

Texas Historical Commission

Choosing Colonists

Grade 4 & 7

SAN FELIPE de AUSTIN

STATE HISTORIC SITE

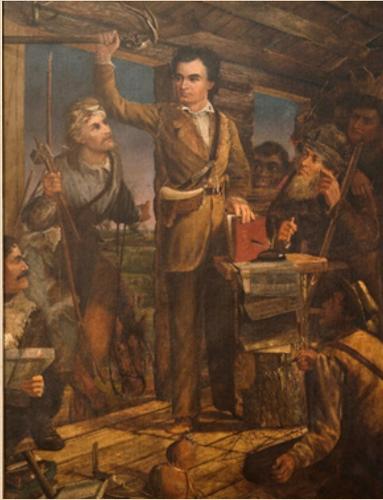
San Felipe, Texas



Virtual Field Trip

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The Settlement of Austin's Colony by Henry Arthur McArdle. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Choosing Colonists?

Overview: A New Beginning for Texas

In Part 4 in the Empresario series from the Texas Historical Commission's San Felipe de Austin site, learners investigate how Stephen F. Austin selected settlers who wanted to move to Texas in the early 19th century. The activities provide learners the opportunity to evaluate potential colonists' suitability based on desirable characteristics. An introductory video and transcriptions of primary source character certificates and historic letters are included.

Objectives

- Demonstrate understanding of Austin's settler selection process in 19th century Texas.
- Analyze primary source documents.
- Reflect on the empresario experience.

Social Studies TEKS

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

7th Grade: 7.2 C, 7.2 E, 7.2 F, 7.20 A, 7.21 A

Resources

- Video: [Choosing Colonists](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcXNthx6RPY&feature=youtu.be) (THC YouTube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcXNthx6RPY&feature=youtu.be>
- Activity 1: Choosing the Right Colonists activity resources (scoring grid, letters)
- Activity 2: A Letter to Stephen F. Austin activity resource
- Activity 3: Primary Source Analyses activity resource
- Activity 4: Journal Reflection activity resource
- Activity 5: Journal Reflection activity resource
- Primary Sources (transcriptions): Character Certificate from George Poindexter, John Woolsey to Unknown, Application Letter from Wyly Martin, Application Letter from Samuel S. Pearson, Letter from Stephen F. Austin to Luciano Garza



Vocabulary

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

industrious (in DUSS tree us) adjective: willing to work hard

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

land speculation (lahnd spek yoo LAY shun) noun: process of obtaining land with the sole purpose of selling it for profit later. This was frowned on by the Mexican government because the process did not promote the growth of the colony.

moral citizen (MOHR uhl SIT uh zin) noun: found in Austin's Terms of Settlement of 1823, a person who makes good choices and knows right from wrong

sober (SO buhr) noun: found in Austin's Terms of Settlement of 1823, a person who has good judgment and refrains from drinking too much alcohol

Historical Context

In the early 19th century, the Mexican government was looking for ways to increase the population, build the economy, and provide better defense in its Texas region. One strategy used to accomplish this was to invite people from the United States and other locations to move into the frontier area. Land agents called empresarios made the arrangements for bringing settlers to a new colony.

Empresario Stephen F. Austin screened prospective colonists who wanted to come to Mexican Texas to ensure he was inviting people who would help make the colony successful by working hard and following the rules. Austin was especially interested in attracting people with skills that would be useful and needed in the colony, such as farming or blacksmithing, or who were going to bring in equipment, such as a sawmill.

A number of surviving documents show evidence that settlers wrote letters directly to Austin describing why they would make good candidates for settlement. A variety of character reference letters also exist. However, even Stephen F. Austin sometimes made poor choices as primary source documents show he was sometimes forced to remove colonists for breaking the rules. Transcriptions of these documents are included in this lesson.



Video: Choosing Colonists

To introduce this lesson on Austin's process of choosing settlers for his colony in 19th century Texas, have learners watch the **Choosing Colonists video**. Discuss concepts after viewing.

Activity 1: Choosing the Right Colonists

In this activity, learners read letters written by nine fictional prospective colonists to evaluate their chances for settlement selection according to criteria Austin considered important. Preview the activity resources including the **selection chart**, **fictional colonist letters**, and the transcription of **Austin's Terms of Settlement of 1823**, which is a clear description of the types of real colonists Austin was seeking. Discuss responses when completed, including the reasons for any disagreements on colonist selection.

