

Stephen Austin's contract to bring settlers to Texas, 1825

Introduction

In order to settle Texas in the 1820s, the Mexican government allowed speculators, called empresarios, to acquire large tracts of land if they promised to bring in settlers to populate the region and make it profitable. Moses and Stephen Austin contracted to bring “500 families on the vacant lands remaining within the limits of the colony already established.” The contract stipulates that “The families which are to compose this Colony besides being industrious as he offers in his petition must be Cat[ho]lics, and of good morals.” Stephen Austin established dozens of communities and brought thousands of settlers into the Mexican province of Texas. While Austin was loyal and committed to the Mexican Republic, by the early 1840s he was leery of the unstable Mexican government and advocated for the independence of Texas.

Excerpt

8th Official Communications with the Govt. or with the authorities of the State, instruments of writing and other public acts, must be written in Spanish, and when new Towns are formed it shall be his duty to establish Spanish Schools in them.

9 It shall also be his duty to promote the erection of churches in said Towns and that they are provided with ornaments, holy vases and other things necessary for divine worship and in the proper time to solicit the necessary numbers of Pastors for the Adminstration of Spiritual affairs.

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction, examine the excerpt and if possible the entire transcript, and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. List and explain the requirements the Mexican government made of Stephen Austin and the new settlers.
2. What motive existed for the Mexican government to allow settlers from the United States? Why did Americans seek to settle in Mexico?
3. How does the excerpt help explain the eventual tensions and disagreements that would harm relations between the settlers and the Mexican government?
4. How is Stephen Austin depicted in your textbook? How do you think he is depicted in textbooks used in high school classes in Mexico?

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Image

Conditions on which the Empresario Stephen F. Austin is authorized by the Gov^t of the State of Coahuila and Texas to Colonize 500 families on the vacant lands remaining within the limits of the Colony already established by him, in the Department of Texas.

1st The Gov^t admits the propriety of the petition of Stephen F. Austin in his representation of the 4th of February of the present year relative to the Colonization of 300 foreign Settlers in conformity with the Colonization Law passed by the Legislature of this State 24th March last, and hereby designates in conformity with the 8th Article of said Law, and agreeably to his petition the Vacant Lands remaining within the limits designated for the Colony which he has already established excepting only 10 (ten) leagues from the Coast which cannot be Colonized except with the previous approbation of the Supreme Executive Power of the Nation agreeably to the 1st Article of the said Law.

2nd In conformity with the said Law of Colonization of the 24th March the said Empresario Stephen F. Austin shall be obliged to introduce the said families within the term of 1 year counting from the day on which these Conditions are signed by the said Empresario under the penalty of losing the right and benefit granted to him by the 8th Article of the said Law.

3rd The families which are to compose this Colony besides being industrious as he reports in his petition must be Catholics, and of good morals proving their qualifications by the documents required by the 5th Article of the said Law of Colonization of the 24th March.

4th He shall be obliged not to admit in the new Colony Criminals, vagabonds, or Men of bad Conduct or Character, and Cause such as are within his limits to leave it, and should it be necessary he shall drive them out by force of arms.

5th For this purpose he shall organize the new Colonists in a body of National Militia of which he shall be the Chief until otherwise ordered.

Stephen Austin's contract to bring settlers to Texas, June 4, 1825 (The Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC01160)

Stephen Austin's contract to bring settlers to Texas, 1825

1st As soon as he shall have introduced 100 families at least he shall notify the Gov^t thereof in order that a Commissioner may be sent on with the competent instructions to put the new Colonists in possession of their lands and to establish Towns in Conformity with the Law.

2^d Official Communications with the Gov^t or with the authorities of the State, instruments of Writing and other public acts, must be written in Spanish, and when these Towns are formed it shall be his duty to establish Spanish Schools in them.

3^d It shall also be his duty to promote the erection of Churches in said Towns and that they are provided with ornaments, bells, vases and other things necessary for divine worship and in the proper time to select the necessary number of Indent for the Administration of Spiritual Affairs.

4th That the said contract be made on the said 4th of June 1825 and that the said contract be made in the presence of the Governor and other general agents.

The foregoing Conditions were accepted and signed by the Empresario Stephen F. Austin on the 4th of June 1825 on the 20th May 1825 the Governor of the State by an Official Order increased the number of Families to Five Hundred.

Stephen F. Austin

Office of the
Surveyor General
June 20th 1825
Office of the
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Transcript

Stephen Austin's contract to bring settlers to Texas, June 4, 1825 (The Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC01160)

Conditions on which the Empresario Stephen F. Austin is authorised by the Gov^t. of the State of Cuahuila and Texas to Colonize 500 families on the vacant lands remaining within the limits of the colony already established by kind, in the Department of Texas.

1st The Gov^t. admits the project prevented by citizen Stephen F. Austin in his representation of the 4th of February of the present year relative to the Colonization of 300 foreign Families so far as [*inserted: is*] in conformity with the Colonization Law passed by the Legislature of this State 24th March last, and hereby designates in Conformity with the 8th article of said Law, and arguably to his petition the vacant lands remaining within the limits designated for the colony which he has already established excepting only 10 (ten) Leagues from the Coast which cannot be colonized except with the previous approbation of the Supreme Executive power of the Nation agreeably to the Law of the 18th [*text loss*]

[2nd] Possessions given to [*text loss*] titles within the limits designated shall be respected.

3d. In conformity with the said Law of Colonization of the [24th] March the said Empresario Citizen Stephen F. Austin shal[l] be obliged to introduce the said families within the term of 6 [*text loss*] Counting from the day on which these conditions are signed by the said Empresario under the penalty of loosing the rights and benefits granted to him by the 8th Article of the said Law.

4th The families which are to compose this Colony besides being industrious as he offers in his petition must be Cat[ho]lics, and of good morals proving these qualifications by the documents required by the 5th Article of the said Law of Colonization of the 24th March.

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5 He shall be obliged not to admit in the new Colony Criminals, Vagabonds, or Men of bad Conduct or Character, and Cause such as are within his limi[ts] to leave it and should it be necessary he shall drive them out by force of arms.

6th For this purpose he shall organize the new Colonists in a body of National Militia of which he shall be the Chief until otherwise ordered.

[2] 7th As soon as he shall have introduced 100 families at least he shall notify the Gov^t. thereof in order that a Commissioner may be sent on with the Competent instructions to put the new colonists in possession of their Lands and to establish Towns in Conformity with the Law.

8th Official Communications with the Govt. or with the authorities of the State, instruments of writing and other public acts, must be written in Spanish, and when new Towns are formed it shall be his duty to establish Spanish Schools in them.

9 It shall also be his duty to promote the erection of churches in said Towns and that they are provided with ornaments, holy vases and other things necessary for divine worship and in the proper time to solicit the necessary number of Pastors for the Administration of Spiritual affairs.

[10] In all ot[her] [*text loss*] and other general Laws.

The foregoing conditions were accepted and signed by the Empresario Stephen F. Austin on the 4th of June 1825 on the 20th May 1825 the Governor of the State by an Official order increased the number of Families to Five Hundred.

Stephen F. Austin

[*docket*]

N^o. [*struck*: 341] – 415

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P[*illegible*] Coles

[*illegible*] Sep^t 17th 1849

ECa[*illegible*]

L,D,C,A,C

Filed 21 Jany 1830

The Carter CDC[*illegible*]C