

Texas Personalities

Stephen F. Austin

Austin was born in the lead mining regions of southwestern Virginia to Moses and Maria Austin. His father Moses travelled to San Antonio and gained a grant of land in the Spanish territory of Texas, with the intention of settling U.S. families in Mexico. Austin was reluctant to join the Texas venture, but he obtained a loan to help support his father's venture. He was at Natchitoches, Louisiana in 1821 when he learned of his father's death. He traveled to San Antonio with the intent of reauthorizing his father's grant, arriving in August 1821. The grant was reauthorized by Governor Antonio María Martínez, who allowed Austin to explore the Gulf Coast between San Antonio and the Brazos River in order to find a suitable location for a colony. Stephen Austin advertised and in 1821 the first U.S. colonists crossed into the granted territory .

Austin's plan for a colony was thrown into turmoil by the independence of Mexico from Spain in 1821. By late 1825, Austin had brought the first 300 families, now known in Texas history as the "Old 300", to the grant. Austin had obtained further contracts to settle an additional 900 families between 1825 and 1829. He had effective civil and military authority over the settlers, but he was quick to introduce a semblance of American law - the Constitution of Coahuila and Texas was agreed on in November 1827. The Mexican government had attempted to stop further US immigration as early as April 1830, but again the skills of Austin had gained an exemption for his colonies.

Austin travelled to Mexico City and he did gain certain important reforms, but not a state government. Austin was arrested in January 1834 and charged with insurrection; he was not tried and was finally released, returning to Texas in August 1835. In his absence the colonists had not softened their stance; war began in October at Gonzales. Austin was appointed commissioner to the US by the provisional government.

He stood for election in the newly independent Republic of Texas in September 1836 and was defeated. He was made Secretary of State, but soon fell ill and died. There are many places in Texas named after Austin.[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_F._Austin][caricature by Texas cartoon-ist Richard Bartholomew courtesy of <http://>

