



# *A Foundation for the Future in* **SAN ANTONIO**

BY ERICA LAYNE NIELSEN

*Like others who have been pioneers for the Church throughout the world, three families in San Antonio, Texas, gave all they had to the building of Zion in their area.*

**W**herever the Church spreads, it often begins with a handful of stalwart Saints who are willing to stand alone in their beliefs until others join them. These pioneers know the significance of the name they bear as members of Christ's restored Church, and thus they are willing to endure isolation and, in some cases, persecution. In spite of these challenges, they befriend their neighbors and other members of the community, and through word and example they help bring many unto Christ.

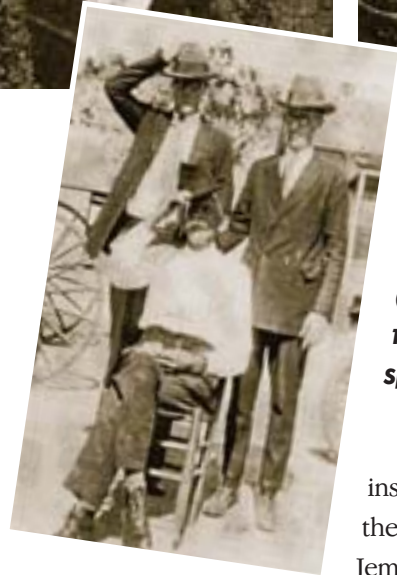
This was the beginning of the Church in south Texas, particularly San Antonio, where a few strong families reached out to their neighbors and helped lay a foundation for the future. The Shaw, Pedraza, and Turley families were among the first Latter-day Saints in the San Antonio area. Three generations later, their descendants recognize their ancestors' contribution to the eventual establishment of four stakes in San Antonio. From two tiny branches established in San Antonio in 1921, this area has blossomed into the home of thousands of members and of a temple of the Lord. Through the sacrifice and dedication of these early pioneers, people throughout south Texas now enjoy the blessings of the gospel.

### Rooted in the Gospel

In response to glowing reports about farming in south Texas, John Richard Shaw and Jemima Catherine Murphree Shaw made the trek from Mississippi to Yorktown, Texas, in 1892. A few years later they moved 15 miles away to Cuero, where they made a name for themselves as hardworking farmers who were staunch members of their Protestant church.

When two hungry, tired Latter-day Saint missionaries turned up on the doorstep, John Shaw almost didn't take pity on them because of the strong anti-Mormon sentiment in the region at the time. However, John had never been one to put too much stock in rumors, so he relented, showed them to the barn, and allowed them to drink of his water and rest on the hay.

Over the next couple of days, the young men impressed John with their constant friendliness and their readiness to help out on the farm. When they learned that Jemima Shaw was suffering with a lump the size of a cantaloupe that had grown on her side, they told the family about priesthood blessings and offered to give her one. John, who wouldn't even allow the missionaries to step



**Above: John Richard and Jemima Murphree Shaw.**

**Left: John Richard Shaw (seated) with two missionaries, Elders Nancy (standing, left) and Beckstead, about 1926. Opposite page: One of the old Spanish missions in San Antonio.**

inside the house, resolutely refused their offer. But the next morning, Jemima, in agony, begged her husband to let the missionaries administer to her, and he finally acquiesced.

Within minutes of the blessing, she found that the lump had decreased noticeably. It disappeared entirely by the next day. Having faith in the power that healed her, Jemima wished to be baptized. Her husband refused to consider it at first, but his heart soon softened. John and Jemima agreed to have the missionaries teach them, and they were both baptized on August 28, 1900, in a river near Cuero. All of their nine living children were baptized over the years, but because there wasn't an organized branch anywhere nearby, the Shaws had to wait for missionaries to come to town to perform the baptisms for their children.

Georgia Williams, a great-granddaughter of John and Jemima Shaw, lives in San Antonio and treasures the family heritage that began in south Texas with her great-grandparents. "It was my great-grandmother's faith that brought [the family] to the gospel," says Sister Williams. "With faith they endured whatever life handed them and made their way through it."





