

In Their Own Words: Stephen F. Austin

In 1820 - 1821, Moses Austin applied for and was eventually granted a contract to settle families in Texas. Unfortunately, on his return trip to Missouri, he contracted pneumonia and would be unable to carry out his dream. His son, Stephen Fuller Austin, took up the cause, despite his lack of enthusiasm for his father's colonization plan. In June 1821, Stephen F. Austin traveled to Texas for the first time and kept a journal of his travels. While on their way to San Antonio, Austin received the news that his father had died. Later in the trip, Austin and the others heard the news that Mexico had won its independence from Spain. The following selection from Austin's journal details his journey from New Orleans to San Antonio in the summer of 1821.

On the 18th June 1821 started from New Orleans in the steam boat Beaver for the Province of Texas in company with Wilson late a Lieut. in the U. S. army, J Beard a saddler from St. Louis, & Doctor Hewitson.

On the 20th took in ---- *Little* at the mouth of Red River one of my party --- Arrived at Nachitoches on the 26th and found Joseph E. Seguin and Berrimandi [Veramendi] and several other Spaniards from St. Antonio, who were waiting the arrival of my father to deliver him the confirmation of his grant from the Spanish Govt. Made an arrangement to go on with them. Purchased mules for the Trip, and other necessary articles--

On the 2d July Mr. Lovelace and par[t]y from Catahoula joined me, and on the 3d July the company all started from N. except Wilson the Spaniards and myself.

July 4, dined at Sibley; and in the evening attended a Ball.

July 5, was detained by one of the horses straying out of the way.

July 6 found the Horse that was missing and started, stayed at Capt Ivins Mo. the Capt. & his man Fryday, being both drunk had a furious quarrel, and parted 11 o'clock at night -- buried a dead Cat that Quin had in the chimney corner for a nosegay - (Item, *habit* even familiarises man to the smell of Carrion) Suped on half a cup miserable Coffee & 1 biscuit -- Slept on the floor (a dirt floor) --

July 7 came to where the company were camped near McGuffins, & found that a mule had left them, in search of which Wilson had returned to Town Spent this day in looking for the mules.

July 8 Wilson still out, Mr. John Lovelace very sick with fever -- Wilson returned at night, no news of the mule -- On the evening of the 8th heard of the runaway mule, & gave Spaniard 2.50 to bring him in, which he did in a few hours & no doubt had him tied out for the purpose of getting the reward -- Swapped away Wilsons Horse & an old Grey (both of whom had given out) for a amule, & exchanged a french saddle for a Spanish one --

July 9. In the morning had a race of about two miles to catch the runaway mule, who outrun us all hobbled, tied head & foot & with a long Cabrass & bell on --

Mr. John Lewis too sick to proceed, & left us to return home to Catahoula - accompanied by [name omitted in original]

About 10 o'clock the company started from McGuffins to wit -- Edward Lovelace, Neel, Gasper-- Bellew-- Henry Holsten, from Catahoula-- Wm. Wilson from District of Columbia late Leut. U. S. Army-- James Beard from St. Louis-- William Little from St. Louis-- Doctor Hewitson-- ---- Irwin-- and W. Smithers from Indian and G. Bush from Nachitoches, the two last I employed as hunters for the company during the trip & agreed to furnish them with ammunition and let them come into the settlement on an equal footing with the other settlers -- Bush furnished a horse for himself & Smithers Wilson mounted on the Black mule Beard on Bay horse, Little on a brown mule, 3 mules for packs, I rode Little's horse -- left Thomas at McGuffins - 8 miles from McG. came to the first waters of Sabine -- Smithers and Lovelace killed a deer, and we camped at Lanan creek 15 miles--

July 10 -- At day light this morning Mr. Barnum (one of my company who we left at Nachitoches) overtook us and communicated to me the sad tidings of my Fathers death-- -- --this melancholy news came to Nachitoches in a letter to Dr. Sibley & Barnum stated that Sibley had forwarded letters to me which would overtake me at Camp Ripley on Sabine-- I started on with a heavy heart and stoped at Camp Ripley, the Company crossed the Sabine & camped in the Province of Texas -- I stayed this night at Forsythes --

July 11. I found that Bush was a worthless fellow and discharged him -- Smithers agreed to remain at Forsythes -- engaged 2 bushels of cold flour, & 50 lbs bacon - spent the day at Forsythes settling some business relative to Richmond --

July 12 not receiving the letters from Nachi -- I determined to return after them 7 started back, got to Buckers --

July 13, went to Nachitoches to breakfast -- and found that Dr. Sibley had forwarded the papers by Erasmo --

July 14 Started out again & overtook Don Erasmo & the other Spaniards 14 in number at the Lanan & camped with them -- recd. letters from my friend Hawkins & one from Dr. Sibley

and some newspapers. The unhappy intelligence of my Fathers death was confirmed beyond a doubt, he died on 10th June --

July 15 -- Arrived at Sabine -- Stayed at Camp Ripley where Wilson was waiting for me.

