

# Alamo

By: Amelia W. Williams



The Alamo, which began as Mission San Antonio de Valero in 1718, is perhaps San Antonio's most iconic landmark. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance

with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. Mission San Antonio de Valero (later known as the Alamo). Courtesy of *Texas Highways* and Texas A&M University. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C.

Layout of the Alamo Mission prior to the battle of the Alamo on March 2, 1836.



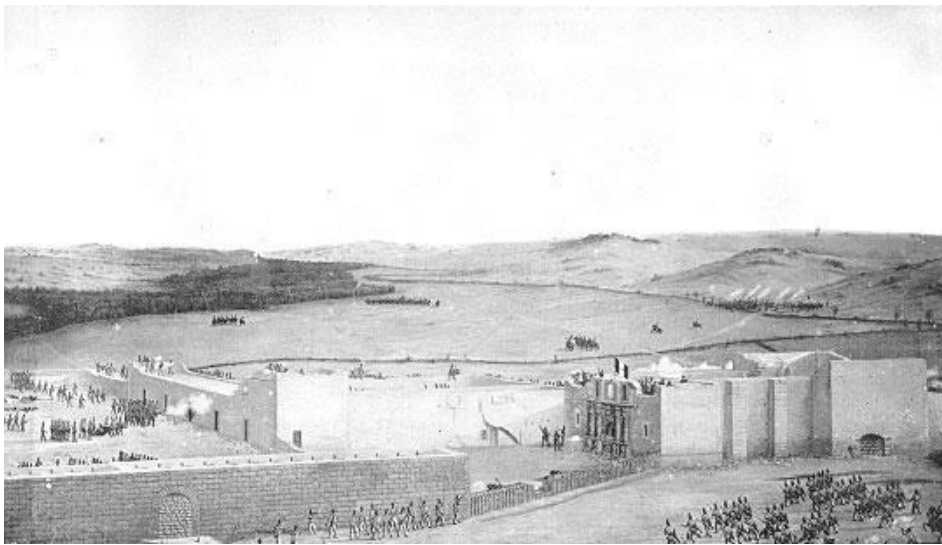
Courtesy of the Portal to Texas History. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

**ALAMO.** San Antonio de Valero Mission (originally referred to as San

Antonio de Padua) was authorized by the viceroy of Mexico in 1716. Fray Antonio de Olivares, who brought with him American Indian converts and the records from San Francisco Solano Mission near San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande, established the mission at the site of present-day San Antonio on May 1, 1718, and named it San Antonio de Valero in honor of Saint Anthony de Padua and the Duke of Valero, the Spanish viceroy. After a hurricane destroyed most of the existing



in 1807 the governor expanded the military hospital to include two rooms at the abandoned mission to serve as a pharmacy. That same year Zervan resigned from the military, and in his place Dr. Jayme Gurza was appointed and served at that position for four years. Gurza noted his tenure was plagued by a deteriorating building and inadequate equipment and supplies. Various diseases treated included smallpox, pneumonia, and venereal diseases. The final surgeon at the Alamo during the Spanish era was Francisco Farina in 1814. The hospital was closed soon thereafter. Spanish and Mexican forces occupied the Alamo almost continuously from 1803 to December 1835, when Gen. Martín Perfecto de Cos surrendered the fortress to Texan forces.



During the siege of Bexar, Cos sought to concentrate his troops at the Alamo and soon asked for terms of surrender on December 9, 1835. The Alamo again housed a hospital under Chief Surgeon Amos Pollard, who reported on December 17 that

there were about seven wounded men from the battle of B exar, who were now part of the Alamo garrison. This hospital was located in two places—a section of the Low Barracks, near the main gate, and the second floor of the old convent, which was established with the Spanish hospital in 1805.



