

Section

3

Political and Economic Issues

Main Ideas

1. Political parties became active in Texas for the first time after annexation.
2. Texas used its public lands to pay of its remaining debt, to promote education, and to improve life.

Why It Matters Today

Texas governors in the 1840s and 1850s tried to improve conditions in the state. Use current events sources to find information about what issues the governor of Texas faces today.



TEKS: 1B, 4C, 17A, 21B, 21D, 21H, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the issues leaders faced after annexation.

Key Terms and People

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Know-Nothing Party
- Elisha M. Pease

The Story Continues

In 1857, near the end of his career in the U.S. Senate, Sam Houston decided to run for governor of Texas as an independent candidate. Houston knew the race would be difficult, so he planned an aggressive campaign. “The people want excitement, and I had as well give it as anyone.” Houston campaigned vigorously throughout the state. He traveled in a red buggy, sometimes sleeping on the ground.



Political Parties

Political parties had not existed in the Republic of Texas. People did band together to support particular candidates for offices, such as Sam Houston or Mirabeau Lamar, but voters had not organized into parties to promote political issues.

Parties were not active in elections for the first few years of Texas statehood either. Eventually, though, the two parties that dominated politics in the United States gained footholds in Texas as well. By the late 1840s, Texans had started to join the Democratic and Whig parties.

The Democratic Party was especially popular in Texas. Democrats generally represented the views of farmers and small business owners. The party was very strong throughout the South, where most Texas leaders came from originally. In addition, Andrew Jackson, a former U.S. president and a favorite of Texans, had been a Democrat. Like many Democrats, Jackson had supported the annexation of Texas.

The **Democratic Party** was so strong in Texas that every governor elected between 1845 and 1857 was a Democrat. This popularity led to some problems within the party, though. Because they usually had little to fear from opposing political groups, the Democrats often fought among themselves. By the 1850s the Democratic Party had split into two rival factions. One faction favored a strong central government, while the other supported the power of the states.

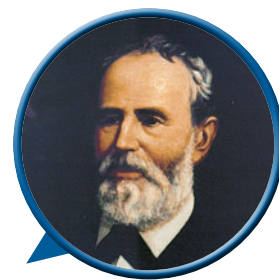
The other major political party in the United States was the Whig Party. Not many Texans supported the Whigs, who stood for banking and large business interests. They had opposed the annexation of Texas. These were not popular positions with most Texans.

The Whig Party collapsed in the 1850s because of divisions over slavery. In its absence, many Whigs in the North joined the newly formed **Republican Party**. Republicans believed that slavery should be banned in all states and territories of the United States. For that reason, the Republican Party had almost no support in Texas or the South.

In the mid-1850s a third party—the American Party, more commonly called the **Know-Nothing Party**—entered the U.S. political scene. This party acquired its name because when asked questions by outsiders, its secretive members answered, “I know nothing.” Its members supported slavery and wanted to keep immigrants and Catholics out of government. The Know-Nothings gained some support in Texas, but most Texans were not interested in their views. Many Texans were recent immigrants or Catholics or both.

For a short time, rumors circulated that Sam Houston had joined the Know-Nothing Party. Houston denied this, saying, “Now, of the Know-Nothings I know nothing; and of them I care nothing.” The appeal of the Know-Nothing Party faded quickly among Texans. By 1857 the Know-Nothing Party of Texas had disappeared.

Reading Check Summarizing What were the beliefs of each of the parties that challenged Democrats in Texas?



BIOGRAPHY

Elisha M. Pease

(1812–1883) One of the popular early governors was Elisha M. Pease. Pease moved to Texas in 1835. He fought in the Battle of Gonzales and helped write the Republic’s constitution. Pease was governor of Texas three times. Under his leadership, the legislature created the Permanent School Fund. In addition, he led the effort to pay off the state’s debt. When Pease left office, the state was debt-free and in solid financial condition.

Why is Governor Pease considered an effective leader?

★ Early Governors of Texas

About two months after James Pinckney Henderson was sworn in as the state’s first governor, war broke out between the United States and Mexico. Henderson, who had served as a general in the Texas Revolution, wanted to serve his new country in the war. He asked the legislature for permission to step down from his office temporarily to rejoin the military. The legislature agreed. Henderson took command of the Second Texas Regiment in the U.S.–Mexican War and thus spent much of his term away from Texas.

Lieutenant Governor Albert C. Horton fulfilled the governor’s duties during this time. When the war ended, Henderson resumed his office. However, he chose not to run for a second term in 1847.

