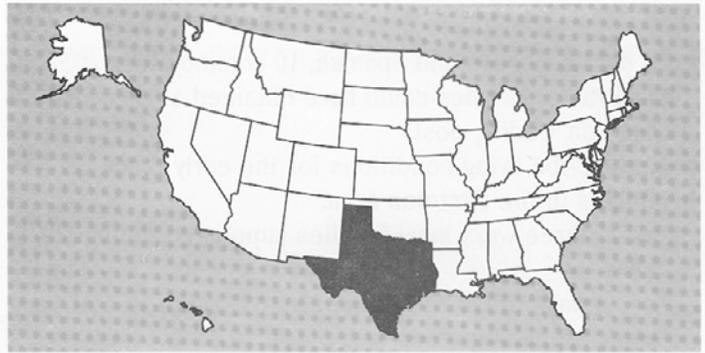




# Teaching with Historic Places



*A program of the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation*

## Castolon: A Meeting Place of Two Cultures

BY CAROL E. SPERLING

Set below the towering cliffs of the Sierra Ponce, Castolon is a small trading and farming community in far southwest Texas. While the muddy Rio Grande brings a constant supply of water to the area, rainfall is scant and the landscape is harsh: white and yellow soils lie open to the southern sun, woody vegetation is sparse and stunted, and turkey vultures soar in the rising thermals. As a place of contrasting land forms and cultures, but also of harmony, Castolon played a unique role in the history of the United States-Mexico border region.

The rich flood plain of the Rio Grande was inhabited and farmed early by American Indians. By 1900, the area began to attract American and Mexican farmers and ranchers interested in establishing homesteads and raising families. As the rest of the nation entered the industrial age, West Texas along the Rio Grande remained a frontier society. The 1910 Mexican Revolution brought unrest and danger to rural families on both sides of the river as bandits and raiders invaded the area. The U.S. Army commissioned several permanent and temporary camps along

the Rio Grande, hoping a military presence would enforce relative peace. One such lonely and isolated temporary post was Camp Santa Helena, soon called Castolon, in the southwest corner of today's Big Bend National Park. In 1921, Wayne Cartledge and Howard Perry entered into a farming, ranching and store-keeping partnership at Castolon known as La Harmonia Enterprises, named for what the partners hoped would be a continuing condition of the area—harmony between peoples.

This lesson about frontier life in Texas is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file,

"Castolon Historic District," and other source materials about Castolon and ranching in the Big Bend region. Materials for students include 1) readings compiled from historic documents and more recent studies; 2) maps of the area; and 3) photographs. The lesson could be

used in teaching units on westward expansion or United States geography. Students will practice skills of map reading and analysis of photographs and primary documents.

### *Objectives for the Students*

- To explain why early settlers in the area of the Rio Grande felt free to cross the international boundary frequently.



*Above: Castolon, Texas (Big Bend National Park).*

- To list, in English and Spanish, 10 commodities local ranch families could have obtained at the Castolon trading post.
- To describe living conditions for the early ranch families in the Castolon area.
- To list three ways local families supported themselves.
- To compare the early history of Castolon to that of their own communities in the early-to-mid 1900s.

## Teaching Activities

### *Setting the Stage*

Explain to students that two general concepts should be kept in mind as they begin their study of the relationship of Castolon to Texas history. First, explain that international boundaries are lines drawn on maps. Although those lines sometimes correspond to natural features we can see—the U.S.-Mexican boundary does follow part of the course of the Rio Grande—the boundaries themselves are not a visible part of the landscape. They exist because humans have agreed that they exist, and they can change over time.

Second, explain that events do not always occur on the same time line in different parts of the country or even within a state. For example, while people in other parts of the country were traveling in motor cars and having milk delivered each morning to their houses, people in West Texas were travelling largely by horse or horse-drawn wagon and were dependent on their gardens, fields, and livestock for most of their food.

Help the students to visualize the terrain surrounding Castolon. West Texas is arid, sparsely vegetated, and shows a great deal of topographic variation. The buildings in the Castolon Historic District sit on a flat mesa just above the flood plain of the Rio Grande about 1,900 feet above sea level. About two miles away from the Castolon Store, a line of huge limestone cliffs fills the southern horizon—the Sierra Ponce. To the north lies a single, flat-topped peak called Cerro Castellan and, beyond that, the Chisos Mountains. Average rainfall in the Castolon area is about eight inches each year. The soil is colorful and woody shrubs and grasses grow in clumps. The Rio Grande, about one-half mile away, is a muddy river which children could wade across most of the year. During flood periods, however, the river roars past Castolon and has even flooded the lower areas where people farmed and lived.

