

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
Composed and dramatized by BOB HEINONEN

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF STEPHEN F. AUSTIN

Part 14: Mexico Doesn't Change But It Does

by Bob Heinonen

During all the years Stephen F. Austin had been in Texas, Mexico had never been able to establish a stable government. From his entry into Texas in 1821 just before Mexico gained its independence from Spain until the early 1830's, Mexico had been in an internal power and social struggle. From one year to the next, you didn't know who would be in power.

Even after gaining independence from Spain, the "... social hierarchy, according to foreign visitors, remained roughly the same as always. It was divided [from top to bottom] into six general groups: whites or Creoles (those who prided themselves on their descent from the Spanish, yet might be mixed blood), mestizos, mulattoes, zambos (descendants of Negroes and Indians), Indians, and Negroes." "The most important distinction, civil and political, was founded on the colour of the skin," wrote Joel Poinsett." Slavery was illegal in Mexico, but having servants indentured for life was not.

The new aristocracy of "The army and the church dominated Mexican life. 'You are warned of this double dominion by the constant sound of the drum and the bell, which ring in your ears from morn to midnight and drown the sounds of industry and labor,' noted Brantz Mayer (Mayer 1844, 346)."

"This new aristocracy controlled the nation by authority and force, meddling in the government's affairs, turning the country into a battlefield. Instead of guarding the nation against invading enemies, the military protected the government against the people." Or overthrew the government to serve a particular officer's needs.

In 1832, General Antonio López de Santa Anna Pérez de Lebrón revolted against President Bustamante who in turn had thrown out the previous president in 1830. Santa Anna said that the Mexican states should have the power, not the central government. But then, in 1833, when Santa Anna himself became President of Mexico, he changed his mind. He forced a change that gave him the power instead of the states. The villain Santa Anna threw out the Constitution of 1824. The thoughts of revolution, or a least reversion to the Constitution of 1824, covered the country...including Texas.

Next Month – Part 15: Having Their Say

*The quotes are from **Life in Mexico Under Santa Anna 1822-1855** by Ruth R. Oliver and Liliane Crete.*

*Bob Heinonen is the founder of **Texas Heroes** and has been portraying Stephen F. Austin since 1993. See www.TexasHeroes.net/StephenFAustin.html. Copyright© by Bob Heinonen 2008.*