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S.A. celebrates Mexico's history

By Elaine Ayala - Express-News
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Melody Ortega, 3, watches the annual "Grito" at Municipal Auditorium. In addition to the 200th anniversary of Mexican independence, events this year in San Antonio are marking the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution. BILLY CALZADA/gcalzada@express-news.net

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The same question comes up every year: Why does a major U.S. city, the nation's seventh-largest, celebrate Mexico's independence from Spain, a fight waged 200 years ago?

And, why is the Alamo City celebrating the Mexican Revolution's 100th anniversary this year with exhibitions at the San Antonio Museum of Art and the Witte Museum, not to mention a yearlong series of events at the Instituto Cultural de México?

Historians such as Gilberto Hinojosa, T.R. Fehrenbach and Ward S. Albro say they aren't the least bit surprised, pointing to longstanding links between San Antonio and Mexico.

Beyond geographic proximity and the fact San Antonio once was part of Mexico, centuries of business and cultural exchanges have interlocked them, they said. So have war and economic turmoil.

This year, while at least 16 Mexican municipalities chose not to celebrate *El Grito de Dolores* on Wednesday night, citing escalating drug violence, the annual independence commemoration reverberated through Municipal Auditorium.

Earlier this year, Mexican Consulate officials said few U.S. cities were

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planning more commemorations than San Antonio.

Throughout 2010, the consulate, the Instituto Cultural de México and the city of San Antonio's Office of Cultural Affairs have coordinated films, music, art and photography shows. The UTSA Mexico Center, Gemini Ink and FotoSeptiembre USA, among others, have organized their own.

More are in store. Gallista Gallery on the South Side, for example, will host a show called "¡Revolución! Because Art Imitates Strife" in November.

If some wonder why San Antonio is looking back at Mexican history, Texas historians say it's because the city played a role in it.

Dieciséis and Mexican independence



Key events in Mexican history:

1807: France occupies Spain and imprisons their king. Some creoles, native-born Mexicans of Spanish descent, wanted to use the confusion to take control of the colonial government. They were unhappy with Spanish control over their affairs and the increase in taxes.

Sept. 15, 1810: Late at night, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla gives his legendary speech, the Grito de Dolores, to inspire Indians and mestizos, people of mixed ancestry, to join the rebellion.

Dieciséis or Sept. 16, 1810: Fight for independence in Mexico begins.

1813: Father Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon holds a congress that formally calls for independence and drafts a constitution for a republic.

1816: King Ferdinand VII is back on the Spanish throne, but mistakenly thinks that all Mexicans are traitors, including the creoles, who just wanted reform. To punish them, he increases taxes and the size of the army, which turns many creoles against Spain.

February 1821: Agustin de Iturbide, leading a Spanish army, meets with Vicente Guerrero, a rebel leader. Instead of a battle, the two decide to join forces in to make Mexico independent.

1824: Mexico officially becomes a republic.

Source: World Book Encyclopedia and "Mexico and the United States"

Compiled by News Researcher Julie Dornel

EXPRESS-NEWS GRAPHIC

It backed the 1810 independence movement. And the Battle of Medina in 1813, the bloodiest battle ever on Texas soil, was fought to free Mexico of Spanish rule. It happened about 20 miles south of downtown San Antonio.

"There were more lives lost there than all the battles of Texas, including the Alamo and San Jacinto put together," said historian Rudi Rodriguez of TexasTejano.com.

And, in what may be the strongest connection, historians note the 1910 Mexican Revolution was plotted in San Antonio.

One of its key figures, Coahuila-born politician Francisco Madero, took refuge in San Antonio to write *El Plan de San Luis Potosí*. Historians believe the document — which called for armed revolt against the dictatorship of President Porfirio Díaz on Nov. 20, 1910 — was published in San Antonio.

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Madero wasn't alone in fleeing here. Several revolutionary figures, including Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón and Andrea and Teresa Villarreal, sought refuge in San Antonio and published newspapers from here, including Regeneración, La Mujer Moderna and El Obrero.

"All during the Mexican Revolution, San Antonio was a key place for refugees," Fehrenbach said. "A quarter of a million affluent Mexicans came" — all escaping violence that far exceeded that of drug cartels today.

"At that time, San Antonio was the center, not Los Angeles," Fehrenbach said. "San Antonio was the capital of the Latin American world outside of Latin America."

Los Angeles is 1,500 miles from the Mexican capital, San Antonio only 700 miles.

"The revolution is what made San Antonio a Mexican city," Albro said. "San Antonio is a product of 20th-century immigration, and a lot of that immigration was forced by the revolution.

"From 1910 to 1920," he said, "Mexico's population was reduced by 1 million people. Some were dead, but an awful lot were just forced out, and a lot of them came to San Antonio.

"I tell a joke that when I first started teaching in South Texas, all my students' grandfathers rode with Pancho Villa and all their grandmothers were loved by Pancho Villa."

But Hinojosa of the University of the Incarnate Word notes that the migration started long before the revolution.

"San Antonio has always been a destination for Mexicans. The thing I like to point out is that in mission-led Indian towns," he said referring to the city's Spanish colonial missions, "those structures say, 'We were here first,' and lend a familiarity for several waves of Mexicans who move north."

That role has not changed much since the days of Mexico's fight for independence or its call for revolution, Rodriguez added.

"They came to San Antonio because they knew they could feel secure."

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Of note is that, as a 1st. Lt. with the Fijo de Vera Cruz infantry regiment of the Spanish Colonial army, under the command of Joaquin Arredondo. Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón, was cited for bravery at the Battle of Medina in 1813. Where over one thousand filibusters from the Gutierrez/Magee expedition were killed and executed. To only 55 royalist soldiers lost in battle. One could argue that, this "no quarter given" experience shaped the counter insurgency policy Gen. Lopez de Santa Ana would apply to the filibusters at the Battle of the Alamo approximately 23 years later. Also, when Mexico's insurgent leadership was captured at the Noria de Acatita de Bajan, Coahuila. in 1811. Fr.Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, Capt.'s Ignacio Allende, .Juan Aldama, Mariano Abasolo, and Mariano Jimenez, were headed to San Antonio Bejar seeking to regroup and rearm their Insurgent army. Following their defeat at the battle of Puente de Calderon in Jalisco. At that time, the Royalist garrison in San Antonio Bejar, led by retired military officer Juan Bautista de las Casas, had rebelled against their Royalist officers. Making San Antonio an insurgent stronghold, for a short time. Following the capture and later execution of the Insurgent leadership. San Antonio Bejar returned to Royalist governance. Only later did he, join the Also,

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