

Gone to Texas: Researching Texas Records

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Aug 9, 2023 Kentucky Genealogical Society

Mini Timeline

- Explore Texas by Historical Eras: <https://texasourtexastexaspbs.org/the-eras-of-texas/>

Empresario Settlements	Jan 3, 1823	Stephen F. Austin received grant from the Mexican government to colonize Texas along the Brazos River.
	Oct 1, 1832	Convention of 1832 to discuss dissatisfaction with the policies by the Mexican government.
	Oct 2, 1835	The Texas revolution began with the Battle of Gonzales over a cannon that was used to protect settlers from Comanche raids. "Come and Take it"
Republic of Texas	March 2, 1836	The Texas Declaration of Independence signed by members of the Convention of 1836
	March 6, 1836	Mexican army defeats Texas at the Battle of the Alamo.
	April 21, 1836	Texans defeat the Mexican army at the Battle of San Jacinto to win independence.
	Nov, 1839	The Texas Congress met in Austin, the frontier site selected for the capital of the Republic.
US	December 29, 1845	Texas admitted to the Union as the 28th state.
	February 1, 1861	Texas seceded from the Union then readmitted on March 30, 1870.

The Republic of Texas only lasted slightly less than 10 years. Researching an Ancestor in the time of 1835-1850 can be frustrating, challenging, and downright difficult. To be successful the genealogical researcher must go beyond looking at census and vital records. To locate people in Texas you have to be aware of the records available and how they may help you.

LAND! LAND! LAND!

Guidebooks and News articles promoted moving to Texas. Examples are:

Publications such as [Mary Austin Holley's Texas in 1836](#), the advertising pamphlets of the [Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company](#) in the early 1830s, and *Texas in 1840 or the Emigrant's Guide to the New Republic* (author unknown) encouraged Americans to come to Texas. [See Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas: <https://www.tshaonline.org/home>.]

Most Moved from KY to Texas on the promise of Land

- "In the Republic of TX, **The Kentucky Mustangs**, one of the six companies which served under James Walker Fannin at Goliad, was composed of **Burr H. Duval's** company of Kentucky Riflemen and the remnant of B. L. Lawrence's company of **Tennessee** volunteers, which had been formed in Nacogdoches in December 1835."
- "Several Towns are named after Kentucky towns: Paducah, Lexington, and Kentucky Town. Kentucky town was settled by a group of settlers that traveled in a wagon train from Kentucky and arrived about 1849. It was originally named something else but soon was referred to as the Kentuckian's town."

- “Peters Colony in North Texas was one of the empresario grants. Half of the investors were residents of England and the other half were probably related to William S. Peters the founder. The headquarter of the Peters Colony was in Louisville, KY. (1849-1853)”

TSHAONLINE.ORG has 1840 entries of people from Kentucky and became ‘notable’ persons in Texas.

- The first settlers of [Texas](#) generally came from **Spain**, although a few **Frenchmen** settled in eastern Texas.
- Between 1821 and 1836 about 38,000 settlers came from the United States, especially from the **southern states**.
- In the thirty years before the Civil War, many European emigrants came to Texas. They were mostly **Germans, Poles, Czechs, Swedes, Norwegians, and Irish**.
- By 1850, some 33,000 **Germans** had settled in Texas. (Texas Hill country New Braunfels and Fredericksburg) Texas beers Pearl and Shiner came from German settlers.
- After the Civil War many people left the South and went to Texas.
- Others came from the North Central states, especially farmers of **Swedish, Polish, and Irish descent**.

Texas Migration from Kentucky to Texas

- [Texas Migration History 1850-2018](#) <https://depts.washington.edu/moving1/Texas.shtml>
- In 1850 Census Kentucky born was 6179. In 1860 there were 144,164. In 1870 there were only 21,996, by 1930 there were 44,519.
- Two land office in the Republic of Texas: **Clarksville** in Red River County and **Nacogdoches**

Vital Records at the State

Birth Records	1903	Some earlier at courthouses; If you can’t find it at the state level check at the county courthouse; delayed/probated at county level
Death	1903	Having consistent death records were as late as 1930s
Marriages	1966	Prior to this check the county
Divorces	1968	NOTE: These are in DISTRICT courts in Texas
FamilySearch.org has everything that can legally be made available		
Search the FamilySearch.org Catalog for the county name or find microfilm from Texas State Library and Archives [May not be indexed in records search! Find the collection and do the search at that level!]		

Locating and Using Land Records

Since Texas was a republic, they retain ALL land records and land grant maps at the **General Land Office** in Austin. All titles in Texas are traced backwards to the original grantee’s name. They grants were surveyed in metes and bounds. Earlier land that came from Mexican land grants maybe in Varas instead of acres. (1 vara =33 and 1/3 inches; 5645.4 square varas = 1 acre. A labor is 1,000,000 square varas or 177.1 acres) See [/www.glo.texas.gov/index.html](http://www.glo.texas.gov/index.html)

- 1st Class land grants: Heads of families (Blacks and American Indians excepted) living in Texas on March 2, 1836, could apply for a square league (4,428 acres) and a [labor](#) (177.1 acres) of land.

