Texas Historical Commission

How Did *Empresarios* Attract Colonists?
Grade 4 & 7

SAN FELIPE de AUSTIN
STATE HISTORIC SITE
San Felipe, Texas

Virtual Field Trip
visitsanfelipedeaustin.com
How Did Empresarios Attract Colonists?

Overview: A New Beginning for Texas
In Part 3 in the Empresario series from the Texas Historical Commission’s San Felipe de Austin site, learners explore the strategies Stephen F. Austin used to advertise to potential colonists interested in settling in Texas in the 19th century. The activities provide the opportunity to analyze primary source documents including Austin’s letter and colony regulations related to the settlement recruitment. An introductory video is also included.

Objectives
• Demonstrate understanding of the empresario system in 19th century Texas.
• Identify the strategies empresarios used to inform and attract settlers to Texas.
• Analyze primary source documents.
• Reflect on the empresario experience.

Social Studies TEKS
4th Grade: 4.2 A, 4.2 E, 4.14 B, 4.21
7th Grade: 7.2 C, 7.2 E, 7.2 F, 7.20 A, 7.21

Resources
• Activity 1: Move to the Texas Frontier! activity resource
• Activity 2: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin activity resources (adapted and full)
• Activity 3: Regulations for Settlement activity resource
• Activity 4: Empresario Advertisement activity resource
• Activity 5: Journal Reflection activity resource
• Primary Source Letter, Stephen F. Austin: July 19, 1823 extract from the Mirror newspaper, Fincastle, VA (images and adapted and full transcriptions)
• Primary Source Document: Stephen F. Austin’s Regulations for Settlement, 1821 (image and transcription)
Vocabulary

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

**incentive** (in SEN tiv) noun: something that encourages a person to try or work harder toward achieving a goal

**labor** (LAY buhr) noun: unit of land used for farming in Mexican Texas; one unit was equivalent to 177 acres

**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

**league** (LEEg) noun: unit of land used for raising stock in Mexican Texas; one unit was equivalent to 4,428 acres, also known as a sitio

**tythe/tithe** (TYthuh) noun: expected contribution to the Catholic Church; usually one-tenth of total earnings

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.

Empresario Stephen F. Austin needed to let prospective colonists know that coming to Mexican Texas was possible. While Austin never formally created ads in newspapers, he and others wrote letters to friends and acquaintances that promoted the settlement. These letters, which were published in newspapers, described the advantages to moving to Austin’s colony, which included more generous grants of inexpensive fertile land than were available in the United States. The letters also demonstrated the political system used at the time.
Video: How Did Empresarios Attract Colonists?

To introduce some of the methods empresarios used to advertise to potential colonists interested in settling in Texas, have learners watch the How Did Empresarios Attract Colonists? video. Discuss concepts after viewing.

Activity 1: Move to the Texas Frontier!

In this activity, learners assume the role of the Mexican government to analyze what the best incentives might be to entice colonists to settle in Texas. Have learners circle the best strategies on the Move to the Texas Frontier! activity resource. Share responses when completed.

Answer Key:

• Give land away for free: The federal Mexican government gave away frontier lands at no cost initially, but later the state government of Coahuila y Tejas imposed some fees.

• Sell land for low prices: Moses Austin originally wished to sell land in Spanish Texas at 12.5 cents an acre. This was 1/10th the price set on frontier land being sold in the United States during the same period.

• Invite citizens of your nation to colonize your frontier lands: Mexico asked its own citizens to move to Texas and offered them incentives, such as equipment to help them settle the new land.

• Invite people from foreign nations to move to Texas: Mexico and Spain both did this after seeing there was a strong desire among some citizens from the U.S. to move into Texas. Mexico did not give any of the equipment offered to its own citizens to those U.S. citizens who moved to Texas.

• Offer an exemption from paying taxes for 10 years: Colonizing land was expensive because the colonists had to build everything they needed to survive and to succeed. As a result of this, it would take a long time to get a home built, start a successful farm, and begin making money.

