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Academy Members Visit Missions as Part of Annual Research Conference

On August 14, 2002, approximately twenty members of the Academy and spouses toured Missions in the San Antonio area. The tour resulted from a suggestion by Marilynn Collins and with the help of Sarah Holmes and Sandy Welch, who presented a paper on accounting records of the San Antonio Missions at the Academy Research Conference the day before. Park Historian, Dr. Rosalind Rock spoke to the group. Dr. Rock has conducted research on the Missions in archives in Mexico and Spain.

The program began at the Park Visitor center at Mission San Jose with an excellent film and a very interesting and enthusiastic presentation by Dr. Rock. Mission San Jose is the largest and most restored of the missions along the San Antonio River, which includes the Mission San Antonio de Valero, commonly called the Alamo. Dr. Rock’s thorough knowledge of the people and events surrounding the establishment and subsequent history of the Missions made the tour much more educational than simply viewing the Mission grounds. Dr. Rock accompanied the tour and provided insights and details about each Mission.

Mission San Jose (San Jose y
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San Miguel de Aguayo) was founded in 1720 and is considered as a model of the mission organization. The unique architecture of its church and size of the complex gave it the reputation as the “Queen of the Missions.”

Mission San Juan Capistrano, originally established as San Jose de los Nazonis in East Texas, was relocated to its permanent location on the San Antonio River in 1731. It became known for its rich farm and pastureland. San Francisco de la Espada, founded in 1690, is the oldest of the East Texas missions. It was moved to the San Antonio River in 1731 and is the southern most of the San Antonio mission chain.

The chain of missions along the San Antonio River in the 18th century was part of Spain’s efforts to expand its dominion northward from New Spain (Mexico). The missions served to bring the Catholic faith to the local American Indian tribes in the area and to provide sanctuary from their enemies. Additionally, the missions and colonization of the area provided protection against French encroachments from Louisiana.