

*Texas*

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**A**LONSO ALVAREZ DE PINEDA, sent by the governor of Jamaica in 1518 to explore the north coast of the Gulf of Mexico, was probably the first white man ever to see the land which is now a part of Texas.

Spaniards from Mexico encountered Frenchmen along the Rio Grande in 1716, which prompted the Spaniards, two years later, to found the Alamo and other mission settlements in Texas. [165]

Philip Nolan, an Irish-American, was in Texas in 1801 buying horses of the Indians. He and several companions were killed by Spaniards and others were captured and confined in Mexican prisons. But American settlers west of the Sabine River still entertained, in 1819, ideas of invading Texas more deeply. [84]

Stephen F. Austin received confirmation in 1823 of a Mexican land grant in Texas. The grant was for a square league, or 4,428 acres of land, for each man to be located; it had been solicited by his since deceased father. He led to Texas the first colony of three hundred families. Hundreds of others soon followed. They located along the Colorado and Brazos Rivers, where they were squatters on the land until permanent locations were allotted them. [161]

During the next year, 247 Mexican grants for land in Texas, not exceeding forty-nine thousand acres each, were made by the governor, but all future grants were to be made by the legislature of the consolidated Mexican state of Coahuila-Texas. Some of these were afterwards forfeited. Many of them were made the basis of wild land speculation in the United States. [161]

James Bowie seems to have discovered the method, under the state colonization law, of having native Mexicans apply for tracts of land of the legal limit of eleven leagues (48,708 acres), and then buying this land from them. Bowie obtained, by 1830, something more than seven hundred thousand acres.

From this precedent, with the help of profit-seeking lawyers, a considerable traffic developed. Native Mexicans in various parts of the republic came to realize that they were entitled to the privilege of being granted eleven leagues of Texas land from their government, and of then selling them to American speculators; [174]—the sale price, over any bribe they may have had to pay the Mexican officials, and lawyer's fees, being all profit.

Coahula-Texas needing funds, the state legislature in 1834 decreed that land could be sold at auction to foreigners as well as to natives, in lots of 177 acres, at a minimum of \$10 per lot, but limited to 48,708 acres to any one purchaser.

The following year the legislature, wanting quicker action, authorized the sale of 1,771,200 acres at private sale, at not less than 6¢ per acre, without restrictions. The wholesale manner in which the Mexican state authorities bartered away the public lands in Texas to speculators created a scandal, and caused great indignation among the colonists. [174]

New York and Boston land speculators were obtaining Mexican grants of large areas of land in the Texas region for purported colonization. Each colonist was to have a square league, of 4,428 acres. By 1832, thirty-three colonization contracts had been made, some of which were transferred to the Galveston Bay & Texas Land Company, and others to the Colorado & Red River Land Company. From the company office at 8 Wall Street, New York, a pamphlet was issued, which computed the area of its grant at twenty million acres and stated that it was authorized to select twenty-three thousand acres additional for each hundred families it colonized.

When the Mexican national government charged corruption in obtaining these state grants, as flagrantly in violation of Mexican laws, and subject to forfeiture, these American speculators proposed forming an independent Republic of Texas. Towards this end they supplied funds for the purchase of arms and am-

munition. One Samuel Williams, a banker, and others advanced funds, for which they received scrip which entitled them to 1,329,000 acres. [21]

In March, 1836, four days before the fall of the Alamo, Texas declared its separation from Coahula and its independence of Mexico, and claimed the Rio Grande as its southern boundary, with an area of 175,587,840 acres.

The Texas Congress ordered the surveying of land on the American plan, into sections of 640 acres each; issued land scrip at 50¢ per acre and provided for agents to dispose of it.

Land was granted on which some settlers built cabins in the Cherokee country. This, together with repudiation by the whites of the treaty with the Cherokees, led to strife between them.

Forging of land deeds was another grievance. Land Commissioners in one county did a profitable business in issuing forged "head right" certificates. [84]

Writing from Texas in 1838, Rev. Littleton Fowler, who was sent there as a missionary, said: "The existing and absorbing subject of locating and proving up lands has prevented many from giving attention to the Gospel. The scramble for land, not the beguilement of the Devil, is the greatest drawback to missionary effort in Texas."

Spanish and Mexican land grants, land frauds and issuance of large quantities of land scrip, gave trouble. Confusion was partially prevented in the future by establishment of a general land office by the new republic. [84]

O. Henry, the noted author, a Texan, writing in 1894 of the Texas Land Office said: "Volumes could be filled with accounts of the knavery, the double-dealing, the cross purposes, the perjury, the lies, the bribery, the alterations and erasing, the suppressing and destroying of papers, the various schemes and plots that for the sake of the almighty dollar have left their stain upon the records of the General Land Office.

"A class of land speculators commonly called land-sharks, unscrupulous and greedy, have left their trail in every department of this office, in the shape of titles destroyed, patents cancelled, homes demolished and torn away, forged transfers and lying affidavits."

After prolonged agitation for and against, the Republic of Texas became one of the states of the American Union, in 1846. In this, Texas stipulated that it retain ownership and jurisdiction of its public land, and Texas lands have never been part of the United States public domain.

Millions of acres were claimed by individuals through fraudulent or illegal titles, and the state was forced to bring suits to recover them. Other vast tracts, which had been cleared or settled upon, added to the confusion. The land question always has been a vexatious problem in Texas. In the "land grabbing" enterprises were the names of some of the most sterling Texas patriots. [161]

The Texas legislature in 1850 allotted for the endowment of public schools, four square leagues (17,712 acres) of land in each county which had been created during the previous 11 years. Large grants of land were made to the University of Texas.

In the 1870's, agents and literature were sent through the northern states, to induce purchase of Texas land and migration of settlers thereto.

Until the Texas public domain was exhausted, railroad promoters were granted twenty, in some instances thirty-two, alternate sections of 640 acres each, for each mile of railroad built and put into operation. These grants, which amounted to millions of acres, were often illegally and fraudulently acquired, and the promoters obtained more land than they were entitled to receive. [84]

The State granted three million acres, valued at \$1.50 per acre, to a building contractor, for the building of a State Capitol building at Austin. During the four years following 1883, Texas sold land at \$2 per acre, with thirty years to pay for it, which enabled speculators to buy and easily hold land unused, while the incoming settlers, requiring land for use, ran up the price on themselves.