

## 15.4 Texas

There was a reason many Americans felt that Texas was so valuable. Much of this region was well suited for growing cotton, the South's most valuable cash crop, and many southerners hoped that one day it would become part of the United States.

**Americans Come to Texas** The Texas tale begins with Moses Austin, a banker and businessman who dreamed of starting an American colony in Spanish Texas. In 1821, Spanish officials granted Austin a huge tract of land. When Moses died suddenly that year, his son Stephen took over his father's dream.

Stephen arrived in Texas just as Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Now Texas was a part of Mexico. Mexican officials agreed to let Austin start his colony—under certain conditions. Austin had to choose only moral and hardworking settlers. The settlers had to promise to become Mexican citizens and to join the Catholic Church.

Austin agreed to the Mexican terms. By 1827, he had attracted 297 families—soon known as the “Old Three Hundred”—to Texas.

**Rising Tensions** The success of Austin's colony started a rush of settlers to Texas. By 1830, there were about 25,000 Americans in Texas, compared to 4,000 Tejanos, or Texans of Mexican descent. Soon tensions between the two groups began to rise.

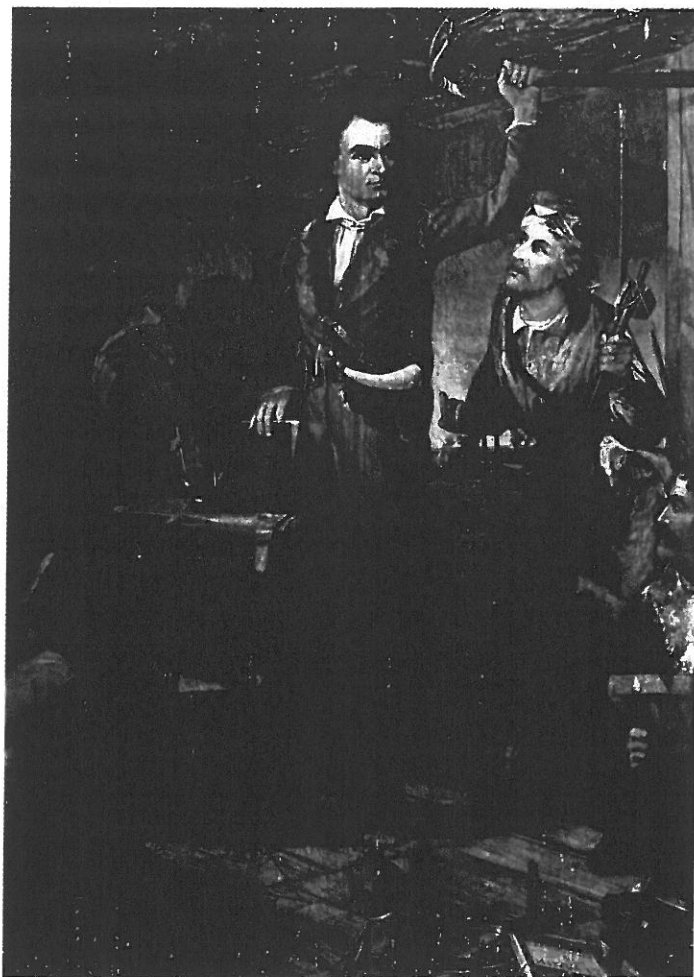
The Americans had several complaints. They were used to governing themselves, and they resented taking orders from Mexican officials. They were unhappy that all official documents had to be in Spanish, a language most of them were unwilling to learn. In addition, many were slaveholders who were upset when Mexico outlawed slavery in 1829.

The Tejanos had their own complaints. They were unhappy that many American settlers had come to Texas illegally. Worse, most of these new immigrants showed little respect for Mexican culture and had no intention of becoming citizens.

The Mexican government responded by closing Texas to further American immigration. The government sent troops to Texas to assert its authority and enforce the immigration laws.

**The Texans Rebel** Americans in Texas resented these actions. Hotheads, led by a young lawyer named William Travis, began calling for revolution. Cooler heads, led by Stephen Austin, asked the Mexican government to reopen Texas to immigration and to make it a separate Mexican state. That way, Texans could run their own affairs.

Stephen Austin made his father's dream a reality when he founded a colony in Texas in 1822. In this painting, we see a young and charismatic Austin talking with a group of Anglo American settlers about the rules Mexico required them to live by.



