San Felipe Secrets

Unveiled

Beauty, Strength and Wisdom in Colonial Texas

Linda Berthelsen
Christopher Dalrymple
Kathryn Berthelsen
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Front cover image: Masonic all-seeing eye mural in San Felipe Methodist Church building.

Back Cover image: Door knob original to the upper room of San Felipe Methodist Church building.

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*Beauty, Strength and Wisdom in Colonial Texas*

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Sugar Land, Texas
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San Felipe United Methodist Church stands as colonial Texas’ oldest protestant church, which has supported a continuous congregation since 1838.
Dedication

Bring your weary feet
to this doorstep, your feet
that have wandered so far
along the rusted river.

Bring your empty palms
to these pews, your palms
that have nothing left
but to come together again.

Bring your half-remembered hymn
in tithe to sunset, your hymn
that has waited so long to wrap
you in its blessing.

Bring your candlelight memory
to this upper room, your memory
that will leave smoke and filigree
among the field of stars.

Bring your open eye
to the iris in bloom, your eye
that an old hand painted
trying to remember the sun.
Commerce Square, San Felipe, Texas
With Gratitude

Special thanks to our companion stars: Spencer Berthelsen, M.D. and Angela Dalrymple; and to our families for their patience, tolerance and understanding support.

Our deepest thanks goes to Heather Smith at San Felipe United Methodist Church, who generously made sure that the doors to San Felipe Church were open when we needed access. Our gratitude includes Juanita Perry and Florence Simms, of J. J. Josey Store Museum, for their dedication to keeping the History of San Felipe alive.

Deepest appreciation also goes to Dr. Elizabeth Hayes Turner for mentoring this project with great kindness and professionalism, along with Dr. Gregg Cantrell for his ground breaking research on Colonial Texas and the life of Steven F. Austin.

Particular thanks goes to the Grand Bodies of York Rite Freemasonry for their research on Freemasonry in colonial Texas.

Finally, thanks to Thomas Bishop, who offered just the right encouragement at crucial points along the way and helped to make this project possible.
Foreword

Forty miles west of Houston, Texas, in the rural town of San Felipe, an historic nineteenth century church stands at ‘ground-zero’ of colonial Texas’ first English speaking colony and the Texas Revolution for independence from Mexico. In June of 2006, Linda began to take a closer look at the history surrounding colonial Texas’ first Protestant church. Through mutual interests in Masonic Templar history, she had met Dr. Chris Dalrymple after he had happened to attend a Masonic meeting in the historic upper room of San Felipe Church.

A short time afterwards, we found ourselves standing inside San Felipe Church at the mercy of the spiritual simplicity and purity of heart that resonated within the church walls. That same day, we decided to create a simple photo-centric book featuring the beauty and charm of this tiny church. Investigations ensued and soon expanded into a hologram of multidimensional insights into the events leading up to the construction of the church.

The result is a book that weaves together a narrative of the historical investigations inspired by three Templar friends’ first visit to San Felipe Church and their deepening impressions concerning the nature of the building, rich with remarkable texture and color. At first the metaphor of a tapestry might seem trite. Yet, like tapestries woven in medieval France that have recounted momentous turning points in history, San Felipe Church has a compelling story to tell.

One usually thinks of tapestry yarn as spun from cotton, wool, or silk, but the tapestry of San Felipe church’s story has been spun from the hardships of frontier life. Stephen F. Austin devoted his life to laying the warp, or vertical threads with the ‘Old Three Hundred’ first settlers. Within little more than a decade they would become citizens of the Republic of Texas. The weft, or horizontal yarns, of the San Felipe tapestry of events would be spun from the actions of the colonists.
The town of San Felipe de Austin was once the thriving capital of Stephen F. Austin’s first colony of American settlers under Mexican rule. Yet, like the Alamo, Austin’s shining capital fell prey to Santa Anna’s tyranny and was totally destroyed during the Texas Revolution.

Within a few short months after independence was secured at the Battle of San Jacinto, a handful of San Felipe residents bravely returned home to rebuild their lives as free citizens in a New Republic. The ashes of the town had barely grown cold when the community rallied to build San Felipe Church. Less than a year passed between the burning of the town and the building of this church that would become the oldest Protestant church building in colonial Texas and the oldest continuous Methodist congregation in colonial Texas History.

The noble spiritual traditions of Methodism and Freemasonry continue to dwell in this charming historic church as vestiges of Stephen F. Austin’s dreams. *San Felipe Secrets Unveiled* explores new insights into the history of colonial Texas in Stephen F. Austin’s first colony and the invaluable contributions made by Methodists and Freemasons to the founding of the Republic of Texas. The traumas of the revolution left San Felipe smoldering in the ashes of the *Runaway Scrape* of 1836. Through the lenses of both camera and heart, we hope to re-weave the fabric which was such an integral part of Colonial Texas’ first protestant church.

Linda Berthelsen
Christopher Dalrymple
Kathryn Berthelsen
San Felipe Church was built only a few months after Texas won independence from Mexico. The building houses the oldest continuing protestant congregation from colonial Texas.
The Marrow of the Bone

The objective of this book is to introduce the reader to the beauty, strength and wisdom of the San Felipe Church, the oldest Protestant church in Mexican colonial Texas, and to the brave colonists who gave it life. Through images, comments and contemplation, the reader may explore various gateways into the church’s more subtle symbolism which flows from the marrow of its bones.

The key to understanding this church at San Felipe is love. Love of God, liberty, family and community. The colonists could not take any comforts for granted. Life was fragile and peppered with only moments of pleasure. Religious rituals were almost nonexistent. For years, these were sacrificed in the name of building a new life on virgin land. Texans today have an opportunity to experience the collective memory of Austin’s Colony. The church building at Constitution Square in San Felipe stands as a symbol of the beauty of Stephen F. Austin’s dreams, his strength of faith, and his wisdom.

As you stand at the outer porch of the church’s eastern face, the historic building welcomes you. May you discover new appreciation of your Texas heritage; and may the beauty, strength, and wisdom of the building unveil her secrets to you.
The Beauty of a Dream

San Felipe Rising
## Early Texas 1718—1838

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1718</td>
<td>Alamo mission is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>U.S. Declaration of Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston are born in Virginia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1803</td>
<td>The Louisiana Purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Mexican Revolution gains independence from Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Austin Colony is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>Mexican Constitution establishes Federal form of government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>De Leon Colony is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>DeWitt Colony is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>U.S. President John Quincy Adams seeks to buy Texas from Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>Mexico passes legislation prohibiting Americans to settle in Texas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>San Felipe Convention requests Statehood in the Mexican Federation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>San Felipe Convention addresses escalating problems with Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Santa Anna establishes his dictatorship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Consultation held in San Felipe establishes provisional government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Texas Revolutionary Battles result in the establishment of the Republic of Texas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>San Felipe Church building is completed.</td>
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The tiny church building of San Felipe de Austin is a sleeping beauty cradled in old Austin Colony forty miles west of Houston on the banks of the Brazos River. The building is filled with wonders, ready to awaken the pioneer spirit in every heart who experiences the church’s virtues. The beauty of this little church is found in its purity of ashlar form, its innocence and its harmonic relationship with the surrounding environment. The architecture’s inherent simplicity draws us ever closer to the essence of the early Texas pioneers.

An idea as large as creating a country sometimes requires decades (and even generations) to germinate. The Colony’s grandfather, Moses Austin, only dreamed of having a settlement in Texas when he negotiated with the Mexican government for Austin Colony land contracts. The Colony’s father, Stephen Fuller Austin, died before it was built but he went to his maker with confidence that San Felipe would rise from the ashes after the town recovered from the Texas Revolution. If this church were a child, her birth certificate might read: Place of Birth: San Felipe de Austin, Constitution Square, near sites of the Conventions 1832, 1833 and The Consultation of 1835; Year of Birth: 1838; Time of birth: Just after the dawn of the new Republic of Texas.

Her life includes many milestones and significant stories. Moses Austin’s fantastic dream of moving 297 families (generally known as the Old Three Hundred) from...
across the southern United States into a Mexican territory called Tejas was an epic undertaking. It required the charisma of a statesman, the fortitude of a warrior, and the business acumen of an entrepreneur.

In 1820, Stephen F. Austin crossed the Sabine River into Texas. He scouted out potential sites for a Colony and chose the encampment on the banks of the Brazos River in December 1821 with the intention of carrying his father’s blueprints forward. Moses Austin nurtured the beautiful idea to establish a colony in Texas. Austin used strength and wisdom to actualize that idea for the betterment of future generations. The founders of the new Republic of Texas would need a building where they could conduct the great works associated with managing an independent nation. Thus, with the founding of Austin’s Colony, from 1821 to 1836, the cornerstone for the Republic of Texas was laid upon the same soil that San Felipe Church was built.

Still in use today, San Felipe Church stands as a tribute to the birth of the Republic. Moses Austin’s ideals still flow from the San Felipe Church building’s rare red cypress wood, possibly harvested from nearby swamps. Even today, the life-giving blood flowing from the marrow of the bone of Austin’s wisdom still shines through San Felipe’s original windowpanes.
San Felipe Secrets Unveiled

Brick pillars were added to San Felipe Church in 1874.
San Felipe de Austin 1820-1861

1820  Moses Austin negotiates with Mexican Government to colonize Texas.
1821  Stephen F. Austin establishes San Felipe de Austin.
1824  San Felipe de Austin is named capital of Austin’s Colony.
1828  First recorded Masonic meeting is held in Austin’s colony.
1829  Thomas Pilgrim establishes the first English speaking school in San Felipe.
1832  Convention in San Felipe requests statehood for the colony.
1833  Convention is held in San Felipe to discuss restrictions of freedom.
1834  Austin is imprisoned in Mexico City for almost a year.
1835  Austin calls a Consultation to establish a provisional government.
1836  The town of San Felipe is burned in the ‘Runaway Scrape.’
1837  Construction of San Felipe Church building begins on municipal land marked as Constitution Square.
1845  Texas is annexed into the United States.
1846  County governmental activities are removed from San Felipe.
1861  Texas secedes from the Union and enters the Civil War.
Bridging the Gap

“How beautiful you are, my Beloved, and how delightful...
The beams of our house are of cedar and paneling cypress”
Song of Solomon 1: 16-17

The cock crowed in the darkness, heralding the coming of dawn. On this early morning, we were ready to bridge the gap between the forgotten past so greatly deserving of restoration, and the forgetful present. We stepped out of our cars. The morning stars were fading into shades of blue.

(The morning breaks, the shadows flee...) Wandering somewhat a field to gain our bearings in the shadows, we felt as if we were walking across a high arched bridge that spanned the morning mists of time beyond the fog of modern life. As we gazed eastward across the pasture, we left behind traffic, electricity, computers, air conditioning and all other modern conveniences to wander into the currents of time.
What a rare sensation it was to relax into the moments just before the rosy dawn which now led us back into the world of colonial Texas. Standing on the front porch of the tiny church we felt her heart energy glow magnificently in the first light of the new day.

It was as if the Great Architect of the Universe was greeting us with the dawning of new awareness. The air was moist, cool and sweet with the promise of interior adventures designed for the soul. As twilight rose from indigo, lavender and crimson into luminous gold, the San Felipe Church building awakened from her nocturnal slumber.

