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Nuevo Santander- The Unrealized Archaeological Potential of a “Civilian” Province in Northern New Spain

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Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools Program

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Presented 27 October 2018 in a session titled

“Spanish Borderlands: Colonial Roots of the Lower Rio Grande Valley”

“Tierras fronterizas españolas: raíces coloniales del valle del Río Bravo del Norte”

89th Annual Meeting of the Texas Archeological Society

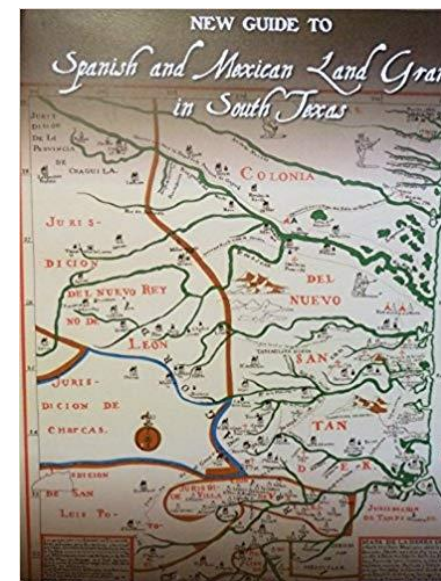
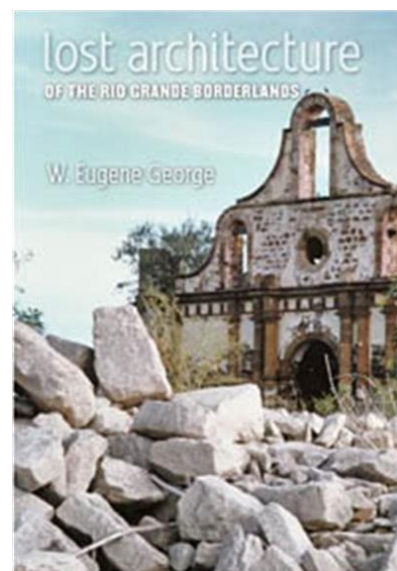
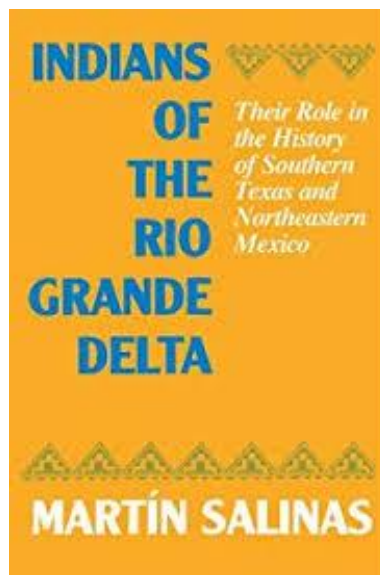
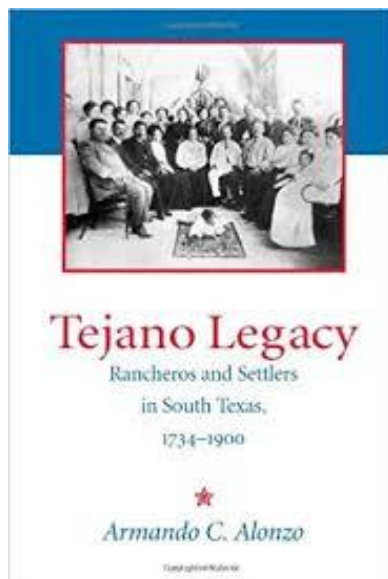
San Antonio, TX



The Lower Rio Grande Valley

An archaeological *tabula rasa* ?

- 2005 –Kathleen Gilmore, Shawn Carlson, J. Barto Arnold, George Gause-UTPA
- Armando Alonso 1998 ***Tejano Legacy***
- Martin Salinas 1990 ***Indians of the Rio Grande Delta***
- W. Eugene George 2008 ***Lost Architecture of the Rio Grande Borderlands***
- Galen D. Greaser 2009 ***New Guide to Spanish and Mexican Land Grants in South Texas***