• Offer large plots of land: Mexican had a large amount of land to offer in Texas. Distributing large amounts of that land would be more attractive to potential colonists.

• Allow colonists to import any goods to build the colony tax-free for 3 years: Settling a colony was expensive and sometimes required special equipment. Allowing colonists to bring this equipment into the country without an extra cost helped speed the growth of the colony.

• Allow colonists to choose what businesses/industries to participate in: Colonists could continue to work in the same fields they had worked in before arriving in Mexican Texas, or they could start working in any other business or industry.
Activity 2: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin

In this activity, learners will analyze a published letter from Stephen F. Austin regarding his colonization recruitment. Preview the transcriptions* of his letter in the Mirror newspaper and the primary source images. 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.

*There are two transcriptions of Austin’s letter published in the Mirror newspaper: an adapted, shorter version, and the full transcription. The language of the text is the original in both. Assisting learners in understanding the meaning of the text may be helpful and/or necessary.

Answer Key:

Adapted version
- In what U.S. state was this letter from Stephen F. Austin published? In what year? **Virginia, 1823**
- Austin guaranteed each new settler to Texas a league of land. Based on the definition of league, how many acres was that? **4,428 acres**
- At the time this letter was published, how many families were already living in Texas? **100**
- At the time he wrote this letter, how many additional families was Austin trying to persuade to move to Texas? **200**

Full version
- At the time Austin wrote this letter in 1823, what action had just been ordered by the government of Mexico? **the election of a new Congress in August, to meet in October**
- In addition to receiving a large sum of land, what were potential colonists freed from? **paying taxes and tythes/tithes for six years**
- At the time he wrote this letter, how many additional families was Austin trying to persuade to move to Texas? **200**
- If the land Austin was offering cost __________ cents an acre, and the potential colonist could receive a league of land (_________ acres), what was the total cost? **12.5 cents an acre x 4,428 acres (a league) = $553.50 total**
Activity 3: Regulations for Settlement

In this activity, learners will analyze the regulations set out by Stephen F. Austin in 1821 required of potential colonists. Preview the transcriptions* of the document and the primary source image and discuss any challenges in dealing with transcriptions of primary source materials. Note that the amounts of land granted to settlers was changed in 1823 from what is on this document, and that the Republic of Mexico abolished slavery in 1829.

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

Answer Key:
• Where was Austin proposing to form his colony? along the Colorado and Brazos (Brassos) Rivers

• According to the terms in this document, how many total acres would a family of a husband, wife, and four children receive in 1821? 640 man, 320 wife, 160 per child (x4) = 1,600 acres

• What requirement must be fulfilled for one of the tracts of land a colonist receives? It must be inhabited and cultivated within a year from January of 1822.

• How could a colonist receive “additional privileges”? by being a mechanic or a man of capital (a person with money)

Activity 4: Empresario Advertisement

Using the Empresario Advertisement activity resource, learners will create a designed ad with graphic and print elements encouraging people to move to Texas in the early 19th century. Discuss with learners what details would be helpful to include in the ad, such as location of the colony, amount and price of land, unique colony features, etc. Share ads when completed.

Activity 5: Journal Reflection

Using the journal reflection activity resource, learners will write in response to the advertisement they created in Activity 4.
The Mexican federal government in the early 19th century needed to decide how to attract people to settle the Texas frontier. **Circle the incentives** that you think would help a potential colonist decide to move to Texas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Give away land for free</th>
<th>No tax exemptions</th>
<th>Sell land at high prices</th>
<th>Invite citizens of your nation to colonize your frontier lands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invite people from foreign nations to move to Texas</td>
<td>Offer an exemption from paying taxes for 10 years</td>
<td>Ban all foreign immigrants from settling frontier lands</td>
<td>Offer large plots of land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer small plots of land</td>
<td>Tax all imported items needed to build the colony</td>
<td>Allow colonists to import goods to build the colony tax-free for 3 years</td>
<td>Place restrictions on the types of businesses and industries colonists can participate in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow colonists to choose what businesses and industries colonists can participate in</td>
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Write two additional facts you learned in this video.

