

10 Texas: Tempting and Beautiful

The name Texas comes from an Indian word, *texía*, for “friends” or “allies.” It was the word a group of Indian tribes used to describe themselves. The Spanish turned it into *téjas* (TAY-huss), and the Anglos (English-speakers) said Texas.

Stephen Austin and his settlers didn’t just barge into Texas. Austin’s father, Moses, a Connecticut Yankee, had made a colonization agreement with the Spanish government shortly before he died. His son got the agreement renewed, so he thought he had a right to be there. By 1824, 300 settlers had joined him.



Stephen Austin wanted to encourage American settlers in Texas, so he got a law passed that allowed people to bring in slaves.

Texas was tempting. All that land... land that seemed made just to grow cotton. That Texas land was part of Mexico and controlled by Spain. It had been so since the 16th century, when Spanish explorers—de Soto, Cabeza de Vaca, Fray Marcos, Estebán, and Coronado—searched for gold and seven fabled cities of Cibola.

Those seven cities turned out to be imaginary. But the invaders carried some things with them that were real—although no one then could even imagine them. They were germs; germs that killed most of the Native American population. So, in the early 19th century, the vast land of Texas was almost empty of people.

Perhaps 30,000 Indians lived there, and a few thousand Spanish Mexicans. (Thirty thousand may sound like a lot of people, but not in Texas. A 20th-century sports stadium—the Houston Astrodome—holds 54,816 people.) The Spaniards had built missions in Texas where priests lived, farmed, and attempted to convert Indians to Christianity. Soldiers lived in *presidios*, which is the Spanish word for forts. The presidios protected the missions. Some Mexicans were ranchers and lived on *haciendas*, which were ranch plantations where cattle and crops were raised. Spanish-speaking cowboys were called *vaqueros*.

Spain had hoped that some of its citizens would settle in Texas—as European settlers settled in the United States—but not many did. There was no gold in Texas, and no political or religious freedom. In the Spanish colonies everyone was expected to be Catholic.

That didn’t bother Stephen Austin. In 1821 he led some settlers to Texas from Missouri. The settlers said they would become good



Mexican citizens and Catholics. That same year, Mexico rebelled against Spanish rule and became independent. Three years later, in 1824, the Mexicans approved a fine constitution and formed a republic. Unfortunately, there was no tradition of self-government in the Spanish colonies (as there had been in the English colonies). The people weren't used to running things themselves. That made it easy for strong, ambitious people to take power, and soon a dictator named Antonio López de Santa Anna took over. Santa Anna ignored many of the freedoms the constitution had promised.

Other people from the United States began settling in Texas. Some of them didn't want to be Mexican citizens. Some of them didn't want to become Catholics. They wanted schools and freedom of religion. They wanted to build towns and to run those towns themselves. Some brought slaves—which was against Mexican law. Some didn't want to share the land with Indians. Some even bragged about killing Indians.

By 1830, there were more English-speaking Americans in Texas than Mexicans. Santa Anna said no more Americans would be allowed to settle in Texas. That didn't stop them. People from the States crossed the border illegally and settled in Mexican territory. They demanded the rights of the Mexican Constitution of 1824. The issues and conflicts were complicated. You can see there would soon be trouble.

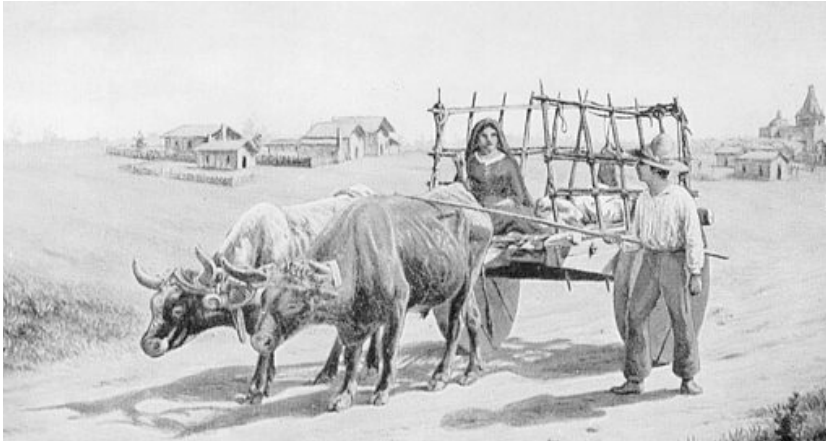
Then in December of 1835, some Texas rebels attacked San Antonio.