Spanish Colonial Archaeological Research

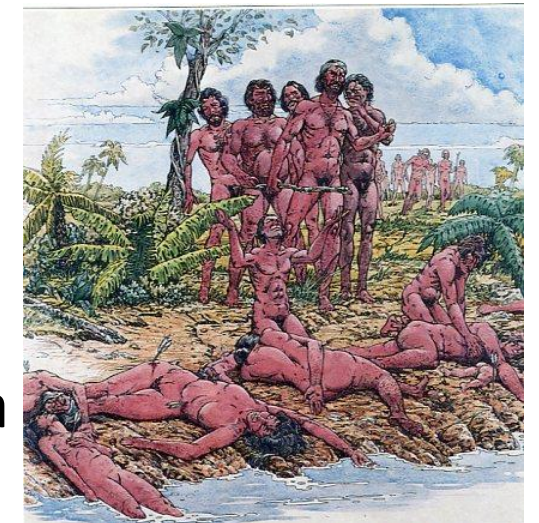
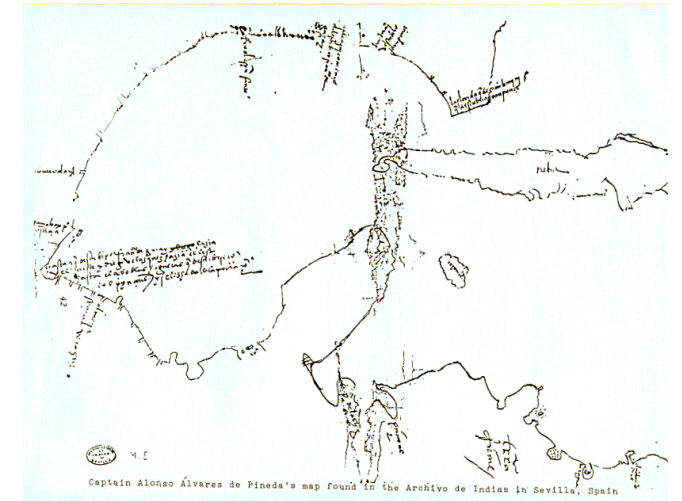
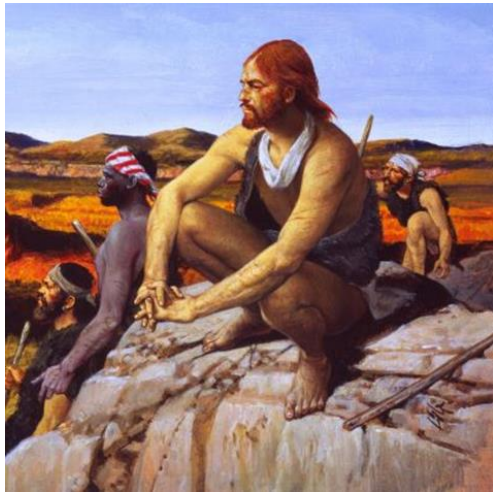
- Mindy Bonine 2001 UT (MA) *Households in the Wilderness: An Analysis of Two Spanish Rancho Sites along the Rio Grande, Starr County, Texas*
- José E. Zapata 2002 UTSA (MA) *A HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF ROMA, TEXAS*
- Mary Jo Galindo 2003 UT (Ph.D.) *Con Un Pie En Cada Lado: Ethnicities and the Archaeology of Spanish Colonial Ranching Communities Along the Lower Rio Grande Valley*
- An excellent start for Starr and Zapata Counties but is this the entire story?

As archaeologists we rely on multiple sources of data to explain the past

- The written word- documents
- The spoken word- oral histories or accounts
- Observed behavior- ethnography, ethnohistory, ethnoarchaeology
- Preserved behavior- material culture, archaeology
- Each approach carries its own bias
- To overcome some of these biases the CHAPS Program uses all of these approaches to identify the “**Colonial Roots of the Lower Rio Grande Valley**”

Questionable First Contacts & Survivors' Tales

- 1519 Alonso Álvarez de Pineda – Geography Gulf Coast
- 1528-36 Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca – 1 of 4 survivors

