

Chronology for Val Verde County History

by

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Val Verde County's history is deep and broad, with significant events related to many historical themes. The following is a chronology, a listing of events that happened in Val Verde. A few other events, *in italics*, are listed to offer some reference to American history.

10,000 B.C. The first people visit the land that will be Val Verde County (VVC). Bonfire Shelter is used is one of the oldest archeological sites in North America.

6,000 B.C.-1,500 A.D. Small groups of people paint pictographs in cave shelters at many sites along the rivers of VVC: the Devil's, the Pecos and the Rio Grande. Prehistoric peoples also lived at times along San Felipe Creek.

1521 Hernandez Cortez expands the Spanish empire onto the North American continent.

1535 Cabeza de Vaca traverses coastal Texas. He later creates the first written account of people and places in Texas.

1590 Gaspar Castaño de Sosas travels from central Mexico through VVC and journeys up the Pecos River on his way to New Mexico.

1598 Juan de Oñate establishes a settlement in the area of El Paso.

1672- 75 Fray Juan Larios and Fray Fernando del Bosque visit the area east of VVC.

1729 Captain José Berroterán visits the area during his inspection of the northern areas of New Spain. Other military inspections occur at infrequent intervals; several others visit the VVC area.

1736 Governor Blas de la Garza Falcon establishes the Presidio de Sacramento south of the Ciudad Acuna site. The fort is abandoned in 1739.

1776 The United States declares independence from Great Britain.

1810 Mexico declares independence from Spain.

1822 Mexico wins independence from Spain.

1834-36 The Dolores Colony is founded on Las Moras Creek (in neighboring Kinney County). The colony was beset by poor weather and Indians.

1836 Texas declares and wins independence from Mexico.

1846 Texas becomes a state in the United States.

1846-48 The Mexican War is fought between the U.S. and Mexico. The treaty signed at the conclusion of the war confirms the Rio Grande from its mouth to El Paso as the international boundary.

1848 John Coffee Hays is the first American recorded to have visited VVC in the effort to establish a road from San Antonio to El Paso. During his track he renames the San Pedro River with a name more fitting the difficulty of the terrain--Devil's River.

1849-50 Several U.S. Army expeditions travel overland and collectively establish the San Antonio-El Paso Road.

1850 Captain Harry Love travels up the Rio Grande from Fort Brown to Boquillas Canyon in the Big Bend finding no settlements upriver from Fort Duncan/Eagle Pass.

1856 Fort Hudson is established by the U.S. Army on the banks of the Devil's River. The fort remains through the beginning of the Civil War abandoned by the U.S. and only briefly occupied by Confederate soldiers in 1861.

1856 The Army also imports camels from the Middle East. A second shipment arrives in 1857. Lt. Edward Beale commands the first Camel Corps expedition through VVC to California; Lt. William Echols commands two more expeditions from Camp Hudson exploring the Big Bend.

1861-1865 The American Civil War is fought.

1862 The Battle of Val Verde is fought in New Mexico between Federal and Confederate soldiers. The battle is won by Confederate forces, but the advance is reversed by their loss at the Battle of Glorietta Pass which essentially ends the war in the West.

1862 A settler family on San Felipe Creek provides food and shelter to Confederate soldiers returning from New Mexico.

1868 The San Felipe Agricultural, Manufacturing & Irrigation Company is organized. The company's canal system is substantially completed by 1871. The community that organized around the canal system becomes known as San Felipe del Rio.

1869 The first transcontinental railroad--the Union Pacific and Central Pacific--is completed.

1869 The first sheep are brought to VVC.

1870 Las Vacas, a settlement across the Rio Grande from Del Rio is founded. 1876 San Felipe del Rio becomes known as Del Rio.

1876 Bullis and Seminole Scouts.

1881 Frank Qualia arrives in VVC to begin grape cultivation. His winery is the only one in Texas to survive Prohibition of the 1920s and 1930s.

1881 The Southern Pacific Railroad enters Texas at El Paso and funds the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railroad which begins building west from San Antonio.

1882 The G.H. & S.A. RR arrives in Del Rio while the S.P. RR approaches the Pecos River from the west.

1882 Saloon-keeper Roy Bean becomes justice-of-the-peace in Vinegarroon and later in Langtry.

1883 The second transcontinental railroad is completed a few miles west of the Pecos River; a Silver Spike Ceremony is held.

