



Being Texan: Celebrating a State of Mind, by Jeff Carroll
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The Spanish Period: 1500—1821

1500—Homefolks

The year of 1500 was not especially important in world history. Pope Alexander VI sold new indulgences to support a crusade against the Turks, and the first black-lead pencils were used in England. The first Caesarean childbirth operation on a living woman was performed in Switzerland by a pig gelder, and a lot of other folks were born, and a lot of others died. Some were important, and some were not. There were the usual wars and revolts, regicides, patricides, fratricides, and suicides. Explorers began to realize that there was a lot more to the “New World” than they supposed. However, it wasn’t until September of 1519 that Magellan set sail on the voyage that would prove to most folks that the Earth was round. It was a pretty ordinary year. Perhaps because nothing happened of monumental importance to confuse us, the year 1500 makes a good dividing line between pre-history and history in our part of the world.

For something to be “Historic” there must be people who leave a written record. “Prehistoric” refers to any time when people do not leave written records. Thus, for something to be prehistoric does not necessarily mean that it is very old. It simply

means that the people involved left no written records to explain their activities. Here in Texas that dividing line came about 1500. There were many people here at that time, and they had been around for thousands of years; but except for pictographs on rocks, they left no written records. Those written records, the accounts of the first European explorers, began about 1519.

Who were those Texans who greeted the first explorers? How many of them were there? What were their lives like? Well, in some cases, we will never know, because they passed from the scene before anyone wrote about them. At best, we have a list of about 900 different tribal names gathered by early explorers, and many of these are no doubt just different names used for the same people. So, unless you are an archaeologist dealing with a particular site for which you have a name, we must lump many groups of people together based on similar lifestyles and give those large groupings names that we can handle. Although there may be many subtle differences between the components of these groups, they had more in common with each other than with their neighbors.

Most of the South Texas brush country (the *brasada*) below the Nueces River and the desert land of West Texas was occupied by scattered bands of people we will call *Coahuiltecan*s. They existed at a very primitive level, most of them trapped in the Early or Middle Archaic stage of development. Just as it is today, water was the primary limiting factor then, followed by a shortage of food for much of the year. They lived in small family groupings that rarely exceeded a dozen or so. Each family unit was the mortal enemy of every other family, because they were in daily competition for the limited resources necessary for survival. They wore little in the way of clothing, because they had little from which clothing could be made. Woven grass or yucca fibers made aprons that, along with braided grass sandals, completed the wardrobes of adult males and females. The children wore nothing. For food they ate anything they could find. Ants, insects of all kinds, birds, mice and rats, lizards and snakes, occasional rabbits, and the roots of some plants made up much of their diet. About the only time of the year when there was plenty of food was in the summer, when pods of mesquite beans and the fruit of the cactus were ripe. Unfortunately, this coincided with

the driest time of the year. The Coahuiltecan could not take advantage of this abundance because they had to stay close to their dwindling water supply.

Like many of the small animals they hunted, they lived under rock overhangs or in brush piles. They had little in the way of personal property and little time to enjoy what they had. Some of them apparently killed female children at birth simply because they represented simply an extra mouth to feed. Some apparently ate their neighbors on occasion. Life was short and probably generally unpleasant, but because they had nothing with which to compare, it was what they were used to.

The *Karankawa* lived in a relatively narrow band along the Gulf Coast, south of Galveston. There are several different spellings of that name, but don't worry about it—all of them are correct. The Karankawa were the most outstanding physical specimens in Texas in 1500. Men and women alike averaged well over six feet in height, and their bodies were well formed. While some lived in wandering bands, many lived together in larger tribal groupings of 100 or more, controlled by a shaman, or religious leader. Like the Coahuiltecan, they wore little in the way of clothing. Males remained nude for most of their lives; before the age of puberty, girls wore deerskin smocks, but adult women wore only braided moss aprons below their waists. Both men and women covered their bodies with tattoos made by piercing the skin with cactus thorns and rubbing rancid alligator grease mixed with soot from the fire into the wound. These wounds festered, of course, and, when healed, left three-dimensional geometric outlines of scar tissue.

Life was much better for the Karankawa than it was for their neighbors to the west. There was abundant water and food. They hunted all manner of game with long bows and arrows that were often four feet or more in length. They were excellent fishers and left islands of oyster shells to attest to their harvests of shellfish. Alligators were such an important part of their diet that they assumed mythical status in Karankawa society. Rancid alligator grease, liberally applied to their skins, protected the folks from mosquitoes and sunburn.

