

Episode 15

(Chapter 4) – Part 2 - Here Come The Anglos (1821 to 1830)

Howdy folks, welcome to another chapter of The Hidden History of Texas.

Here Come The Anglos (1821 to 1830) – Part 2

In this chapter, I will focus on one of the other early empresarios of Texas- Haden Edwards

Haden Edwards received his empresariosial grant on April 14, 1825. Like all empresarios he was to uphold land grants certified by the Spanish and Mexican governments, provide an organization for the protection of all colonists in the area, and receive a land commissioner appointed by the Mexican government.

Edwards's contract specified land for up to 800 Anglo-American families in a large area of East Texas from northwest of Nacogdoches, including the forks of the Trinity, west to the Navasota River, thence southeast along the Trinity River valley to upper Galveston Bay. The tract did not include Galveston Island, or the twenty-six-mile-wide coastal reserve forbidden to foreigners. The eastern boundary was the fifty-two-mile-wide border reserve along the Sabine River running north from the Gulf of Mexico to the thirty-second parallel. The state instructed Edwards to respect the property of long-time residents in the Nacogdoches area, some of whom had been there since the 1780s. Edwards, insensitive to Hispanic culture, reached Nacogdoches in October 1825 and threatened to dispossess those who had

no proof of ownership unless they paid him for the land. The Spanish process to acquire land on the remote frontier was lengthy and expensive, and almost nobody had deeds. But besides Hispanics, there were a number of Anglo-American hunters and traders who had moved there in the 1790s, as well as new squatters who had arrived since 1821. Although local alcaldes were authorized for the scattered settlements, there was no ayuntamiento until 1828, so all official business had to be conducted in San Antonio. In general, Hispanics and old-time Anglos opposed Edwards and complained to the political chief in San Antonio; some newcomers supported the empresario, while others remained aloof.

The settlement held an election for alcalde in December. The established settlers nominated Samuel Norris while the newcomers nominated Chichester Chaplin, who happened to be Edwards's son-in-law. After the votes were tallied Edwards certified Chaplin's election to political chief José Antonio Saucedo in San Antonio. However, Norris's supporters challenged his claim and charged that the voters in Chaplin's support had come from unqualified voters. (Almost reminds you of elections today doesn't it?) Well the allegations caused Saucedo to reverse his decision and he ordered archives and duties to be surrendered to Norris. The controversy did not settle down, and by the time the news reached Saltillo and federal authorities in Mexico, Edwards appeared to be unwilling to abide by their terms, so in mid-year 1826 the grant was declared forfeit. Edwards was outraged,

and he found support in the settlers he had brought. In order to overthrow the election on November 22, 1826, Martin Parmer, John S. Roberts, and Burrell J. Thompson led a group of thirty-six men from the Ayish Bayou to Nacogdoches, where they seized Norris, Haden Edwards, José Antonio Sepulveda. They then tried them for oppression and corruption in office. Haden was released, and in fact his inclusion in the group may have been to cover up his participation in the attack. The others were tried, convicted, and told they deserved to die but would be released if they relinquished their offices. Parmer turned the enforcement of the verdict over to Joseph Durst and proclaimed him alcalde.

As soon as Mexican authorities heard of the incident, Lt. Col. Mateo Ahumada, principal military commander in Texas, was ordered to the area. He left San Antonio on December 11 with twenty dragoons and 110 infantrymen. It was clear to Haden Edwards that his only chance to make good the time and estimated \$50,000 he had already expended on his colony was to separate from Mexico.

He and Parmer began preparations to meet the Mexican force in the name of an independent republic they called Fredonia. They wanted to include the Cherokees in their move for independence, not because of any positive feelings towards them, but because they needed the manpower. They designed a flag that had two parallel bars, red and white, symbolizing Indian and White. In fact, although a treaty was signed with the Indian leaders, Richard Fields and John Dunn Hunter, that support

never materialized. The flag was inscribed "Independence, Liberty, Justice." Their Declaration of Independence was signed on December 21, 1826.

Haden Edwards designated his brother Benjamin commander in chief and appealed to the United States for help. But Ahumada enlisted Stephen F. Austin, who sided with the government, and Peter Ellis Bean, the Mexican Indian agent, together they headed for Nacogdoches. When the Mexican officers and militia and members of Austin's colony reached Nacogdoches on January 31, 1827, the revolutionists fled and crossed the Sabine River. The Indians killed Hunter and Fields for involving them in the venture.

Thus ended the quixotic Fredonian Rebellion, which aroused fears of widespread Anglo-Texan revolt among Mexican leaders. The state banished the ringleaders, promised to send a land commissioner to issue titles to families who had settled the area in good faith, and established a permanent garrison at Nacogdoches to guard against ruffians and filibusters from the United States.

Almost as troublesome was the Leftwich contract, which, unknown to the authorities, was intended as a profit-making undertaking for the benefit of stockholders. This empresario grant eventually was known as Robertson's colony. Leftwich, who was in Mexico City when Austin was there, represented seventy Tennessee investors called the Texas Association. The land assigned was in the

upper Brazos valley just north of Austin's grant and touching that of Edwards on the east. When Leftwich returned to Nashville in 1825 with the empresario contract in his name instead of the company's, the investors had to buy out his interest. They sent several agents to Coahuila-Texas to get the contract in their name, but the suspicions raised by the Fredonia Rebellion deterred their efforts. With Austin's help, the Nashville Association (as it was now called) was finally recognized as successor to Leftwich in October 1827. But the stockholders failed to send settlers until October 1830, only six months before the end of their contract. Shareholder Sterling C. Robertson and six others reached the garrison at Fort Tenoxtitlán, one of the new military posts established in 1830; Tenoxtitlán guarded the old Spanish road crossing on the Brazos River. Nine families trailed Robertson, and when they reached Nacogdoches the commandant detained them. The newly passed Law of April 6, 1830, prohibited the entrance of Anglo-Americans into Texas unless they had a passport to Austin's or DeWitt's colony. Austin had quickly secured an exemption from the restriction for his and DeWitt's colonies when he discovered an ambiguous phrase seeming to allow immigration to "established" colonies. This he interpreted as those with more than 100 families in residence. The authorities acquiesced. The Law of April 6 also forbade the immigration of slaves, but even the authorities admitted that this restriction was impossible to enforce.

That's going to wrap up this episode, next time, I'll continue to look at Anglo – Mexican relations during this time period. Remember Anglos showed little or no desire to actually cooperate with the authorities. The settlers showed little interest in Catholicism and other aspects of Mexican culture. The expansion was a quest for a better chance and more living room and in many ways the Americans kept their culture.

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