

Tejano Defenders of the Alamo

by Scott Sosebee

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Scott Sosebee is Executive Director of the Association and can be contacted at sosebeem@sfasu.edu.

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(Jul 31, 2022) If there was a “Texan citizenship exam”—and perhaps there should be—I am sure one of the questions would ask you to identify prominent defenders of the Alamo. David Crockett and James Bowie would no doubt immediately come to mind. William Travis would also be a popular answer. Advanced students in “Texan Studies” would probably provide the names James Bonham and Almaron Dickinson, while those looking for advanced degrees might throw in George Washington Cottle and Phillip Dimmitt (I am not showing off—I had to look those two up). What many forget is that a number of Tejanos—Texans of Mexican descent—also fought and died during the iconic battle. Two of those were Jose Toribio Losoya and Gregorio Esparza.

Jose Maria Gregorio Esparza came from a prominent San Antonio family. His parents, early settlers of the town, were what we would now call “pillars of the community,” and Gregorio (as they called him) grew up in the proud tradition of Bexareños. He married Ana Salazar when he was twenty-five and together, they raised four children, one daughter and four sons. When the Texas Revolution began, Esparza volunteered for the Texian Army and traveled to La Bahia where he joined with James Bowie’s forces and helped capture Goliad for the Texian forces. After that engagement he went with Bowie back to San Antonio, where he participated in the Battle of San Antonio in December 1835.

After his service in December, Esparza left the Texian Army and returned to his family, but Santa Anna’s approach on San Antonio would decide his fate. Esparza had no aversion to fighting the Mexican dictator, but the approaching Mexican forces were a danger to his family and he had to consider their safety. He first thought of joining some San Antonio residents who had fled to Nacogdoches, but he had no time to prepare for such a trip. Faced with few options, Esparza and his family entered the Alamo on the evening of February 23 just before Santa Anna’s advance into the city; they were the last people to enter the ill-fated mission/fort.

Esparza helped man the artillery at the rear of the Alamo, a vital defense position. Like the other defenders, he was killed when the Mexican forces overran the mission on the morning of March 6, 1836. Esparza's death did not end his notoriety to history. His brother Francisco was a conscripted soldier in Santa Anna's army, and he asked to be allowed to properly bury his brother. He found his sibling fallen at his post and buried him in San Antonio's El Campo cemetery. His family members survived the battle and became some key eyewitnesses to history.

Jose Toribio Losoya was also a resident of San Antonio, born in that city in 1808. Losoya and his wife Concepcion lived in a small house just outside the Alamo compound. Losoya was drawn to a military life, and he joined the Alamo de Parras military company under Lt. Colonel Jose Francisco Ruiz. He and his compatriots helped to establish Fort Tenoxtitlan for the Mexican authorities on the vital road between San Antonio and Nacogdoches, where he and his family lived until 1832, when he returned to San Antonio.

When Santa Anna seized full control of the Mexican government under a Centralist regime in 1832, Losoya became one of many Mexican soldiers committed to ending the despotic ruler's reign. He deserted the Mexican army and joined with fellow Bexareño Juan Seguin and, like Esparza, joined in the Battle of San Antonio to repel General Cos from the city. After the December fight most of Seguin's men joined in the defense of the Alamo, and although Seguin and some others would ride out as scouts and couriers before the battle, Losoya and seven others stayed in the fortress. Losoya's family joined him in the mission compound as they waited for Santa Anna's approach.

Losoya, along with Esparza, died during the early hours of March 6 in the mission's chapel, which more than likely made his one of the last casualties. He probably had come to the chapel to protect his family, who survived the battle. Unlike Esparza, Losoya's remains met the same fate of most of the defenders of the Alamo—he was stacked and burned by the Mexican forces. Today, Losoya Street in downtown San Antonio honors his memory, and a bronze statue of the brave Tejano defender stands just across the street from the Hyatt Regency Hotel, adjacent to and at street level of the famed Riverwalk.

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