

MAPPING WEST TEXAS

As you have seen in the earlier maps, most of west Texas was not charted. There were very few inhabitants and no real trails in that area. Then, in 1848, gold was discovered in California and there was a great need for a route across the United States. People also wanted to have access to the lucrative trade in northern Mexico, and to search for a possible route for a railroad.

The elite Army Corps of Topographical Engineers, formed in 1838, were skilled in charting land and rivers, and making maps. They mapped a northern and southern route across Texas, but neither proved satisfactory or easy. To help travelers go across the west, maps not only guided the way, but also showed the location of water, trading posts and Indian tribes. Their work helped reinforce the concept of Manifest Destiny or American Nationalism. Many Americans believed they had a god-given right to claim all the land to the Pacific for the United States.

The importance of accurate maps became obvious at the end of the Mexican American War in 1848. The Disturnell Treaty Map was incorrect and gave Mexico too much land. Later the U.S. had to renegotiate and pay Mexico \$10 million in the Gadsden Purchase.

Discussion: Manifest Destiny

Activity: Compare the different boundaries of Texas before and after the Gadsden Purchase.