

*A Borderlands Town  
in Transition*

LAREDO, 1755-1870



*By* Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa

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*Manufactured in the United States of America*  
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*A mis padres, José H. Hinojosa y  
Concepción González de Hinojosa,  
a mi esposa, Gloria, y a mis hijas,  
María del Carmen y Teresita*

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## Preface

Rapid transcontinental expansion by the United States during the nineteenth century obscured the presence of earlier Indian and Spanish settlement in the Southwest, but the heritage of these peoples survived and, in time, was rediscovered. Disregard for the history of these earlier settlements stemmed from the struggle for control of the continent. As a result of the Mexican War and the annexation of Texas, the United States subjugated the people of the Southwest during the 1840s. Overpowering American economic and political forces dismantled large parts of the older Hispanic institutions and economic structures soon after the conquest. The past seemed to disappear, but Spain's centuries-long roots in the Southwest could not be completely pruned loose, and some sought to nurture them and recapture the past's Hispanic grandeur and significance.

The groundwork for the rediscovery of the Hispanic history of the Southwest was laid in California in the nineteenth century by Hubert Howe Bancroft. His writings called attention to the historical role of the Indian and the Spanish-Mexican in western North America. Among Bancroft's many successors, Herbert E. Bolton led the way in uncovering valuable archival materials, defining the extent for the borderlands region, studying the principal institutions of the Spanish empire, editing historical documents for the Southwest, and stressing the comparative study of the history of the Americas. Prominent among the many historians who built on the foundations laid by Bancroft and Bolton were Texas scholars Charles W. Hackett and Carlos E. Castañeda.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For an evaluation of the work of Hubert Howe Bancroft see John W. Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West*; and Donald Cutter, "Dedication to the Memory of Hubert Howe Bancroft," *Arizona and the West* 2 (Summer, 1960): 105-106. For a brief evaluation of the writings of Herbert E. Bolton, see John Francis Bannon,

*(footnote continued on the next page)*

Focusing on Spanish political, ecclesiastical, and military history, most studies of the borderlands have concentrated on missions, *presidios* (garrisons), and *cabildos* (town councils) as vehicles of Spanish culture and imperial power. Because historical records are largely bureaucratic documents, existing scholarly works present, quite understandably, the picture of a society dominated by institutions. The importance of the military, religious orders, and *cabildos* is unquestionable, since the objectives of these institutions embodied Spanish expectations in the area. But with few exceptions, the details as to how people lived out these expectations or changed them to meet the exigencies of frontier life have been left out of scholarly works. Studies of the economics of land, labor, and trade describe other facets of Spanish settlement in the Southwest without casting more than an occasional glance at the society in which institutions and economic forces operated. At best these studies describe the relationship between certain groups-government and ecclesiastical elites, Indians, soldiers, and traders-and institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, however, the influence of other disciplines on history has offered scholars new methods and perspectives for investigating neglected aspects of southwestern history.<sup>3</sup> An-

(footnote continued from the previous page)

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*Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands*, pp. 3-19; Charles W. Hackett, *Pichardo's Treatise on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas*; and Carlos E. Castañeda, *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas*.

<sup>2</sup>Donald E. Worcester, "The Significance of the Spanish Borderlands to the United States," *Western Historical Quarterly* 7 (January, 1976): 5-18. Although somewhat dated, the bibliographical essay in John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821*, pp. 257-87, remains valuable. A major work on social history is Paul Horgan, *Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History*. Horgan's historical methodology has received considerable criticism from scholars, and these flaws have unfortunately prevented the acceptance of the subtle cultural tones sketched by Horgan. See Frank D. Reeve, "A Letter to Clio," *New Mexico Historical Review* 31 (April, 1956): 102-32.