In 1833, Austin traveled to Mexico and presented the Texans' demands to the new head of the Mexican government, General Antonio López de Santa Anna. The general was a power-hungry dictator who once boasted, "If I were God, I would wish to be more." Rather than bargain with Austin, Santa Anna tossed him in jail for promoting rebellion.

Soon after Austin was released in 1835, Texans rose up in revolt. Determined to crush the rebels, Santa Anna marched north with approximately 6,000 troops.

**The Alamo** In late February 1836, a large part of Santa Anna's army reached San Antonio, Texas. The town was defended by about 180 Texan volunteers, including eight Tejanos. The Texans had taken over an old mission known as the Alamo. Among them was Davy Crockett, the famous frontiersman and former congressman from Tennessee. Sharing command with William Travis was James Bowie, a well-known Texas "freedom fighter."

Fewer than 200 Texans fought 4,000 Mexican troops at the Alamo. When the battle was over, they were all dead—including James Bowie and the fabled frontiersman Davy Crockett.

The Alamo's defenders watched as General Santa Anna raised a black flag that meant "Expect no mercy." The general demanded that the Texans surrender. Travis answered with a cannon shot.

Slowly, Santa Anna's troops began surrounding the Alamo. The Texans were outnumbered by at least ten to one, but only one man fled.



Meanwhile, Travis sent messengers to other towns in Texas, pleading for reinforcements and vowing not to abandon the Alamo. "Victory or death!" he proclaimed. But reinforcements never came.

For 12 days, the Mexicans pounded the Alamo with cannonballs. Then, at the first light of dawn on March 6, Santa Anna gave the order to storm the fort. Desperately, the Texans tried to stave off the attackers with a hailstorm of rifle fire.

For 90 minutes the battle raged. Then it was all over. By day's end, every one of the Alamo's defenders was dead. By Santa Anna's order, those who had survived the battle were executed on the spot.

Santa Anna described the fight for the Alamo as "but a small affair." But his decision to kill every man at the Alamo filled Texans with rage. It was a rage that cried out for revenge.

**Texas Wins Its Independence** Sam Houston, the commander of the Texas revolutionary army, understood Texans' rage. But as Santa Anna pushed on, Houston's only hope was to retreat eastward. By luring Santa Anna deeper into Texas, he hoped to make it harder for the general to supply his army and keep it battle-ready.

Houston's strategy wasn't popular, but it worked brilliantly. In April, Santa Anna caught up with Houston near the San Jacinto River. Expecting the Texans to attack at dawn, the general kept his troops awake all night. When no attack came, the weary Mexicans relaxed. Santa Anna went to his tent to take a nap.

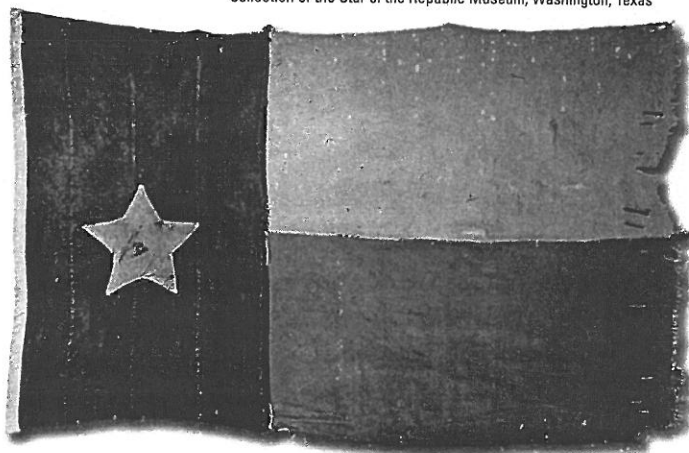
Late that afternoon, Houston's troops staged a surprise attack. Yelling "Remember the Alamo!" the Texans overran the Mexican camp. Santa Anna fled, but he was captured the next day. In exchange for his freedom, he ordered all his remaining troops out of Texas. Texans had won their independence. Still, Mexico did not fully accept the loss of Texas.

**To Annex Texas or Not?** Now an independent country, Texas became known as the Lone Star Republic because of the single star on its flag. But most Texans were Americans who wanted Texas to become part of the United States.