### *Locating the Site*

Have the students examine Map 1, a map of Texas. Have them locate the Rio Grande and specifically the area known as the Big Bend in far southwest Texas. Show them the boundaries of Big Bend National Park and ask them to find the towns of Alpine and Marathon. Explain that these two towns, located 110 and 140 miles from Castolon respectively, were the closest communities with stores, churches, and access to the railroad for people living in the Big Bend in the early part of the 20th century.

Next, have students examine Map 2 and ask them to locate Castolon, Santa Elena (in Mexico), and the Rio Grande. Explain that the occupants of the sites marked as “Homer Wilson Ranch” and “Old Ranch” were neighbors to the people who lived in and around Castolon. Ask them to locate Terlingua Abaja, a farming community that grew up along Terlingua creek, and Terlingua, a mining community.

### *Determining the Facts*

#### **Reading 1: Settling the Big Bend**

Have the students complete Reading 1 and answer the following questions:

1. Why was the U.S. Army Cavalry sent to Castolon? What event made it important that soldiers be in the area?
2. What kept settlers from moving into the Big Bend area before the end of the 1800s? What kinds of dangers would they have faced if they had settled in the area then?
3. Why was cinnabar important in the settlement of Castolon?
4. Who was Howard Perry and what was his role in Castolon’s history?
5. Why did Cartledge and Perry name their store “La Harmonia?” Do you think Mr. Cartledge was serious about his goal?
6. When did the Mexican Revolution begin and how long did it last?
7. What natural feature marks the international boundary near Castolon?
8. Why do you think the international boundary between Mexico and the United States was often ignored?

#### **Readings 2 and 3: Army Life on the Southwestern Frontier**

Next, ask students to study Reading 2, “Captain Lafferty’s Report,” and Reading 3 “Captain Hornbook’s Recruiting Announcement.” Ask them to compare the two readings, and then to discuss the following questions:

1. Which report do you think painted a more accurate picture of life in small Army posts like Castolon? Why?
2. What did Captain Lafferty seem to feel was the biggest threat his men faced?
3. Describe three items in Colonel Hornbrook's recruiting notice he hoped would attract men to enlist under his command. Would you have enlisted after reading this notice? (As it turned out, the Big Bend District which Hornbook commanded was disbanded a few months after this announcement was published.)

#### Reading 4: A Frontier Border Trading Post

Before students begin the next reading, have them make a list of things they might buy if they were going to the grocery store and the mall with their families. Next, have them use a Spanish-English dictionary to look up at least 10 of their items and write down the word. (Spanish-speaking students might want to reverse this process.) Then have students complete Reading 4 and answer the following questions:

1. How many of the things you wanted to buy would have been available at La Harmonia Store?
2. What could you have substituted and what could you have done without?
3. Where would families in Castolon have obtained goods like fresh milk, vegetables, and eggs?

#### Visual Evidence

Have students examine Photos 1 and 2 and answer the following questions:

1. Can you tell what kinds of building materials were used to construct the buildings? Why might they have been chosen?
2. What do you think the tall structure on the left of Photo 1 is (water tower)? Why would it have been necessary?
3. Compare Photo 2 (taken in 1961) with the list of items stocked in the store from Reading 4. What kinds of items appear in the photo? How are these items similar to and different from those listed in Reading 4?

Now have students examine Photo 3, the remains of the Castolon cotton gin. Explain that cotton gins were used to separate the cotton lint (fibers) from the seeds and stalks of the plants. Mr. Cartledge had the gin built in 1923 and brought an expert into the community to teach the farmers how to use it. Families in the area grew cotton and ginned it in the Castolon gin for most of the next 20 years. Ask the students if they can imagine any reason why cotton farming was never very profitable in the Big Bend.

(Bales of cotton had to be shipped to Houston or Galveston to find buyers.) Have students refer back to the map of Texas.

