

Section

2

Daily Life on the Frontier

Main Ideas

1. Early Texans made homes, clothing, and meals out of the resources around them.
2. Roman Catholicism was the official religion of Mexican Texas, but many settlers wanted to remain Protestant.
3. Education was limited in early Texas.

Key Terms

- dogtrot cabin
- quilting bees
- buckskin
- venison

Why It Matters Today

Many settlers in Texas relied on their crops for food. Use current events sources to find out how people rely on agriculture today.



TEKS: 2F, 10A, 11A, 19B, 19C, 21B, 21C, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on daily life in Texas during the Mexican national period.

The Story Continues

After a long journey, immigrant families often found a warm welcome in Texas. From miles around, settlers came to help them build a house. After greeting the new arrivals, they set to work. While the men cut down trees and hauled logs, the women barbecued meat and prepared cornbread. Children played games and learned to dance. Their work done, the settlers finally left as night fell.



Frontier Homes

One of the first tasks for newcomers in Texas was building a house. For this chore, Texans had to rely on the building materials at hand. What those materials were depended on where a person lived. To the south and west, trees were scarce. As a result, the people who lived there—mostly Tejanos—did not have much wood to build with. Some built with adobe or stone. Others lived in jacales, small huts made of sticks and mud.

In East Texas, where trees were plentiful, Tejanos and newly arrived Anglo settlers built rough log cabins. Cut logs of pine, cedar, or oak were stacked and notched together to form walls. The space between logs was filled with clay, stones, grass, and sticks. In hot weather, people might knock out this filling to let in breezes. Of course, bugs came in as well. Long, thin boards formed the cabins' roofs, while floors were usually clay, dirt, or wood.



VIDEO

Log Home

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Most log homes were small one- or two-room cabins. A popular design was the **dogtrot cabin**, which included an open passage separating two rooms. Breezes would flow through this passage, cooling the cabin. Even prominent settlers like Stephen F. Austin lived in dogtrot cabins. One visitor described Austin's home as "a double log cabin with a wide 'passage' through the center, a porch . . . on the front with windows opening upon it, and [a] chimney at each end." As time passed, many successful settlers replaced their cabins with larger, fancier homes.

Settlers usually furnished their homes with items they made themselves. This handmade furniture was generally simple and sturdy. Some items, though, were both functional and beautiful, like the quilts that women made. Many of these quilts were made at **quilting bees**, which doubled as social occasions. Participants could chat and trade stories as they assembled their quilts.

Reading Check Analyzing Information What factors contributed to the design of homes in Texas during this period?



Clothing in Early Texas

Just as they did for their homes, Texans used local materials to make their clothes. Cloth was hard to come by in so remote an area, so Texans of the period turned to other sources. In addition, life on the Texas frontier was rough, so clothing had to be durable and sturdy. Texas had plenty of wild deer and other animals, so leather clothing was common. Many people—men, women, and children—wore **buckskin**, or tanned deer hide. Although it was extremely strong, buckskin was very uncomfortable and often smelly, especially when it got wet. It was generally worn only as a last resort.

Although buckskin was convenient, it was not the only fabric used to make clothing. Wool was a popular choice, especially for making shirts. By the 1830s Texans had begun growing cotton, and homespun cotton fabric was soon in common use. More expensive fabrics could be imported from the United States, Mexico, or Europe.

Clothing styles differed based on people's backgrounds. Anglo settlers tended to dress much as they had in the United States, while Tejanos dressed similarly to other Mexican citizens. For working, men usually wore long shirts that could be tucked into their pants. Heavy leather boots protected their feet, while hats provided protection from the sun and extra warmth on cold days. Hat styles ranged from coon-skin caps popular with some Anglo settlers to straw sombreros worn by some Tejanos. Women and girls wore dresses, often made from cotton, and bonnets or sun hats. In cold weather, people wore coats of leather or wool. Many Tejanos preferred to wear Saltillo blankets—or ponchos—and some Anglo settlers adopted this style as well.

CONNECTING TO

The Arts

Texas Quilts

Because settlers could rarely obtain new fabric, they used old clothing, sacks, and scraps to make quilts. Pieces of fabric were arranged and sewn in complex patterns. The quilt below is example of a design called the Lone Star, which was popular in Texas during the Mexican period. **Why do you think quilters chose elaborate patterns for their quilts?**





A Blending of Foods

Immigrants brought their traditional recipes and cooking styles to Texas. For example, German immigrants introduced spicy sausages and sauerkraut. Settlers from the United States expanded their diets as they encountered new foods. Many settlers became fond of Mexican tortillas and tamales. Sometimes settlers combined traditional dishes to form a new tradition, such as Tex-Mex food. **How did immigrants adapt to Texas culture while maintaining their own heritage?**

Texans of this period enjoyed dances and other celebrations, and they liked to dress for the occasions. Wealthy men wore suits of patterned silk or wool. A popular style of the time was the frock coat, which fit tightly across the chest but flared into a skirtlike shape around the waist and thighs. It was commonly worn with a ruffled shirt and vest. Less wealthy men wore similar styles but made of less expensive cotton. Women wore fancier dresses. For those who could afford to buy them, elaborate gowns from the United States and Mexico were popular. Stylish dresses had long pleated skirts and full sleeves.

Reading Check Summarizing What materials were used to make clothing in Texas during the Mexican period?



Frontier Foods

As you would expect, most Texans had to be self-reliant for food as well as clothing. They depended on the crops they grew, livestock they raised, and game they hunted for their meals. Corn, which both Indians and Tejanos had been growing for hundreds of years in Texas, also became a staple of the new arrivals' diets. It was both easy to harvest and nutritious. As one new arrival to Texas stated, "Raising corn was a matter of life and death, since upon it depended the existence of the colony."