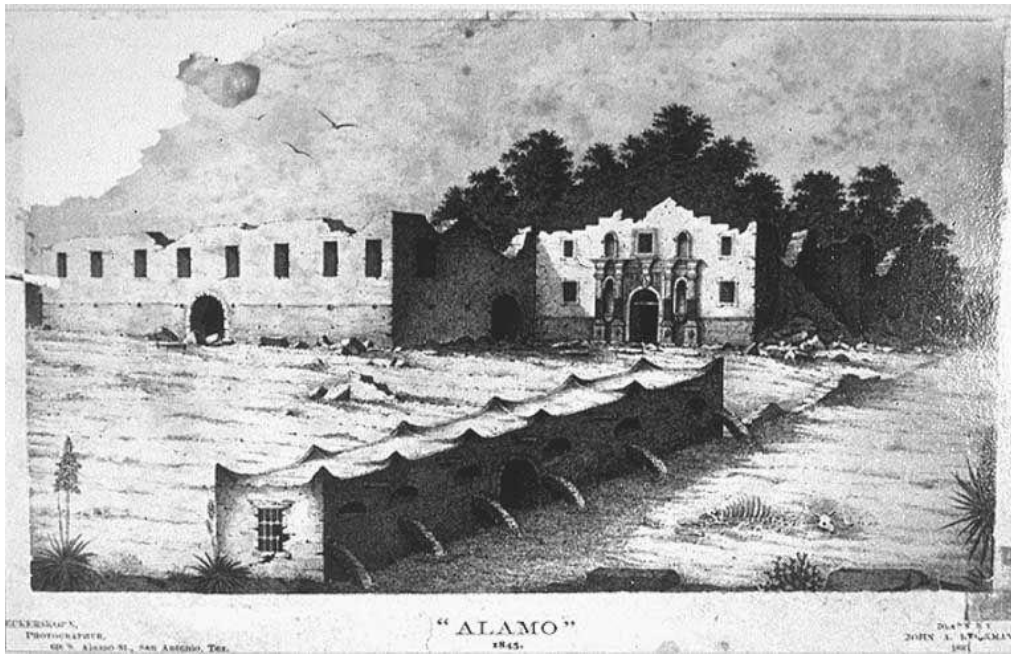
Painting, *Dawn at the Alamo*, by Henry Arthur McArdle, hanging in the Senate Chamber of the Texas State Capitol in Austin, Texas. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Image available on the

Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. *Fall of the Alamo*, by Theodore Gentilz. Courtesy of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

On February 23, 1836, Mexican forces under the command of Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna besieged Lt. Col. William B. Travis and his Texas garrison in the Alamo. The siege of the Alamo lasted thirteen days and ended on March 6 with a complete loss of all the combatant Texans (*see* ALAMO, BATTLE OF THE). Alamo survivor, Susannah Dickinson recalled that at the beginning of the siege there were fifty or sixty wounded from the earlier battle of San Antonio. During the thirteen-day siege, five of the Alamo defenders were physicians: William D. Howell, Edward F. Mitchasson, Amos Pollard, John Purdy Reynolds, and John W. Thomson. Two strong healing women or curanderas, Juana Gertrudis Navarro Alsbury and María Andrea Castañon Villanueva (also known as Señora Candelaria), were reportedly at the siege and battle of the Alamo. Both of their stories and lore are related to their care of Col. James Bowie. Following the battle, Mexican sergeant Becerra set up a hospital for Mexican casualties of the battle on the ground floor of the Alamo. After being spared from the Goliad Massacre, doctors Jack Shackelford and John Henry Barnard were transported to San Antonio to administer care to the Mexican soldiers wounded at the Alamo.

Sketch, Conjectural view of the Alamo in Ruins (circa 1845) by John A. Beckmann in 1895. Issued on a souvenir photograph by J. Eckerskorn of San Antonio.

Courtesy of the DRT Library and Texas A&M University. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.



After the fall of the Alamo, the building was practically in ruins, but no attempt was made at that time to restore it. The Republic of Texas, on January 18, 1841, passed an act returning the chapel of the Alamo to

the Catholic Church. After Texas was annexed to the United States, the Alamo was declared property of the United States government. During the Mexican War the United States Army occupied the building and grounds and until the Civil War used them for quartermaster purposes. For some time, the city of San Antonio, the Catholic Church, and the United States government all claimed the Alamo. On January 15, 1848, the Grand Lodge of Texas granted a charter for Alamo Masonic Lodge No. 44 to be established. Alamo Lodge was the first and oldest Masonic lodge in San Antonio and upon its establishment met in rented space of the historic Alamo. The United States government finally agreed to lease the property from the Catholic Church and made some improvements. These included a new roof for the chapel and convent (also known as the Long Barrack), repairs to the chapel's stone walls, and the addition of the chapel's iconic arched gable which was overseen by Bvt. Maj. Edwin Burr Babbitt of the United States Army Quartermaster Corps and carried out under the supervision of contractors John M. Fries and David Russi in 1850. An 1855 court decision later reaffirmed the Catholic Church's rightful ownership of the structure.

