

The Canary Island Texans

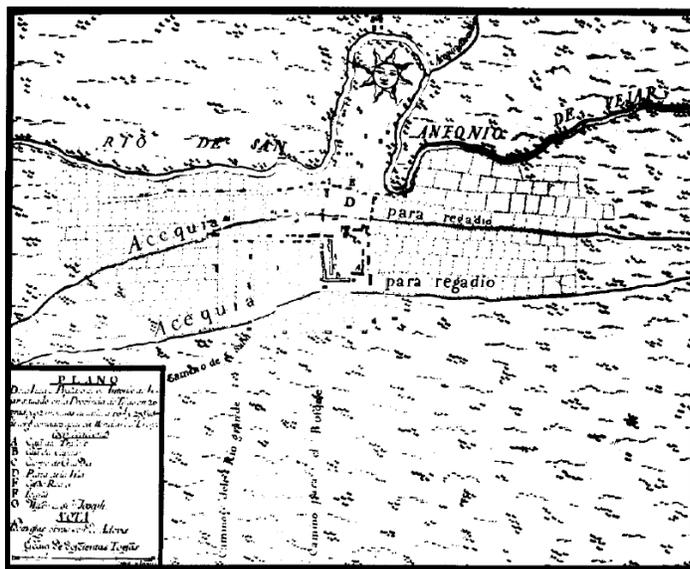
On March 9, 1731, sixteen families from the Spanish Canary Islands arrived at San Antonio de Béxar, a small village on the banks of the San Antonio River. The village consisted of the Presidio San Antonio de Béxar and the Mission San Antonio de Valero (now called The Alamo) across the river. The Presidio was the Spanish fort that housed soldiers, their families, and other settler families. The mission was occupied by American Indians and the Franciscan friars charged by the King of Spain to convert them to Christianity.



After their long journey to San Antonio, the Isleños (as the Canary Island families were called) were greeted by the Presidio commander, Captain Don Juan de Almazán. He gave them fresh supplies and places to stay until they could build their own houses and plant their own crops.

Upon their arrival, the Isleños established La Villa de San Fernando adjacent to the Presidio. San Fernando was not a religious mission or military outpost, it was a civilian town set up to be the capital of Spanish Texas, and was the first municipal government established in Texas.

On orders from Spain, Captain Almazán appointed seven Isleño men to form a village council, or a *cabildo*. These men then elected two *alcaldes*, Juan Leal Goras and Antonio Santos, who served as mayors, judges, and sheriffs of the new village. Together, these nine men were responsible for administering Spanish law, dividing the village land, and overseeing the economic activity of the village.



Map of San Antonio de Béxar by Joseph de Urrutia, 1767

The Isleños had traveled from the Canary Islands with most of the tools and livestock they would need to start farms in New Spain, including axes, hoes, saws, cows, horses, and goats. But because the governors of New Spain knew it would take time for the Isleños to establish farms and grow their own food, they supplied them with four *reales* (about 50 cents) a day, as well as staples of meat, flour, and corn.

They built temporary *jacal* houses, and after they divided the land between the families, they set to work creating their farms and permanent homes.



Woman seated outside a jacal, San Antonio, Texas, 1880s

Many of the Isleños who settled in the village of San Fernando had been farmers on the Canary Islands, so they quickly set about establishing new farms along the San Antonio River. Captain Almazán supplied the seed for planting the fields and the oxen to plow them.

Planting as much as they could, the Isleños sowed their fields with corn, beans, barley, cotton, peppers, and a variety of fruit, including grape vines. Once planting was completed, they turned their attention to building the village of San Fernando.



*Espada Acequia built in 1731,
Photographed 1942*

The Spanish government had laws for how new towns should be built. The Isleños laid out the Villa de San Fernando around a large open plaza (now San Antonio's Main Plaza) directly adjacent to the Presidio (Military Plaza).