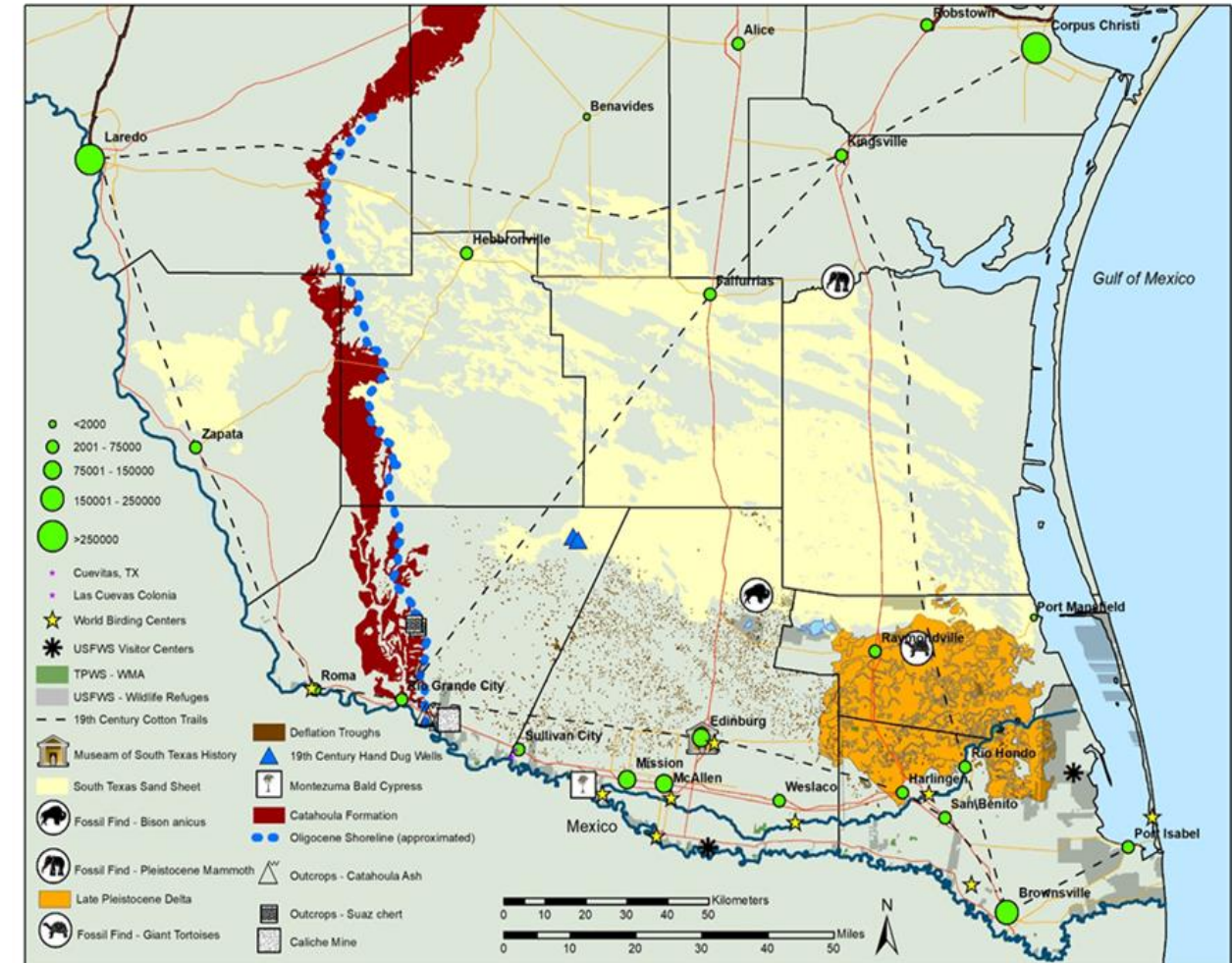
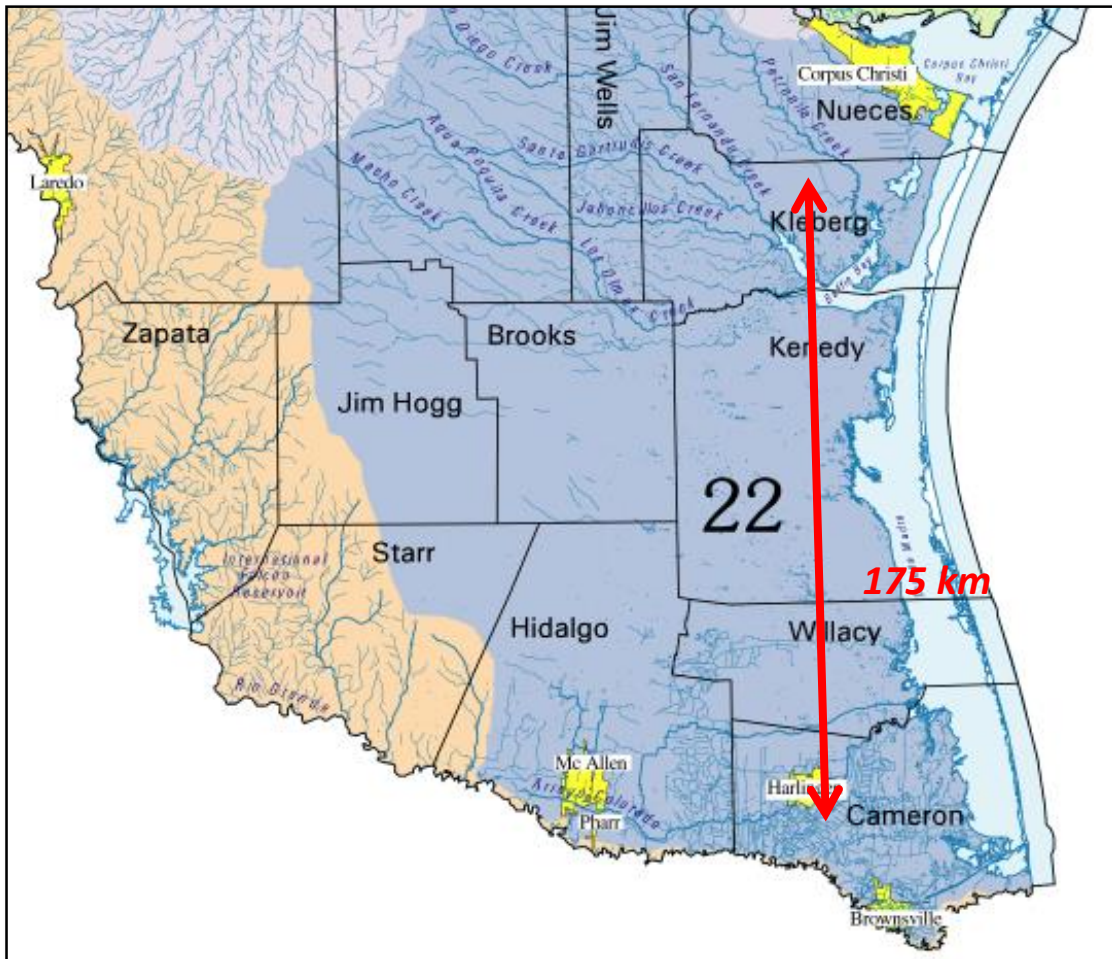


- 1554 Padre Island *flota* survivors ran afoul of the Karankawa
- 200 years would pass...Why?

Water is a rare resource in South Texas

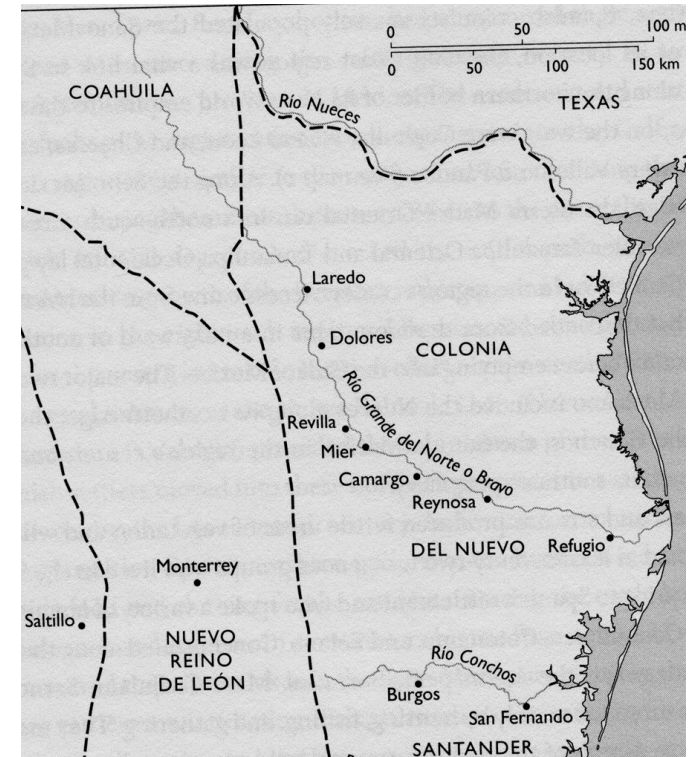
“La Costa,” “El Desierto Muerto,” “Wild Horse Desert,” “terra nullus,” “Brasada”

An island without water between the Nueces and the Rio Grande !



