

The Alamo Mission originally known as the Misión San Antonio de Valero, is a historic Spanish mission and fortress compound founded in the 18th century by Roman Catholic missionaries in what is now San Antonio, Texas. It was the site of the Battle of the Alamo in 1836, where American folk heroes James Bowie and Davy Crockett died. Today it is a museum in the Alamo Plaza Historic District and a part of the San Antonio Missions World Heritage Site. In 1716, the Spanish government established several Roman Catholic missions in East Texas. The isolation of the missions—the nearest Spanish settlement, San Juan Bautista, Coahuila was over 400 miles away—made it difficult to keep them adequately provisioned. To assist the missionaries, the new governor of Spanish Texas, Martín de Alarcón, wished to establish a waystation between the settlements along the Rio Grande and the new missions in East Texas. In April 1718, Alarcón led an expedition to found a new community in Texas. The group erected a temporary mud, brush, and straw structure near the headwaters of the San Antonio River. The mission was located near a community of Coahuiltecan and was initially populated by three to five Indian converts from Mission San Francisco Solano near San Juan Bautista. Close by the first civilian community in Texas was founded, San Antonio de Bxar, which later developed into the present-day city of San Antonio, Texas. Within a year, the mission moved to the western bank of the river, where it was less likely to flood. Over the next several years, a chain of missions were established nearby. In 1724, after remnants of a Gulf Coast hurricane destroyed the existing structures at Misión San Antonio de Valero, the mission was moved to its current location.

Over the next several decades, the mission complex expanded to cover 3 acres. The first permanent building was likely the two-story, L-shaped stone residence for the priests. The building served as parts of the west and south edges of an inner courtyard. A series of adobe barracks buildings were constructed to house the mission Indians and a textile workshop was erected. By 1744, over 300 Indian converts resided at San Antonio de Valero. The mission was largely self-sufficient, relying on its 2,000 head of cattle and 1,300 sheep for food and clothing. Each year, the mission's farmland produced up to 2,000 bushels of corn and 100 bushels of beans; cotton was also grown. The first stones were laid for a more permanent church building in 1744, however, the church, its tower, and the sacristy collapsed in the late 1750s. Reconstruction began in 1758, with the new chapel located at the south end of the inner courtyard. Constructed of 4-foot thick limestone blocks, it was intended to be three stories high and topped by a dome, with bell towers on either side. Its shape was a traditional cross, with a long nave and short transepts. Although the first two levels were completed, the bell towers and third story were never begun. While four stone arches were erected to support the planned dome, the dome itself was never built and the church was never completed. As the nearby presidio was perpetually understaffed, the mission was built to withstand attacks by Apache and Comanche raiders. In 1745, 100 mission Indians successfully drove off a band of 300 Apaches which had surrounded the presidio. Their actions saved the presidio, the mission, and likely the town from destruction. Walls were erected around the Indian homes in 1758, likely in response to a massacre at the Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá. The convent and church were not fully enclosed within the 8-foot high walls. For additional protection, a turret housing three cannons was added near the main gate in 1762. By 1793, an additional one-pounder cannon had been placed on a rampart near the convent. The population of Indians fluctuated from a high of 328 in 1756 to a low of 44 in 1777. The new commandant general of the interior provinces, Teodoro de Croix, thought the missions were a liability and began taking actions to decrease their influence. In 1778, he ruled that all unbranded cattle belonged to the government. Raiding Apache tribes had stolen most of the mission's horses, making it difficult to round up and brand the cattle. As a result, when the ruling took effect, the mission lost a great deal of its wealth and was unable to support a larger population of converts. By 1793, only 12 Indians remained. By this point, few of the hunting and gathering tribes in Texas had not been Christianized. In 1793, Misión San Antonio de Valero was secularized.

Shortly after, the mission was abandoned. Ten years later, it became a fortress housing the Second Flying Company of San Carlos de Parras military unit, who likely gave the mission the name Alamo. During the Texas Revolution in 1835, the fort was surrendered to the Texian Army following the Siege of Bxar. A relatively small number of Texian soldiers then occupied the compound for several months. The defenders were wiped out at the Battle of the Alamo on March 6, 1836. As the Mexican Army retreated from Texas several months later, they tore down many of the Alamo walls and burned some of the buildings. For the next five years, the Alamo was periodically used to garrison soldiers, both Texian and Mexican, but was ultimately abandoned. In 1849, several years after Texas was annexed to the United States, the U.S. Army began renting the facility for use as a quartermaster's depot, before again abandoning the mission in 1876 after nearby Fort Sam Houston was established. The Alamo chapel was sold to the state of Texas, which conducted occasional tours but made no effort to restore it. The remaining buildings were sold to a mercantile company that operated them as a wholesale grocery store. The Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) formed in 1891 and began trying to preserve the Alamo. Adina Emilia De Zavala and Clara Driscoll successfully convinced the state legislature in 1905 to purchase the remaining buildings and to name the DRT as the permanent custodian of the site. Over the next century, periodic attempts were made to transfer control of the Alamo from the DRT. In early 2015, Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush officially moved control of the Alamo to the Texas General Land Office. The Alamo and the four missions in the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site on July 5, 2015.