Their living shelters were brush arbors (*ramadas*) made of poles with brush, grass, or anything else on top to provide

shade. They made small boats by hollowing logs with fire and used oyster shells to scrape away the burned wood. In these they poled their way from island to island and to the mainland.

Children were the wealth of the family and the tribe. If a child died for any reason, the whole tribe mourned for a year and parents cut fingers from their hands.

Early in their contact with Europeans, the Karankawa got a bad reputation as man-eaters. Lurid accounts of Karankawa cannibalism appeared in books throughout Europe. Most Europeans were so afraid of this, that the Karankawa were hunted and killed to the point of extinction. Europeans just didn't understand that there are basically two kinds of cannibalism. The first kind is for food value, and is rather rare. The other kind is performed as a part of semi-religious ritual. This ritualistic cannibalism is quite common throughout history, in many societies and in many parts of the world. Look at it this way: if you consider that there is something special about *you*—something that sets you apart from all other people—and that this special something is responsible for your intelligence, bravery, honor, etc., then you're on the right track. Now consider that when you die, all of that is lost to your family, your friends, and your community. You may not realize it, but you now have the answer. Within the Karankawa culture they believed that when you died everything that was special about you was lost *unless* everyone else in your group ate a small portion of your flesh. When they did that, you did not really die; that special something that was *you* lived on in others. It worked for your enemies, too—if you killed an enemy and ate a bite, you got some of his energy and bravery.

Central Texas, an area roughly bounded by the Nueces River on the south, the Trinity River on the North, today's I-35 on the west, and the coastal lands of the Karankawa on the east, was the home of people we call the *Tonkawa*. Actually, they called themselves *Tickanwatic*, which means "*the most human of people*." The Tonkawa lived in a land of plenty, with an abundance of water in many streams, springs, and rivers. They had an almost constant food supply in the form of fruits and nuts and the wild game that fed and drank in the same land.

As a rule, the Tonkawa lived in family-based clans and

moved about through the course of the year within a relatively small area. Summer took them to the drier ridges, where the prickly-pear cactus, grapes and berries, and other fruits, such as wild plums, were abundant. In winter they sheltered in the valleys to escape the weather and to gather pecans and acorns. They usually returned to the same camping spots every year. Their standard shelter was the tipi covered with skins. They cooked their food, wore more complex clothing than their neighbors, and acquired more private property.

Regardless of the relative levels of the two civilizations, the Tonkawa were actually far more cannibalistic than the Karankawa. They often held a true cannibalistic feast after a battle in which they killed or captured enemies. Despite this habit, they adapted well to European culture; many served later as military scouts for the army and the Texas Rangers.

In 1500 most of Texas to the west of a line drawn from today's Fort Worth to San Antonio, to Eagle Pass and on to El Paso, was claimed and sparsely occupied by the eastern branches of the *Apache*, who were the eastern-most extension of the Athapascan Intrusion. We are not sure of the date, but they apparently came from the far north into the area around 700 AD. Their warriors, among whom there were many women, were fierce fighters. They tended to kill, run out of the country, or absorb their neighbors. They were primarily nomadic, following the buffalo herds on their winter migrations into the area. They planted small gardens in the spring and summer. They brought with them the laminated recurve bow and the domestic dog, which was at that time the only satisfactory beast of burden in North America. They wore minimal clothing, but that included knee-high moccasins similar to the "mukluks" of the far north.

Two small and very different groups of people that we know by the same name existed like islands in the sea of the Apache. The Spanish called them both *Jumano*, and that didn't help much because, as I said, they were quite different. One small group lived in the vicinity of present-day San Angelo, near where the Concho joins the Colorado River. They remain something of a puzzle because, at that time, they appeared to be a culture in decline, one that had lost its will to live. The Apache tended to

leave them alone, because they just didn't act like normal people. They hunted only enough to keep from starving and rarely practiced any form of agriculture. There is really not much to say about them, except that they existed.

The other group we know as Jumano lived along the Rio Grande below today's El Paso. They were the most southeastern extension of the Puebloan Culture of New Mexico. They lived in permanent adobe *pueblos* (towns) ruled by a tribal council and shaman. They practiced an advanced form of agriculture based on complex irrigation systems and had a social system that divided the labor among all of the people who shared in the harvest. The Apache also left them alone most of the time, but I suspect for a different reason. Cyclic weather patterns in the Southwest dictate that there will be a drought about every 7-10 years. During these times the buffalo herds, on which the Apache depended for food, did not migrate to the south, which meant that the Apache went hungry. In drought times they raided the pueblos for stored food but didn't kill the people, because they knew that, when the next drought came around in another 7-10 years, they could come back and do it again. For the Apache, the Jumano of the pueblos were rather like a savings account in the bank.