<sup>3</sup>Anthropologist Edward H. Spicer, in *Cycles of Conquest*, and *Plural Society in the Southwest*, describes the relationships between the Indians of the borderlands and their Spanish, Mexican, and American conquerors. D. W. Meinig's *Southwest: Three Peoples in Geographical Change* is a study of the Southwest by a demographic geographer. Sociologist Frances Leon Swadesh, in *Los Primeros Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier*, analyzes the historical basis for the social structure in New Mexico's Chama Valley.

thropologists have described formal and informal relationships between Indians and their various conquerors, and sociologists have researched the foundations of present social structures. Some historians of the American frontier, employing quantitative techniques used by sociologists, have directed their attention to population movements, occupational mobility, property ownership, marriage and family patterns, dwelling and household structure, and other demographic characteristics of the West.<sup>4</sup> Their influence is evident in recent demographic research on the borderlands. Most of this work concentrates on the post-1848 period, for which data and sources in English are readily available in the United States. Studies on Mexican Americans in California are among the several worthwhile contributions in this area.<sup>5</sup> Only a few works cover the Spanish-Mexican borderlands, and these are mostly regional or provincial in scope.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ground was broken in Western history by Merle E. Curti's *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County*. A more recent work, James Edward Davis's *Frontier America, 1800-1840: A Comparative Analysis of the Settlement Process* provides an excellent description of the demography of the westward movement.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890: A Social History*; Albert Michael Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930*. Perhaps the best bibliographical essay on Chicano history is found in Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Luis Leobardo Arroyo, "On the State of Chicano History: Observations on Its Development, Interpretations and Theory, 1970-1974." *Western Historical Quarterly* 7 (April, 1976): 155-85. Among the works pertinent to this study and not included in their otherwise extensive list are David Thomas Bailey, "Stratification and Ethnic Differentiation in Santa Fe, 1860 and 1870" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1975), and James M. McReynolds, "Family Life in a Borderlands Community: Nacogdoches, Texas, 1779-1861" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1978).

<sup>6</sup>A recent study which incorporates demographic material is by Oakah L. Jones, Jr., *Los Paisanos: Spanish Settlers on the Northern Frontier of New Spain*. Other interesting demographic studies of the borderlands area are those of Alicia V. Tjarks, "Comparative Demographic Analysis of Texas, 1777-1793," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 77 (January, 1974): 291-338, and "Demographic, Ethnic, and Occupational Structures of New Mexico, 1790," *The Americas* 35 (July, 1978): 45-88; and Andrew A. Tjerina, "Tejanos and Texas: Native Mexicanos of Texas, 1820-1850" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1977). Both authors analyze communities over time, but both are interested more in the development of the province than that of any one town. Henry F. Dobyn's *Spanish Colonial Tucson: A Demographic History*, provides new insights into the role of the mission and the *presidio* in Indian-Spanish relations.

This study of Laredo between 1755 and 1870 also addresses demographic topics, focusing on the dynamics of population change within the community. Laredo's relative smallness made it possible to study the entire community, a procedure which enabled me to trace individuals from one census to another. Laredo's existence since the mid-1700s provided an opportunity to describe and analyze the adjustment made by the townspeople to several sovereignties: Spanish, Mexican, American, Confederate, and American again.

Concerned mostly with military and political events related to these transitions and with genealogical interests, Laredo historians have overlooked the data that reveal the effects of public events on the townspeople. Their studies leave unanswered many important questions pertaining to demographic change in the town.<sup>7</sup> What were the rates of population growth and decline? What brought about the population changes, and how did the fluctuations affect Laredoans? Were the townspeople a homogeneous group or a community exhibiting divisions based on time of arrival, race, wealth, politics, or ethnic background? Was there a source of unity among Laredoans and, if so, was this

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<sup>7</sup>Shortly after the Americas conquest, the issue of land ownership arose, and the records of the allotment of lands were retrieved from the town's archives. Not until the 1930s and 1940s were documentary resources utilized in a historical manner. The archives from the Spanish, Mexican, and early American periods were saved from destruction by Seb S. Wilcox, a court reporter with an interest in Laredo's past. He and Florencio Andrés, pastor of St. Augustine church, spent countless hours arranging, annotating, and translating documents. Later they assisted the Works Progress Administration in the transcription of most of the records. Father Andrés added notes to entries in the church records. Wilcox published three articles, "Laredo During the Texas Republic," "The Laredo City Elections and Riot of 1886," and "The Spanish Archives of Laredo" in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 42 (October, 1938): 83-107, 45 (July, 1941): 1-23, and 49 (January, 1946): 341-60, respectively. He also occasionally wrote letters and sent research notes to the editor of the *Quarterly*.