- 2nd Class land grants: arriving between March 2, 1836, and October 1, 1837, a grant of 1,280 acres for heads of families and 640 acres for single men or Women head of household!
- 3rd Class land grants: Allocated 640 acres and 320 acres, respectively, to heads of family and single men arriving after October 1, 1837, and before January 1, 1840.
- 4th Class land grants were issued from 1 January 1840 to January 1842
- There were other types of land grants: Wounded veterans of the Republic, Railroad, School and Hospitals or 1900 Scrap Act.

Some had to live in Texas three years to receive a clear title. The process was:

- 1) Receive a headright grant of X acres from Board of Commissioners
- 2) Choose your county
- 3) Prove residence and marital status by 2 witnesses
- 4) Pay \$5 to board for the certificate
- 5) Choose plot and establish residence
- 6) Survey the land [You had to pay the county surveyor and supply a chain carrier to assist]
- 7) Surveyor sent the land survey to Austin to be recorded at the General Land Office.

Later after Texas became a state these were converted to Land Patents. There were exceptions to the residency for anyone that served in the Texas military or received a 1st class land grant.

If the county courthouse burned people brought their deeds back into the courthouse and recorded them with no problem because they all tied back to the original land grants.

Methodology with Texas Land:

- 1) Locate the deed
- 2) Plot it (See Metes and Bounds software at sandyknollsw.com) (Free version available)
- 3) **Find the witnesses / chain carriers to the survey**
- 4) Plot all the neighbors (or get Texas land grant maps at Portal to Texas History) [GLO Historic County Maps - <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/GLOHCM/>])

The neighbors were likely to be kin of the owner or married one of the children.

Other Texas Records Repositories

- 1) **Regional archives and Texas State Library and Archives** <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/> [Archives & Reference – Genealogy]
 - a. City Directories - print and microfilm
 - b. Newspaper Research (Many have been placed at the Portal to Texas History)
 - c. Native American & African American collections (*No Land, Only Slaves* Book by Edith Smith & Vivian Lehman is online and free at familysearch.org)
 - d. Reconstruction military rolls
 - e. Civil War Pensions
 - f. **TAX RECORDS 1837-1910 (Only a few years are online at familysearch.org)**

- i. Poll Tax (Head tax on Males of certain ages)
 - ii. Property Taxes (farm animals, wagons, buggies) [Some widowed females]
 - iii. Transcribing for many years can reveal full names, son's names, and middle names by looking at the property headright or abstract listed.
 - g. Texas Supreme Court cases
 - h. Photographs, letters, diaries, Service to the Republic of Texas (like Southern Claims Commission these are usually supplying of goods or food to the army, and even letters to the Governor)
- 2) **Portal to Texas History** <https://texashistory.unt.edu/>
- a. Gammel's *The Laws of Texas* [Summarizes legislative acts which can include early divorces, claims for the Republic and state, disputes with officials, etc.]
 - b. Journals and Newsletters of several Genealogy societies (ETGS, Collin & Dallas County)
 - c. County history books
 - d. Newspapers
 - e. Pictures
 - f. Company papers
 - g. Artwork
- 3) FamilySearch.org (Not all counties have good coverage of records)
- a. Use the catalog for the state of Texas and it has links to all the other Texas record pages.
 - b. FS wiki entry for Texas research has pointers to Counties (note they do NOT make clear which counties were burned!)
 - c. Use the Wiki page for Burned counties and overcoming brick walls in your research for ideas of other records

Other Hints

- 1) Texas had a Scholastic Census to enumerate school age children. Not many survive but search at the major sites.
- 2) Deed books were used when paper was not available. I have seen marriage records, military service, as well as wills and estate information recorded in books that are labeled 'Deeds'.
- 3) Courts in Texas change over time: County Courts (Handle appeals from Justice of the Peace and Municipal courts), District Courts (Felony, title to land, election contest, divorces, probate), and Criminal courts are now separate.
- 4) Other Universities with digital online archives: University of Texas Austin & Arlington, East Texas Research Center (Nacogdoches) [Early TX material]

Bibliography of Books

- 1) Eicholz Alice. 1992. *Ancestry's Red Book: American State County & Town Sources* Rev. Ed. Second ed. Salt Lake City UT: Ancestry Publ.

It has a table showing the ages of people to be taxed by year. Important since the maximum age varies by year. Person could be too old one year and then reappear the next!

- 2) Bockstruck Lloyd Dewitt. 1992. *Research in Texas*. Arlington Va: National Genealogical Society.
- 3) Gournay, Luke. *Texas Boundaries: Evolution of the State's Counties*. Texas A&M University Press, 2002.

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