Texas Historical Commission

The Militia in Austin's Colony

Grade 4 & 7

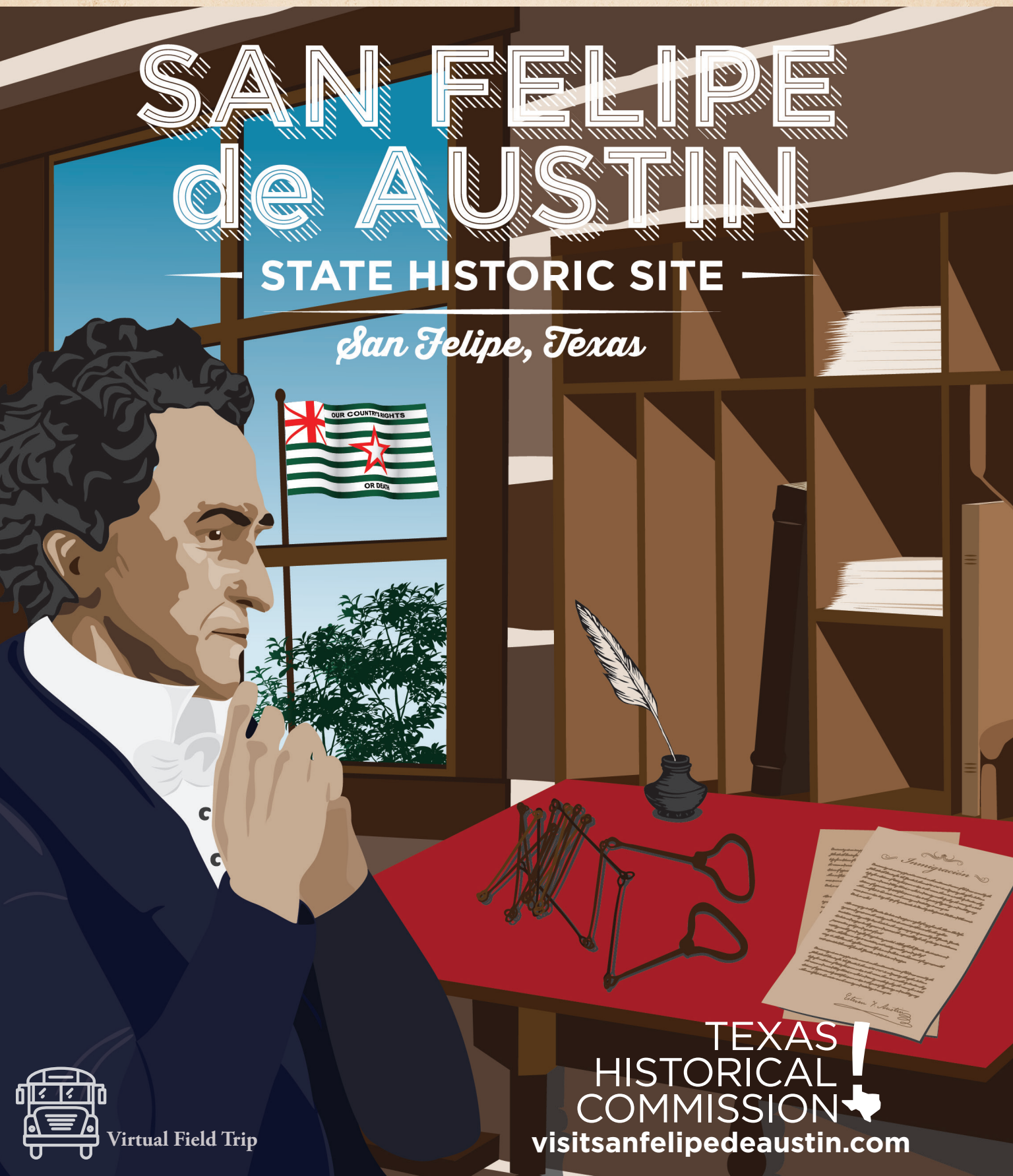


Image by John Wilson

The Militia in Austin's Colony

Overview: A New Beginning for Texas

In Part 10 in the *Empresario* series from the Texas Historical Commission's **San Felipe de Austin** site, learners are introduced to the role of the civic militia in Mexican Texas during the early 19th century. The Constitution of Coahuila and Texas provided that a civic militia be established in all towns of the state. In 1826, militias of Stephen F. Austin and Green DeWitt's colonies were mustered to defeat the Fredonian Rebellion, an early attempt by Anglo colonists in Texas to declare independence from Mexico. The activities explore the role of the militia and the regulations governing it.

Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of the empresario system.
- Identify the reasons for the organization of a militia in 19th century Texas.
- Analyze primary source documents.
- Reflect on the empresario experience.

Social Studies TEKS

4th Grade: 4.2 A E, 4.8 C, 4.12, 4.14 B, 4.15 A, 4.21 A B, 4.23
7th Grade: 7.2 D E F, 7.10 A B, 7.20 A B, 7.23

Resources

- Video: The Militia in Austin's Colony (THC YouTube) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzOHNZK4iK4&feature=youtu.be
- Activity 1: Muster! activity resource
- Activity 2: Analyzing Primary resources activity
- Activity 3: Forming a Militia: Decision activity resources
- Activity 4: Journal Reflection activity resource
- Primary Source: Report of Militia Strength and Armaments, June 14, 1826
- Primary Source: Frank Johnson report on San Felipe militia preparations, 1827
- Primary Source: Stephen F. Austin letter, 1824

Vocabulary

batallion (buh TAAL yun) noun: a military unit made up of multiple companies

company (KUHM puh nee) noun: a military unit of up to 100 men

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

Fredonian Rebellion (frih DOH nee uhn rih BELL yun) noun: an early attempt by Anglo settlers to declare independence from Mexico, 1826

muster (MUH ster) noun: a gathering of military troops to practice or prepare for battle

tanner (TAAH nur) noun: a person whose job is to prepare animal hides for use

Historical Context

On February 18, 1823, Stephen F. Austin received authorization to organize the colonists into a body of National Militia. This date is honored as the founding date of the Texas military, and later, the 141st United States Infantry Regiment. Stephen F. Austin organized the colony's militia into a battalion of five companies in 1824. Three companies were for the upper, middle, and lower Brazos areas. Two companies were for the Colorado River settlements. In the elections for the second company at San Felipe on June 22, 1824, Horatio Chriesman was elected Captain and Seth Ingram as first lieutenant. Both were surveyors. Two other lieutenants, James Baird and John McCroskey, were tanners and saddlers.

Militias in Mexican Texas were organized with the intent of defending the area from hostile native tribes, criminals, and filibusters. In 1826, the militias of Austin's Colony and Green DeWitt's colony were mustered to defeat what came to be known as the Fredonian Rebellion (December 21, 1826 – January 23, 1827). This rebellion was an early attempt by Anglo colonists in Texas to declare independence from Mexico. It was led by Empresario Haden Edwards, who created the Republic of Fredonia near Nacogdoches. Though Edwards originally had support from some of the nearby Cherokee, Stephen F. Austin and Mexican officials convinced them to withdraw their support.

The rebellion did not last long, as over 200 Mexican soldiers from San Antonio and 275 Texian Militia members marched to Nacogdoches to restore order. Edwards and many of his followers fled to the United States. The rebellion led to Mexican President Guadalupe Victoria increasing the number of military troops in Texas. Some historians consider the Fredonian Rebellion to be the beginning of the Texas Revolution.

Video: The Militia in Austin's Colony

To introduce the activities, have learners watch **The Militia in Austin's Colony video**. Share reactions after viewing.

Activity 1: Muster!

In this activity, learners use the **Muster! activity resource** to determine their service path in the colony militia. Preview the flowchart and the final response question. Share responses when completed.

Activity 2: Analyzing Primary Resources

In this activity, learners analyze the 1826 militia strength and armament report and Frederic Johnson's 1827 San Felipe militia report for information. Preview each document and the questions for information. Share responses when completed. Note: To enlarge the view of the 1826 strength and armament report, go to https://brbl-zoom.library.yale.edu/viewer/15237650.