Answer Key:

Applicant Name	Yes	No	Reason for Decision
James Johnson	X		Brings a valuable skill and equipment to the colony
Dr. Thaddeus Archibald		X	Not a real doctor, physically harms people
Stephen Tubbs	X		Bringing needed equipment into the colony
Franklin Smith		X	U.S. soldier, but questions as to his loyalty to Mexico
Walter Grant	?	?	Is skilled, is bringing his family, but has debt
Isaac Harris	?	?	Seems hotheaded, but has a pre-existing claim to his land
Ezekial Andersson	X		Educated and is willing to teach, but he is not Catholic
Horst Westmann	X		Has a skill, may attract other settlers
Nathaniel Summerset	?	?	No mentions of skills, has no family, but is in good standing in his home in Mississippi

Activity 2: A Letter to Stephen F. Austin

In this activity, learners will write a letter to Stephen F. Austin explaining why they'd like to be selected as a colonist to settle in Texas. Share responses when completed.



Activity 3: Primary Sources Analyses

In this activity, learners will analyze five transcriptions of primary source documents for information to complete the **Primary Sources Analyses activity resource**. The transcriptions include two character certificates (letters written by government officials in the U.S. vouching for the good character of potential colonists wanting to move to Texas), **historic letters written to Austin** by prospective settlers, and an **historic letter from Stephen F. Austin** to Luciano Garcia, Commandant General of the Province of Texas, explaining why he was removing specific settlers from the colony. The language of each transcription is the original. Assisting learners in understanding the meaning of the text may be helpful and/or necessary. Share responses when completed.

Answer Key:

Character Certificate from George Poindexter, 11-09-1821

- ★ Who was George Poindexter? **Governor of Mississippi**
- ★ Why did he write this letter? **to vouch for the character of Hardy Coward**
- ★ To whom was Poindexter writing? **unknown**
- ★ When was the letter written? **November 9, 1821**

John Woolsey to Unknown, 09-17-1821

- ★ When was this letter signed? **September 17, 1821**
- ★ What U.S. state do the potential Texas colonists want to move from? **Arkansas**
- ★ For how long do the signers say they have known the potential colonists? **4 years**
- ★ What two things do the signers swear that the potential colonists never did? **joined the Republican Army, traded with the “Indians”**

Application Letter from Wyly Martin to Stephen F. Austin, 07-31-1824

- ★ Why is Martin writing a letter instead of talking to Austin directly about wanting to become a Texas colonist? **circumstances require that he return immediately to the U.S.**
- ★ What does Martin request Austin to do for him? **put his name on a list/roll of applicants**
- ★ How does Martin describe himself? **unmarried, owner of three enslaved persons and more than 100 head of cattle, plus property**
Ideally, where does Martin want to settle within the colony? **along the Brazos River**



Answer Key cont.:

Application Letter from Samuel S. Pearson to Stephen F. Austin, 01-20-1823

- ★ Where does Pearson want to settle within the colony? **mouth of the Colorado or Brazos Rivers**
- ★ What skills and assets does he offer to the colony? **knowledge of ship building, carpentry, machinery necessary for operating cotton gins**

Letter from Stephen F. Austin to Luciano Garcia, 10-20-1823

- ★ Why is Austin writing this letter to the commandant general of the Texas Province? **to tell him that he is expelling five men and their families from the colony for bad character and conduct**
- ★ What does Austin explain these colonists have done to be expelled? **committed murder, counterfeited money**
- ★ How does Austin suggest that he will keep more unsatisfactory colonists from settling? **“keep up a rigid and active police”**
- ★ Based on what you now know about Austin’s process for selecting and rejecting settlers for his colony, would you have selected Wyly Martin or Samuel S. Pearson to join? Explain your reasons. **Answers will vary.**

Activity 4: Journal Reflection

Using the **journal reflection activity resource**, learners will write in response to a prompt: Now that you understand how Austin chose colonists to settle in Texas in the early 19th century, are there any other ways that he could have checked people’s backgrounds before they came to the colony? What would you have done if you were an *empresario* and had told a person they couldn’t settle in Texas, but they showed up to your colony anyway?



