



**SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF THE ISLEÑOS IN  
LOUISIANA AND TEXAS**

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The history of those *canarios* who uprooted themselves from their homelands in favor of new lives in Louisiana and Texas, as is demonstrated by William Hyland elsewhere in this volume, is rich and fascinating. But as rich as is the history, the historiography is pathetically poor, almost nonexistent. This paradox is difficult to comprehend, especially in view of the abundance of archival sources, located both in the Old World and the New.

Historians in general have tended to neglect the social and economic history of Spanish Texas and Louisiana. In a similar fashion, the history of the immigration, colonization and development of *isleño* communities in these regions has been ignored by serious scholars. The classic nineteenth-century works of Martin, Gayarré and Fortier all failed to cite the contributions of the *isleños* to the early history of Louisiana<sup>1</sup>. Similarly the monumental narrative histories of Texas that Bancroft and his contemporaries produced passed over all too quickly the canario experience in San Antonio and other parts of Texas<sup>2</sup>.

Despite increased scholarly interest in social and economic history, studies of the *isleños* in Spanish Louisiana and Texas have been limited to articles in relatively obscure journals, or brief parenthetical treatment in larger works. The scant literature that does exist varies in quality from excellent, objective analyses, to narrow, biased, poorly researched essays. Representative of the more solid efforts is Thomas Glick's short monograph, *The Old World Background of the Irrigation System of San Antonio, Texas*<sup>3</sup>, a skillful analysis of the development of irrigation systems in the Canary Islands and their implementation by canario settlers in mideighteenth-century Texas. Du-

1. FRANÇOIS XAVIER MARTIN: *The History of Louisiana from the Earliest Period*, New Orleans, 1829; CHARLES GAYARRÉ: *History of Louisiana. The Spanish Dominion*, New Orleans, 1854; ALCÉE FORTIER: *A History of Louisiana*, New York, 1904.

2. HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT: *North Mexican States*, 2 vols., San Francisco, 1883-1889; HERBERT EUGENE BOLTON: *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century*, Berkeley, 1915.

3. El Paso, 1972.



ring the course of this study, Glick offered insights into the motivation for the isleños' migration from their homeland, the initial difficulties faced by them in establishing a new settlement in San Antonio, and their contributions to the development of this important area of the Spanish borderlands.

The bulk of the literature unfortunately tends to fall into the latter category. V. M. Scramuzza's article, «Galveztown, a Spanish Settlement of Colonial Louisiana»<sup>4</sup>, was the first to make use of archival sources to highlight the isleño experience in Louisiana, but the author's racial biases against the isleños detract greatly from the usefulness of his work.

Shallow and incomplete research has also plagued the literature particularly in the case of those who examined their subject from a genealogical perspective. Alfred Barrios and Marie Barrios Caballero, in their *History of the Barrios Family*<sup>5</sup>, for example, confused the isleño settlement of Galveztown in Louisiana with Galvezton, Texas<sup>6</sup>. Sidney Villere, in *The Canary Islands Migration to Louisiana, 1778-1783; the History and Passenger Lists of the Isleños Volunteer Recruits and their Families*<sup>7</sup>, confounded his readers by neglecting to cite the *legajos* in the Papeles Procedentes de Cuba (Archivo General de Indias) from which he had extracted his data.

The lamentable state of the historiography serves to accentuate the need for scholars to direct their attention to this important area of social and economic history. The significance of studying the history of the isleños in Texas and Louisiana transcends the mere examination of one ethnic element and its experiences on the fringes of the northern frontier of Spanish America. The canario immigration must be studied in the context of the needs and exigencies of the Spanish Crown in the eighteenth century, and in that of the ever-changing international rivalry between France, Spain and England in North America. Moreover, the experiences of the isleños in Texas and Louisiana must be considered in relation to that of their cousins who settled in Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico and other parts of the Spanish colonial empire. Why, for example, were the isleños of Louisiana more successful in planting and sustaining their ethnic culture than those in other parts of Latin America?

4. *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. XIII, New Orleans, 1930, pp. 553-609.