Our first impression of San Felipe Methodist Church and the Upper Room can most accurately be compared to meeting a new love for the first time.
We were struck by the building’s rustic pioneer structure and authentic charm and reminded of John Wesley’s mystic warming of the heart. The morning sun streamed through the original window panes, pouring a sort of liquid fire into the veins of our imaginations.

Yet, like any new relationship, curiosity leads to exploration. Questions gave rise to historical inquiries. How could it be that this tiny yet fragile wooden building could endure so long as an original tribute to the Almighty and to the founding of the Republic of Texas? How could something as priceless as the original art of early Texans have gone unnoticed?

Before the arrival of the Europeans, primeval pine, cypress and cedar forests covered east Texas. When the colonists arrived, they used resources at hand. Did the builders of this cypress wood treasure box foresee the durability of cypress hard wood? Was it merely circumstance that mandated the gathering of Brazos river-bottom planks as the most plentiful materials available? Or was their intention to emulate King Solomon’s Temple Where in this wilderness did pioneers find tools to build such a finely jointed structure or glazes to create such enduring art?

Over time, the Church’s post colonial architecture had changed with each new addition and adaptation made to its structure. It did not even have a steeple until 1883. Old things are usually kept where land and property are handed down by families and cultures past. This was certainly true of the guardians of San Felipe Church, since the land upon which the church was built had been owned by the town of San Felipe since the colony was established in 1821.

(The original cypress wood craftsmanship has withstood the test of time.)
We stood on the outer porch as apprentices, ready to enter a hidden temple of Texas history. Maybe answers could be found in clues that had been covered by the sands of time. Heart blended with history; mind with emotion; structure with symbol, pointing the way to subtle yet firm answers to these questions. Perhaps behind the art and edifice lay an intention to create a perfect union, a new nation, a republic, a new utopia, envisioned by the Freemasonic founders of the United States. The American experiment was still in its infancy when the new day dawned on Austin’s Colony.

(San Felipe Church was used as a community building for ten years and served as house of worship, education building and city hall.)
Standing on the porch, we realized just how fragile life had been in colonial Texas. Yet, as moss grows in the most unlikely places and harshest environments, so Austin's Colony grew in Mexican Territory before the establishment of the Republic of Texas. As is true with any brilliant idea, initial concepts must be practically implemented. While the soul of the dream remains intact and unchanged, the manner of accomplishing concrete goals must respond to its environment. The beauty of the dream inevitably requires strength, endurance and wisdom to complete the project.

Such was the case with San Felipe de Austin. The dream began with Moses Austin, Stephen's father. Spain and France loosely shared the Texas territory. It was untamed and only inhabited by Native Americans and a few enterprising entrepreneurs. Most of the land ripe for settlement was owned by powerful Spaniards affiliated with the Catholic Church, who dominated the military. As early as 1819, Moses Austin negotiated with the Spanish under the Mexican Government Impresario System to establish an Anglo European colony. In 1820, the Texas territory did not enjoy separation between church and state. Under the Impresario System, the Mexican government made contracts with entrepreneurs like Austin to develop land in remote areas and at the same time, populate these areas with Catholics. Protestants were not allowed to immigrate to Mexican territory.
Less than a year after Texas won its independence from Mexico, the residents of San Felipe broke ground on the church. The town of San Felipe de Austin had fared better than the Alamo, because the people evacuated before the town burned, but most never fully recovered from the devastation of Santa Anna’s rampages. Some of the residents returned to San Felipe to rebuild their homes and businesses after the Battle of San Jacinto, but the process was arduous. The raising of new buildings came slowly. Everyone’s strength was tested severely but Austin’s dream lived on. In 1837, the town council began construction of San Felipe Church to serve as a church, school, city hall and more.

After the revolution, the colonists were free to worship according to their consciences. San Felipe Church is the earliest surviving vestige of Austin’s colony and is a living testament to the fulfillment of Moses Austin’s dream.
San Felipe church may be the oldest protestant church in Colonial Texas. After Moses’ death in 1820, Stephen carried the torch through to the finish line where the Lone Star Republic won its Independence from Mexico.

Stephen F. Austin died December 27, 1836, within a month after seeing the new Republic of Texas initiated. Over the course of eighteen years his entrepreneurial plans had unfolded (from 1820-1838), giving rise to a new nation.

(Untold historic treasures rest beneath the pasture lands surrounding San Felipe Church, waiting for archeologists to piece together the past.)
Looking east from San Felipe Church, the morning mists linger as San Felipe Church rises with the morning sun.
The Strength of Faith
in San Felipe de Austin

Sweet Hour of Prayer in San Felipe Church
Texas Methodists 1738—1883

1738  John Wesley’s new method of worship spreads to America.

1800  *The Great Revival* movement in Methodism begins in Kentucky.

1818  Methodist minister, William Stevenson, visits the future site of San Felipe.

1820  Austin obtains permission to settle 300 American families in Texas.

1824  First Protestant worship service is held at San Felipe.

1830  Religious Orthodoxy begins to take root in Texas.

1831  Father Muldoon arrives in San Felipe.

1832  David Ayres, founder of the Texas Missionary Society comes to Texas.

1834  Alexander Thompson, John Kinney and William Crawford preach in San Felipe.

1835  William B. Travis asks for Methodist missionaries to be sent to Texas.

1836  Dr. Martin Ruter of Massachusetts prepares to leave for Texas.

1837  Martin Ruter arrives in San Felipe with hymnals and ministry books.

1838  San Felipe church is completed.

1839  San Felipe citizens celebrate the centenary of Methodism.

1847  Second floor is added to the church building.

1859  Church bell is added.

1874  Brick pillars are placed under the church foundation.

1883  San Felipe town council builds a rostrum and steeple for the church.
We walked around the periphery of the church in awe of the colonists’ fortitude. The need for hope was an integral part of life in the wilderness and religion offered concrete comfort. Organized worship directed attention toward happier and more loving thoughts by reducing feelings of isolation.

The settlers did their best to cope with geographic and spiritual loneliness tough enough to break even the most tenacious soul. Although Texas’ earlier settlers had been poor “squatters,” the Old Three Hundred were generally people of some wealth or who had fallen on desperately lean times during the depression which followed the War of 1812. Austin’s Colony offered them a way, through the purchase of fertile land at bargain prices, to recreate the life that they had lost.

However, they had to clear away trees and rocks for building cabins and planting crops, and deal with Indians. The colonists’ faith and patience were severely tested. The brave families who first settled in Austin Colony sacrificed many conveniences and braved many hardships in order to establish a new living in the wilds of Texas.
No organized religion was equipped to meet the spiritual needs of such remote communities. One of the more subtle and unspoken sorrows of life in Mexican territory was the outward deference to Roman Catholic rule. But the hearts of the settlers did not totally bend to institutional laws. Though the colonists lived in compliance with their obligations to the Mexican government, they yearned for spiritual freedom.

The protestant religion arrived in Austin Colony in the distant aftermath of a spiritual phenomenon called the Great Revival, which swept through the southern states roughly from the late 1700’s to 1830. After the American Revolution, the Age of Reason blossomed in the hearts of new American citizens, who looked to leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen for moral instruction in lieu of the church. Reason, rationality and enlightenment, which had once been suppressed under British rule, now basked in the open air.

In contrast, organized religion suffered an all time low ebb in church attendance and membership. As man began to embrace a belief in the perfection of humanity based on reason, clear thinking, and Bible-based systems of individual belief, the Anglican Church in America became an orphan of the American Revolution. Rational thinking drew the heart and mind into more individualistic pursuits.

Yet, just as it began to appear that religion was dead in the Southern States, a new religious phenomenon was born out the more indigenous agrarian psyche; one designed ideally for those who were mostly illiterate and tied to the land. Camp meetings first erupted in Kentucky and spread though the South just before the turn of 1800, when the state of Kentucky was in turmoil over the divisive issue of slavery. Although the population was growing across...
the frontiers in the South, farming families were, in many ways, isolated geographically, socially and spiritually. The camp meeting revivals, which were started by itinerant Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian ministers, introduced a solution to the boredom and isolation of agrarian living.\(^3\)

The Virginian climate into which Stephen F. Austin was born in 1793 was not religiously oriented. General attitudes of society gravitated toward the views generated by the Age of Reason. It seems that his parents also held these views, because they insisted that Stephen be educated as a gentleman. By the time Stephen had arrived at Transylvanian University, Kentucky in 1808, however, the Great Revival was in full swing. Although the revivals were not well suited to Austin’s intellectual inclinations, he must have been aware of their power of sway and their value in developing the culture of the frontier. Even though the camp meetings often overwhelmed the participants with frenzied emotions, continual services and passionate sermons of camp meetings also filled basic human needs. These gatherings were a remedy to isolation, release from boredom, as well as a means of social interaction and entertainment.

Protestantism arrived in Texas, not via governing powers of religious institutions, but in the trappings of conversion experiences which had been fine tuned in the previous three decades of the Great Revival. Evangelism served as a civilizing and educating agent for the back country folk; “a great change of manners” had taken place.
“Formerly, [people] collected together, drinking, swearing, horseracing, fighting, and such practices... But now... you will seldom see one pursuing any of these practices. Those who make no pretensions to religion, still appear under great restraint." Even if this statement was even marginally true, it would still provide evidence that religion helped to smooth out some pretty rough edges within frontier culture. By 1830, churches served as moral courts and helped make society less barbaric and uncouth. Churches also reinforced the value of education and self-discipline in order to create a stabilized society.

Austin colonists brought these beliefs with them along with their own needs for social interaction and spiritual succor. The southern farmer responded to religion of the heart and not so much to the intellect. Many were illiterate, yet rooted in an alternate intelligence connected to the land. Worship used no formalized ritual of worship, but revolved around preachers and hymn singing. Few could read musical notes, so the earliest song books contained only printed words. Although Roman Catholicism was established by law and supported by the Government in Austin’s Colony, most were Protestant and occasionally ministers of different denominations visited the scattered settlements and preached in private houses. In the privacy of hearth and home the flame of free worship never died. Only a few miles to the east in Louisiana, Protestants were free to worship. But on the western banks of the Brazos, Catholicism ruled.
Stephen F. Austin was careful to abide by Mexican law but personally supported freedom of worship. He held no particular opinion on religion but learned early in life the value of religious tolerance and the perils of bigotry. He carefully chose original colonists who were generally “honest and kind hearted, never refusing to lend a helping hand to those in distress.”

Even though neither the Mexican government nor the Catholic Church had any organized method for meeting the spiritual needs of such remote settlements, Austin reminded the colonists “to respect the Catholic religion with all attention due to its sacredness and to the laws of the Land.” Austin had no problem with Protestantism, but he expected the Protestant colonists to practice their faith discreetly so as not to jeopardize the wellbeing of the Colony as a whole. Regardless of the institutional or personal belief systems that circulated through the colony, the colonists had very little access to organized religion.

In 1831, the Catholic Church assigned one priest, Father Michael Muldoon, to Texas. Muldoon was the only authorized person who could legally perform sacraments such as marriages and baptisms. Many a man paid the exorbitant price of $25 for a marriage ceremony at a time when a cow cost only $9.00. Some say that Fr. Muldoon arrived on the scene with his pockets filled with indulgences and a ‘softness’ for liquor. Others note that Father Muldoon worked as Austin’s friend and political ally behind the scene to Liberate Texas from Mexico. During Austin’s imprisonment in Mexico City, Father Muldoon facilitated Austin’s release from solitary confinement.