Next, have students examine Photos 4-6 and ask them how they would describe the landscape or countryside. All of the photos (including cover photo) were taken during the 1950s and 1960s. Does the area appear to have grown much since the 1920s and 1930s?

#### Putting It All Together

The remote and isolated community of Castolon seems to have lived in a different time-frame from much of the rest of the United States. In these activities, students will compare what it was like to live in Castolon with life in their own communities during the same time period. They will also get some additional practice using a foreign language—in this case, Spanish.

#### Activity 1: Growing Up in Castolon

Ask students to write a 300 word essay describing the life they would have experienced if they were their current age and lived in the Castolon area during frontier times. Ask them to take into account the following questions:

1. What language or languages would you have spoken at home? Would everyone in the neighborhood have spoken the same language?
2. How would your family have made a living?
3. How often would you have travelled to a big city?
4. What would have happened when somebody got sick? Who would the family have called to help cure the sick person?
5. If you had the choice of crossing the Rio Grande in a rowboat and walking half a mile to La Harmonia Store, or doing without sugar, salt and flour, what would you have done?

#### Activity 2: Comparing Castolon to the Local Community

Have the students research what was happening in their own community from 1920 to 1940. Have them investigate:

1. The population in 1920 and in 1940;
2. Whether there were railroads, paved roads and electric lights by 1935;
3. Public schools, hospitals, and libraries;
4. The kinds of work people did to make a living;
5. Whether the community was ethnically or racially mixed, and the dominant languages spoken;
6. Commercial and agricultural firms operating in 1920 and 1940;

7. The effects of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression; and
8. Historic photographs depicting building materials, size of buildings, ornamentation, density of buildings, etc.

When research is completed, have the students prepare a tabloid-sized newspaper which provides a description of the community from 1920 to 1940. Then ask students to draw a timeline showing the comparison of their community and Castolon.

### Activity 3: Learning Some Spanish

Have the students use a Spanish/English dictionary to define the following words:

cerro, sierra, harina, leche, azucar, sal, vestido, maiz, pantalon, caballo, caballero, queso, casa, rio, camisa, zapatos, sombrero.

Then hold an old-fashioned spelling bee—with a twist. Divide the class into two equal groups (if class numbers are unequal, appoint one student as assistant judge whose duty is to keep a running tally of correctly spelled and correctly used words). Have groups line up in two rows and then, alternating sides, give each student an opportunity to state the correct

Spanish word when you call out the English equivalent. If there are more students than words, go through the process again, this time calling out the words in Spanish, with the students responding with the English version.

### Visiting the Site

Castolon Historic District is located in the southwest corner of Big Bend National Park, in West Texas. Park headquarters are 100 miles southeast of Alpine, Texas, off State Highway 118, and Castolon is 38 miles southwest of headquarters. For information, write: Superintendent, Big Bend National Park, Big Bend National Park, TX 79834.

*Carol E. Sperling is Supervisory Park Ranger at Big Bend National Park.*

*Fay Metcalf, the series editor for Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans, is an education consultant living in Mesa, Arizona.*

*This is one in a series of lesson plans by the National Register of Historic Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as a means of recognizing properties significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. Each registration file contains a description of the property, an explanation of its historical importance, one or more photographs, one or more maps, and sometimes other documentation. The computerized National Register Information System (NRIS) can produce listings according to location, historical function, historical theme, and other categories. To obtain copies of registration documents or NRIS information, contact **Teaching with Historic Places**, National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127, or phone (202) 343-9536. The National Trust and its 250,000 members support preservation organizations and programs in neighborhoods and communities throughout the United States where staff and volunteers are available to work with their schools. For more information on the National Trust's educational programs, please write Heritage Education, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, or phone (202) 673-4040.*

