



Why We Are Here



Congress established Chamizal National Memorial to commemorate the Chamizal Convention (treaty) of 1963. U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Mexican President Adolfo Lopez Mateos met to discuss the “Chamizal Issue,” which had been a sore point between the two nations for 100 years. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established the Rio Grande River as the boundary line between a more than 1,000-mile stretch of the U. S.—Mexico border. One problematic area of this boundary was between the two densely populated communities of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. As time went on, the river gradually, and sometimes suddenly, shifted its course between the two cities leaving families with parts of their property on the other side of the river. As questions of ownership arose, animosity between neighbors grew as well.

During the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy felt it was important to finally settle the dispute in order

to strengthen ties with Mexico. Unfortunately, Kennedy did not live to see the agreement finalized. It was U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson and Mexican President Lopez Mateos who ultimately witnessed the settlement of the Chamizal dispute. As agreed upon in the treaty, both countries shared the cost of cementing the river bed and building ports of entry within the major populated areas of both cities. Each nation also acquired a portion of Mexico’s Cordova Island. In addition, the U.S. ceded the Chamizal Tract—437 acres of south El Paso that had originally belonged to Mexico after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

While the Chamizal treaty was celebrated as a huge success of political diplomacy, many people were upset by its terms. Over 5,000 U.S. citizens were removed from their homes and businesses so the land could be given back to Mexico. In addition, Mexican business and home owners had to relinquish their claims on Cordova Island.

While many individuals were personally affected by the terms

of the agreement, the citizens of both countries benefited from peacefully settling the 100-year dispute. On Cordova Island, Mexico established Parque Chamizal, built several government buildings, schools and established an archeological museum. The U.S. constructed a highway running alongside the border, a high school, and established Chamizal National Memorial to serve as a symbol of what can be accomplished when two entities come together to discuss their differences and peacefully settle a dispute.

Today, Chamizal National Memorial serves as a cultural center where people from all backgrounds can experience the shared wealth of diverse cultural groups living within the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez borderland community. Through the use of the visual and performing arts, and education programs, the memorial promotes cultural awareness, and preserves the sentiments behind the treaty that made the peaceful resolution a reality.

U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson and Mexican President Adolfo Lopez Mateos unveil the new boundary marker signaling the peaceful resolution of the Chamizal dispute.