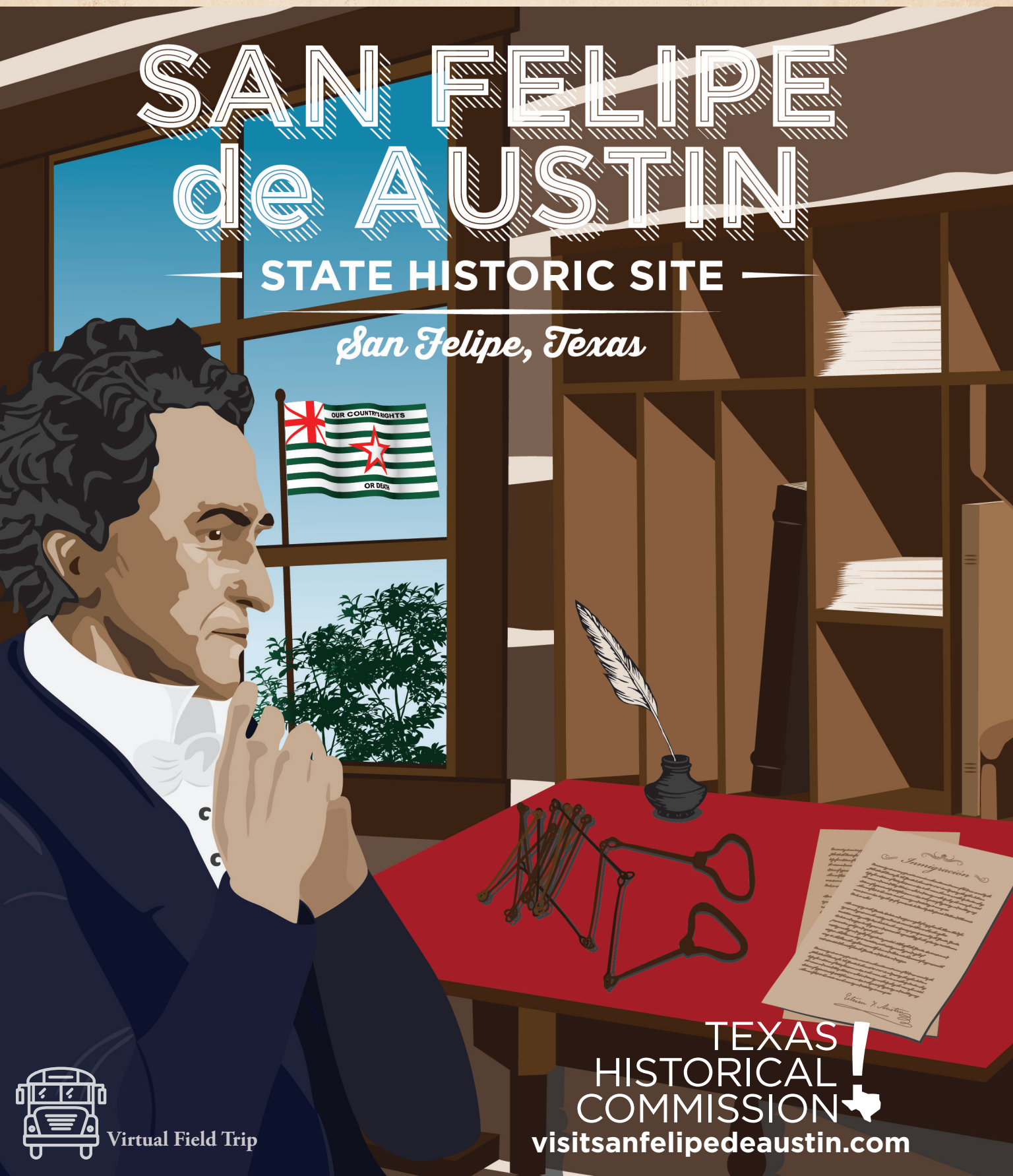
# Texas Historical Commission

## What Is an *Empresario?*

Grade 4 & 7



Stephen F. Austin, Texas empresario.
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# What Is an Empresario?

