

# The WILD WEST

*People and Events  
That Shaped the  
American West*



*Stephen Fuller Austin*

**Stephen Fuller Austin** is known as “The Father of Texas”. He grew up in Missouri, but moved to Arkansas after becoming an adult. While he was living in Arkansas, his father got an offer to help settle the new land of Texas, but he got sick and died before he could do so. He left the contract in Austin’s name, and he decided to carry out his father’s wish.

However, on his way there, Spain gave Texas to Mexico, who wouldn’t honor the land grants that Spain had given out to people like Austin’s father. Austin traveled all the way to Mexico City to convince the government to let him have the land he was promised. The Mexican government changed the law so that individual states could allow settlers to make their homes in the new land.

Stephen Austin eventually recruited 300 families, known in Texas history as ‘The Old 300’, to settle there. He became their leader, and set up infrastructure and government in the settlement. However, in 1830, Mexico passed a law that wouldn’t let any more immigrants into Texas. Austin, who always preferred to work with the Mexican laws that were in place whenever possible, found a loophole that let him continue to peacefully bring settlers to his colony, but his residents were still angry that the government would not allow their new town to grow. They sent Austin to Mexico with a list of their complaints, and also a constitution for a new state where they could live under their own government. The Mexican president, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, repealed the law but didn’t let them become a separate state.

Austin still wanted to keep a peaceful alliance with Mexico, but the start of the Texas Revolution forced him to side with his settlers. He went to Washington to ask for help from the U.S. military. He did not succeed, but by the time he had returned to Texas, Texas had won its independence at the Battle of San Jacinto. He went on to serve as Secretary of State to the new republic.

## *Fun Fact:*

*Both the city of Austin and Austin County in Texas are named after him. However, the city of Austin is not actually in Austin County!*

**It is often said that Stephen Austin would rather work with the Mexican government rather than fight them for as long as peace was possible. Do you think this was a realistic way of making decisions for his new colony? Why or why not?**

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