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FRIENDS OF SAN FELIPE DE AUSTIN

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VISITORS GUIDE

SAN FELIPE de AUSTIN

— STATE HISTORIC SITE —

San Felipe, Texas



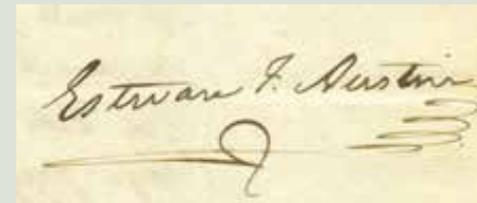
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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Welcome to San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site, the headquarters of Stephen F. Austin's colony in Mexican Texas. Founded in 1823, the town served as the administrative, political, and cultural capital of American immigration to Texas before it was intentionally burned by its residents during the Runaway Scrape of the Texas Revolution. Austin lured settlers with cheap land and the promise of a better life on the frontier, and oversaw the transfer of nearly four million acres of land from the Mexican government to citizen settlers.

Today, visitors can walk in the footsteps of those that carved out a town on this bluff above the Brazos River. We hope you will gain some understanding of the struggles those who chose to settle this land experienced during the turbulent era when the Mexican national flag flew over Texas.

AUSTIN'S COLONIAL CAPITAL

In 1821, Moses Austin received permission from the Spanish government to settle 300 families in Texas, but he died before he could realize these plans. His son, Stephen F. Austin, the successor to this enterprise, found his status complicated by Mexican independence from Spain. Austin traveled to Mexico City in 1822 to renegotiate his rights as an *empresario* or land contractor with the new national government.



Austin selected the site of San Felipe de Austin in the fall of 1823. By the summer of 1824 most of the first 300 contract families had arrived in Texas, settling along the bottomlands of the Brazos and Colorado rivers. Per the colonization regulations, each family was entitled to 177 acres for farming and 4,428 acres for ranching, often with river frontage. It was home to a unique mix of settlers including American backwoodsmen, political elites, enslaved and free people of African ancestry, informal trading parties of Indigenous tribes as well as official intertribal delegations, Tejano ranchers, and Mexican governmental leaders.

Ultimately San Felipe de Austin served as the de facto capital of what Austin often called the "foreign settlements" in Mexican Texas. The town hosted the delegate conventions of 1832 and 1833 where participants voiced a goal of Mexican statehood, separate from Coahuila. The Texas Revolution was managed from San Felipe de Austin until the temporary government moved to Washington-on-the-Brazos in March of 1836 and declared independence. The town paid the ultimate price during the war for Texas independence, burned to the ground by its own residents as they evacuated ahead of the advancing Mexican army during the Runaway Scrape.

Following the fall of the Alamo, forces led by General Santa Anna briefly occupied the ruins of the town prior to meeting unexpected defeat at the battle of San Jacinto. During the Republic, the town was resettled as simply "San Felipe." Evidence of the historic township is still visible in the street names between the cemetery and the state historic site on the Brazos River—they are taken from the original town plat.



WALKING TOUR



1 VISITORS CENTER AND EXHIBITS

Opened in 2018, this modern visitors center displays Stephen F. Austin's field desk, a partially preserved log cabin, an 1830s printing press, and recovered artifacts. Custom murals set the themes of the exhibit, and interactive multimedia exhibits and films allow visitors to engage with the site's rich history.

2 INTERPRETIVE TRAILS

Our graveled, accessible pathways on each side of FM 1458 take visitors to interpretive panels and historic locations across the site.

3 COMMEMORATIVE AREA

This area marks the originally designated state historic site. It includes the 1928 obelisk and Centennial Austin statue memorials as well as a marker for John Bricker, the only Texian casualty to die defending the Brazos River crossing from Santa Anna's forces in April 1836. This is also the site of a 1950s replica log cabin, the historic (1847) Josey Store building, and the only remaining architectural remnant of the town—a hand-dug, brick-lined well near the oak tree.



4 VILLA DE AUSTIN

This 2021 recreation of buildings offers an impression of the historic fabric of the town. The Villa depicts Town Lot 566, the most developed lot in the historic town's business district.



5 TEXAS GAZETTE PRINTSHOP

This outbuilding in the Peyton's Tavern complex was rented by several businesses over time,

including first Colony printer, Godwin B. Cotten. He produced a weekly newspaper, form documents for the land office, and the first book printed in Texas which was a translation of colonization laws.

6 AUSTIN ACADEMY SCHOOL

Representing one of the earliest buildings in town, the schoolhouse was a basic log cabin with dirt floor. Joseph Pilgrim operated the school, and the first Baptist Sunday School in Texas, which Austin was compelled to discourage because of the government's expectation that Mexican citizens should be Catholics.



7 COURTHOUSE AND CONVENTION HALL

The nicest structure in town, with frame siding and a wood-burning stove, was likely planned as a permanent school. But it became the de facto courthouse and hosted the 1832, 1833, and 1835 delegate conventions, as well as the provisional government of 1835-36.

8 EMIGRANT'S RESIDENCE

While Austin's settlers typically occupied their headright grants, some rented temporary housing while they completed their immigration and land grant paperwork. This represents a typical one-room home.



9 FARMER'S HOTEL

Representing the last significant hotel structure built, it operated only a few months before it converted to a boarding house and a center of commercial cooking services. The structure was a lively centerpiece to the busiest lot in town.



10 CELIA'S BAKE OVEN AND KITCHEN

Celia was brought to Texas enslaved to a commercial cooking services partnership. The kitchen allowed for large-scale food prep and the oven provided breads and baked goods.



11 PITSAW FRAME

This was an important town-building tool for residents, allowing them to square logs and create plank boards for their structures.



REBUILDING STORIES FROM THE ASHES

Reviving the stories of a town lost to history presents great challenges. Fortunately, San Felipe de Austin generated many documents, grants, surveys, probate filings, deed records, and personal letters. These primary sources contribute to our understanding of the town. Governmental communications, particularly during the political conflict that led to revolution, and personal writings (like the William B. Travis diary) provide unique insights. Researchers conducting "deep-dive" archival excavations have uncovered remarkable evidence of the day-to-day life of Austin's Colony. Additionally, the physical landscape of this burned town offers a

compelling archeological perspective. Artifacts that survived the fire such as ceramics, metal, brick/stone, and glass give astounding glimpses into town life. We are at the beginning of the archeological journey to discover these remains. Regular excavations uncover objects that often appear in the archeology case at the conclusion of the exhibit.

