

# Texas Historical Commission

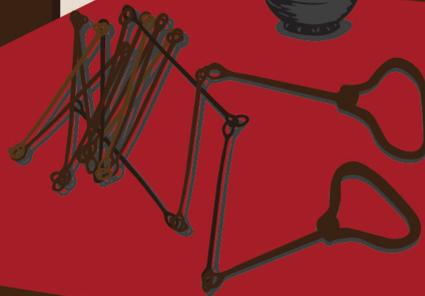
Constructing a Capital

Grade 4 & 7

## SAN FELIPE de AUSTIN

STATE HISTORIC SITE

*San Felipe, Texas*



TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION



[visitsanfelipedeAustin.com](http://visitsanfelipedeAustin.com)



Virtual Field Trip

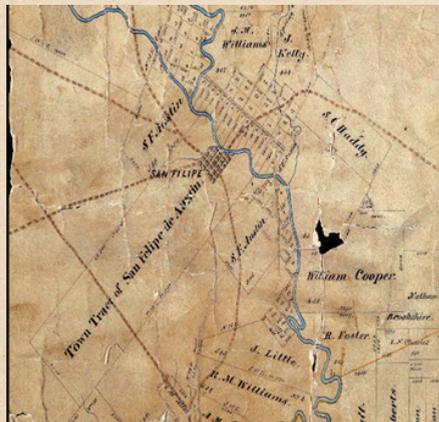


Image of town tract of San Felipe de Austin.  
Courtesy of the Texas General Land Office.

## Constructing a Capital

### Overview: A New Beginning for Texas

In Part 6 in the Empresario series from the Texas Historical Commission's **San Felipe de Austin** site, learners investigate the process Austin experienced in creating an administrative center for his colony. The activities explore the requirements for colonization by the Mexican government and the variety of factors that had to be considered in situating a colony. An introductory video and primary sources are included. A video and primary source documents are included.

### Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of the empresario system in 19th century Texas.
- Identify the Mexican government requirements for colonization.
- Analyze primary source documents.
- Plot an 1830s town reflecting colony requirements.
- Reflect on the empresario experience.

### Social Studies TEKS

4th Grade: 4.2A, 4.2E, 4.14B, 4.21

7th Grade: 7.2C, 7.2E, 7.2F, 7.20A, 7.12A

### Resources

- Video: Constructing a Capital (THC YouTube)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYIRsMT4g78&feature=youtu.be>
- Activity 1: Colonization Law of 1823 activity resource
- Activity 2: Design an 1830s Town activity resource
- Activity 3: Journal Reflection activity resource
- Primary Source: Map of the San Felipe town tract, 1823
- Primary Source: Town Map of San Felipe de Austin, 1823
- Primary Source: Town Map of San Felipe de Austin, 1823 (close-up)
- Primary Source: 1823 Town Plat of San Felipe de Austin
- Primary Source: Excerpts of articles of the Colonization Law of 1823



# Vocabulary

**ayuntamiento** (ah yoon tah me EHN toh) noun: a city or town council

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

**land grant** (lahnd grahnt) noun: land given to an empresario to settle colonists

## Historical Context

In the early 19th century, Stephen F. Austin was required by the Mexican government to create an administrative center for his colony. He chose the site of San Felipe de Austin based on a several factors: the site was almost exactly in the geographic center of the colony, surrounded by fertile land, and it was located on some high land overlooking the Brazos River. The river was important both as a water source and as a means of transportation. More importantly, there was already a ferry crossing across the Brazos River.

Austin spent time planning his town, thinking that many settlers would want to live there. He laid out an orderly system of streets, combined with public plazas. Austin had many ideas for how his town should be laid out, and he drew a plan even before he had chosen the actual site. His first sketch showed 1,200 acres in a rectangular grid around five central squares. The town design looked more like the Spanish-style towns he saw on his trips to Mexico City, rather than the American-style towns he had grown up in.

The plan of the town changed significantly in its final form. Seth Ingram, a surveyor, was tasked with turning Austin's ideas into a more manageable form. He shrank the town down to about 320 acres and divided into a grid of town blocks, each containing six lots. Plazas devoted to business, government, and the military were spaced along a central line through town. Austin even dedicated land for a college and an alms house for the poor, though those were never built. Ingram also platted a series of garden lots of about 12 acres each on the west side of town. Streets had a variety of English and Spanish names of trees, fruits and flowers, and heroes of Mexican independence.

However, the types of settlers he was attracting to Texas didn't really want to live in a town, right next to many neighbors. They were more interested in living by themselves, far away from anyone else. Still, by 1836, San Felipe de Austin was the second largest town in Mexican Texas (second only to San Antonio), with a population of about 600 people.



