

History

History is always someone's version of what happened, and Texans can spin larger-than-life stories with the best of them. Just say the words 'Alamo' or 'JFK assassination' and you're bound to hear a hundred versions of the same story, all with gleaming bits of truth among the assorted fictions and perspectives. The Lone Star State has always been a cultural, political and geographical hotbed – and you'd think all that land would make everyone just peacefully coexist and mind their own business! Nope. From the fight for Texas independence to the border wars, Texas seems to stay at the front of the action: loud, proud and a subject of heated controversy. One thing's for sure: in the course of its history, you can say Texas has been loved and hated, but you can't say it's been ignored.

You'll find more versions of Texas history than recipes for barbecue sauce. In other words, swallow a Texas tale like you would a margarita: with a grain or two of salt.

IN THE BEGINNING...

Texas hasn't always been Texas. Or Mexico, for that matter. Or the United States, or Spain, or France...or any of the six flags that once flew over this epic state in its eight changes of sovereignty. The earliest evidence of humans in what is now Texas exists in the *llano estacado* ('staked plain') section of Texas and New Mexico. Little is known about the various indigenous peoples, but by the time the first Europeans arrived in the 16th century, several distinct groups of Native Americans were settled in the region.

One of these tribes, the Caddos, still figures strongly both as a namesake and cultural influence in east Texas, particularly in places like Caddo Lake and around Nacogdoches, where the Caddo Mounds State Historic Site commemorates their unique history.

SPANISH EXPLORATION

In 1519, Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda mapped the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to Mexico, creating the first maps of present-day Texas. He camped at the mouth of the Rio Grande (which he called the 'river of palms').

The Spanish planned a settlement along the Rio Grande, but after battles following disagreements between settlers and tribespeople, the Spanish withdrew.

In 1542 Luis de Moscoso led an exploration of present-day east Texas. He was frantically looking for gold – Indians would always tell him it was

The word 'Texas' goes back to 1691. Spanish explorers found the Caddos so friendly that they began to call their new territory *tejas* ('tay-has'), a corruption of the Caddo word for 'friend.'

Lone Star Junction (www.lsjunction.com) has ebooks and fascinating historical archives.

The Texas State Historical Association maintains an enormous handbook of Texas history at www.tshaonline.org.

TIMELINE

1519

Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda maps the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to Mexico, creating the first maps of present-day Texas.

1539

Franciscan friar Marcos de Niza leads a greed-fueled expedition to Texas. After Indian attacks wipe out half the expedition, the friar flees back to Mexico – after hastily claiming the ground he'd covered for Spain, of course.

1598

Nearly a quarter century before pilgrims and Indians party at Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts, Native Americans and Spanish explorers feast on the banks of the Rio Grande. Many Texans believe it to be the first real Thanksgiving.

In the early 1500s, hapless explorer Cabeza de Vaca wrote diaries documenting his experiences as a shipwrecked prisoner in Texas, and Texas' written history – part truth, part fiction, all fascinating – was born.

THE SIX (COUNT 'EM!) FLAGS OF TEXAS

Spanish – 1519 to 1685; 1690 to 1821

French – 1685 to 1690

Mexican – 1821 to 1836

Republic of Texas – 1836 to 1845

United States – 1845 to 1861

Confederate States – 1861 to 1865

United States – 1865 to the present

located somewhere else – but he never found any. What he and his men did notice was that the whole place was covered in black stuff that was slimy, smelled bad and burned easily – oil, aka 'black gold.' They used the material to caulk ships and for other pedestrian applications, but apparently did not consider using it as fuel.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

By 1600, Spain controlled Florida and nearly all of present-day Mexico and Central America, among other lands. While the conquest of new lands was brutal, Spain's conquistadores considered their objectives not just economic and political but moral: winning over new Christian souls.

By the mid-17th century, the Spaniards' had embarked on the construction of a series of *misiones* (missions) and *presidios* (forts) from Florida across the continent all the way to California in an effort to convert the Native Americans to Christianity and, not incidentally, into Spanish subjects.

More than 30 missions were constructed in Texas. The missions at their best were fully self-reliant outposts where missionaries taught local Native Americans Spanish, as well as European building and farming techniques. During the heyday of the missions, from 1745 to 1775, they became successful enough to attract the attention of Apache and Comanche Indians, who began a series of crippling attacks.

THE FRENCH THREAT

Meanwhile, the French were also exploring North America. In the 1680s, they laid claim to the territory they called Louisiana and to a piece of Texas. This hardly amused the Spanish, and it spurred them to begin their mission-building in Texas.

In 1690, construction of Spain's first mission in east Texas, Misión San Francisco de los Tejas, began. It was completed in 1691, failing only two years later. Over the next 20 years, the Spanish continued to settle east Texas, but many of the missions designed to fortify the east Texas border fell to disease, incompetence, skirmishes with Native Americans and French troops, and other disasters. In 1718, the Spanish began building missions and forts in south-central Texas to reduce the distances crossed by supply trains.

Misión San Antonio de Valero, which later became known as the Alamo, and the present-day Mission Trail were constructed around this time. In 1731, the settlement of Villa de Bexar was established by Spanish colonists imported from the Canary Islands, and a civil government was set up in the area.

The Spanish finally gave up control in 1821, and Texas became a state of newly independent Mexico. Under Mexican rule the missions were discontinued.

From 1680

More than 30 missions are constructed in Texas alone. The earliest of them can be seen near what is now El Paso.

1800

Napoléon Bonaparte forces the Spanish to cede Louisiana to France. Yet three years later France turns around and, in the best real-estate deal since the Dutch bought Manhattan, sells the entire Louisiana Territory to the USA for \$15 million.

1810

Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, parish priest of the town of Dolores, issues his now-famous call to rebellion, the *Grito de Dolores*, demanding 'death to bad government.'