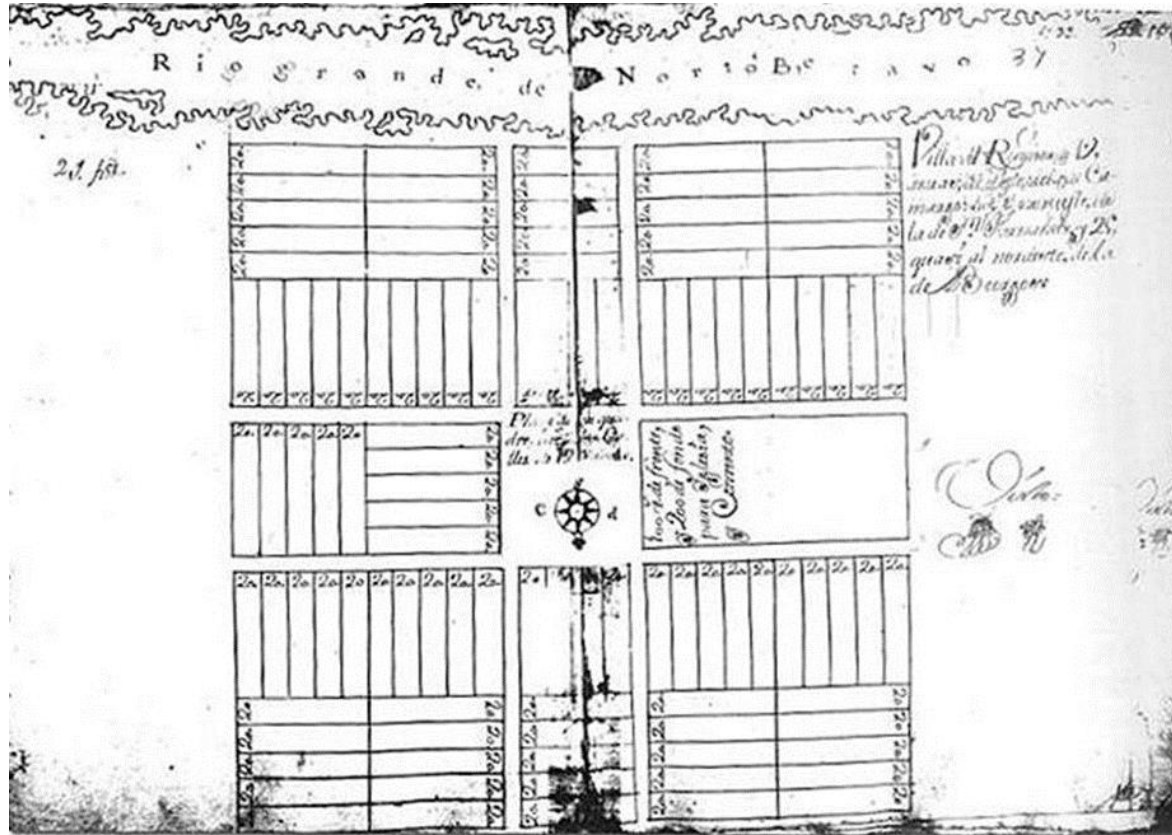
“Aquí Nuevo Santander, no estuvo Tejas”

- The southern boundary of Texas was the Nueces River
- 1746 a new province approved for civilian settlement
- 1749-1755 José de Escandón established 23 towns and 15 missions
- He brought 6,000 settlers from Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Queretaro
- 1749- Camargo & Reynosa; 1750- Revilla (aka- Guerrero); Dolores; 1752-Mier; 1755- Laredo--These were civilian pueblos or villas
- By 1790 -
- Nuevo Santander- had 20,000 Hispanic settlers
- Tejas had 2510
- Mexico City had 110,000
- Puebla 53,000
- Guanajuato 32,000

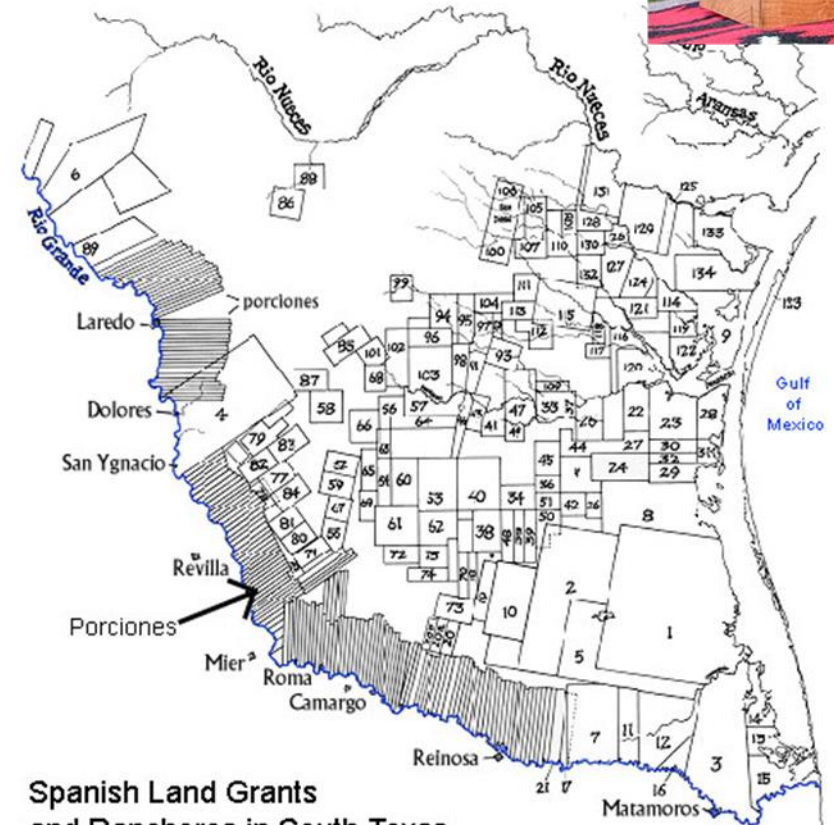


Agriculture & Ranching

- Land grants for irrigation, grazing, and towns began in 1767
- Grid iron town plan- a hallmark of the Spanish colonial world