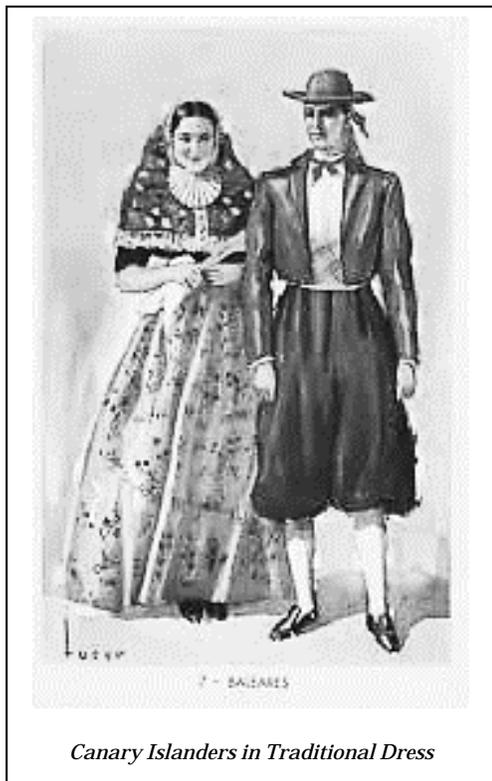
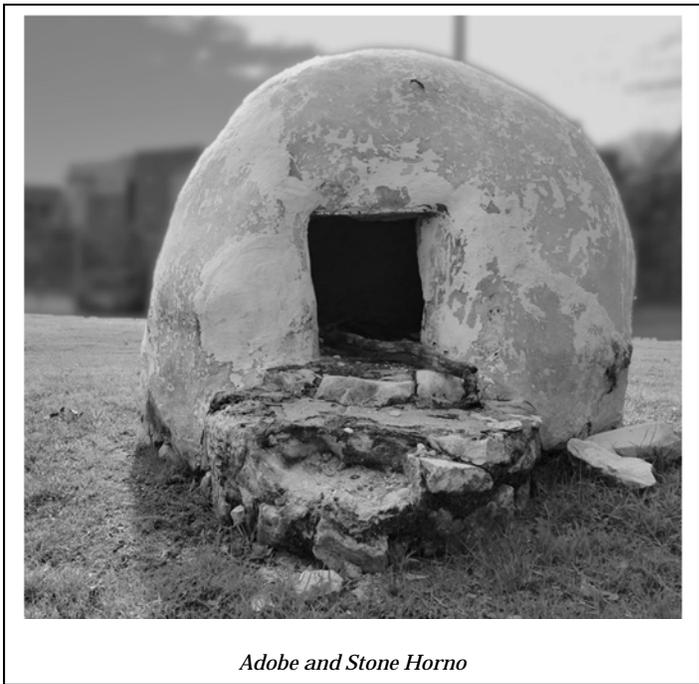
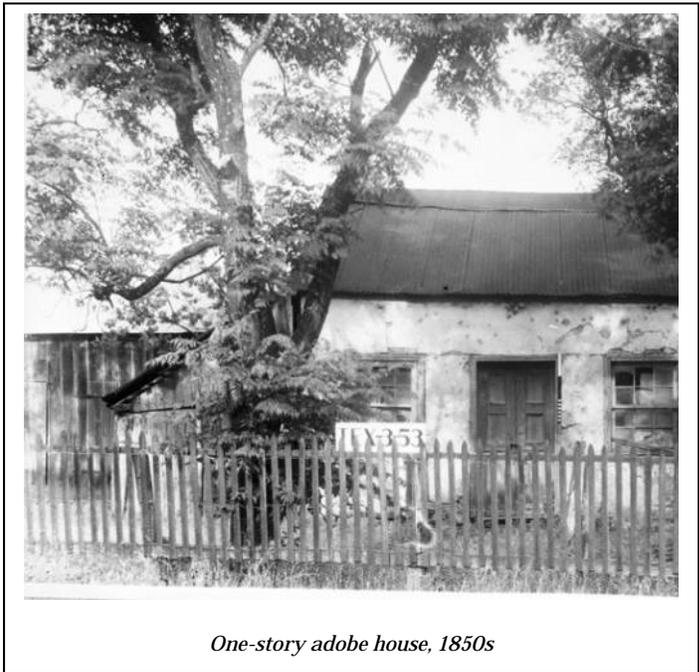
Around the plaza they built a small church, which would later become San Fernando Cathedral, and laid out 12 straight streets for the homes of their families. They designated lands for grazing animals, public buildings, fields, roads, and dug additional irrigation channels called *acequia* to bring water to their crops.