Despite their wishes, Texas remained independent for ten years. People in the United States were divided over whether to **annex** Texas. Southerners were eager to add another slave state. Northerners who opposed slavery wanted to keep Texas out.

Others feared that annexation would lead to war with Mexico. The 1844 presidential campaign was influenced by the question of whether to expand U.S. territory. One of the candidates, Henry Clay, warned, "Annexation and war with Mexico are identical." His opponent, James K. Polk, however, was a strong believer in Manifest Destiny. He was eager to acquire Texas. After Polk was elected, Congress voted to annex Texas. In 1845, Texas was admitted as the 28th state.

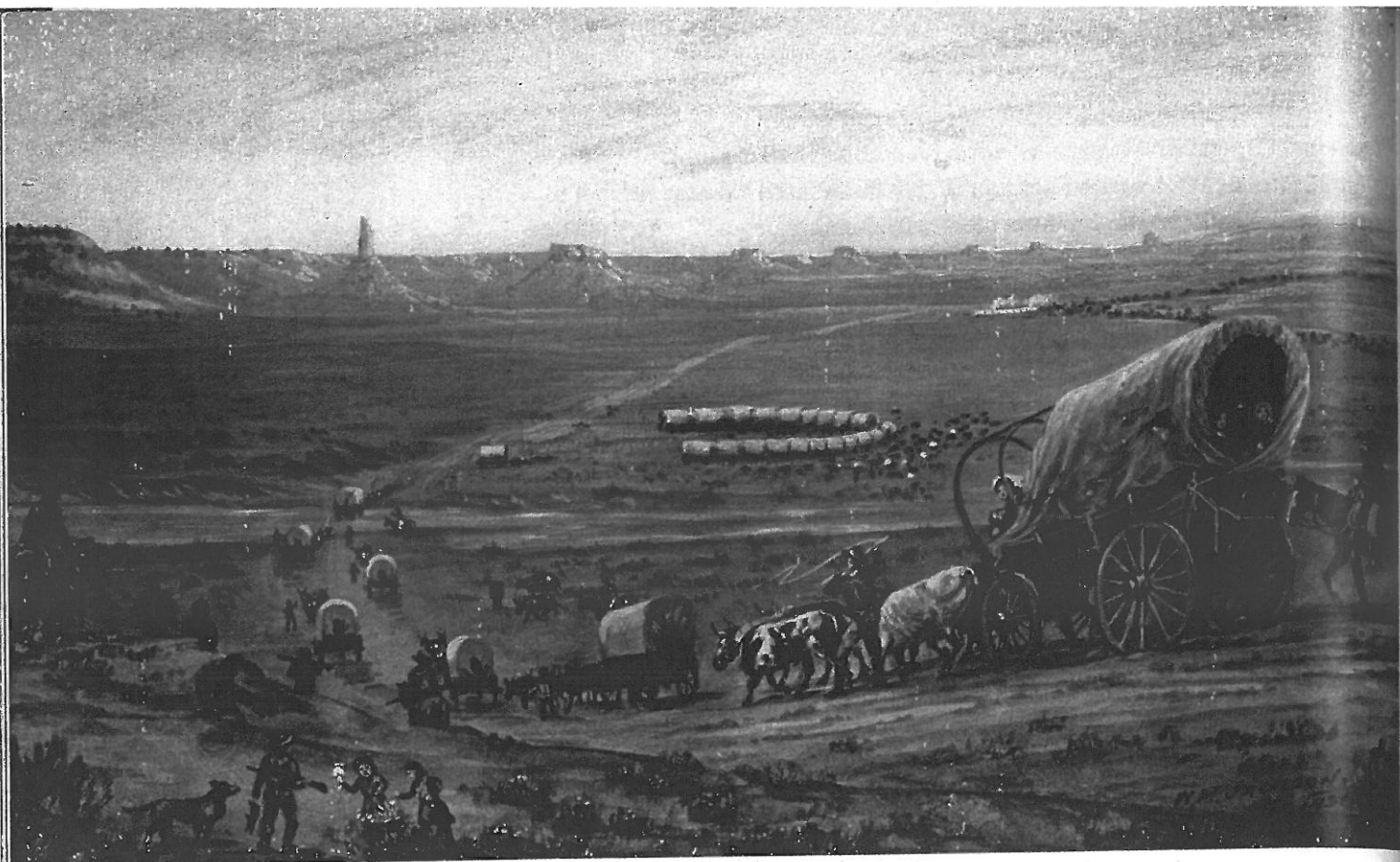
Collection of the Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas



The flag of the Lone Star Republic. Sam Houston was elected the first president of the independent country of Texas in 1836. In 1845, Texas was admitted to the United States. Today, Texas is known as the Lone Star State. This is the only known official Lone Star flag of the Republic of Texas of the period 1836-1846.