Monday July 16 Started from Camp Ripley and entered the Province of Texas. Stayed at Amberson's (Boreg Creek) 8 miles, the first 4 miles fine timber & poor land -- we then suddenly came to a open rolling country thinly Timbered soil about the color of Spanish Browne, & in some places redder -- this red land is very productive and is covered with the most luxuriant growth of Grass I ever beheld in any country, almost any of it would produce as much hay as the best meddows. the country so far is well watered.

July 17 Tuesday Star[t]ed on in company with Wilson, Polly & Marple, the two last overtook me at this place & joined me for the whole route, they produced satisfactory recommendations and I accepted of them as part of the Company -- stopped at Englishes 17 miles for breakfast and turned off the road to J.H. Bells. the other continued on after the company. stayed at Bells this night--

Wednesday July 18.

Crossed the Atouyaque River about 25 yds wide high banks & fine bottoms -- overtook the company 12 miles from Nacogdoches and found that Erasmo had captured a Caviard of mules & horses which some traders were taking in from the Comanches.

Thursday July 19. Arrived at Nacogdoches with the Caviard prisoners. The Inhabitants of the country collected to the number of 36 by request of the Spaniards to hear what the got. wished them to do -- and Erasmo informed them that it was the wish of the Spanish Got. that they should all remove to the eastern part of the province which they agreed to do, & promised to go to St Antonio to make the necessary arrangement for their removal in Novr. next.

July 20. This day the council was held with the Inhabitants and Mr Dill was appointed Commandant at Nacogdoches. I started in the evening, & went out 4 miles leaving the Spaniards at Nacogdoches, after dark I was informed by Mr Barnum that a party of Americans intended to attack the Caviard and take it from the Spaniards. on receiving this information I immediately returned to Nacogdoches to aid the Spaniards to guard the Caviard. no violence was attempted and the people declared next morning they had no intention of attacking it --

The general face of the country from within 5 miles of the Sabine to Nacogdoches is gently rolling and very much resembles the Barrens of Kentucky, except that the growth of timber is larger and not so bushy -- Black jack and Black Hickory, Mulbery, is the principal timber, but it [is] all too low and scruby for Rails, or building, except on the Creeks where the timber is very good and lofty -- the grass is more abundant and of a ranker and more luxuriant growth than I have ever seen before in the country and is indicative of a strong rich soil, the

appearance of the Corn through the country proves to me beyond a doubt that the red soil is nearly if not quite as good as the black The soil generally is very red, the riches is a pure Spanish Brown --

This country is tolerably well watered -- though springs are not so abundant as I could wish -- the creeks are numerous and the water very pure and limpid -- no appearance of Rock or Stone except a soft argillaceous Rock at [Nacogdoches?].

Nacogdoches is now the ruins of a [once] flourishing little village. the church and Seven Houses are still standing entire one of them two story high built of soft Rock -- it was the seat of the Indian trade and a great deal of business was formerly done here. the situation is a vally. a creek runs on each side of the town.

July 21 Started in Company with the Spaniards and came on 12 miles to a fine running Creek, where two families had settled -- this is the last habitation to Bexar this country this day was heavier timberd some pine, land more rolling and sandy -- large rich bottoms on the banks and good pasturage on the upland.