## Video: Constructing a Capitol

Have learners watch the **Constructing a Capitol video** to begin thinking about the challenges empresarios faced when deciding where to situate a town and what types of amenities to include.

### Activity 1: Colonization Law of 1823

In this activity, learners will use the **Colonization Law activity resources** to read for information and answer questions. Preview the document and point out that “ART” means articles. The language of the text is from the original. Assisting learners in understanding the meaning of the text may be helpful and/or necessary. Discuss any challenges in dealing with the language of primary source materials. Preview the comprehension questions and share responses when completed.

#### Answer Key:

- ★ How much land could each town settler receive? **Art. 34: 4 square leagues** (1 square league = approximately 7,928 acres. 4 square leagues = approximately 30,512 acres)
- ★ Why did each settler have to pay \$1.00 per lot every year? **Art. 36: to help pay for the construction of churches in the town**
- ★ What were the requirements for layout of the streets? **Art 37: Streets must run north to south and east to west**
- ★ How many families were required in order to form a new town? **Art. 40: 40 families**
- ★ What was the minimum number of people required to be considered a town? **Art. 41: 200 people**

### Activity 2: Design an 1830s Town

In this activity using the **Design an 1830s Town activity resource**, learners will plot their own 1830 town, following some of the same requirements from the Mexican government that Austin had to follow to establish his settlement. Review the Colonization Law of 1823 for town requirements. Share the **primary source documents** as resources. Primary source maps include the town tract that was set aside for the town of San Felipe de Austin, Stephen F. Austin’s original plan for the town of San Felipe de Austin, a close-up of the center of town, and the map of the San Felipe de Austin as it was finally constructed.

### Activity 3: Journal Reflection

Using **the journal reflection activity resource**, learners will write in response to the 1830s town they plotted in Activity 1.





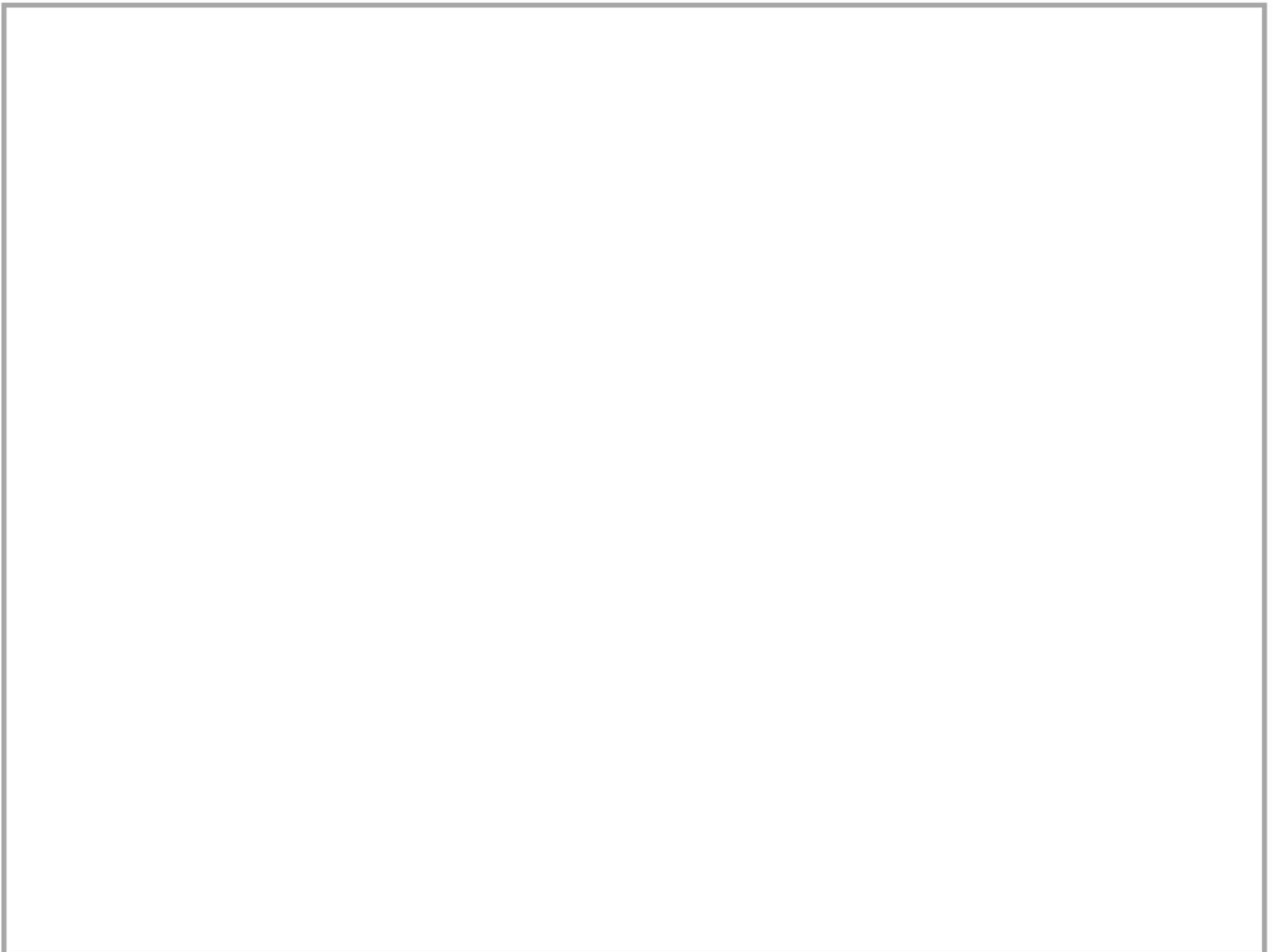
## Activity 2 Resource: Design an 1830s Town

