

3 *The Texas Land Grant* **AN INTRODUCTION**

To truly understand the connection between the early settlers and land in Texas, it's important to have a basic understanding of the land granting process. Settlers came to Texas in the 19th century for the same reasons many come today—economic opportunity and a chance for a better life. At a time when money was scarce, land became the currency and symbol of prosperity for many immigrants. No wonder the Texas General Land Office was the first state agency established in the Republic of Texas!

Many teachers of Texas history may be unfamiliar with how settlers legally obtained public land in Texas. There were a variety of programs that were developed during the 19th century to dispose of public lands, but the fundamental process was essentially the same. Incorporating land grant history into lessons is much easier once the basic land granting process is understood.

The following is a general introduction to the basic land grant process after Texas gained its independence from Mexico. For more detailed information on the history of land grants in Texas, please download the Texas General Land Office Teachers Guide.

WHY STUDY LAND GRANTS?

The study of land grants is interesting because of the stories they tell. Some files contain letters, notes or affidavits that give us a glimpse into the settler's personal history. A typical land grant file contains the following information:

- ★ **WHO** settled the land.
- ★ **WHY** he or she received a land grant.
- ★ **WHEN** the settler arrived in Texas.
- ★ **WHERE** he or she settled.

TEKS

When researching land files, you will find TEKS connections to language arts, science, math and social studies. Many of the early land grants are even in Spanish. The following address only social studies 7th grade geography, and are examples of how our land history relates to state curriculum.

SS, GEOGRAPHY, 8

- B. Pose and answer questions about geographic distributions and patterns in Texas during the 19th and 20th centuries.

SS, GEOGRAPHY, 10

- A. Identify ways in which Texans have adapted to and modified the environment and analyze the consequences of the modifications.
- B. Explain ways in which geographic factors have affected the political, economic, and social development of Texas.

SS, GEOGRAPHY, 11

- A. Analyze why immigrant groups came to Texas and where they settled.

VOCABULARY

public domain

land owned by the government.

County Board of Land Commissioners, Secretary of War, Adjutant General's Office

government entities authorized to issue land certificates.

land certificate

a legal document issued by a government, entitling a grantee to a certain acreage of land.

grantee

a person to whom a land certificate is issued.

patentee

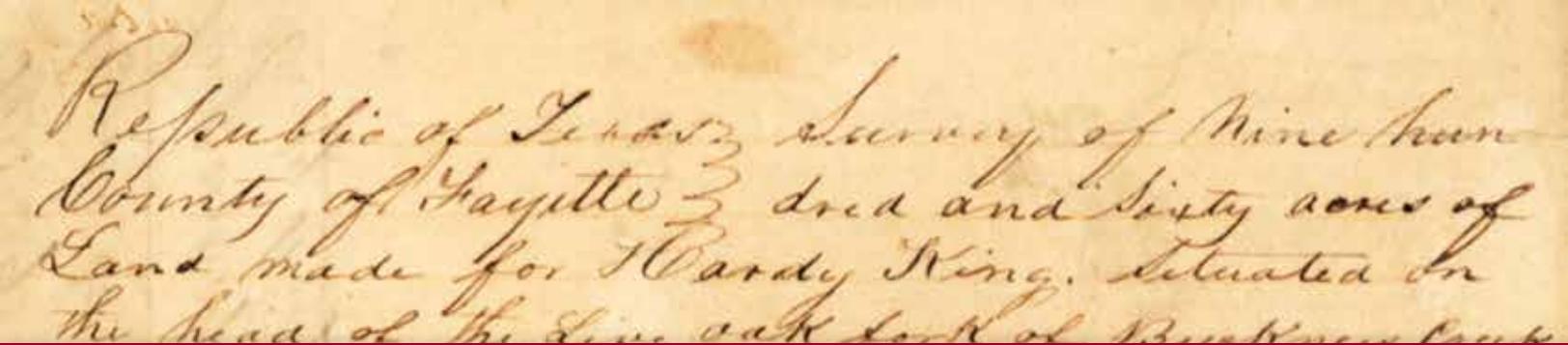
a person who receives a land title.

field notes

notes taken by a lawful surveyor that describe the boundaries (metes and bounds) of a tract of land.

patent

a form of land title by which land was transferred from the government to the private sector.



Republic of Texas, Survey of Nine Acres
County of Fayette, drea and Sixty acres of
Land made for Hardy King, situated on
the head of the ...

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Basic Land Grant Process

Refer to the examples folder that came packaged with Lesson Plan 3 to see real examples of the following documents.

ELIGIBILITY

A settler eligible for a land grant for immigrating to Texas could apply before a **County Board of Land Commissioners**, which determined eligibility based on sworn oral testimony from the settler. Settlers might have testified about when they arrived in Texas, if they were married or single and how long they had lived in Texas, depending on the land grant program in place. Soldiers eligible for land grants applied to the **Secretary of War** or the **Adjutant General's Office** and presented written or sworn evidence of military service. Examples of eligibility documents include: headrights, bounty grants, donation grants, affidavits, statements of service, etc.

LAND CERTIFICATE

Once eligibility was established, a **land certificate** was issued. The settler, or certificate **grantee**, could then locate any unclaimed land in the **public domain** of Texas, or sell the certificate to someone else. Most settlers looked for land that had access to water, roads, and other resources.

SURVEY

After locating the land, the settler would then have it legally surveyed. The surveyor would determine the property lines based on a system of *metes and bounds*. Metes and bounds was a simple way to describe the boundaries of a land grant. The surveyor would write down the description of the metes and bounds. These are called **field notes**.

PATENT

After the land was legally surveyed, the settler sent his certificate and the surveyor's field notes to the Texas General Land Office. The Land Office would then issue the settler a **patent**. A patent is essentially a title to the land. When a patent is issued, the land is legally transferred from the sovereign (government) to private ownership.

ACTIVITY STEPS

A review of the key terms and their connections is necessary for students to thoroughly comprehend the land grant process in early Texas history. Use the following suggested activity as reinforcement of the basic process.

1. Copy the vocabulary card sheets provided. The key words and terms have been provided.
2. Have the students find the definitions and write them in their own words on the reverse of the appropriate word or term.
3. In pairs, have the students quiz each other on the information.
4. When you are satisfied that the students have a basic understanding of the land grant process, use the Jeopardy template provided to create categories of information and their corresponding answers under each category.

EXTENSION

- ★ Research your family's heritage using the Archives and Records land grant database.
- ★ Create stories based on facts from land grant files.
- ★ Read surveyor field notes for clues to the geographic location of a land grant.
- ★ Research land grant information to link land history to famous Texans during the Revolution and Republic eras.
- ★ Research original land grants relevant to your county or town to discover the first settlers in your area.
- ★ Create an exhibit that explains the land grant process in early Texas history.

The Texas General Land Office values your thoughts and feedback. Please report oversights, errors or omissions or other comments to as well as particular activities that students find interesting. Comment may be directed to the Texas General Land Office Archives at email@glo.texas.gov.

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THE LAND GRANT PROCESS: VOCABULARY CARD SHEET

Print and cutout these words and terms associated with the early land granting process in Texas. For each word or term, write the definitions of each on the reverse of the appropriate in your own words.

✂ Cut along the dotted line.

1837	Texas General Land Office	Land Grant	Public Domain
Adjutant General	Land Certificate	Grantee	Patentee
Field Notes	Patent	Secretary of War	Eligibility
Immigrants	Board of Land Commissioners	Sovereign	Surveyor
metes and bounds			

Use these words and terms, and other information from the reading to create categories and answers for the Jeopardy review game.