

The Bandera PROPHECT

July 18, 2024

Today in Texas History

On this day in 1972, the state of Texas, the city of Laredo, and St. Mary's University agreed on a tentative settlement that gave the state title and ownership of the Spanish Archives of Laredo, but allowed the university to retain possession of the collection. The Laredo Archives, as they were commonly known, cover a period from 1749 to 1872, and consist of 3,452 handwritten official documents totaling 13,343 pages.

For many years, the collection was stored in the basement of the old county courthouse in Laredo. The archives were neglected and began to deteriorate from exposure to fire, flooding and dampness. In 1934, an order was given to destroy the papers, but Sebron S. Wilcox rescued the archives and began restoring them.

After Wilcox died in 1959, his family donated the archives to St. Mary's University in San Antonio, but later demanded that the university compensate them for the archives. In 1971, the state obtained a temporary restraining order to prohibit either the Wilcox family or St. Mary's University from selling or otherwise disposing of the collection. At the same time, the state also petitioned for custody of the archives on the grounds that as the successor to the Mexican government, the state of Texas had a legal right to all official papers held by the Spanish and Mexican governments of Laredo.

In 1979, a court ruling held that St. Mary's had lawfully acquired the Laredo Archives and further decreed that all parties must abide by the terms of the 1972 settlement.