

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Filipino Texans

Most of the Filipinos in Texas are comparatively recent arrivals. Strong economic and political ties with the Spanish empire from the 16th to the 19th centuries brought few known individuals to the Americas, but United States control in the early 20th century was responsible for Filipino settlement in every metropolitan area in the state.

Considering the Spanish trade with the Philippines—the Manila galleons operated between Acapulco and Manila from 1565 to 1815—travelers from the islands may have been in Mexico after the mid-16th century.

The first Filipino known by name in Texas arrived in 1822. Francisco Flores from Cebu, a cabin boy on a freighter, decided to make Port Isabel his home. Some time later he owned a fishing business with two schooners. At 40 Flores married Augustina Gonzales and moved the family and business to Rockport. He witnessed a long span of Texas history, dying in 1917 at the age of 108.

The Spanish-American War, at the end of the century, was responsible for the first substantial entry of Filipinos to Texas. The United States, acquiring the Philippines from Spain by military conquest—and for a payment of \$20 million for Spanish improvements—maintained a substantial number of servicemen in the islands. Military rule lasted until 1907, after which a civil government was instituted. A large number of Filipinos were hired as servants, mainly by military officers, and when the servicemen returned to the United States, some employees followed. Many came to San Antonio, which has always been a military city.

A few Filipinos who had moved to other parts of the United States chose Texas as a home because of the climate.

During World War II, many Filipino men joined the United States armed forces. At the independence of the islands, granted by the U.S. in 1946, these men could become citizens because of their service. Many did, some continuing their military careers. And



Filipino dance group at the Texas Folklife Festival, San Antonio

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language was never a problem. Filipino and English were official languages, and Spanish was still present in the homeland.

After 1945 the United States became attractive to Filipino professionals: doctors, engineers, nurses, bankers, architects, accountants, pharmacists... Some Texas locations were favorable for those entering with work visas. Other arrivals to Texas were second-generation, born in the United States.

Houston became home to about 2,000 Filipino nurses, San Antonio to somewhat fewer. Today, some 58,000 Filipinos live in Texas. Until the last three decades, most were foreign-born. These are urban settlers who are succeeding in preserving a significant number of Filipino customs.