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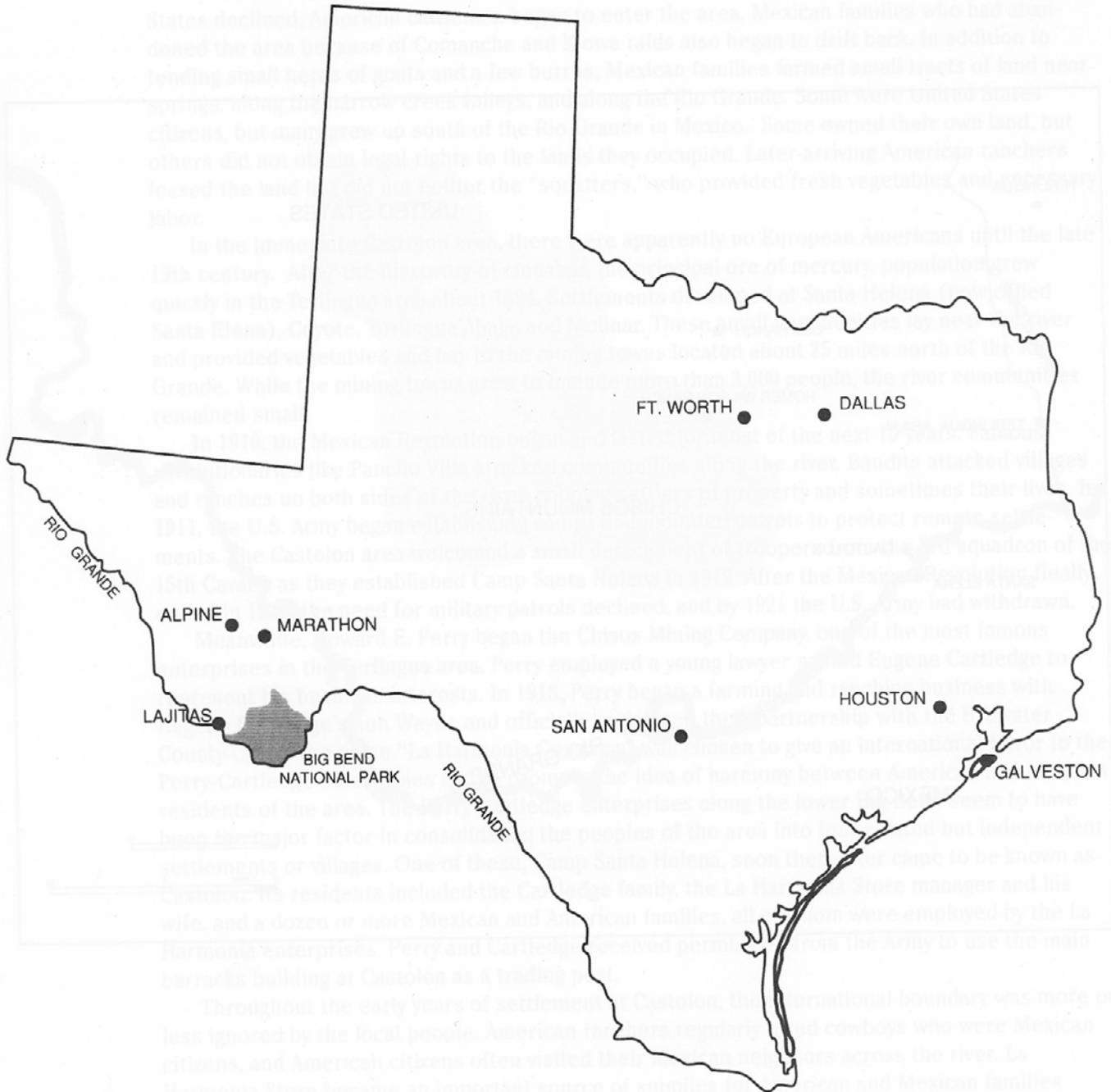
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# Map 1