Activity 1 Resource: Choosing the Right Colonists: Decision

Like Stephen F. Austin, you must choose settlers for a new colony. Read the letters they submitted, read Austin's Terms of Settlement of 1823 for guidance, and remember that the Mexican government might take away your *empresario* contract if you choose poorly!

Several things to think about as you choose colonists include:

- The Mexican government has specific types of people that they want to come to Texas—ones that will follow Mexican laws.
- Settlers need to show evidence that they are law abiding and of good moral character.
- People coming to Texas must be willing to live on their land and farm it. Land speculation is frowned upon.
- Settlers who have specific skills that are useful for life in a new colony (carpentry, blacksmithing, farming, surveying, etc.) and those who can afford to bring equipment and supplies with them are seen as particularly valuable.
- Settlers have to be Catholic, or at least be quiet about having any other religious beliefs.

Put an X in either the YES or NO column for each colonist. Explain your decision.

Applicant Name	Yes	No	Reason for Decision
James Johnson			
Dr. Thaddeus Archibald			
Stephen Tubbs			
Franklin Smith			
Walter Grant			
Isaac Harris			
Ezekial Andersson			
Horst Westmann			
Nathaniel Summerset			

Activity 1 Resource: Colonists' Letters for Selection (pg. 1)

Read these letters from the nine colonists. Think about whether each colonist would be a good selection as you score them Yes or No on the decision chart.

March 7, 1832

Dear Mr. Austin,

My name is James Johnson and I want to come to Texas something bad. I am a blacksmith with 10 years experience and I live in Davidson County, Tennessee. My wife died last year, and I am looking for a new start in a new territory with my four young boys. I plan on bringing my own anvil, as well as all my tools. If you need a good blacksmith, just let me know.

J. Johnson

January 16, 1824

Mr. Austin,

I am writing to you today to request acceptance to join your colony in Mexican Texas. I am a doctor who has traveled all over the United States selling my tonics even though I have no formal doctoring training. These tonics are of my design and are sure to cure any illness that might afflict you or the other colonists. Some people have called me a liar and a charlatan and ignored my medical advice, resulting in the untimely ending of their lives! In response to this, I have honed my dueling skills and am well known for my quick aim. Due to my near-constant travels, I am not yet married and have no children. I do hope that you respond to me soon so I may begin my long journey to join you in Texas.

Dr. Thaddeus Archibald

September 25, 1830

Dear Sir,

I, Stephen Tubbs, wish to join you in your colonization of Texas with my wife and 5 children, 3 of whom are young men. I have been an upstanding citizen in my home state of Georgia where I currently own and operate a lumber mill. If it would aid my acceptance into your colony, I am willing to bring my lumber mill with me at my own expense. My only requirement from you with that I have access to a river or stream with a strong current that would be required to power my mill. I eagerly await your answer, and, in the meantime, I shall begin early preparations in the hope I will be welcomed to your colony.

Respectfully yours,
Stephen Tubbs



Activity 1 Resource: Colonists' Letters for Selection (pg. 2)

June 2, 1825

Mr. Austin!

I have been a soldier in the U.S. Army, so I have a lot of experience with handling a gun. Why, I can help you keep law and order in that wild land of Texas. Those Mexicans need to be taught how to do things right, and I am just the man to do it. I've farmed tobacco in the past, so I'm sure I'd be well suited to come to your colony.

Yours,
Franklin Smith

November 5, 1829

Dear Mr. Austin,

Sir, I am writing to you today to request the ability to settle my family in your colony in Texas. I am a stonemason and have been involved in the construction of numerous buildings and towns from Pennsylvania to Ohio where I now reside. My family and I have fallen on hard times of late and I have taken on many debts due to events outside of my control. I have reason to believe that I will not be able to pay off those debts in my current situation. I strongly believe that in joining your colony my family and I will be a great asset to you and I shall be placed on a strong footing to be able to one day pay my debts in full.