During the decade following the Revolution, San Felipe recovered enough to build the second floor of the church, a new Town Hall and the J.J. Josey General store, currently a museum located just a few yards from the well in Commerce Square. When the handful of Methodist preachers finally arrived in Texas, they had no set field assigned to them. Settlers were scattered across thousands of square miles of wilderness. When Methodist preacher Henry Stephenson visited four families just below San Felipe de Austin in 1823, the colonists were still in the throws of building shelter, digging their first well and, struggling to survive the harsh pioneer life. In fact, when a Houston circuit preacher was not available, worship services in the San Felipe Church building were mostly conducted by a carpenter.
Morning mists melted into another steamy summer day as we opened the screen door and stepped across the threshold into the tiny sanctuary. A further thrill rushed through us when we realized that we stood on the same holy ground where the colonial congregation had worshipped.

When we turned to face the altar and walked up the center aisle to admire the historic Bible and kneeling rail, we noticed that the kneeling rail echoed the original Wesley Chapel design in London. The morning sun filled the room with the same warmth that must have filled Wesley’s Chapel in London before Methodism reached Texas.

The original Old San Felipe Church had burned in 1836 when the town was razed in the ‘Runaway Scrape’. In 1837, the town council began construction a new one-story multipurpose building located on the original Constitutional Square site. This building could be used as a church, school and meeting house to supplement Thomas Pilgrim’s Schoolhouse which was also located nearby. In 1847, the town council built a new town hall, a general store and added the second floor to the church building.
Even today, the town of San Felipe owns the land and the church building, while the Methodist congregation keeps the faith of original Methodism burning like the original lamps hanging on the walls.

Methodism spread throughout America as an extension of John Wesley’s evangelical movement within the Anglican Church. In 1738, John Wesley experienced a strange warming of the heart as he walked home from prayer one evening in London, England. In this strange warming, Wesley felt the Christ enter his heart and mouth and give him a new strength.

Out of this expansion of his heart poured a new spiritual energy that would open new doors of worship to eager souls. This new method of worship also spread across the frontiers of the New World. Methodism arrived in the American colonies decades before the American Revolution and was eagerly adopted by the colonists living in remote areas.

The Methodists employed a system of itinerant ministers to serve the needs of westward expansion where worship could be adapted equally well to camp settings, hearth-side, oak groves or river banks. They visited the scattered settlements and preached
in private houses. “Missionaries sent to Texas in 1838 had no
definite field assigned to them. They entered the Republic at the
most convenient point and labored wherever a provincial opening
was found.”

When missionary Henry Stevenson visited Austin’s Colony
as early as 1824, Austin bemoaned Stevenson’s wildly emotional
methods, saying that the “aggressively evangelistic” techniques
of one Methodist minister could cause more harm than a “dozen
horse thieves.” Two more Methodist ministers named Alexan-
der Thompson and John Wesley Kinney passed through the col-
ony just a few months before Padre Muldoon made his first visit
in 1830. William Crawford first visited in 1834. Crawford was a
good scholar and proved to be an invaluable statesman in the
Convention of 1836. On a warm Sunday night in a camp meet-
ing in September of 1834 Henry Stevenson administered the first
Holy Communion within the bounds of Austin’s Colony.

William Barrett Travis, a Freemason, San Felipe resident
and lawyer, found a new friend in David Ayres, a pioneer mer-
chant from New York and founder of the first Methodist mis-
sionary society in Texas in 1832. Their friendship would shape
San Felipe’s spiritual course before, during and after the Revolu-
tion.

Ayres brought a supply of Bibles and books with him and
distributed them to all who would receive them. Ayres and his
wife also began a school in Washington County. Travis left his
son, Charles Edward Travis with the Ayres family to attend
school. Then Edward stayed with them for two years after the
Alamo. In 1835 Ayres served as secretary in the formation of the
unofficial Methodist quarterly conference and wrote to the
Methodist Missionary Society in New York requesting that mis-
sionaries be sent to Texas. Deafness prevented him from serving
in the active duty in the revolution, but Sam Houston assigned
him to protect families during the Runaway Scrape. After the
battle of San Jacinto, he returned to find his property in ruins
and finally settled near Bellville, north of San Felipe. There, he
organized worship services and prayer meetings.

In August of 1835, Travis also appealed to the New York
Christian Advocate asking that "about five educated and talented
young preachers " be sent to Texas. He went on to say, Texas is composed of the shrewdest and most intelligent population of any new country on earth. Therefore, a preacher to do good must be respectable and talented."

The conflict with Mexico was escalating, and Stephen F. Austin was locked in a Mexican prison, so it was not until the spring of 1837, a year after Texas had gained her Independence from Mexico, that the Missionary Board of New York appointed Reverend Martin Ruter D.D. to missionary work in Texas with Littleton Fowler and Robert Alexander as his assistants. Mr. Alexander was the first to reach San Felipe, where he was cordially greeted by a little band of Methodists who had been praying for a preacher. Littleton Fowler, another Freemason, arrived a few months after and organized a missionary society, whose annual contributions totaled $1,000.

Martin Ruter, a native of Massachusetts and an orthodox Theologian, earned his doctorate in Divinity from Transylvania University in Kentucky, the same ground upon which Austin had been trained. He volunteered for missionary service in the new Republic of Texas, put his family on a boat and left them in New Albany, Indiana, with his relatives, planning to bring them to Texas as soon as possible. Like Ayres, Ruter brought with him bibles, hymnals and Sunday school supplies on a steamboat crowded with passengers.
Ruter also brought the vestiges of the Great Revival, but with the same intellect and orthodox conservatism that would manifest in his foundation of Rutersville College, now named Southwestern University.

When Ruter arrived at the Sabine River in November 1837, he met his fellow Methodist preachers, Robert Alexander and John Wesley Kinney, who accompanied him to San Felipe. At night, Kinney would preach and Ruter would hold a class meeting. David Ayres also served as Ruter’s companion and guide in establishing the first Methodist Missionary Society in Texas, where Ayres was elected secretary and headed the list of subscribers with a $100 contribution. Ayres was also a major contributor to the funding of Rutersville College in 1840.

Ruter was preparing to bring his family to Texas when he died of typhoid fever in 1838, the same year that San Felipe Church was completed. He was buried on the bank of the Brazos river. Ruter’s momentum did not wane after his demise because “three plain churches” were erected during that year...one at San Augustine...a second in McMahan settlement, and another near Washington on the Brazos river.”

As we pondered the fervor of the early Methodist missionaries, we understood how the colonists’ strength of faith contributed to the success of Austin’s colony. But we could feel a deeper current of wisdom running through San Felipe’s story that transcended the boundaries set by any one religion. Her secrets seemed to flicker only as reflections of a flame in the kerosene lamps. The beauty of John Wesley’s vision and the strength of the itinerant ministers’ evangelism served the religious needs of the Protestant colonists, but unveiling the building’s secrets would require more exploration.
Stairs rise behind the altar into the upper room.
Stephen F. Austin 1793—1836

1793  Stephen F. Austin is born November 3rd in Virginia.

1798  The Austin family moves to Missouri Territory.

1804  Austin attends Bacon Academy in Connecticut.

1808  Austin transfers to Transylvania University, Kentucky.

1813  Austin joins the Militia and is elected to Missouri Territory Legislature.

1815  Austin is made a Mason and re-elected to legislature.

1820  Austin moves to New Orleans to study law.

1821  Austin surveys future site of San Felipe de Austin Township.

1822  Austin becomes Empresario of Austin Colony.

1828  Austin leads the earliest recorded Masonic meeting in Texas.

1831  Mary Austin Holley arrives in San Felipe.

1832  Austin leads the Convention to request Mexican statehood.

1834  Austin is arrested on his return to Texas after carrying the Convention’s petition to Mexico City.

1835  Austin is released from Mexican prison and organizes the Consultation.

1836  Austin dies December 27th of pneumonia.
The Obligation

~The act of binding oneself by a social, legal or moral tie.~

The life of Stephen Fuller Austin, as a chapter in the San Felipe Church story, bridges her body with her soul in a unique manner. Stephen F. Austin was not outwardly affiliated with any particular religious denomination. Yet as a Freemason, he respected religion. He professed belief in God or he could not have been made a Mason. So we wondered if the fact that San Felipe Church’s second floor housed an historic Freemasonic Lodge could provide clues to Stephen F. Austin’s previous Masonic activities.

Just as the Freemasonic fraternity was a precursor of later fraternal societies, so was Stephen F. Austin a father of Texas. One of the marks of a patriarch is the ability to assume responsibility for the welfare of others. Stephen F. Austin’s mark as a patriarch was ‘obligation.’ The circumstances into which Stephen F. Austin was born set the stage for the rising curtain on the Republic of Texas. His character, temperament, personality and sense of obligation to family and community prepared him for
providing settlers safe passage into the Mexican frontier. Without Austin's ability to knit these aspects of his world into one garment, the Republic of Texas might never have been born.

The paradoxes which evolved out of Austin's singleness of purpose generated more legends than fact during the century following the Texas Revolution. The rapids coursing through the rivers of change ran swiftly from establishing the new nation in 1836 to being annexed into the United States in 1845. Only sixteen years later, Texans voted to secede and enter the Civil War as a slave state in 1861.

Through it all, most Texans revered only the names of military heroes such as General Sam Houston and those who died at the Alamo. Austin, who had been highly respected by his peers, was not so well remembered by the public. For many years, Austin's gifts to posterity were relegated to the darkness of public indifference.

Born November 3, 1793 in Austinville, Virginia, the town his father Moses Austin founded, Stephen F. Austin was groomed for "greatness in life." Although Stephen's parents guided their eldest son with deepest affection and discipline, they took their obligation of parenthood seriously and sought to prepare Stephen for a successful life as a gentleman. Little did his parents know that when they sent Stephen away to Bacon Academy in Connecticut and then Transylvania University in Kentucky, they prepared him also for a life of loneliness in the frontiers of Mexico and Texas.

As a child, Stephen observed his father sparing no sacrifice to achieve his dreams. Stephen suffered first-hand along with his mother and siblings from the conflicts and entrepreneurial failures of his father, who relinquished his American citizenship in compliance with Spanish requirements for colonization, and suffered in debtor's prison. Moses Austin was a man before his time who, at an unconscious level, intuited a glimpse of the larger stage upon which the Texas drama would unfold. However, both the business manual that he wrote for Stephen when he
was a toddler, and Moses’ business failures became Stephen’s primer for the rest of his life. No matter how loving and affectionate Moses was as a father, the price of his grandiose schemes cost his family its livelihood. Moses groomed Stephen for the specific purpose of “redeeming” his family’s fortunes and reputation. He repeatedly turned to Stephen for support when his schemes failed.7

Cultural diversity of the Missouri frontier taught Stephen the value of tolerance, adaptation and self-reliance. As a young boy, Stephen played with Shawnee children. He observed Moses negotiating with the Mexican government and doing business with Frenchmen, Spaniards, Anglo-Americans, African Americans and Native Americans. At Transylvania University, which was affiliated with the Presbyterian church, Austin witnessed destructive high profile battles between “nonsectarian liberalism and Protestant orthodoxy” and clashes over slavery. He also learned the value of fostering friendships early in life.8

When opportunity knocks, a Freemason is usually close to open fortune’s door. Stephen F. Austin was no exception. Militia service provided Stephen with the necessary military connections and credentials for entrance into politics. During his tour of duty he gained the confidence of the famous explorer and later governor William Clark. In 1815, at the age of twenty-two, Stephen was made a Mason. Soon afterwards, he was elected to a seat in the new Missouri Territorial Legislature.