During the Civil War, the Alamo was surrendered with all other federal property by Gen. David E. Twiggs in February 1861. The state turned it over to the Confederates who also used the building as a warehouse. After the Civil War, the United States government again took over and used it until 1877, when quartermaster operations moved to the permanent army post that was eventually

designated Fort Sam Houston. In the ensuing decades, much of what remained of the original Alamo site, including the remnants of the outer walls and central courtyard, was consumed by the development of Alamo Plaza and the construction of new city streets and businesses. By the late 1880s, the only original elements still standing were the Long Barrack and the iconic chapel. In 1877 the Catholic Church sold the Long Barrack to French merchant Henri Grenet, who remodeled it to house a general store. Grenet also leased the chapel for use as a warehouse. After his death in 1882 the remodeled Long Barrack was acquired by the mercantile firm Hugo & Schmeltzer; control of the chapel reverted back to the Catholic Church.

Under an act of April 23, 1883, the state of Texas purchased the Alamo chapel from the Catholic Church and placed it in the custody of the city of San Antonio on condition that the city should care for the building and pay a custodian for that purpose. This system continued until January 25, 1905, when the Texas legislature passed a resolution ordering the governor to purchase the Long Barrack. It was further ordered that the governor should deliver the property thus acquired, with the property then owned by the state (the chapel of the Alamo), to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT), who were entrusted with its care, maintenance, and preservation.

A controversy over custody of the Alamo developed almost immediately between the Daughters of the Republic of Texas and the De Zavala chapter of that organization at San Antonio. The disagreement revolved around the disposition of the Long Barrack—while one faction sought to demolish much of the structure to make way for a public park, another proposed that it should be restored to its original appearance. The resulting legal battle drew the involvement of Governor O. B. Colquitt, who agreed that the Long Barrack should be fully restored and temporarily suspended the DRT's custody of the property. In 1912 the Fourth Court of Civil Appeals resolved the matter and reinstated the DRT's custodial rights. Ultimately, the DRT decided to demolish the second floor of the Long Barrack and reconstruct the walls of the first floor between 1913 and 1916. Public exhibits to draw visitors and tourists to the site began about 1915. In 1921 construction crews added a new concrete, barrel-vaulted roof to the chapel to replace the wooden roof constructed by the U.S. Army and installed electric lighting.



Ruins of the Alamo (circa 1920). Courtesy of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

Several appropriations for funds to improve the

Alamo have been made, the largest being in connection with the celebration of the Texas Centennial. Between 1925 and 1937 a combination of federal, state, municipal, and private funds were used to purchase and consolidate surrounding properties for the expansion of Alamo Plaza and creation of a museum complex. Beautification efforts included new landscaping on Alamo Plaza and the construction of an enclosed garden to the east of the chapel. Within the enclosed space the construction of several new structures included a restored section of acequia, the Alamo Museum (later converted into a gift shop), the Arcade (a Works Progress Administration project that since 1997 has housed the “Wall of History”), and Alamo Hall (a remodeled fire station deeded by the city of San Antonio in 1938 that as of 2018 served as an event venue). The chapel also received a new flagstone floor and a new outer roof of copper and lead over the north rooms. The 1930s expansion effort culminated with the installation of the Alamo Cenotaph, sculpted by renowned artist [Pompeo Coppini](#) and formally dedicated by Mayor Maury Maverick in November 1940. Post-1940 additions include the construction of the DRT Library in 1950 and the installment of a museum in the Long Barrack in preparation for HemisFair '68. An outdoor amphitheater was added to the Alamo gardens in 1997.

The the 4.2-acre Alamo complex has long been considered one of the most popular tourist destinations in the state of Texas and has received designations as a National Historic Landmark (1960), a Texas Historic Landmark (1962), and a Texas State Antiquities Landmark (1983). In 1966 it was listed on the National Register of

Historic Places (NRHP), and in 1977 it was included in the NRHP's newly-designated Alamo Plaza Historic District. On July 5, 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the Alamo and the missions of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park a World Heritage Site—the first such designation in Texas.