

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in the Texas Revolution

Enduring Understanding:

The Irish immigrants who settled in Coahuila y Texas participated in the Texas Revolution.

Essential Questions:

1. Why did the Irish support the fight for Texas' independence against the Mexican government?
2. How did the Irish support the Texas Army?
3. How are the Irish commemorated and remembered as Texas Revolution participants?

Contextual Essay:

In 1834 Irish immigrant families arrived in Coahuila y Texas to become colonists in the Power-Hewetson Colony. After a short period of time the Irish colonists became frustrated with the Mexican government for breaking provisions promised to them concerning duty free imported goods, government manifesto, and the formation of a militia. Thus the Irish colonists supported the fight for Texas independence by participating as informants, suppliers, and soldiers for the Texas Army. Yet, these participants are rarely remembered or commemorated as Irish colonists that contributed to the fight for Texas independence.

The loss of duty free goods was devastating. Rosalie B. Hart Priour, an original Power-Hewetson colonist, described the colonists as “dissatisfied with the Mexican government”

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in **the Texas Revolution**

because it broke its promise not to tax imports for five years.¹ The desire for duty free products was more than merely just greed; many of these Irish colonists did not have enough money to pay duty on food, clothing, farming tools, or seeds. However, in their second year in Coahuila y Texas the government charged the colonists a hundred percent duty on goods.²

In addition to the loss of duty free goods, the Mexican government created a manifesto at the beginning of the Texas Revolution that threatened the new Irish colonists and their ownership of land. On July 5, 1835 General Martin Perfecto de Cos, a Mexican brigadier general who fought during the Texas Revolution, printed a manifesto for the colonists of the departments of Texas, Bexar, Nacogdoches, and Brazos. Cos threatened the people that if they participated in the rebellion or helped other rebels they could lose everything. Ethnicity, family, and friendship closely connected the Irish colonists that lived in the Power-Hewetson Colony. For example, James Power's nephews, Thomas O'Connor and Martin Power, traveled from County Wexford, Ireland to Coahuila y Texas. If they became involved in the Revolution the whole tightly connected colony would then be vulnerable to the manifesto. With the threat by General Cos many of the Irish colonists risked a high likelihood of being accused of associating with anyone who was part of the rebellion especially since many were related or had immigrated together.

The Mexican government also broke the promise of allowing the Irish colonists to have a state militia as article eight of the empresario contract. However, "the [Mexican] Federal Congress, on March 31, 1835, [passed] a law limiting the state militia to one man per 500

¹ Rosalie B. Hart Priour, "Memoirs of Rosalie B. Hart Priour," vertical files in the Institute of Texan Cultures Library, Irish Texans Section, Rosalie B. Hart Priour folder, 28.

² Priour, "Memoirs of Rosalie B. Hart Priour," 28.

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in

the Texas Revolution

inhabitants.”³ This change meant the Power-Hewetson Colony’s militia would consist of only two or three men, thus the colonists would not be able to defend themselves from any attacks from the Karankawas or vagrants. These broken provisions convinced the colonists that the Mexican government did not truly concern itself with the welfare of the new colonists or the promises it had made.

Whether the Irish colonists of the Power-Hewetson Colony joined the Revolution because of broken promises, threats to their independence, or invasions and loss of their land, they played a role in Texas Revolution. Some participated in the Texas Revolution as informants, suppliers, or as soldiers. Empresario James Power became an informant for the Texas Army. Since Power had familial and business connections in Mexico he was “was able to provide advance intelligence of the Mexican armies” to the Texas Army and provisional government that other settlers could not.⁴ Power lived near El Copano Bay, which proved helpful when informing on the Mexican Army movements to the Texas Army. For instance, in September 1835 the Mexican army under General Cos entered the Copano Bay in a warship, Power sent “Walter Lambert, to Victoria and Goliad to inform the people of the presence of the Mexican Army.”⁵ Without Power’s information, the colonists of Goliad and Victoria would have been unprepared for the invasion. Power also provided important information to his friend General Sam Houston, they had first met at the General Convention in November 1835, and Power passed along orders from General Houston to contingents of the Texas Army as shown in

³ Hobart Huson, *Refugio: A Comprehensive History of Refugio County from Aboriginal Times to 1953, Vol. I Aboriginal to 1861* (Woodsboro, Texas: The Rooke Foundation, Inc., 1956), 211.

⁴ Graham Davis, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 115.

⁵ William H. Oberste, *Texas Irish Empresarios and Their Colonies: Power and Hewetson McMullen and McGloin Refugio San Patricio* (Austin, Texas: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1953), 153.

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in

the Texas Revolution

this letter from General Houston to Power dated, December 28, 1835. Power continued spying for the Texas Army throughout the whole revolution. By October 1836 Power had “styled himself as ‘Commandant Texas Spying Company’ confirming his role in supplying military intelligence for the Texan Army.”⁶

Power also contributed supplies and food to the Texas Army. “Power provided mules, oxen, and beef cattle for government use in 1835, and in 1836 he supplied clothing for the army at Victoria, including 105 pairs of duck pantaloons and 365 shirts.”⁷ Many other Irish immigrants from the southern area also supplied the Texas Army. Nicholas Fagan, an Irish colonist survivor of the Goliad massacre, provided the Texas Army with “corn and beef to Mission Refugio in December, 1835, and February, 1836.”⁸ Other men such as James McGloin and Thomas O’Connor also provided food and supplies that the Texas Army needed to defeat Mexico. Support from the Irish colonists with their generous donations and supplies reinforced the Texas Army throughout the Texas Revolution.