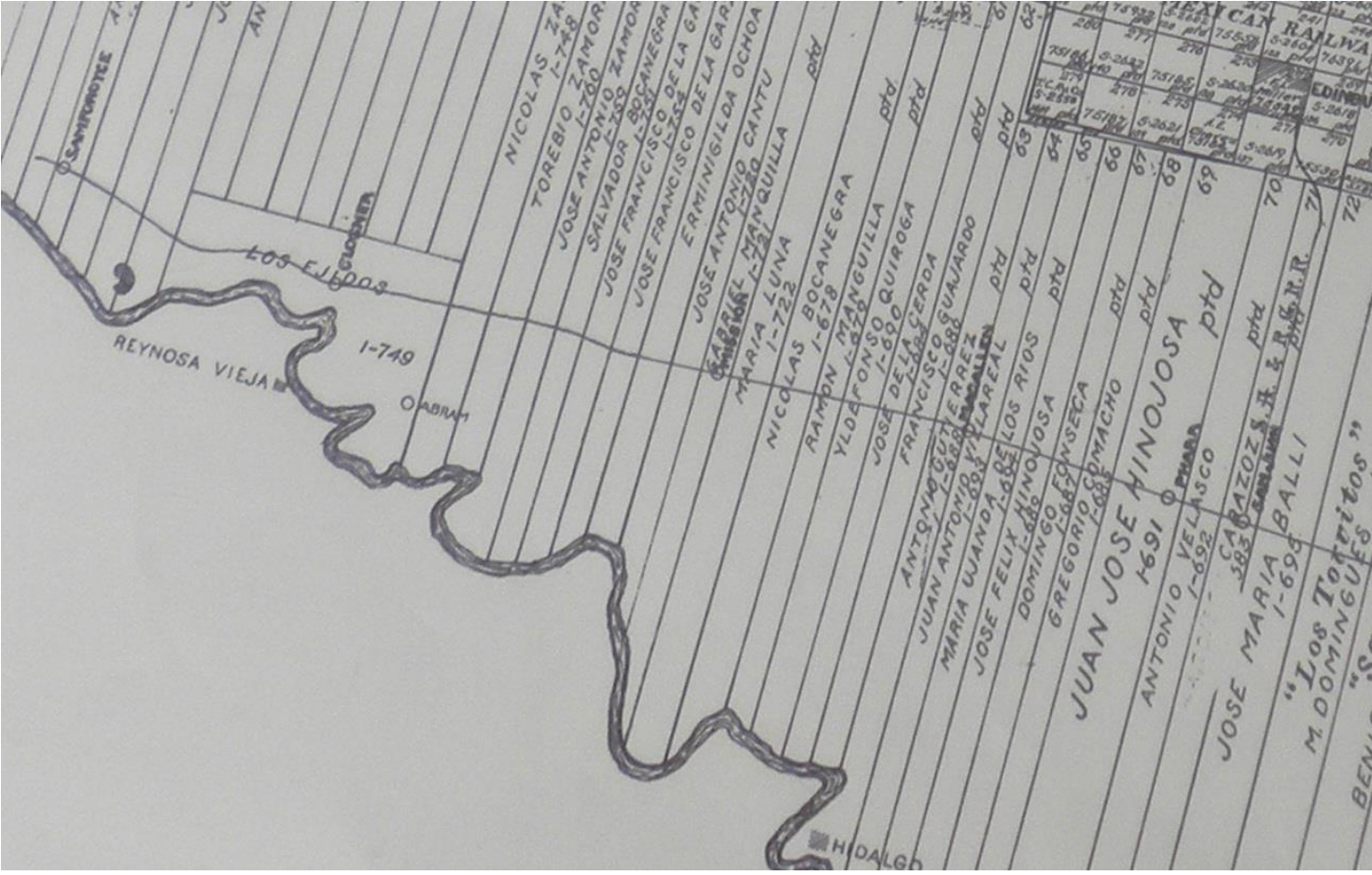
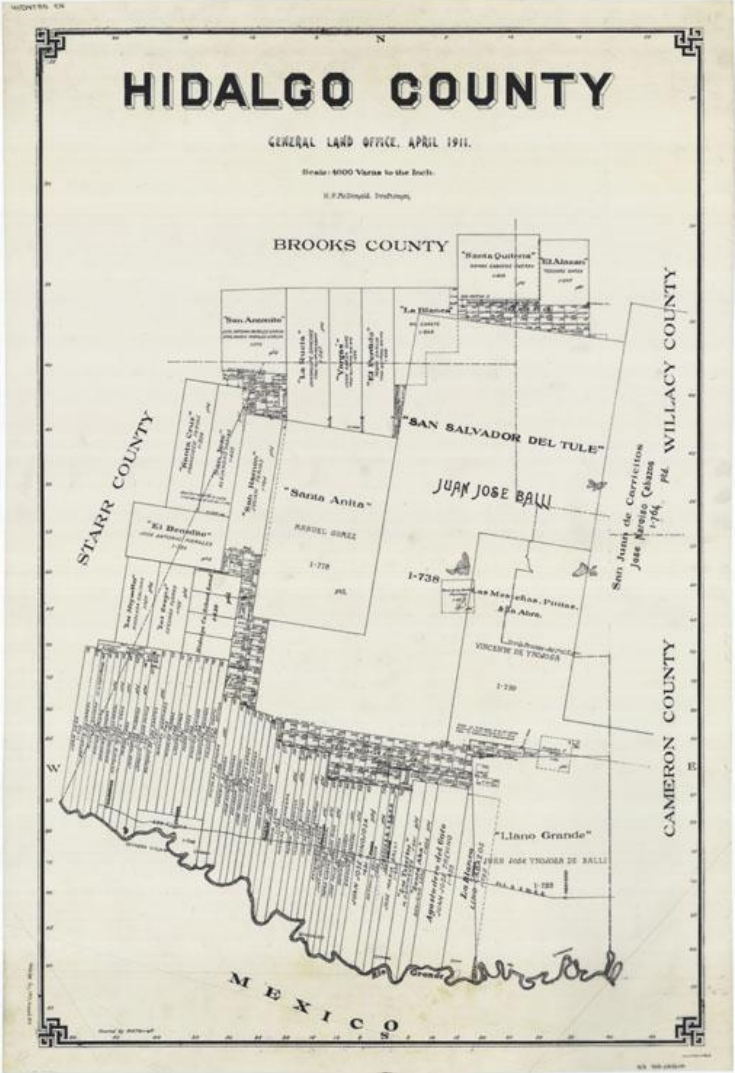