Daily life in San Fernando was difficult. For the first few years, the food they harvested from their fields did not last them long, so the Isleños had to rely on wagon trains of supplies from other Spanish settlements.

Native Americans from the area, especially the Apache, were hostile to the encroaching settlement and were a constant threat to the village. They stole horses and livestock, and occasionally attacked wagon trains, travelers, and soldiers on the road to or from the settlement.

But the Isleño settlers persisted, and permanent homes of adobe and stone slowly replaced the *jacales* surrounding Main Plaza. Like most frontier settlers, their furnishings were simple - beds made of rawhide on wooden frames, wooden tables and chairs, and handmade clay bowls, plates, and cooking pots were used. Food was cooked in outdoor stone ovens known as *hornos*, or over an open fire. Ovens and cooking fires were often outdoors so that in case of fire, the house itself would not burn down.

The Isleños brought their cooking traditions and love of spices (including cumin) with them on their journey to Texas. They made traditional Canary Island dishes like *gofio* – a mixture of goat’s milk, fine brown meal, and spices – but also local foods like tortillas and tamales. Later, hot chocolate and coffee became popular beverages, and lumps of brown sugar became staples for desserts.



Like their food, the Isleños also brought their clothing styles with them. Most clothing was simple, homespun, and sturdy to handle the rigors of daily work that the settlers faced. Men and boys wore knee-length pants and loose shirts while women and girls wore white blouses tucked into coarsely woven skirts.

The daily work for men mostly included farming and tending the livestock. Women cooked food for their family, helped with the farming, spun wool and cotton to make clothes, and wove baskets of reeds, among many other jobs.



Exterior of San Fernando Cathedral, San Antonio, 1870s

Like in most Spanish settlements, the Catholic Church played a huge role in the daily lives of the Isleños. At first, the colonists celebrated Catholic mass at the Mission Valero chapel. Families would walk along the river together before crossing the bridge to Mission Valero. After they had settled into their new homes, the community built a small church on the west side of Main Plaza. They named their parish *Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria y Guadalupe* after the patron saint of the Canary Islands and Mexico.

And as San Antonio grew in the mid-1800s, this small church eventually became the grand San Fernando Cathedral that we see today. Its famous history continued during the Texas Revolution, when General Santa Anna of the Mexican Army hoisted his flag from the church's tower, and began the siege of the Alamo. To this day, San Fernando Cathedral continues to have a central role in San Antonio life.

The Canary Islanders, together with the missionaries, soldiers, Bexareños, and American Indian tribes, created an enduring legacy that has added to the rich cultural heritage of San Antonio and Texas.

The Sixteen Canary Island Families of San Antonio de Béxar

Juan Leal Goras and his two sons	Juan Leal and Gracia de Acosta and their children
Juan Curbelo and Gracia Perdomo y Umpierres and their children	Antonio Santos and Isabel Rodriguez and their children
Joseph Padron and Maria Francisca Zanaria	Manuel de Niz and Sebastiana de la Peña
Vicente Travieso and Maria Ana Curbelo	Salvador Rodriguez and Maria Perez Cabrera and son
Antonio Rodriguez and Josefa de Niz	Francisco de Arocha and Juana Curbelo
Joseph Leal and Ana Santos	Juan Delgado and Catarina Leal
Joseph, Marcos, and Ana Cabrera	Maria Rodriguez-Robaina and her children
Mariana Melian and her children	Phelipe and Joseph Antonio Perez, Martin and Ignacio Lorenzo de Armas

Texans One and All: The Canary Island Texans

NAME: _____ DATE: _____ PERIOD: _____

Canary Island Texans

Instructions: Read and answer the corresponding questions

After more than a year of dangerous and deadly travels, sixteen families from the Canary Islands were welcomed on the banks of the San Antonio River by Captain Juan de Almazan and his soldiers. The Isleños brought with them livestock and tools to help them in their new home.