Stephen Austin’s accomplishments mirrored his temperament and character. He was “soft spoken, emotionally self-sufficient, introspective and deliberative.” Thoroughly a gentleman from his dress and demeanor, his personal habits and manner were honest yet cautious, loyal and forgiving. He possessed remarkable discipline in setting aside his personal needs for the sake of the more noble cause and was adept as a politician, statesman, and businessman.9
Initially, Stephen did not share his father’s enthusiasm for such a far-fetched scheme as establishing a colony. He was keen to settle into a more secure law career in Missouri. But “Moses Austin taught his son to think big” and to be willing to take the risks. Stephen felt the weight of his obligations from an early age, but he was determined to learn from Moses’ mistakes. Austin also viewed colonizing Texas as a way to repay his father’s debts and to fulfill his father’s dying wish to “redeem” the wilderness of Texas. As the eldest son, Stephen assumed the role of patriarch of the Austin family and ultimately shouldered financial responsibilities for his mother and siblings on numerous occasions. He even vowed not to marry until his mother and younger siblings were financially secure.

As Empresario he viewed the Texas colony as his extended family, which he promised to protect and oversee. His obligations followed him into his negotiations with the Mexican Government and toward the colonists, where he dealt with legal contracts and social dynamics that constantly intruded upon his quiet nature and treasured solitude. Austin had many acquaintances, but few close friends. He sometimes felt that his efforts went unnoticed. He once wrote, “It was my duty to steer my precious bark (colony) through all shoals and quicks regardless of the curse and ridicule of the passengers. I knew what I was about - they did not.”

Austin’s prime motivation was guided by two principles: to conform with Mexican law, and to afford as much democratic freedom to the colonists as possible. “One of the greatest pleasures a virtuous mind can receive in this world is the consciousness of having benefited others....I look upon them (the colo-
nists) as one great family who are under my care... My Labors in this country, although arduous and in every way perplexing will not yield me anything for some years... I shall benefit others much more than myself in proportion.12

As a statesman, Austin practiced perseverance and patience. His travel outside the colony involved negotiating leniency in immigration laws and permission to issue clear titles for land grants. Ultimately, he languished in prison for speaking out on behalf of Texas' right to Mexican statehood.

In 1822, twenty-nine year-old Austin traveled to Mexico City seeking permission to settle three hundred families in Texas. Many months later he returned to his new colony as land agent. Whereas Moses had made enemies, Stephen made friends quickly and kept them. As a negotiator, Austin displayed the "courage of a lion... and caution of a fox." As the Mexican government faltered in confusion during the years after the Mexican Revolution, Austin remained flexible, patient, vigilant and sly in order to retain the colony's land contracts.13

Austin learned Spanish quickly. Just as Moses had done years before, Stephen relinquished his cherished rights as an American citizen to become a citizen of Mexico by swearing an oath of allegiance in order to win his first land grant. While traveling through Mexico he observed a land rich in resources yet poorly managed. He witnessed bigotry and superstition of overwhelming proportions. Rampant poverty and ignorance led Austin to comment that Mexico City was at least a century behind other places in intelligence and creativity.14

The one joy of Stephen's life was his extended family. He urged his mother, sister and cousins to immigrate to the colony
not to only benefit from his ventures but also to bring the family closer together. Amidst the arrival of Austin’s relatives who hoped to gain their own land contracts was his cousin, Mary Austin Holley.

Although Mary was nine years his senior, they had been close childhood companions and held much in common. Mary’s interests ran contrary to typical attributes required of a woman in the wilderness. She was adept in writing, music, and languages and was highly educated and self-sufficient.  

Being widowed four years prior to her move to San Felipe, Mary corresponded with Stephen frequently. When Ms. Holley arrived in late 1831, Stephen was suffering from a fever and had been too ill to travel on business. Upon seeing her, his spirits immediately improved and he soon recovered. Mary Holley brought vitality to Stephen’s otherwise solitary life as bachelor and public figure. They eagerly engaged in intellectual discussions concerning books and philosophy. Mary’s vitality was contagious and permeated the entire family when she would lead them in singing her newest musical compositions. She and Stephen corresponded frequently as confidants through his final years.

Mary Austin Holley’s role as Austin’s best friend, coupled with her writing abilities, positioned her to be at the right place, right time, with the right skills to help Stephen fulfill his obligation to the birth of the Republic. Their friendship contributed not only to Stephen’s happiness but also toward the preservation of historical documents in the form of correspondences and translations of early documents.

Holley became a prolific and famous American writer, who published a romantic history, travelogue and immigrant guide to the wilds of Texas in 1833. But she also applied her craft to the business of creating a nation. She translated from Spanish into English and then published key historical documents surrounding the Texas Revolution, including the Texas Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the Republic, colonization laws and William B. Travis’s ‘give me victory or give me death’ letter. 

It is interesting to consider the fact that all official correspondence in colonial Texas would have been in Spanish. The only English spoken would have been between the few Anglo
settlers. Therefore, in order for the American colonists to understand let alone communicate effectively with the Mexican government, they needed someone who could be their trustworthy emissary and translator, someone like Austin.

In August 1832, Austin organized the convention to petition Mexico to repeal an anti-immigration law and to request statehood for Texas under the Mexican Constitution. Then in April 1833, the Colony held another convention working with the same requests and drafted a provisional state constitution in anticipation of statehood. Although the delegates at the 1833 Convention elected Austin to carry the petition to Mexico City, public tides turned against Austin. He began to lose favor with many of the newer colonists because they viewed him as part of the Mexican establishment and not their trustworthy representative. Austin however served them without bitterness.

Prisons come in many guises and in October of 1833, on his way back from petitioning for statehood in Mexico City, the Mexican government arrested Austin for insulting the government. It was presumed that Austin’s crime revolved around his endorsement of statehood and illegal assembly of the Convention. Stephen found himself contemplating how his negotiation
strategies had gone sour and why his miscalculations had cost him his freedom.\textsuperscript{18} Doing hard time for his political beliefs was not part of his plans, but little did Austin know that his darkest hours of incarceration would herald the dawning of the Republic of Texas.

In January 1834, Austin was incarcerated in the barbaric Inquisition Prison on the central square in Mexico City. His cell measured sixteen-by-thirteen feet; a dungeon with thick stone walls, no windows and a high ceiling with a tiny sky light. Austin spent several months in solitary confinement as a political prisoner. He was required to pay for his own meals and was allowed no books.\textsuperscript{19}

Father Michael Muldoon proved to be one of Austin’s strongest political allies in Mexico with important connections to Antonio López de Santa Anna, President of Mexico. After a few weeks he exercised enough influence to be allowed to visit Stephen. Austin sent letters to Texas urging his friends to stay calm and patient. He reassured them that the misunderstanding would be resolved. A heart rendering insight into Austin’s suffering comes from his own words, “I prefer bread and water \textit{with} books to the best eating without them…. I expect to die in prison.”\textsuperscript{20} This time of cruel isolation gave him an even deeper appreciation for freedom. After several months in solitary confinement Austin was moved to more comfortable quarters. He was finally allowed to interact with friends and colleagues, like Father Muldoon, until he was finally released.

Even with all that he had suffered, Austin held out hope that Texas would gain Mexican statehood, for he wrote, “Every evil complained of has been remedied - this fully compensates me for all I have suffered.”\textsuperscript{21} Austin was released from prison December 25, 1834, after his friends finally posted bond. Austin languished in prison for over eight months and a few more months under house arrest without having been indicted for a crime.\textsuperscript{22} But by late summer 1835, Austin returned to Texas and moved into an
empty house. Some of the colonists were glad to see him back, but others resented his previous absence.

Behind the scenes, Santa Anna was moving to centralize power in the federal government with such stealth that no one realized what he intended to do. Austin believed that Santa Anna was friendly to himself and to Texas because Santa Anna had invited Austin to travel with him on a ‘good will’ visit to Austin’s Colony.23 By the time Austin returned to Texas soil however, he must have had a change of heart toward Santa Anna because he immediately started coordinating the Consultation. Austin confessed that Santa Anna’s “visit is uncertain- his friendship much more so. We must rely upon ourselves and prepare for the worst. A large immigration will prepare us, give us strength... to Americanize Texas...the constitutional rights and security...demand a general consultation of the people.”24

Austin explained to the settlers that Mexico’s objective was to defuse organized uprisings by destroying American settlements. The colonists responded by electing him Commander in Chief to the Militia. Although he was so ill that he “was just able to sit on his horse,” Austin assumed his new responsibilities by steadfastly affirming to the Texas volunteer army that the salvation of Texas depended on them and that he would hold fast “as long as ten men would stick to him.” Austin found himself with the militia fighting in San Antonio during the Consultation of 1835 and therefore had little influence on its outcome.25

The Consultation delegation voted to send Austin, William Wharton and B.T. Archer to the United States to solicit financial support for the Texas cause. Before the Consultation, Austin, Wharton and Archer did not personally know one another, but in time they became good friends.26

During the Revolution, Austin found himself torn between the widening breach of the colonists’ popular opinion and the demands of the Mexican government. Many of the later arriving colonists from America incorrectly misconstrued Austin’s absence from the colony as desertion in pursuance of self-interest. But these late comers had no concept of his ongoing contributions to the colony.27

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Ironically, the colonists removed Austin from active participation during the war, though they also held it against him for his not being there for them. William Barrett Travis, however, expressed his respect for Austin when he declared, “all eyes are turned toward you... Texas can be wielded by you and you alone; and her destiny is now completely in your hands. I have every confidence that you will guide us safe through all our perils.”

After the Battle of San Jacinto, Austin’s health continued to decline. He found strength nevertheless, to run for President of the Republic of Texas. Unfortunately, when Sam Houston entered the race, Austin could not compete with Houston’s popularity as a military hero.

In September 1836, Austin returned from his fundraising mission to find the town of San Felipe and his own personal affairs in ruin. San Felipe had been burned to the ground along with Austin’s home and office. His health was rapidly declining. The loss of the election wounded Austin deeply and his health worsened after the presidential race.

(Sculpted by Raoul Josset in 1958, Gen. Sam Houston stands at the entrance of the Texas State Archives in Austin. The original sculpture resides in the Grand Lodge of Texas in Waco.)
Austin's cousin, Mary Holley assessed the situation, “no slaughtered or smoking cities attest his devotion to the cause of human happiness, and he is regarded by the mass of the world as a humble instrument to pave the way for others.”\textsuperscript{31}
In disappointment, loss, loneliness and weariness, he owned that “I have no house... all my wealth is perspective and contingent upon the events of the future.” \textsuperscript{32}

In October 1836, he reluctantly accepted appointment as Secretary of State of the new Republic of Texas. As winter set in he moved to Columbia to be near his sister and her family. Succumbing to a sense of defeat, he rented a ‘shed room’ from George B. McKinstry on the outskirts of Columbia, Texas with no fireplace or stove, located on the north side of a house. Austin again soon fell seriously ill when a cold settled into pneumonia. Masonic brother and physician, B.T. Archer cared for Stephen throughout those final days.

