FIND RUSTIC BEAUTY AND TRANQUILITY SET IN THE HILLS OF THE EAST TEXAS PINEYWOODS WHERE THE CADDDO INDIAN FARMSTEADS ONCE DOTTED THE LANDSCAPE. A BUILDING COMMEMORATING A SPANISH MISSION AND A LOG HOUSE TAKE YOU TO TEXAS’S PAST. ENJOY NATURE WHILE CAMPING, PICNICKING, AND HIking AMONG TALL PINES AT THIS 1930S ERA CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC) CAMP.
Captain Alonso de León and Fray Damián Massanet led an expedition to counter the French settlement. They built the first mission in the province of Texas among a village of the Caddo Indians. Three Spanish priests, three soldiers, and supplies remained at the new mission on June 1, 1690, and completed a cluster of crude wooden buildings.

A smallpox epidemic in the winter of 1690 killed almost 300 people near the mission and 3,000 others in the area. The Caddo associated the disease with the Spaniards and their baptismal water. They became disenchanted with the Spanish and plotted to get rid of them. Father Massanet learned of a planned attack on October 6, 1693. The Spaniards then buried heavy items, burned the mission, and retreated to Mexico.

The Spanish never achieved the level of success in East Texas that they desired. Spanish friars returned to rebuild the mission in 1716. But renewed conflict between France and Spain caused them to again abandon it in 1719.

WITH HELP FROM THE CCC

In 1934 the citizens of Houston County purchased land and erected a marker to commemorate the Mission San Francisco de los Tejas. The federal government chose the site for a CCC project. Young men of the 200-strong CCC Company 888 worked under army officers to build the park and reclaim the land. They received food, clothing, pay, and educational benefits for the work. For many unskilled young men during the Great Depression, the CCC offered a chance for a better life. The company completed its work and disbanded in 1935.

The Texas Forest Service continued to manage the forest here until 1957. Today, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department practices sound resource management to promote stewardship and provide a safe family atmosphere at a park rich in history.

FRANCE AND SPAIN STAKE THEIR CLAIM

In the late 1600s, rival European powers competed to gain control of Texas. René de la Salle led a group of French colonists who arrived on the Texas coast in 1685 and built a makeshift settlement. As news of it spread, the Spanish sought to remove the French, whom they considered intruders.

From 1686 to 1692 the Spanish began building a 2500 mile road from Guerrero Mexico to Louisiana. It passed through Laredo, San Antonio, and what is now this park. It received the name El Camino Real: the Royal Road. Generations of people used the road for commerce and to find a new life in Texas. It began to pass out of use as people traveled to Texas settlements off its route, by other means during the 1800s. Modern highways Texas 21 and Louisiana 6 follow much of the old path of El Camino Real. In 2004, it became El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail.

In 1828, Joseph and Willie Masters Rice built a log home near a section of El Camino Real in this area. In 1973, the Rice family donated the old log home to the State of Texas, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department moved the historic structure to its present location at Mission Tejas State Park.

EARLY SETTLEMENT

Caddo tribes established agricultural societies in East Texas. Their settlements date from the 800s to the 1830s and included farmsteads spread over an area of 78 miles. The Caddo people lived in thatched buildings spaced between cultivated and non-cultivated areas. They raised crops of corn, beans, melons, squash, sunflowers, and tobacco.

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