

# **Educational Packet :Power-Hewetson Irish Colonists as Settlers**

## Enduring Understanding:

The Irish immigrants who settled in Coahuila y Texas exemplify the Mexican government's empresario system in contrast to the popular Texas myth of Anglo-American settlement of Texas.

## Essential Questions:

1. Why did the Mexican government approve the Power-Hewetson Contract?
2. How did the Irish colonists gain land in Coahuila y Texas?
3. How are the Irish settlers commemorated or remembered?

## Contextual Essay:

In 1824 the Mexican government combined the two provinces Coahuila and Texas to form one state, Coahuila y Texas. The Mexican government wanted to colonize the new province and started to approve colonization contracts, known as empresario contracts. The empresario system provided James Power and James Hewetson, two Irishmen, a way to set up a colony for Mexican and Irish families. The Mexican government approved the Power-Hewetson empresario contract because the contract dictated that the colonists were European immigrants and Catholic. Once the Irish colonists had arrived in the southeastern area of Coahuila y Texas they began gaining land through colonist grants, marriages, and government bounties. Yet, these Irish immigrants are commemorated as settlers by two historical markers in the area of the Power-Hewetson Colony, now the Refugio and Aransas counties.

The Mexican government set up several committees and laws to discuss the colonization of the province Coahuila y Texas. The government created most of the colonization laws to

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populate the territory while preventing citizens of the United States from overrunning and annexing the territory. In “Texas as Viewed from Mexico, 1820-1834” Nettie Lee Benson explains that the government endorsed colonizing Coahuila y Texas with European settlers because despite “the covetous designs that Europeans had for it, [they] were so much greater in the United States.”<sup>1</sup> The government also wanted to colonize the area with Catholic Europeans rather than Protestant Anglo-Americans. In 1822 the Committee of Foreign Relations discussed several options for colonizing the area, one of which involved offering preferences to European colonists. Its final proposal called for colonizing the Texas territory specifically with Irish immigrants, because they practiced the Catholic religion and disliked England and the United States.<sup>2</sup> This report thus made it easier for Irishmen like James Power and James Hewetson to form a colony of Irish immigrants and Mexican families in Coahuila y Texas in 1834.

In the summer of 1834, the Irish colonists arrived in Coahuila y Texas and began gaining land through colonist grants, marriages, and government bounties. Most families received land grants from the Coahuila y Texas state government in the fall of 1834. Another way the colonists gained land in Coahuila y Texas was through marriage. Power-Hewetson Irish colonist, Thomas O’Connor, received land through his marriage to another Irish immigrant Mary Fagan. Thomas O’Connor’s had acquired over 500,000 acres of land used for ranching through colonist grants, marriage, and government bounties. The Irish immigrants who fought for the Texas Army received “bounty grants of 640 acres for each three months of military service” from the provisional government.<sup>3</sup> In April 1882, Mrs. Thomasa Lambert, Irish immigrant

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<sup>1</sup> Nettie Lee Benson, “Texas as Viewed from Mexico, 1820-1834,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (1987): 225.

<sup>2</sup>Benson, “Texas as Viewed from Mexico,” 227.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Davis, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 129.

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Walter Lambert's widow, received a 1280 acres previously promised to her husband for fighting in the Battle of San Jacinto during the Texas Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

The Power-Hewetson Irish colonists settled the area of southeastern Coahuila y Texas, present day Refugio and Aransas counties. Yet, they are only remembered and commemorated with two historical markers located in the present day town of Refugio, Texas. One of these historical markers is the "Empresario James Power" marker, which is located in front of the Refugio County Courthouse. The other historical marker is the "Irish Immigrants" marker located in the King's Park across from the courthouse. These two markers mention the Power-Hewetson Irish immigrants as settlers of the Refugio County. The Texas Historical Commission approved the "Empresario James Power" created in 1976 and the "Irish Immigrants in Refugio" in 1995. These historical markers that specifically deal with the colonists' Irish heritage present a diversity of Texan society during the bicentennial when there was a intense focus on colonial settlement and then again after social history had become a prominent field in academia.

The empresario system provided Power and Hewetson a way to form an Irish and Mexican colony. In 1834 the colonists arrived and received land through colonist grants, marriages, and government bounties. The Power-Hewetson Irish colonists played an important role in developing the land of southeastern Coahuila y Texas, the area of present day Refugio and Aransas counties. Still, they have not been frequently commemorated for their role in the area's colonization and progress.

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<sup>4</sup> Texas General Land Office, "Republican Donation Voucher for Thomasa Lambert, 000933," <http://scandocs.glo.texas.gov/webfiles/landgrants/pdfs/3/5/1/351928.pdf>, (accessed July 14, 2011).

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## Suggestions for Classroom Exercises:

### **Elementary School 4<sup>th</sup> Grade: (Social Studies TEKS 2E, 6B, 7A, 8A, 19A)**

1. Have the students compare and contrast the historical markers for the Irish colonists and for the Texas soldiers.
2. Have the students identify other ethnic groups of colonists in Texas before 1836, the Texas Revolution.
3. Give the students a black and white map of Coahuila y Texas with the empresario colonies. Have the student then color coordinate the different empresario colonies based on the ethnic background of the colonists. For example, the Power-Hewetson colony can be a certain color for the Irish colonists (green), Stephen F. Austin colony can be a certain color for American colonists (blue), and Martin De Leon colony can be a certain color for Mexican and Tejano colonists (red).
4. Identify the accomplishments and explain the economic motivations and impact of significant empresarios, including James Power and Stephen F. Austin.
5. Have the students discuss as a class the populated areas of Coahuila y Texas and why these areas are more populated then other areas.
6. Have the students look at the Power-Hewetson Colonists Excel Spreadsheet and as a class have them discuss several reasons why other that some of the dates are earlier than others?

### **Middle School 7<sup>th</sup> Grade: (Social Studies TEKS 2C, 2E, 9A, 11A, 19C)**

1. Give the students a blank map of Coahuila y Texas. Have the students draw the boarders of the colonies located in Coahuila y Texas.

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2. Have the students write a one-page comparison and contrast of the Stephen F. Austin colonists and the Irish colonists of the Power-Hewetson Colony.
3. Have the students identify specific empresarios and their contribution to early Coahuila y Texas. For example Stephen F. Austin brought the original 300 hundred families and proceeded to colonize the area of Coahuila y Texas.
4. Have a blank map that the students add the important towns and missions in Coahuila y Texas.
5. Have the students analyzes the names of places, towns, missions, and how they changed overtime. The students can also make a list of Spanish words still used today by Texans.
6. Have the students discuss the Irish Colonists Excel Spreadsheet and the James Power, Thomas O'Connor, and Walter Lambert Land Grants.

### **Middle School 8<sup>th</sup> Grade: (Social Studies TEKS 6A, 10B, 12A, 24A, 30A)**

1. Have the students explain the impact of the colonization of Coahuila y Texas on the establishment of the Republic of Texas.
2. Have the students compare and contrast historical maps of Coahuila y Texas to current maps to determine different place names and changing borders.
3. Have the students analyze the migration patterns of the colonists of Coahuila y Texas. For example show them the different colonies with Irish colonists and let them analyze why these colonies are beside each other. Why different immigrant groups seemed to settle near each other.
4. Have the students compare how the Mexican government empresario system to the Northwest Ordinance.

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5. Have the students view and discuss the two photographs of the historical markers, “Irish Immigrants in Refugio” and “Amon B. King.”
6. Have the students write a one page essay about the importance of looking at primary sources such as Land Grants while researching specific topics on Texas colonization.