Andrés's and Wilcox's work laid the foundation for other Laredo historians: Rogelia O. García *Laredo, Dolores, Revilla: Three Sister Settlements*, and *The Song of La Grande Agua*; Jerry Don Thompson, *Sabers on the Rio Grande*, and *Vaqueros in Blue and Grey*; and J. B. Wilkinson, *Laredo and the Rio Grande Frontier*. Another important work on Laredo is John Dennis Riley's "Santos Benavides: His Influence on the Lower Rio Grande 1823-1891" Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 1976). James Arthur Irby's "Line on the Rio Grande: War and Trade on the Confederate Frontier, 1861-1865" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1969) also makes extensive reference to events in Laredo.

unity threatened or destroyed at any time? Was Laredo self-sufficient or was it dependent upon external sources for its security, its economic well-being, and its sense of purpose?

A demographic study of Laredo in the prerailroad years may explain in part the present-day political and economic prominence of Mexican Americans there. Since it had been hardened by transitions experienced before the 1870s, Laredoans were able to maintain in its basic outline the social structure planted in the Spanish period. Laredo's development in the early period also commands attention because its population in the Spanish and Mexican periods was not significantly smaller than the population of Santa Fe, San Antonio, and Los Angeles. In fact, in these periods Laredo had a larger population than La Bahía del Espíritu Santo and Nacogdoches in Texas, Albuquerque in Nuevo México, and Santa Bárbara in California. There were many other towns smaller than Laredo. Many of these passed into oblivion. Laredo was spared their fate because its geographical location placed it at an economic crossroads. Thus the historical experience of Laredoans may be representative of that lived by settlers and sojourners in both small and large communities in the chaparral region and across the borderlands.

The findings from this study of Laredo may also shed new light on the history of the Southwest. Many historians of the borderlands tend to assume that communities on the northern Spanish-Mexican frontier were somewhat static and that daily life was governed in almost every detail by royal decree. Because institutions in the borderlands were designed to carry out imperial objectives of expansion and defense, many studies give the impression that these communities either had no goals of their own or were not allowed to pursue them.<sup>8</sup> This book shows that Laredoans acted primarily out of concern for their own best interests and only secondarily, if at all, to advance imperial or national goals. Further study of other communities may prove Laredo's experience was common to other borderlands towns,

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<sup>8</sup>This interpretation of a static Spanish-Mexican society is at times employed to stress the aggressive nature of the Anglo-American westward movement. See Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier*, pp.5-7, Seymour V. Connor, *Texas: A History*, p. 54.

but if the evidence suggests otherwise, this investigation at least will have raised the questions.

Most primary sources for Laredo's history during the Spanish and Mexican periods are found in the Laredo Archives housed at St. Mary's University of San Antonio. For the American era the Laredo city records, Webb County records, some records of the State of Texas, and the manuscript returns of the United States censuses of 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 are the principal sources. The Laredo Archives contain a number of decrees, censuses, wills, military and municipal reports to higher authorities, and some trial records. These materials have been examined by a handful of historians interested in Laredo, but until now none has investigated and analyzed them thoroughly or with the intention of studying the demographic history of Laredo.<sup>9</sup> Very little has heretofore been written about Laredo from city and county records, and the census returns have not been utilized at all. Materials for military activities on the Rio Grande can be found in the Texas State Archives and in the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas at Austin. (Detailed statistical data, based on these sources, are in the appendix to this book.)

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<sup>9</sup>As with all historical critical judgement must be employed in the use of materials in the Laredo Archives. For example, reports of Indian threats seem at times exaggerated. Occasionally the accuracy of a census is questionable, such as the census of 1833, which is uncannily similar to that of 1831. For the most part, however, there is little reason to doubt the validity of census tabulations, reports made to the governor, descriptions of the settlement, and the recounting of events.

## Acknowledgments

The preparation for this book began with my graduate training at the University of Texas at Austin, and I am indebted to all my professors there, particularly Dr. John E. Sunder and Dr. Barnes F. Lathrop, who worked long hours with me, carefully examining my work and offering invaluable suggestions. I also wish to thank Dr. Nettie Lee Benson, Dr. Américo Paredes, Dr. Norman D. Brown, and Dr. L. Tuffly Ellis for their time and guidance. Omissions or errors that may appear in this book persist despite their advice to the contrary.