Answer Key 1826 Militia Strength and Armament Report:

- How many pistolas (pistols) did Stephen (Estevan) F. Austin own? **2**
- How many soldados (soldiers) did Samuel Miller command? **36**

Answer Key 1827 San Felipe Militia Report:

- What impression does Mr. Johnson have of the Mexican soldiers? **They are well-disciplined and practice regularly. They like playing cards and gambling when off duty.**
- How does Mr. Johnson describe the soldiers' march? **long and fatiguing due to bad roads**
- What happened to the San Felipe cannon? **Part of the muzzle blew off when the colonists fired it in response to the Mexican soldiers' morning gun.**

Activity 3: Forming a Militia

In this activity, learners read **Stephen F. Austin's June 22, 1824 letter** for information and for context on how Austin organized a militia. Preview the letter and address any challenges in reading the original language of a primary source document. In the following activity, learners use the **Forming a Militia activity resource** to evaluate fictional applicants to select individuals for militia positions. Answers may vary. Share responses when completed.

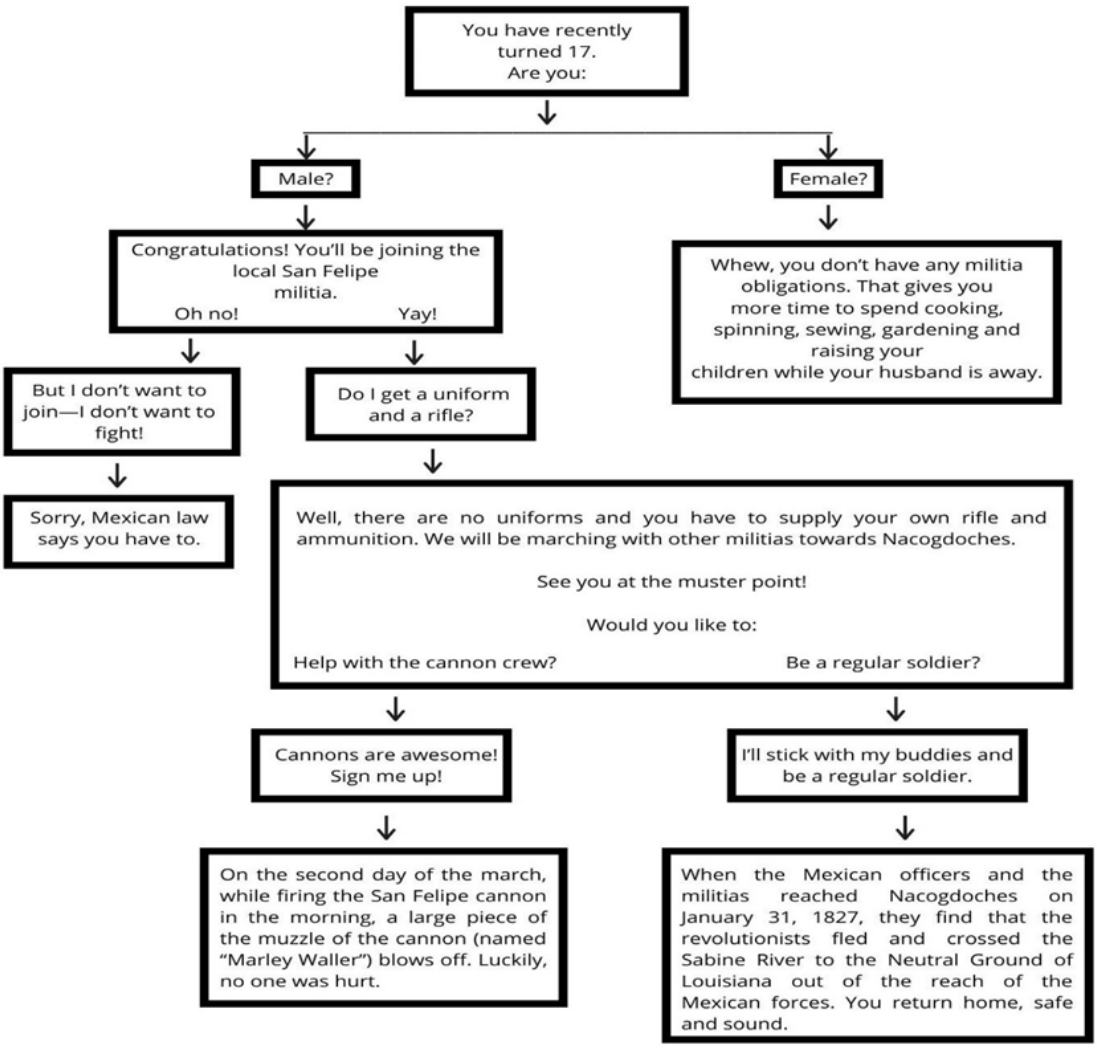
Activity 4: Journal Reflection

Using **the journal reflection activity resource**, learners write a plan for acquiring supplies to supply a militia for a month.

Activity 1 Resource: Muster!

Follow the flowchart to determine your role in the Fredonian Rebellion. Write answers to the questions.

In late December, 1826, a group of Anglo settlers led by empresario Haden Edwards declared independence from Mexico and created the Republic of Fredonia, located near Nacogdoches. In response, the Mexican government sends over 100 soldiers from San Antonio to stop the rebellion. It is early January, 1827. Muster has been called



As a female, what are your reactions to your outcome?

As a male, what are your reactions to your outcome?

Activity 2 Resource: Analyzing Primary Resources

Read the **1826 militia strength and armament report** and **Frederic Johnson's 1827 San Felipe militia report** to answer the questions.

1826 Militia Strength and Armament Report

- How many pistolas (pistols) did Stephen (Estevan) F. Austin own?

- How many soldados (soldiers) did Samuel Miller command?

1827 San Felipe Militia Report

- What impression does Mr. Johnson have of the Mexican soldiers?

- How does Mr. Johnson describe the soldiers' march?

- What happened to the San Felipe cannon?

Activity 3 Resource: Forming a Militia: Decision

Read **Stephen F. Austin's 1824 letter** on organizing a militia battalion. Notice the positions and the number of people Austin outlined as being needed to fill each position. Then read the fictional **applications from militia candidates**.