## Overview: A New Beginning for Texas

In Part 1 in the Empresario series from the Texas Historical Commission's **San Felipe de Austin** site, learners are introduced to the empresario system which brought permanent settlers to Mexican Texas during the early 19th century. The activities explore the duties and character qualities of an empresario, and engage learners as they consider the experiences and challenges of an empresario. A video and primary source documents are included.

## Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of the empresario system in 19th century Texas.
- Identify the qualities beneficial to a Texas empresario.
- Analyze primary source documents.
- Reflect on the empresario experience.

## Social Studies TEKS

4th Grade: 4.2 E, 4.3 B, 4.14 B, 4.21 A B, 4.23
7th Grade: 7.1 B, 7.2 D E, 7.17 A, 7.20 A, 7.23

## Resources

- Video: What Is an Empresario? (THC YouTube) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Az9KgwVSHkk&feature=youtu.be
- Activity 1: What is an Empresario? video activity resource
- Activity 2: What Makes a Good Empresario? activity resource
- Activity 3: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin activity resource (adapted and full versions)
- Activity 4: A Letter to Governor Rafael Gonzales activity resource
- Activity 5: Journal Reflection activity resource
- Primary Source Letter: Stephen F. Austin letter to Governor Rafael Gonzales (transcription)
- Primary Source Map: Stephen F. Austin Map of Texas With Parts of the Adjoining States

## Vocabulary

**attribute** (AAH trih byut) noun: a quality or characteristic of a person or thing

**Coahuila y Tejas** (koh a WHEE lah ee TEH hass) noun: a state in the United Mexican States formed in 1824. Location was in most of present-day Texas and the Mexican state of Coahuila.

**empresario** (ehm preh SAH ree oh) noun: a person who was contracted by the Mexican government to bring colonists to settle in Texas

**empresario contract** (ehm preh SAH ree oh kahn trakt) noun: legal contract for the number of families an empresario could bring to Texas and location of where they were to settle

**land grant** (lahnd grahnt) noun: land given to an empresario to settle colonists

**land title** (lahnd TY tuhl) noun: deed that showed a colonist owned a certain section of land

**Mexico City** (MEX ih koh SIH tee) noun: capital of the Republic of Mexico

**Saltillo** (saw TEE yoh) noun: capital of Coahuila y Tejas

## Historical Context

In the early 19th century, the Mexican government was looking for ways to increase the population, build the economy, and provide better defense in its Texas region. One strategy used to accomplish this was to invite people from the United States and other locations to move into the frontier area. Land agents called empresarios made the arrangements for bringing settlers to a new colony.

## Activity 1: What is an Empresario?

To introduce the concept of empresarios in 19th century Texas, have learners watch the **What Is an Empresario? video** and use the **notes resource**. This video focuses on defining the role of an empresario. Share responses when completed.

Answer Key:

1. Moses Austin
2. Spain, 1821
3. Mexico City, 1823
4. Stephen F. Austin
5. agent, government, families, time, limit
6. 300
7. Answers will vary

## Activity 2: What Makes a Good Empresario?

In this activity, learners will consider what qualities helped potential empresarios be best suited for the task. Review the definition of the word *attribute*. Talk about what challenges an empresario might have faced in bringing new settlers to Mexican Texas in the early 19th century. What attributes might have helped the empresarios be successful in those conditions?

Have learners circle the qualities needed for success on the **What Makes a Good Empresario? activity resource**. Share responses when completed.