Finally, the Irish colonists participated in the fight for independence and the defense of their land as soldiers in the Texas Army. Approximately forty Irish colonists from the Power-Hewetson Colony volunteered in the Texas Army. They supported the fight for independence from the very beginning. On October 9, 1835 during the battle for the Goliad garrison, twelve volunteers from the Power-Hewetson Colony joined Captain George M. Collinsworth’s company. Captain Collinsworth and the company won the struggle and gained the Goliad garrison on October 9, 1835, which was a strategic point in southern Texas. Not only did several

⁶ Davis, *Land!*, 147.

⁷ Davis, *Land!*, 147.

⁸ Davis, *Land!*, 147.

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in the Texas Revolution

Irish colonists help win this victory but also the garrison was later reinforced with men from Power-Hewetson Colony including Power. The South Texas theater was small, which means the small number of Irish colonists participating in the Texas Revolution counted more than in the other theaters. The Irish played a role as soldiers in winning one of the first struggles in the war in South Texas. By the time the Battle of San Jacinto took place on April 21, 1836 the Irish colonists had joined the fight for Texas independence. “In all, about one hundred Irish-born participated in the Battle of San Jacinto. They made up about one-seventh of the Texas Army that participated in the battle.”⁹ Specifically the six participants from the Power-Hewetson colony were “Walter Lambert, William McGuill, George Morris, James O’Connor, Thomas O’Connor, and Daniel O’Driscoll.”¹⁰ Some of these men like Walter Lambert had been fighting in the Revolution since the beginning.

The Power-Hewetson Irish colonists supported the fight for Texas independence. They are remembered and commemorated through historical markers and monuments as Texan soldiers. Still, their Irish ethnicity is never mentioned in these commemorative sites. This proves problematic when trying to form a correct public memory of the history of the town. The site of many of these markers and monuments are not well publicized locations, which hampers the formation of a collective memory of Irish involvement in the Texas Revolution. Both Refugio and Aransas counties do not publicize any of their historical markers or monuments through tourism guides, advertising, or promotional brochures, which hinders the public’s knowledge of the markers and monuments existence.

⁹ John Brendan Flannery, *The Irish Texans* (San Antonio: The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, 1980), 11.

¹⁰ Davis, *Land!*, 257, Appendix 4.

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in the Texas Revolution

Suggestions for Classroom Exercises:

Elementary School: 4th Grade: (Social Studies TEKS 3A, 3A, 3B, 12A, 14B)

1. Have the students analyze the causes that motivated the Irish colonists to join the Texas Revolution?
2. Before teaching the students about the Irish colonists in the Texas Revolution, have the class make a list on the board of what things did to participate and help the Texas Army during the Texas Revolution. Then after the lesson have the class make a second list on the board and have the students compare and contrast the two lists.
3. Have the students identify some events during the Texas Revolution and discuss the Irish colonists' involvement in the revolution.
4. Have the students discuss how the Irish colonists used their professions to help the Irish colonists such as merchants and ranchers supplying the army.
5. Have the students explain how the Mexican government's broken promises influenced the Irish colonists support for Texas independence.
6. Have the students look at the Texas Bounties received by Thomas O'Connor and Walter Lambert to discuss the participation of Irish colonists as soldiers in the Texas Revolution.

Middle School 7th Grade: (Social Studies TEKS 3A, 3B, 10B, 14B, 21A)

1. Have the students write a one-page essay on why the Irish fought in the war and provide specific examples.
2. Have the students compare and contrast the origins of Anglo-American Texas Army leaders versus the Irish men fighting and the reasons these men fought.

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in the Texas Revolution

3. Have the students read the Texas Declaration of Independence and the United States Declaration of Independence and have them discuss why these documents were created. Have the students discuss if the Texas Declaration could apply to current Texas government and politics.
4. Have the students examine how geographic location affected the Irish colonists during the Texas Revolution.
5. Have the students identify ways that the primary sources that are typically used to analyze the reasons for the Irish support of Texas independence can be bias.
6. Have the students compare the origins of the Goliad Declaration signers and their future involvement as soldiers in the Texas Army during the Revolution.

Middle School 8th Grade: (Social Studies TEKS 4C, 6D, 10B, 16C, 24D)

1. Have the students compare and contrast the United States Revolution to the Texas Revolution and the involvement of different ethnic groups in these revolutions.
2. Have the students interpret a historical map and how geographic location influenced the Texas Revolution. For example the closeness to the United States and the lots of American people settled in Texas by the time of the Revolution.
3. Have the students examine the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the Texas Declaration Independence and compare the two documents.
4. Analyze the photographs of historical markers and have the students discuss how the markers describe the Irish involvement in the Texas Revolution.
5. Have the students explain how the Texas Revolution impacted the Mexican War.

Educational Packet: Power-Hewetson Colonists as participants in
the Texas Revolution

6. Have the students examine the letter from Sam Houston to James Power and have them write a one page essay explaining the importance of informants during wartime.