You are in charge of forming a new militia and must choose from several applicants to fill the positions below. Read each of their applications and complete the chart with your selections.

Position	Selection Name	Reason for Decision
Captain		
Lieutenant		
Sergeant		
Sergeant		
Corporal		
Drummer		

Activity 3 Resource: Forming a Militia: Applications

These are the applications you have received for the potential positions in your militia.

My name is **George Talbot** and I am a great choice to become an officer in your militia. I have made my living as a farmer and before coming to join this colony. Before I came here, I served in a couple different militias back in my home state of Tennessee where I participated in many fights against some of the Indians living in Tennessee. I haven't led a large group of men before, but it sure looks easy to do.

I am **Erasmus** and believe I would be the best officer for this militia. I served in the US Army during the war of 1812. To be honest I did not serve in the front lines of a battle. While I was a soldier my job was to cook for the army's Generals. While serving the Generals their food I learned many things about leading men into battle. All these things I can apply to leading the militia of this colony. Once the battle is over, I can prepare a fine meat pie for the men to eat while they celebrate our victory.

I am **William Smith**, blacksmith. I think I am just the man you need to lead your militia. I can handle a rifle and can fix most anything! Those Indians don't scare me at all. I also like telling people what to do—I have 15 children, and I've raised them all right.

As a member of the US Army and I served as a supply officer for 6 years. That training has helped me as a merchant to run a successful business. Something that I learned from my time as a supply officer is that a lack of supplies can ruin any chance an army or a militia has for winning a battle. I will be happy to lead men into battle and to ensure that they have the supplies to win it. It would be my pleasure to serve as an officer in this colony's militia and to help protect this colony.

Charles Swartz

My name is **Lancelot Stone** and I have always been known as a great fighter either with my fists, knives or with my rifle. I have won most of those fights so I figure how hard can it be to lead a bunch of men into a fight. The other men in the militia will have to follow my orders as soon as I give them. I will make it clear to the men that I will not hesitate to fight anyone who might disagree with me.

