

Bexar Archives Online

<http://www.cah.utexas.edu/projects/bexar/index.php>, Accessed October 24, 2014.

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The Bexar Archives Online is a digital archive that collects historical documents pertaining to the Spanish and Mexican cultures existing in Texas from 1717–1805. Of particular note in the archives are materials that shed light on immigration, settlement, and governance of the territory. The University of Texas maintains the Bexar Archives, having housed the original documents since 1899. Completed by librarians with the University of Texas and a variety of historians, the online resource emerged via large-scale, multi-year efforts to digitize the archive's extensive microfilm collection. Funding for development and completion of the project came from grants awarded by the Institute for Museum and Library studies, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, and a series of three TexTreasures grants (2009–2011).

With more than five thousand documents in translation, the digital archive provides an invaluable resource for individuals seeking insight into the population, regulation, and development of Hispanic Texas during this time period. Digitized documents in the archives detail military interactions with Native populations, agricultural strategies, judicial proceedings, and royal correspondence regarding settlers and trade. Translation efforts for these documents began in 1934 and continue today.

The site's primary strength for many is the digital availability of English translations for these rare materials, formerly only available onsite in bound volumes and on microfilm. Online users can browse translated transcripts individually, or in a side-by-side comparison with the original source material. The side-by-side interface allows users to compare documents, zoom in, and navigate easily between pages--features that can streamline the research process for many who would rather do keyword searches rather than compare the materials by hand at the Briscoe Center for American History in Austin, TX.

Searching for materials on the site is utilitarian but not always necessarily conducive to exploration. An index of search terms (including places and names) exists and can be searched using keywords or can be broken into exceptionally long alphabetical lists. While effective in most regards, this type of search and exploration creates a fairly segmented research process, with the user essentially starting each search from square one. Subject searches return individual pages, necessitating the user to note the citation and then, if need be, search out the entire document. Thankfully, the site also has a keyword search for document descriptions and the full-text of translation. There are not many options for enhanced, faceted searching, but still, this is a helpful feature for the researcher without specific aims or just getting her feet underneath her in terms of where to start.

Another timesaving tool on the site allows users to save pages to a section called "Selects" for later perusal, which helps corral individual search results into a central area. The site

also links out to various finding aids for these materials, most notably, a listing of all the census materials contained in the collection. An interactive timeline feature, curated thematic galleries of images, more robust search tools, or providing other points of entry could engage users more actively, but the primary source material available here is certainly worth a bit of extra mining.

Giving users the ability to group items for later examination, providing translations of foreign language materials, and creating an interface that makes possible side-by-side comparison of documents are all valuable assets to any digital archives. And while the site is not flashy, nor the images super high-resolution, the depth and breadth of the Bexar Archives Online is tremendously important, documenting a time of enormous social, political, and cultural evolution within Texas that is surely of great interest to many. This project serves as a fine example for institutions and organizations looking to make textual documentation more readily accessible for digital researchers.