Plano del trazo de la Villa de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Reynosa. (Croquis de la Villa de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Reynosa, luego de la fundación por José de Escandón en 1749, Archivo General de la Nación.)

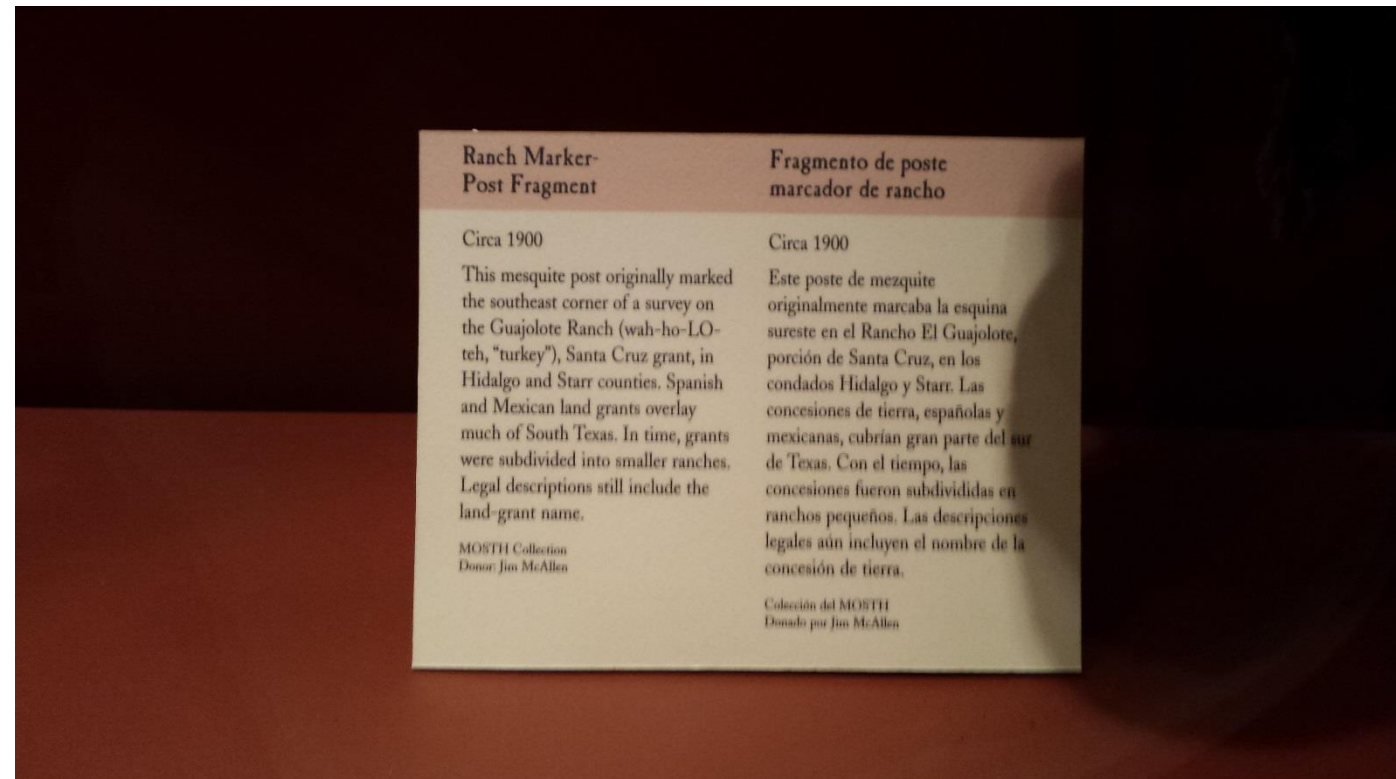


Spanish Land Grants and Rancheros in South Texas

Hidalgo County Porciones Map



Mesquite Post – marks the corners of original Spanish land grant properties



STATE OF TEXAS,
HIDALGO COUNTY.

Field notes of a corrected survey of 640 acres of land made for the Texas Mexican Railway Co. by virtue of Certificate No. 135. Said survey is number 267 in Hidalgo County, Texas, about 16 miles northeast of Hidalgo, Texas.