Luckily for the Texans, corn was also versatile. It could be—and was—prepared in many different ways. Settlers roasted or boiled corn on the cob. They dried corn kernels to make cornmeal, which could be used to make tortillas or cornbread, depending on one's background and preferences. Cornmeal batter cooked over hot coals produced johnnycakes. Tejanos also made tamales and *atole*. Corn was also useful for feeding their livestock. People even found uses for corn cobs, making items such as bottle stoppers and fishing floats.

Besides corn, Texans grew vegetables such as cabbages, peas, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and turnips. Tejanos grew sugar cane, watermelons, and chili peppers. Indians, including the Caddo, grew squash and sunflowers. Texans gathered fruits such as berries, grapes, and peaches along with the pecans and other nuts. Because refrigeration was not available, butter, cheese, eggs, flour, and milk were rarely on hand.

The Spanish had introduced ranching to Texas early in its history. In addition, wild game was common in the area. As a result, meat was a major part of the Texan frontier diet. The meats most commonly eaten were beef, pork, and **venison**, or deer meat. Among Tejanos, *cabrito*, or goat, was also popular. Along coasts and rivers, fish was also standard fare. Meat and fish were sometimes cooked fresh, but more often they were preserved to be eaten later. Cuts of meat were smoked or salted so they would keep for long periods.

Reading Check Evaluating How did the Texas settlers' use of corn demonstrate their ability to adapt to and modify their environment?



Residents of San Antonio could attend churches such as the Mission Espada Church, founded in 1720. Few other parts of Texas had active places of worship.

★ Religion in Early Texas

Mexico's official religion was Roman Catholicism, and most of the Tejanos living in Texas were active in that religion. They went to mass on Sundays and holidays. Religious events such as baptisms, weddings, and saints' days were times of great celebration. Even nonreligious holidays, such as Mexican Independence Day, were celebrated with masses.

Although the Anglo settlers who came to Texas in this period had promised to become Catholic, few truly converted. Most of them were Protestant and unwilling to change their beliefs. Publicly, they stated support for the Roman Catholic Church, but privately they worshiped as they pleased. In fact, most Anglo settlements did not have any priests. Finally, Father Michael Muldoon, an Irish priest, arrived in San Felipe in 1831. He was one of the few priests any of the early U.S. settlers ever saw.

While under Mexican rule, Texas did not have any organized Protestant churches. Only the Catholic Church was legal. A fair amount of Protestant activity did exist, however. Traveling preachers and missionaries from the United States held camp meetings. Sumner Bacon, a Presbyterian, traveled through Texas giving sermons and handing out Bibles. Several Texans also organized Protestant Sunday schools. In 1829 Thomas J. Pilgrim, a Baptist, organized the first Sunday school in San Felipe. That same year, Mary Wightman began a Sunday school at Matagorda. Mexican officials usually ignored such religious activity.

Reading Check Analyzing Information How did Anglo settlers in Texas maintain their religious heritage?

Daily Life

Leisure Time

Settlers in early Texas enjoyed many forms of entertainment. Riders and spectators alike loved horse racing, a favorite pastime of the first Spanish settlers. Frontier Texans also enjoyed music and dancing. One man remembered a dance that lasted almost 15 hours. Weddings and balls were also popular social occasions. At home, settlers often read aloud from the Bible and other books. Storytellers told tall tales as family members gathered around. **How did settlers entertain themselves in Texas?**



Interpreting Visuals

Education. Students met to study in small, one-room schools. **How does this painting reflect the way children were taught in Mexican Texas?**

★ Education on the Frontier

The Coahuila y Texas Constitution stated that public education should be available for all children. However, few settlements had money to establish schools. In addition, capable teachers were in short supply. As a result, education in early Texas was mainly limited to teaching in the home. Wealthier settlers sometimes sent their children to schools in the United States, where the education system was better established.

A few ambitious individuals did open private schools in Texas for those students whose parents could afford to pay for education. These schools were often small. Teachers often lived in the same rooms in which they taught. Frances Trask, who opened a school at Cole's Settlement in 1835, wrote of her small building that it "answers for schoolroom, parlor, bed chamber, and hall." Students paid two dollars per week to live and study with her.

Although limited by money and the availability of teachers, schools had operated in San Antonio as far back as the 1700s. Aside from the missions, small schools in San Antonio, La Bahía, and Nacogdoches operated when people could afford to pay a teacher. During the 1820s such small schools also opened in Jonesborough, San Augustine, and other settler communities. Students in these schools learned reading, writing, arithmetic, and other subjects.

By 1836 Texas had more than 20 schools. However, many children did not have access to education. Even when schools were available, the demands of farm life kept many children in the fields. In addition, enslaved African Americans were not allowed to attend school.

Reading Check Drawing Inferences and Conclusions Why do you think the Mexican government tried to establish public schools in Texas?

★ Section 2 Review

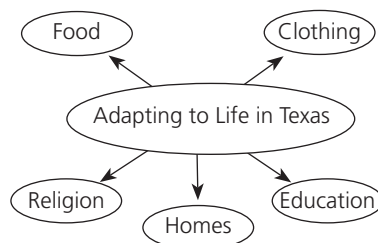
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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

- dogtrot cabins
- quilting bees
- buckskin
- venison

2. Summarizing

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to describe life in Texas during the 1820s and early 1830s.



3. Finding the Main Idea

- What were some ways in which Mexican ways of life continued to shape life in Texas even as more Anglo settlers moved here?
- Why were public schools rare in Texas?

4. Writing and Critical Thinking myWriteSmart

Analyzing Information Write a letter to a family planning to move to Texas in the early 1830s. Explain how they can adapt to life there.

Consider the following:

- available resources in Texas
- culture and policies of Texas