The frosty dawn of December 27th, 1836, heralded the Masonic feast of St. John the Evangelist and the passing of Texas’ unsung hero. Austin’s final words echoed his father’s dying wish, “The independence of Texas is recognized! Don’t you see it in the papers? Doctor Archer told me so!”

President General Sam Houston, Stephen’s dear friend and Masonic brother received the first word that “The Father of Texas is no more!”\textsuperscript{33} Only a few months before ground was broken on San Felipe Church, the body of Stephen Fuller Austin was laid to rest with full honors at the age of 43, surrounded no doubt by his beloved Masonic brethren.
San Felipe Freemasonry 1815—1860

1815  Stephen F. Austin is made a Mason.
1828  Austin leads the earliest recorded Masonic meeting in Texas.
1835  First Lodge is established in Colonial Texas.
1837  Grand Lodge of Louisiana establishes three lodges in East Texas.
1838  Grand Lodge of Texas is founded.
1847  Upper floor of San Felipe Church is built.
1859  San Felipe Masonic Lodge is organized July 18th, meeting in the upper room of San Felipe Church.
1860  Masonic Lodge # 239 AF & AM occupies San Felipe Church's lodge room until 1911.
2006  San Felipe's Olive Branch Lodge # 26 is reconstituted, paying tribute to Austin's 1828 meeting.
2008  Olive Branch Lodge seeks to change its name to 'Lodge of Union' in honor of Austin's dream.
The Keystone
Freemasonry in Austin Colony
The Keystone

The symbiotic relationship between Stephen F. Austin’s Colony, Freemasonry, and religion became the catalyst for the birth of the Republic of Texas. Most modern churchgoers are unaware that Freemasonry and mainstream religion complement one another, or that these two traditions shaped the hearts and minds of the founders of the Republic of Texas. They understood that religion and Freemasonry comprised both institutional and spiritual elements that work in tandem to accomplish similar tasks.

Methodism, as one of the earliest Protestant religious institutions on the Frontier, served as a foundation upon which family and community could worship together. Freemasonry spoke to the hearts of men in a different way.¹ Freemasonry, known as The Craft, served as a venue for making good men better, but it also worked at a more subtle level as a force for freedom.

Just as character cannot be separated from the person, Austin’s Colony was inextricably intertwined with Freemasonic history. In the eighteenth century, Freemasonry spread from Europe and England to the New World as a chivalric organization wherein military men demonstrated a code of honor to their troops. The primary purpose of this chivalric code was to build character and maintain personal dignity amidst the gruesome realities of battle.

¹(Freemasonry; the Character calling card)
The common denominator in Freemasonry has always been the core belief in a supreme being. This profession of faith in a higher power bound men of upright character together and transcended all other differences. Through the decades, Masonic lodges have guarded the principles upon which the Republic of Texas was built and they continue to represent the common values upon which human beings of upright character work together to build a better world.

In colonial Texas, Freemasonic membership served as an entree to new relationships with strangers and became a currency of character. This character calling card within both military and political arenas established a common ground among men of different cultures, languages, religions and interests. Masonic brethren recognized and honored the same rules of engagement – honesty, fairness, mutual respect for each other and the same code of chivalric honor. Mutual trust between all Masons allowed brethren to safely offer hospitality and refuge to each other without fear of danger.

Many of the founders of the Republic of Texas were Freemasons. Many of the pioneer leaders who created the Texas Constitution were Freemasons. Stephen F. Austin, B. T. Archer, William Wharton, General Sam Houston, William Barret Travis, Littleton Fowler, Samuel May Williams and many more served as lights in their own lodges and as pillars of the communities they established.

Membership in the Masonic Order widened Austin’s connections and provided valuable introductions to Mexican Masons of influence. Many Mexican officials with whom Austin associated, negotiated and befriended, were Masons.

Freemasonry evolved along different lines in Mexico than in the United States. While American lodges welcomed any man of upright character, in Mexico, Freemasonry was reserved for the well educated noblemen. Mexican Masonic lodges became the driving force in Mexican politics and by 1816 the York Rite Federalists and the Scottish Rite Centralists in Mexico polarized into a political party system.
B.T. Archer was Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Texas in 1839. Littleton Fowler, who was both an itinerant Methodist minister and Freemason, in 1838, leveled the cornerstone of the new state Capitol building and also served as the first Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of the Republic of Texas in 1840. It is not clear whether Fowler was instrumental in building San Felipe Church, but it is possible that he could have participated in the project.

The Texas Declaration of Independence cited the failure of the Mexican government to establish public schools. Early Texas Freemasons were instrumental in establishing public education across Texas. They perpetuated the ancient European Guild Hall tradition by constructing multi-story community buildings that served as houses of worship, education and civic participation. Freemasons also set aside land for future development of community welfare. San Felipe church fit the guild hall profile perfectly because it was originally used as town hall, church and school. The municipality of San Felipe has owned the land, originally known as Constitution Square, and the church building since the dawn of the Colony.

In light of the evidence that many of the same Freemasons who had served the Republic of Texas also spent time in San Felipe, we wondered if San Felipe Church had also served as a Masonic Lodge. If so, when did Freemasonry arrive in Austin’s Colony? Austin was made a Mason years before he arrived in Texas, as were many other founders of the Republic. There was a strong possibility that Masons would have gathered informally from the earliest days of the colony.
Dome of State Capital of Texas in Austin
The Wisdom of Love

The Birth of a Republic
The Lodge of Union

“Above all, be loving. This ties everything together perfectly.”

Colossians 3:14

For seven long years Stephen F. Austin worked to complete the vision of beauty held by his father Moses—colonization of Texas. Austin labored to bring his father’s vision to fruition and to create the capital of the colony at San Felipe de Austin. He had traveled long and had worked hard. He had risked much and had led the people across the river to the promised land. Like another Moses, Stephen’s father was not to cross the river into the land promised to him by the Mexican government. Like Joshua, it was up to Stephen to lead the first 300 families across the rivers and into the promised lands of his father. For five long, hard years, Stephen surveyed, contracted, built and politicked in order to fulfill his father’s dying wish.

Once the colony was well established, and relatively secure, and once religious ministers were at last catching up to the colonists to lead them in their religious observances, Stephen turned his thoughts to creating a bond of union that would further strengthen his colony. In 1828 there were enough Freemasons in one location for a long enough period of time to turn their thoughts to establishing a Lodge of Freemasons in Austin’s Colony. As they were under the jurisdiction of Mexico they naturally sought a charter from the Masonic Grand Lodge of their country—Mexico.

On a crisp February 11, 1828, in San Felipe, the capital of Austin’s Colony, Stephen F. Austin and six other Freemasons met to form a Masonic Lodge. Near the Brazos River seven men met together in brotherly love to seek permission from the Grand Lodge of Mexico to create a Freemasons’ lodge. The handwritten minutes of this meeting exist and are in possession of the Grand Lodge of Texas, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons.
"At a meeting of Ancient York Masons, held in the town of San Felipe de Austin, on the 11th day of February, 1828, for the purpose of taking into consideration the expediency of petitioning the Grand York Lodge of Mexico for granting a Charter or Dispensation for organizing a Subordinate Lodge at this place, the following brethren were present: Bros. H.H. League, Stephen F. Austin, Ira Ingram, Eli Mitchell, Joseph White, G.B. Hall, and Thos. M. Duke....On a motion of Bro. Stephen F. Austin, and seconded, it was unanimously agreed that we petition the Grand York Lodge of Mexico for a Charter or Dispensation to organize a Lodge at this place, to be called the Lodge of Union...On balloting for officers of the Lodge, the following Brethren were duly elected: Bro. S. F. Austin, Master; Bro. Ira Ingram, Senior Warden; and Bro. H.H. League, Junior Warden."

Signed by H. H. LEAGUE, Chairman and Attested by THOMAS M. DUKE, Secretary.¹

This marked the first recorded meeting of Freemasons in Texas. What prompted this meeting and what is significant about the first recorded meeting of Masons in Texas? We have seen that Stephen wanted only families of good strong character for his colony. After some five years of colonization, the time had now come to establish a means whereby the young men and boys of these families, not to mention the newly arriving colonists, could experience and learn from a group of men coming together in brotherly love and affection for the purpose of upholding each other, strengthening each other, and assisting each other where necessary.
Colossians states, “above all, be loving. This ties everything together perfectly.” What better way to tie the beauty of Moses’ vision and the strength of Stephen’s work than through the establishment of a Lodge of Union, which has as its hallmark brotherly love, relief and truth?

Who were these seven brothers who sought to create this union at San Felipe? About some we know very little and about some we know a great deal. First there was Hosea H. League, at the time a fifty-two-year-old man from Tennessee who had been a Mason perhaps between four and sixteen years at the time of the 1828 meeting—Masonic records are very sketchy. He later became the first magistrate of Harrisburg, in what became Houston, Texas. Perhaps he was made magistrate because he had experience with the law – he had been arrested as an accessory to murder in San Felipe de Austin.

Stephen Fuller Austin was thirty-five at the time of the meeting and had been a Mason for some thirteen years. He was from a part of Louisiana that later became the Missouri territory and had previously served as the Junior Deacon of his Lodge before coming to Texas.

Other brothers included Thomas Marshall Duke of Kentucky. He was thirty-three years old, and had been a Mason for a decade or more, and had served as the Junior Warden, and perhaps had officiated in the higher offices of his previous lodge. Eli Mitchell, from Pennsylvania, was thirty-one years old and had been a Mason for seven years at the time of this first meeting. Seven years later he would be associated with the Battle of Gonzales where the Mexican army sought to confiscate a cannon located at that township. The colonists took a stand under a banner bearing the words, “Come and Take It” to resist the con-
fiscation of their townships’ defensive weapon. The colonists mounted the cannon on a caisson made from Eli Mitchell’s wagon. It is alleged that he fired the first shot of the battle of Gonzales.

Ira Ingram, also from Tennessee, was thirty years old in 1828 and had been a Mason for seven years. He is documented to have been an Arch Mason, a member of the Royal Arch branch of the York Rite of Freemasonry, for equally as long. Brother and companion Ingram would later serve as the first Speaker of the House for the First Congress of the Republic of Texas. Also present at the 1828 meeting but for whom little, if any, information could be obtained was Joseph White, who was born in Georgia and buried at San Felipe. Also present was G. B. Hall. We know very little about Brother Hall, but we do know that he was a part owner of land on Chocolate Bayou near what is now Alvin, Texas.

The Grand York Lodge of Mexico did not grant the requested charter or a dispensation to form a lodge due to political turmoil in Mexico, a growing anti-immigration sentiment on the part of the Mexican government and suspicions that liberal elements in Texas might try to gain their independence. On October 25, 1828, the Mexican government outlawed Freemasonry in Texas. Soon afterwards, Austin deemed it unwise to try to form a Masonic lodge in Texas. We do know that these seven brothers persisted in their desire to form a Masonic Lodge at San Felipe as there is mention in a diary that there was a second meeting in 1829, though no recorded minutes have survived.