I have not served in a militia and I am not happy about the idea of harming another person. However, I think that I would be a good choice to become an officer in this militia because I am well liked by all the other colonists. I am confident that I can lead the militia well. Not to mention that the best part of being an officer is that if we do get into a fight, I will be too busy directing the men to worry about shooting.

Wilson Weatherby

I led a group of 8 families to Texas, so I know a thing or two about organizing a group of people. I am a capable hunter, and learned to be a good leader on our long trip to Texas. I know how important it is to protect ourselves here on the frontier. I'm willing to step up and do my part.

Frank Kennedy

I am 14 years old, and even though I'm small for my age, I am sure I'm getting ready to grow soon. Plus, I'm pretty brave and am ready to fight. I hear you need a drummer or a fifer. Well, I can play the spoons AND a tin whistle. What do you say? Do I have the job? I'm looking forward to leaving home and being out on my own.

Allan Jones

I recently moved to Texas, and want to do my part. I am a schoolteacher by trade, and have taught up to 40 students at a time. I have excellent penmanship, and am an amateur botanist. I look forward to seeing more of Texas while marching.

Callum Thompson

Activity 4 Resource: Journal Reflection

The militia you formed is marching alongside Francis Johnson and the Mexican army. You expect to be in the field for a month. There are no stores along the way so you must take with you everything you, your militia, and your animals will need. Make lists in each category of the items that will be essential along your journey.