Stephen F. Austin spent a great deal of time making sure the town of San Felipe de Austin was well planned. He drew several map versions to make sure the town was laid out in the best way possible. He also had to follow the requirements in the Colonization Law of 1823.

Draw a town you might have established in the 1830s as an empresario. Give your town a name and include these landmarks on your map:

- homes for 20 families
- at least two businesses
- a school
- a cemetery
- a hotel
- a source of water
- **three** other features you think your town needs

Map for the Town of \_\_\_\_\_





## Primary Resource: Colonization Law of 1823 (extracts pg.1)

These are several articles (ART) from the Mexican government law that empresarios had to follow to establish new colonies in early 19th century Mexican Texas.

(From: Gammel, Hans Peter Marcus Neilsen. The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897 Volume 1, book, 1898; Austin, Texas (Page 44-45). (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph5872/>: accessed September 8, 2020 University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>)

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ART. 34. Towns shall be founded on the sites deemed most suitable, by the government, or the person commissioned for this effect, and for each one, there shall be designed four square leagues, whose area may be in a regular or irregular form, agreeably to the situation.

ART. 35. If any of the said sites should be the property of an individual, and the establishment of new towns on them, should notoriously be of general utility, they can, notwithstanding, be appropriated to this object, previously indemnifying the owner for its just value, to be determined by appraisers.

ART. 36. Building lots in the new towns shall be given gratis, to the contractors of them, and also to artists of every class, as many as are necessary for the establishment of their trade; and to the other settlers they shall be sold at public auction, after having been previously valued—under the obligation to pay the purchase money by instalments of one third each; the first in six months, the second in twelve months, and the third in eighteen months; but all owners of lots, including contractors and artists, shall annually pay one dollar for each lot, which, together with the produce of the sales, shall be collected by the ayuntamientos, and applied to the building of churches in said towns.

ART. 37. So far as practicable, the towns shall be composed of natives and foreigners, and in their delineations great care should be taken to lay off the streets straight, giving them a direction from north to south, and from east to west, when the site will permit it.

## Primary Resource: Colonization Law of 1823 (extracts pg. 2)

ART. 38. For the better location of the said new towns, their regular formation and exact partition of their lands and lots, the government on account of having admitted any project, and agreed with the contractor or contractors, who may have presented it, shall commission a person of intelligence and confidence, giving him such particular instructions as may be deemed necessary and expedient; and authorising him under his own responsibility, to appoint one or more surveyors to lay off the town scientifically, and do whatever else may be required.

ART. 39. The governor in conformity with the last fee bill *Arancel*, of notary publics of the ancient audience of Mexico, shall designate the fees of the commissioner, who, in conjunction with the colonists, shall fix the surveyor's fees; but both shall be paid by the colonists, and in the manner which all parties among themselves may agree upon.

ART. 40. As soon as at least forty families are united in one place, they shall proceed to the formal establishment of the new towns, and all of them shall take an oath to support the general and state constitutions; which oath will be administered by the commissioner, they shall then, in his presence, proceed for the first time to the election of their municipal authority.

ART. 41. A new town, whose inhabitants shall not be less than two hundred, shall elect an ayuntamiento, provided there is not another one established within eight leagues, in which case, it shall be added to it. The number of individuals which are to compose the ayuntamiento, shall be regulated by the existing laws.

# Primary Resource: Map of San Felipe de Austin Town Tract, 1823



Image courtesy of the Texas General Land Office



## Primary Resource: Town Map of San Felipe de Austin, 1823

Stephen F. Austin's original plan for San Felipe de Austin. Courtesy of The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin

[https://www.cah.utexas.edu/db/dmr/gallery\\_lg.php?gallery=maps&t=544&s=155](https://www.cah.utexas.edu/db/dmr/gallery_lg.php?gallery=maps&t=544&s=155)

