

Texas Historical Commission

Where to Begin a Colony?

Grade 4 & 7

SAN FELIPE de AUSTIN

STATE HISTORIC SITE

San Felipe, Texas



Virtual Field Trip

TEXAS
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

visitsanfelipedeAustin.com



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Where to Begin a Colony?

Overview: A New Beginning for Texas

In Part 5 in the *Empresario* series from the Texas Historical Commission's **San Felipe de Austin** site, learners explore how Stephen F. Austin evaluated land features in considering where to begin settling colonists in Texas in the 19th century. The activities provide the opportunity to analyze primary source documents including Austin's journal entries describing this exploratory trip through Texas.

Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of the empresario system in 19th century Texas.
- Analyze strategies empresarios used to select land grants.
- Analyze primary source documents.
- Reflect on the empresario experience.

Social Studies TEKS

4th Grade: 4.7A, 4.9B, 4.10B, 4.21A, 4.23A, 4.23B

7th Grade: 7.2 D, 7.10 A, 7.29 A, 7.23

Resources

- Video: Where to Begin a Colony? (THC video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ubv7FxsSUxU&feature=youtu.be>
- Activity 1: Choose Your Land Grant activity resource
- Activity 2: Stephen F. Austin journal entries activity resources (adapted and full)
- Activity 3: Journal Reflection activity resource
- Activity 4: Empresario Advertisement activity resource
- Primary Source: Stephen F. Austin journal entries, 1821



Vocabulary

abundant (uh BUN dunt) adjective: more than enough, plenty

cash crop (KASH krop) noun: a crop, such as cotton or sugar cane, that is grown for the purpose of selling it for profit

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: an empresario's legal contract detailing how many families he can bring to Texas and where they are 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

row crop (ROW krop) noun: a plant grown primarily as food for the colony

Historical Context

While the government of Coahuila y Tejas and the federal Mexican government offered many incentives to potential colonists, it was still the responsibility of an empresario to find ways to attract colonists.

Colonists agreed to join a colony without knowing what the land looked like. They wanted to know whether they might be moving into forested areas, prairies, deserts, or wetlands. How much water was available and its quality, the quality of the soil and the crops it would support, and what types of trees occupied the forested areas were also important to colonists.

In 1821, empresario Stephen F. Austin traveled to Texas to survey the land that his father had hoped to colonize. He wanted to see the land for himself so that he could describe its features and benefits to potential colonists. During the trip, Austin kept a journal in which he recorded what routes he was traveling, where he traveled, who he traveled with, and his thoughts about the land he was passing through. Some of Stephen F. Austin's journal has survived to give us insight into the first thoughts that he had while traveling into Texas.

He described some areas with large woodlands mixed with prairie and easy access to water. He described the types of trees and soil and even speculated on the types of crops that would grow well in various areas. While Austin's overall thoughts of Texas were positive, he did see some areas that were barren, with poor soil and poor water. He felt those areas weren't of value for settlements and could even endanger his ability to fulfill his empresario contract by bringing a specified number of families to an area.



Video: Where to Begin a Colony?

To introduce the content, have learners watch the **Where to Begin a Colony?** video that explores the land features that empresarios found desirable for colony settlement.

Activity 1: Choose Your Land Grant

In this activity, learners assume the role of an empresario to analyze the geographic features of settlement areas in order to pick the best overall land grant to choose for a colony. Have learners circle the land grant they choose and write an explanation for that choice on the **Choose Your Land Grant activity resource**. Share responses when completed. Selections of land grants may vary. Learners will write about why they chose the grant they did in Activity 3.

Activity 2: Stephen F. Austin Journal Entries

In this activity using the **journal entries** and the **worksheet resources**, learners analyze several journal entries for information from Stephen F. Austin's journey through Spanish Texas in 1821 recounting the land he saw and the people he met.

The journal entries may be challenging for some learners to read because Austin has many misspellings and wrote only initials for many names or places. Any word, phrase, or initial followed by [] includes a clarification of a misspelling or abbreviation. Some words, however, aren't easily clarified. The symbol --- indicates that the writing was unreadable.

Preview the transcriptions of the journal entries and point out the symbols and clarifications. Discuss any challenges in dealing with transcriptions of primary source materials. Preview the comprehension questions at the bottom of the activity resource. Share responses when completed.