Texas



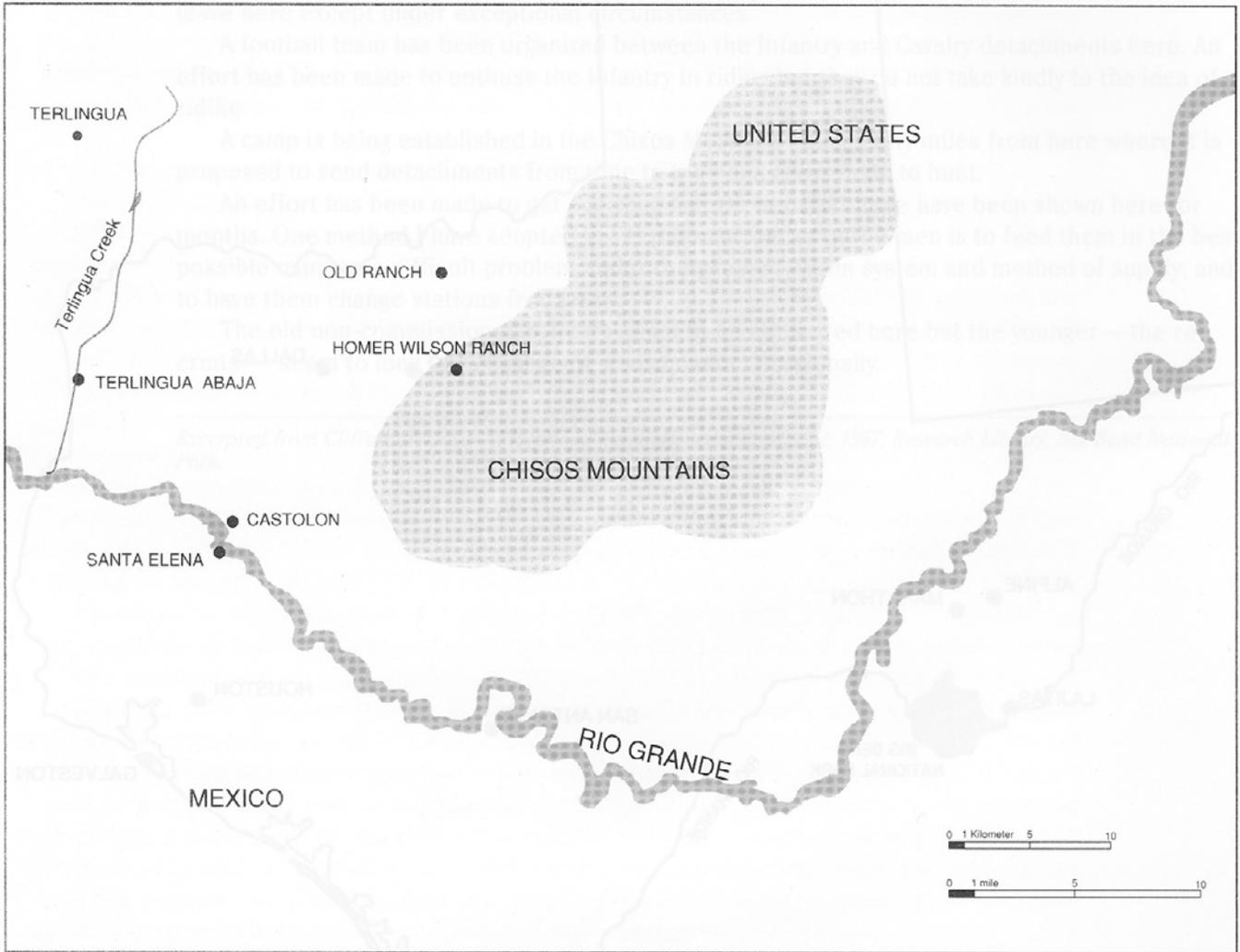
In the late 1800s and early 1900s few families chose to settle in the Big Bend territory. The Comanches and Kiowa attacked passing travelers and the Army could provide little protection. The region boasted few such services as churches and schools and transportation was difficult. By the 1880s when railroads had been built and conflict between the Indians and the United States declined, some people began to enter the area. Mexican families who had abandoned the area because of Comanche and Kiowa raids also began to drift back. In addition to tending small herds of goats and a few burros, Mexican families farmed small tracts of land near springs along the narrow creek valleys, and along the Rio Grande. Some were United States citizens, but many grew up south of the Rio Grande in Mexico. Some owned their own land, but others did not have legal rights to the land they occupied. Later-arriving American ranchers leased the land to the Mexicans, who provided fresh vegetables and necessary labor.

In the immediate Castolon area, there were apparently no European Americans until the late 19th century. After the discovery of silver in the Big Bend area, some prospectors (including Santa Elena) came to the area. These prospectors were located about 25 miles north of the Rio Grande. White miners from the Big Bend area, including the most famous, Perry and Cardenas, arrived in the area in the late 1800s. Perry began the Chase Mining Company in the Castolon area. Cardenas, who was apparently no European American until the late 19th century, was a Mexican prospector who worked in the Big Bend area. He and Perry began the Chase Mining Company in the Castolon area. Perry employed a young lawyer, Eugene Cardenas, to give an international status to the area. Cardenas was a Mexican prospector who worked in the Big Bend area. He and Perry began the Chase Mining Company in the Castolon area. Perry employed a young lawyer, Eugene Cardenas, to give an international status to the area. Cardenas was a Mexican prospector who worked in the Big Bend area. He and Perry began the Chase Mining Company in the Castolon area. Perry employed a young lawyer, Eugene Cardenas, to give an international status to the area.

