



# *The Daughters of the Republic of Texas*

**STONE FORT CHAPTER - NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Susan Aikin, 569-2023

## REMEMBERING THE BIRTHDAY OF STEPHEN F. AUSTIN

On November 3, we celebrate the birthday of Stephen F. Austin, "The Father of Texas." Remembering his birthday provides a time to reflect on the life of our founder and the importance of his contributions to Texas history, and ultimately U.S history. He lived only forty-three years, but the significance of his achievements in the successful settlement and independence of Texas shaped our country's history forever.

Stephen Fuller Austin was born in Wythe County, Virginia on November 3, 1793, the eldest of three surviving children born to Moses and Mary (Brown) Austin. At the age of five, the family moved to the lead mining areas of Missouri, then in Spanish territory. Stephen was educated at the Bacon Academy in Connecticut, followed by Transylvania University in Kentucky. Upon graduation, he returned to work in his father's business.

During the Panic of 1819, the family suffered significant financial loss, and Stephen looked to Arkansas for a new beginning. His father looked to the Spanish territory of Texas to reclaim his fortune as an empresario, or colonization agent, and obtained a grant to settle three hundred families. Stephen spent less than two years in Arkansas before moving to New Orleans, Louisiana where he planned to study law. Fate would soon change his plans. Moses Austin died in 1821, leaving his land grant and a dying wish for completion of the venture with his son. Stephen F. Austin honored the wish, and charted a new course, the settlement and prosperity of Texas.

Only twenty-eight years old, Austin traveled to San Antonio and obtained permission from Spanish officials to carry out the colonization venture under his father's grant. He selected a site between the San Antonio and Brazos Rivers for his colony and traveled back to New Orleans to recruit colonists with the promise of land and a climate well suited to American agriculture. He was careful to select good, honest, hard-working settlers for his settlement.

In 1821, Mexico declared independence from Spain, and Austin made the first of many perilous trips to Mexico City on behalf of the settlers. He succeeded in obtaining a

new immigration contract to settle the 300 families, known in Texas history as "The Old Three Hundred." This group of families constituted the first legal Anglo-American settlement in Texas. Austin had thus completed the contract and fulfilled his father's dying wish. Under subsequent immigration laws, Austin received contracts to settle an additional 900 families, making him the most successful of the empresarios. He was viewed as their leader and represented the Anglo settlers in the legislature of the Mexican state of Coahuila y Texas.

By the early 1830's, friction between the central government of Mexico and the Anglo settlers was growing. Once again, Stephen F. Austin traveled to Mexico City to express the settlers' grievances and requests for reform. On his way home, he was arrested and jailed in Mexico City for almost two years. Released in July 1835, Austin returned and participated in the Texas Revolution. While Sam Houston was elected the first president of the Republic of Texas, Stephen F. Austin served loyally in Houston's cabinet as secretary of state until his untimely death on December 27, 1836. When Sam Houston learned of Austin's death, he issued an official statement declaring, "The Father of Texas is no more; the first pioneer of the wilderness has departed."

Stephen F. Austin's birthday is one of twelve Texas Honor Days designated by The Daughters of the Republic of Texas. The D.R.T. is the oldest women's patriotic organization in Texas and is dedicated to the preservation and education of Texas history. For more information on Texas Honor Days and the work of the D.R.T., please visit the website at [www.drinfo.org](http://www.drinfo.org)

*Sources:* Barker, Eugene C. *The Life of Stephen F. Austin: Founder of Texas, 1793–1836*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1926.; Eugene C. Barker, "AUSTIN, STEPHEN FULLER," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fau14>), accessed October 26, 2012.; *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture* /[www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net); Strickland, Rex W. "Miller County, Arkansas Territory, The Frontier that Men Forgot." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 18 (March 1940): 12–34; Texas State Cemetery, [www.cemetery.state.tx.us](http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us); *The Father of Texas* by Archie McDonald.