

FYI on Texas History

A Free E-Mail Newsletter from Texas Heroes Issue 22 September 15, 2004



*Bob Heinonen as
Stephen F. Austin*

MORE GOOD RESOURCES

The Texas State Historical Association has been a wealth of knowledge for many years. With the **Handbook of Texas History** (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online>), you can look up almost anything you want about Texas history from an authoritative source.

Now comes **My Texas** (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/mytexas>) where individuals such as you and I can record our recollections on-line for posterity. And you can access the recorded stories of others....stuff you won't read in history books.

What a great way to use technology to record history that would otherwise be lost. Now all we need is for you to record your memories, or for you to encourage and guide others to record their memories. Use it or lose it!

LEGENDS OF TEXAS

For a number of issues we have addressed the validity of legends of The Alamo. Now we are going to open up Legends to a broader level....**Legends of Texas**. We would love to have you ask us about legends you have heard and would like us to address. Until we hear from you, we will take a shot at a few we came up with ourselves. Legend: Stephen F. Austin may have had an affair with his first-cousin Mary Austin Holley.

*Life is too short
not to live it as a
Texan!*

Mary Austin Holley, a widow and 47 years of age, came to Texas to visit her cousin Stephen in 1831 with the intent of looking the place over as a potential new home, and to gain material for a book she wanted to write on Texas. She and Stephen had met in 1804 when Stephen, 10 years old, had been sent from the wilds of Missouri to attend the Bacon Academy in Colchester, Connecticut. His 19 year old first-cousin, Mary Austin, who was making plans to marry Horace Holley, was given the assignment of bringing Stephen into society....you see, this was the home stomping grounds of the very prominent Austin clan. After attending the Bacon Academy for three years, Stephen did not see Mary again until she arrived in Texas....25 years later.

For the ten days Mary was in Texas in late 1831, she and Stephen were inseparable. They talked of music, art, philosophy, literature, theology and utopias. They both stayed with Mary's brother Henry Austin plus Henry's wife and five children in a three room home. This was hardly a place for intimacy. Afterward Stephen wrote Mary, "Yes, we will be happy. Before you came I had begun to change the opinion that I was

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*Texas Heroes
574 Altwein Road
Blanco, TX 78606
(830)833-0809
bob.heinonen@texasheroes.net
www.texasheroes.net*

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laboring here solely for others and posterity, and now I am convinced that I shall enjoy some of the fruits of my planting.”

It was four years later that Stephen and Mary saw each other again. Stephen had been sent to the United States at the end of 1835 to raise money for the Texas revolution and to find men to help fight the revolution. “He was alone, and seemed weary after spending about fifteen hours on the ninety miles of icy road from Louisville to Lexington.” For the next 36 hours, he visited with Mary, college classmates, and people interested in the Texas revolution. And then he left....in effect, forever. Within the year, Stephen died; he and Mary never saw each other again.

So did they have a short affair? Probably not considering the circumstances. Would they have had an affair if Stephen hadn't passed away? Possibly. Would they have gotten married? Possibly. In those days it was not considered unacceptable for older first-cousins to marry, plus on the frontier the choice of spouses was sometimes limited to relatives.

CURRICULUM GUIDE

This year, each **Texas Heroes** school performance will be preceded by a *Curriculum Guide* for each character you invite. The *Curriculum Guide* is basically a menu of pre- and post-performance activities and resources for the teacher and students. The use of the *Curriculum Guide* is optional, but in experiments with using them last year, the already powerful impact of each performance was multiplied.

For example, Stephen F. Austin's *Curriculum Guide* includes a list of vocabulary that students should understand in order to better understand what Stephen F. talks about. Another suggestion is that each student come to the performance with at least one question they want to ask Stephen F.

Other suggestions include reading materials, art projects and field trips.

The *Curriculum Guide* is a powerful new tool for the Texas history teacher.

FEES FOR SCHOOLS

The fee for each school performance this school year is \$175 except where more than one performance per character is required because of the size of the school population. We keep our audience size to an “intimate” 150 students which means some schools may require two or more performances. When one character does more than one performance in a row to accommodate a school, the fee per performance is \$160.

TEXAS COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

Bob Heinonen will be at the Annual Conference for TCSS on October 1-2; the conference is being held at the Hotel Intercontinental in Addison. Bob will personally man the **Texas Heroes** booth (Booth #114) and will be presenting two sessions. On Friday afternoon, at 3:00PM, Bob will present “*William Barret Travis - The Man and The Myth*”. On Saturday morning, at 9:15AM, Bob will present “*Stephen F. Austin - The Man and The Myth*”.

