The Canary Islanders

The Canary Islanders arrived in San Antonio in March 1731. This was almost 300 years (3 centuries) ago. This group of people numbered about 56.

When they arrived to San Antonio they found the mission of San Antonio de Valero and a *presidio* (an army post). During the first few months of their stay in San Antonio the women and children had to live in *adobe* buildings inside the *presidio* as they did not have any other place to live. The men lived in tents. Life was difficult for them as they had settled in a new country.

Why did the Canary Islanders move from their island? By 1730, land was becoming scarce (hard to find) in the volcanic Canary Islands. The islanders asked the King of Spain to allow them to settle in a Spanish colony. The Canary Islanders were offered a chance to settle in New Spain. There were ten families that accepted the king’s offer of his best ships. The ships were to take them to the New World. They were promised that they would be taken care of in the New World. The king promised that the head of each family would be given money for one year. They would also be given cattle, goats, sheep, farming tools, supplies and their own land in this new settlement. The king even promised to give the new settlers titles of nobility (class of persons distinguished by high birth or rank; example kings, queens).
Therefore, each man could add the title Don to his name.

The islanders were ready to leave their homes in the Canary Islands. They were to begin their journey to the New World. This journey lasted almost a year. They stopped in Havana, Cuba, Vera Cruz, Mexico, and traveled through Saltillo on their way to Texas. When they stopped in Vera Cruz, Mexico, a tropical fever killed two of the Canary Islanders. Another man left the voyage with his family because he was not sure he wanted to settle in New Spain. No one knows where they went.

When the Canary Islanders arrived in what is now San Antonio, they settled in the Villa de San Fernando de Bexár along the banks of the San Antonio River (which at that time was called Rio San Antonio De Padua). They settled near the San Antonio River because they were given land near the river. This land was good farm and pasture land. They were also given land near the presidio which was level and good for building, gardening, and farming. A captain by the name of Captain Juan Antonio Perez de Almazán taught the Canary Islanders to plow and plant crops. They did not like farming because they had never been farmers on their island, but they had to farm if they wanted to eat. When the Canary Islanders lived on the Islands, they worked as mule-drivers, goat-hair weavers, water vendors, potters, ditch-diggers and tanners.
When the Canary Islanders first settled San Antonio, their settlement had no rules that people had to follow. This was necessary so that the community could be peaceful and there would be leaders to help make decisions to help make improvements to the community. As the people saw a need for rules, the first city government was set up. This city government was set up in July of 1731. A man by the name of Juan Leal Goras was elected the first city councilman by the new landowners. The next month, two members of the council were elected alcades (a mayor of a Spanish town) by the rest of the council. Their names were Juan Leal Goras and Salvador Rodriguez. They were elected as a combination justice of the peace, sheriff and mayor. This event marked the first civil settlement of San Antonio.