After settling into their new environment, the Isleños constructed *jacals* near fields where they sowed corn, beans, barley, cotton, peppers, melons, and fruits. They combined Canary Island foods with local Texas foods. They used a mano and metate to grind corn for masa and made tortillas on comales, but also made traditional Canary Island food like *gofio*, a stew made of goat's milk, brown meal, and spices. Coffee and hot chocolate were favored beverages.

Because they were the first civilian settlers in San Antonio de Béxar, the Spanish King gave the Isleños land-holding noble titles. They also formed the first municipal government in Texas in their new village of San Fernando de Béxar.

The Canary Islanders contributed to San Antonio's cultural heritage and can still be seen today through language, faith, and customs.

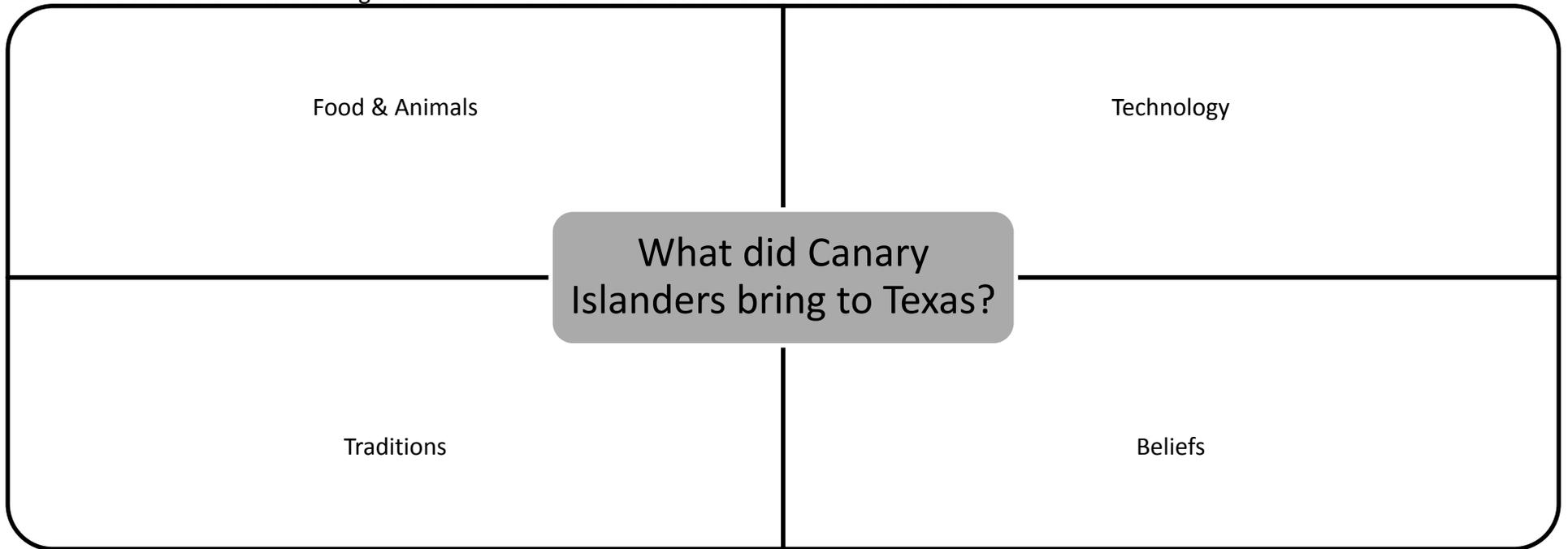
When did Canary Islanders first come to Texas?

What were the Canary Islander's goals upon arrival to San Antonio de Béxar?

How did Canary Island settlers help shape Texas? What parts of their culture are still important today?

