After their explorations in the 1500s and 1600s, the Spanish established their presence in Texas. Throughout the Spanish colonial era, the Winedale area continued as a major crossroads of exploration, travel, and trade. Spanish explorers, soldiers, missionaries, and cattle herds traversed the region from San Antonio and La Bahía to Nacogdoches and into Louisiana. Except for the dwindling Tonkawa population, the area remained sparsely settled until Mexican independence from Spain and the beginnings of Anglo colonization in the 1820s.

The large Spanish cattle industry in south Texas exported horses and cattle up the Caminos Reales ("Royal Roads") from San Antonio and La Bahía for sale in Louisiana. The practice of branding livestock was one of many cattle-raising traditions that the Spanish brought to the New World. These traditions also included a comprehensive legal structure regulating cattle taxes, roundups, slaughter, and export and sale.

Stephen F. Austin kept a homespun-bound ledger of land titles issued to the settlers in his colony. Among the original "Old Three Hundred" settlers was William Rabb, who received three titles north of the Colorado River in the summer of 1824. Rabb was vital to the success of Austin's colony because he agreed to establish a mill. Rabb's Prairie in northern Fayette County recalls his role in the history of the region.

This adapted 1835 map of Texas is based on the surveys of empresario Stephen F. Austin and Mexican General Mier y Terán. It depicts the strategic location of the Winedale area near the major road connecting the presidio, missions, and cattle ranches of La Bahía (now Goliad) with Nacogdoches in east Texas. In the 1820s, the area lay in the northern part of Austin's original colony, La Bahía Road, which developed from an old Indian trail and was traveled as early as 1690 by the Alonso de León expedition, crossed the Colorado River near present-day La Grange, then curved to the northeast before joining the Camino Real from San Antonio. It has left its name in Fayette County in the form of La Bahía Prairie.

With independence from Spain in 1821, the new Mexican Republic was eager to settle its sparsely populated northern frontier with stable and prosperous farmers and planters. American Stephen F. Austin promised to fill that need with his first colony in 1822. Austin worked hard to promote peace and stability between the settlers and the Mexican authorities. The Austin Colony was a generous grant, extending far inland from the coast to embrace the area of present-day Winedale (see map above). The original Austin colonists, known as the "Old Three Hundred," included the first Anglo settlers in what is now northern Fayette County.

John and Mary Rabb, William Rabb's son and daughter-in-law, also settled in the area in the 1830s. Pioneer life in the Austin Colony demanded unceasing toil and privation to wrest a livelihood from the wilderness. Mary Rabb left a written reminiscence of those early days:

"... then you Pa left me and the children and the cows and the hogs and went over to the colianas... I stayed all summer by myself ovening my two little children... While you Pa raised corn on the Colorado I would pick the cotton with my fingers and open six hundred threads a round the not every day and milk my cows and pound my meat in a mortar and cook and churn and wash my children..."