5. MARRERO, Louisiana, 1977. The authors indicate that this work is a translation of MIGUEL RODRÍGUEZ DÍAZ DE QUINTANA: *Historia de la familia Barrios*, Las Palmas [no date].

6. ALFRED BARRIOS and MARIE BARRIOS CABALLERO: *History of the Barrios Family*. MARRERO, Louisiana, 1977, p. 111.

7. New Orleans, 1971.

The answers to this and to many other key questions may be found among the wealth of primary documentation contained in archives on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The manuscript sources for the history of the isleños of Louisiana and Texas are indeed rich, diverse, and in many cases, just now becoming available for consultation.

By far the wealthiest sources of documentation lie in the Archivo General de Indias in Sevilla. The Papeles Procedentes de Cuba (Sección XI)<sup>8</sup> and Gobierno-Audiencias de Guadalajara y Santo Domingo (Sección IV)<sup>9</sup> hold a tremendous amount of data concerning the planning and execution of the migration of isleños to the New World, as well as the early operations of the fledgling colonies. Pioneer scholars such as Gilbert Din, Francisco Morales Padrón, Pablo Tornero Tinajero and Antonio Acosta Rodríguez utilized the correspondence between colonial governors, and reports filed by Crown officials in Galveztown, San Bernardo and Valenzuela, all contained in these sections in the AGI, to document the early history of the isleño experience in Louisiana<sup>10</sup>. Other sections of the AGI, such as Contratación (Sección III), Estado (Sección IX) and Ultramar (Sección X) hold scattered materials pertaining to the migration and administration of the settlements<sup>11</sup>, but the Papeles and Audiencias documentation emerge as the most lucrative sources.

While the major administrative records may be found in Spanish archives, local manuscript repositories in Louisiana and Texas contain a tremendous amount of material documenting the everyday social and economic life of the canario settlers in the New World. The bulk of these records are maintained in county and parish courthouses<sup>12</sup>, and in state, university, museum and church archives.

Perhaps the richest sources for a collective biography of the Louisiana isleños lie among the parish courthouse records for St. Bernard, Ascension and Iberville Parishes (corresponding to the co-

8. SEE ROSCOE R. HILL: *Descriptive Catalogue of the Documents relating to the History of the United States in the Papeles Procedentes de Cuba deposited in the Archivo General de Indias at Seville*, Washington, 1916; New York, 1965.

9. SEE: *Catálogo de documentos del Archivo General de Indias - Sección V, Gobierno, Audiencia de Santo Domingo*, 2 vols., New Orleans, 1968.

10. FRANCISCO MORALES PADRÓN: *Las Canarias y la política emigratoria a Indias*, "Primer Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana", Las Palmas, 1977, pp. 211-291; PABLO TORNERO TINAJERO: *Emigración Canaria a América: la expedición cívico-militar a Luisiana de 1777-1779*, "Primer Coloquio...", pp. 345-354; ANTONIO ACOSTA RODRÍGUEZ: *Ideas sobre el consumo de inmigrantes canarios en América*, "Primer Coloquio...", pp. 333-341; GILBERT DIN: *History of the Isleños in Louisiana* (in progress).

11. Dirección General de Archivos y Bibliotecas: *Guía de fuentes para la historia de Ibero-América conservadas en España*, 2 vols., Madrid, 1966, pp. 27-61.

12. Parishes in Louisiana are analogous to counties in other states.



lonial settlements of San Bernardo, Valenzuela and Galveztown), as well as those for Orleans Parish<sup>13</sup>. These documents consist primarily of notarial acts, including property transfers, building and marriage contracts, mortgages, slave sales, powers of attorney, emancipations and wills. Judicial records, such as those found in the parish courthouses and in the Judicial Records of the Spanish Cabildo at the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans, are particularly valuable in reconstructing the lives and experiences of the isleños. Contained within these archives are criminal and civil suits, successions, plantation and household inventories, business and personal contracts, and material relating to slavery.