July 22d. Started late. Don Erasmo was taken sick yesterday with fever & complained very much this morning Seven miles passed a runing Creek good bottoms two miles further crossed the Yauhaline River -- this is a branch of the Naches and receives the Atouyaque & a number of other Creeks the bottoms are wide , but overflow three miles further came to a beautiful running Creek with wide rich bottoms well timbered where we overtook some of my men who I sent out in the morning to hunt. they had one deer and camp and wounded 4 Don Erasmo was too unwell to go on and we camped for the day & turned out to hunt -- but killed no deer

July 23 Started late Don Erasmo still unwell. stopped at Mount Prairie 9 miles -- The country this day was very similar to that we passed yesterday, except that the timber is rather more scrubby, interspersed with handsome smooth Prairies, tolerably well watered with small creeks, and some fine Springs the soil generally 2nd rate, on the branches rich bottoms and heavy timber. Oak Hickory, Elm and some black walnut -- very little undergrowth --

July 24 Don Erasmo very sick with fever, took an emetic, Barre and Beard also quite unwell -- remained here the whole day the party washed their clothes and in the evening turned out to hunt. Killed one deer. The country for 4 miles round this place, which was as far as the hunters went was good some tracts of first rate and the balance good end rate land. they found several good springs -- this place takes the name of Mount Prairie from a mound which stands at the edge of it --

July 25. Started early -- two miles came to the forks of the road -- the right hand goes to the Comanches & a part of the company took the Comanche road by mistake & I sent a Spaniard after them, they went 4 miles on that road 2 miles further came to the River *Naches* -- This

River is about 30 yds wide -- It affords tolerable keel Boat navigation from the mouth of the Atouyaque down, & mouths in Sabine Bay. The bottoms on this River are generally liable to overflow, but it affords some large bodies of rich uplands then timber is generally good, after crossing the Naches passed a fine body of rich land for about 3 miles, after that the country became broken, poor pine ridges for 3 miles to a clear running Spring branch where there was a small body of good land, after which pine ridges for about 5 miles, & the country then becomes level and very much resembled the barrens of Kentucky, interspersed with small level Prairies. timber very low and scruby, soil generally 2d rate, water very scarce, 12 miles from the last Spring branch to the next water, a Small branch nearly dry, where we encamped for the night, came about 20 miles this day. Erasmo better. Barre & Beard both sick. Bellow took the Comanche road in company with the two Spaniards who also took it by mistake.

July 26 Started late this morning owing to absence of Barnam's Horse & Don Ferdinand the Drs came on 10 miles, to Creek where we found water standing in holes badly flavored & very warm -- took dinner of dried Buffaloe meat & cold flour.

Met two parties from La Bahia who informed us that they saw three fresh corps on the road, one Spaniard & two Americans and saw where more had been lately buried. Supposed to have been killed by Indians -- they also stated that the Indians came into the very Town of St Antonio and killed men & stole Horses and mules, and that the people were in a very distressed situation -- there were two women within this party who Spoke English -- Mr Lovelace went out a hunting & killed one Deer and a fawn

Started again at 2 oclock 7 came to the Trinity River, 13 miles were benighted and had some difficulty in getting through the bottom.

The Spaniards and Mr Lovelace & party did not get to the River & encamped in a Prairie without water -- I got over about 10 oclck at night with my packs and 13 men and encamped on the western bank in the edge of a large Prairie --

about 6 miles back a large trail came into the road and went on the same direction we were going, in consequence of which we began this night to watch, and herd the Horses, -- we finished supper at 11 oclck, & I took the first watch untill 12 -- in Dr. H's watch between 2 & 3 he saw several Indians & other alarming things, and soo roused the Camp. some of the party distinctly saw them mounted on White Horses, & the Dr and B presented arms to fire at one of them, but I stopped them, this alarm prevented our sleeping for the balance of the night -- in the morning we discovered the Indians firmly fixed in the ground in the form of a stump & some Roots of trees that had been blown up -- at day light some of the party went hunting, others fishing, & I tryed to make up some lost time in sleeping -- The Spaniards & Lovelace came up about 9 o'ck, no news of bellew and the other Spaniards, and we concluded to go on to the forks of the road about 5 miles ahead and wate for them -- the Spaniards went on & I remained & took dinner of Turkey & venison soup and started about 12 oclck.

Fryday July 27.