Throughout the early years of settlement in Castolon, the international boundary was more or less ignored by the local people. American cowboys and regular cowboys who were Mexican citizens, and American citizens often visited their friends across the river. La Harmon's Store became an important source of supplies for both American and Mexican families throughout the area. Only after 1920 did the laws of the international border become more carefully enforced. Yet even today there is no staffed port of entry within 75 miles of Castolon, and Mexican citizens from Santa Elena, Mexico, regularly cross the Rio Grande and shop at the Castolon Store (formerly La Harmon's Store), use the telephones, or contact Big Bend National Park rangers for emergency medical help.

## Map 2

### Southern part of the Big Bend.



## Reading 1: Settling the Big Bend

In the late 1800s and early 1900s few families chose to settle in the Big Bend territory. The Comanches and Kiowa attacked passing travelers and the Army could provide little protection. The region boasted few such services as churches and schools and transportation was difficult.

By the 1880s when railroads had been built and conflict between the Indians and the United States declined, American cattlemen began to enter the area. Mexican families who had abandoned the area because of Comanche and Kiowa raids also began to drift back. In addition to tending small herds of goats and a few burros, Mexican families farmed small tracts of land near springs, along the narrow creek valleys, and along the Rio Grande. Some were United States citizens, but many grew up south of the Rio Grande in Mexico. Some owned their own land, but others did not obtain legal rights to the lands they occupied. Later-arriving American ranchers leased the land but did not bother the "squatters," who provided fresh vegetables and necessary labor.

In the immediate Castolon area, there were apparently no European Americans until the late 19th century. After the discovery of cinnabar, the principal ore of mercury, population grew quickly in the Terlingua area about 1894. Settlements developed at Santa Helena (now called Santa Elena), Coyote, Terlingua Abaja, and Molinar. These small communities lay near the river and provided vegetables and hay to the mining towns located about 25 miles north of the Rio Grande. While the mining towns grew to include more than 3,000 people, the river communities remained small.

In 1910, the Mexican Revolution began and lasted for most of the next 10 years. Famous revolutionaries like Pancho Villa attacked communities along the river. Bandits attacked villages and ranches on both sides of the river, robbing settlers of property and sometimes their lives. In 1911, the U.S. Army began establishing camps and mounted patrols to protect remote settlements. The Castolon area welcomed a small detachment of troopers from the 3rd squadron of the 15th Cavalry as they established Camp Santa Helena in 1919. After the Mexican Revolution finally ended in 1920, the need for military patrols declined, and by 1921 the U.S. Army had withdrawn.

Meanwhile, Howard E. Perry began the Chisos Mining Company, one of the most famous enterprises in the Terlingua area. Perry employed a young lawyer named Eugene Cartledge to represent his business interests. In 1918, Perry began a farming and ranching business with Eugene Cartledge's son Wayne and officially registered their partnership with the Brewster County Clerk. The name "La Harmonia Company" was chosen to give an international flavor to the Perry-Cartledge enterprises and to promote the idea of harmony between American and Mexican residents of the area. The Perry-Cartledge enterprises along the lower Big Bend seem to have been the major factor in consolidating the peoples of the area into four related but independent settlements or villages. One of these, Camp Santa Helena, soon thereafter came to be known as Castolon. Its residents included the Cartledge family, the La Harmonia Store manager and his wife, and a dozen or more Mexican and American families, all of whom were employed by the La Harmonia enterprises. Perry and Cartledge received permission from the Army to use the main barracks building at Castolon as a trading post.

Throughout the early years of settlement at Castolon, the international boundary was more or less ignored by the local people. American ranchers regularly hired cowboys who were Mexican citizens, and American citizens often visited their Mexican neighbors across the river. La Harmonia Store became an important source of supplies for American and Mexican families throughout the area. Only after 1920 did the laws of the international border become more carefully enforced. Yet even today there is no staffed port of entry within 75 miles of Castolon, and Mexican citizens from Santa Elena, Mexico, regularly cross the Rio Grande and shop at the Castolon Store (formerly La Harmonia Store), use the telephones, or contact Big Bend National Park rangers for emergency medical help.