Answer Key:

- timber, grass, soil, springs/creeks/rivers, rock, prairie
- One of their men got lost. They had to go out to look for him.
- pecan, ash, oak , cedar; gold and silver
- Sunday August 12
- Tankawas (now spelled Tonkawa)



Activity 3: Journal Reflection

Using the **journal reflection activity resource**, learners will write about the decision process they used and the land features they considered in their land grant selection from Activity 1.

Activity 1 Resource: Choose Your Land Grant

You are an empresario with a decision to make. You must choose which land grant to accept to begin your settlement. Each grant has positive and negative qualities. Circle the land grant that you think offers the best location for your colony. Be prepared to explain your reasoning.

Land Grant 1

Positive: lowlands near the coast, abundant water for crops, good soil for crops

Negative: many insects, above average occurrence of disease

Land Grant 2

Positive: open prairie land, average soil for crops, abundant bison to hunt

Negative: few trees to use for building, not much water

Land Grant 3

Positive: hilly prairie land, a few creeks, abundant deer to hunt

Negative: rocky soil not suitable for cash crops, unfriendly native tribes

Land Grant 4

Positive: abundant silver and gold, small amount of timber for building

Negative: not much water, desert area, soil doesn't support crops well

Land Grant 5

Positive: abundant iron and coal, good amounts of timber for building

Negative: not much water, desert area, soil doesn't support crops well

Land Grant 6

Positive: abundant timber for building, abundant water

Negative: abundant timber must be cleared for planting crops, hostile native tribes

Land Grant 7

Positive: abundant silver and gold, small amount of timber for building

Negative: not much water, desert area, soil doesn't support crops well

Land Grant 8

Positive: abundant water in shallow pools, good land for cash crops

Negative: high number of biting insects, high occurrence of disease

Land Grant 9

Positive: river bottom land with abundant water and good soil for crops, adequate timber for building

Negative: land often floods, some hostile native tribes



Land grant ____ is the best choice for a settlement because _____

_____.



Activity 2 Resource: Stephen F. Austin Journals

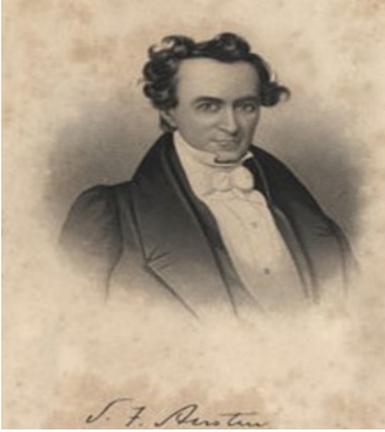


Image courtesy of The Portal to Texas History, crediting Palestine Public Library.

Read the **journal entries** from Stephen F. Austin describing his Texas travels in 1821.

Write answers to the questions.

★ Read the **July 20** and **July 27** entries. Name at least three land features that Austin comments on.

★ Read the **July 30** entry. What event happened that caused the whole company to take action?

★ Read the **August 7** entry. What types of trees (timber) did Austin find along the Colorado River? What valuable metals does he also note in this entry?

★ On what date does Austin note in his journal that Mexico received independence from Spain?

★ Austin records meeting with a group of Native American men and women, including several chiefs. What tribe did they belong to?

★ In one of his journal entries, Austin describes coming upon the remains of the village of Nacogdoches. How does he describe what's left of the village?



Activity 5 Resource: Journal Reflection

Think about **land grant** you chose in Activity 1. Write reflections on these topics.

★ Describe the thinking process you used to choose the land grant you did.

★ As an empresario, how would you deal with the negative features of the land grant you chose?

★ If you could choose **two** of the best positive features of other land grants to add to your land grant, which features would you add? Why?



Primary Resource: Stephen F. Austin Journal Entries, 1821

These are the transcribed words from Austin's journals. The words and spellings appear as he wrote them. In his journal entries, Austin describes the land he saw when travelling through Mexican Texas in 1821. Words in brackets [] help explain his writing. The symbol --- is used where the writing was unreadable.

July 20:

The general dace of the country from within 5 miles of the Sabine to Nacogdoches is gently rolling and very much resembles the Barrens of Kentucky, except that the growth of timber is larger and not so bushy---- Black jack and Black Hickory, Mulberry is the principle timber; but is all too low and scrubby for Rails, or building, except on the Creeks where the timber is very good and lofty---- the grass is more abundany [abundant] and of a ranker and more luxuriant growth than I have ever seen before in any country and is indicative of a strong rich soil, the appearance of the Corn through the country proves to me beyond a doubt that the red soil is nearly if not quite as good as the black The soil generally is very red, the richest is a pure Spanish Brown----

This country is tolerably well watered--- though springs are not so abundant as I could wish---- the creeks are numerous and the water very pure and limpid--- no appearance of Rock or Stone except a soft argillaceous Rock at -----.

