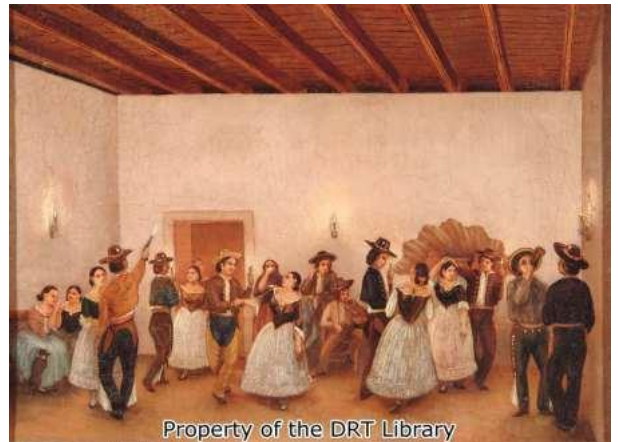


Stories of Texas Women Women of San Antonio

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Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, the Anglo population in Texas grew substantially, however, the population of the city of San Antonio de Bexar remained largely Hispanic. While there were a good number of families, and even widowed women, who established residence in the colonies in East Texas, only a handful of single Anglo men sought residency in the political and economic capital of Mexican Texas. Over the years a few Anglo women, among them Jane Long and Susanna Dickinson, temporarily resided in San Antonio, but until the arrival of Mary Maverick in the city in 1837, all of the permanent female residents of San Antonio were Tejanas.

This frontier town, established shortly after the mission that it shares its name with, was settled initially by families attached to the presidio. By 1726 there were fifty-four presidial families in San Antonio, but the civilian population remained small until the settlement of the fifty-five Canary Islanders at villa San Fernando de Béxar in 1731. In addition to the women who arrived in San Antonio with this group as wives or dependent daughters, there were also two widowed women who were the heads of their households, meaning two of the original fifteen Canary Island families were led by women. Throughout the 1700s and into the 1800s the population of San Antonio grew at a slow rate, but it is interesting to note that unlike other frontier areas, the city's expansion was



Theodore Gentilz. "Fandango", 1848. Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library Collection, Alamo Research Center, San Antonio, TX.

carried out largely by family units and the proportion of male and female settlers was fairly balanced.ⁱ

The women living in San Antonio on the eve of the Texas revolution were not new to the Texas frontier. Most of them had been born there, and few had travelled even as far as Saltillo. The women of San Antonio were also not newcomers to revolution, as the memory of the Battle of Medina and other skirmishes of the Wars of Independence would still be fresh for those old enough to remember the losses Texas suffered in Mexico's quest for independence from the Spanish empire. Unfortunately, due to the high illiteracy rate of the women of San Antonio, they did not leave behind any records of their thoughts of the political upheaval sweeping through Texas in 1835. It is probably safe to speculate that like their male counterparts, the women of San Antonio were torn between supporting the Centralist government and the Federalist revolutionaries.

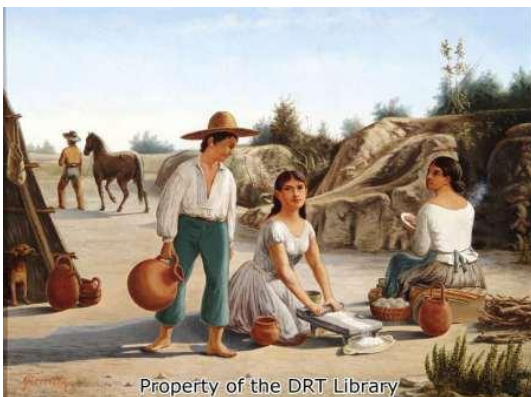
While the Tejanas themselves left behind few records, visitors to Texas recorded their impressions of the women they encountered. Herman Ehrenberg, a Prussian immigrant who fought in the Battle of Bexar as a member of the New Orleans Greys and spent the winter of 1835-1836 in San Antonio, described the city's female residents:

"Through the broad streets glided many a cute *señora*, even if not as elegant and as graceful and resilient as the pretty New York ladies as they flutter by the hundreds along the magnificent Broadway, yet endowed with that charm and courtesy for which their nation is known and which so drastically is distinguished from the rougher manners and mores of the inhabitants of the north."ⁱⁱ

Other visitors to the city made note of observing the Tejanas in their daily work of making tortillas and spinning and weaving wool.

One area of life that was markedly different for Tejanas, and the women in Mexico generally, is that they had different expectations regarding their legal status and protections than did women of the United States. In the nineteenth century, the legal system in the United States was based on that of England, while in Mexico the legal system was based on the Castilian system of Spain. In both legal systems, women are clearly second class citizens to men, but the Castilian system unlike the English allowed women to maintain property rights even after marriage. Under both systems single and widowed women could own property, but in Mexico married women could own property independently of their husbands.

In many regards the Tejana residents of San Antonio in 1835 did not differ much from



Theodore Gentilz. "Tortilleras," Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library Collection, Alamo Research Center, San Antonio, TX.

the Anglo females in the colonies of East Texas. The lives of both centered around taking care of their families and communities; mere survival on the Texas frontier was a constant struggle. If anything, the women of San Antonio probably had an advantage over their Anglo counterparts in that San Antonio was a more established city than the new settlements and therefore provided better protection from the rougher elements of the frontier and better access

to provisions. Life was about to change in the city, however, beginning in October 1835 it became the center stage of the Texas Revolution and the Tejanas would have a front row seat for the next act.

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ⁱ De La Teja, 21.

ⁱⁱ Ehrenberg, 166.