

Remember the Alamo! **The Making of a Nation – Program No. 47** **Andrew Jackson – Part Two**

From VOA Learning English, welcome to The Making of a Nation, our weekly program of American history for people learning English. I'm Steve Ember.

The national election of 1832 put Andrew Jackson in the White House for a second term as president.

One of the major events of his second term was the fight against the Bank of the United States.

In 1836, the bank's charter ended, and the Treasury Department took responsibility for most of the government's finances. Many people considered Jackson's bank veto one of the most important actions of his presidency.

Another major event of Andrew Jackson's second term as president involved Texas. The United States had given its claim to Texas to Spain in 1819. Then

Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821. After that, Texas belonged to Mexico.

During the 1820s, Americans poured into Texas. Most of the settlers came from the states of Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana. Many owned slaves and brought the slaves with them to Texas.

American settlers in Texas were able to buy land for almost nothing. But they had to promise to join the Roman Catholic Church. They also had to promise to obey the laws of Mexico.

Over time, Mexican leaders saw the danger of continuing to permit Americans to settle in Texas. The Mexican government sent an official to inspect conditions along the border with the United States. The official reported that as he traveled north through Texas, he saw less and less that was Mexican and more and more that was American.

He said there were very few Mexicans in some towns. And these Mexicans, he said, were extremely poor. He said the American settlers were not becoming true Mexicans. They were not speaking Spanish. They were not becoming Catholics. And they were not accepting Mexican traditions.

The official said the situation in Texas could throw the whole Mexican nation into revolution. He urged Mexico to send troops to occupy Texas.

The situation between the settlers and the Mexican government became increasingly tense.

For the most part, there was little that President Andrew Jackson could do. The United States had a friendship treaty with Mexico. The government in Washington had a duty to remain neutral.

In April 1833, the settlers in Texas held a convention. They prepared a list of appeals to the leader of Mexico, General Santa Anna.

One of the Americans, Stephen Austin, carried the appeals to Mexico City. He spent six months negotiating with the Mexican government.

General Santa Anna promised to honor all the requests except one. He would not make Texas a Mexican state, although he said that might be possible someday. Stephen Austin was satisfied. He left the Mexican capital to return to Texas.

On his way home, to his surprise, Austin was arrested. He was arrested because of a letter he had written earlier. He had written it when his negotiations with Mexican officials seemed to be failing. He had said it might be best if the people declared Texas an independent state. Austin was put in prison in Mexico City for a year and a half.

Stephen Austin urged the people of Texas to remain loyal to Mexico. But talk of rebellion had already begun. The settlers were calling themselves "Texans."

In November 1835, representatives from all parts of Texas held a convention to discuss the situation. They had no plans to take Texas out of the Mexican Republic. In fact, a proposal to do that was defeated by a large vote.

However, the Texans took action to protect themselves against Santa Anna, who had declared himself dictator. They organized a temporary state government. They also organized a state army. And they made plans for another convention.

Before the Texans could meet again, Santa Anna led an army of 7,000 men across the Rio Grande River into Texas. The first soldiers reached San

Antonio on February 23. The Texas forces withdrew to an old Spanish mission church called the Alamo.

On March 1, the second Texas convention opened. This time, the representatives voted to declare Texas a free, independent and sovereign republic. They wrote a constitution based on the Constitution of the United States. They created a government. David Burnet became president. Sam Houston was to continue as commander of Texas forces.

On the second day of the convention, a letter came from the Alamo in San Antonio. The letter was addressed to the people of Texas and all Americans. The commander of Texas forces at the Alamo, Lieutenant Colonel William Barrett Travis, wrote:

"I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna — I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man — The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken — I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls — I shall never surrender or retreat.

The letter from the Alamo closed with the words: "Victory or Death."

Representatives at the convention wanted to leave immediately to go to the aid of the Texans at the Alamo. But Sam Houston told them it was their duty to remain and create a government for Texas. Houston would go there himself with a small force.



The Battle of the Alamo

The help came too late for the 189 men – perhaps even more – at the Alamo. The defenders included some Tejanos, or Hispanic Texans, and the famed frontiersman Davy Crockett. Santa Anna's forces captured the mission on March 6. When the battle ended, not a single one of the defenders was still alive.

Sam Houston ordered all Texas forces to withdraw to the northeast — away from the Mexican army.

One group of Texans did not move fast enough. Santa Anna trapped them. He said the Texans would not be harmed if they surrendered. They did. One week later, they were marched to a field and shot. Only a few escaped to tell the story.

Santa Anna then moved against Sam Houston. He was sure his large army could defeat the remaining Texas force.

President Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston were close friends. When told of Houston's retreat, the president pointed to a map of Texas. He said: "If Sam Houston is worth anything, he will make his stand here."

Jackson pointed to the mouth of the San Jacinto River.



"Remember the Alamo" was the rallying cry as Texans fought Mexican troops in the Battle of San Jacinto - Painting in the Texas State Capitol in Austin

The battle of San Jacinto began at four o'clock in the afternoon. There were about 800 Texans. There were twice as many Mexicans. The Mexicans did not expect the retreating Texans to turn and fight. But they did.

Shouting "Remember the Alamo!" the Texans ran at the Mexican soldiers. Eighteen minutes later, the battle was over. Santa Anna's army was destroyed.

On May 14, 1836, Texas' President David Burnet and General Santa Anna signed a treaty. The treaty made Texas independent from Mexico.

Historian Daniel Feller says President Jackson had to be careful when responding to the situation in Texas.

"Whether or not Jackson approved of the insurrection in Texas, whether or not he saw it as complicating or easing the path toward eventual assimilation of Texas, there's no doubt that he wanted Texas as part of the United States."

Jackson did not want Mexico to blame the United States for the revolution, even though the American government had been trying to buy Texas for many years.

Jackson believed the country should spread as far west as it could. But he also worried that giving statehood to Texas would deepen the split between the northern and southern states. Texas would be a state where slavery was permitted. For this reason, the anti-slavery leaders in the North strongly opposed Texas statehood.

Jackson told a representative from Texas, William Wharton, that there was a way that statehood for Texas would bring the North and South together, instead of splitting them apart.

Jackson said Texas should claim California. The fishing interests of the North and East, said Jackson, wanted a port on the Pacific coast. Offer it to them, the president said, and they will soon forget that Texas is a slave state.

Jackson and Wharton held this discussion just three weeks before the end of the president's term. Wharton spent much time at the White House.

He also worked with congressmen, urging the lawmakers to recognize Texas. He was able to get Congress to include in a bill a statement permitting the United States to send a minister to Texas. This bill was approved four days before the end of Jackson's term.

On the afternoon of March 3, 1837, Jackson agreed to recognize the new republic led by his old friend, Sam Houston.

Nine years would pass before Texas became an American state.

Jackson's presidency was almost over. His legacy and the election of 1836 will be our story next week.

I'm Steve Ember, inviting you to join us next time for The Making of a Nation — American History from VOA Learning English.