

## The Austin Colonies

### Main Ideas

1. In its first years, Austin's colony faced problems that threatened to drive everyone away.
2. The Old Three Hundred helped make Austin's colony, centered on San Felipe de Austin, a success.
3. After the success of his first colony, Austin established four more colonies in Texas.

### Why It Matters Today

Austin's colony experienced many problems during its early years. Use current events sources to find out about problems communities today face and the solutions they use to fix those problems.



TEKS: 2E, 2F, 9A, 9C,  
10B, 11A, 11B, 21A,  
21B, 22D

### myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on life in Stephen F. Austin's colonies.

### Key Terms and People

- Old Three Hundred
- Jane Long
- San Felipe de Austin
- Little Colony

## The Story Continues

Life in the Texas colonies was hard. Early settlers lived in crude log cabins without any floors or windows. Frightened families huddled together in small villages in hopes of fending off American Indian attacks. Swarms of mosquitoes pestered people along the hot and humid Gulf Coast, spreading deadly diseases. Alligators prowled at night, eating dogs and—on rare occasions—even people. Despite the discomfort caused by such harsh conditions, many settlers stayed, and even more kept coming.



### Early Problems in Austin's Colony

Stephen F. Austin returned to his colony in August 1823. With him was the Baron de Bastrop, who had been appointed to issue the land titles. When they reached the colony, though, they found that many of the settlers were discouraged. Several had left to return to the United States, and several more were threatening to leave. A number of problems had arisen during Austin's absence. A bad drought had ruined the colony's first crop. Low on food, the settlers had eaten wild game to survive. In addition, the Karankawas, Tonkawas, and other local American Indians did not like the colonists living on their land and had raided the colony.

Austin tried to reassure the settlers, telling them that Mexico had approved the contract for the colony. To help bring order to the colony, he established a headquarters near present-day La Grange. There he set up a system of government and created rules to guide the colony. These rules blended Mexican and U.S. laws. Austin tried, with limited success, to form peaceful relations with nearby Texas Indians. At the same time, though, he also formed a militia for protection from raids. As he dealt with these problems, Austin began to look upon the settlers “as one great family who are under my care.” With Austin working to restore good spirits to the colonists, people stopped leaving. Gradually the population of the colony increased.

**Reading Check Summarizing** What early problems affected settlers in Austin’s colony, and how did Austin try to solve them?

## ★ The Old Three Hundred

By the fall of 1824, Austin had nearly fulfilled his contract with the Mexican government. In all, 297 families and single men had received land in his colony. Together these settlers became known as the **Old Three Hundred**. Most of them had come from the southern United States, particularly Louisiana. They were mostly farmers, and some were also slaveholders. Of the 1,790 colonists living in Austin’s colony in 1825, about 440 were enslaved African Americans. Jared Groce, the wealthiest colonist, had brought some 90 slaves to the colony.

The settlers were fairly well educated. Only four of the white colonists could not read, a low figure for the time. Settlers also tended to be law-abiding, largely because of Austin’s strict regulations.

Well-known members of the Old Three Hundred included Samuel May Williams and John P. Coles. Williams served as Austin’s colonial secretary, and Coles built a sawmill that supplied lumber to the colony. Because many colonists brought their families with them to Texas, the colony was home to many women and children.



Image Credit: © Illustration by Norman Price, Texas State Library and Archives Commission

## Daily Life

### Hospitality in Austin’s Colonies

While waiting to receive a land grant, Texas settlers occasionally stayed in hotels. One traveler in 1831 shared his Texas hotel room with 30 other men. Each man paid \$1 for a place to put his bedroll on the floor. “In order to place thirty men in a horizontal position, on a space about twenty feet square . . . required no small care,” he wrote. Many Texas families were also willing to put up strangers. The settlers, many of whom lived in isolated areas, gathered eagerly to hear the latest news. **How did travelers in Texas help settlers deal with the isolation of frontier life?**

## BIOGRAPHY

### Jane Long

(1798–1880) Jane Long was one of the Old Three Hundred. With her daughter Ann she obtained land in present-day Fort Bend and Waller Counties. On her land, Long ran boardinghouses, started a farm, raised cattle, and even tried raising sheep. Like many colonists, Long used slave labor in these efforts. In 1850 Long's plantation was worth more than \$10,000. She never remarried, but tradition holds that some of the leading men of Texas courted her. **How did Jane Long contribute to the colonization of Texas?**

**Analyzing Primary Sources**  
**Drawing Inferences and Conclusions** Considering the colonists' building materials, how do you think they adapted to the environment of the region?

In addition, a few women held land grants on their own. **Jane Long**, the widow of filibuster James Long, received land in Austin's colony in 1824. She became one of the most famous of the Old Three Hundred. Another widow, Rebekah Cumings, came to the colony in 1822 with her children. She claimed land in present-day Brazoria and Waller Counties.

