

JUAN SEGUIN PARK

The Juan Seguin Park is located in the old town of San Jacinto, on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou and the west bank of the San Jacinto River, near where the two waters meet, north of the San Jacinto Battlefield, Monument and the Battleship Texas. The Park is just opposite the south landing of the Lynchburg Ferry. The ancient Lynchburg Ferry road forms the eastern boundary of the Park. Here is where hundreds of settlers, their families, priceless possessions, and animals waited to cross on the Ferry to escape the Mexican Army in April 1836.

When Juan Seguin was only six years old, San Antonio was invaded by organizers of a revolt led by Juan Bautista de las Casas, a former militia officer who was supported by the Canary Island families. De las Casas took control of Bexar Villa as San Antonio was known at the time, only to be overthrown and beheaded by the Spanish authorities within the year. About the same, Bernardo Gutierrez and James McGee began an uprising in Nacogdoches that spread into San Antonio by 1813 over the Spanish edicts forbidding trade between Texas and the US state of Louisiana in wool, cattle, and horses.

New trade routes were opened to Texas from Louisiana that included the Opelousas Road (Orange to Lake Charles) and Trammell's Trace (Nacogdoches to St. Louis, Missouri). Trammel traded guns, powder, shot and salt to St. Louis and Tennessee merchants. Salt had been selling at thirty dollars a bushel at Ball's Bluff, Tennessee. Words like "aggressive American" were attributed to Trammel and, in turn, the Texas Tejanos were called "speculators of trade." As a teenager, Juan Seguin saw the proud old ranching families around San Antonio de Bexar and Nacogdoches heavily disrupted in their lives by the political warring across Texas caused by the harsh and unjust rules of the Spanish authorities acting under orders from Spain. "Free Mexico" continued to be the undercurrent among the old settlers of Texas.

Juan's father served as the Postmaster of Bexar District for thirty years being elected to the Congress in 1823 – 24. At age seventeen, Juan Seguin took over the responsibility, assisting his mother to run the Bexar District Post Office during his father's Congressional term. In 1825, at age nineteen, Juan Seguin married the daughter of one of the area's most important Tejano ranching families, Maria Gertrudis Flores de Abrego. Ten children were born to the couple. Rearing his family in San Antonio, Juan Seguin served next as alderman (1828), then as alcalde (1833), having already served on several electoral boards in the city. In 1834, at age 27, he acted as political chief for the Bexar Department, over a population of 4,000.

During his service as alcalde, Sam Houston began practicing law in Nacogdoches and Thomas Rusk had moved to the same city that had a growing population of 3500 residents. The total Texas population was estimated by Col. Almonte at 26,000 "civilized" individuals, including 2,000 slaves and 15,400 Indians. However, these numbers were probably very conservative due to the rapid influx on a daily basis of Americans from the United States. Augustus Chapman Allen, his wife, Charlotte Baldwin, and brother, John Kirby Allen, were listed among the residents of Nacogdoches. The Allen's frequented San Antonio, speculating in local land sales.

By 1835, Juan Seguin, at only 28 years of age, had eleven years of public service behind him when he entered his military career on the Federalist side to lead a militia company into Monclova against the Centralist forces. In October the same year, he led a company of thirty-seven men to take on the cause of Stephen F. Austin at Gonzales. For his service, Austin honored Juan Seguin with the rank of captain. Captain Seguin then led his men on scouting and supply operations for the growing revolutionary army, returning to San Antonio to battle General Martin Perfecto de Cos' army.

Housing in San Antonio was more substantial than that of Nacogdoches. Residential buildings in Nacogdoches, with few exceptions, were old Mexican *jacals*, constructed by inserting pickets in the ground and fastening them at the top by a plate, daubing the interstices with local red mud. A few buildings were of log, covered with clapboard and accented with chimneys of mud. San Antonio residents, to that time, constructed buildings of cut limestone and adobe bricks faced with plaster inside and out, which was adapted to the drier climate of that region and favored by the local citizenry. The Anglo American residents and early trappers moving into eastern Texas fashioned their homes from cypress and heart pine logs that were readily available in the forests between the Brazos and Sabine Rivers.

The old mission buildings, abandoned by the Catholic clergy in 1815, were excellent structures of cut limestone, making a natural headquarters for the expanding Texian cause. The mission of San Antonio de Valero, later known as the "Alamo" for the early Spanish troops stationed at the mission, became a refuge for the Texian forces in San Antonio when Santa Anna's army arrived there in spring of 1836. Juan Seguin missed the battle when he was dispatched on 28 February as a courier to meet Sam Houston then camping outside of Gonzales. At Gonzales, Juan Seguin organized a unit of local Tejano ranchers to join Houston's army as the rear guard. Juan Seguin's unit was the only Tejano military forces to fight at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. For his service, Juan Seguin was awarded the promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel of the Texian Army and ordered to take possession of San Antonio which he did on 4 June 1836.

In 1858, Juan Seguin wrote and published his purpose for joining the Texian Revolution in 1835 in order to implode the malicious, false rumors and attacks on his personal and political life. The extensive account details his actions between 1834 and 1842 during the overthrow of the Mexican forces and the formation of the Republic government in Texas.

To his credit, Juan Seguin was solely responsible for saving the city of San Antonio from unwarranted destruction in March 1837. During that month, Juan Seguin was ordered by General Felix Houston to destroy San Antonio and transfer the inhabitants to the east bank of the Brazos River. Lieutenant-Colonel Switzer of the Volunteers joined Juan Seguin in San Antonio to assist in carrying out that order. Juan Seguin noted the measure as premature and unjust, appealed to the President to rescind the order. The President agreed with Juan Seguin and sent orders to Felix Houston to cease the operation. Juan Seguin then acquired a "bitter enemy" in the likes of Felix Houston, even though Seguin had not been paid in money or goods for his command. Jose Antonio Navarro, seeing the situation, provided Juan Seguin and his command in San Antonio with goods of more than \$3000 in value.

During the next few years, from 1837 through 1839, Juan Seguin was rewarded by the citizens of San Antonio by his election as Senator to the Congress, then as Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs, and later as Mayor of the city. General Rusk was a close friend and supporter of Juan Seguin. Not so of the numbers of new arrivals fleeing from debts mounted in the United States to the Texas Republic and San Antonio. Juan Seguin writes that these were the scum of society who also became enemies of the richest families of San Antonio.

Juan Seguin was proud of his military career stating that he never deviated from the line of duty and never shed or caused to be shed, human blood un-necessarily, never insulted a prisoner and always drew a distinction between his obligations as a soldier on the battlefield and as a civilized man afterwards. Juan Seguin embraced the cause of Texas and liberty by filling an honorable role in the “ranks of the conquerors of San Jacinto” as a leader of the only Tejano force to participate in the fight. Seguin died in Laredo but his remains were brought back to the town of his namesake, Seguin, and he rests in a grove of trees on the side of a small hill overlooking the Guadalupe River. Texas honors this man and his supporters.