SETTLEMENT DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE 1800s placed an initial Anglo American imprint on the Winedale area. Most Austin Colony pioneers were farming families who grew corn, sugar cane, and especially cotton. The soil, climate, and market for cotton attracted southern planters, who brought slaves to the new and abundant lands between the Colorado and the Brazos rivers. Life on the Texas frontier was full of hardship and violence. Austin colonists were swept up in the Texas Revolution in 1836, and remained on constant guard against marauding bands of Comanches.

During this period, William Townsend, and then Samuel K. Lewis, built the first structures on the historic Winedale property.

In 1831, the Mexican government made adjoining grants of a quarter league each to brothers John and William S. Townsend in the Austin Colony at the present site of Winedale. “Townsend” was also the original name given to the settlement now known as Round Top. Early Anglo settlers in the vicinity also included the Leadbetter, Taylor, Slack, and Hill families. Following his marriage in 1834 to the daughter of ferry owner Jesse Burnam, William S. Townsend built a large room on his property with a fireplace and a loft. This was the first, or south, section of what is now called the Lewis-Wagner House. Historic Winedale began to take shape.

DETERIORATING RELATIONS BETWEEN Anglo settlers and the Mexican government culminated in the Texas Revolution of 1835-36. The defeat of the Texans at the Alamo and Goliad spread panic throughout Austin’s colony. Fearing themselves at the mercy of Santa Anna’s punitive expedition, the settlers abandoned their farms and fled to the Louisiana border in the “Runaway Scrape.” The recollections of colonist Mary Rabb evoke both their fear and suffering:

“...then we was all driven out of our houses with our little ones to suffer with cold and hunger and little Loney not three months old when we started out and died on the road ... when the Mexicans was invading Texas ... we'd have called the invading of Texas the runaway trip to your uncle Tommyny's wife only lived one day after the got home there was many births and deaths on that road while we was running from the Mexicans.”

Having survived the Revolution, Winedale area settlers still faced the constant threat of raids by bands of Comanches and their Waco and Kichki allies. Comanche raiding parties regularly penetrated into the heart of the Anglo settlements near the Gulf coast. Thus, the threat of Indian attack was a fact of daily life as much as the toll of working the land.

Samuel K. Lewis came to the Republic of Texas in 1838, and soon acquired land in present-day Fayette County. A surveyor, legislator, and farmer, Lewis bought the Townsend property in 1848 from Indian fighter Capt. John York and developed it into a large cotton plantation worked by his slaves. He then expanded Townsend’s original structure, turning the loft into a second story and adding an identical section to the north, with a breezeway between the two sections. Across the front he added a broad two-story gallery, with cedar pillars running the full height of the structure. Lewis’s house and the nearby four-square barn are the only buildings that today occupy their original sites on the old Lewis farmstead.

As a result of Sam Lewis’s lobbying efforts, a public road was built that passed in front of the Lewis house. By the early 1860s this road served as a stagecoach route from Brenham to Austin. The Lewis residence became known locally as “Sam Lewis’s Stopping Place,” though it seldom lodged travelers. Affleck’s Southern Rural Almanac for 1860, published in nearby Brenham, shows the road from Brenham to La Grange passing through Round Top and “Vine Grove,” a Washington County community that predated Winedale. Sam Lewis died in 1867, but his heirs retained the house until 1882. His grave is located near Winedale in the Richter Cemetery on FM 1457.