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*Excerpted and adapted from Clifford B. Casey, "Castolon," unpublished manuscript, 1967. Research Library, Big Bend National Park.*

## Reading 2: Captain Lafferty's Report

On November 12, 1919, Acting Morale Officer Captain F. R. Lafferty, stationed at Lajitas, Texas, reported that the troops of his command were split into three detachments: Lajitas, Terlingua, and Santa Helena. He went on to say:

There is little opportunity for amusement for these men—there is nothing but a small Mexican settlement at Terlingua, and La Jitas [Lajitas] and nothing at all at Santa Helena. This station is located at a point over one hundred miles from the nearest railroad and the men rarely leave here except under exceptional circumstances.

A football team has been organized between the Infantry and Cavalry detachments here. An effort has been made to enthruse the Infantry in riding but they do not take kindly to the idea of riding.

A camp is being established in the Chisos Mountains about fifty miles from here where it is proposed to send detachments from time to time and allow them to hunt.

An effort has been made to get a moving picture here but none have been shown here for months. One method I have adopted to keep up the spirits of the men is to feed them in the best possible manner, a difficult problem under the present ration system and method of supply; and to have them change stations frequently.

The old non-commissioned officers seem to be contented here but the younger—the recruits— seem to long for a change of environment occasionally.

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*Excerpted from Clifford B. Casey, "Castolon," unpublished manuscript, 1967. Research Library, Big Bend National Park.*

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### Reading 3: Colonel Hornbrook's Recruiting Announcement

Because Castolon was far from the kinds of activities many young soldiers would want for their free time, Colonel Hornbrook wrote a recruiting broadside that he hoped would entice men to enlist. It was printed in February, 1920.

#### **Red Blooded Men Take Notice!**

**Do you ever long for the great outdoors?**

**Does the silent appeal of Nature, as exemplified by rugged mountains, deep canyons, rocky precipices, all equally inspiring get you?**

**Does being in a vast and undeveloped section, 100 miles from the railroad, strike a sympathetic note in your heart?**

**Does the idea of patrolling this historic and history making country where every man is on his own, make your pulse beat a bit faster?**

**Wouldn't you like to be in one of the wildest, least explored sections and the only real frontier of the greatest nation on earth?**

**Is there a man to whom hunting—and the best to be had in the United States at that—camping out for days and cooking your own meals under the bluest sky on earth, with the added zest that at any time the crack of a bandit's rifle may call you to the really serious business of being a soldier, is there a real man I repeat, to whom these things do not appeal?**

**Join the Fifth Cavalry, hunting and fishing par excellence, deer and quail in abundance, rabbits by the thousands, with the added thought that at any moment the tables may be turned and you may be the hunter, hunted.**

**We get hunters in this district from Maine to California. The Government pays you to be here. This is an opportunity for any outdoors man who is a real sure nuff hunter and trapper who wants to see real untrammelled Nature at her best.**

**Join the Fifth Cavalry if you are for really honest-to-God outdoor life and next to nature stuff. We have it and are enjoying every minute of it, and we are calling to any man—and that is every man—whose heart and soul yearns for the riches we have, and who hasn't the necessary riches to enjoy them.**

**The Fifth Cavalry wants real men: men who like to rough it. We need you and you need us and our wonderful Big Bend District with all its vastness, all its wildness, and that added zest of danger that all the men desire. Sign up now while the spirit moves.**

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*Excerpted from Earl H. Elam, "Big Bend Archives: The Big Bend Military District and Colonel James J. Hornbrook's Recruiting Announcement," The Journal of Big Bend Studies, VII, pp. 117-121, January 1990.*

## Reading 4: A Frontier Border Trading Post

When Cartledge and Perry decided to go into the mercantile business in 1918, there had already been at least two small stores in operation in the Castolon area for nearly 20 years. By 1918, however, the rapid development of ranching, mining, and farming in the area had yielded a considerable increase in the population of the lower Big Bend. In addition, the store's location adjacent to a vast region of the northern portions of two Mexican states, isolated from the interior of Mexico, gave it a large clientele from the northern part of Mexico.

