

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
Composed and dramatized by BOB HEINONEN

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF STEPHEN F. AUSTIN

Part 15: Having Their Say

by Bob Heinonen

In 1833, when Antonio López de Santa Anna became President of Mexico, he forced a change in government that gave him the power instead of the states and threw out the Constitution of 1824. The thoughts of revolution spread across Mexico, and Texas was no exception.

The colonists in Texas, Stephen F. Austin's colonists and the colonists of other empresarios that had now come to Texas, decided they wanted to hold a consultation...a convention...to discuss several courses of action. Austin recommended against holding a consultation since it was against Mexican law and would do nothing but irritate the authorities. The representatives could be put in prison. But the colonists decided to hold the consultation anyway and their representatives met at San Felipe on April 1, 1833. "Among the delegates was the flamboyant, hard-drinking ex-governor of Tennessee, Sam Houston, representing Nacogdoches...the convention chose William Wharton to preside over the gathering, a sign that Austin's cautious policies had fallen from favor."

The representatives debated:

1. Should Texas become an independent nation through revolution, or
2. Should Texas apply for full statehood within the Republic of Mexico under the Constitution of 1824 (up until then Texas had been a part of Coahuila which was hundreds of miles to the west)

After lot of arguing and debating, as only Texians seemed to be able to do, the decision was made to apply for full statehood. And, in spite of the fact that Stephen F. Austin had recommended against holding the consultation, the consultation asked Austin to represent them. They asked Austin to go to Mexico City to petition the government for Texas statehood.

Although Austin was tired of the new politics of Texas, he accepted the challenge. He wrote to his cousin, Mary Austin Holley, "If I succeed in this mission I intend it shall terminate my participation in public matters. I have contributed very much to the settling of the Country, and if I am now successful, I shall be contented, and think I have done my part."

"Austin mounted his mule on April 22, 1833, and rode west out of San Filipe for San Antonio" as he began his journey to Mexico City via land and sea; he arrived there three months later. For the next five months, Austin lobbied and petitioned for statehood. But, as usual, the Mexican government was in a state of political turmoil. From one day to the next, he didn't know what the opinions of the men in power would be. Stephen F. Austin was a very patient man, but even Austin lost his patience. He wrote a letter to his friends in San Antonio de Bexar saying they should form a government because Texas would need one one way or the other – as a state or as an independent nation.

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Unfortunately, Austin's letter fell into the hands of his enemies. He was called a traitor for suggesting the formation of an unauthorized government. Austin was captured by the Mexican Army and put in the Inquisition Prison in Mexico City where he was placed in solitary confinement.

Next Month – Part 16: Prison Changes Things

*All quotes come from Gregg Cantrell's book **Stephen F. Austin – Empresario of Texas***

*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.*