

## Section

# 5

## Life in Spanish Texas

### Main Ideas

1. Mission life was structured around prayer and work.
2. The life of a presidio soldier could be harsh.
3. Life in Spanish settlements reflected the influence of Spanish culture, which is still felt in Texas today.

### Key Terms

- *ayuntamiento*
- *alcalde*
- *vaqueros*

### Why It Matters Today

Many states in the American Southwest still show signs of a strong Spanish influence. Use current events sources to identify one way this influence is felt in your area of Texas today.



**TEKS:** 2C, 2F, 10A, 19C, 19D, 21B, 21C, 22D

### myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on life in Spanish Texas.

## The Story Continues

The mission bells rang as daylight began to brighten the dark Texas sky. Rising from buffalo-skin mattresses, American Indians walked to the chapel. The priests counted the churchgoers as they entered. Then the congregation chanted and prayed. Later, the Spaniards and the Indians rose to sing a song called *El Alabado*. It told the churchgoers to lift their hearts and praise God. It was the start of another day at a Spanish mission in Texas.



## Life in the Missions

The Spanish wanted Texas Indians to live in the missions and learn the Spanish way of life. In the missions, life followed a regular pattern of worship and work. The day started at dawn with religious services. For at least an hour, priests taught mission Indians about the Catholic faith. Then the Indians' workday began under the direction of the priests, soldiers, and civilians, including women. One priest described the work.

### TEXAS VOICES



"The labor of the Indians is to plant the fields, look after the cattle, to water the crops, to clear away weeds, and to gather their grain, to [build] their dwellings and other buildings. . . . Some work at weaving and in the forges, and others work as carpenters and bricklayers."

—Isidro Félix de Espinosa, quoted in *Spanish Expeditions into Texas, 1689–1768*, by Nancy Haston Foster

American Indian men tended crops of beans, corn, and cotton. The women made pottery, cared for livestock, wove cloth, and ran the mission kitchen. The day ended with prayers and dinner—usually thin cereal. When they were not in church or working, mission Indians also learned Spanish songs and dances. The Spanish hoped these lessons would encourage Indians to abandon their traditional celebrations. This strategy rarely worked, as one missionary complained. “When the ministers are not watching them they go off to the woods, and there hold their dances.” Some Indians also left the missions during hunting or fishing seasons. Most Texas Indians attempted to keep their own culture and traditions despite pressure from the missionaries.

Mission life was often harsh for the Indians who lived there. The missionaries forced them to work growing food both for themselves and for the Spaniards. Indians often were forced to stay in small, closed quarters so they could not leave the missions. In addition, the foods available at missions was less varied than what Indians had in their own settlements. As one missionary noted, “The meals consisted of nothing more than a little purslane [a wild herb] seasoned with salt and pepper.” Cramped conditions and a restricted diet led to illness for many Indians.

Nevertheless, some missions, particularly those at San Antonio, became substantial communities. By the 1720s, Indians were irrigating the missions’ crops. By 1750, one mission had 2,000 cattle and 1,000 sheep. Mission Indians harvested 2,400 bushels of corn that year. Missions near El Paso and San Antonio thrived because Indians there adopted Spanish cultures. Other missions, such as those in East Texas and La Bahía, helped the Spanish gain a presence in the borderlands.

**Reading Check Evaluating** How did some Texas Indians adapt to Spanish culture while maintaining their Indian traditions?



## Life in the Presidios

A mission was more likely to succeed if it had a presidio nearby. These military outposts were built of adobe, stone, and timber. Each presidio had a chapel, barracks for soldiers, storage rooms, and a headquarters building. Sometimes a stockade, or wall, surrounded these buildings.

Soldiers in the presidios had several duties. They guarded the missions and protected the Spaniards’ herds of horses. They helped supervise the American Indians who lived there. They also provided escorts for travelers, delivered mail, and performed construction work. At times, missionaries and soldiers argued about who had the higher authority in the borderlands. This tension added to the hardship of living in the small, isolated presidios. Although their work was risky, the soldiers received low wages. Many soldiers fell into debt because their pay was late in coming. In addition, the soldiers had poor equipment. Their uniforms were often worn and ragged.



