Life in Laredo

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The town of San Agustín de Laredo belongs to the State of Tamaulipas in the Mexican federation. It was founded the 25th of August, 1755 and in the twelfth year of its existence it was given the land for six leagues around it from the center in all directions, recognizing at the same time as its jurisdictional limit the open territory of some 20 leagues: to the North, up to the Nueces river; to the south, along the banks of the Rio Grande to the 75 sections granted to the deceased Citizen José Vásquez Borrego who at the time had three thriving ranches which today are deserted because of the devastation of the War. It [Laredo] is located on the north bank of the Rio Grande, distant from the capital to the south by some 150 leagues, and from the closest town Ciudad Guerrero, also to the south, by some 20 leagues. Going southwest it is 30 leagues to the town of Vallecillo; to the west there are 35 leagues to Lampasos in the state of Nuevo León. To the northwest it is 40 leagues to the town of Guerrero in the state of Coahuila. Going north-northwest Béxar is 80 leagues away. The climate is hot and dry. The prevailing winds are from the north and east. The former begin regularly in the month of October and end in the month of March. When storms come during these months the river floods. Early sowing on the river flats begins in the month of February and crops
result with little moisture. From May on the rains come and the late sowing takes place. When the midsummer isn’t too dry, crops result. The land around this town is especially good for raising all kinds of animals, but neither this nor the sowing of crops has been very extensive for lack of laborers, and particularly because of the constant hostility of the barbarians to the north. The only plants which are cultivated with great difficulty are corn, beans and seasonal fruits due to lack of irrigation water everywhere. Wood for making things has to be brought from the State of Coahuila more than 60 leagues away since there is nothing here but mesquite and willows along the banks of the river. Physically speaking the inhabitants are robust and healthy. The average height is five feet. Most of them are white-skinned. The ordinary diet is corn and meat. They are occupied in military service and as cowboys, muleteers, and field laborers. The infirmities are pleurisy and especially wounds from guns, lances, and arrows caused by the Comanches which happens because they are not pursued or fought against until they are exterminated. The dwellings are of adobe and mostly thatched huts. This town has two plazas, the main one and the military one, each one hundred varas square, not counting the streets. There is a Mayor with two Aldermen, a Solicitor and an ecclesiastic who has the parish as a benefice. The wealth or subsistence of these inhabitants consists in a little income from being middlemen and muleteers for the convoys which bring victuals both for here and for Bexar, and some raising of animals of all kinds which still does not supply enough. The consumption of this town in regard to cattle is about 365 beeves, and of smaller animals, 1,000 head. We consume 700 g.s of flour and about 6,500 fanegas of corn.

ENDNOTES

1. F 33, D 1-2.
2. F 64, D 22.
3. F 74, D 19.
4. Emilio Martínez Amador’s Standard Spanish Dictionary, 1584, says a
fanega is 1.60 bushels. J. V. Haggard’s *Handbook for Translators of Spanish Historical Documents*, 76, states that a fanega in Mexico is 2.57 bushels.

5. F 83, D 186. The writer is probably confusing the dates of foundation and of official approbation by the viceroy, which was in August of the following year. In the Visit of 1757, Sánchez clearly states that the foundation was in May. Other documentation further clarifies that it was May 15, specifically. AGN, Historia, Vol. 5A, 210b. “Esta pequeña población se formó en 15 de mayo de 1755.”

6. A vara equals 2.78 feet.

7. The consumption of flour is not clear. The abbreviation g.s. should mean grams, but 700 grams of flour would be only twenty-five pounds. With 2,000 people in Laredo at this time, this would almost have to be per person, or at best per family, but all the other figures are totals for everyone.