

The Santa Fe Expedition Extension *Advanced*

Unit 6: The Republic of Texas

Name:

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Mirabeau Lamar & the Santa Fe Expedition

In the final months of Mirabeau Lamar's presidency, Lamar sent an expedition of over 300 people to Santa Fe without the approval of the Texas congress. He hoped to establish trade with Santa Fe and to convince New Mexico, which was part of Mexico at the time, to join the Republic of Texas.

The expedition set out in June 1841 and arrived in Santa Fe in September after three incredibly challenging months of travel. They faced food shortages, sickness, Indian attacks, wildfires in the dry terrain of the Great Plains, and often became lost during the journey.

Upon their arrival, they were not welcomed into Santa Fe as they had believed they would be. Instead, they were arrested and marched thousands of miles to Mexico City and then Veracruz, where they were held in the dungeons of Perote prison. The Santa Fe Expedition was a disastrous failure and an embarrassment to Texas and the Lamar administration.

A Texan named Thomas Falconer was one of the members of the expedition. He kept a journal and wrote several letters about his experience on the Santa Fe Expedition. His accounts were published in newspapers across Texas at that time. In this lesson, you will read excerpts from Falconer's writings to get a glimpse into the firsthand experience of the hardships and struggles that the participants of the Santa Fe expedition encountered.

What was the Santa Fe expedition and why was it significant? What primary source materials will we use in this assignment to gain a better understanding of this event?

Thomas Falconer's Account of the Santa Fe Expedition

The following primary source excerpts were taken from an account of the Santa Fe Expedition written by expedition member, Thomas Falconer. Falconer's account was published in the Houston *Morning Star* newspaper on Tuesday May 17, 1842, a few months after most expedition members had been captured, imprisoned, and released. His account described his experience of the events from the beginning to the end of the expedition.

"We left Austin on the 18th of June, 1841, for the camp at Brushy, about twelve miles off. At this place we found the expedition to Santa Fe, prepared to start..."

"It consisted of a military force - of the merchants and of others who had joined the expedition for the purpose of pleasure and of information..."

"There were fourteen wagons laden with the goods of merchants, two wagons containing the property of Gen. McLeod, the commissioners and the guests, and a doctor's wagon for the sick. Each of the military companies also had a baggage wagon. The wagons were drawn by six to eight pair of oxen, and the cannon by mules."

1. Based on the information Falconer presented in the excerpts above, in what ways might the expedition's preparations be beneficial to them on their journey? In what ways might these preparations cause challenges?

“All that was necessary for success, it was assumed, was prepared. The merchants felt, no doubt, that they would find a favorable market for their goods, that they would be peaceably received, and would be allowed to trade without interruption. That their position was precarious did not appear to be imagined by any, or that goods entering Mexico from Texas were liable to confiscation. All were confident and all satisfied.”

2. What assumptions, expectations, or beliefs did many expedition members have at the start of the journey? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

“On the morning of September 4th, at about half past 8 o’clock, there was an alarm of Indians. In a few minutes they were seen driving off all our cattle and 83 horses. – They were soon out of sight of the camp...Seventy-three men were, in consequence of this loss, compelled to march on foot. Raymond, the Mexican, was on this occasion killed and scalped, and a few days afterwards Glasse met with the same fate. Mercer, who joined us from the Brazos, was speared and died after lingering for some time. Four other men...never returned, and were no doubt killed.”

3. What was one significant challenge the expedition faced according to this excerpt? How did this challenge affect the journey to Santa Fe?

The Capture of the Santa Fe Expedition

Upon the expedition's arrival in Santa Fe, a Mexican military force intercepted them and demanded their surrender. In his account published in the Texas newspaper, Thomas Falconer included the text of a letter that Mexican Colonel Diego Archuleta had sent to New Mexico governor, Manuel Armijo (spelled Armigo in the newspaper article). Archuleta's letter instructed Armijo to order the surrender of the Texans, confiscate their weapons, and arrest them, but not to harm them. Armijo then had the letter presented to the Texan military leader, General McLeod, demanding the Texans' surrender. An excerpt from Archuleta's letter is included below.

"...You will also state to the general commanding the camp of the enemy, in case of his not surrendering, that the propositions made will remain, with complete liberty to fight, as the respective Generals shall think fit, advising him, however, with the best faith, that the forces under my command are five times his number, and that he will be responsible to God and man for the blood that may be shed by his feeble and disproportioned camp. Having surrendered, you will treat the General and the other officers according to the rules and ordinances, and the troops the same, conducting them securely until you shall present them at this camp."

*- Headquarters at the Galenas
Oct. 5, 1841, Manuel Armigo*

4. What warning did Manuel Armijo, the governor of Mexico, give to the Texans if they chose not to surrender to the Mexican forces?

5. Based on the language used in his letter, what can you infer about how Governor Armijo viewed the members of the Texan expedition?

Thomas Falconer's Thoughts on the Expedition

During his imprisonment in Perote prison in Veracruz, Falconer wrote a letter to his friend Alfred Austin (no relation to Stephen F. Austin.) In the letter, Falconer gave his opinions of the purpose and significance of the Santa Fe Expedition. Let's take a look.

<p><i>"In June 1841, I visited Austin where an Expedition was then about to start for Santa Fe. The objects were, professedly, for the purpose of trade... The [merchants] were assured that there would be no difficulty in their trading at Santa Fe... It was not improbable that a trade with Texas and Santa Fe would be allowed."</i></p> <p><i>"As respected the trade with Santa Fe, it, from the first appeared to me, that the expedition was useless. Santa Fe is every day becoming less and less important. It was the most convenient and accessible overland depot for goods from the United States. At present, this is not the case. The state of Chihuahua (pronounced Chiwawa) was the great mart for these goods."</i></p> <p><i>"Trade, however, was not the chief object of the expedition. It really was to take possession of Santa Fe. The private instructions to the commissioners direct this to be done. They falsify the representations made of peaceful expectations and prove the utmost immorality of conduct to have been practiced toward the merchants and even toward the soldiers."</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did Thomas Falconer initially believe the purpose of the Santa Fe Expedition to be? 2. What were Falconer's thoughts on the importance of Santa Fe? 3. What was the true purpose of the Santa Fe Expedition, according to Falconer? Based on the language he used, what can you infer about his feelings concerning this purpose?
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