**Top: Members of the first Spanish branch in San Antonio. Above: José Pedraza (right) and a friend during the period when he was a migrant worker. Right: José as a missionary, and the pamphlet that introduced him to the Church.**

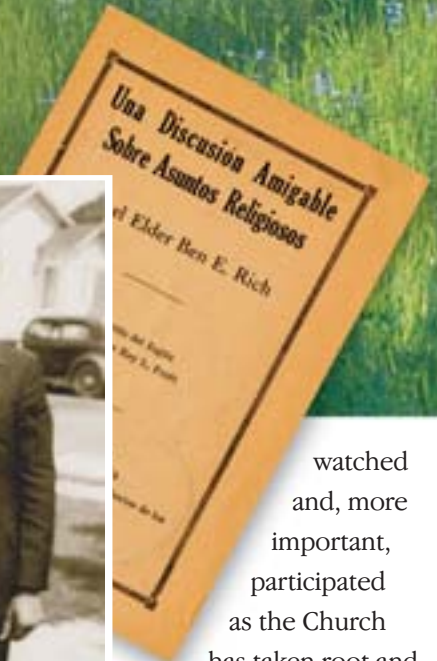
In fact, John and Jemima’s faith sustained them through years of persecution for their membership in the Church.

“Neighboring families became bitter and tried to run them out of the country,” says Sister Williams. “Troublemakers shot holes in their home. The Shaws were persecuted by family friends and sometimes family members who just didn’t understand why they had joined the Church.”

Despite the hostility, John Shaw taught the gospel whenever he could and even helped convert several neighbors.

John and Jemima Shaw were never able to travel to a temple during their lifetime, though their descendants performed their temple ordinances for them after they passed away. Since the San Antonio Texas Temple was dedicated in 2005, Georgia Williams has cherished the opportunity to attend often. She knows what having a temple in their area would have meant to her great-grandparents. She now serves as a temple worker in the San Antonio temple, along with six of her cousins, each of whom descends from a different child of John and Jemima.

The number of John and Jemima’s descendants now exceeds 1,000. While not all are active Church members, Sister Williams says many of the descendants who still live in south Texas have gone on missions and have served in bishoprics, on high councils, and in many other leadership positions in the Church. The Shaw family has



watched and, more important, participated as the Church has taken root and flourished in the area.

**Taking the First Steps**

Frank Pedraza Jr. says his grandfather José Pedraza left behind a

legacy of sacrifice and dedication to spreading the gospel—a legacy Brother Pedraza is now trying to instill in his own children.

When José Pedraza first heard the Latter-day Saint missionaries preaching on the street in 1921, his heart immediately recognized the power of their words. Yet the taunting crowd that stood between José and the missionaries kept him from contacting them. But several days later, José came in from the fields where he worked as a laborer and found a pamphlet the missionaries had left on the porch.

The Spirit touched him as he read, and he decided to write a letter to the only contact he could find on the pamphlet—the author, Ben E. Rich of Salt Lake City. Though Brother Rich had passed away, the letter went

through several hands and eventually reached the missionaries in the San Antonio area. They searched San Antonio until they finally found José, who unreservedly embraced the gospel and became one of the first members of the Church in south Texas.

“He was one of the first Mexican-American members of the Church in San Antonio,” says Frank Pedraza. “There was no example to follow. He had to take the first step.”

After his conversion, José immediately began spreading the gospel in any way he could. He helped bring many of his fellow Mexican-Americans to the Church.

Frank Pedraza says his grandfather’s example, even in times of trial, showed his steadfastness in the gospel and thus led many people to investigate and join the Church. “He was a laborer, so if he didn’t work, he didn’t get paid and couldn’t feed his family. But he still gave everything he could to the Church.”

José’s dedication to spreading the message of the restored gospel had an impact on hundreds of people, especially those in his own family.

In his later years, after the death of his wife, Crescencia, José lived with his son and daughter-in-law, Francisco and Horténcia Pedraza. José stayed with Horténcia in San Antonio while Francisco—Frank Jr.’s father—was stationed with the military in Japan. Because Horténcia was not a member of the Church, José began teaching her the gospel. After she accepted it, José baptized her while Francisco was still in Japan. Upon his return, Francisco was delighted to learn of his wife’s conversion. The story now reminds José’s descendants of

his insatiable love for missionary work.