Beginning at a mesquite post marked N. W. 247 D. on the South boundary of a grant called San Salvador del Tule 4352 vs. N. 80° 53' W. from the S. E. corner of said San Salvador del Tule grant for the N. W. corner of Survey 247 Certificate 125; thence S. 8° 59' W. 3800 vs. to a mesquite post marked S. E. 245 D. and S. W. 250 for the S. E. corner of survey 245 Certificate 124, for a beginning point of this survey; thence N. 80° 53' W. on South boundary of survey 245, 670 vs. to a mesquite post marked N. W. 267 D. and N. E. 268 for the N. W. corner of this survey and N. E. corner of Survey 268, from which a mesquite marked — brs. S. 52-3/4° W. 32 vs. another marked — brs. N. 2° 45' E. 16 vs; thence S. 8° 59' W. on the east boundary of Survey 268, 614 vs. to a mesquite marked S. W. 267 D. for the S. W. corner of this survey, from which a mesquite marked — brs. S. 42° 15' E. 11.4 vs. another marked — brs. S. 86° 45' W. 15.4 vs; thence S. 80° 53' E. at 849.5 vs. a point which is 1377 vs. N. 9° 07' E. from the old N. W. corner of a grant called Las Torritos, from which a mesquite marked X brs. S. 62° 40' W. 20.8 vs. another marked X brs. 9° 15' E. 2.0 vs. (these are the original bearing trees), at 5880 vs. in all to a mesquite post marked S. E. 267 D and S. W. 266 for the S. W. corner of survey 266 and S. E. corner of this survey, from which a mesquite marked — brs. N. 66° W. 22.5 vs. another marked — brs. N. 80° 45' E. 13.9 vs. Thence N. 8° 59' E. 614 vs. to a mesquite post marked N. E. 267 D and N. W. 266 on the South boundary of Survey 254, for the N. W. corner of Survey 266 and N. E. corner of this survey, from which a mesquite marked — brs. N. 33° W. 13 vs. another marked — brs. N. 11° 45' E. N. 80° 53' W. at 1410 vs. passed the S. E. corner 249, at 3310 vs. passed the S. E. corner 250, from which a mesquite marked — brs. N. 8° 15' E. 63 vs. another mkd. — brs. N. 80° 53' E. at 5210 vs. in all to the place of beginning.

George Dennett } Chain
Romulo Garcia }

Surveyed April 11th, 1908.
Variation 8° 42' E.

I, S. W. DeWolf, Deputy County Surveyor of Hidalgo County, Texas, do hereby certify that the foregoing described Survey was actually made by me on the ground, according to the Chain Carriers aforesaid, duly qualified, and that all the Corners, Line Marks of the same, whether natural or artificial, are truly and correctly described in the foregoing Plat and Field Notes.

S. W. DeWolf
Deputy County Surveyor, Hidalgo County, Texas

I, Thos. P. Gore, Surveyor of Hidalgo Co. do hereby certify that I have examined the foregoing Plat and Field Notes and find them correct and that they are recorded in my office in Book

boundary of a grant called San Salvador del Tule grant
W. 3800 vs. to a mesquite post
Certificate 124, for a beginning point of this survey and N. E. corner
W. 32 vs. another marked —
Survey 268, 614 vs. to a mesquite post
which a mesquite marked —
N. 80° 53' E. at

Mojonera
de la Porcion 74
Los Saenz Cemetery
Roma, TX



Oral History

- In 1998 Armando Alonso described La Feria in *Tejano Legacy* as a habitation site and location for commercial activity during the first third of the nineteenth century.
- In conversations with local residents the question was raised about Spanish colonial- and Mexican Republican-era homesteads in Hidalgo County.
- The response always was, “Go to Starr County, there is nothing of importance here.”
- Why?
- Most of the original landowners in Hidalgo County lost their land more than a century ago
- And it may have to do with the nature of the construction.

Ethnography, Ethnohistory & Earth Sciences

Spanish Colonial Building Materials

- This is a story of [WATER](#)
- Wood and thatch, *jacal* or *palisado*
- Building materials of stone blocks cut from a natural deposit
- There are two kinds-
- Sandstone
- Limestone or *caliche* - Forms in arid regions when through capillary action dissolved calcium carbonate and other minerals accumulates in layers 3 to ten feet below the surface
- Location of resources dictates the nature of structures

Wood & Thatch- *Jacal*- bias against



Caliche (limestone) away from the river
La Noria at San Isidro



Santa Anita Ranch Hidalgo County



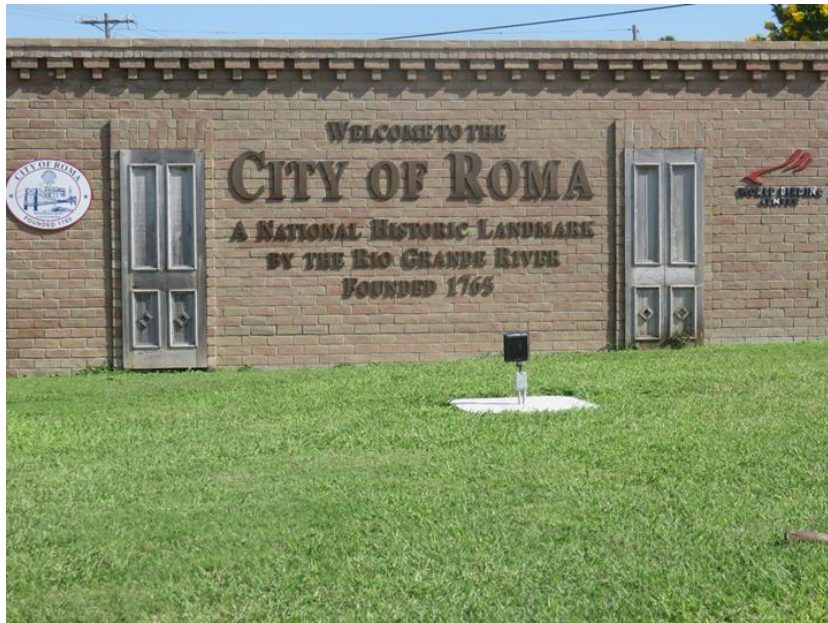
Havana



Roma – Los Sáenz

Beach front property- Sandstone

- Roma stands on porciones 71 and 72. in the 1760s Juan Salinas and Juan Angel Sáenz families move from Mier to these properties.
- linked to the 1753 Escandón villa of Mier by its formal jurisdiction as ranch lands, and has maintained continuous commercial, political, and family ties to the present day.