In a strange twist of fate, these two groups we call Jumano joined together about 100 years later to become the *Tigua*. Their descendants still live in the El Paso area today.

If you look at a botanical map of Texas, you will notice a long tongue of heavy vegetation entering Texas from Oklahoma above Fort Worth and generally following the west side of I-35 south until it runs out on the Edwards Plateau. We call this the "Cross Timbers" region, and it was the home to a very large, but loosely organized group we call the *Wichita*. This isn't an accurate term, because it really applies to only one of a collection of several hundred remnant and refugee populations.

Texas was not much like their ancestral home, and being woodland Indians, they didn't do well on the prairies. They fled the upper Midwest around the Great Lakes, forced from their homelands by expanding pressure from other tribes in eastern North America. Pushed steadily south, they were trapped by a combination of geography and hostile inhabitants.

There were a lot of them, but they represented such a wide variety of languages, cultures, religions, and organizational patterns that they were unable to capitalize on their numbers, and so remained a rather weak people, harassed by enemies and competitors on all sides.

North and east of the Trinity River the land belonged to the *Caddo*, part of that great *Caddo-Hasinai* Confederation that occupied much of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri. These, in turn, were a part of the even greater Mississippian or Mound-Building Culture of the Mississippi, Tennessee, and Ohio River valleys.

The Caddo were the most culturally advanced residents of Texas in 1500. Each local community was part of a true political confederation made up of semi-autonomous towns, with a highly stratified social order based on agriculture and bound together by agreements of mutual aid. The mounds they built for ceremony, living and burial, were replicas of those found throughout the central part of the United States and served the same purposes. Towns were permanent, as were the tall, cone-shaped houses thatched with river cane. It was a matriarchal society in which one's social position was dependent on the mother, not the father, and where women could and did rise to positions of tribal control.

Of all of the counties in Texas, only one is named for a woman—Angelina. She was Caddo and governed her people well. The Spanish called her a “sagacious” woman.

Occupying a small coastal corner of Southeast Texas and slopping over into southern Louisiana to the Mississippi, were the *Attakapans*. They were a curious, war-like people who kept to themselves, hunted and fished in the swamps where they also practiced some agriculture on the dry islands. They spoke a language unassociated with any other in North America. Some cultural geographers contend that their language stems from ancient Phoenician, and that they may well have been descendents of shipwrecked Phoenician sailors from the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Certainly, such could be the case, because Phoenicians were the greatest world navigators of their day.

That brings us full circle. Remember that in any of these groups there was a great deal of variation and that they were lumped together because they had more in common with each other than with their neighbors.

The question remains: “So, OK, we’ve got a lot of different groups of people. Just how many people are we talking about?”

Of course, we will never know. From almost the beginning of this time period in 1500, the church was interested in how many souls there were to save; and the government was interested in how many there were, who, as slaves, represented a possible profit. Historians and anthropologists, and all manner of agencies and disciplines, have worked on the problem ever since. Although there is a lot of argument and the total is revised almost every year, a partial consensus estimates a total population of today’s Mexico and the American Southwest circa 1500 of about 50 million people. About 30 million of these were in today’s Mexico, where the Central Valley was the most densely populated spot on earth. That leaves about 20 million to divide between Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, a little tip of Nevada, and the southern half of California.

Certainly, there were places where no one lived. There are places like that today. Likewise, there were places where the available resources allowed abundant populations. You can make up your own mind about how to divide those folks between Texas, California, and the desert areas; but if we give Texas only one fourth of the total, which equals 5 million people, that was equal to the population of Texas according to the modern census of 1930. Any way you look at it, there were a lot of people of different cultures here in 1500. This was their home, just as it is yours today.

Mexican Texas and the War for Texas Independence: 1821—1836 1836—The Alamo Rose

Legend tells us that during his wars in Europe, Napoleon often called meetings of his officers. While they argued what they thought best to do, he slept, with his eyes open. When they were

through arguing he woke up and told them what he planned to do in the first place. Is it truth, or fiction?

Have you ever wondered how legends get started? A large part of the job assumed by revisionist historians is to seek out and destroy legends that cannot be proven. I guess they perform a valuable service. I've done it myself on occasion, but that doesn't get to the question, "How do legends get started?" Let's try an example.

