

## *BEGIN IN CENTER OF ALAMO PLAZA*

### Introduction

Europeans considered Texas a wilderness waiting to be tamed. The Spanish first visited this area in 1691 and met native people camped at the springs just north of here. They returned in 1718 and established a chain of missions. They named this mission San Antonio de Valero in honor of Saint Anthony of Padua, a name already given by the Spanish to the nearby river. Valero was the Spanish viceroy who approved the mission's founding. They relocated to this site in 1724.

San Antonio eventually had four other missions located to the south of Valero: Concepción, San José, San Juan, and Espada. Today, along with Valero, the San Antonio missions share the designation of UNESCO "World Heritage Site" because of their outstanding universal value.

Missions served the Spanish in two ways. Although normally thought of as just religious institutions, missions also helped mark territorial claims by establishing a physical presence in disputed areas. In addition to Europeans, Comanche Indians were also expanding their empire into the region. Missions like Valero strengthened Spain's claim to Texas.

Few people from the settled portions of New Spain wanted to move to the frontier with its dangers and hardships. Therefore, Spanish missionaries planned to use population already living here to form a town.

Much of the original Mission San Antonio de Valero now lies beneath buildings, streets and the plaza you see today. The Alamo of 1836 was nearly four acres in size and sprawled across several city blocks, especially to the west and north of the familiar Church. Today barely one-third of the original Mission San Antonio de Valero remains.

### WALK TO GREEN SPACE IN FRONT OF ALAMO CHURCH AND FACE THE CHURCH

#### Stop 1: The Church

We are standing in front of the building that most people recognize as The Alamo. The truth is that the church is just one building in a much larger compound that is the Alamo. We are inside that compound. Only two original buildings remain today, the church and the convento or Long Barrack, which is the oldest structure in San Antonio. At one time several structures surrounded the space that today we call Alamo Plaza.

But it isn't just the site itself that is bigger than you might have imagined, the story of the Alamo is bigger, too. This historic site started as a Spanish Mission. It later served as a military outpost for soldiers of five nations: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the United States, and the Confederate States of America.

The majority of the façade dates to the period of the mission, around 1760. The detail of the columns represents the cords worn by Franciscan missionaries to secure their robes. The niches

once held the statues of saints, which disappeared sometime after the battle. There are letters engraved on the keystone over the door. "M.A.R." Maria Angelorum Regina, which translates to Mary Queen of Angels. Though never completed, the original design would have had tall bell towers on both sides of the door and a domed roof at the center.

During the battle of 1836, the church had no roof and an earthen ramp ran from the front door to an artillery platform located at the back of the church. The iconic rounded parapet was not added until the mid-nineteenth century when the U.S. Army added a roof to the church. In addition to the rounded parapet, or hump on top of the building, the U.S. Army also installed the two upper windows that you see. Freight wagons used to back directly up to the front door so supplies could be loaded and unloaded.