Answer Key:

- **Hard-working**: It took a lot of effort to gather colonists and to organize a colony.
- **Can read and write English**: Most of the colonists were coming from the United States and many of them sent letters to an empresario asking for information about the colony.
- **Patient**: In addition to all the hard work, nothing moved very quickly. For example, it took Stephen F. Austin years to settle his first 300 families in Texas.
- **Recognizes land titles given to citizens**: There were some people living in Texas before the first empresario contract was made. While there were not many people already living in Spanish or Mexican Texas, the land that was already owned was to be recognized and not given to a new colonist. One empresario, Haden Edwards, refused to do this. When his contract was canceled by the Mexican government, he rebelled. That rebellion is called the Fredonian Rebellion.
- **Can read, write, and speak Spanish**: If an empresario needed to communicate with the government but could not travel to the capital, he would have to write a letter. That letter had to be written in Spanish as that was the language the government officials knew.

- **Willing to travel long distances**: The federal and state governments were far away and required empresarios like Austin to travel to them. The Coahuila y Tejas capital in Saltillo was 500 miles away from San Felipe de Austin.
- **Cares for others around them**: Among other tasks, an empresario was trying to fulfill his contract with the Mexican government. If the colonists were not happy, they could leave and could not be counted towards a completed contract. It was to the empresario's advantage to take good care of his colonists.
- **Follows the law**: An empresario who refused to obey the laws could have his contract canceled.

## Activity 3: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin

In this activity, learners will interact with Stephen F. Austin's own words and drawings to experience his journey as an empresario. Preview the **transcription* of Stephen F. Austin's letter** to Governor Rafael Gonzales asking him to grant an additional contract for the empresario to bring in more colonists to the Mexican Texas region. Discuss any challenges in dealing with transcriptions of primary source materials.

Preview the **map drawn by Stephen F. Austin** showing where all the empresario land grants were located. Discuss what information can be learned from the elements represented on the map as well as the map attribution. A close-up view of the map can be found at https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f2/Austin_%26_Tanner_Map_of_Texas_with_Parts_of_the_Adjoining_States_1836_UTA.jpg

Preview the comprehension questions at the bottom of the activity resource. Share responses when completed.

*There are two transcriptions of the letter included for use: an adapted, shorter version, and the full transcription. The language of the text is the original. Assisting learners in understanding the meaning of the text may be helpful and/or necessary.

Answer Key:

**Adapted version**

- If Stephen F. Austin received final permission to become an empresario in 1823, how long did it take him to complete his first contract? **Two years. He is writing the letter saying he completed his contract in 1825.**
- What two crops does Stephen F. Austin reference in his fourth point? **cotton and sugar**
- What is the title of the map that was based on Austin's drawings and information? **Map of Texas With Parts of the Adjoining States**
- What year was the map published? **1836**

**Full version**

- Did Stephen F. Austin allow anyone to join his colony? Explain. **No. He rejected potential colonists who were of bad character.**
- What areas of Texas was Stephen F. Austin planning to colonize if he received permission for another empresario contract? **areas along the Brazos, Colorado, and San Jacinto Rivers and their tributaries, as well as Galveston Island.**
- What is the title of the map that was based on Austin's drawings and information? **Map of Texas With Parts of the Adjoining States**
- What year was the map published? **1836**

## Activity 4: A Letter to Governor Rafael Gonzales

In this activity, learners will **write a letter using the activity resource** to Rafael Gonzales, the Governor of Coahuila y Tejas from 1824-1826, asking him to grant them an empresario contract to bring settlers into Mexican Texas. Discuss the prompt and answer any questions. Point out that the response should include what specific attributes the learner has that make him/her the best candidate for a contract. Remind them of additional attributes identified in Activity 2. Share responses when completed.

<u>Prompt:</u> You would like to become an empresario to bring colonists into Mexican Texas. But first, you must write a letter to Rafael Gonzales, the governor of Coahuila y Tejas, asking him to grant you an empresario contract. Be sure to explain what personal attributes you have that would make you the best person to bring colonists to Mexican Texas.

## Activity 5: Journal Reflection

Using **the journal reflection activity resource**, learners will write in response to the letter they wrote Governor Gonzales in Activity 4. Why did they choose those particular personal attributes to highlight? Were there any attributes they should have included, but didn't? Why?

