

REMEMBER THE ALAMO!

The land that is now Texas was not always part of the United States. It actually belonged to Mexico, after Mexico became its own nation in 1821.

Not many people lived in the Texas region at that time. So, Mexico welcomed Americans who wanted to come live in Texas. The Mexican government even gave some Americans land for free. For the next 15 years, Americans poured into the region. By 1836, about 30,000 Americans had come.

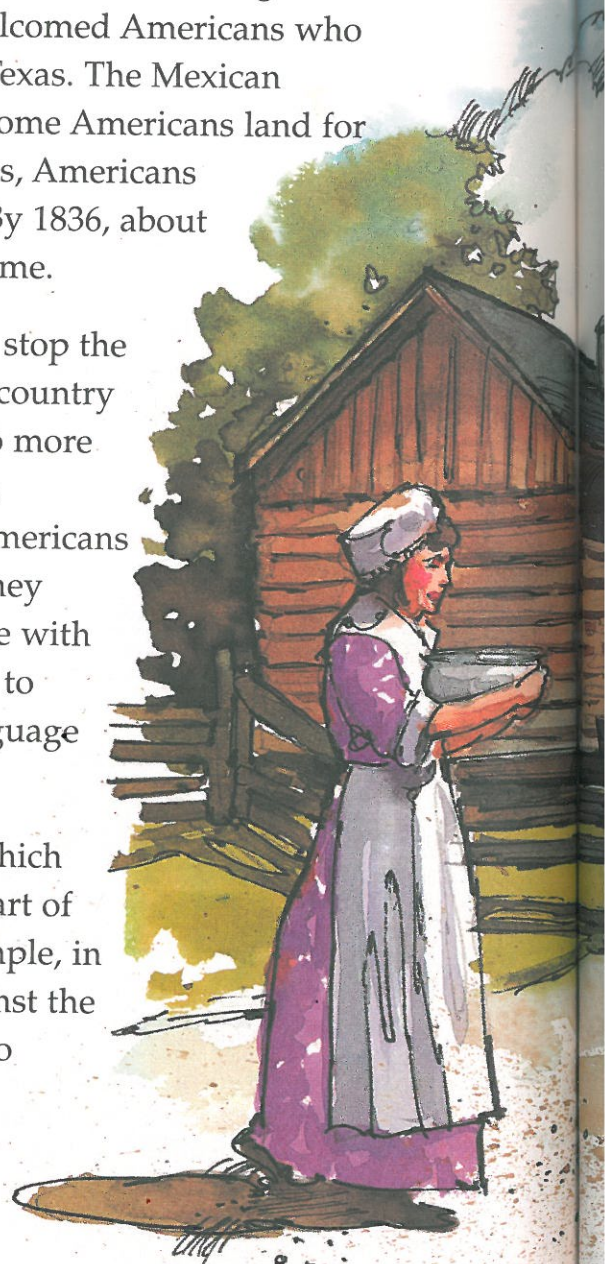
Then, Mexico tried to stop the flood of Americans. The country passed a law that said no more could settle in Texas. The Mexicans resented the Americans living in Texas because they brought their own culture with them. They did not want to embrace the Spanish language or the Catholic religion.

There were ways in which Americans did not feel part of Mexico, as well. For example, in Mexico, slavery was against the law. Some Americans who came to live in Texas wanted slaves to work their land.



Davy Crockett

Davy Crockett was among the men for whom death at the Alamo helped create a legend. Even before he joined Texas's fight for independence, Davy already was known around the nation, both as a frontiersman and as a politician—he represented Tennessee in Congress. It is said that when the Mexicans came over the wall, Davy had no gunpowder left to fire. So, he used his rifle as a club against the attackers.



In 1834, Mexico's government was overthrown by Antonio López de Santa Ana. He was a general who made himself a dictator. A dictator is a leader who makes all the decisions, with no one else to say whether those decisions are fair and just. The Americans did not want to live in a dictatorship. For all these reasons, Texas decided to separate itself from Mexico.

The Battle of the Alamo

General Santa Ana heard of the trouble in the Texas territory. He took the Mexican Army north to stop the American rebels. On February 23, 1836, the Mexican Army—about 4 or 5 thousand strong—attacked San Antonio, which was being held by about 150 Americans.

