

Stop 1 – East Texas Beginnings

The discovery of a French fort in Spanish Texas jolted Spanish authorities into action. How would Spain keep France out of the land called *Tejas*? The Spanish would use the mission system to convert native Indians into citizens loyal to the Spanish Crown. Speaking Spanish, wearing clothes, paying taxes, and worshipping as Roman Catholics, these new citizens would establish a clear Spanish presence at the far reaches of the Camino Real, the King's Highway.

In 1716 friars from the college of Queretero, Mexico established Mission *San Jose de los Nazonis* near what is now Nacogdoches, Texas. Troubles plagued the East Texas missions from the beginning. The nearby French military presence was a threat. The local native population resisted the structured religious lessons and endless work of mission life. These East Texas *Caddoes* already practiced farming, traded with other Indians, and had their own religion. They were mound builders. They had settled villages. Cultivated crops were plentiful. When disease broke out, the Indians blamed the fatal waters of baptism and rejected the missionaries.

Franciscans moved the mission west in 1731. The hunter gatherer tribes of the San Antonio area proved much more receptive to the Spanish message. Missionaries found hundreds of potential converts enjoying the springs and refreshing waters of the San Antonio River. Scarce food, harsh weather, and hostile *Apaches* drew local Indians to mission life. Native hardship led to mission success. Soon the thriving mission, renamed San Juan Capistrano, exported food, blankets, and cloth along the *Camino Real* and into Louisiana.