Nacogdoches is now the ruins of a flourishing little village. the church and Seven Houses are still standing entire one of them two story high built of soft Rock----- it was the seat of the Indian trade and a great deal of business was formerly done here. the situation is a vally. a creek runs on each side of the town.

Fryday July 27:

The Trinity River is about 100 yds wide from the top of one bank to the top of the other. the banks are very steep & about 40 ft high---- the water at this time is uncommonly low & is about 15 yds. wide 2 feet deep & a lively current---- the bed of the River including sand bars is 40 yds. the water at this time is very clear, but a little brackish and unpalative [unpalatable]--- the bottom hard gravel the banks whitish Clay --- Iron Pyrites in abundance with the gravil --- & some detached masses of soft sand stone ---- the bottoms of this river are very wide and where we crossed there is a large smooth Prairie on each side, covered with the highest and thickest growth of grass I ever saw--- the grass is coarse and very much resembles sugar cane the soil in the bottoms is deep & a jet black ----

Primary Resource: Stephen F. Austin Journal Entries pg. 2

Fryday July 27 continued:

This River rises at times from 55 to 60 feet and overflows all its bottoms and forms a sheet of water from Hill to Hill---- more resembling a lake than a River----there is a large Prairie on west side extending about 2 miles to the high land where Col. Peros encamped. at this place there formerly was a Spanish post. the situation is very beautiful and commanding on a smooth knoll which rises at the edge of the Prairie ---- Paros left a part of his men and 4 pieces of Artillery at this place when he went out against Long [Long was the leader of a filibuster expedition launched in 1819]. At this old encampment the roads fork, the left goes to La Bahia, the right which we took to San Antonio, 2 miles further overtook the Spaniards who passed us while at dinner at Trinity and came on 2 miles further where finding water we stoped for the night, Barre & Beard being too sick to go in the hot sun which was very oppressive today—

The country from the low ground of the Trinity out so far is open--- poor dry Barrens, covered with fine grass, and a good deal of low scruby oak bushes---- The Spaniards came on about 3 oclk [o'clock] & continued on to the next water.

Beard took an Emetic. Barre Very sick with the fever and Wilson quite unwell with a headache and severe cold. in the afternoon several turned out to hunt, and Little found a Bee tree, which afforded about 1.5 gallons honey---- heavy rain in night.

Monday July 30:

----Started early. Barnum and Nell went on ahead to hunt--- they were cautioned not loose sight of the road, neither of them being good wood men---- 6 miles came to a beautiful Creek of pure running water called Corpus Christi---- fine bottoms covered with heavy timber a good deal of Cedar, very large---- from Navisot [Navasota] to this place the country is principally prairie very beautiful. soil good, but a gravelly in places----

came on 8 miles further & stoped at a hole of water in the edge of the Prairie. Nell came in with a faun, & said that Barnum was within hearing of the Bells at camp soon after that we heard him shout and expected him in every moment.

The Country from Corpus to this place is very handsome, rolling Prairies, intersected by dreans in most of which water was standing in holes. timber rather scarce, but sufficient--- after Dinner Barnum not coming in we concluded he must be lost, and nearly the whole company turned out to hunt him---- at night we all returned to camp. no news of Barnum___ Bellew overtook us this day from the Comanche Trail.



Primary Resource: Stephen F. Austin Journal Entries pg. 3

Fryday July 3 [It was actually August]

started early ... and soon struck the large Prairies, stoped at a hole of water in Prairie & took breakfast--- Buffaloe at a distance---- Deer abundant---- ... struck the road about 10 miles from the River & came on to camp at night where we found Barnum

He struck the River about 12 miles below the road, tied his horse and came up on foot under the bank until he came to the road, eat nothing for 4 days---- very much fatigued & his feet scratched & inflamed & blistered was lost 4 days---- sent 2 Spds [Spaniards] for horse

Tuesday August 7:

came to the Colorado River 10 miles. poor gravelly ridges and near the river heavy pine timber, grapes in immense quantities on low vines, red, large, & well flavored, good for Red wine The C R [Colorado River] is something less than the Brassos [Brazos] bank very high-- -- generally clear of overflow ---- bottom and banks gravelly. water very clear and well tasted, current brisk the river very much resembles Cumberland River, except that there are no rocks & it is some larger----

The bottom where the road crosses is about 5 miles, mostly high prairie clear of overflow, land rich, timber Pecan, Ash, Oak, Cedar, abundance of fish.