Roma National Historic Landmark District

- Roma contains the most outstanding collection of vernacular structures extant today for the Lower Río Grande region from Laredo to the Gulf of Mexico.
- 16 of the 38 properties date from 1829-1870
- The 1830 Rodriguez House is the only structure in Roma built of limestone blocks constructed in the *sillar* technique. **All others are sandstone.**

Roma's 42 MY old beach & oysters Cox/Vale House



Filomeno Gongora House- 1830s sandstone



Lopeño, San Ignacio,



Culture of Fear on the Rio Grande Frontier- Treviño Fort San Ygnacio and San José de los Corralitos



Rancho El Saladito, Tamaulipas,

- Work done at this site by Mary Jo Galindo revealed limestone and sandstone structures
- Their architecture and artifacts mirrored the findings associated with those inundated by Falcon Dam.

Eighteenth-century stone ranchos were submerged beneath the waters of Falcon Reservoir.

Photo by Jack Humphreys, from TARL archives



Archeologists from the University of Texas at Austin unearth the floor of a Spanish Colonial ranch house. This excavation and others conducted during the early 1950s provided a wealth of information about early ranch life on the border.

It was the first rancho excavated in Texas. ■

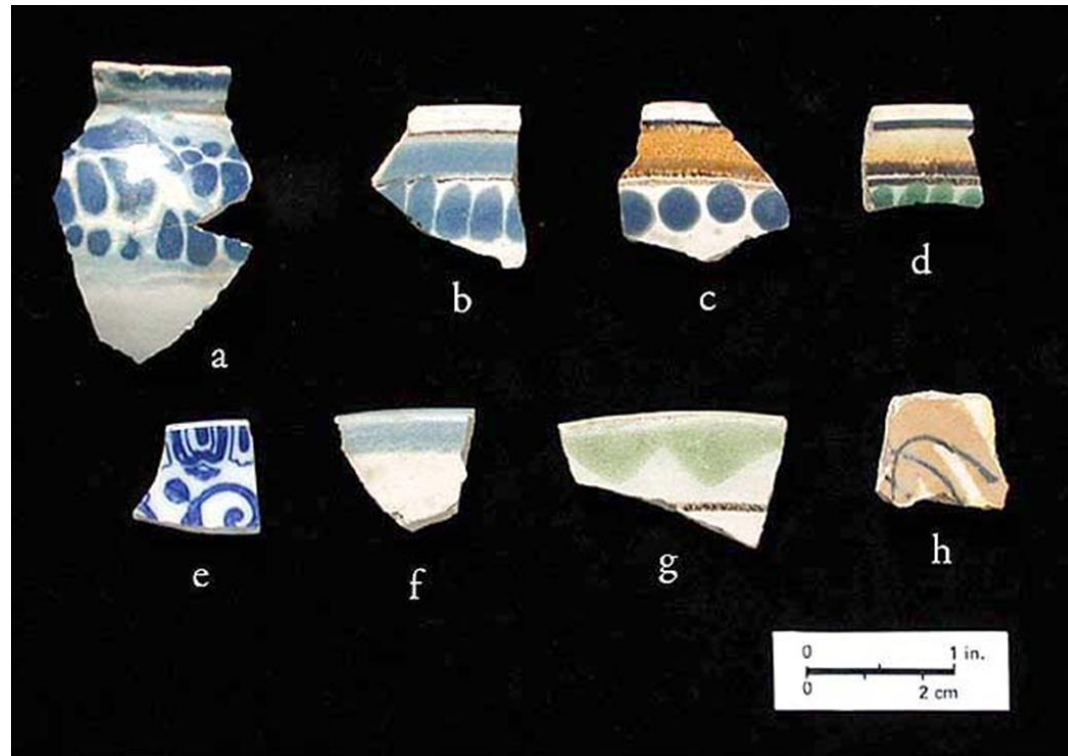


Ceramics- Maiolicas, Porcelain, Utilitarian



Majolica, or glazed enamelware, in a variety of patterns and colors were found at the site. These fragments were from bowls and other tableware. a, Puebla Blue on White; b-c, San Elizario; d, Aranama Polychrome; e, Chinese Porcelain; f, Huetjotzingo Blue on White; g, Puebla Green on White; h, Aranama Polychrome

Puebla Green on White; h, Aranama Polychrome



Utilitarian Lead-Glazed



“Galera” Chocolate Pot



Unglazed storage and cooking jars



At the end of the day...Questions & Challenges abound

- Does site plan vary by location?
- How do ranch houses compare with those in villas?
- Are there differences in material culture? Are ranches more or less self-sufficient than frontier towns?
- Will UTRGV support the creation of an archaeology lab?
- Archaeological potential is great but rapid development and inaccurate perceptions create a race against time
- NEH- "... the results will provide information for understanding the use of this part of Texas, but have little relevance for broader questions or scholars outside this area. I doubt it will stimulate new research because it is so particularistic." **OUCH!**