I am grateful for the research support provided by the Center for Mexican American Studies and the Department of History of the University of Texas at Austin and for the photographs furnished by the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio. In the process of preparing this work I also incurred debts to Carmen Perry, archivist at St. Mary's University of San Antonio, who arranged the Laredo Archives and made them accessible to me and other scholars; to Dr. Thomas C. Greaves, director of the Division of Social Studies, and my other colleagues at the University of Texas at San Antonio for encouraging me in my project; to Luciano Guajardo, director of the Laredo Public Library, for directing me to a variety of resources and providing some of the photographs; to the Reverend Kenneth Hennessy, pastor of St. Augustine Catholic Church in Laredo, who allowed me to use parish records; to Laredo and Webb County officials who assisted me in finding documents; and in a special way to Dr. José Roberto Juárez and the Laredo Council for the Arts, without whose enthusiastic and generous backing the manuscript could not have been published.

Whatever pride I can take in this my first book I must share with my family, to whom I dedicate it, and with my professors

and friends who helped me to complete it; whatever remuneration I receive I would like to share with the people of Laredo by assigning the royalties to the Webb County Historical Commission.

## Chapter 1

### Implantation, Growth, and Maturity, 1755-1810

More than two hundred years after the conquest of Tenochtitlan vast areas in northeastern New Spain remained unsettled. Explorers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries judged these lands infertile and the natives uncooperative. Settlers chose to colonize the rich valleys of the upper Rio Grande and the mining districts of Nuevo León and Coahuila. To prevent a possible French expansion into these areas, *conquistadores* ventured far to the east and planted the Spanish banner near the Louisiana border. Hidden inside this arch of settlement reaching from Nuevo León to Louisiana, skirted by the string of missions, forts, and villages that maintained the supply lines to the distant outposts, El Seno Mexicano (the Mexican Gulf Coast) remained a desolate barren plain until the mid-eighteenth century.

Bounded on the west by the Sierra Madre Oriental, El Seno Mexicano extended north from the Pánuco along the Gulf Coast to the Provinces of Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Texas, which it resembled physiographically. It was hot and dry, and appeared uninhabitable. Prospective settlers could farm only the bottomlands of the few streams that crossed this chaparral desert. Yet the land provided sufficient vegetation for wild cattle and mustangs and for the livestock that any settler would bring. Undesirable as El Seno Mexicano appeared initially, by the early 1700s it offered new opportunities for survival and wealth to *rancheros* and settlers from the adjoining areas, where growing herds had created a need for new grazing lands.<sup>1</sup>

Along with possibilities for expansion, however, the area

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<sup>1</sup>Fray Vicente Santa María, "Relación histórica de la colonia de Nuevo Santander y costa del seno mexicano," in *Estado general de las fundaciones hechas por d. José de Escandón en la Colonia de Nuevo Santander*, II, 35-36, 360-64.

presented many dangers to settlers. In the southern portion, Janambres, Napanames, Aracaes, and other tribes that had been pushed into the rugged Tamaulipa ranges-the Sierra Gorda-periodically sallied from their mountain refuges in attempts to retake their lands or simply to survive. Farther north, the same Apaches, Lipans, and Comanches who made incursions into Coahuila and Nuevo León also swept down into El Seno Mexicano.<sup>2</sup> Threatening and yet promising, this semiarid plain could be settled only by a strong, deliberate, and carefully prepared colonizing expedition.

### **The Colonization of Nuevo Santander**

The man selected for this task was José de Escandón, a peninsular who had successfully pursued a military career in New Spain, married well, and held a position of prominence in Querétaro. Escandón's experience and social status made him a likely choice first to pacify the southern region and later to lead the colonization projects. In 1746 Escandón, by then Conde de la Sierra Gorda, received the appointment as *conquistador*, captain general, and governor of the area recently named the Province of Nuevo Santander. In this capacity he planned and organized a several-pronged *entrada* which resulted in the establishment of twenty towns and eighteen missions between 1749 and 1755. With the foundation of Laredo, the last of these towns, Escandón's colonization project was considered complete.<sup>3</sup>

The settlement of El Seno Mexicano differed significantly from earlier colonization enterprises in the borderlands. In the *entradas* of Juan de Oñate into New Mexico in 1598, Luis de Carvajal into Nuevo León in 1659, and Alonso de León and Fray Damián de Massanet into Texas in 1686 and 1689, the attraction of great wealth or a foreign threat called for conquest far beyond the line of settlement. The special objective and the bypassing of large unsettled areas made these early *entradas* appear force-

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<sup>2</sup>David M. Vigness, trans. and ed., "Nuevo Santander in 1795: A Provincial Inspection by Félix Calleja," *Southwestern historical Quarterly* 75 (April, 1972): 464.

