

How Did Texas Get (Part of) Its Shape?

The Adams-Onís Treaty

About half of the boundary line of Texas that we recognize today was created in 1819. After The United States purchased Louisiana, no one was sure what the boundaries should be between Spanish territory and American territory. The United States claimed all of the land in the basins of rivers that drained into the Mississippi River. This would have included the Red River and its tributaries, some of which were in land claimed by Spain. In the Adams-Onís Treaty, Spain and the United States agreed on a boundary. The following paragraph is a slightly simplified version of what the treaty actually stated that the boundary line should be.

The boundary shall begin at the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the Sabine River. It shall continue north along that river to 32° N Latitude. Then it shall extend due north until it reaches the Red River. It shall follow the Red River westward to the 100° W Longitude line. It shall run due north to the Arkansas River. After that, it follows the Arkansas River west to its source. If the source of the river is below the 42° N Latitude, then the line will run north to that latitude. If the source of the river is above the 42° N Latitude, then the line will run south to that latitude. The boundary shall continue to follow the 42nd parallel until it reaches the Pacific Ocean.