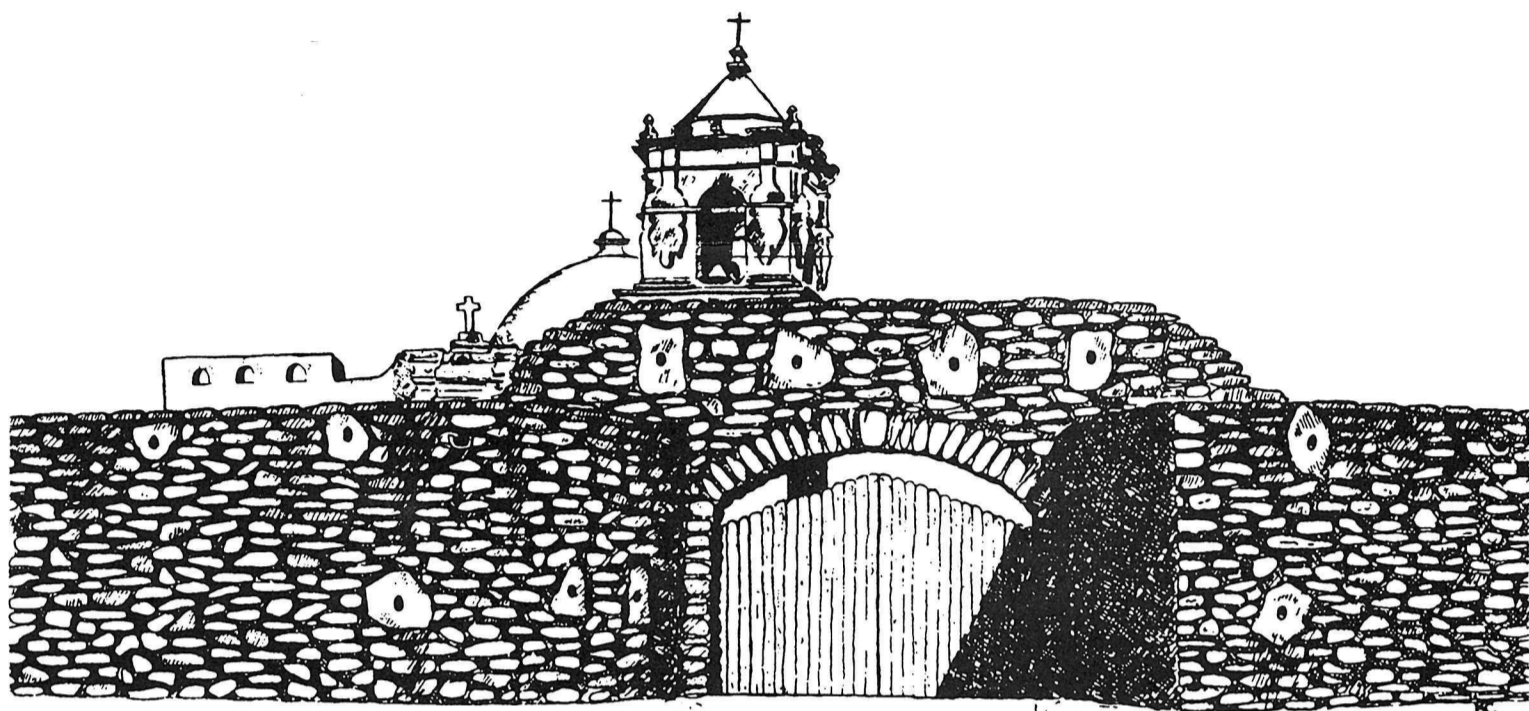


San Antonio Missions

National Historical Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Mission San José Y San Miguel De Aguayo



The First People

The first people of South Texas, the Coahuiltecan (kwa-weel-tekens), were hunters and gatherers. Their land was once a great green prairie with an abundance of plants and animals. Spending most of their day in a difficult, sometimes unsuccessful search for food, they occasionally skirmished

for prime hunting and gathering grounds. They ate rodents, reptiles, bugs, spiders, ants, worms, lizards and birds, as well as fish, deer, alligators and buffalo. Dressed in animal hides, they lived in small huts made of mats that were rolled up and easily transported to the next

campsite. Their religious ceremonies celebrated the seasons. Some involved the use of peyote. To the rhythm of drums, gourd rattles and singing, they danced and worshiped. For thousands of years, these nomadic peoples lived this ancient way of life.

Their Ancient Way Threatened

By the early 1700s, the Coahuiltecan were threatened by two outside forces. Lipan Apaches, drawn by Spanish settlements, raided south and descended upon the dispersed bands of hunter-gatherers. The Coahuiltecan were no match against the fighting skills of horse-mounted Apaches. Meanwhile, the Spanish Empire continued to move north in search of wealth. While roaming the land, the Coahuiltecan came

in contact with various Spanish settlements. Accompanying their settlements was an unseen enemy, European disease. Contact with the Spaniards brought widespread epidemics which swept through the Coahuiltecan bands, killing many. Caught between the Apaches and diseases, they became desperately in need of assistance. Their ancient nomadic ways were threatened.

Learning New Ways

Offered food, protection and spirituality by the Spaniards, the Coahuiltecan turned to the missions. Mission San José was established in 1720 to transform indigenous peoples into Spanish Catholic citizens, and to protect Spain's northern frontier against the French and other enemies. Here, the former hunter-gatherers learned a new way of life structured by the summoning of bells. They were taught Christianity through religious instruction, worship, singing and prayer.

Agriculture and ranching were introduced to them. Constructing dams and digging over fifty miles of irrigation ditches, they diverted the San Antonio River to irrigate hundreds of acres of farmland where they grew corn, beans and sugar cane. They herded cattle and thousands of sheep and goats for meat and wool. They dug limestone from a quarry to build houses, and a towering magnificent church. Men and boys became weavers, farmers, ranchers,

stonemasons, blacksmiths and soldiers. Women and girls learned how to cook, sew, and make soap, pottery and candles. They learned two new languages: Spanish for speech and Latin for worship. They even changed their names. Sacrificing their ancient nomadic ways in order to save themselves, they learned a new way life.

The Learning Continues

Today, people are still drawn to Mission San José. Thousands come to feel, to see, and to learn about this remnant of the past. San José parish still maintains an active church. Parishioners, some who trace their roots to the original

peoples, continue to worship as their ancestors did over 250 years ago. Here, from a vantage point of a vibrant and living piece of the past, we learn how the missions helped to settle Spain's northern frontier. Mission San José stands today as a unique

place where we gain a glimpse of the past from our modern world.

Mission San José Today