The date is March 3, 1836, and a hardy mixed bag of about 180 frontiersmen and patriots are bottled up in the old Spanish mission of *San Antonio de Valero* that we now call the Alamo. John W. Smith, later to become a member of the First Congress of the Republic of Texas, slips through the south wall with William B. Travis's last communication to the outside world. The stage is set. Before dawn on March 6, while the Mexican trumpets play the *Deguello*, Santa Anna's forces overwhelm the defenders. You've read it a dozen times and you've seen it in movies. Now come the questions. What happened in the Alamo between the time that Smith left on March 3 and the defenders died on March 6? How do we know?

Well, of course, 18-year-old Suzanna Dickinson can tell us. She was the wife of Almeron Dickinson, a blacksmith by trade, who commanded one of the cannons. She was there and she survived. Well, she did tell us, but then again, she didn't. You see, when the Mexican artillery started lobbing shells into the mission, Suzanna and a handful of other non-combatants were herded into an enclosed room, and they didn't come out until it was all over. According to Suzanna, she could hear the battle but could not see it. To make matters worse, she later changed her story many times.

Then there are the stories of Andrea Castañón Villanueva, usually known as Madam Candelaria. She was also in the Alamo, along with the wives and families of other loyal Federalist Tejanos who were fighting to regain their Constitution of 1824. Although you rarely hear of her today, people once beat a path to the door of her little house on South Laredo Street in San Antonio to hear her tell of the Alamo defenders' last hours. She was there. She was not herded into an enclosed room with others. She nursed the sick and injured James Bowie, and said that he died in her arms. Of course,

over time, her stories also tended to change somewhat, and they frequently disagreed with those of Suzanna. The two were simply not in the same place at the same time, so they didn't see the same things.

What about the citizens of San Antonio? No, they couldn't see it either. The old mission wasn't in the middle of town like it is today. What there was of San Antonio was on the other side of the river, and, in any case, its citizens wouldn't have been able to see inside the walls.

So, we are left with a puzzle surrounding that legendary episode in which Travis made a patriotic plea to his troops, drew a line on the ground with his saber, and asked all who would stand by him to cross the line. It is a memorable point in most stories of the Alamo and is rarely left out of the movies. Suzanna doesn't mention it. Madam Candelaria does. We cherish that legend of heroism. To believe it though, we must also believe the legend of Louis "Moses" Rose, and a lot of folks prefer to leave that out. You see, he also could have told the story.

Rose was a veteran of Napoleon's defeat in Russia and the bitter retreat from Moscow. He served Napoleon well, becoming an officer and receiving the award of the Legion of Honor. He came to Texas seeking peace in about 1827. In the Nacogdoches area he worked as a timber cutter until he was involved in the Fredonia Rebellion. Somewhere along the way he met, and became friends with, Jim Bowie, and went to join him in the Siege of Bexar. Apparently he was a valiant soldier, but not a foolish one. Later, when folks asked him why he left the Alamo, he simply said that he saw no benefit in dying.

According to the legend, when Travis drew the line in the sand, all crossed over except Rose. Madam Candelaria mentions the incident, but she doesn't mention Rose by name. She said that all crossed over except two—James Bowie, who couldn't because he was too sick and weak to leave his bed and so asked to be carried over, and "another," who jumped over the wall. She may have been in a good position to know all about it. If she were Bowie's nurse, she would not have been far away, and would have taken a great interest in the proceedings. Since Rose was in the Alamo because of his friendship with Bowie, it stands to reason that he stayed with him until Bowie made his choice.

According to the legend, on the night of March 3rd, Rose

dropped out of a window, made his way west, through San Antonio, then south, to circle around the Mexican troops, and then east. He avoided the roads and saw no one until, crippled and starving, he reached the Colorado River. A family that we'll never know took him in and fed him, but then threw him out—not because he left the Alamo (surprisingly few Texans cared about it then), but because two traveling hucksters from Nacogdoches wanted his bed and convinced his hosts that they could pay for it. Rose went on to the home of the parents of Captain W. P. Zuber in Washington County, and there he told his story about Travis, the line in the sand, and his departure from the Alamo.

Rose was no youngster. He was over 50 at the Alamo, and they called him “Moses” because of his age. He almost died there in Washington County, but the Zubers cared for him and removed festering cactus spines from his legs. When he was finally able to travel, Rose moved on in search of the peace he wanted.

