

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Texas Means 'Friends'**

Texas is a big state. It is the largest state in the union, and roughly comprises about 1-12<sup>th</sup> the area of the entire United States. It is 773 miles from the extreme west and 801 miles from north to south. Its immensity is further shown by the fact that out of a total of 254 counties 59 are as big or bigger than Rhode Island.

The above information was gleaned from Western Tour Book provided by Jack Zimmerman at the California Automobile Association office in Monterey, a guide book that no motoring tourist should be without.

From El Paso, Texas, we have driven to Laredo in a good full day, through flat land, rolling hills and desert country – picturesque but at times monotonous, with one redeeming feature – no traffic problem and no evidence of tourists' beer cans and other trash. Last night we experienced a thunder storm and lightning, followed by a few sprinkles. The natives here tell us that it has been three years since the dry spell began, but sheep can still find feed amongst the cactus and other desert shrubbery.

Tonight we are in Laredo a town of 51,910 population. It is the chief port of entry into Mexico on the Pan-American Highway. We decided to travel by this route rather than the one out of Juarez, because it is longer. If we become anxious to get home to California we will have the shorter route before us and also will have seen the country and cities on both routes. So far everything has been perfect for travel.

Laredo was founded in 1750 by Tomas Sanches, an officer in the Royal Army of Spain. The city has two more flags to brag about than Monterey, for it has been under five flags, and at one time was a separate republic known as "The Republic of the Rio Grande." The capitol building of this republic is still standing. The streets are very narrow, many of them "one way". To the tourist it seems to be more Mexican than American.

Chamber of Commerce literature tells us that today Laredo is the center of a rich cattle, oil, gas and agricultural district. The surrounding lands are cultivated extensively by means of irrigation and thousands of carloads of spinach, Bermuda onions and broccoli are shipped from here each year.

In 1690 Spain sent Capt. Alonzo de Leon and Father Manzanet to found a mission in Texas. De Leon named the country Texas, meaning in the Comanche Indian language, "Friends," and established his mission San Francisco de los Tejas at the Neches River, near the present site of the town of Alto. During the next few years no other settlements were made, but between 1714 and 1718 missions were built at Victoria, St. Augustine, Nacogdoches and Gollad. In 1716 San Antonio de Bejar was founded by Captain Domingo Ramon and in 1718 the Mission Alamo, built on the Rio Grande in 1703, was removed to San Antonio.

The United States offered Texas statehood in 1845. Entry into the union was followed by the Mexican War, caused by the dispute over the Texas boundary. The Americans were successful at several points, and Mexico abandoned its claim when a treaty was signed with the United States in 1848. Texas sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War and seceded from the Union in 1861. Following the period of reconstruction, the state, in 1870, was again admitted to the Union.

It was refreshing to read this and study history from the fiftieth anniversary number of the "Western Tour Book."