

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park

Centuries ago sprawling fields of open land commanded the Texas terrain. It's hard to imagine the Texas of the 1800s as we pass by the busy metropolitan area of San Antonio, Texas' third largest city.

What is now strewn with highways, buildings, and people was once a new frontier...and Spain was determined to extend its rule in this new world.

It did so by sending missionaries to build fort-like missions, converting inhabitants to Catholicism, and developing settlements. Franciscan clerics taught native Indians about Christianity, but also about agriculture and various trades, so that Spanish Missions could become stable communities and expand Spain's colonial territory. Each mission was comprised of a granary, workshops, quarters for soldiers, dwellings for Indians who chose to convert to Catholicism, a residence for missionaries and of course, a church. Outside the compound were large farms and cattle ranches. The mission could easily be transformed into a fortress for battle. The Apache and Comanche tribes constantly harassed the San Antonio missions, because of this the population of the missions remained smaller than their counterparts in California.

San Antonio is unique in that it is home to five Spanish Missions. Missions San Jose, San Juan, Concepcion, Espada and San Antonio de Valero were all built in the early 1700's, and are now managed by the National Park Service. In the center of San Antonio today is the most famous of the five missions, San Antonio de Valero, more widely known as The Alamo. You can visit this popular attraction near San Antonio's River Walk, and attend interpretive programs by National Park Service rangers, view exhibits of mission life during the Spanish era, or quietly reflect on the important event that took place within the mission walls.

The Alamo was the site of a key battle during the Texas Revolution from Mexico in 1836. After a twelve-day siege, Mexican President Santa Anna sent troops to attack the mission, leaving only two survivors. A grand memorial to those who lost their lives at the Alamo can be seen in the plaza in front of the mission.

Source(s):

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Habig, Marion A. The Alamo Chain of Missions: A History of San Antonio's Five Old Missions. Chicago : Franciscan Herald Press, 1976, c1968.

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