LINKING Past to Present

The Governor's Mansion

The Governor's Mansion in Austin is the fourth-oldest governor's mansion still in use in the United States. The early governors of Texas lived in Austin hotels or boardinghouses. In 1854 the legislature set aside \$17,000 to build an executive mansion. The building was completed in 1856. Elisha M. Pease was the first governor to live in the mansion. In 1976 the mansion became a National Historic Landmark. Today visitors are welcome to tour the mansion.

Why is it important for the governor to have a residence in Austin?



In that year Texas voters elected George T. Wood as their new governor. Wood was a plantation owner and friend of Sam Houston's. Frontier defense and disputes over the location of the state's northern and western boundaries were key issues during his administration. Wood ran for re-election in 1849 but faced strong opposition from Houston's opponents. They vowed to "move heaven and earth to defeat Wood."

Wood lost the election to Peter Hansborough Bell, a veteran of the Texas Revolution. During his two terms as governor, Bell tried to add part of New Mexico to Texas. However, he resigned from office to take a seat in the U.S. Congress. Lieutenant Governor J. W. Henderson became the governor for the remaining 28 days of Bell's term.

In 1853, Texans elected **Elisha M. Pease** to the state's highest office. Pease was an active popular governor who supported education and other reforms. He also worked to improve the state's financial situation. During his two terms, Pease paid off the state's debt. When he left office, he left Texas in excellent financial shape.

As governor, Pease also began an extensive building program in Austin. Many public buildings, including the Governor's Mansion, the General Land Office building, and the former Capitol—which burned down in 1881—were constructed as part of this program.

In 1857 Sam Houston ran for governor against Hardin Runnels. Houston campaigned hard for the office. He gave 60 speeches in little more than two months during the hot Texas summer. Even so, Houston lost in a bitter campaign—the only election he ever lost. During Runnels's term in office, conflicts between settlers and American Indians increased. Runnels proved unable to deal with the problem effectively. When Houston ran against Runnels again in 1859, he defeated Runnels easily. With that victory, Houston became the only person to serve Texas as army commander, president of the Republic, senator, and governor.

Reading Check Sequencing Name in order the governors of Texas during the 1840s and 1850s.

★ Debts and Land Issues

The first few governors of Texas, like the presidents of the Republic, faced issues of public debt and land. At the time of annexation, Texas owed some \$10 million. Under the terms of the annexation agreement, the state was responsible for paying this debt.

The state tried to raise money to pay off the debt by selling public land. The state had plenty of land to sell. But with an asking price of 50 cents per acre, there were few buyers. The debt continued to rise, reaching more than \$12 million by 1850.

Together, the federal government and Texas developed a plan to eliminate the debt. In the Compromise of 1850, Texas gave up its claim to 67 million acres of land in present-day Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Wyoming. In return, the federal government gave Texas money to help pay the debt. In this way, the debt was paid off completely by 1855.

Even without these claims, Texas had millions of acres of public land. The state gave much of it to settlers. These settlers had to live on the land and improve it in some way—typically by farming. The state also set aside land for colleges, public schools, and universities. Additional land was designated for roads, harbors, and railroads. By 1898 there was no unclaimed public land left in Texas.

Reading Check Finding the Main Idea How did the government use public land to improve the state?

CONNECTING TO

ECONOMICS AND MATH

The Republic's Debt

Because the Republic's government spent more than it received in revenue, the public debt grew by leaps and bounds. As the debt went unpaid and even increased, the interest mounted. Even after Texas had become a state, interest continued to increase the amount of the debt. By 1851, interest alone on the debt totaled \$3.1 million.

The following chart shows how the debt accumulated by the Republic grew from 1836 to 1851. Study it and answer the questions.

YEAR	DEBT
1836	\$1.25 million
1845	\$9.9 million
1851	\$12.4 million

Source: Handbook of Texas

Interpreting Data

1. By how many millions of dollars did the Republic's debt increase between 1836 and 1845?
2. How many times greater was the debt in 1851 than the debt in 1836?



Section 3 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Identify and explain

the significance of each of the following in Texas history:

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Know-Nothing Party
- Elisha M. Pease

2. Sequencing

Copy the time line below. Use it to show the governors between 1845 and 1859.

- 1845 _____
- 1847 _____
- 1849 _____
- 1851 _____
- 1853 _____
- 1855 _____
- 1857 _____
- 1859 _____

3. Finding the Main Idea

- a. What were the positions of the political parties in Texas, and what effect did they have on Texas politics?
- b. How did the state pay its debt?

4. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

Identifying Points of View Write a paragraph describing the Democratic and Whig positions. Explain which was more popular. Consider the following:

- which party opposed slavery
- the popularity of annexation in Texas