La Harmonia Store sold not only merchandise, but also bought furs and candelilla wax, a natural wax derived from a desert plant. The business of dealing in hides, skins and furs continued at a lively pace until about 1940, when the dwindling supply from Mexico made it unprofitable. From 1920 to 1940, especially in the winter months, La Harmonia often looked like an old western fur trading post with hides, skins and furs stacked in every possible nook and corner.

The management at La Harmonia soon learned to stock only those items which had a ready sale with the clientele of the border and the laborers on the farms and ranchers in the southern part of Brewster County. In addition, there was a limited demand from the occasional tourist for items such as blankets, glassware, pottery and other items. The majority of items on display for sale at La Harmonia were things needed by the people of the area. This is a partial list: pocket knives, barb wire, windmills, plows, harnesses, saddles, screwworm medicine, nails, sugar, coffee, meal, beans, salt, crackers, spices, karo [Karo] syrup, sardines, prunes, raisins, American cheese, salve, Quinine capsules, ointment, diarrhea pills, toothache drops, liniments, patent medicines, broad-brimmed hats, shoes (mostly work shoes), shirts, trousers, socks, underwear, lace ribbon, ladies' dresses, mens' suits (sometimes), bridal wreaths and veils, candies, beer, shoelaces, toys, and miscellaneous furniture.

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*Excerpted and adapted from Clifford B. Casey, "Castolon," unpublished manuscript. Research Library, Big Bend National Park.*

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## Photo 1

*La Harmonia store, garage, shop, and water tower, 1955 (Big Bend National Park).*



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## Photo 2

*La Harmonia store, 1961 (Big Bend National Park).*



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## Photo 3

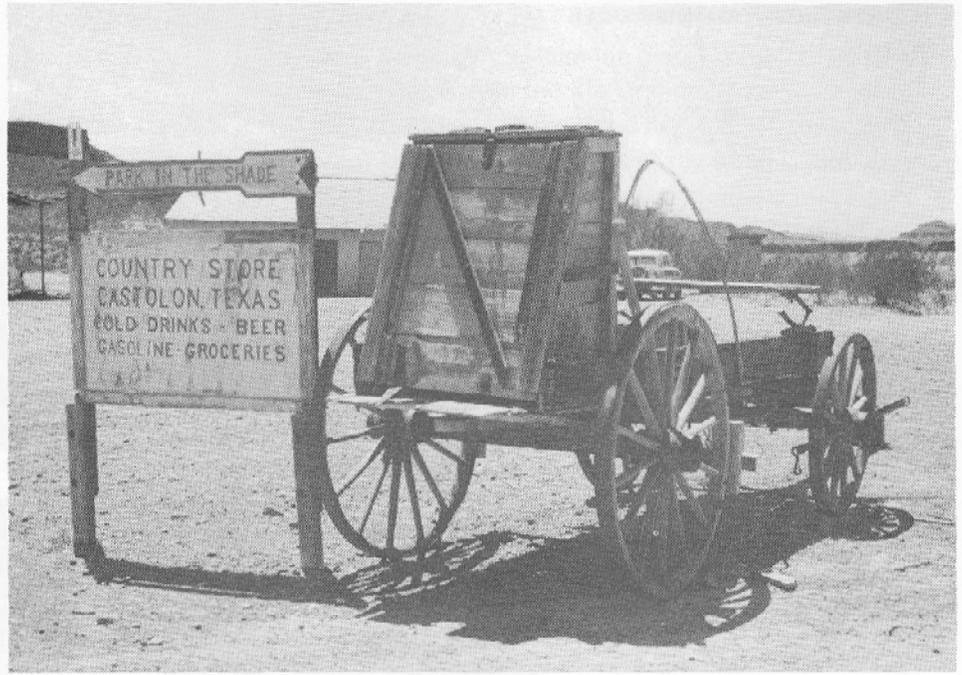
*Old cotton gin at Castolon (Big Bend National Park).*



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## Photo 4

*Old chuck wagon and sign at the Castolon store, 1961 (Big Bend National Park).*



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## Photo 5

*Cerro Castellan, from Castolon (Big Bend National Park).*



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## Photo 6

*Colton fields, with the Sierra Ponce in the background (Big Bend National Park).*