**Reading Check Analyzing Information** Explain the significance of the term Old Three Hundred.

## San Felipe de Austin

By 1824, Austin felt that his colony needed a capital. In that year he founded **San Felipe de Austin**, better known as San Felipe. The town was located in present-day Austin County along the Brazos River. This site had several advantages. It was in the center of the colony, half-way between the coast and El Camino Real. Because travelers between Mexico, San Antonio, and East Texas traveled along the road, many people passed through San Felipe. The town sat on a high bluff, which aided in its defense. Below the bluff, the river provided a source of water. In addition, a ferry was located at the site.

San Felipe soon became the heart of Austin's colony. The town's population grew quickly as settlers moved to the capital. Austin placed his land office there and built a cabin on the edge of town. Other well-known residents included Gail Borden Jr. and Robert Williamson. Borden, with his brother Thomas and Joseph Baker, published the *Telegraph and Texas Register* newspaper. He also worked as a surveyor and inventor. Williamson was a judge who wore a wooden peg to support the knee of a weak leg. Known as Three-Legged Willie, Williamson would later help form the Texas court system. By 1827 San Felipe had between 100 and 200 residents. One settler described the town as it looked at the time.

### TEXAS VOICES



"Twenty-five or perhaps thirty log cabins strung along the west bank of the Brazos River was all there was of it. . . . The buildings all being of unhewn [rough] logs with clapboard roofs, presented few distinguishing features. . . . Every fellow built to suit himself . . . so that the town was strung along either side of the road something like half a mile . . . 'Pretty good as to length, but rather thin.'"

—Noah Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State, or Recollections of Old Texas Days*

By the early 1830s San Felipe was the second largest business center in Texas, after San Antonio. Homes and stores lined Atascosito Road, the town's main street. A lumber mill, newspaper office, and post office provided needed services. The town even had a hotel for weary travelers. Austin's colony was a success.

**Reading Check Evaluating** What geographic factors helped San Felipe de Austin thrive?

## ★ Austin's Other Colonies

Several Tejano leaders helped Austin succeed in his colonization efforts. José Miguel de Arciniega, Gaspar Flores de Abrego, José Antonio Saucedo, and Erasmo Seguín all gave valuable assistance. With their help, Austin was able to acquire contracts for four more colonies between 1825 and 1831. Each of them overlapped his first colony except for one. This one isolated colony became known as Austin's **Little Colony**.

Austin's contract for the Little Colony provided for settlement of 100 families north of the Old San Antonio Road and east of the Colorado River. This was an isolated location on the western edge of Texas settlement. The colony's main town of Bastrop was near Comanche hunting grounds and, as a result, suffered attacks.

Because of its isolation, the Little Colony grew slowly. Austin tried to help the colony thrive by organizing a militia and recruiting some Tonkawas as allies. Although these efforts helped, the colony remained small. In 1830 just one bachelor and two families lived in Bastrop.

Despite the slow growth of the Little Colony, Austin's other colonization efforts were a success. Austin described his feelings about his achievements in 1829.



Robert Williamson was one of the most famous residents of San Felipe.

### TEXAS VOICES

“My ambition has been to succeed in redeeming [freeing] Texas from its wilderness state by means of the plough alone. . . . In doing this I hoped to make the fortune of thousands and my own amongst the rest. . . . I think that I derived more satisfaction from the view of flourishing farms springing up in this wilderness than military or political chieftains do from . . . their victorious campaigns.”

—Stephen F. Austin, quoted in *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*, by Gregg Cantrell

**Reading Check Finding the Main Idea** In total, how many colonies did Stephen F. Austin establish in Texas?

**Analyzing Primary Sources**  
**Analyzing Information** What did Austin say was his goal in settling Texas?



## Section 3 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

### 1. Identify and explain

the significance of each of the following in Texas history:

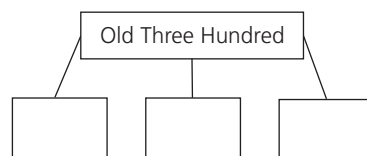
- Old Three Hundred
- Jane Long
- San Felipe de Austin
- Little Colony

### 2. Locate on a Texas map:

- San Felipe

### 3. Categorizing

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to identify three characteristics of the Old Three Hundred.



### 4. Finding the Main Idea

- Why did some settlers threaten to leave Austin's colony, and how did Austin react?
- What geographic factors caused Bastrop to grow more slowly than San Felipe?

### 5. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

**Summarizing** Imagine that you live in San Felipe de Austin. Write a letter home describing life in the settlement.

Consider the following:

- its location
- the town's residents and buildings