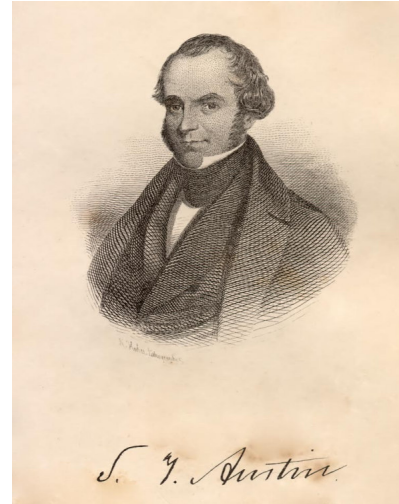


Stephen Fuller Austin, Freemason and Father of Texas

Stephen Fuller Austin (November 3, 1793 – December 27, 1836), known as the "Father of Texas", led the second and ultimately successful colonization of the region of northern Mexico known as Bexar in the state of Coahuila y Tejas. Austin was made a Master Mason in Louisiana Lodge No. 109 in St. Genevieve, Louisiana, in June of 1815. From the time he first entered Mexico City in 1822 to renew his father's land grant in order to bring families to Texas, until his death in 1836, his efforts and adventures are constantly mingled with the efforts and adventures of fellow Master Masons in Texas.



Austin's plan for a colony in Texas was halted when Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821. Austin was informed that the *junta instituyente*, the new congress of the government of Agustín I of Mexico, refused to recognize the land grant made to his father by the Spanish government. Austin traveled to Mexico City and managed to persuade the *junta instituyente* to authorize the grant that had been given to his father, which would, in turn, permit immigration plans by Emprario Austin to continue.

By late 1825, Austin had brought the first 300 families, now known in Texas history as the Old Three Hundred, to the land grant originally given to his father. Of the original 300 families, 39 of them are known to have been headed by Master Masons.

In contrast to the many ruffians who later came to Texas, Austin made every effort to accept only colonists who were law abiding, and of sterling character. In the same manner that a lodge requires background information on members, Austin required the colonists to bring with them documents that attested to their good character. Although he had effective civil and military authority over the settlers, he was quick to introduce a semblance of American law, and the Constitution of Coahuila y Tejas was agreed upon in November 1827. To uphold law and order and protect the colonists, Austin organized small armed groups that came to be known as the Texas Rangers.

Despite his hopes, Austin was making little money from his endeavors. The colonists were unwilling to pay for his services as emprario, and most of the money gained was spent on the processes of government and public services.

It was during these years that Austin sought to establish Freemasonry in Texas. Freemasonry was well established and accepted among the educated classes of Mexican society, and many of the men coming into Texas were Masons. It should be noted that the (American) Anti-Masonic political party was formed in 1826, and skepticism about Masonry was widespread in the United States at that time. It is the author's belief that this led to the immigration of many Masons into Texas.

On February 11, 1828, Austin called a meeting of Freemasons at San Felipe for the purpose of electing officers and petitioning the Masonic Grand Lodge in Mexico City for a charter to form a lodge. Austin was elected Worshipful Master of the new lodge. Although the petition reached Matamoros, and was to be forwarded to Mexico City, nothing more was heard of it.

By 1828, the ruling faction in Mexico was afraid that the liberal elements in Texas might try to gain their independence. Fully aware of the political philosophies of American Freemasons, the Mexican government outlawed Freemasonry on October 25, 1828. In 1829, Austin called another meeting where it was decided that it was "impolitic and imprudent, at this time, to form Masonic lodges in Texas."

In December of 1836, Austin was in the new capital of Columbia (now known as West Columbia) where he caught a severe cold, and his condition worsened. Doctors were called in, but could not help him. Austin died of pneumonia at noon on December 27, 1836, at the home of George B. McKinstry right outside of what is now West Columbia, Texas. Austin's last words were "The independence of Texas is recognized! Don't you see it in the papers?..." Upon hearing of Austin's death, Houston ordered an official statement proclaiming: "The Father of Texas is no more; the first pioneer of the wilderness has departed."

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Compiled by the 2008 Grand Lodge of Texas History Committee, from articles published by the Grand Lodge of Texas; Wikipedia; The Handbook of Texas Online; *The Texas Masons: The Fraternity of Ancient Free & Accepted Masons in the History of Texas* by Pete Normand; and *Masonry in Texas: Background, History, and Influence to 1846*. by the Committee on Masonic Education and Service, Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M.