The cattle that *vaqueros* (above, with their horses) tended weren't bred for beef; until railroad cars were refrigerated no meat could be sent long distances. So their cattle were used for tallow (fat for candles) and for their hides—leather.



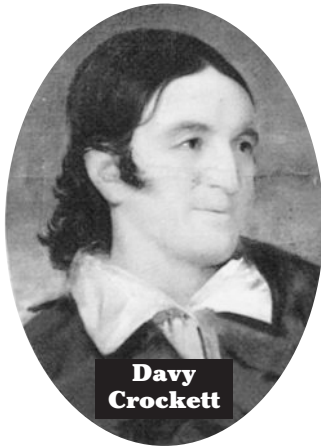
General Antonio López de Santa Anna saw himself as “the Napoleon of the West.”

A HISTORY OF US



An oxcart outside San Antonio in old Mexican Texas.

Alamo means “poplar” in Spanish. A grove of poplar trees grew near the mission.



Davy Crockett

March 5: Pop, pop, pop! Boom, boom, boom! throughout the day. No time for memorandums now. Go ahead! Liberty and independence forever!

—DAVY CROCKETT

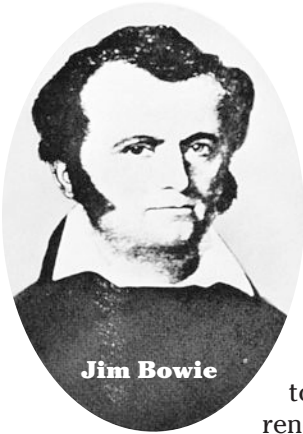
“We went through the old adobe and picket houses of the Mexicans, using battering rams made of logs ten or twelve feet long.... How the women and children would yell when we knocked holes in the walls through which we passed,” wrote one rebel. Other Texans occupied the garrisons of San Patricio and Goliad. The Mexicans were not about to sit back and do

nothing. In 1836, Santa Anna marched toward Texas with a big army. He was determined to rout the *anglos* (the English-speaking Americans), some of whom ran back to the United States. But those who stayed gathered in the chapel of an old, walled San Antonio mission named the *Alamo*. They intended to fight. There weren’t even 200 of them, but they included Davy Crockett, William Travis, and Jim Bowie.

Crockett had a rifle he called “Old Betsy.” He said Old Betsy had killed 105 bears in one season, and maybe that was true. Crockett was a great storyteller. He said it was his storytelling ability, not his speechmaking skills, that got him elected when he decided to go into politics.

The thought of having to make a speech made my knees feel mighty weak, and set my heart to fluttering almost as bad as my first love-scrape. But as good luck would have it, those big candidates spoke nearly all day, and when they quit, the people were worn out with fatigue, which afforded me a good apology for not discussing the government. But I listened mighty close to them and was learning pretty fast about political matters. When they were all done, I got up and told some laughable story and quit. I found I was safe in those parts, and so I went home and I didn’t go back again until after the election was over. But to cut this matter short, I was elected, doubling my competitor, and nine votes over.

Giving a campaign speech may have scared Davy Crockett, but once he got to the U.S. Congress he was fearless. He stood up and spoke out—even when he disagreed with the president, popular Andrew Jackson. When President Jackson sent the Cherokee Indians from their homes in Georgia to the Oklahoma territory, Davy Crockett thought it was wrong and said so. It didn’t help the Indians, or Crockett. He lost his seat in Congress. But he kept, he said, “my conscience and my judgment.”



Jim Bowie was a fearsome fighter who designed a wicked, razor-sharp knife that is still called by his name. Travis, Crockett, and Bowie and the others in the Alamo held out for 12 days. Supplies and ammunition ran low. "I shall never surrender or retreat . . . victory or death," Travis declared. He was not to be victorious. One soldier, a few women and children, and a slave lived to tell the story. At Goliad, 330 Americans did surrender; they were all murdered.

The remaining English-speaking settlers in Texas were furious. On March 2, 1836, four days before the Alamo fell, they decided to fight for independence. They were soon yelling, "Remember the Alamo!"

