

TEXASCACHE

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LAMPASAS

LEGENDS:

- Abandoned Spanish Mission Ruins
- Arrowheads & Artifacts

LAST DAYS OF THE TEXAS STONE AGE



TERREROS MISSION

PART I: **Exploring the Ruins and Legends of an Abandoned Spanish Mission Presidio Complex**



I live a little south of **Lampasas**, and was recently talking with Bill Arnold, who lives nearby, and he mentioned in passing “the old Spanish mission ruins on Lucy Creek”. I had to stop for a second... “Wait, what? How could I have never heard of this?!”

So began a historical rabbit hole I quickly jumped into that seems to have no bottom. There are indeed ruins and documentation of a little-known site described as an “abandoned mission/presidio/ranching complex” known as the **Terreros Presidio** near a spot called Long Meadows in Lampasas County. (ref. 1, 6)

All indications suggest that the mission was started in 1756, abandoned in its early stages, and was likely related to the well-documented Mission Santa Cruz de San Saba in present-day **Menard** that was established in 1757 and fell to a brutal Indian attack in 1758. The fledgling Lampasas mission and accompanying presidio, like in Menard about 100 miles to the west, seemed doomed from the beginning.

Most of what is known about the origin of the Terreros Mission and Presidio come from historical records begun by Thomas Isaac Cox, an American who served in the Spanish Army and was at the site in 1756.

His descendants compiled a trove of documents archived by two groups: the Gowen Research Foundation and the Brandywine Crucible Inc. Additionally, an archaeological survey by Dr. Judd Burton from the Unit for Strategic Anthropological Ventures (USAV), and extensive research by local historian and author Peggy Smith Wolfe offer a glimpse of the ill-fated mission and its subsequent appropriations after the Spanish left it behind.

It should be clarified at the onset that generally, in what was then New Spain and now Texas, “missions” (churches) and associated “presidios” (forts) were often erected some distance apart, sometimes separated by several miles. The clergy in this case seems to have preferred the protection of the military kept at a veritable arms’ length—not too close but not too far. In many of the older source documents cited in this article, the Terreros mission site was commonly referred to as the “presidio” with the terms interchangeably used for the same site. As of this writing, a new site has appeared that could be connected to the Terreros complex. Here all references to the “mission” refer to the site of the ruins located near Long Meadows and a geographical feature called Arroyo Caballo on Lucy Creek; allusions to the “presidio” refer to the accompanying site believed to be a garrison fort located approximately 7 miles from the mission. (ref. 2)



This photo of the horse corral ruins at Terreros Mission by Peggy Smith Wolfe appears on the cover of her book “Lampasas County, Texas Timeline of Early Events”

Spanish Presence in Lampasas

A little over 300 years ago, the Aguayo expedition in 1721 is believed to be the first recorded instance of the Spanish reaching the banks of the Lampasas River at its confluence with the Leon and Salado Rivers as they sought to expand northeastward to counter westward French encroachment. There are some suggestions, however that earlier expeditions could have passed through the area prior to Aguayo and charted the presence of the springs there. It is likely that around this time the Spaniards named the river after Lampazos, a mission town to the southwest in modern day Nuevo Leon, Mexico. (ref. 3, 6)

According to Cox family records, a few decades after Aguayo's foray into the area plans were made to establish a mission/school near the springs of modern Lampasas on Delucia Creek, now called Lucy Creek.



Father Alonzo Giraldo de Terreros (left) and Don Pedro Romero de Terreros (right) were cousins who played major roles in the venture: the former a Franciscan friar with a zeal to bring Christianity to the Natives, and the latter a wealthy mining magnate who pledged to finance the planting of missions in Apacheria. He wished to establish a presence and a converted Apache labor force for the purported silver deposits in the region. The man of the cloth embarked to carry the Cross into the wilderness, and the man of wealth financed it. This was done with the aid and protection of the soldiers of New Spain and led by a "Captain Bastera," probably Joachin de Orobio Bastera, who served at Presidio La Bahia. The Terreros cousins also helped establish the San Saba Mission around this same time. (ref. 11,12)

