

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN
Composed and dramatized by BOB HEINONEN

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF STEPHEN F. AUSTIN

Part 17: There Will Be War

by Bob Heinonen

Over two years after leaving Texas in April, 1833, for Mexico City to petition for Texas statehood, Stephen F. Austin was allowed to come home to Texas. He had been held as a prisoner in Mexico City for the last sixteen months; three months in solitary confinement, seven months in the general prison, and six months on parole at a Mexico City hotel. When the government's case against him was revealed, "Nowhere in the huge bundle of papers could Austin or his lawyers find anything resembling an indictment, nor could anyone determine the statute under which he was charged."

During his last six months on parole in the city, revolts broke out in Mexico. President Santa Anna was trying to consolidate power in his central government instead of leaving it in the states (as he had advocated before he became President). In April, 1835, Santa Anna took an army to the State of Zacatecas to suppress a revolt by the state government. His soldiers brutally killed thousands of citizens and then, in Santa Anna's glorious victory over his own people, he turned his army loose for two days of raping and pillaging in the villages. How Santa Anna would handle future revolts was now known.

In early August, 1835, Stephen F. Austin arrived by ship at New Orleans where he waited about three weeks for a ship to Texas. When he finally arrived in Texas he found things had changed. Land speculation, some involving his own secretary Samuel Williams, had angered many people. New immigrants from the United States were clamoring for land. Mexican authorities were trying to enforce import taxes on goods being shipped into Texas. Rumors of Santa Anna's heavy handed central government reached Texas and ran rampant. The Constitution of 1824 had been thrown out by Santa Anna and Texans were upset.

Stephen F. Austin had had a vision...a dream...for a Texas carved from the wilderness by his colonists. But now, "Events had finally convinced him that only independence from Mexico could make this vision a reality. The question was no longer one of ends, only of means."

After arriving at his sister Emily's plantation on September 1, a dinner was given in Austin's honor at Brazoria. He was warmly received and recognized by the leading citizens. His overall leadership was honored by both the War Party and the Peace Party. William Barret Travis, a lawyer, firebrand and member of the War Party wrote Austin, "All eyes are turned towards you...Texas can be wielded by you and *you alone*; and her destiny is now completely in your hands. I have every confidence that you will guide us safe through all our perils." Austin called for a general consultation (convention) to decide on what course the people of Texas should take. He was asked by the people of Brazoria and San Felipe to organize the Consultation for all of Texas.

"Austin understood that without unity the Texan revolt stood no chance of success. The overwhelming reception he received on his return to Texas and the numerous claims of both War and Peace Party men that all were now united behind his leadership probably gave Austin a

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misleading view of how much unity really existed. Many old settlers – landed conservatives who had always followed Austin’s conciliatory leadership and who stood to lose much by a bloody revolution – were privately dismayed to see the empresario essentially cast his lot with the War Party. Those who supported revolution were cut from the fiercely individualistic cloth of the American frontier, and they would be difficult to mold into a disciplined force, either politically or militarily.” Every Texan acted like a king unto himself and took orders from no one.

As the events unfolded, there was only one thing that seemed certain...there would be war.

Next Month – Part 18: And There Was War

*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 2009.*