As the father of four, Frank Pedraza Jr. shares the legacy of his great-grandfather with his children by trying to live the same way. “I tell them about their grandfather and his sacrifice,” he says. “They all know his story.”

Frank Pedraza’s oldest son, Brandon, served a mission in Boise, Idaho, where he often

used the stories of his great-grandfather as he taught many of the migrant workers in the area. His second son, Ryan, is now serving in the Argentina Bahia Blanca Mission.

The third generation to descend from José and Crescencia Pedraza, these young people are not only strengthening the Church in San Antonio, they are taking José Pedraza’s legacy and sharing it with the world.



**Top: Henry Eyring Turley (second from left, back row) with President Heber J. Grant (third from right, back) and other members and missionaries at a San Antonio branch conference in 1924. Above: Henry Turley and wife, Louise, in the 1950s. He was called as patriarch in 1958 when a stake was organized in San Antonio.**

### Willing to Give

Henry Eyring Turley grew up surrounded by members of the Church in the Latter-day Saint colonies in Mexico, but a series of events landed him in San Antonio, where he joined the ranks of the few but steadfast Saints in south Texas.

After being injured earlier in a logging accident in Mexico, Henry sought help from a chiropractor in El Paso, Texas. He quickly decided that life as a chiropractor appealed to him, so he moved in 1922 to San Antonio to attend the Texas Chiropractic College. He completed his degree and returned to the colonies, where he married Louise Robinson. When the Texas Chiropractic College offered Henry a position on the faculty in 1927, he and his young family moved to San Antonio.



*The efforts of pioneering families laid a groundwork for growth that brought a temple to San Antonio.*



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN LUKE

Henry taught at that college for 38 years while also fulfilling various leadership callings in the Church.

Henry's son, Herbert Turley, was one year old when his family moved to San Antonio. He said it was an adjustment for his parents to go from being surrounded by members of the Church in the colonies to meeting with a handful of Saints in people's homes in San Antonio.

"Nobody even knew what a Mormon was, except for the stories they had heard," Brother Turley says. He also says his parents were excluded from many community activities primarily because of their religion.

In a place where the Church was just beginning to establish itself, Herbert Turley said his mother and father taught their four children to be loyal to the standards of the gospel, to love the Church and the way it functions, and to be dependable in any capacity.

While Henry was a district president in what was then called the Texas Louisiana Mission, his loyalty, love, and dependability kept him traveling to different parts of his district every weekend. The district over which he presided was about 300 miles long and 250 miles wide, so travel was inevitable.

"We had to go with him sometimes just to be able to see him," Herbert says now.

But Brother Turley recognized the great work his father

was engaged in and the impact it had on so many people in south Texas. "I don't know that I've ever met a man any better than my dad," he says. "I never heard him say a bad word about anyone. He was loved by everyone."

Henry and Louise's posterity—nearly 150 descendants—are now spreading that same love as they serve in many Church capacities. They are following the example of Henry and Louise by doing all they can to strengthen the stakes of Zion.

"We've got four stakes in San Antonio now. We used to get along with 10 or 12 people," says Herbert Turley.

### **Strengthening the Stakes of Zion**

The Shaw, Pedraza, and Turley families were willing to stand alone at first. But they wouldn't allow feelings of exclusion or even moments of persecution to keep them standing alone for long; they extended their love to neighbors and taught the gospel by the way they lived. Like hundreds of others who have been pioneers for the Church throughout the world, these families and a few others living in south Texas in the early 1900s willingly gave all they had to strengthening the stakes of Zion in their area. ■

*Information for this article was obtained from author interviews with Georgia Williams, Frank Pedraza Jr., and Herbert Turley; family records from Georgia Williams and Frank Pedraza Jr.; microfilm records of the Kenedy Branch; microfilm records of the Mexican Mission; and mission records of the Central States Mission.*