This was a tumultuous time with simultaneous movement of warring tribes, the French, and the Spanish into Texas. As the Comanche encroached on the Apache territory to their south, they had little choice but to retreat from their enemy invaders into New Spain—where they engaged in both peace and war. Around this time, the Apache had even advocated for missions and the priests of New Spain were

eager to oblige. (ref. 4)

The turmoil occurred in a rapid succession of events in the relatively short span of two years. At any rate, some 268 years later, today it is apparent that the mission and ranching site on Lucy Creek was started near the Arroyo Caballo (Horse Gully) where feral mustangs were trapped and corralled for a short time before constant Indian attacks drove the missionaries from the spot, leaving behind few artifacts other than the stone walls they erected as foundations, ramparts, and pens for the horses.

A year or so later, at the Mission in Menard, Father de Terreros and his fellow clergyman Joseph Santiesteban were murdered, mutilated, and martyred in the well-documented attack on San Saba Mission. Don Pedro later commissioned a famous painting for his slain cousin and Santiesteban, which is on display in Mexico City. A full-size replica stands in Menard. (See Back Cover). A statue of the slain friar was erected in Cortegana, Spain, a "sister city" of Menard with an official relationship between the two municipalities over their shared history having been established in recent years.



(Above) The Arroyo Caballo mustang entrapment at the Terreros site is a natural feature that the mission was erected around. Feral broncos roamed these hills by the thousands from the 1500s until the land started being fenced. It's unknown if the Comanche or Apache used the gully to trap horses before the Spanish built the adjoining stone pen in 1756--they could have employed its use before Terreros arrived for the brief occupation. This inconspicuous roadside washout has a storied history; most notably as a spot for capturing horses for the Continental Army in the American Revolution. (CONTINUED ON P. 16)

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TERREROS PRESIDIO

The Hilltop Fort: A New Chapter for an Old Story

A new development can be added to this ancient history. **Peggy Smith Wolfe** is a prolific author, historian, retired educator, and lifelong resident who has been studying the Spanish presence in Lampasas County for 15 years.

“I believe I have located the abandoned foundation of a Spanish Presidio.”

She stated flatly, along with a generous invitation to the site. I couldn't get out the door fast enough... soon we were on a hilltop amidst stone block ruins with a distant view in every direction. The landowners have requested anonymity and privacy; however, they have kindly allowed these photos of the site to be published.

On this small plateau lies a sprawling maze of stacked rock fences, crumbling structures, and palisades made entirely of limestone cobbles and many boulders weighing several hundred pounds. From this vantage one can see the seven-mile distance to the mission site and the areas of the major springs of Lampasas.

“The landowners gave me the name of the previous landowner, and I located and talked to him. He was about 90 years of age, remembered playing on the walls as a child, and was able to describe them very well.” Says Wolfe. “His family owned the land there for a long time. He said they always wondered who built the walls of such huge stones and why they built them. His family came into the Lampasas area only 18 years after the organization of the county; I believe that if such a massive project had been undertaken during the early settlement of our county, they would've passed that information on to their descendants.”

“With permission from the landowners I have taken several interested people to see the area... In 2021, a group of historians met

with the landowners to discuss the origins and purpose of these unfinished walls,” Continues Peggy. “This site was accepted as I had identified it by Col. Terrell Kelley, President of the San Saba mission restoration project at Menard. After his inspection of the five acres of abandoned Presidio ruins, I asked for a quote. He said, “Everything I see here fits your theory 100 percent.” (ref. 2)



(Above) Peggy Smith Wolfe at the hilltop site. The distant view can be seen in the photo. (Below) In that cursory visit and surface examination it seemed apparent that this was not a typical German or Irish-style simple stone livestock fence like so many erected in the area by 19th-century immigrants. Here were larger boulders at the base, a well or pit feature, what looks to be window bases overlooking the valleys, an apparent battery ditch, and a perimeter wall around much of the hilltop.



REPUTED ARTIFACTS:

In the Brandywine Crucible archives, handwritten letters describe an “Apache village” within proximity to the mission site where “many hundreds of arrowheads, {illegible}, stone axes, and corn-grinding tools were picked up.” (ref. 7). It should be noted, however that this letter was written some 200 years after the time of the Spanish presence, and that secondhand accounts of scattered surface artifacts collected at an occupation site cannot confirm anything, let alone “Apache” origin. Nonetheless, it shows evidence of a Native presence very close to the mission site, albeit without time-diagnostic archaeological information.