Religious archives also hold a considerable amount of material concerning the lives of Louisiana isleños. The Archives of the Diocese of Baton Rouge hold the baptismal, marriage and burial records from the parish churches of Valenzuela and Galveztown; the parish church records for San Bernardo still remain in the archives of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Violet, and those for St. Louis Cathedral among the Cathedral Archives of the Ursuline Convent in New Orleans. In addition, chancery records, held partly in the New Orleans Archdiocesan Archives and partly at Notre Dame University in Indiana<sup>14</sup>, contain correspondence between civil and ecclesiastical officials, dispensations for marriage, instructions to clerics from superiors in Spain and Havana, and financial accounts<sup>15</sup>.

Several other repositories in Louisiana hold material pertaining to early isleño settlement. The minutes and fiscal records of the Cabildo, as well as the nineteenth-century records of the Civil District Court, are located at the New Orleans Public Library. The Pintado family papers, housed at the Louisiana State University Archives in Baton Rouge, contain several references to isleño settlement in Galveztown and Valenzuela, including surveys of plantations held by canarios in these areas. The libraries of Loyola University (New Orleans), Louisiana State University, and the University of Southwest Louisiana (Lafayette) all maintain microfilm copies of selected legajos from the Archivo General de Indias (Papeles de Cuba and Audiencia de Santo Domingo) that pertain to Louisiana.

It is strongly suspected that Cuban archives contain significant

13. Microfilm copies of these notarial records are available for consultation at the Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

14. Microfilm copies of the *Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas, 1576-1803* are available for consultation at the Louisiana State Museum and other repositories in Louisiana.

15. CHARLES E. NOLAN: *A Southern Catholic Heritage, Volume I, Colonial Period, 1704-1813*, New Orleans, 1976.



materials relating to the Louisiana isleños. Included among the records of the Archivo Nacional de Cuba in Havana are correspondence between Bernardo de Gálvez, Governor of Louisiana, and José de Gálvez, Visitador General of New Spain (containing several letters not found in the Papeles de Cuba or the Audiencia de Santo Domingo), and eight legalos concerning commerce between Havana and New Orleans<sup>16</sup>.

Local archival sources documenting the history of the isleños of Texas are no less replete with documentation. The most valuable body of records evolve from the archives of Bexar County<sup>17</sup>, divided in 1899 into two sections: the «Bexar Archives» located in Austin; and the «Bexar County Archives» housed in the courthouse at San Antonio. The latter collection includes such vital material as land grant and property transfer records, probate proceedings, powers of attorney and business and marriage contracts, civil suits, military reports, and other relevant governmental records from the founding of San Antonio by the isleños in 1731 through the early years of the twentieth century<sup>18</sup>. The Bexar Archives, located at the Barker Texas History Center in Austin, houses most of the administrative records pertaining to the isleño settlements in and around San Antonio, such as decrees and correspondence from Spain, Mexico City and Coahuila, proceedings of the Cabildo, administrative records of the governors of the province of Texas, military, records and census reports from 1717 to 1836<sup>19</sup>. Also located at the Barker Texas History Center is the Louis Lenz Collection, consisting of several important orders, letters and reports pertaining to the migration of the Canary Islanders from Veracruz northward to San Antonio in 1731.

The Texas State Library, also in Austin, holds two collections that are of interest to scholars of isleño history. The Pérez de Almazán Papers contain information pertaining to the division of land in the Presidio of San Antonio among canario settlers. Found among the papers of the Valentine O. King Collection in documentation relating to isleño families and their settlement on lands around San Antonio.

Texas is also blessed with a wealth of religious documentation pertaining to the canarios. The Archives of the Diocese of San An-

16. LUIS MARINO PÉREZ: *Guide to Materials for American History in Cuban Archives*, Washington, 1907; JOAQUÍN LLAVERÍAS Y MARTÍNEZ: *Historia de los archivos de Cuba*, La Habana, 1912.