There is a small hill 2 miles above the road out of which Dn Era [Don Erasmo] informed me smoke & sparks issued---- there is a very rich silver mine up this River on the St Saber, also a gold dust mine on the Yana [Llano] the country up this river is very good but scarce of timber.

Fryday 10th [August]

came on to the Guadalupe River--- country the most beautiful I ever saw--- rolling Prairies---- soil very black and deep---- mixed with flint pebbles---- from the size of a hazelnut to a man's head, no timber but Muskete except on the branches & not much there--- soft white lime stone rock, water scarce but very good--- the soils cracks badly in many places where it is not sandy--- is very stiff---- The Guadalupe is a beautiful bold stream of perfectly clear lime stone water, banks are very high. There was formerly a Stockade fort at this place and at St. Marcus----



Primary Resource: Stephen F. Austin Journal Entries pg. 4

Sunday 12 [August]

This morning at daylight three men who had been dispatched from the Gal. [Guadeloupe] by Erasmo to St Ao. [San Antonio] returned with others & brought the glorious news of the Independence of Mexico? the Spaniards hailed this news with acclamations of "viva Independencia" and every other demonstration of joy? Erasmo invited us to breakfast with him on various Spanish dishes sent out by their wives and started in high spirits and arrived at St. Antonio about 11 ock [o'clock]

Wednesday 22. [August]

Came to ranchos de las arrochas a Creek, not runing but good water in a hole---- country rolling, land generally rich, rather more sandy than near Bexar--- in the afternoon the hunters turned out hunting, but killed nothing, and as we got no meat at St. Ao. [San Antonio] we had but bread and coffee---

In the evening the head chief of the Tankawas [Tonkawa] and 3 other chiefs and 4 men and 10 squaws came to camp on their way to Bexar, the chief was called Gocoso--- I had a talk with him, smoked and gave him some tobacco, informed him of my intended settlement which pleased him, & he sent on two of his sons next day with me to his town to inform his nation who we were and our objects &c----

Thursday 20 [September]

Started from the Pond & came on about 4 miles and struck the Tuscasite of oppelou road, turned along it to the River & we concluded to divide the company. Mr. Lovelace and 3 others went up on the west side & crossed with 4 others to examine the country on the east side, agreeing to meet at the Labaddie road.

The Prairie comes bluff to the river just below the Tuscasite road, and affords a most beautiful situation for a Town or settlement---- The bluff is about 60 feet high-----

The country back of this place and below for about 15 miles (as far as we went) is as good in every respect as man could wish for, Land all first rate, plenty of timber, fine water--- beautifully rolling ---- we calculated that we were within 12 or 15 miles of the Coast.



Primary Resource: Stephen F. Austin Journal Entries pg. 5

Thursday 20 [September] continued

The river was humming & raising fast we therefore built a raft, loaded our things and one of the company who could not swim on it, and swam over pushing the raft before us, in this way all crossed safely, took dinner the bank and entered the bottom. The trace was very old and blind one, the bottom (which was about 6 miles through) most of the way a heavy cane break, we therefore had great difficulty in following the road and getting through Caves & vines & did not reach the Prairie before night---- just before dark after we had almost despaired of getting through that day struck the Prairie at a delightful clear running spring Creek where we encamped for the night-----

Saturday 22d. [September]

About 11 o'clk [o'clock] Mr. Lovelace and his party came up, they had to swim the river--- they reported that the Country they came over was superior to any thing they had seen before in the Province, they found two fine springs that broke out from under a sand rock, crossed a number of fine runing Creeks all good water and many of them large enough for mills, abundance of timber, and land all first rate and very rolling--- the River bottom about 2 miles wide heavy timbered no overflow--- the range of rich land on the west side is about 150 miles in length and generally extends from one river to the other, on the St. Antonio it is the same, 25 miles about one of our company (Higginbottom) had been through & he said it was the same & two of the company H----- & Barr had crossed it at the Wacoe village 60 to 70 miles further up and it was the same there only rather more rolling and plenty of mill seats--- saw several Bear and plenty of sign--- near the mouth of Brassos there are plenty of wild cattle. we saw abundance of cattle.