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Activity 2 Resource: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin (adapted)

Read the **Primary Source adapted transcript** of the letter from Stephen F. Austin that was published in the *Mirror* newspaper.

**Write answers to the questions.**

⭐ In what U.S. state was this letter from Stephen F. Austin published? In what year?

⭐ Austin guaranteed each new settler to Texas a league of land. Based on the definition of league, how many acres was that?

⭐ At the time this letter was published, how many families were already living in Texas?

⭐ At the time he wrote this letter, how many additional families was Austin trying to persuade to move to Texas?
Activity 2 Resource: A Letter from Stephen F. Austin (full)

Image of Stephen F. Austin courtesy Portal to Texas History via Palestine Public Library. Newspaper image courtesy Genealogybank, researched by Michael Rugeley Moore.

Read the Primary Source full transcript of the letter from Stephen F. Austin that was published in the Mirror newspaper

Write answers to the questions.

- At the time Austin wrote this letter, what action had just been ordered by the government of Mexico?

- In addition to receiving a large sum of land, what were potential colonists freed from?

- At the time he wrote this letter, how many additional families was Austin trying to persuade to move to Texas?

- If the land Austin was offering cost __________ cents an acre, and the potential colonist could receive a league of land (__________ acres), what was the total cost?
Activity 3 Resource: Regulations for Settlement

Read the **Primary Source transcript** of Stephen F. Austin’s 1821 rules for colony settlement.

**Write answers to the questions.**

★ Where was Austin proposing to form his colony?

★★ According to the terms in the document, how many total acres would a family of a husband, wife, and four children receive in 1821?

★★ What requirement must be fulfilled for one of the tracts of land a colonist receives?

★★ How could a colonist receive “additional privileges”?
Activity 4 Resource: Empresario Advertisement

Step into the shoes of a Texas *empresario*, and create an advertisement with graphic and print elements to convince settlers to come to your colony to live. Include details that would make your colony an attractive choice, such as the price of land, location of the colony, amount and price of land, and any unique colony features.
Think about advertisement you created to persuade settlers to come to your colony. How did your advertisement represent what was unique about your colony? Why did you use the design and print elements you did? What do you think is the strongest element of your advertisement? Is there anything you would change or add? Why?

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This is a full-page image from the July 19, 1823 Mirror newspaper, published in Fincastle, Virginia. Stephen F. Austin’s letter begins at the bottom of the second column from the left, and continues at the top of the third column from the left. Image courtesy of Genealogybank, researched by Michael Rugeley Moore.
Extract of a letter from Stephen F. Austin to a citizen of this State, dated Texas, July 11, 1823.

"After great delay I finally succeeded in getting my business satisfactorily arranged and shall immediately begin to lay off the land. My Grant was made by the Emperor, Hurdyge, according to the colonization Law, and after his fall, was confirmed by the Sovereign Congress, and Supreme Executive power. This was done on the 10th April and the colonization Law at the same time repealed as regards all others. Capt. ———— was in Mexico and had presented a petition to Congress for the introduction of six hundred families which on the 1st June my last intelligence had not been acted on. The whole nation has proclaimed the Federal Republican System. The four Eastern provinces will form one State for the present. A new Congress is ordered by the present one, the election to be next month and Congress to meet in October. Now is the time to move to this Country. There is no longer a doubt as to having a stable government, the nation seems unanimous. Settlers who establish themselves under me will have more privileges than ever will be granted again, the smallest quanti-

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The crops of this year will be immense, eighty bushels of corn to the acre; it is calculated will be raised in many places in the settlement, the rains have been plentiful throughout the summer. I want settlers of respectability, and if you or your friends will join me, I will allow you all the privileges in my power. The land will cost twelve and a half cents an acre in two yearly installments for the greater part, some must be paid on receiving titles. This province presents the most brilliant prospects under the Federal System. The people are anxious for the next settlement to succeed, that we may form a state separate from the other three provinces. General Trescaucus is removed from the command of this province and a new Governor appointed. The people will in all probability elect their own Governor and receive no more civil officers from Mexico."
After great delay I finally succeeded in getting my business satisfactorily arranged and shall immediately begin to lay off the land.