<sup>3</sup>Lawrence F. Hill, *José de Escandón and the Founding of Nuevo Santander: A Study of Spanish Colonization*, pp. 5, 19-21, 56-58.

ful and dramatic in comparison with the gradual expansion later into Nuevo Santander. Yet both patterns were in keeping with Spanish tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Slow, well-plotted incorporation of areas from adjacent provinces was the result of steady population growth and the consequent need for new sources of wealth. To facilitate this colonization, men of stature from well-established interior regions, such as José de Escandón from Querétaro, received authority from the Crown and made the necessary investments. The mid-level leadership and settlers came from nearby provinces. Later, growth within a colony followed a scaled-down version of this same expansion-settlement-expansion process. Through this pattern of gradualism Laredo was established.<sup>5</sup>

In the northeastern corner of the new province of Nuevo Santander, Escandón planted settlements along the Rio Grande as defense outposts against the *indios bárbaros* (nomadic Indians). He brought colonists from Nuevo León to Mier and Camargo in 1749 and the following year he recruited *rancheros* from Coahuila to settle upriver in Revilla and Dolores. Notwithstanding dangers and difficulties in the high brush country, these towns prospered, and five years later there was need for expansion. Escandón agreed to the request for a new settlement, and colonists from Dolores and Revilla then moved to vacant lands upriver. They named the settlement San Agustín de Laredo.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Founding of Laredo**

Located in the northern tip of Nuevo Santander, Laredo was an extension of Revilla and Dolores. Revilla's prosperity rivaled that of the other towns along the Rio Grande. Flanked by Mier and the Hacienda de Dolores and prevented from expanding

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<sup>4</sup>Vito Alessio Robles, *Coahuila y Texas desde la consumación de la independencia hasta el tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo*, pp. 19-20; Herbert Eugene Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest*, pp. 170-77, 207-31; Philip Wayne Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>See *Estado general de las fundaciones*, II, 115, 118, 121.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 429-30, 440.

southward by the prosperous town of Camargo, Revilla's growing population looked for new land above the Paso de Jacinto. Perhaps intending to capitalize on these land and population pressures, don José Vázquez Borrego, founder and head of the *hacienda* (large feudal estate) of Dolores, seized the opportunity of Escandón's visit to the Rio Grande to propose a colonization project in northern Nuevo Santander. Vázquez Borrego nominated as leader one of his administrators, who later became his son-in-law, don Tomás Sánchez de la Barreda y Gallardo.<sup>7</sup>

Originally from Nuevo León don Tomás Sánchez had come from Coahuila where he had managed another *hacienda*. His family had been associated with different settlement expeditions in those two provinces, a background and experience which served him well on the Rio Grande frontier. Supported by Vázquez Borrego, Sánchez received from Escandón political and military authority to carry out the new colonizing expedition. In return for his investment Sánchez was promised land. Complying with Escandón's suggestion, Sánchez explored the Nueces area, but opted not to settle there, perhaps because such an outpost would have been too removed from other settlements. Instead, on May 15, 1755, Sánchez brought three families to an area between the Jacinto and Garza fords on the Rio Grande.<sup>8</sup>

With the establishment of Laredo, Escandón's mission was accomplished, and the viceroy shortly thereafter commissioned a *visita*, or inspection, of El Seno Mexicano. Such an inquiry was part of the system of checks and balances within the Spanish government. Crown appointees such as Escandón usually received wide discretionary authority over people and wealth. These appointees were fully aware, however, that abuses and irregularities could be reported to the *visitador* (inspector), who evaluated their performance once their term of office or assignment was completed. As in other inspections, the selection of the *visitador* and the rigor of the investigation were open to political pressures.<sup>9</sup> Escandón's rapid success in settling an area as

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<sup>7</sup>J.B. Wilkinson, *Laredo and the Rio Grande Frontier*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>8</sup>Ben Cuellar Ximenes, *Gallant Outcasts*, p. 89; *Estado general de las fundaciones*, I, 444-45.