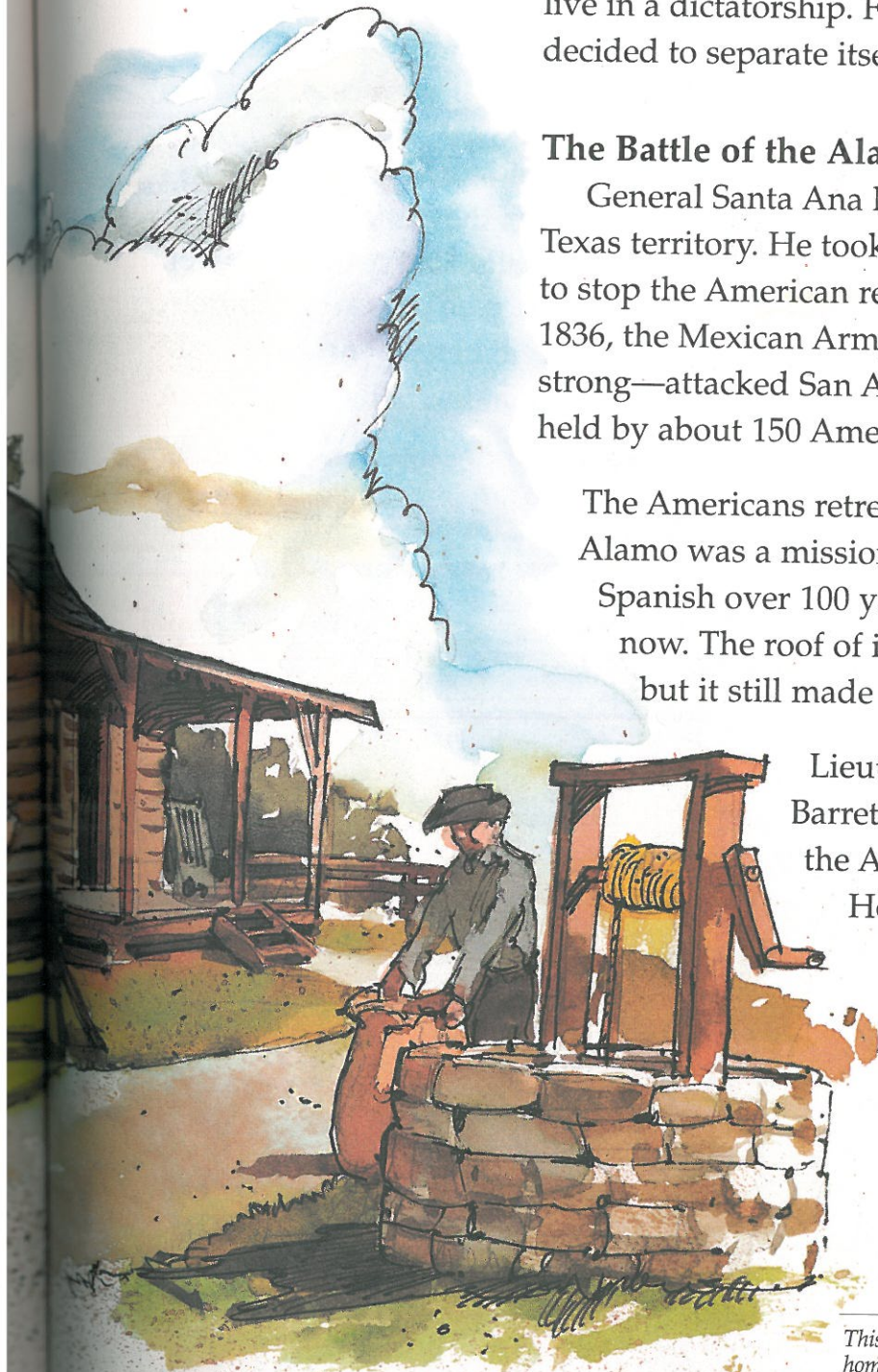
The Americans retreated to the Alamo. The Alamo was a mission. It had been built by the Spanish over 100 years before. It was empty now. The roof of its church had caved in, but it still made a fairly good fort.

Lieutenant Colonel William Barret Travis was in charge of the Americans at the Alamo.

He knew that 150

volunteer fighters could never hold off an entire army. The day after fighting began, he wrote for help. Here is part of his letter:

