

FANNIN BATTLEGROUND

state historic site

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VISITORS GUIDE

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Welcome to Fannin Battleground State Historic Site. On March 19 and 20, 1836, the Battle of Coleto Creek was fought here between Texian forces commanded by Col. James W. Fannin and Mexican forces led by Gen. José de Urrea.

It was in the climax of what historians call "The Goliad Campaign" during the Texas Revolution. The site, with its impressive stone obelisk, is a memorial to the brave men who helped shape the future of Texas.





A BRIEF HISTORY

After word spread that the Alamo had fallen on March 6, 1836, Gen. Sam Houston ordered Col. Fannin to destroy Presidio La Bahía—which he and a large force of Texian volunteers had been fortifying from Mexican attack—and retreat to Victoria.

On March 19, Fannin and about 300 men began the retreat with Gen. Urrea's forces only two hours behind. Fannin's lead quickly evaporated due to disturbances along the way. Soon they were caught in the middle of an open prairie near Coletto Creek, outnumbered by the Mexicans.

For the rest of the day, the Texians successfully fought off attacks by the Mexican soldiers, but by nightfall the Texians were completely surrounded. With seven dead and 28 wounded, Fannin faced the prospect of fighting through Urrea's lines or remaining on the field. Realizing that they would have to leave their wounded, including Fannin, the Texians reworked their defenses, dug trenches, and waited for sunrise.

The next morning, the Mexican troops resumed fire. When it was impossible to continue fighting, Fannin and his officers surrendered. It is believed they drafted surrender terms, which consisted of a guarantee they would be treated as prisoners of war and all prisoners would eventually gain freedom by release to the United States. Urrea told Fannin that he could not ratify those terms, but would use his influence with Mexican President and General Santa Anna on their behalf.

Fannin and his men were marched to nearby Goliad and held prisoner. Despite Urrea's belief that the prisoners would be treated well, Santa Anna ordered the prisoners executed. The Mexicans spared 20 physicians, orderlies, and interpreters, and another 28 prisoners escaped. Deemed a massacre, the execution of Fannin's command on March 27, 1836, served to inflame the Texas cause. When Texian forces attacked Santa Anna's command on April 21, 1836, at San Jacinto, the battle cry rang out "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!"



Col. James Walker Fannin



Texas Governor Jim Ferguson visits Fannin Battleground, March 3, 1916

Background

Various factors contributed to the circumstances that led to the Texas War for Independence. Settlers living in the Mexican Province of Tejas included groups and individuals from Europe and the United States. These settlers were attracted by the land and incentives promoted by the Mexican government. Americans also hoped to bring slaves into the province, even though Mexico had already abolished slavery. In exchange for settlement, colonists were expected to become Mexican citizens and convert to Roman Catholicism if they did not already belong to that faith. In 1830, however, Mexico closed its borders with the United States in response to signs of unrest due to Mexican political upheaval and change spurred in part by the abandonment of the liberal 1824 Mexican constitution.

With the border closing, Mexican authorities restricted trade and imposed custom duties on import and export items in an attempt to halt the progress of American settlers into Texas. Rather than controlling unrest, these actions served to deepen antipathy toward rule by Santa Anna among many Texas residents. Many Spanish-speaking Texians hoped for a return to the 1824 constitution, while others, such as the American settlers, hoped for union with the United States.

By the summer of 1835, Santa Anna—now dictator of Mexico—grew tired of the continued agitation against his authority in Texas, and began to take steps to enforce Mexican rule. He ordered Gen. Martín Perfecto de Cos to Texas. Cos and his troops reached Goliad, took control of Presidio La Bahía, and on October 5 continued their march to San Antonio. Within four days Texians seized the Presidio from Mexican troops in a surprise attack. Meanwhile, after reaching San Antonio, troops under Gen. Cos were held under siege by Texian forces, and were captured in early December. As a result of these actions, Texian forces expelled all Mexican military from Texas.

In response, the Mexican government enforced the Tornel Decree in late December 1835. This decree was initially issued by the Mexican government in response to plundering by pirates upon Mexican coastal towns and outposts. When it became clear that Texian insurgents were intent upon armed response to the Mexican military presence, the decree was invoked. It stated that all foreigners attacking Mexico (through action or by supplying arms to those with that intent) would be deemed pirates and mercilessly dealt with as such.

Aftermath

The consequences of the Battle of Coletto Creek were far reaching. The execution of Fannin and most of his command at Goliad ignited the Texas cause. The subsequent Texian victory at San Jacinto helped to secure the independence of Texas.

Today, part of the site of the Battle of Coletto Creek is preserved as a memorial to the soldiers who fought here in 1836. Walk the grounds and honor the place where Fannin surrendered, taking a moment to remember those who helped forge Texas' destiny.