Stop by Booth #114 and say “Hello” to Bob.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RIP FORD

Part 22: Inaugurating Governor Coke

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bob.heinonen@texasheroes.net

In 1873, the incumbent Reconstruction Republican Governor of Texas, E. J. Davis, was defeated by Democrat Richard Coke in a landslide decision of the voters. The animosity and tactics of the Reconstruction years had created total distrust between the government of Texas and its citizens. Davis refused to give up the governorship. “Sensing a fight, Ford, . . . left for Austin at once. There he found a crisis almost as foreboding as the secession movement of a decade before.”¹

Since the end of the War Between the States, Texas had been under military rule and then the rule of the Republican Party that had won the war. Any person who had served in the Confederate Army or had held office prior to the War and supported the Confederacy could not hold office or sit on juries. This meant nine-tenths of the white population was not eligible to participate in its government or civil courts. “The problem was that Radical rule in Texas could only be imposed by bayonets or wholesale chicanery and fraud. United States authorities, unable to countenance the first, chose the second.”² Chicanery and fraud it was.

Within this framework, E. J. Davis had become Governor of Texas in 1870. Under his administration, Davis got bills passed extending his stay in office, creating a militia under his direct control, creating a State Police under his control, giving him power to appoint almost all office holders statewide (including mayors and city alderman), and forcing designated newspapers to print official notices (propaganda).

When Davis could no longer put off democratically held elections, the Democrats were able to field a candidate – Richard Coke. “Rupert Richardson wrote of the election of 1873: ‘The genius of legality had forsaken the people; men practiced fraud unashamed.’ What seems to have happened is that the Carpetbaggers had taught the Texans how. Democrat politicians bluntly indicated that power would be won depending on who outfrauded whom. No practice was ignored.”³

The results of the election were overwhelmingly in Cokes favor. . . but Davis claimed the election laws that he had proposed and signed into law were invalid. Davis asked the state supreme court, that he had appointed, to invalidate the election. Davis’ supreme court declared the election law unconstitutional. “This ruling would have prevented Democrats from assuming almost every office in the state, because Democrats had won them all.”⁴

“The supreme court’s order was not resisted—it was ignored. In January, all over Texas the newly elected officials went to their offices and took them over.”⁵ Davis asked U. S. President Grant to intervene with Federal troops as he had in Louisiana, but Grant turned him down:

Your dispatches and letters reciting the action of the supreme court of Texas, in declaring the late election unconstitutional, and asking the use of troops to prevent apprehended violence, are received. The call is not made in accordance with the constitution of the United States and the acts of congress under it, and cannot, therefore, be granted. The act of the legislature of Texas providing for the recent election having received your approval, and both political parties having made nominations, and having conducted a political campaign under its provisions, would it not be prudent, as well as right, to yield to the verdict of the people as expressed by their ballots?⁶

Davis did not do the prudent, right thing and yield to the verdict of the people of Texas. Instead he issued a proclamation telling those elected not to take office until the constitutionality of the situation could be decided.

When Old Rip arrived in Austin, he found chaos. The new legislature was allowed into the Senate Chamber and Hall of Representatives by the keeper of the keys. They officially organized and informed Davis they were ready to begin work. Davis not only refused to accept them, he blockaded the rest of the Capitol Building. A group of armed men in support of Davis gathered in the basement of the capital with muskets and bayonets fixed. Some of the men were white and some were Negro. They were determined to resist with force the taking of the capital by Coke and his government.

Various groups on both sides began to form militia units. The word had gone out from Coke that no shots should be fired or Texas would be put back under military rule. Davis called on the Travis Rifles for support and they marched on the Capitol. Old Rip, the Rifles first commander, intercepted them and ordered them to defend the new legislature and Governor Coke – they obeyed Old Rip.

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It wasn't easy controlling the Travis Rifles. "His men, recalling the humiliating years they had been without political rights, were spoiling for a fight. But they quieted when Ford threatened personally to thrash the first man who stepped out of line. Twice he prevented his men from firing on the Negro militia. Governor Coke remarked later that Old Rip's control over the [Travis] Rifles had probably prevented another civil war. Until January 23, when Davis finally gave up the governorship and went home, Ford never left the capitol, spending nights on a straw couch in the executive office."⁷

"From his office he [Davis] could see the stacked arms of Texas militia—stacked against him. Old Rip Ford, tall, grim, still ruddy-faced and handsome at sixty, was marching toward the Capitol at the head of an armed, angry, but disciplined body of men. They were singing 'The Yellow Rose of Texas' in a mighty roar. Davis surrendered."⁸ Even then, Davis literally refused to surrender the keys to his office. The door had to be kicked in.

Old Rip Ford, now sixty years old, was still in command and continued to influence the destiny of Texas. But Old Rip didn't influence just Texas...he influenced the political scene south of the Rio Grande.

Next Month – Part 23: The Cortina Wars

¹ *Rip Ford's Texas* by John Salmon Ford edited by Stephen B. Oates, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1963, pp xlii-xliii

² *Lone Star – A History of Texas and the Texans* by T. R. Fehrenbach, American Legacy Press, New York, NY 1983, pp 414

³ *ibid*, pp 429

⁴ *ibid*, pp429

⁵ *ibid*, pp429-430

⁶ *Rip Ford's Texas* by John Salmon Ford edited by Stephen B. Oates, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1963, pp 419

⁷ *ibid*, pp xliii

⁸ *Lone Star – A History of Texas and the Texans* by T. R. Fehrenbach, American Legacy Press, New York, NY 1983, pp 431-432