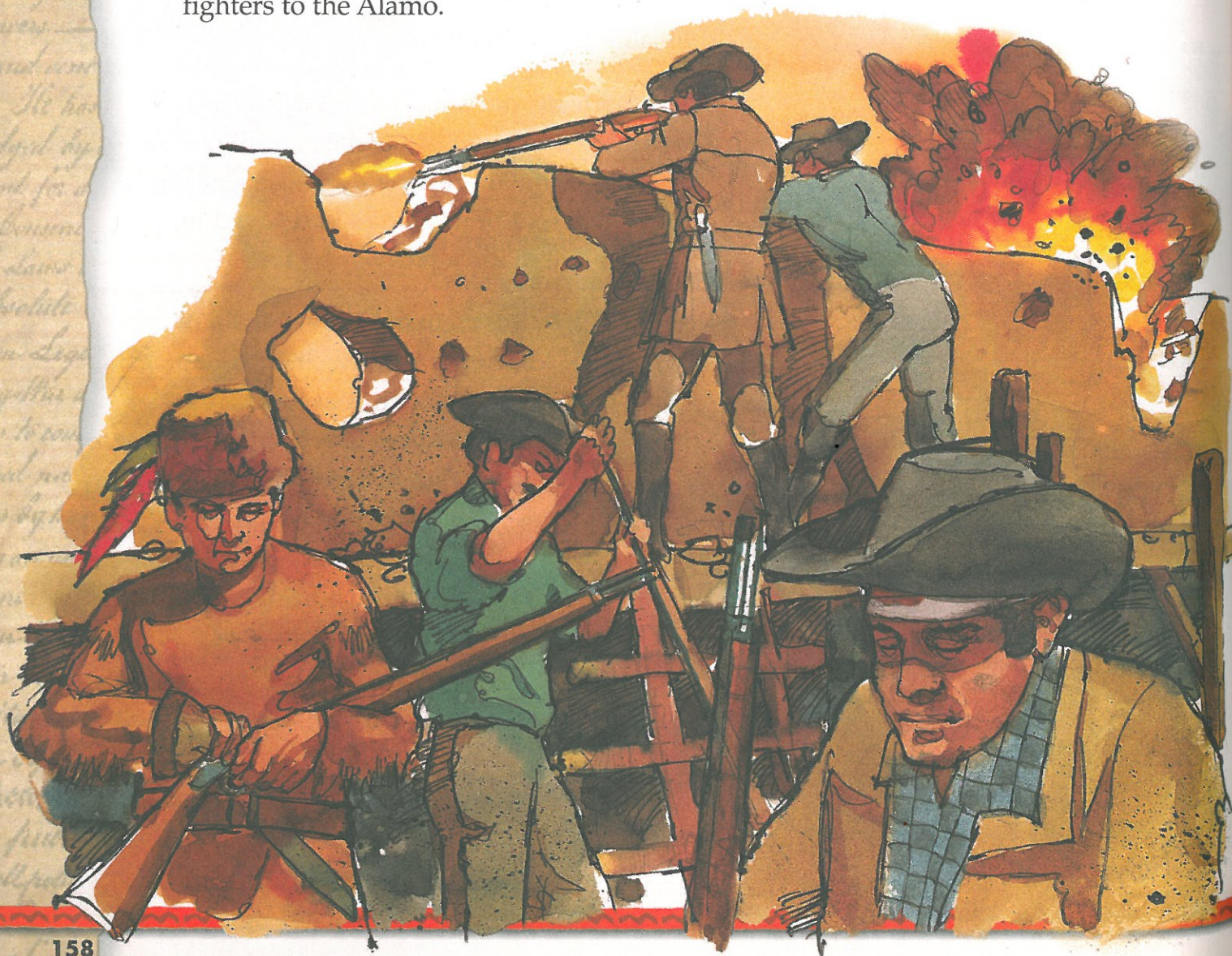
This is an illustration of an early American homestead in Texas, when it was still part of Mexico.



"I am besieged [under attack] with a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Ana. I have sustained a continued Bombardment and cannonade for 24 hours and have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded surrender . . . otherwise, the garrison [soldiers] is to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken. I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender or retreat. . . ." The letter ended with a plea to send more American fighters to the Alamo.

Only 32 Americans answered William's plea. The new volunteers slipped through enemy lines and joined the Americans already in the Alamo. Now, the soldiers in the mission numbered about 188. For 12 days, outnumbered 20 or 30 to 1, those Americans held off an entire army.

In the end, the Mexicans won. On March 6, they finally scaled the Alamo's walls. The battle was over.



Some of the Americans may have survived the battle. If they did, General Santa Ana made sure they did not survive the surrender. All the American soldiers were killed. The Mexicans spared only a woman, her child, and a slave. The woman and the slave lived to tell other Americans of the fate of those who tried to stand up against Mexico's army.

Mexico won the battle at the Alamo. However, the cost to the Mexican Army was high. The Americans had killed hundreds and hundreds of Mexican soldiers. Historians think that maybe as many as one in four Mexican soldiers died at the Alamo. General Santa Ana called the Alamo a "glorious victory" for Mexico. But, one of his officers said, "One more such 'glorious victory,' and we are finished."

After the Alamo

On April 21 of the same year, Texan Sam Houston led a new Texas Army against General Santa Ana and his army. He decided to attack the Mexicans outside San Jacinto. To inspire his soldiers, Sam mounted a white horse and rode among his men, crying "Remember the Alamo! Remember the Alamo!"

The battle that followed was over quickly. In just 18 minutes, the Texans had killed over 600 Mexican soldiers. They captured over 700 more. The rest of the Mexican Army fled back across the Rio Grande—the river that would become the border between Texas and Mexico.

The victory at San Jacinto ended the war. Texas was free. For almost ten years, it was an independent nation. It had its own president and its own constitution. Then, on December 29, 1845, Texas became the 28th state of the United States.

Show What You Know

You read about how Sam Houston inspired his soldiers by crying, "Remember the Alamo!" Now imagine that you have been chosen to help Sam Houston gather together an army. Make a poster that you think would inspire Americans to join Texas's war for independence. Make sure you use the words "Remember the Alamo!" on your poster.