As of press time, inquiries to the USAV for notes or comment about their archaeology survey done in the early 2000s have not been answered. Perhaps they might shed some more light if they are able and willing to share their findings.

The prospective presidio site likely remains mostly archaeologically intact as of this writing, as there have been no recorded excavations known to the author. Peggy mentioned some **musket balls** found by the property owners and metal detectorists. The Indians were known to have French firearms at the time and as excavations at Mission San Saba show, they used them to fight the Spanish, but again, diagnostic relics (if any exist) have so far eluded the light of day. A buckle, some unidentifiable **corroded coins**, and a heavily patinated **hand-blown glass** bottle bottom have also been found there.



(Left) A piece of **molten lead** from the hilltop presidio site that looks very much like one recovered from archaeological excavations led by Texas Tech in 1993-1994 at the San Saba Mission (right, c/o Texas Beyond History website). (ref. 2, 5.) Examination of many documents and landowner involvement are necessary to to get a better idea of what archaeologist Judd Burton calls “the Iberian phantoms that linger in the history of Lampasas.” (ref. 6)

UNCLE JOHN'S PROTO-METAL DETECOTOR

Among the many Cox family letters, an old anecdote written by Joe B. Cox, Sr. surfaced about a descendant named “Uncle John” who was obsessed with finding the fabled lost Spanish gold (Not to be confused with the Lost San Saba Mine) that had supposedly been hastily stashed in a hidden location betwixt the Brazos and Colorado Rivers by Santa Anna’s army’s retreat during the Mexican Revolution. In the late 1800s he spent his later years preoccupied with the legendary treasure.

Uncle John roamed the countryside with his “mineral rod”, a homemade device with a coiled wire spring in a corkscrew soaked in baker’s ammonia and a green coloring agent, which he believed would act as a divining rod that would swivel in his arms when he walked over metal buried in the ground. His obsession resulted in countless large holes, some as deep as 20 feet, that he would dig in the spots where his rod registered, sometimes employing the help of friends and relatives whom he would pay with his State pension from serving as an Indian fighter during the Civil War. His final hole, dug when he was an aged widower and quite feeble, was near the Terreros mission on Lucy Creek where he grew up.

“Nothing discouraged him... As the weeks passed, the hole grew deeper, and the mound of earth near it grew wider and higher. When the hole was ten or twelve feet deep, they found what appeared to be a wide plank about an inch thick. This was taken out in small pieces as it was fairly rotten. Uncle John was excited. “It’s right under thar,” he said, pointing to the center of the hole. Work resumed with renewed energy, but the expected treasure did not show up.” (ref. 7)

~Of course, such anecdotes can’t provide evidence, but an ancient piece of lumber at such a depth and in the vicinity of the mission site found in this manner is at least entertainingly noteworthy.

TEXAS

***Author’s note:** There are still people searching for this infamous treasure that I have met personally: I once had to break up a shoving fight in my own backyard between two brothers (their grandfather sought the gold too)-- grown men, one of whom is a television meteorologist-- who nearly came to blows arguing about it!

The story of the **Terreros Mission** does not end with the Spanish retreat. In fact, it takes an unexpected turn that incredibly leads to a resurrection of the site that had a rippling effect through vast time and distance—bringing wild Texas mustangs to George Washington and the Continental Army on the battlefield of the war for independence.

The Fall issue of Texas Cache will have Part II of the Terreros Mission: an amazing story of over 800 feral horses caught in Arroyo Caballo that went to Philadelphia and helped win the US Revolution! You won't want to miss it!

*“Historic Schools of Lampasas County” by Peggy Smith Wolfe is available at the Lampasas County Museum and is available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Lulu, and other major book sellers.

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"The Destruction of Mission San Sabá in the Province of Texas and the Martyrdom of the Fathers Alonso de Terreros, Joseph Santiesteban," circa 1765.

Painter unknown with general attribution to Jose de Paez.

See page 12 for evidence of Terreros Presidio & Mission: a little-known abandoned mission complex in Lampasas that could be related to this one in Menard.



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