... Now is the time to move to this Country. Settlers who establish themselves under me will have more privileges than ever will be granted again, the smallest guaranty of land they are to receive is one League square, and are free from all taxes and tythes for six years. I am as yet unlimited as to the number which I may introduce into the interior of the province near the ancient settlement; there are about one hundred families on the Colorado and Brasos, the other two hundred I am determined shall be of the best kind.

The crops this year will be immense, eighty bushels of corn will be raised in many places in the settlement, the rains have been plentiful throughout the summer. I want settlers of respectability, and if you or your friends will join me, I will allow you all the privileges in my power. The land will cost twelve and a half cents an acre Stephen F. Austin.
Extract of a letter from Stephen F. Austin to a citizen of this State, dated Texas, July 1823. After great delay I finally succeeded in getting my business satisfactorily arranged and shall immediately begin to lay off the land. My Grant was made by the Emperor Iturbide agreeably to the colonization law, and after his fall, was confirmed by the Sovereign Congress and Supreme Executive power. This was done on the 10th of April and the colonization Law at the same time repealed as regards all others. Capt.---- was in Mexico and had presented a petition to Congress for the introduction of six hundred families which on the _th June (my last intelligence) had not been acted on. ---The whole nation has proclaimed the Federal Republican System. The four eastern provinces will form one State for the present. A new Congress is ordered by the present one, the election to be next month and Congress to meet in October. Now is the time to move to this Country. There is no longer a doubt to having a free government, the nation seems unanimous. Settlers who establish themselves under me will have more privileges than ever will be granted again, the smallest guaranty of land they are to receive is one League square, and are free from all taxes and tythes for six years. I am as yet unlimited as to the number which I may introduce into the interior of the province near the ancient settlement; there are about one hundred families on the Colorado and Brasos, the other two hundred I am determined shall be of the best kind.

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Primary Resource: Austin’s Regulations for Settlement, 1821

BY STEPHEN F. AUSTIN,

Civil Commandant of the Colony forming on the Colorado and Brassos Rivers, in the Province of Texas:

Permission is hereby granted to
to emigrate and settle in the Colony forming by me, under the authority and protection of the government of New Spain, at the points above stated.

Said

required to comply with the general regulations hereunto annexed:

General Regulations relative to the Colony.

1. No person will be admitted as a settler, who does not produce satisfactory evidence of having supported the character of a moral, sober, and industrious citizen.

2. Each settler must, when called on by the Governor of said Province, take the oath of allegiance to the government exercising the sovereignty of the country.

3. Six hundred and forty acres of land will be granted to the head of each family, and in addition to that, three hundred and twenty acres to a man’s wife, one hundred and sixty acres for each child, and eighty acres for each slave; which land will be laid off in two equal tracts, one on the river in an oblong, the other is to be located so as not to interfere with the river lands; one of said tracts must be actually inhabited and cultivated by the person and family who has permission to settle it, within one year from the first of January 1822.—Twelve cents and half per acre, must be paid for said land, one half on receipt of title, the other half in one year after, which will be in full for surveying fees and all other charges—each settler will choose his own tracts of land within the limits designated by said Austin.

4. Mechanics and men of capital, will receive additional privileges in proportion to their capacity to be useful.

5. Each settler is required to report himself to me, or the officer who has charge of the Colony, immediately on his arrival, and to furnish a list of the number of his family, giving the names of his children and their ages, the number of negroes, designating those under twelve years of age, those over twelve and under twenty-one, those over twenty-one, and whether male or female; and if any of the family are mechanics to state what kind.

Image courtesy of San Felipe de Austin, THC.
This is a transcription of the document written by Stephen F. Austin in 1821 settling out the rules potential colonists were required to follow for settlement.

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