1885 Val Verde County is created and organized by the Texas state legislature.

1887-1888 The Val Verde County courthouse is built.

1890 The Del Rio Independent School District is created. The rest of the county remains divided into county-managed schools.

1892 The Viaduct, also known as the High Bridge, is built by the railroad over the Pecos River Canyon; it is the third highest bridge in the world.

1903 Judge Bean dies; a few months later the love of his life Lily Langtry visits Langtry.

1908 Revolutionary forces called magonistas begin attacks on government forces in Las Vacas.

1910-20 Mexico is torn by the Revolution, a series of civil wars.

1911 Calbraith Rodgers pilots the Vin Fiz, a Wright Brothers aircraft for the first coast to coast flight stopping in Del Rio.

1911-21 Camp Michie is established and maintained by the U.S. Army to keep watch on the international border during the Revolution and the First World War.

1912 Las Vacas is renamed Villa Acuña.

1915 The Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association is created in Del Rio which is known as the Wool and Mohair Capital of the World.

1914-18 The Great and Terrible War is waged in Europe and around the world.

1929 The San Felipe Independent School District is created in the southeast part of town.

- 1929 The stock market crash begins the Great Depression which continues through the 1930s.
- 1931 Dr. John Brinkley builds Radio XER in Villa Acuña to advertise his medical practice. The station is relicensed in 1935 as Radio XERA and is the most powerful radio station in the world.
- 1932 A flood on the Devil's River destroys the famed pecan trees.
- 1932 Dr. Brinkley moves his medical practice from Kansas to Del Rio. The operation occupies two floors of the Roswell Hotel and continues through 1938 when it is moved to Arkansas.
- 1935 A flood on San Felipe Creek devastates much of Del Rio.
- 1939-45 The Second World War is waged. America becomes a combatant in 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor.*
- 1942 The army establishes a pilot training school which is later named Laughlin Army Air Field after Lt. Jack Laughlin, the first Del Rio army pilot killed during World War II. The Field is closed in 1945 after the close of the war.
- 1942 Dr. Brinkley dies a short time after his radio station is closed.
- 1944 The High Bridge over the Pecos is replaced by a new, heavier High -Bridge because of the increased weight demands from heavier locomotives and large Army shipments.
- 1947 Radio XERF comes on the air using Brinkley's old station facilities.
- 1948 Paul Kallinger comes to Del Rio as the voice of country music broadcasting on XERF.
- 1952 The old military base is reopened by the newly created Air Force as Laughlin Air Force Base.
- 1954 A flood on the Devil's, Pecos and Rio Grande devastates Ciudad Acuña and destroys the bridges connecting the U.S. and Mexico at Del Rio/Acuña, Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras and Laredo/Nuevo Laredo.
- 1957 Villa Acuña is renamed Ciudad Acuña.
- 1957 A wing of the super-secret U-2 aircraft is stationed at Laughlin Air Force Base. The wing remains until 1963.
- 1960 American pilot Gary Francis Powers is shot down over the Soviet Union while flying the secret spy-plane--the U-2.*
- 1960 President Dwight Eisenhower visits Del Rio and meets with Mexican President Adolfo López Mateos to sign the papers starting the Amistad Dam flood control project. While at Laughlin AFB he receives a briefing about and sees the U-2 spyplanes based here.

- 1962 The Cuban Missile Crisis occurs. Proof that the Soviet Union was placing nuclear capable missiles is photographed by a Laughlin pilot.
- 1962 Laughlin A.F.B. becomes a pilot training school for the Air Force.
- 1963 Bob Smith comes to Del Rio and transforms himself into Wolfman Jack on XERF.
- 1965 Ground is broken for Amistad Dam.
- 1966 President Lyndon Johnson visits Del Rio and meets with Mexican President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz.
- 1969 President Richard Nixon visits Del Rio and joins with President Diaz Ordaz to dedicate Amistad Dam. Amistad Recreation Area is created around the American portion of the reservoir.
- 1971 A federal judge consolidates the two Del Rio school districts into the San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District.
- 1971 Amtrak takes over passenger traffic on railroads.
- 1990 Amistad Recreation Area is reclassified and upgraded to Amistad National Recreation Area.
- 1996 The Union Pacific Railroad acquires the Southern Pacific Railroad.
- 1998 Del Rio suffers the worst disaster in its history. The Flood of 1998 killed at least nine residents, forced thousands from their homes and caused millions of dollars in damage.