**annex** To add a territory to a country. Such an addition is called an *annexation*.





In the 1800s, wagon trains like the one depicted in this William Henry Jackson painting transported thousands of American families from established eastern settlements to the rugged West. This wagon train is winding its way across Nebraska toward Oregon Country.

## 15.5 Oregon Country

**F**ar to the northwest of Texas lay Oregon Country. This enormous, tree-covered wilderness stretched from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. To the north, Oregon was bounded by Russian Alaska. To the south, it was bordered by Spanish California and New Mexico.

In 1819, Oregon was claimed by four nations—Russia, Spain, Great Britain, and the United States. Spain was the first to drop out of the scramble. As part of the treaty to purchase Florida, Spain gave up its claim to Oregon. A few years later, Russia also dropped out. By 1825, Russia agreed to limit its claim to the territory that lay north of the 54°40' parallel of latitude. Today that line marks the southern border of Alaska.

That left Britain and the United States. For the time being, the two nations agreed to a peaceful “joint occupation” of Oregon.

**Discovering Oregon** America’s claim to Oregon was based on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Between 1804 and 1806, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had led a small band of explorers to the Oregon coast. You will read more about their epic adventure in the next chapter.

Lewis thought that many more Americans would follow the path blazed by the expedition. “In the course of 10 or 12 years,” he predicted in 1806, “a tour across the continent by this route will be undertaken with as little concern as a voyage across the Atlantic.”

That was wishful thinking. The route that Lewis and Clark had followed was far too rugged for ordinary travelers. There had to be a better way.

In 1824, a young fur trapper named Jedediah Smith found that better way. Smith discovered a passage through the Rocky Mountains called

South Pass. Unlike the high, steep passes used by Lewis and Clark, South Pass was low and flat enough for wagons to use in crossing the Rockies. Now the way was open for settlers to seek their fortunes in Oregon.

**Oregon Fever** The first American settlers to travel through South Pass to Oregon were missionaries. These earnest preachers made few converts among Oregon's Indians. However, their glowing reports of Oregon's fertile soil and towering forests soon attracted more settlers.

These early settlers wrote letters home describing Oregon as a "pioneer's paradise." The weather was always sunny, they claimed. Disease was unknown. Trees grew as thick as hairs on a dog's back. And farms were free for the taking. One joker even claimed that "pigs are running about under the great acorn trees, round and fat, and already cooked, with knives and forks sticking in them so you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry."

These reports inspired other settlers who were looking for a fresh start. In 1843, about 1,000 pioneers packed their belongings into covered wagons and headed for Oregon. A year later, nearly twice as many people made the long journey across the plains and mountains. "The Oregon Fever has broke out," stated a Boston newspaper, "and is now raging."

**All of Oregon or Half?** Along with Texas, "Oregon fever" also played a role in the 1844 presidential campaign. Polk won the election with stirring slogans such as "All of Oregon or none!" and "Fifty-four forty or fight!" Polk promised that he would not rest until the United States had annexed all of Oregon Country.

But Polk didn't want Oregon enough to risk starting a war with Britain. Instead, he agreed to a compromise treaty that divided Oregon roughly in half at the 49th parallel. That line now marks the western border between the United States and Canada.

The Senate debate over the Oregon treaty was fierce. Senators from the South and the East strongly favored the treaty. They saw no reason to go to war over worse than useless territory on the coast of the Pacific." Senators from the West opposed the treaty. They wanted to hold out for all of Oregon. On June 18, 1846, the Senate ratified the compromise treaty by a vote of 41 to 14.

Polk got neither "fifty-four forty" nor a fight. What he got was even better: a diplomatic settlement that both the United States and Great Britain could accept without spilling a drop of blood.

**converts** people who accept a new religion

Settlers who braved the 2,000 mile trek from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon Country were rewarded by fertile land in the Willamette Valley.