FOOD

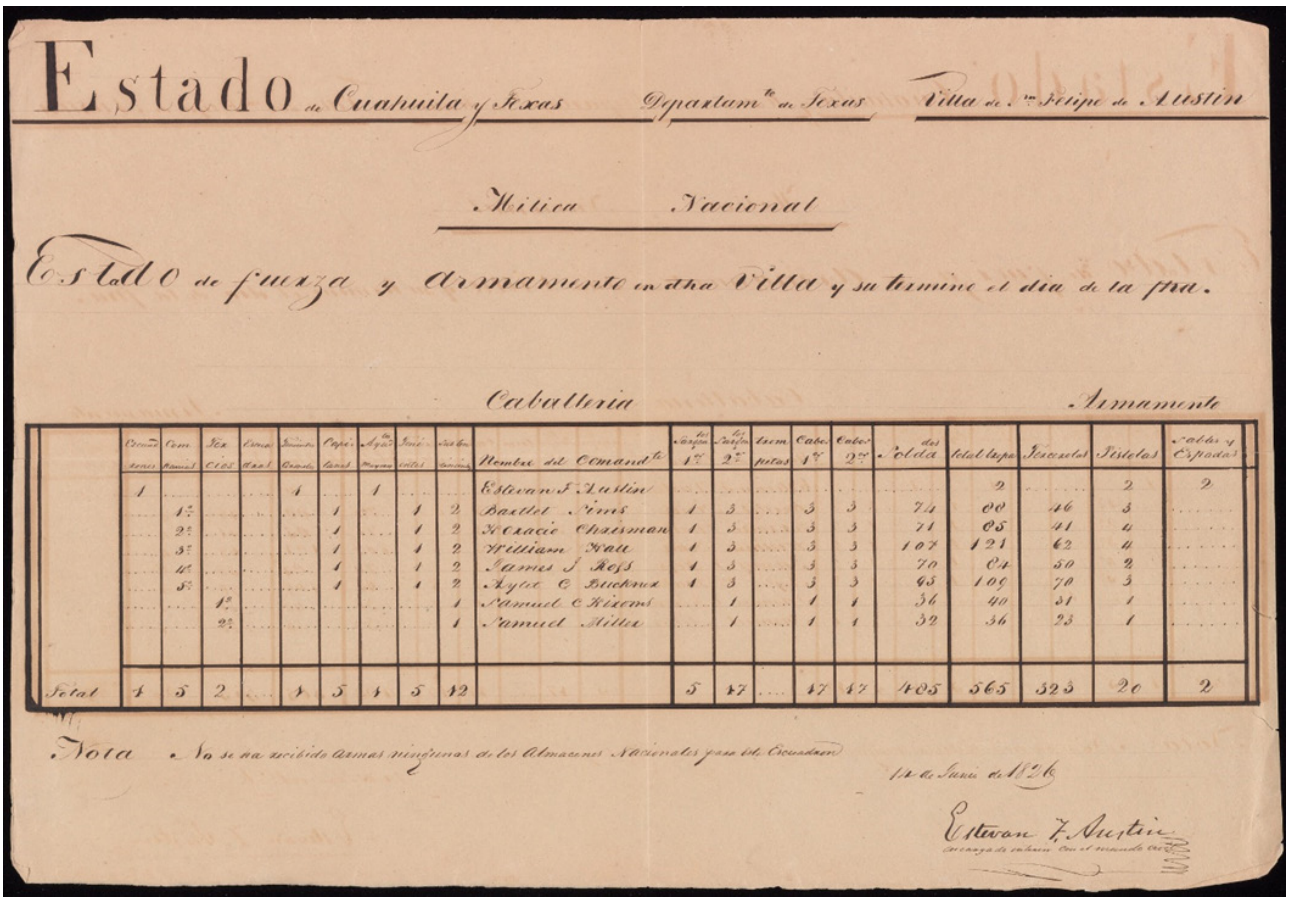
TOOLS

MILITARY SUPPLIES

OTHER SUPPLIES

Primary Resource: 1826 Militia Strength and Armament Report

is is a report of strength and armament of the militia at San Felipe de Austin, San Felipe de Austin, June 14, 1826. Also included is a translation. Image Austin, S. F. (S. F., & Wagner, H. R. Report of strength and armament of the militia at San Felipe de Austin, San Felipe de Austin. (June 14, 1826) https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4102277?image_id=15237650



Estado de Coahuila y Texas — Departam.to de Texas — Villa de S.n Felipe de Austin

Milicia Nacional

Estado de fuerza y armamento en dha Villa y su termino el dia de la fha.

	Squadrons	Companies	Tericios	Squads	Lieutenant Colonel	Capitans	Sub Adjudant	Lieutenant	Sub Lieutenants	Name of the commander	1st Sargent	2nd Sargents	Trumpets	1st corporal	2nd corporal	Soldiers	Total Troops	Carbine	Pistols	Sabers and Swords
	1				1		1			Stephen F. Austin							2		2	2
		1				1		1	2	Bartlet Sims	1	3		3	3	74	88	46	3	
		2				1		1	2	Horacio Chrisman	1	3		3	3	71	85	41	4	
		3				1		1	2	William Hall	1	3		3	3	107	121	52	4	
		4				1		1	2	Samual J Ross	1	3		3	3	70	84	50	2	
		5				1		1	2	Aylet C Buckmer	1	3		3	3	95	109	70	3	
			1						1	Samuel C. Hinones		1		1	1	36	40	31	1	
			2						1	Samuel Miller		1		1	1	32	36	23	1	
Total	1	5	3		1	5	1	5	12		5	17		17	17	485	565	323	20	2

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Primary Resource: 1827 San Felipe Militia Report

In early 1827, Colonel Mateo Ahumada of the Mexican Army marched a force of 200 soldiers from San Antonio de Bejar to San Felipe de Austin. Colonel Ahumada had orders to march his army to Nacogdoches to defeat the Fredonian Rebellion that had been started there by an empresario named Haden Edwards. Colonel Ahumada wanted the militia of Austin's Colony to join his army and to defeat Haden Edwards and his rebellious colonists.

San Felipe's militia mustered, took a roll call, reaffirmed their loyalty to the Mexican government, and then joined Colonel Ahumada's army. To aid the militia in any battle that might take place, the blacksmiths and carpenters of San Felipe prepared a small cannon owned by Stephen F. Austin to be taken on the expedition. Surveyor and future alcalde Frank W. Johnson recalled the events of January 1827.

"During this time I visited San Felipe de Austin frequently. In early spring, some three hundred Mexican troops arrived on their march to the seat of war. The colonists, to nearly an equal number, assembled and joined the Mexicans, who showed no disposition to march further without them. The Mexican troops were well provided, drilled regularly, and seemed to be under good discipline. When not on duty, both officers and men indulged in their favorite game at cards---Monte.