The Trinity River is about 100 yds wide from the top of one bank to the top of the other. the banks are very steep & about 40 ft high -- the water at this time is uncommonly low & is about 15 yds. wide 2 feet deep & a lively current -- the bed of the River including sand bars is 40 yds. the water at this time is very clear, but a little brackish and unpalative -- the bottom hard gravel the banks whitish Clay -- Iron Pyrites in abundance with the gravil -- & some detached masses of soft sand stone -- the bottoms of this river are very wide and where we crossed there is a large smooth Prairie on each side, covered with the highest and thickest growth of grass I ever saw -- the grass is coarse & very much resembles sugar cane the soil in the bottoms is deep & a jet black -- This River rises at times from 55 to 60 feet and overflows all its bottoms & forms a sheet of water from Hill to Hill -- more resembling a lake than a River -- there is a large Prairie on west side extending about 2 miles to the high land where Col. Peros encamped. at this place there formerly was a Spanish Post. the situation is very beautiful and commanding on a smooth knoll which rises at the edge of the Prairie -- Paros left a part of his men and 4 pieces of Artillery at this place when he went out against Long. At this old encampment the roads fork, the left goes to La Bahia, the right which we took to St Antonio, 3 miles further overtook the Spaniards who passed us while at dinner at Trinity and came on 2 miles further where finding water we stoped for the night, Barre & Beard being to sick to go in the hot sun which was very oppressive today --

The country from the low ground of the Trinity out so far is open -- poor dry Barrens, covered with fine grass, and a good deal of low scrubby oak bushes -- The Spaniards came on about 3 oclck & continued on to the next water.

Beard took an Emetic. Barre very sick with the fever and Wilson quite unwell with a headache and severe cold. in the afternoon several turned out to hunt, and Little found a Bee tree, which afforded about 1 1/2 gallon honey -- heavy rain in night.

Saturday July 28. The sick were much better this morning and we made a pretty good start and came on 12 miles where the Spaniards were camped and a heavy cloud appearing we stoped & pitched Tents -- the rain was very heavy and we remained here the balance of the day -- Mr Polly killed a fine Buck this morning and Little killed a small Buck in the evening so that we lived on fresh venison & Honey this day.

The country these 12 miles is open Barrens and only wanted the lime stone to make it a perfect picture of the Barrens of Ky. the soil rather thin, of a dark colour mixed with sand badly watered & Timbered.

Barnum & the Dr had a *Skirmish* about a ramrod

Sunday, July 29

came on 6 miles to a Creek, water standing in holes -- small Prairies.

10 miles further to the Navisot River a branch of Brassas, clear running water, well tasted -- extensive swamps in bottoms with ponds. timber oak hickory Pecan. Item found a human Scull -- camped at Navisot --

Monday July 30 -- Started early. Barnum & Neel went on ahead to hunt -- they were cautioned not loose sight of the road, neither of them being good wood men -- 6 miles came to a beautiful Creek of pure running water called Corpus Christi -- fine bottoms covered with heavy timber a good deal of Cedar, very large -- from Navisot to this place the country is principally prairie very beautiful. soil good, but a [bit] gravelly in places --

came on 8 miles further & stoped at a hole of water in the edge of the Prairie. Neel came in with a faun, & said that Barnum was within hearing of the Bells at camp soon after that we heard him shout and expected him in every moment.

This Country from Corpus to this place is very handsome, rolling Prairies, intersected by dreams in most of which water was standing in holes. timber rather scarce, but sufficient -- after Dinner Barnum not coming in we concluded he must be lost, and nearly the whole company turned out to hunt him -- at night we all returned to camp. no news of Barnum -- Bellow overtook us this day from the Comanche trail

Tuesday July 31 This day was spent in hunting Barnum. Lovelace & self took a tour to the South East and I killed a Buck and L--- a Buffaloe about 12 miles from camp -- got back some time after night to camp no news of Barnum --

The country we travelled over this day is very good, rolling Prairie black soil, sufficiently timbered, runing water scarce, but abundance in the holes of branches--

Wednesday Augt. 1 -- Our water hole was exhausted & we were obliged to proceed & accordingly started and crossed the Brassos River and encamped on a beautiful eminence in the edge of an extensive Prairie, sufficient timber -- soil generally good -- parts inclined to be gravelly -- Brassos bottoms at this place 4 miles on the west side. overflows in extreem high water -- a large dry Creek at the beginning of bottom -- land same colour & texture & timber the River is about the size of Red River at Nacitoches -- Banks very high the bottom smooth Rock. water about 4 feet deep and 80 yds wide -- the land raises on the west side from the bank to the Prairie -- water a little brackish tho much better than Red River. (Navigation.)