These seven brothers sought to form a Masonic Lodge in San Felipe some seven years before the next meeting of Freemasons was able to petition the Grand Lodge of Louisiana to establish the first official Masonic lodge in Texas. In an attitude of loving that “ties everything together perfectly.” Masons of today continue the tradition of brotherly love.
Holy Ground

*God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings.'*

Exodus 3:4-7

During the early years of the colony, Mexico underwent drastic and volatile transformations. Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, just as Austin first surveyed the settlement site. By the time San Felipe was established as the capital of Austin’s Colony, Mexico had only recently created a new constitution.

The dynamics leading up to Texas’ declaration of Independence echoed worsening conditions in Mexico. The newly independent and fragile Mexican economy could not support its new constitution. Reverberations of the inconsistencies and abuses toward Texans aligned themselves like dominoes ready to fall. The tipping of the first domino came from Austin’s own hand when he returned from Mexico City to Texas after he was released from prison. Austin resolved that, “war is our only recourse... to defend our rights, ourselves, and our country by force of arms. To do this, we must unite; the delegates of the people must meet in a general consultation and organize a system of defense.”

By 1830 anti-immigration sentiment toward Texas colonists constricted and threatened San Felipe’s livelihood. The tide ebbed when Santa Anna was elected as Mexico’s president but the tsunami hit when Santa Anna usurped the Mexican government in 1834, vowing to crush any dissention within the colonies. The fact that Santa Anna held Stephen F. Austin as political prisoner from 1834 to late 1835 only strengthened Austin’s commitment to the preservation of the colony’s freedom.
Eight years after Austin held his 1828 Masonic meeting in San Felipe he called for a Consultation of the public to declare that Texas had the right to take up arms in defense of their civil liberties and to craft a provisional government.\(^3\) The colonists met not just to vent frustration but to express their grievances in concrete form. Like Moses standing before the burning bush, the delegation of the Consultation of 1835 stood face to face with a higher purpose; one where an appointment with Providence would commission average human beings to commence the ‘Great Work’ of crafting a nation. Austin Colony residents honored the Mexican government, but they took up arms in opposition to the dictatorship of Santa Anna. They also urged Mexicans and U.S. citizens to volunteer in the fight.\(^4\)

Freemasonic imagery permeates the text of the Agenda of the Consultation. As the elected president of the Consultation, Brother B.T. Archer outlined in the Agenda the work to be accomplished:

“Gentlemen: I return to you my thanks for the honor you have conferred upon me. The duties which devolve upon the members of this body are arduous and highly important. In fact the destinies of Texas are placed in your hands and I hope that you are in every way prepared to discharge those duties in a manner creditable to yourselves and beneficial to your country. I call upon you, each and all, to divest yourself of all party feelings, to discard every selfish motive, and look alone to the true interests of your country. In the words of the Hebrew prophet I would say, *Put off your shoes, for the ground upon which you stand is holy. The rights and liberties of thousands of freemen are in your hands, and millions yet unborn may be effected by your decision.*"
The First measure that will be brought before the house will be a declaration in which we will set forth to the world the causes which have impelled it to take up arms, and the objects for which we fight.

Secondly, I will suggest for your consideration the propriety of establishing a provisional Government... This measure I conceive absolutely necessary to prevent Texas from falling into the labyrinth of anarchy.

Thirdly, the organization of the militia requires your immediate attention... deeds of chivalry and heroism will meet their reward...

Finally, gentlemen and friends, let me call your attention from these details to the higher position which you now occupy. Let me remind you that the eyes of the world are upon you; that battling as we are, against the despotism of a military chieftain, all true republicans, all friends of the liberties of man, are anxious spectators of the conflict, or deeply enlisted in the cause. Let us give evidence that we are true descendants of that band of heroes who sustained eight years' war against tyranny and oppression and gave liberty to a new world. Let our achievements be such that our mother country, when she reads the bright page that records them, shall proudly and joyfully exclaim: "These are my sons; their heroic deeds mark them as such!" Again, gentlemen, let me admonish you, that the ground upon which you stand is holy; that your decisions will affect the rights and liberties of thousands of freemen, the destinies of millions yet unborn, and perhaps the cause of liberty itself. I do not view the cause in which we are now engaged as that of
I do not view it as Texas battling alone for her rights and her liberties; I view it in a nobler, more exalted light; I view it as the great work of laying the cornerstone of liberty in the great Mexican Republic.\textsuperscript{5}

After the delegation organized a provisional government, they elected a non-Mason, Henry Smith of Brazoria as governor. In retrospect, the general consensus was that Henry Smith was not qualified to fulfill his responsibilities. Instead of acting according to the declaration agreed upon by the Consultation, he acted as if Texas were an independent entity and proposed that Texans attack the Mexican city of Matamoros.\textsuperscript{6} By January 1836, dissension within the council was so strong that they impeached Smith and the government collapsed. The provisional government commissioned three of the Colony’s most prominent Freemasons, Stephen F. Austin, William Wharton and Dr. B.T. Archer to solicit financial support in the United States for the militia and Texas’ cause. Unfortunately, the Colony was left without these strong leaders at a critical time in Texas history.\textsuperscript{7}

March 2, 1836, another Convention met again to sign a Declaration of Independence, which contained a long list of charges against Mexico. The same architect of the Agenda of the Consultation of 1835, B.T. Archer, presided as president of the Constitutional Convention in November 1836 as Austin’s health was failing.\textsuperscript{8} One month later, Dr. Archer would tend the dying Austin as physician, friend and brother.
In light of our new understanding concerning Freemasonry’s dominant role in securing Texas’ independence, we contemplated what we might possibly find in the upper room. It was fairly clear why these men would be willing to risk everything to take such daring measures and create a provisional government. But since San Felipe Church was built on the site Austin called “Constitution Square” only a year later, could the church render any more clues concerning the connection between Freemasonry in early Texas history?

Did this tiny church hold secrets which had not been hidden from the world, but were merely overlooked by the public?
Only a few short months elapsed between the Declaration of Independence and the birth of the Republic and barely a year between Austin’s death and the completion of San Felipe Church. We paused at the outer door to the upper room, imagining that we were candidates for initiation into an organization well known for its men of strong character. Carefully, we made our way across the tiny threshold of the stairway leading upstairs. A single shaft of light from the doorway below cast a beam across the brown painted walls. The color of the earth, the dark brown walls and floor made the stairway even darker, but we noticed that there were shadows of soot left by kerosene lamps that had once shown the way for the initiate. As we climbed this “stairway to heaven” the brown painted walls of the mundane world gave way to a clear sky blue.

At the top of the stairs the landing revealed a wall and closed doors. The closed doors created a dead end, yet we found that the door to the anteroom opened into a small dressing chamber—the chamber of reflection—where initiates had once prepared themselves for the serious and dignified ceremonies of initiation. Entering the chamber of reflection, we had passed the apparent dead end represented by the landing of the stairs. Yet the door to the lodge room was closed and we could not see inside. With further reflection the door soon opened.
Like the candidate hoodwinked by the outside world of ignorance, we took upon ourselves the blindfolded role of the initiate being led into the lodge room and the world of symbols. In the upper room, the dark night sky formed a gloomy border around the perimeter of the room, as the All-Seeing Eye floated upon the eastern wall. Myriads of five pointed stars out-shone the mid-day sun through the bright blue mid-day sky.

We imagined the setting as it had appeared to the candidate of the new lodge that was established in 1860 and began to meet in the upper room of the church building, with a painted ceiling of bright shining stars in a cloudless night sky bordered by a horizon of dark night clouds. We imagined brothers sitting in chairs around the perimeter of the room under the canopy of the night sky as kerosene lamps reflected the starry heavens above. The gloomy clouds denoted the world between heaven and earth, which veiled the candidate’s spiritual understanding.

A stove in the corner gently warmed the room as the crickets chirped merrily in the cool night air. Three burning candles illuminated the sacred words of wisdom in the center of the room. Great lights brightened the starry sky with the clarity of wisdom while from the eastern wall the all-seeing-eye of the Great Architect of the Universe, the great creator, filled the room.
Twenty two years elapsed between Austin's first recorded Masonic meeting and the next recorded lodge meeting in 1860. The second story of the church was added in 1848, so the 1860 meeting could have taken place in this upper room. No known records exist to date paintings or identify the artist, but the sooty wall and ceiling imprints left by kerosene lamps suggests that the paintings could have been created as early as the 1860 meeting.

How many caring hands had touched and turned these burled doorknobs these past 140 years? How many meetings were held by moon light shining through the large windows of the upper room, while the kerosene lamps caused ghostly shadows to dance upon the walls? Did hats and coats hang from the hooks around the periphery of the room or did they serve other purposes?

This was once a place where candidates stood under the stars of companionship while they were instructed in the character traits of honorable men. This room once welcomed men, weary from long days in the fields or traveling on horseback. Ghostly remnants of the dais where the officers' platforms stood—three steps in the East, two in the West, and one in the South—demonstrated that members of this lodge shouldered both civic and fraternal responsibilities.

Traces of the kerosene lamps outlined ghost-like silhouettes on the walls and ceilings where they once lit the way for many. Directly overhead where the candidate was received into the lodge, twin stars shone through the high clouds through the grains of wood. The two old friends reminded us of trusty companions. Elsewhere about the lodge, the ceiling of the upper room was filled with five-pointed stars in a painted multihued evening sky. From ancient times the five-
pointed star symbolized friendship, fellowship and education. In the lodge, stars shone as symbol of spirit struggling against the forces of darkness and the bringing forth of knowledge.

As the coming day dims the night canopy of heaven, so the fading paint of the ceiling allowed the cypress rings of wood to swirl through the star field like cosmic storms. Some stars, with wood grains trailing like comet dust, seemed to shoot through the heavens. The five-pointed star reminded us, like the Lone Star of Texas, of the fellowship that must have warmed this place.

Perhaps the old wood stove witnessed the warm glow of brotherly love and affection. Its cross to bear was to warm both body and soul of the brethren.

While tending the “fire of the hearth” required tools such as those found on the old rusty stove, so tending the “fire of the heart” required tools such as those used by the Freemasons through the ages. These tools include the Holy Bible, columns, gavels, plumb, square, level, trowel and white apron.
Along the eastern wall the All-Seeing Eye gazed from under a cloudy brow. Though faded and water-damaged as if obscured by tears, the All-Seeing eye beckoned us to imagine the Master sitting in the East just under this Eye as he presided over the Lodge.

Meticulous details of the rays of the all-seeing eye shining across the eastern wall represented the end of darkness of ignorance and the dawning of the new spiritual day of Enlightenment to early Texas Freemasons. As there was no way to know the actual age of the art work in the Upper Room, we could only speculate that the art possibly dated back to when the San Felipe Masonic lodge was established in 1859 and occupied the upper room of San Felipe Church until 1911.
The universal symbol of the all-seeing eye as a representation of the Creator is found within many faiths, ranging from ancient Egypt to Christianity. St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived in the 13th century took as his symbol, the “Sun in splendor with the Eye, while the Anglican Church also cherishes the All-seeing Eye as symbol of God the Father.¹

In ancient Egypt, the All-Seeing-Eye was the emblem of the Sun with its protection of all living things. The 18th century philosopher, Jacob Bohme once wrote that ‘Eternity’s eye of wonder’ reveals itself in the mirror of wisdom like an eye that sees yet guides nothing in seeing that it may see, for the seeing is without being ...Its seeing is in itself.’
The Eye observed the workings of the Lodge with rays shining forth like the Wisdom of Solomon. The lovingly painted detail of the eye's rays has shone clear and bright across the eastern wall over 100 years. Although the stresses of wear had not seemed to dim the vision of this All-Seeing-Eye.