All things necessary for a forward movement being provided, the troops took up the line of march, in all the pride and circumstance of war, for Nacogdoches, with the beat of drum and sound of bugle. The march was long and fatiguing, on account of the bad state of the roads. Nothing happened on the line of march worthy of note, except, perhaps, the blowing off of a part of the muzzle of a four-pounder gun belonging to the colonists, which happened in this wise: The Mexicans on the second morning of the march fired a morning gun, the colonists, not to be outdone, fired the four-pounder, with the result mentioned; fortunately no injury was done except that to the gun."

Primary Resource: Stephen F. Austin Letter, 1824

This letter, written by Stephen F. Austin and dated June 22, 1824, outlines the organization of a militia battalion. It lists the positions that need to be filled, depending on how many men have enlisted.

In conformity with the decree of the Superior Government of the Mexican Nation dated at the City of Mexico the 18 day of February 1823 and in complyance with the commission and instructions issued to me by Brigidier General Don Felipe de la Garza Commandant General of the eastern Internal Provinces dated at the city of Monterry the 16 day of June 1823 whereby I am fully empowered and ordered to form a Battalion of Militia in this Colony so soon as the number would justify it and to command the same with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel until the organization of this Colony is finally completed and the Militia are regulated by the Ayuntamientos agreeably to the laws on that subject; and considering that our numbers are sufficient to form a Battalion and that the public security requires it I have thought proper to order that a Battalion shall be immediately organized in the following manner—to continue untill the Government order otherwise, or untill the augmentation of numbers may require an alteration—

1—-The Militia on the Brazos River and its waters above the Coshatta will form the first company—

2—The Militia on the said Brazos River and its waters from the Coshatta Road to the upper line of League No 22 including the East bank of the Bernard to opposite the 22d League on a west course, will form the second Company —

3—The Militia on said Brazos River and its waters from the lower line of the 2nd Company to the Sea Shore and as far East as the Chocolate Bayou and including both banks of the Bernard from the Mound down will form the third company—

4—The Militia on the Colorado River and its waters above a west south west line that will pass through the Eagle Lake, as far west as Labaca, and including all the waters of the Bernard north of the Coshatta road will form the fourth Company —-

5—The Militia on the said Colorado River and its waters South of the 4th Company, as far west as La Baca and including both banks of the Bernard from the lower line of the 2d Company down to the Mound and the settlements of the Bay Prairie will form the fifth Company.

Agreeably to the Militia law of the Mexican Nation a full company of consists of from 60, to 100 men with 1 Captain, 4 Lieutenants, 5 Sergeants, 12 Corporals 2 drummers and 1 fifer — The officers and non commissioned officers will therefore be regulated in this Battalion according to this standard in proportion to the strength of the respective Companies —and therefore when the Company consists of less than 60 and more than 45 men the officers will be 1 Captain 3 Lieutenants, 4 Sergeants 6 corporals 1 drummer 1 fifer —when the Company consists of less than 45 and over 30 the officers will be 1 Captain, 2 Lieutenants —3 Sergeants and 4 corporals —under 30 men will form detachments and be commanded by 1 Lieutenant and the necessary number of non commissioned officers—

The staff consists of the Lieutenant Colonel Commandant one adjutant with the rank of captain, one sub-adjutant with the rank of Lieutenant—one standard bearer or Ensign—One quarter master sergeant and one surgeon —All the Company officers and non commissioned officers will be elected by the men of the respective Companies— San Felipe de Austin June 22. 1823 [1824] Stephen F. Austin Lieut. Col. of Militia

MILITIA OFFICERS
[June 22, 1824.]
Andrew Robinson Capt. 1 Company Militia Samuel S Brown 1 Lieut do do Jas. Alexander 2d Simon Miller 3 Lieut Horacio Chrisman Capn 2d Compy Seth Ingram 1 Lieut do James Baird 2 do do John McClosky do do Randal Jones Cap 3d Compy David Shelby 1 Lieut do Jesse Burnham Capn \. 4th compy John Hadden 1 Lieut do Amos Rawls Capn. 5 Compy Thos Rabb 1 Lieut

Source: Eugene Barker, ed., Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1919: The Austin Papers, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 3 vols., Vol 1, Part 1, pp. 838-839 http://digitalaustinpapers.org/document?id=APB0783