He lived in Nacogdoches for many years, working as a butcher, and was very helpful to the heirs of those who died at the Alamo, helping them to receive land offered by the Republic. But, we have no record that he ever told that particular story again. The Zubers in turn told the story to their son, and, in Richardson's *Texas Almanac* for 1873, he passed the story on to the public. Zuber later corrected a few details, and the result appeared in Pennybacker's *History For Schools*, but not before a baker's dozen of self-appointed historians got their hands on it and began to publish their own “true” accounts—although they hadn't been there to see it.

Zuber was still defending his story in the July 1901 issue of the *Quarterly* of the Texas State Historical Association. Most textbooks now offer only an edited version, or leave it out altogether. We are left with the problem that surrounds all legends: “*Is it true, partially true, or false?*” We may never know.

A New Century, New Frontiers: 1900—Present

1900—The Hobby and the Hurricane

We live in a throwaway society. This should come as no surprise to those who seek convenience, whether it is in diapers, beverage

containers, or automobiles. Unfortunately, in our haste to dispose of the unneeded and unwanted—those things that have outlived their usefulness—we often throw out people, too. There is a tremendous waste of love, understanding, and both factual knowledge and experience every time we decide that, just because folks are old, they no longer have anything to offer society.

His hobby met him at the gate when he finally managed to reach his little frame house on the afternoon of Saturday, September 15, 1900.

W. H. Plummer was getting on in years. Already retired from a life spent at sea off the Northeast Coast, he was called “Captain” or simply “Cap” by his friends. Unable to find regular work because folks said he was too old, he was a part-time employee of the Galveston Police—cleaning the station and making sure the doors were locked. His hobby reminded him of his youth; it was a small-scale and carefully handcrafted boat built on the lines of the sturdy crafts used by Maine lobstermen. Floating free from her chocks in the already waist-high water, she seemed eager to be off. Around him, in the rising wind and water, a city was dying in what would soon be called “The Great Galveston Storm.”

Whenever we are faced with a natural or man-made disaster, we see those who prey on the misfortunes of others. Fortunately, we also see those who have led unspectacular lives suddenly rise above the call of ordinary duty in their service and acceptance of responsibility. This was something Cap knew and something he could do! He and the sea were old adversaries, and his hobby was waiting to prove her strength.

Cap Plummer didn’t wait. He put on his boots and his old slicker, took his two grown sons and four stout hand-carved oars, kicked down what was left of his picket fence, and started out to save as much of his adopted city as he could.

Huracan, the *Quiche* Indian god of thunder, lightning, and evil winds, had ravaged Galveston before. The pirate/privateer Jean LaFitte had once sailed his ships completely across the island during such a storm. The storm of October 3, 1867, did more damage than the Civil War and Yankee occupation combined, but this was different. In 1900, Galveston was a Victorian Queen of Commerce and Culture and was built accordingly. “The Strand”

was the Wall Street of the American Southwest. Mansions dedicated to both style and opulence nestled in private gardens or flaunted their excesses next to the streets. The port was as busy as that of Liverpool or Shanghai. People, however, tend to forget the awesome power of wind and water. A city engineer, E. M. Hartrick had said, "*The people of Galveston will go on living in fancied security as they always have.*" Now, in the false security of Victorian mansions, they were dying.

Cap's hobby was only 14 feet long. With the crew of three at the oars, that left room for only a handful of people. At first, Cap tried to carry survivors from their destroyed homes to higher ground, but there was no higher ground. The waves were already crossing the island. Neighbors first. In the area between 1st and 7th Streets they often had to split up families, but they kept coming back.

Cap saw his little home demolished, with all those around it, early in the afternoon. He plucked men, women, and children from the floating wreckage and ferried them in the long haul to the red brick security of St. Mary's Infirmery. Then there was the longer haul back against the wind and waves for more survivors. Each trip was more difficult. On each trip, as their strength failed, he found fewer survivors in the wreckage. As buildings large and small were reduced to floating wreckage, the little boat and its crew continued to pick their way through water that rose higher than the second story of Old St. Mary's. Finally, they could do no more. Capsized and broken, the hobby was tied to a window casing, and Cap and his sons joined those they had saved.

We'll never know how many people died in The Great Galveston Storm, but a median estimate of 7,200 makes it by far our biggest natural disaster in terms of lives lost. There were, of course, many survivors, and among them were over 200 at St. Mary's who would not have made it if it had not been for Cap Plummer and his hobby ... and something else—his acceptance of responsibility and his value to the community.