The eye seemed to weep at the fact that this treasure of a room has for so long been going unheeded and unused but for attic space.

We felt at peace under this starry ceiling sky, filled with cloudy horizons, clear nights, and remnants of flickering lights from so long ago.

We could almost sense the reflections of honorable men interacting in brotherly love under the watchful gaze of a heavenly-being. This was still a place of refuge.
As we descended from this miniscule cosmos we could not help but feel the heaviness of the ordinary world. The time had come to slowly make our way back to everyday life. With one last sigh and a large step down from the threshold onto the Earth, we concluded our sojourn into the upper room. The beauty of its starry cosmos its blue lodge room continues to beckon to us.

Even now it saddens us to leave. The ancient brethren took solace in the knowledge that they could return to that peaceful and quiet abode. They could remove themselves from the confrontational and conflicting life of the ordinary world to a place where brotherly love, relief of distress and the true safety of honorable men would offer them a place of refuge—peace and relative comfort in the wilds of the new Republic. Many today long for such a refuge. The shining example of this antebellum lodge room offers a pattern for us to create such a place in our own lives.

(A cypress staircase connects the outside world to the upper room.)
Solemn Tribute
Slavery in Colonial Texas

"Yea, though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death..."
Psalm 23:4

Not everyone who immigrated to Texas was allowed to claim the benefits of their sacrifices. Although it is not in the scope of this book to address the nuances surrounding slavery in colonial Texas, we would be remiss to not acknowledge that there was a shadow side to the history of Austin Colony.

For the slaves who were brought to Austin's Colony, it must have often seemed as if they were walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Certainly upon the frontier of the old west the shadow of death was ever present for the slaves as well as for the freeborn. But the freedom of the settlers was purchased at the expense of many equally disserving human beings. How sad it is to think that Texas' earliest Anglo settlers did not understand the magnitude of slavery's transgression against the human soul.

The institution of slavery, however, was deeply rooted in the Southern economy and culture long before the Texas colony was established. It had become a Southern cultural tradition, and an economic "norm." Many of Austin Colony's settlers hailed from the South and brought slaves with them in their bid for a new life. It is unfortunate that the colonists assumed they would be able to continue the practice of slave holding in another country.

The Mexican government made repeated attempts to limit or abolish slavery in Texas, but was met with strident resistance from the Anglos. The Spanish government issued a colonization law in 1821 which prohibited slave trafficking and freed the children of slaves over the age of 14. Stephen F. Austin was caught between satisfying the needs of his constituents and conforming to the dictates of the Mexican government. Spain and Mexico were against slavery and sought to abolish it. There was to be no
sale or purchase of slaves within Mexican territory. Yet it seems that Mexico was more interested in populating her most sparsely populated areas than adhering to her higher principles. On more than several occasions the Mexican Government chose to only restrict the introduction of new slaves into the Texas territory.  

Although Austin’s primary allegiance was to the success of the colony, he personally demonstrated conflicting attitudes toward slavery. Austin grew up in the New England, where society was just awakening to the conflicting mind-sets toward slavery. Austin brought slavery to Texas and himself owned slaves. On one hand, he granted a few free black colonists land in his colony and called slavery a “curse… on civilized man.” Yet years later, he was convinced that Texas must remain “a slave country.”

The Methodists and Baptists also argued time and again against slavery as early as 1784 in the colonial South. The gap between faith and the practice of that faith was wide, however, for they did not need to look any further than their own household for the need for moral edification. By the time of the Texas Revolution in 1836, there were 5,000 slaves in Texas. Then a decade later, there were 30,000. By 1860, the Methodists alone claimed 7,541 slaves among their members in Texas.

San Felipe church was built amidst slave labor of the surrounding fields. And yet San Felipe Town minutes show that there were fifty-five Anglo Methodists and twelve “Colored” residing in San Felipe between 1860 and 1866. These same minutes also describe San Felipe Church as being located to the east of town, while in 1874, San Felipe town minutes refer to the Town government donating lot of land to a Methodist Episcopal Church “south” for a parsonage supporting the separate church for the ‘colored’ residents. The authors pay tribute to Texas’ pioneers who were unjustly disenfranchised and to the unsung heroes who also contributed to the birth of the Republic of Texas.
During our process of creating this book, we have made many friends who also hold San Felipe Church dear to their hearts for various reasons. The one thing we all have in common is the desire to preserve San Felipe’s heritage in all ways.

Those who tend the flame of historic San Felipe have succeeded in sharing their embers with others around the state in hopes of restoring or, at the least, preserving this original historical landmark of the birth of Texas. The increasing urgency of preserving the physical structure of the church is becoming more evident with each passing day. The building’s “lean” towards the east is ever increasing. The “Upper Room” ceiling boards deteriorate with more sawdust falling from the rafters with passing time. Insects occupy this time capsule as their home.

At the publication of this book, it seems as if this old building is becoming as frail as Brother Stephen F. Austin in his last days. The stability and security of the structure is diminishing faster than expected. It is sad to witness, such deterioration; to doubt the stability and security of the structure because the frailty of San Felipe Church’s increasing age is becoming ever more evident.
This 170-plus year old edifice is in need of care. The community of San Felipe quietly and proudly shoulders the responsibility of preserving and maintaining the vestiges of the town’s remaining post-colonial buildings. Some of its community has banded together to continue caring for the history that their community is built upon. They are truly making the effort to tend the flame of history that has been left to their care. Efforts are being made by the city and county governments to work with state and national agencies to preserve and explore San Felipe’s “heart” of Texas History.

Authors are creating books to help raise funds for preservation. Archeology societies are managing digs to explore what is still hidden below ground. Private landowners are assuming the role of care-taker as they preserve historical artifacts found or located on their property. Teachers are bringing their classes for educational field trips. Churches are increasing their awareness and support. Fraternal societies are holding fund raisers and relocating to this historic site of the true birthplace of Texas.

It is important to revitalize a sense of stewardship of our Texas heritage, and San Felipe offers us a unique way of doing this. Much of the original town site still maintains its original layout. Much of the area within and around San Felipe is still undeveloped and offers a historians a glimpse into how Colonial Texas may have appeared almost two hundred years ago. History is also a dynamic entity, and not merely static facts and figures. As the preservation and restoration of San Felipe continues, the story that once was burned in the funeral pyres of the Texas Revolution will rise from those ashes and spring to life.

The Earth reclaims her own. Time has weathered the face of San Felipe Church yet she has miraculously survived the sands of time and even
hurricanes. After tools which built the church have been shattered into shards and charred remains of cabins have melted into swampy mire, the abandoned cemeteries of San Felipe de Austin fill with the mists of pioneer spirits sleep along the highways. The secret of the San Felipe Church building’s survival rests in the hands of a small number of people who have cared enough to protect and to maintain her. It is the hope of the authors that more of us from around the state, and around the world, will join to preserve of the birthplace of the great state of Texas.

At first glance, one might assume that this book has been about the history of a tiny church, but look again! As the veil falls away from this cypress beauty, the triumph of the human spirit reveals itself in the form of beauty, strength, and wisdom. The San Felipe story is an archetypical saga, where heroes followed their beautiful dreams of a better world, acted with the strength of faith and ultimately established the wisdom of a more loving and liberated society.

The San Felipe story is one of the multitudes of threads woven into the magnificent mantle that the Freemasonic Craft calls the Great Experiment and what the Bible refers to as the Temple not made by human hands. Behind her cypress-wood veil stands the temple within the human heart, which continues to be built and perfected by growing stronger so as to become wise. Even today, she is filled with the clouds of witnesses who participated in the birth of a Republic, testifying to the triumph of the human spirit and ready to embrace adventures in the name of Liberty yet to come.

May her light never be extinguished.
## San Felipe Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1718</td>
<td>Alamo is established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1763</td>
<td>Spain seizes Louisiana from France</td>
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<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>American Declaration of Independence</td>
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<tr>
<td>1792</td>
<td>Moses Austin purchases a lead mine and establishes the town of Austinville, Virginia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston born in Virginia</td>
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<tr>
<td>1796</td>
<td>Moses travels to Missouri Territory in upper Louisiana to investigate Spanish lead mines.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>Austin family move to Missouri with five-year-old Stephen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1803</td>
<td>America buys Louisiana from Spain in the Louisiana Purchase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1808</td>
<td>Austin attends Transylvania University, in Kentucky</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1810 | • Mexican Independence from Spain; Texas stays with Spain.  
• Stephen is “taken from school” to run his father’s lead mine business. |
| 1811 | Stephen makes his first trip to New Orleans, as he manages the family mercantile business of shipping lead. |
| 1813 | • Stephen is commissioned in Missouri militia  
• Stephen is elected Missouri Territorial Legislature.  
• Moses establishes the county of Washington in Missouri because settlers were pouring into the territory  
• Moses sets his eye on possible mines in Spanish Mexico. |
| 1815 | • Austin is promoted in Militia and re-elected to the Legislature  
• Austin is made a Mason at age twenty-two.... Initiated into the St. Genevieve Masonic lodge, the first chapter of that order west of the Mississippi. |
| 1817 | Stephen manages Moses’ business while he builds his career in public affairs. |
1818
- Methodist ministers first visit Texas territory.
- Moses Austin acquires an interest in present day Arkansas possibly through a connection with Methodist minister, William Stevenson, who lead a group of settlers from Washington County Missouri.

1819
- Stephen travels to Arkansas, hoping to establish a town, but fails due to lack of financial resources.

1820
- Moses Austin petitions Spanish governor in Mexico to form a colony in Texas.
- Moses is briefly imprisoned for debt, then heads to Arkansas and then to Texas.
- Stephen heads for New Orleans to escape being lured into any more of his father’s fanciful schemes. “My reputation is all I have on earth.”
- Moses enlists the Baron de Bastrop to gain permission to settle three hundred American Catholic families in a town at the mouth of the Colorado River.
- Moses is forced to return to Missouri to deal with more debts.

1821
- June-Moses gains permission to settle a colony in Texas.
- June-Stephen leaves New Orleans for Texas before he knows his father is ill.
- July. Stephen learns of Moses death on the same day he arrives at the Sabine River.
- August, Mexican Revolution gains independence for Mexico.
- August- Stephen’s party explores East Texas and arrives at the Brazos River.
- December- Austin surveys the colony boundaries along the Brazos River.
- Brown Austin, Stephen’s younger brother arrives in the Colony.
- Stephen travels to Mexico City to renew permission from the Mexican Government for his contract and to become a Mexican Citizen.
- July - Stephen returns from Mexico City as a Lieutenant colonel in the Mexican Militia,” with full powers to administrate justice and preserve good order.
• Stephen F. Austin establishes Austin Colony at San Felipe with the Old Three Hundred families.
• Stephen F. Austin establishes the Texas Rangers.

1824
• Mexican constitution is established and adopts a federal form of government.
• San Felipe de Austin is chartered as the Capital of Austin’s Colony.
• Austin applies for subsequent Impresario contracts
• The first Protestant Services are held three miles below San Felipe.