Good health to you,
Walter Grant

January 2, 1823

Austin,

I think it's a real shame that you're setting up this colony on land where I already live and own. I moved here with all my family in 1818 and I bought my land from Spain. If the Mexican government disagrees, that's their problem because I ain't leaving! I know we have had our differences, and I'm not going to say I regret getting into that fistfight with you, but I let's leave that behind us. You mind your business, I'll mind mine. But I'm not leaving the land I was rightfully granted by Spain.

Isaac Harris



Activity 1 Resource: Colonists' Letters for Selection (pg. 3)

18 de Marzo 1828

Señor Austin,

My name is Ezekial Andersson and I am a college educated man with an aim to move to your colony in Tejas. I am a devout Baptist and a preacher; I feel called to spread the word of the Lord. I know the law is to be Catholic, so I can keep things quiet if you need me too. I also have another skill: I'm an experienced school master and would be happy to open a place of education in your town. I propose we call it the Austin Academy: I can teach geography, reading, writing, grammar, rhetoric, history, composition, arithmetic, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, mathematics and languages including English, Latin, and Spanish. I hope to hear from you soon.

Ezekial Andersson

30 Mai 1832

Herr Austin,

I am Horst Westmann, a brickmason in Munster, Germany. I wish to come to your colony and build a home. Once the home is built my frau and children can come to live in it. We wish to come because it is becoming hard to be a Catholic in Germany, and I hear that Texas is a place we will be more comfortable. I also hear the land is beautiful, the water good, and it is comfortable living for a working man, as long as you don't get into a fight with Indians. There are more Germans in this area looking to move, so please tell us your thoughts quickly and we will tell our neighbors to write to you.

-Horst Westmann,
Münster, Westphalia, Germany

March 22, 1832

Esteemed Sir,

I write to enquire about a possible migration to Texas. I hear tell that conditions are favorable for committed and honorable men to make claim on substantial tracts with an eye to sufficiency. While I am currently a single man, I hope to find a suitable situation to improve my lot and feel that location to Texas could be ideal for me. I do not currently own any domestics or field hands, but would hope that by acquiring a large agricultural tract in your country I might be able to make such investment soon. I am in good standing in my community – with letters of character to show it – and bid that you respond as soon as is practical to let me know if I can begin my journey to that place.

Yours,
Nathaniel Summerset, of Corinth, Mississippi



Activity 3 Resource: Primary Source Analyses (Pg.1)

Read Primary Source 1-5 transcriptions to write answers to the questions.

Character Certificate from George Poindexter, 11-09-1821

★ Who was George Poindexter?

★ Why did he write this letter?

★ To whom was Poindexter writing?

★ When was the letter written?

John Woolsey to Unknown, 09-17-1821

★ When was this letter signed?

★ What U.S. state do the potential Texas colonists want to move from?

★ For how long do the signers say they have known the potential colonists?

★ What two things do the signers swear that the potential colonists never did?

Application Letter from Wyly Martin to Stephen F. Austin, 07-31-1824

★ Why is Martin writing a letter instead of talking to Austin directly about wanting to become a Texas colonist?

★ What does Martin request Austin do for him?

★ How does Martin describe himself?

★ Ideally, where does Martin want to settle within the colony?



Activity 3 Resource: Primary Source Analyses (Pg.2)

Application Letter from Samuel S. Pearson to Stephen F. Austin, 01-20-1823

★ Where does Pearson want to settle within the colony?

★ What skills and assets does he offer to the colony?

Letter from Stephen F. Austin to Luciano Garcia, 10-20-1823

★ Why is Austin writing this letter to the commandant general of the Texas Province?

★ What does Austin explain these colonists have done to be expelled?

★ How does Austin suggest that he will keep more unsatisfactory colonists from settling?

★ Based on what you now know about Austin's process for selecting and rejecting settlers for his colony, would you have selected Wyly Martin or Samuel S. Pearson to join? Explain your reasons.

Wyly Martin: _____

Samuel S. Pearson: _____

Primary Resource 1: Character Certificate from George Poindexter, 11-09-1821

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. 425-426.

George Poindexter, Governor of the State of Mississippi.

To all to whom these presents shall come:

Know ye, That whearas it is represented to me, that Hardy Coward, a Citizen of the County of Amrite, and State aforesaid, is desirous of traveling into the Province of Texas, on his own private business; I do therefore, make known to all persons whom it may concern, that the said Hardy Coward is a man of family, and of good character and conduct; and I desire that he may be received accordingly.

