

# Empresario

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An **empresario** was a person who, in the early years of the settlement of Texas, had been granted the right to settle on Mexican land in exchange for recruiting and taking responsibility for new settlers. The word is Spanish for entrepreneur.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Background

In the late 18th century, Spain stopped allocating new lands in much of Spanish Texas, stunting the growth of the province.<sup>[2]</sup> The policy was reversed in 1820, when Spanish law allowed colonists of any religion to settle in Texas.<sup>[3]</sup> Only one man, Moses Austin, was granted an *empresarial* contract under Spanish law. But Moses Austin died before he could begin his colony, and Mexico achieved its independence from Spain in September 1821. At this time, about 3500 people lived in Texas, mostly congregated at San Antonio and La Bahia.<sup>[4]</sup>

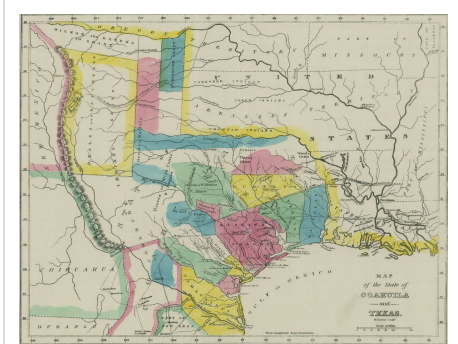
The Mexican government continued the immigration policies.<sup>[5]</sup> Even as the government debated a new colonization law, Stephen F. Austin, son of Moses Austin, was given permission to take over his father's colonization contract. The first group of colonists, known as the Old Three Hundred, arrived in 1822 and settled along the Brazos River, ranging from the Gulf of Mexico to near present-day Dallas.<sup>[6]</sup> Immigration was approved on a wider basis in 1824 when the General Colonization Law of 1824 was passed. This law enabled all heads of household who were citizens of or immigrants to Mexico to be eligible to claim land.<sup>[5]</sup> After the law passed, the state government of Coahuila y Tejas was inundated with requests to allow foreign speculators to establish colonies within the state.<sup>[7]</sup> There was no shortage of people willing to come to Texas. The United States was still struggling with the aftermath of the Panic of 1819, and soaring land prices within the United States made the Mexican land policy seem very generous.<sup>[7]</sup>

Most successful empresarios recruited primarily in the United States. Only two of the groups who attempted to recruit in Europe built lasting colonies, Refugio and San Patricio.<sup>[8][9]</sup> These colonies were successful in part because the empresarios spoke Spanish, were familiar with Mexican ways, and allowed local Mexican families to join their colonies.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Rules for settlers

Unlike its predecessor, the Mexican law required immigrants to practice Catholicism and stressed that foreigners needed to learn Spanish.<sup>[10]</sup> Settlers were supposed to own property or have a craft or useful profession, and all people wishing to live in Texas were expected to report to the nearest Mexican authority for permission to settle. The rules were widely disregarded and many families became squatters.<sup>[11]</sup>

Under the new laws, people who did not already possess property in Texas could claim one square league (4438 acres) of irrigable land, with an additional league available to those who owned cattle. Empresarios and individuals with large families were exempt from the limit.<sup>[12]</sup>



Map of Texas in 1833 showing several of the land grants

## Notable empresarios

Empresario	Colony location	Capital	Notes
Stephen F. Austin	Austin's Colony between Brazos and Colorado rivers	San Felipe	(son of Moses Austin) considered by many the "Father of Texas".
David G. Burnet	east Texas, northwest of Nacogdoches		sold his land grant to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company
Martín De León	De León's Colony	Victoria	Only Mexican-born empresario
Green DeWitt	DeWitt Colony	Gonzales	
Haden Harrison Edwards	East Texas – from the Navasota River to 20 leagues west of the Sabine River, and from 20 leagues north of the Gulf of Mexico to 15 leagues north of the town of Nacogdoches. <sup>[13]</sup>	Nacogdoches	Expelled from Texas after launching the Fredonia Rebellion in 1827
Benjamin Drake Lovell and John Purnell			Attempted to establish a socialist colony; Purnell died and Lovell abandoned the colony in 1826; land later given to McMullen and McGloin. <sup>[14]</sup>
John McMullen and James McGloin		San Patricio, TX	of Irish descent, these men recruited primarily European settlers <sup>[9][15]</sup>
James Power and James Hewetson	land between Guadalupe and Lavaca rivers <sup>[16]</sup>	San Patricio and Refugio	Half of settlers were to come from Ireland, the other half from Mexico. <sup>[17]</sup>
Sterling C. Robertson	An area along the Brazos River about 100 miles wide and 200 miles long, centered on Waco, comprising all or some of thirty present-day counties in Central Texas. <sup>[18]</sup>	Sarahville	At various times also called Robertson's Colony, the Texas Association, Leftwich's Grant, the Nashville colony, or the upper colony. <sup>[18]</sup>
Lorenzo de Zavala	southeastern Texas in the Galveston Bay Area		transferred ownership to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company
Henri Castro	southwestern Texas on the Medina River	Castroville	

After the Republic of Texas won its independence from Mexico, the young nation continued its own version of the empresario program, offering grants to French diplomat Henri Castro and abolitionist Charles Fenton Mercer, among others.

## References

- [1] Compare "impresario".
- [2] Manchaca (2001), p. 194.
- [3] Vazquez (1997), p. 48.
- [4] Edmondson (2000), p. 75.
- [5] Manchaca (2001), p. 187.
- [6] Manchaca (2001), p. 198.
- [7] Vazquez (1997), p. 53.
- [8] Davis (2002), p. 72.
- [9] Davis (2002), p. 75.
- [10] Vazquez (1997), p. 50.
- [11] de la Teja (1997), p. 88.
- [12] Manchaca (2001), p. 196.
- [13] Ericson (2000), p. 37.
- [14] Davis (2002), p. 76.
- [15] Davis (2002), p. 73.

[16] Davis (2002), p. 78.

[17] Davis (2002), p. 79.

[18] <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/uer1.html>

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## External links

### Maps:

- Texas Land Grants and Political Divisions, 1821-1836, from the *Atlas of Texas*, 1976 ([http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas\\_texas/texas\\_land\\_grants.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas_texas/texas_land_grants.jpg))
- T. G. Bradford's Map of Texas, 1835 (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/bradford-texas-1835-01.jpg>)

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