Mission San Francisco de la Espada

At the end of Espada Road, .4 miles off Loop 410

San Antonio

State: Texas

Category: District

Ownership: Public

Status: Occupied

Present Use: Residential

Owner's Name: Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio

Cathedral Basilica, P.O. Box 13190

San Antonio, Texas 048

Title of Survey: Historic American Buildings Survey

Date of Survey: 1934

Library of Congress

Washington, DC 008

FEB 25 1972
## Mission San Francisco de la Espada

Mission San Francisco de la Espada, located in southeast San Antonio, stands partially in ruins, partially reconstructed and partially restored.

Initially, the mission complex was made up of temporary buildings. By 1745 though the building of permanent stone structures had begun. One building in progress at this time was the small chapel, part of which has survived and is still used today. The south and north walls had collapsed when Father Francis Bouchu arrived as parish priest in 1858. It is due to his efforts that the church is rebuilt and standing today. Ruins of a later church (1762) are located on the south of the compound adjacent to the convent. It was demolished in 1777 because of faulty construction.

The mission complex follows a similar arrangement to that of other missions, particularly San Juan Capistrano. That is, rooms and buildings arranged in a rough quadrangle around a central courtyard. Entrances to the rooms are made through those walls facing the courtyard leaving the exterior protected. The main entrance to the mission compound was through a gate on the south.

The Espada church is a small, rectangular building whose main facade faces east. Transcepts on the south and north elevations give the building the traditional cross-shape. A two-tiered espadana the width of the east facade is pierced by two bells on the lower tier and a third at the top. Finials at either side of the tiers and a wrought iron cross at the top complete the decorations of the wall belfry. The arrangement of this espadana is virtually identical to that of San Juan.

Attached at right angles to the rear south wall is a covered arcade with rooms in back of it creating the west wall. The convent is built onto this arrangement at right angles at the south end of the arcade. The convent is a rectangular building with the greatest length on an east/west axis. This complex of three contiguous buildings, convento, arcade with rooms and church, has a flat roof surrounded by a parapet and drained by canales.

The fortified bastion in the southeast corner, of rubble construction, is part of the early construction at the site. It is unique in that no other missions here have surviving remains of any fortified section of the wall.

Efforts are now being made by the Archdiocese of San Antonio to maintain and perhaps, in the future, to restore the buildings which comprised the original complex.
S. SIGNIFICANCE

**PERIOD** (Check One or More as Appropriate)
- ☑️ Pre-Columbian
- ☑️ 18th Century
- ☑️ Pre-Columbian
- ☑️ 17th Century
- ☑️ 16th Century
- ☑️ 19th Century
- ☑️ 20th Century

**SPECIFIC DATE(s) (If Applicable and Known)** 1731

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE** (Check One or More as Appropriate)
- ☑️ Aboriginal
- ☑️ Historic
- ☑️ Agriculture
- ☑️ Architecture
- ☑️ Commerce
- ☑️ Communications
- ☑️ Conservation
- ☑️ Education
- ☑️ Engineering
- ☑️ Industry
- ☑️ Invention
- ☑️ Landscape
- ☑️ Literature
- ☑️ Military
- ☑️ Music
- ☑️ Political
- ☑️ Religion/Philosophy
- ☑️ Science
- ☑️ Sculpture
- ☑️ Social/Humanitarian
- ☑️ Theater
- ☑️ Transportation
- ☑️ Urban Planning
- ☑️ Other (Specify)

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The mission system, a vital part of Spanish conquest and control, was designed to extend, hold, Christianize and civilized the frontier. This system is exemplified by the chain of missions established in the 1730s along the San Antonio River. The farthest south in this chain, Mission San Francisco de la Espada, is the successor to the first East Texas mission, San Francisco de los Tejas (1690).

Initially, the Espada complex consisted of temporary buildings; however, by 1745, more permanent stone structures were being erected. Those remnants of the early buildings are: the chapel, convento, the fortified tower in the southeast corner, several ruins of Indian quarters and the foundations of a large church (1762) and a granary.

One of the early missionary priests at Espada, Father Bartolome Garcia, made a significant contribution while he was there. In 1760 his Manual para Administrar los Sacramentos, a confessional manual, was published in Spanish and Coahuiltecan. This remains as the only record of the language of those mission Indians.

Espada Aqueduct, nearby the mission complex, is the sole extant Spanish aqueduct in the United States and is still in use.

Espada's history did not end with the secularization of its mission lands though. In 1835 the mission buildings were occupied by Bowie, Travis and their Texas Army and used as a fortification against the Mexican Army.

Primarily, though, Espada Mission stands as a vital and living reminder of the Spanish colonial past in the southwest, as well as an architectural and symbolic continuum of this special kind of religious institution.
**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**


Castaneda, Carlos E. 1936. *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas.* III.
Austin: Von Boeckman-Jones.


(See continuation sheet #1)

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
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**APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:** 10 acres

**LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES**

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<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>CODE</th>
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</thead>
</table>

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

**NAME AND TITLE:** Wayne Bell, Project Director
Marsha Jackson, Research Associate

**ORGANIZATION:**
Texas State Historical Survey Committee

**STREET AND NUMBER:**
108 W. 15th Street

**CITY OR TOWN:**
Austin

**STATE:**
Texas

**CODE:**
048

**12. STATE LIASON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National [ ] State [ ] Local [x]

**Title:** State Liaison Officer

**Date:** 10-26-71

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

**Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation**

**FEB 23 1972**

**ATTEST:**

**Keeper of The National Register**

**JAN 27 1972**
9. (contd.)

MISSION SAN FRANCISCO DE LA ESPADA
SITE PLAN

ADAPTED FROM HABS
TEX 320

1934 = EXISTING WALLS

10 Scale: ---
FPS Number: 2.23.72
Title: Mission San Francisco de La Espada
NPS Number 2.23.72

Title: Mission San Francisco de la Espada; Bexar County, Texas

Loc. West face, chapel, compound wall. View from west entrance off Espada Road. View east-southeast.
Title: Mission San Francisco de la Espada
Bexar County, Texas

View across mission compound
Courtyard toward north wall.
Note house. View north.
NPS Number 2.23.72

Title: Mission San Francisco de la Espada

Bexar County, Texas

Loc. S. wall & original main entrance of south. View northwest.
Title: Mission San Francisco de la Espada; Bexar County, Texas
Loc. S. wall + entrance, interior view. View southeast.
Title: Mission San Francisco de la Espada

Bexar County, Texas

Loc. View across mission compound toward north wall, view northwest.