### CONNECTING TO

## The Arts

### Mission Architecture

Many of the early mission chapels in Texas were simple, rough structures made of wood. As the Spanish continued to settle in Texas, they began using stone to build mission villages. The buildings had baroque, or fancy, details. Carvings and sculptures decorated arched windows and doorways. Soaring bell towers stood high against the Texas sky. Mission San José in San Antonio is often called the Queen of Texas Missions. It includes a domed chapel and bright wall paintings. It also has a sculpted window known as the Rose Window. **Why might Spanish missionaries have wanted to create beautiful and fancy chapels?**





## CONNECTING TO

# Music

### **Romances Corridos**

*Romances corridos*, or folk songs, were very popular in Spanish settlements in the 1700s and 1800s. These songs, sometimes accompanied by guitar, dealt with many different subjects—love, heartbreak, and bravery. *Romances corridos* continue to appeal to many Texans. The tunes have new words. Even so, they can be traced to the songs that Spanish settlers sang to entertain themselves on the frontier. **How are romances corridos from frontier times similar to popular songs of today?**

Despite the harsh conditions, some soldiers brought their families with them. Eventually, a few of these families moved from the presidios and helped start Spanish settlements.

**Reading Check Comparing** How was life in the presidios similar to life in the missions?



## Life in the Settlements

Texas settlements had a diverse population of Spaniards, American Indians, and people of African descent. Most of the Spanish had moved north from Mexico in search of good land for farming or ranching. Some settlers were former soldiers who had married Texas Indians. Others were free African Americans, many of whom were of mixed descent.

A few permanent Texas towns grew from the mission-presidio system. As they grew, these Spanish settlements shared some similarities with modern towns. Many had well-defined streets leading past houses and government buildings. There were many different stores, including bakeries and candle shops. In San Antonio, by far the largest settlement, dams were built to create an irrigation system of canals.

San Antonio was the first town in Texas that allowed people to participate in their government. When the Canary Islanders first came, they were given lands and a charter for their settlement, San Fernando de Béxar. They elected an **ayuntamiento** (ah-yoon-tah-MYEN-toh), or governing council, to enforce royal and local laws. One member, the **alcalde** (ahl-KAHL-deh), held both judicial and law enforcement powers. However, the viceroy in Mexico City still had authority over

all settlements in New Spain, including Texas. The viceroy appointed a governor to act as his representative in Texas and the neighboring state of Coahuila.

The economy of the settlements was mostly based on farming and ranching. Both men and women helped with the planting and harvesting of crops. The cattle business helped San Antonio and other towns grow. **Vaqueros** (vah-KEHR-ohz), or cowboys, worked on ranches near the settlements. Vaqueros were well known for their skilled horse riding and cattle handling. The Spanish also used their skills at horse riding to provide entertainment. Horse racing was a popular event.

Most social activities centered around the family and the church. Religious holidays offered opportunities for worship and socializing. On other special occasions, residents gathered at fandangos, or dances. As the Spanish settlements grew, they developed more cultural activities.

Spanish influences on the culture and history of Texas can still be seen today. Some Spanish missions are still active churches. The restored La Bahía presidio can be seen near present-day Goliad. The Spanish also laid out the first Texas roads, such as El Camino Real. Many of the place names of cities and natural features, such as rivers, are Spanish.

Many Texas traditions also reflect Spanish influence. For example, the Spanish had introduced horses and cattle ranching to the Americas. They settled in Mexico and then moved north, bringing cattle with them. Cowboys later used the equipment developed by the vaqueros. Spanish law also helped shape life in Texas. For example, early Spanish laws protected the property rights of women. Women continued to benefit from these laws when Texas became part of the United States. Spanish architecture, art, food, language, and music are alive in Texas today.

**Reading Check Drawing Inferences and Conclusions** What influence did the Spanish have on Texas place names and the cattle industry?



## Section 5 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

### 1. Define and explain:

- *ayuntamiento*
- *alcalde*
- *vaqueros*

### 2. Comparing and Contrasting

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to compare and contrast the defining characteristics of life in Spanish Texas with present-day Texas.



### 3. Finding the Main Idea

- a. What were some elements of life in the missions and presidios?
- b. What was life in the Spanish settlements like?

### 4. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

**Evaluating** Write a short speech describing examples of Spanish influence on place names or towns in Texas.

Consider the following:

- architecture, food, and music
- languages spoken there