



The Old Three Hundred

The Old Three Hundred is a term used to describe 297 settlers who purchased grants of land from Stephen Fuller Austin, an empresario appointed by the governor to distribute land in the name of the Mexican government. The settlers made up the first approved group of Anglo-American immigrants to Texas. The titles covered the land between the Brazos River and the Colorado River from the Gulf Coast to the San Antonio Road. Brenham and Independence are included in that corridor of land.

Background: From 1762 to 1800, Missouri was under Spanish control as was Texas. Moses Austin, an American businessman, had obtained Spanish citizenship to establish a Spanish colony in Missouri. In 1790, he decided to request an empresarios grant in Spanish Texas. Traveling to San Antonio de Bexar, he met with the governor. Though refused at first, with the help of a former acquaintance, Felipe Enrique Neri, Baron de Bastrop, his request was finally approved. On the way home to Missouri, he was attacked and brutally beaten by highwaymen. He died soon after reaching home, leaving his newly obtained grant to his son, Stephen F. Austin.

Stephen carried out his father's wishes and in 1821, he led a small group of settlers into Texas. Before his arrival in San Antonio to talk with the governor, Mexico had earned its independence from Spain. Now, Texas was a Mexican province, but the governor assured him that the colonization contract would be honored by the new Mexican government. Austin was successful in recruiting more settlers in Louisiana but learned in March 1822, that his father's land grant was not ratified. He traveled 1,200 miles to Mexico City to get permission for his colony. The Imperial Colonization Law was passed in 1823 by the Mexican Government allowing approval of Austin's contract.

Between 1824 and 1828, 297 titles were granted. Each head of household received between 177 acres and 4,428 acres, depending on the purposes stated by the settler. Variances depended on whether the land was used for farming or ranching, whether an industry would be established and on the size of the family. The land would be forfeited if not used in two years.

Austin chose settlers based on whether or not he thought they would be productive. Thus, he chose immigrants who could read and write and immigrants who owned property. One-quarter bought slaves. According to historian William Davis, the high degree of literacy among the settlers improved communication among them and thus impacted the future of the colony in that they were able to unite in a common purpose.