# Activity 1 Resource: What is an Empresario?

As you watch the video, **write answers** to complete the sentences.

1. _____ was the first person to develop the idea to bring colonists into Texas

2. Mexico gained its independence from _____ in _____.

3. Stephen F. Austin traveled to _____ to seek permission to continue his colony. He would receive that permission in _____.

4. Who would become Mexico's first *empresario* for Texas? _____

5. Stephen F. Austin would describe the role of an *empresario* as "an _____ who is hired by the _____ to introduce a certain number of _____of a certain description within a certain _____, who are to be settled within a certain designated _____."

6. Stephen F. Austin's first contract allowed him to bring _____ families into Mexican Texas.

7. Write **two** additional facts you learned in this video.

   ★ _____

   ★ _____

# Activity 2 Resource: What Makes a Good Empresario?

Being an empresario settling Mexican Texas in the early 19th century was challenging. **Circle the attributes** that you think would help an empresario be successful. Some qualities are more beneficial than others, so choose wisely!

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Can read and write English** | **Can read and write English** | **Recognizes land titles given to early settlers** |
| **Refuses to travel long distances** | **Patient** | **Hard-working** |
| **Does not follow the law** | **Lazy** | **Refuses to protect land given to early settlers** |
| **Willing to travel long distances** | **Cares for others around them** | **Impatient** |
| **Cares only about themselves** | **Can't read or write English** | **Does their best to follow the law** |
| | **Can read, write, and speak Spanish** | |

Name **two** beneficial attributes that aren't listed above, but which should be included.

★ _____

★ _____

# Activity 3 Resource: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin (adapted)

Images of Stephen F. Austin and map by Wiki Creative Commons.

Read the **Primary Source adapted transcript** of the letter from Stephen F. Austin to Governor Rafael Gonzales asking him to grant an additional contract for the empresario to bring in more colonists to the Mexican Texas region. Look at the **Primary Source map** based on Austin's sketches and information, engraved and published by Philadelphia publisher H. S. Tanner, that shows where land grants were located.

**Write answers to the questions.**

- If Stephen F. Austin received final permission to become an empresario in 1823, how long did it take him to complete his first contract?

- What two crops does Stephen F. Austin reference in his fourth point?

- What is the title of the map that was based on Austin's drawings and information?

- What year was the map published?

# Activity 3 Resource: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin (full)

Images of Stephen F. Austin and map by Wiki Creative Commons.

Read the **Primary Source adapted transcript** of the letter from Stephen F. Austin to Governor Rafael Gonzales asking him to grant an additional contract for the empresario to bring in more colonists to the Mexican Texas region. Look at the **Primary Source map** based on Austin's sketches and information, engraved and published by Philadelphia publisher H. S. Tanner, that shows where land grants were located.

**Write answers to the questions.**

★ Did Stephen F. Austin allow anyone to join his colony? Explain.

★ What areas of Texas was Stephen F. Austin planning to colonize if he received permission for another empresario contract?

★ What is the title of the map that was based on Austin's drawings and information?

★ What year was the map published?

# Activity 4 Resource: A Letter to Governor Rafael Gonzales

You would like to become an empresario to bring colonists into Mexican Texas. But first, you must **write a letter to Rafael Gonzales**, the governor of Coahuila y Tejas, asking him to grant you an empresario contract. Be sure to explain what personal attributes you have that would make you the best person to bring colonists to Mexican Texas.

*Dear Governor Rafael Gonzales,*

*Sincerely,*

# Activity 5 Resource: Journal Reflection

Think about the letter you wrote to Governor Gonzales about your attributes for becoming an empresario. Why did you choose those particular personal qualities to highlight? Were there any attributes you should have included, but didn't? Why do you think you're well-suited for challenging opportunities?

