

Stop 27 – The Master Craftsman

The hunter-gatherers groups of pre-Spanish Texas were very primitive. They did not live in permanent structures or settlements. They moved constantly to different campsites. Their belongings consisted of simple tools and weapons, baskets, and very limited clothing of animal skins.

Initially upon entering the mission, Indians were taught by the missionary to build *jacales*, or huts, from trees, mud, and brush. But eventually they would need formally trained craftsmen to help produce permanent buildings, or other specific products. You probably guessed that master craftsmen were hard to come by in remote mission areas.

The designation, Master, was achieved by studying a trade first as an apprentice, then journeyman, until finally being considered an expert at his trade. Carpenters, masons, glassworkers, blacksmiths, weavers and other workers originally organized in guilds to protect and control the secrets or mysteries of their crafts. The guild controlled the number of apprentices, journeymen, and equipment a master was allowed to employ or own. It set wages and disallowed a member of one trade guild to work outside his area of expertise. Experts have found evidence of guild-like associations going back over 2000 years.

Because of the remoteness of the Texas frontier, guild traditions were often suspended. Masters or even journeymen were not always available. While there is evidence of church and other structures being started, completed, or partially completed and then collapsing for lack of stability, master masons were always on-site during the construction of the churches. Perhaps some masters were poorly trained which contributed to failures.

Master masons and carpenters and other experts contributed to the building and functioning of the missions throughout the 18th Century. Alongside the Franciscans and Spanish soldiers, they taught mission Indians many skills. However, an Indian studying a craft probably remained an apprentice and may have worked at several crafts during his time at the Mission. Even so, marvel at the beauty of the mission structures that relied on a Master and newly trained workers, to create the permanence we see today.