Given under my hand and the Great Seal of said State, at Columbia, the ninth day of November, A.D. 1821.

Geo. Poindexter

Primary Resource 2: Character Certificate from John Woolsey to Unknown, 09-17-1821

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. 414-415. <http://digitalaustinpapers.org/document?id=APB0408>

We the underneath Subscribers of the County of Hempstead and Territory of Arkansas Being personally acquainted with Mr. John Woolsey John Edens Elijah Kelley and John Marshal and their familys Belonging to them for the Space of four Years do certify that they are good honest hard working people and their has nothing Been laid to their Charge any way dishonest they have Been considered good honest Citizens we further State that they never did join the Republican Army nor never was engaged in any Indian trade wha[t]ever Given from under our hands this 17th day of September 1821

William Stevenson D. Wilburn

James M Stuart Clerk Robert Messer

D. Clark James Graham

Robert Benifield

Abreham Wagley

Thomas Helms

Tho H Talbott

Isaac Lee

Wm Reese

Reno Alexander

John Holcomb

Alexander Norris

John Wagley

William Talbott

William Reves

Rowland Huitt

John B. Dilliard JP

George Leeper



Primary Resource 3: Application Letter from Wyly Martin to Stephen F. Austin, 07-31-1824

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. 862-863. <http://digitalaustinpapers.org/document?id=APB0810>

Bend of the Brazos July 31st 1824

Sir.
I am desirous of becoming a citizen of your colony, and a subject of the Mexican Republick. Circumstances beyond my controul has occasioned me an absence of four months from the province; A in the same chain of circumstances, requires me to return to the U. States immediately; hence the impracticability of my making any personal application to you at this time. The object of this address then is, to request that my name be put upon the list or roll of those who are applicants for land within the Colony.

I am not aware what quantity of land you will be disposed to allow me, under existing circumstances; I am not a married man, I am the owner of three negroes and a stock of cattle of upwards of one hundred head, together with some other property—the utmost of what you are in the habit of allowing to other men similarly circumstanced, I trust you will allow to me.

About the beginning of October I shall return to the Colony at which time I will do myself the honor of waiting upon you in person on the above subject.

I am very desirous of obtaining land on the Brazos, should my application however be too late to affect that object, I will content myself with securing it on the Bay Prairie or on the St. Bernardo.

Wyly Martin

Colo. S. F. Austin

Primary Resource 4: Application Letter from Samuel S. Pearson to Stephen F. Austin, 01-20-1823

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. 572. <http://digitalaustinpapers.org/document?id=APB0557>

I Samuel S. Pearson of the United States

Wishing to become a settler of the Province of Texas, makes the following proposition, that it is my wish to settle at or near the mouth of the river Colorado or Brases on land taken up by Stephen F. Austin Esq. I being perfectly acquainted with Ship Building in all its various Branches and can likewise put up the machinry that is necessary for driving Cotton Ginns and other Carpenter work etc. It being understood that it is my wish to settle in the first settlement that shall be built at or near the mouths of one of those rivers (and that I shall have one League Square of land on one of those Rivers as near the mouth as possible) for the purpose of carrying on my Business

Mexico Jany 20th 1823

Saml S Pearson

Primary Resource 5: Letter from Stephen F. Austin to Luciano Garcia, 10-20-1823

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. 702. <http://digitalaustinpapers.org/document?id=APB0640>

To preserve good order in the colony under my charge, I have been compelled to cause five men to leave it, with their families, to wit: Briton Baylie, John M Coy Alen White, David Fitzgerald and Daniel O. Quin. They are all men of infamous character and bad conduct, fugitives from the United States, one for having committed murder, the others for having counterfeited money, and for whose apprehension the American Government has offered high rewards Men of such a stamp can not but be prejudicial to this new settlement; therefore, I hope that my action will meet your high approbation.

To prevent, hereafter, the introduction into this Colony of men of that kind, I shall be compelled to keep up a rigid and active police; which measure, I think, will also be approved by you.

Estevan F. Austin.

Brazos River, October 20th, 1823. 3rd & 2nd.