Their leader was Sam Houston. He had been born in Virginia but, when he was 13 years old, his parents moved to the frontier of Tennessee. At age 15 he was working in a store in Tennessee when he ran away from home. He became a Cherokee Indian—adopted into a tribe—and lived with the Indians for three years. Then he came back to the white settlements. These are some of the things he did: taught school, fought in Andrew Jackson's army, studied law, was



Sam Houston beat Santa Anna with an army half the size of the Mexican general's.

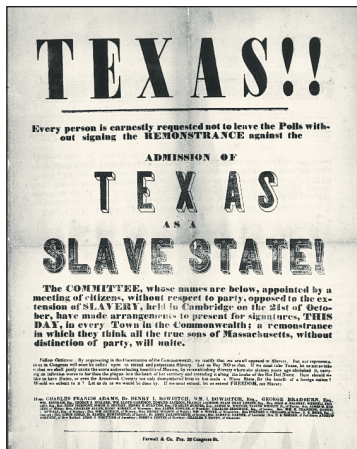


Mexico was colonized by Spain, but in 1821 Mexico fought for and won its independence. Still, Spanish culture dominated. Here, Mexicans dance the Spanish fandango at a ball in San Antonio, Texas, in 1844.

A HISTORY OF US



Most Texans wanted to be part of the United States. But neither President Jackson nor President Van Buren wanted to let Texas in. They were afraid of more trouble with Mexico if they did. And Texas wanted to be a slave state—that would have upset the balance in Congress.



A Compromise, Not a Solution

The problem of keeping a balance between slave and free states had come up when Missouri entered the union as a slave state in 1820. Maine became a free state at the same time, so that there

elect to Congress, and became governor of Tennessee. But when his young wife left him he was in despair. He became an Indian again—this time for four years—and moved to Texas as an Indian trader.

Sam Houston and his followers decided to fight Santa Anna at San Jacinto, which is near the city that is now called Houston. It was April of 1836; the Texans were outnumbered, but they were smart. They waited until the siesta hour, which is a time after lunch when some Spaniards and Mexicans take a nap. It didn't take long—some say only 15 minutes—and Houston and his men captured Santa Anna and routed the Mexicans. They made Santa Anna sign a treaty that made Texas an independent nation. Sam Houston was elected president of the new nation: the republic of Texas. Texas had its own flag, with one lone star on it.

This poster urged Massachusetts voters to protest against admitting Texas into the Union as a slave state.

would be an equal number of slave and free states. That was known as the Missouri Compromise, and it was a law passed by Congress in 1820. It did more than just create two new states. The Missouri Compromise said that the rest of the territory left from the Louisiana Purchase would be free territory (and, after that, free states). For 30 years that idea seemed reasonable; then something happened. The Compromise was broken. Read on, and you'll see how that led to trouble—big trouble.



Susanna Dickinson was a young wife with a baby when her husband died defending the Alamo. She was spared so she could warn Houston about the fate of those who defied Santa Anna.

Houston wanted Texas to become part of the United States. There should have been no problem with that, except that some Texans wanted to have slaves. By this time, the United States was divided: there were slave states and free states, and they were equal in number. If Texas became a state, and a slave state, the South would have more votes in Congress than the North. That would create trouble. President Andrew Jackson had to say no to his old soldier friend Sam Houston. Texas stayed independent.

Finally, in December of 1845, while James K. Polk was president, Congress made Texas a state (the 28th state). Sam Houston was now a Texas senator.

By this time, slavery was becoming a hot issue. The abolitionists were

trying to end slavery; the slave owners were trying to convince everyone that slavery was a good thing—they wanted the United States to become a slave nation. When they realized that wasn't going to happen, many Texans and other Southerners began saying that the South should go its own way, and that the Southern states should secede (suh-SEED) from the United States and become a separate nation—a nation built on slavery.

Sam Houston disagreed. He had worked hard to make Texas a part of the Union. He hated the idea of secession and he didn't like slavery. It took courage to say what he thought. Especially in 1859, which was when he was elected governor again. But when he refused to take an oath of loyalty to the Confederacy he was forced to resign. That was in 1861. Now it is 1846 and trouble is brewing on the Mexican border.

