One of the earliest missions established in Texas by Spanish colonizers, Mission Espiritu Santo was used as a center for the Spaniards’ efforts to convert native people living in the area to Christianity and turn them into colonial subjects. Over its 109-year history, the mission was moved several times for strategic purposes. The fourth and final location of the mission, where it was located from 1749 to 1830, was excavated first in 1933 and later in the 1970s-1990s.

The artifacts recovered from these excavations tell a fascinating story about this transitional time in Texas history. Mixed with colonial Spanish items, such as metal jewelry, European ceramics, and glass trade beads, are many artifacts similar or identical to those found in Native American sites from the same era. These include bone-tempered “Goliad ware” vessels, ornaments and tools made from shell and antler, and stone tools including grinding stones, projectile points, and scrapers. The many native people who were drawn to the mission by its prosperity or coerced into living there clearly maintained many traditional aspects of their material culture.

The lifestyle of the mission inhabitants was a blend of traditional activities including hunting and gathering, processing wild plant foods, and making stone tools, along with activities introduced by the European colonists such as ranching, spinning cotton and wool, and building stone-and-mortar structures in the European style.

Learn more at www.texasbeyondhistory.net/espiritu or tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/goliad

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