Thursday Augt. 2

I could not feel satisfied with myself without making another effort to find Barnum & accordingly this morning I went back in search of him, accompanied by Mr Wilson, Marple, Polly & 1 Spaniard we steared S. E & S. S E aften ten crossing the river -- 8 miles thence N.E &

N -- until night. country near the River very good. out 8 miles hilly Postoak -- scarce of water -- camped this night without water -- mustangs good

Fryday [August] 3. started early steared N. N. W -- and soon struck the large Prairies. stoped at a hole of water in Prairie & took breakfast -- Buffaloe at a distance -- Deer abundant -- Steared N. W. & struck the road about 10 miles from the River & came on to camp at night where we found Barnum

He struck the River about 12 miles below the road, tied his horse and came up on foot under the bank until he came to the road, eat night for 4 days -- very much fatigued & his feet scratched & inflamed & blistered was lost 4 days -- sent 2 Spds for horse

Saturday Augt. 4 -- This morning we started all together once more, the strays all up -- 6 miles the Nunas a beautifull clear runing Creek of pure lyme stone water. 7 miles a clear runing Creek Angeline 6 miles another runing Creek ulmo 4 miles another Creek -- Ailes The country on these Creeks is very good -- rolling Prairie -- sufficient timber. good water soil black & generally very rich -- killed a Buffaloe. Higginbottom

Sunday Augt. 5th. Buffaloe was plenty & all hands turned out hinting, but the Spaniards run them off & we only killed a Bull. I killed a fat Buck --

Monday Augt. 6. came on to the Yagua, 6 miles R.W. land good 15 miles further to Agua Dulce land not so good, rolling, post oak.

Tuesday Augt 7 came to the Colorado River 10 miles. poor gravelly ridges and near the river heavy pine timber, grapes in immense quantities on low vines, red, large, & well flavored, good for Red wine. The C. R. is something less than the Brassos banks very high -- generally clear of overflow -- bottom and banks gravelly. water very clear and well tasted, current brisk the river very much resembles Cumberland River, except that there are no rocks & it is some larger --

The bottom where the road crosses is about 5 miles, mostly high prairie clear of overflow, land rich, timber Pecan, Ash, Oak, Cedar, abundance of fish.

There is a small hill 2 miles above the road out of which Dn Era [Don Erasmo] informed me smoke & sparks issued -- there is a very rich silver mine up this River on the St. Saber, also a gold mine on the Yana [Llano] the country up this river is very good but scarce of timber

Wednesday Augt. 8 came on to Cedar Creek 8 miles -- country generally poor & gravelly, abundance of cedar on this creek very large good water -- Post oak wood -- 10 miles further to a Creek in the Barrens -- no water, weather hot & we travelled until 10 oclck at night. country poor & gravelly

Thursday Augt 9 In the morning we found water in a hole 300 yds above the road where we took supper & breakfast together -- came on about a miles & found plenty of water on the left of the road -- the Spds were in the lead & took a mustang road & went 3 or 4 miles out of road came to St. Marcus River 20 miles Country beautifully rolling, soil very black & rick not much sandy -- very gravelly, round pebble & flint, no timber, Muskete bushes & grass 8 miles from St M. there is a Creek called Los Ulmos, between which & the River there is an extensive rich prairie and with some timber adjoining & on the Creek -- the River very clear pure water, but 9 miles to the head of it, where it breaks out in 3 Springs and forms the river at once -- fall very great. Current rapid -- by taking out the water high up and leading it in cannals the up lands on both banks might be watered.

Fryday 10th. came on to the Guadalupe River -- country the most beautiful I ever saw -- rolling Prairies -- soil very black and deep -- mixed with flint pebbles -- from the size of a hazlenut to a man's head, no timber but Muskete except on the branches & not much there -- soft white lime stone rock, water scarce but very good -- the soil cracks badly in many places where it is not sandy -- is very stiff -- The Guadalupe is a beautiful bold stream of perfectly clear lime stone water, banks very high. There was formerly a Stockade fort at this place and at St Marcus-

Saturday 11 -- came on to the Paredona Creek, 16 miles and camped, country the same as yesterday -- except being more hilly. there is a high ridge near the Gaudaloupe which I was informed is well timbered -- gaude. river has a very great fall and rapid Current also the St. Marcus -- the latter fine for mills --

Sunday 12 This morning at daylight three men who had been distpatched from the Gal. by Erasmo to St Ao. returned with others & brought the glorious news of the Independence of Mexico -- the Spaniards hailed this news with acclamations of "viva Independencia" and every other demonstration of joy -- Erasmo invited us to breakfast with him on various Spanish dishes sent out by their wives and started in high spirits and arrived at San Antonio about 11 ock.

SOURCE:

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