (shown in green on the map to the right), and then again to Truth or Consequences about 5 million years ago. And beginning about 3.5 mya, the Rio Grande ended as a series of lakes around Las Cruces, collectively called Lake Cabeza de Vaca by geologists.

Water pooled at Lake Cabeza de Vaca because the river was blocked by the saddle ridge at El Paso between the Franklin Mountains and the Sierra de Juarez Range. It wasn't until about 2.0-2.25 mya that the water cut through this section (which the Spaniards later named El Paso del Norte - The Pass to the North). Geologists date this stage of the river's progress from a cataclysmic event: a massive eruption of the Yellowstone volcano – which blanketed western North America in ash at that time. It provides a time marker for the oldest date from which the river was flowing past El Paso.

Following that, the river filled the Hueco Basin and then spilled downstream toward Presidio. Before the Rio Grande's arrival, the Rio Conchos had likely formed an ancient "Lake Presidio", as flow downstream of Presidio was blocked by higher elevations along what is today's River Road, such "The Big Hill" midway to Lajitas. But it is believed the combined rivers then soon "escaped" the basin to Lajitas – where they began to carve the vast Big Bend canyons at Santa Elena, Mariscal, Hot Springs, and Boquillas.

Interestingly, water in the San Luis Basin in Colorado was trapped in a broad Lake Alamosa much longer, and did not break through to join the rest of the downstream paleo-Rio Grande until between 450,000-300,0000 years ago. When it did cut through, it deepened the Taos Gorge as we see today, and this linking of the San Luis Basin resulted in a new headwater for the Rio Grande up in the San Juan Mountains. The draining of Lake Alamosa also allowed the top layers of sand captured by the lake to dry and be blown eastward up against the Sangre de Cristo Range, forming today's Great Sand Dunes National Park.





Meanwhile, back over to the Pecos River, it reached the Langtry/Comstock area millions of years before all that. That said, there are some competing models of how it got there, whether: 1) The Conchos actually got there as well before the Rio Grande joined it (unlikely); or whether 2) A version of the paleo-Rio Grande had a temporary offshoot that spilled east around today's Socorro from its blocked path south to capture/combine with the Pecos River and then help carve a path to Comstock (maybe); or whether 3) The Pecos got there first by itself (most likely). Regardless, once that happened, the stream cut its path to the Gulf long before the Rio Grande River, as we know it today, made its way through Big Bend to Comstock/Amistad. Geologists date that arrival at about 800,000 years ago, at which point it joined the Pecos that was already there, and followed the path that whatever version of the Pecos had already carved to the Gulf.

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[1] Sources and material for this section include:
* Interview with Dan Koning, a senior field geologist with the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, from: https://www.marfapublicradio.org/show/nature-notes/2020-09-10/the-making-of-the-great-river-the-epic-story-of-the-rio-grande
* Paper by Daniel Koning and Sean Connell: https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/publications/periodicals/litegeology/32/lg_v32.pdf
* Ref: The Geomorphic Evolution of the Pecos River System by Ronny G. Thomas et al; 1972; Baylor University Department of Geology
* Unfolding the Geology of the West; Chapter 13: Geomorphic evolution of the San Luis Basin and Rio Grande in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. C.A. Ruleman, M.N. Machette et al 2016.
* The Pecos River Hypogene Speleogenetic Province: A Basin Scale Karst Paradigm for Eastern New Mexico and West Texas. USA by Kevin Stafford, Alexander Klimchouk, Lewis Land, and Marcus Gary, 2009 S.F. Austin University

Colorado Canyon



Looking west, the Rio Grande River makes its way to Colorado Canyon.
This canyon was carved over thousands of years through volcanic rocks formed from vents in the nearby Sierra Rica and Bofecillos Mountains.
Image from the "Big Hill", along the River Road (Hwy 170), between Presidio and Lajitas