



*Stephen F. Austin favored United States annexation of Texas, but he died before the task was accomplished.*

Americans had applauded the independence movements in Latin America. Some had even volunteered to help the Mexicans achieve freedom, joining expeditions into Texas to fight the Spaniards. However, some of these volunteers aimed to detach Texas politically from Mexico and establish an independent republic. The dust had hardly settled on the latest effort to do that—led by a Dr. James Long—when Moses Austin arrived in San Antonio.

**A** Plan for Colonization. The Spanish response to these expeditions and their participants was harsh. After defeating the invaders, Spanish authorities executed or drove from Texas every American they could find. By 1820, that vast region was inhabited by about 30,000 Indians and fewer than 4,000 whites.

From the white point of view, Texas needed people, and that is what Moses Austin planned to provide.

However, Governor Martínez' order prevented Austin from even mentioning his proposal. Glumly, Austin left the governor's office to prepare for the long journey back to Missouri. At that point, he happened to run into an old friend he had known in Louisiana—Felipe Enrique Neri, called the Baron de Bastrop—who had influence with the governor.

Neri arranged for Austin to meet with Martínez again, and together they persuaded the governor that American colonization would benefit Spain. The Spanish were sold on two ideas. One was that colonists would be a buffer against the Indians. The second was that the immigrants, being landowners and slaveholders, would not be revolutionaries but rather law-abiding citizens with a stake in discouraging change. The governor recommended Austin's plan to higher authorities, and they agreed.

In January 1821, with a grant of Texas land and permission to settle 300 immigrant families on it, Moses Austin began his return journey to Missouri. The journey home was even rougher than the outbound trip had been, and by the time he reached his destination he was exhausted. Soon after arriving home, Austin died, never to see his colonization plan reach fruition. However, his son, Stephen, aged 28, knew the plan well. A college graduate who had served in the Missouri territorial legislature, Stephen Austin was becoming as astute a businessman as his father had been. Along with his father's Texas land grant, Stephen Austin got the task of carrying out the region's colonization.

**T**he First Immigrants. By this time, Mexico had achieved independence from Spain. Texas became a Mexican—rather than a Spanish—province, and the colonial capital of Mexico City became the seat of government.



Given a choice of land, Stephen Austin selected a region between the Colorado and Brazos rivers. It was an area of fertile soil, well-watered and timbered. Each farming family would be entitled to 177 acres (72 hectares), while those planning to establish ranches were allowed 4,428 acres (1,792 hectares). To get the maximum amount of land, many immigrants who actually planned to grow cotton said they intended to raise cattle. Land was initially priced at 12¼ cents per acre (0.4 hectare), but many settlers got it for less.

Austin had no trouble finding candidates for immigration, for word of mouth had preceded the advertisements he placed in newspapers. Most of the new immigrants came from Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, and Missouri. At the time, the United States government was selling land for \$1.25 per acre—and much of it was not nearly as fertile as the land that Austin controlled. Austin screened the applicants carefully, weeding out frontiersmen whose main occupation was hunting, as well as known drunkards, gamblers, “profane swearers,” and those with reputations as idlers.

Once the agreed-upon 300 families had been settled in Texas, Austin applied for, and received, additional land grants. By 1835, he had increased the population of Texas by 1,500 families.

Austin had the power to name his own local government officials. His settlers were exempt from paying taxes for six years and also from paying tithes to the Roman Catholic Church of Mexico. The immigrants’ main obligation, as far as Mexican authorities were concerned, was to defend the northern part of the nation.

Individuals besides Austin also received land grants and permission to bring immigrants to Texas, and by 1830, the American population there amounted to about 20,000. That was five times the number of Spanish-speaking inhabitants.

**C**ultural Differences. During those early years, officials in Mexico City paid little attention to the Texas settlements 1,200 miles (1,930 kilometers) to the north. There was practically no Texan trade with Mexico,

*Cowboys got their start in Texas. Many Mexican cowboys remained in Texas after it declared its independence from Mexico in 1836.*