<sup>9</sup>C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America*, pp. 148-57; Charles Gibson, *Spain in America*, p. 100.

vast as Nuevo Santander and his great profit from such an unpromising venture gave rise to suspicion and jealousy. The *visita* of El Seno Mexicano in 1757 may have been inspired by such sentiments since the Conde, and later his son, subsequently struggled through a lengthy legal process fighting charges stemming from the colonization of Nuevo Santander.<sup>10</sup>

Suspensions of Escandón's actions were absent in the actual inquiry, however. The *visitador*, don José Tienda de Cuervo, and his assistants reached the northern edge of the province by mid-1757 and set about the task of describing the Rio Grande settlements. They interviewed all the heads of households, asking them to list the members of their families and households, the size of their herds, and the availability of weapons for defense. They reviewed the colonization process and also heard complaints and suggestions. From the information gathered they wrote their report.<sup>11</sup>

Their account reveals that the three settlements at the very tip of Nuevo Santander varied in population size (Revilla, 557; Dolores, 122; and Laredo, 85), but resembled each other very closely in their social structure. In all three, most members of the households were bound by nuclear family ties. Over half of the family and household units were made up of five or fewer members. In Revilla and Dolores over half of the families with children reported three children or less; in Laredo the number of children was only slightly higher. Even *solteros*, unmarried related or unrelated adults, resided for the most part in households composed of families. In Revilla, such single adults made up only a small fraction of the population because they tended to migrate to Laredo. All three settlements thus displayed a social structure based upon the family, with very few households headed by single adults. The pattern was so common that the *visitadores* and the settlers found it unnecessary to allude to it, but family unity constituted a social reality that gave the community strength and purpose in the early years of settlement.

The main problem that surfaced from Tienda de Cuervo's interviews was the question of the distribution of land. Escandón had decreed that the land granted to the towns be held in

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<sup>10</sup>Wilkinson, *Laredo and the Rio Grande Frontier*, pp. 43-46.

<sup>11</sup>*Estado general de las fundaciones*, 1, 5-10.

common in order to avoid petty disputes and land monopolies which would stave off immigration. Those interviewed stated that while this arrangement attracted immigrants it also created an uncertainty which discouraged land and housing improvements.<sup>12</sup> The *visitadores* concurred in this opinion and noted that this problem affected all the town settlements along the Rio Grande.

Besides being anxious to acquire title to the land in order to build and improve their holdings, these early settlers of Laredo were no doubt concerned also with securing positions of prominence in the town before other newcomers arrived. Within two years Laredo had grown from a handful of settlers to eighty-four people. The push of population from Revilla, as well as the attraction of open lands for the grazing of sheep and goats around Laredo, would soon encourage even more immigration to the new townsite. While this was indeed the purpose for the establishment of Laredo, *los primos pobladores*, the town's founders, would have preferred that change not come so rapidly.

As things stood, Laredo was don Tomás Sánchez's *hacienda*, much as Dolores was Vázquez Borrego's feudal estate. Sánchez owned about three-fourths of all the horses, both tamed and on the range, one-fourth of the sheep, half of the cattle, and all of the mules and oxen in Laredo. Furthermore, when the social and economic predominance of the entire Sánchez family is examined, Laredo appears to have been their private acquisition rather than the public colonization project it was intended to be.<sup>13</sup>

Laredo was a small settlement-the engineer of the inspection party characterized it as a *rancho*-yet it retained a certain flexibility similar to that of Revilla, the nearest town on the Rio Grande.<sup>14</sup> In Laredo three heads of households listed servants,

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., I, 428-30, 432-36, 444-50.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., II, 123-25, 449. For a description of the *hacienda* as an economic and social unit, see François Chevalier's *Land and Society in Colonial Mexico*, pp. 264, 277-80.

<sup>14</sup>The town, or *villa*, was a legal entity usually created by the commissioned leader of an expedition and juridically dependent on the governor (Haring, *Spanish Empire in America*, pp. 147-53). For the description of Laredo as a *rancho* see Herbert Eugene Bolton, "Tienda de Cuervo's *Ynspección* of Laredo, 1757," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 6 (January, 1903): 202.