17. San Antonio is the governmental center for Bexar County.

18. ROBERT D. GREEN: *A Guide to the Bexar County Archives*, San Antonio, 1972.

19. GREEN: *A Guide to the Bexar County Archives*; CHESTER V. KIELMAN: *Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Bexar Archives, 1717-1836*, 3 vols., Austin, 1967-1971.



tonio contain the baptismal, marriage and burial records for the isleño parishioners of the Cathedral of San Fernando, as well as several volumes of administrative records dealing with missionary, military and Indian affairs. The Catholic Archives of Texas, located in Austin, holds an extensive microfilm collection that includes films of isleño documentation from Spanish and Mexican archives.

Researchers would be remiss to neglect the wealth of documentary materials in Mexican archives. The Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City), Ramos de Historia and Provincias Internas, are replete with accounts of the expeditions of the canarios from Veracruz to San Antonio in the early eighteenth century, of problems between the isleños and other settlers in Texas, and of plans to attract more immigrants from the Canary Islands. Similar administrative documentation may also be found in Saltillo, Coahuila, in the Archivo de la Secretaría de Gobierno del Estado<sup>20</sup>.

The time is opportune for scholars of Canary-American history to make use of these wealthy manuscript sources to reconstruct the history of the isleños in Texas and Louisiana. After nearly two hundred years of abuse and neglect, many of these records have just recently become available for consultation. The Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans is in the midst of a project to calendar and microfilm its large holdings of French and Spanish judicial records. Similar projects are either recently completed or are in progress at repositories in both states.

The wealth of documentation begs for historians to address a multitude of viable research topics. A collective biography of the Canary Island immigrants to Texas or Louisiana in the eighteenth century, comparative studies on the development of isleño communities in different parts of Latin America, or the evolution of isleño culture in areas thousands of miles from its origins, are all possible areas of investigation. Scholars in Louisiana and Texas are just now realizing the potential of local archival sources for the development of social and economic history. It is hoped that students of canario history will also utilize these sources in order to gain a deeper understanding of the isleño experience in Louisiana and Texas.

20. BOLTON: *Guide to Materials for the History of the United States in the Principal Archives of Mexico*, Washington, 1913.



## APPENDIX

### DIRECTORY OF MAJOR ARCHIVAL REPOSITORIES CONTAINING ISLEÑO MATERIAL IN LOUISIANA AND TEXAS

#### I. LOUISIANA:

##### A) *New Orleans Area:*

1. Louisiana State Museum  
Louisiana Historical Center  
Old U. S. Mint  
400 Esplanade Avenue  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70116
2. Archive of St. Louis Cathedral and of the Archdiocese of New Orleans  
Ursuline Convent  
531 Ursulines Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70116
3. New Orleans Notarial Archives  
Civil District Court Building  
421 Loyola Avenue  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112
4. New Orleans Public Library  
219 Loyola Avenue  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112
5. Tulane University  
Howard-Tilton Library  
Special Collections Division  
7001 Freret Street 70118
6. Loyola University  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118
7. St. Bernard Parish Archives  
Courthouse  
Chalmette, Louisiana 70043
8. Our Lady of Lourdes Church  
P. O. Box 217  
St. Bernard Highway  
Violet, Louisiana 70092

##### B) *Baton Rouge:*

1. Department of State Archives and Records  
P. O. Box 44125  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804



2. Archives of the Diocese of Baton Rouge  
P. O. Box 2028  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821
3. Louisiana State University Archives  
Library  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803

C) *Lafayette:*

1. University of Southwest Louisiana  
Center for Louisiana Studies  
Lafayette, Louisiana 70504

II. TEXAS:

A) *San Antonio:*

1. Bexar County Archives  
Office of the County Clerk  
San Antonio, Texas 78205
2. Archives of the Church of San Fernando and of the Diocese  
of San Antonio  
P. O. Box 32648  
San Antonio, Texas 78284
3. Archives of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas  
The Alamo  
San Antonio, Texas 78205

B) *Austin:*

1. Barker Texas History Center  
University of Texas  
Austin, Texas 78712
2. Texas State Library  
Lorenzo de Zavala State Archives and Library Building  
Box 12927, Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711
3. Catholic Archives of Texas  
Box 13327, Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711