# Primary Resource: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin (adapted)

This is a transcription of a letter from Stephen F. Austin to Governor of Coahuila y Tejas Rafael Gonzales, written April 4th, 1825. Austin announces that he has completed his first empresario contract. He also lets the governor know that there are many more settlers who wish to join his colony. In this, letter Austin outlines why adding these colonists would benefit his colony and the state of Coahuila y Tejas.

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*Citizen Stephen F. Austin, Lieutenant Colonel of the National Militia, of the river Brazos and Colorado, Judge ad interim for the administration of justice, and Empresario of this Colony- Most respectfully represents to your Excellency, that:*

*Having already completed the settlement of the three hundred families which the Supreme Government of Mexico authorized me to introduce into this Province of Texas. Application is made to me daily to receive and settle more families, as colonists, some of which have already arrived here, others are on the road, and have written to me, besides a number amounting to nearly three hundred, who have applied to me from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. … . Among the applicants, are some few of bad repute, these I have ordered to depart forthwith out of the limits of this Jurisdiction; …, in consequence of which, that class of people are very much irritated against me, and under the excitement, disseminating infinite calumnies, and raising false reports, relative to my conduct and authority; but I feel perfectly secure under the conviction, that the Government, taking into consideration the great injury which would result from the introduction of such characters, will approve the course I have pursued in this instance; …—I request the Supreme Government of the State of Coahuila and Texas, in its acknowledged goodness to authorize me to settle the additional number of five hundred families on the lands which remain vacant upon the rivers San Jacinto, Brazos, and Colorado, and their tributaries, and on the Island and Bay of Galveston, with full power to expel from this jurisdiction, all persons of notoriously bad character, who in future may immigrate hither. The arguments I offer in support of this petition are:*

# Primary Resource: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin (cont.)

*1st—The number of three hundred families already legally settled is very small to sustain itself against the Savage Indians, who surround us.*

*2nd—It is important that the settlement of the vacant lands contiguous to, and adjoining those already distributed, should be effected through the same Empresario, or authority who surveyed and*
*distributed the lands to the present Colonists, in order to prevent all clashing or dispute between the new and old Colonists, …*

*3rd—Should the National Government make a port of entry of Galveston, the advantages of sales which would result therefrom, will not be realized from it unless Colonists settle there, … I entreat the Government of the State to do me the honor of effecting its settlement, and completing its establishment.*

*4th—Nothing but foreign commerce, particularly the exportation of cotton to Europe, can enrich the inhabitants of this section of the State; and this cannot be expected without an increase of population, and physical force; … it is in my opinion a matter of the greatest importance, to authorize the emigrants to bring in their Slaves and Servants; and that the right of property in these servants so introduced, as well as their descendants, be guaranteed to them by law; for without this security, we cannot expect colonists with large and competent means, nor can we have hands for the cultivation of Cotton or Sugar; and consequently these fertile lands, instead of being occupied by wealthy planters, will remain for many years, in the hands of mere shepherds, or poor people, …—Therefore, I pray the Government of the State of Coahuila and Texas, to grant me authority to settle Five hundred families more, at the places above mentioned.*

*Town of San Felipe de Austin, 4th April 1825.*
*Most Excellent Sir,*
*Stephen F. Austin.*

# Primary Resource: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin (full)

This is a transcription of a letter from Stephen F. Austin to Governor of Coahuila y Tejas Rafael Gonzales, written April 4th, 1825. Austin announces that he has completed his first empresario contract. He also lets the governor know that there are many more settlers who wish to join his colony. In this, letter Austin outlines why adding these colonists would benefit his colony and the state of Coahuila y Tejas.

