

Chapter 1

What Would You Do?

Once upon a time, back in the 1820s, land in Texas was really, really cheap. Even though the Spanish government owned the land, the government gave an American, Stephen F. Austin, permission to move to Texas and bring three hundred American families to settle on Texas soil. What a deal! But while Austin was riding his horse to Texas, Mexico won a war against Spain and took Texas like a big, fat prize. For the next sixteen years, Austin and his fellow settlers nursed relationships with Mexico, Texas' new owner. They worked the land, fought with the Native Americans (and sometimes each other) and generally tried to make a go out of a difficult situation.

What began with those original “Old Three Hundred” families ended in 1835–36 with a “Texian” (American + Texan = Texian) revolt against Mexican rule. That’s what this book is about—the revolt or revolution.

Between the time Austin and his Old Three Hundred settled in Texas and the time the revolution started, the settlers had made great progress gained through hard work, suffering and sacrifice. The revolution brought it all to a screeching halt, as people who had come to Texas to be farmers, merchants, craftsmen, lawyers and land speculators left their land and occupations to grab a gun—or a stick, rock, knife or whatever they could find—to fight against the powerful Mexican army.

If you lived in Texas in 1835, what would life be like for you? Well, it depends on if you were a man, woman, child or slave.

If you were a man, chances were pretty good that even if you survived the battles with Mexican troops, your farm or home in town would be burned by Mexican troops



(or by retreating, as in running away, Texas forces), your livestock stolen or plundered and your crops trampled or destroyed. Women and children left behind when the men went off to fight the Mexicans might also fall prey to raids by Native Americans or be forced to flee by marauding soldiers from both sides. What were you doing if you were a slave? The common denominator for everyone was hard times. Life in Texas during 1835-36 was no cakewalk.

That is something to think about, isn't it?

Imagine you made the long wagon ride to Texas, spent years building something up and then a war came and all your work disappeared before your eyes. What do you care about "constitutional rights" or "Mexican tyranny" when you see everything you have worked and risked your life for about to vanish? Don't forget—the colonist kids worked as hard as their parents did. And Texas was now their only home. It might be prestigious to be one of the Old Three Hundred, but what if your house is gone and your dad or brother is killed in the war?

Wouldn't you rather have them back? How much would you care about "freedom" or "liberty" anyway? Is it worth the price you have to pay?

Many thought it was, which is the next part of the story.