1827
• Henry Smith, future Governor of the Texas Provisional Government settles on the Brazos.
• U.S. President John Quincy Adams seeks to purchase Texas from Mexico.

1828
• February 11th—first recorded Masonic meeting near the Brazos River at San Felipe de Austin.

1829
• Thomas Pilgrim establishes the first English speaking school in the colony.

1830
• Mexican government passes an anti-immigration law to stem the tide of American settlers.
• Brown Austin, Stephen’s younger brother and only relative in Texas dies of yellow fever. Austin never fully recovers from his death.

1831
• Mary Austin Holly arrives in Austin Colony.
• Father Michael Muldoon arrives in San Felipe.

1832
• August—Convention convenes in San Felipe to petition Mexico to repeal the 1830 anti-immigration law and requesting Statehood in the Mexican Federation.
• Battles for Texas independence begin in Velasco & Nacogdoches.
1833
- January- Santa Anna is elected President of Mexico.
- Convention to discuss restrictions placed on Texas and Coahuila.
- Stephen F. Austin travels to Mexico to present the Convention petition.

1834
- January- Stephen F. Austin is arrested and imprisoned in Mexico City.
- April- Santa Anna deposes Mexican government, establishing a dictatorship.
- Alexander Thompson, John Wesley Kinney and William Crawford preach in Austin Colony.
- December 25- Stephen F. Austin is released from Mexico City prison but is not allowed to return to Texas until July 1835

1835
- William Barrett Travis appeals to the Methodist church to send at least five young ministers to Texas.
- Fall - Battles of Gonzales, Goliad, Concepcion, and Bexar
- Winter - First Masonic meeting in Brazoria
- November 3rd-13th - Consultation convenes to establish provisional government. This is the earliest recorded example of Anglo Saxon Law in Texas.

1836
- February - Santa Anna starts out for San Antonio, Texas.
- Feb 23rd - Siege of Alamo begins.
- The Great Fifty Days of the Revolution: March 2 – April 21st.
- March 2 - Convention of Washington on the Brazos; Texas Declaration of Independence
- March 4- San Houston is confirmed as Commander in Chief.
- March 6 - Alamo falls in San Antonio
- March 30- The town of San Felipe is evacuated and burned and never recovers from the damage.
• April 21 - Battle of San Jacinto wins independence for Texas.
• May 14 - Santa Anna signs the Treaty of Velasco and withdraws troops to the Rio Grande. BUT a secret treaty promises to recognize Texas as an independent Government.
• April 21, 1836 – February 1837, Santa Anna is incarcerated
• May - People start returning to San Felipe
• September - Sam Houston is elected president of the Republic of Texas.
• Stephen F. Austin serves as Secretary of State
• Stephen F. Austin dies of pneumonia on December 27th, St. John the Evangelist Feast Day.

1837
• U.S.A. recognizes Texas as an independent Republic
• Methodist preachers, Martin Ruter, Littleton Fowler and Robert Alexander come to San Felipe in answer to William B. Travis.

1838
San Felipe Church first floor is completed.

1839
San Felipe citizens celebrate centenary of Methodism encamped on the Brazos.

1841
Grand Royal Arch Chapter convention of the Republic of Texas convenes in the city of Austin.

1845
Texas joins the Union and becomes a state within the United States.

1846
Bellville becomes county seat of Austin colony.

1847
San Felipe Church second story, Josey's store and Town Hall are constructed.

1848
All county governmental activities are removed from San Felipe.

1859
Church bell arrives from a plantation in Waller County.

1860
Masonic lodge activities recorded in the upper room of San Felipe Church.

1861
Texas secedes from the Union.

1874
Brick pillars placed under the church.

1875
San Felipe Town Council builds a rostrum and a steeple for the church.

2008
San Felipe United Methodist Church preserves the colonial spirit.
The five-pointed star, the lone star, shines forth in many places in San Felipe. Here it is seen on the hilt of this antique Texas Templar sword.

San Felipe Church records indicate that the congregation bought this stove in 1860 for the school for $25.

Twin stars on a field of blue shine like two old friends over the candidate. Fading paint dims the shining stars as the coming day dims the canopy of heaven. The five-pointed star reminds us of the five points of fellowship.
San Felipe Church’s Upper Room now serves as an attic space for recently added air conditioning.

Remnants of a Masonic Dais in the Upper Room leaves interesting silhouettes of rituals past.

Looking East, the ‘All-Seeing Eye’ becomes a delicate fixture.

View from replica of Austin’s ‘dog-run’ cabin rebuilt on Merchant Square near San Felipe Church
Notes from San Felipe United Methodist Church records state that the church stands on Constitution Plaza, the site designated in the original charter of San Felipe de Austin. The present church is still owned by the town of San Felipe along with the land on which the church stands.

The first log church was used as both a school and church, which once housed the oldest Sunday school in Texas. The school was founded by Thomas J. Pilgrim in 1829 in a log cabin used as a church in early 1820's. The original log church was burned in 1836, during the Texas Revolution, as General Sam Houston sought to out-maneuver General Santa Anna and his Mexican troops. Once the present church was rebuilt in 1838 after the Runaway Scrape, Thomas Pilgrim resumed teaching in San Felipe's new church building.

The upper story of the church building housed the San Felipe Masonic Lodge for many years. The second floor was also used as a school until March 29, 1880.

San Felipe Newspaper, commemorating Stephen F. Austin's Birthday, noted in an article on November 3, 1993 that the San Felipe Masonic Lodge organized on July 18, 1859, met in the second story of the church building. The Masonic Lodge # 239 AF & AM occupied this location from 1860 until 1911. The main floor remained the church. The Masonic lodge was moved to Sealy in 1909.

The oldest record available concerning the church is an old membership book dated November 1913. Books previous to this one are lost. There are no other known records available.
Freemasonic imagery even found its way into the seal of the Mexican Land grants with the Delta and the all seeing eye.
Notes

Laying the Cornerstone

2 Fort Bend County Museum Association, [http://www.fortbendmuseum.org/texian/consortium/projects/](http://www.fortbendmuseum.org/texian/consortium/projects/)
3 Cantrell, Gregg, *Stephen F. Austin, Empresario of Texas.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.) p 205

Bridging the Gap

3 Cedar and cypress from Lebanon are the precious materials from which the Temple and the palace of Solomon were built.

Porch Time Under the Rosy Dawn

1 Cantrell, Gregg, *Stephen F. Austin, Empresario of Texas.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.) p 105
2 Ibid, p 75

Thirst for Living Waters

2 The Great Revival {need citation info} p. 53
3 The Great Revival {need citation info} p. 56
4 The Great Revival {need citation info} p. 187-188
5 The Great Revival {need citation info} p. 121-122
8 Cantrell, Gregg, *Stephen F. Austin, Empresario of Texas.* (New Haven and London:
The World is My Parish

1 J.J. Josey General Store Museum records
2 San Felipe United Methodist Church Service Leaflet, July 2006
3 Pullock, John Wesley, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1995) p 101
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Images of Austin’s parents: Courtesy of J.J. Josey Museum

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2 The Texas Mason Magazine, “Stephen Fuller Austin: Freemason and Father of Texas” (Grand Lodge of Texas History Committee, Winter 2007) p. 11
3 In 2006 a small number of Masons reconstituted a lodge named the “Olive Branch Lodge” which meets at San Felipe Church in honor of the vision of Brother Austin, their worthy brother. The brethren of the lodge hope that after a suitable time the lodge may be renamed “Lodge of Union” to complete the work undertaken by Brother Stephen F. Austin and companions who first met in 1828.

Holy Ground

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Image of B.T. Archer: Courtesy of Graham Masonic Lodge, Brenham, Texas.

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Solemn Tribute

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Tending the Flame

Photo on page 73, of Mr. Fred Strauss, at Stephen F. Austin; printed with permission of Fred Strauss.

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About the Authors

Linda Berthelsen

Linda Berthelsen, R.T.O. serves as the Grand Prior of the Templar Order, Grand Priory of North America and a Knight of the Templar Order, Grand Priory of Austria. Her enthusiasm for Templar History has guided her to investigate many aspects of spirituality, including religious symbolism in historic buildings such as Rosslyn Chapel in Midlothian, Scotland. Ms. Berthelsen is grounded in many facets of Templar studies and holds a deep understanding of Early Masonic and Templar history.

As a Templar historian, Linda has contributed to several international publications, including *Masonic Magazine*, *The Templar Way* column for *Templar History Magazine* and best sellers, *Templar Code for Dummies* and *Nobly Born*, as well as several ecclesiastic publications.

Linda is a sixth generation Texan, dating from the Texas Revolution. She graduated from University of Texas at Arlington with a B.S. in English Literature and has lectured in the USA, Austria and Scotland.

Chris Dalrymple

An active Knight Templar for over fifteen years, Chris Dalrymple is a dynamic Masonic Knight. His activities with regional Masonic groups led to his discovery of the subject of this book. His desire is to contribute to the creation of a work that will both serve to raise awareness of this historical treasure and to help to generate the funding necessary to preserve this Texas landmark. His interest in Texas history originates with this grandmother who was a Texas History School Teacher.

Dr. Dalrymple is a chiropractic doctor and has been in active practice for nearly 30 years. He has served as the president of the Texas Chiropractic Association and is designated as a Fellow of the International College of Chiropractors.
Chris is the Editor of *Mind and Thought Series*, by Thomas Bishop. He has served as Editor-in-Chief of the *Texas Journal of Chiropractic* for a decade and has received numerous national journalism awards.

Active in Freemasonry for over 20 years, Chris has held every subordinate presiding office of the York Rite of Freemasonry, Knight Masons, and was named Knight Commander of the Red Branch of Eri of the Allied Masonic Degrees. Dalrymple currently serves as the Grand Seneschal of the Templar Order, Grand Priory of North America, and numerous other positions of service and education.

**Kathryn Berthelsen**

Kathryn Berthelsen holds an MSc with Distinction in Creative Writing from University of Edinburgh in Scotland and a B.S. in Advertising from University of Texas at Austin. Recent poetry collections include "Restoration: Thirty Poems for Rosslyn Chapel" and "The Vocabulary of Clouds". She was a 2005 prize-winner in the Grierson Verse Competition and shortlisted for the Ayr800 Poetry Prize. Kathryn is an active member of the Templar Fellowship of America and currently works as a marketing project manager in Houston, Texas.

**Other Projects**

In 2007, the authors co-founded the Templar Fellowship of America and its online magazine at www.templarfellowship.com, dedicated to Templar Education. Future projects include soon-to-be published *Rosslyn Chapel Secrets Unveiled*, poetry collections and a pipeline of uncommon literature for our changing times.
To contribute to the health and welfare of Old San Felipe Church building, send donations to:

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Attention: SFUMC Treasurer
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For more information about Old San Felipe Church or to book a tour, contact jhsawdust@sbcglobal.net
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In 1837, more than a decade before Texas entered statehood, historic San Felipe church was built as an exercise in new spiritual freedom, giving birth to Texas' oldest continuing Methodist congregation. The church building houses one of the most astounding examples of early Texas art work, with its painted ceiling and cedar planked walls. Located some forty miles west of Houston, this historic treasure genuinely protects one of Texas' "best kept secrets."

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