The Constitution of 1824 established Mexico as a federal republic. Although this provided a national framework for the country’s governance, each state in the federation proceeded to write and ratify its own constitution. The national constitution had combined two former Spanish provinces, Coahuila and Texas, into a twin state called Coahuila y Tejas. The action was taken because neither by itself possessed the population required for statehood. Work on creating the constitution for the state was the first order of business for legislators meeting in Saltillo, the newly designated state capital. The first article of Decree No. 1 stated that “Said Congress is solemnly and legally installed in conformity to the decrees to its institution, and qualified to exercise its functions agreeably to the constitutive act of the Mexican Confederation, and other federal laws, that have been, or may be hereafter enacted by the general Congress.” Thus, the legislators recognized that Coahuila y Tejas was indeed a part of the larger Mexican federation.

The next article of the same decree, however, elaborated a principle that would bring the state into conflict with the national or central government located in Mexico City. Article 2 of Decree No. 1 announced “[Although the] State of Coahuila and Texas is an integral of the Federation, [it is] equal to the other States of which the same is composed, and it is free, sovereign, and independent in whatever exclusively relates to the internal administration . . ..” With this statement, the political leaders of Coahuila y Tejas were endorsing a states’ right doctrine in which they asserted they state would have authority over its own internal matters. Understanding this states’ rights position helps to understand the conflict that would rise out of the growth of centralism in Mexico.
Legislators worked for three years on the state constitution, officially promulgating it on March 11, 1827. Citizens of the state were designated Coahuiltecs, a term that combined the names of both former provinces. Sovereignty rested in the citizens but was exercised through their chosen representatives. As in the case of the Mexican nation as a whole, Catholicism was the official religion with no other being allowed. Although exemptions would later be granted, slavery was originally prohibited within the confines of the state. For purposes of governance, the state was initially divided into three political departments: Saltillo, Monclova, and Béjar. Each department was administered by a political chief (jefe político). Towns within these departments with more than one thousand residents were allowed to have a town council called an ayuntamiento. As the population of Texas increased owing to colonization, the legislature allowed Texas two more administrative departments: Nacogdoches (1831) and Brazos (1834). Texas towns with ayuntamientos were the capitals of the three departments: San Antonio de Béjar, Nacogdoches, and San Felipe de Austin. In order for other towns to establish their own ayuntamientos they had to show they met the population requirement but even then residents had to receive permission from the state legislature before it could legally be organized. (The Villa de la Santísima Trinidad de la Libertad—Liberty for short—effort to establish its own ayuntamiento led in part to the 1832 conflict between colonists and government officials in known as the first Anahuac Disturbance.)

An ayuntamiento provided a range of services for the town it represented. Its tasks included insuring public health regarding both disease and food preparation, regulating the use and maintenance of the acequia system, combating crime, judging both civil and criminal cases, imposing and collecting taxes, helping to organize the town’s defenses, keeping public records, and looking after the general welfare of the community. The size of the town determined the
number of positions on the *ayuntamiento*. The men who served on the *ayuntamiento* tended to be drawn from the higher end of society, as they had more at stake with the town’s progress and safety. The chief offices on the town council included the *alcalde*, *regidores*, and *síndico procurador*. Although this position roughly corresponded to mayor, councilmen, and city attorney, the duties associated with them were more extensive. For example, members of the *ayuntamiento* often had to patrol the town as policemen, judge civil and criminal cases, arbitrate private disputes, and serve as city inspectors. They also oversaw public matters such as road building, construction of public structures as well as regulating grazing and water rights.

Although the former Spanish system of appointment to the council was replaced by election, in truth the offices usually circulated among a small group of social elites. In Béxar, the *ayuntamiento* often included members of the Ruiz, Navarro, and Seguín families and their relatives.

In 1829, the *ayuntamientos* of Béxar, Goliad, and San Felipe de Austin submitted ordinances adopted by their respective councils for the governance of their towns to the state legislature. The plan adopted by Béxar presents a clear view of how authorities regulated town life on the frontier. The council was to meet every Thursday morning from 8AM to 11AM. Accurate records of all proceedings and discussions were to be kept. Headings within the body of the plan indicate its areas of interest: Administration of City Funds, Public Health, Public Welfare, Public Facilities, City Treasury Funds, and Fines. Unlike today where there is often little interaction between political leaders and a town’s residents, members of the *ayuntamiento* were expected to establish and maintain a close working relationship with the community. Even though the Béxar *ayuntamiento* still functioned during the Texas Revolution, this system of town government came to an end with the establishment of the Republic of Texas.
Examples of Ordinances for San Antonio de Béxar as Adopted in 1829

Regarding Public Health

- There will be a committee on health made up of an alcalde, an alderman (regidor), and the city attorney (síndico procurador), the curate, and two residents that the municipal government will elect.

- It shall be the duty of the citizens whose property borders the acequia, and especially the city attorney to guard that no dead animals, pelts, or any other corruptible refuse be cast into the acequia. Those found at fault shall be fined in a manner equal to the offence.

- The slaughter of bovine livestock, lambs and sheep, or of bristle producing animals for consumption by the public shall take place outside the city limits.

- It is prohibited to maintain any kind of livestock, regardless of the number, within the city limits. All livestock should be cared for away from the city.

- It is prohibited to construct homes from bullrushes or grass. Those unable to obtain less combustible building material will need to bring their case before local authority.

Regarding Public Welfare

- It is entirely prohibited to engage in all types of card games and the owner of an establishment permitting these games will be punished with the full rigor of the laws.

- Business establishments are to close by 10PM. Dances are to end by the time designated ahead of time.

- There will be two weekly patrols charged with the safety and maintenance of public order.

- Two judges will be appointed to oversee the distribution of firewood so as to protect pecan and fruit trees as well as to conserve newly planted trees within the city.

- The chief of police, upon notifying the alcalde, may request help from the military authorities to protect individuals whose business interest oblige them to leave the city.

Regarding Public Facilities
• It shall be the duty of the municipal government to take care that, during the drought years or times of necessity, that all means be taken to provide granary and storage facilities for all primary food sources.

• The municipal government shall take care to construct properly furnished inns to meet the lodging needs of travelers.

• The required funds for a free public school shall come from donations, volunteered by citizens of the community and from all sales taxes on meats.

Regarding Beautification of Public Places

• An alameda shall be maintained.

• Residents are encouraged to plant trees on their property bordering plazas, the river, and acequias.

• The hall where the municipal government meets shall be adorned with patriotic symbols.

Regarding the Creation of City Treasury Funds (Fees)

• Three reales on each head of livestock that is slaughtered.

• One-half real on each slaughtered sheep or goat.

• Six reales on each slaughtered hog.

• One peso on each cart or wagon at each time it is brought into the city carrying national or foreign products.

• All mules loaded with goods or some sort and who pass through the city shall be taxed one peso per mule.

• Four reales on one or more musicians when they exercise their profession at dances that take place in all homes, streets, plazas, or even when plying at an event popularly called the serenade.

Regarding Monetary Fines

• Two reales for not fencing property bordering a public thoroughfare.
• Four *reales* for polluting or obstructing the *acequia*.
• Four *reales* for burning trash in the patio of a home.
• Two *pesos* for shooting a firearm without sufficient cause.
• Fines for persons whose animals damage the property of another to begin at four *reales*.
• Habitual drunks causing scandal are to pay twenty-five *pesos* for the first offense.
• All meat or bread merchants who deceive the public through false advertisement and unfair sales practice shall be deprived of their business licenses and shall be liable to a jail sentence.

Sources