Word Knowledge		(*Answer Key)
<p>Write the letter next to the correct meaning</p> <p>1. Alcaldes _____</p> <p>2. Isleños _____</p> <p>3. Jacals _____</p> <p>4. Mano and metate _____</p> <p>5. Horno _____</p> <p>6. Cabildo _____</p> <p>7. Acequia _____</p>	<p>WORD BANK</p> <p>A. Canary Islanders</p> <p>B. Village Council</p> <p>C. Stones used for grinding corn</p> <p>D. Irrigation channels</p> <p>E. Stone and adobe oven</p> <p>F. A simple huts made of sticks reeds, grass, and mud</p> <p>G. Mayors and judges of a town/village</p>	

The Isleños brought with them many aspects of their culture when they settled Texas. Complete the graphic organizer with details from the reading to describe what the Isleños brought with them to Texas and how it has influenced culture.



*Answer Key: 1-B; 2-A; 3-F; 4-C; 5-E; 6-G; 7-D

Welcome to San Antonio de Béxar!

As a representative of the Spanish Crown, you are trying to attract more people to come to San Antonio de Béxar. You will be creating a travel brochure describing San Antonio and the Canary Islanders' civil settlement for the newcomers¹.

Draw a map of the San Antonio area the settlers will occupy.	Advise the new settlers what good and bad situations they might encounter in their new homes (jobs, environment, frontier life, etc.).	Inform settlers what type of government they will be able to participate in.

¹ Adapted from Escobedo, Sonia Y. 2000 *Welcome to the Settlement of the New World: A Brochure for Newcomers*. OH Magazine of History, 14(4):59-62.

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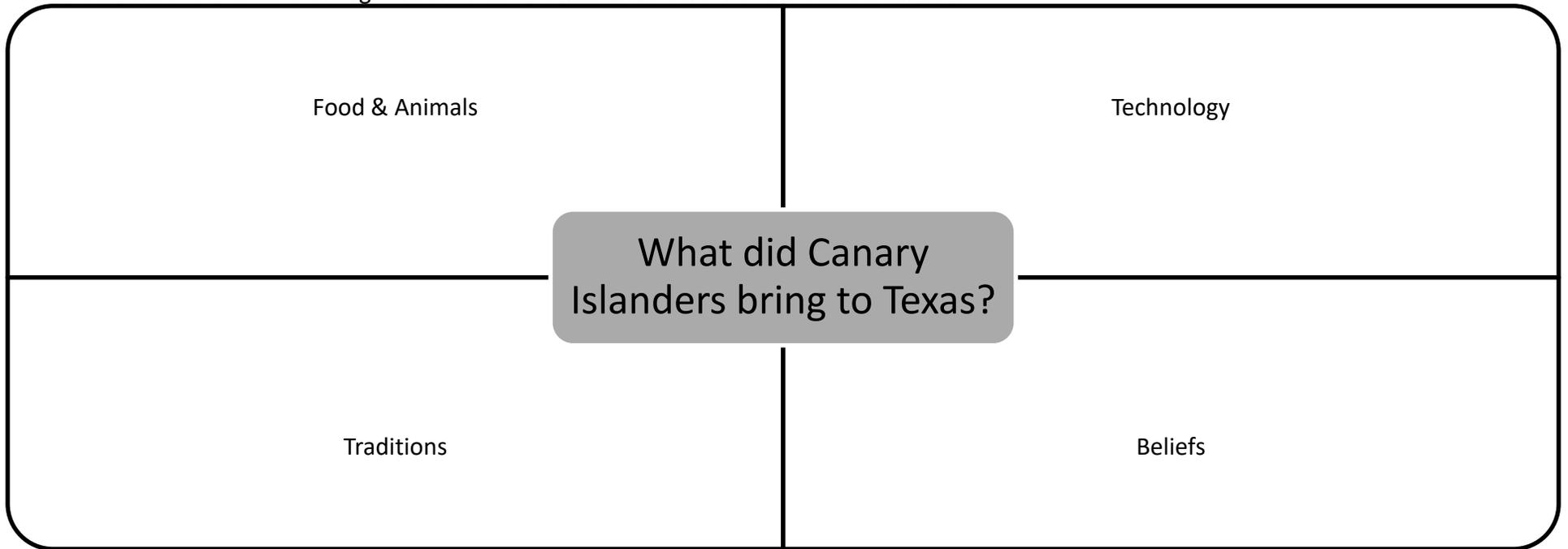
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