

The Bandera PROPHECY

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Today in Texas history

Republic of Texas authorizes ill-fated Peters Colony in North Texas

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On Feb. 4, 1841, the Republic of Texas passed a law authorizing the president to enter into an empresario contract with William S. Peters of Pennsylvania and his associates. The contract required Peters to bring 200 colonists to North Texas every three years.

The colony was headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, and its bumpy history contrasts sharply with that of such earlier colonies as the Austin colony partly because the successful earlier empresarios lived in their colonies and managed them personally.

After the initial authorizing law, the Peters colony entered four contracts with the republic. Each was an effort to correct some defect in the previous one, or to relax the demands of the government on colony officials, who failed to bring in the requisite colonists. Peters and his investors soon gave up, and in 1844 the Texas Emigration and Land Company was founded to take over the colony.

The company continued the earlier management's precedents for rapacious demands on the colonists and inept management. The installation in 1845 of the officious Henry O. Hedgcoxe as the company's agent in residence inflamed the colonists and precipitated the Hedgcoxe War, in which the agent was driven from the colony.

A settlement was eventually reached, and the deadline for colonists to file their claims was extended to May 7, 1853. But it took nearly 10 legislative enactments over nearly 20 years to bring final settlement of the land titles. The colony that helped settle North Texas brought little if any profit to the investors and much disgruntlement to the settlers.