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*Citizen Stephen F. Austin, Lieutenant Colonel of the National Militia, of the river Brazos and Colorado, Judge ad interim for the administration of justice, and Empresario of this Colony- Most respectfully represents to your Excellency, that:*

*Having already completed the settlement of the three hundred families which the Supreme Government of Mexico authorized me to introduce into this Province of Texas. Application is made to me daily to receive and settle more families, as colonists, some of which have already arrived here, others are on the road, and have written to me, besides a number amounting to nearly three hundred, who have applied to me from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The only reply I have made at present to them, is, that I would make their applications known to the Supreme Government of the State, Stating to them, that it is out of my power to grant them license or permission to occupy or appropriate any land whatever, in the district under my charge, until the resolution of the Government should be known. Among the applicants, are some few of bad repute, these I have ordered to depart forthwith out of the limits of this Jurisdiction; a measure of Executive Police which circumstances required me to take, to preserve good order, and tranquility among these worthy Colonists, in consequence of which, that class of people are very much irritated against me, and under the excitement, disseminating infinite calumnies, and raising false reports, relative to my conduct and authority; but I feel perfectly secure under the conviction, that the Government, taking into consideration the great injury which would result from the introduction of such characters, will approve the course I have pursued in this instance; thereby preventing such persons from incommoding these Colonist hereafter; and at the same time, promote the progress of this section of the State generally.*

*— I request the Supreme Government of the State of Coahuila and Texas, in its acknowledged goodness to authorize me to settle the additional number of five hundred families on the lands which remain vacant upon the rivers San Jacinto, Brazos, and Colorado, and their tributaries, and on the Island and Bay of Galveston, with full power to expel from this jurisdiction, all persons of notoriously bad character, who in future may immigrate hither. The arguments I offer in support of this petition are:*

*1st—The number of three hundred families already legally settled is very small to sustain itself against the Savage Indians, who surround us.*

*2nd—It is important that the settlement of the vacant lands contiguous to, and adjoining those already distributed, should be effected through the same Empresario, or authority who surveyed and distributed the lands to the present Colonists, in order to prevent all clashing or dispute between the new and old Colonists, with regard to their lines and boundaries; likewise, by these means, to form in this town a general and minute Record of all the lands distributed within this jurisdiction; a matter of the greatest importance in preventing hereafter, even the possibility of doubts, or disputes, in relation to titles.*

*3rd—Should the National Government make a port of entry of Galveston, the advantages of sales which would result therefrom, will not be realized from it unless Colonists settle there, and in its immediate neighborhood, and in as much as I was the first who proposed this matter to the Government, I entreat the Government of the State to do me the honor of effecting its settlement, and completing its establishment.*

*4th—Nothing but foreign commerce, particularly the exportation of cotton to Europe, can enrich the inhabitants of this section of the State; and this cannot be expected without an increase of population, and physical force; for without this, Capitalists will not undertake to enter into it, with vessels of sufficient size, for European Commerce ; and to obtain these great benefits to the full extent that would indubitably result to the nation, by the enterprise and industry of these new colonists, it is in my opinion a matter of the greatest importance, to authorize the emigrants to bring in their Slaves and Servants ; and that the right of property in*

*these servants so introduced, as well as their descendants, be guaranteed to them by law; for without this security, we cannot expect colonists with large and competent means, nor can we have hands for the cultivation of Cotton or Sugar; and consequently these fertile lands, instead of being occupied by wealthy planters, will remain for many years, in the hands of mere shepherds, or poor people, who will scarcely raise a sufficiency for the sustenance of their families, without any overplus of sufficient importance to give an impulse to active foreign commerce.—Therefore, I pray the Government of the State of Coahuila and Texas, to grant me authority to settle Five hundred families more, at the places above mentioned.*

*Town of San Felipe de Austin, 4th April 1825.*
*Most Excellent Sir,*
*Stephen F. Austin.*

# **Primary Resource:** Map of Texas With Parts of the Adjoining States, Stephen F. Austin

Austin, Stephen F. Map of Texas With Parts of the Adjoining States. Philadelphia: H. S. Tanner, 1836.

Click the map to be able to view the image more closely. Or visit https://www.loc.gov/item/2001622094/



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION