

FYI on Texas History by Bob Heinonen

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*Jack Edmondson as
James Bowie*

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TEXAS STATE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The Texas State Historical Association holds an annual conference somewhere in Texas; this year it is at the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Fort Worth on March 3-5. There are a large number of sessions on a wide range of topics of interest to any historian or teacher. Take a look at their website: www.tsha.utexas.edu/

VIDEOCONFERENCING

TEA Region XIII has received a \$900,000 grant aimed at improving middle school social studies instruction. Teacher collaborative teams are creating student-centered learning projects based on the Big6™ problem-solving model integrating social studies and technology. Thirty schools teaching 7th grade Texas history are participating. Check <http://target.esc13.net/>

Texas Heroes has been asked to provide remote performances for the schools. I will go to Blanco High School (8 miles from my home) at a scheduled time and will have two-way video and audio communication with any participating school in the Region XIII that has similar capabilities. Although **Texas Heroes'** prefers onsite, hands-on performances, this experiment will lay the groundwork for getting in front of remote schools that would not otherwise be able to bring us in.

LEGENDS OF TEXAS

Legend: James Bowie was a respectable businessman

In 1819, James Bowie met Jean Lafitte, the well known smuggler and pirate; they became good friends immediately. One of Lafitte's products was slaves that he sold for \$1 per pound; James and his brother Rezin decided to smuggle slaves into Louisiana. In 1808, Congress made it illegal to bring new slaves into the United States. Rather than taking a chance on being caught, and knowing it would be hard to sell smuggled slaves, the Bowie's came up with an audacious scheme.

They smuggled the slaves into Louisiana but then turn the slaves over to the authorities without revealing their involvement in bringing the slaves into the country. The authorities would then, as a matter of law, put the slaves on the auction block. At auction, the Bowie's would then outbid everyone else and then receive half of what they paid for the slaves paid back to them as a reward for turning the slaves in. They could then turn around and sell the slaves legally.

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, legal and illegal land speculation ran rampant. Old Spanish land grants with unknown boundaries were sold, and others were newly created via forged documents. It wasn't until May 11, 1820, that Congress passed a law allowing all claimants to Spanish land grants in Louisiana to file their claims prior to December 31, 1820. All claims were to be turned over to a registrar with all supporting evidence.

James Bowie paid two men to witness claims based on Spanish land grants that he forged; he claimed over 65,000 acres. Amazingly there was no law against this. It took over four years before authorities could prove fraud; Congress then denied his claims. In forging the documents, Bowie dated a document 1788 but then used a geographic area name that didn't come into being until the early 1800's.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RIP FORD

Part 26: School for the Deaf and Dumb

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Old Rip's term as a Senator was over. Now what would he do? Old Rip had done a lot of things in his life, but the one that he was about to embark on was the most rewarding of his entire life.

“When his senate term was over, Rip accepted an appointment as superintendent of the Deaf and Dumb Institute in Austin. Managing it from September 1879 to December 1883, he made it a school rather than an asylum for illiterate handicaps. He revised the curriculum, introduced the teaching of trade skills such as shoemaking and bookbinding. In time he conducted a crack typography course and this led to the institute's own newspaper, the *Texas Mute Ranger*, for which Ford wrote a number of historical articles and lively editorials on current political issues. He came to love his work at the institute more than anything he had ever done, taking pride in the rapid progress his pupils were making.

“One day he collapsed with fever. It was an ominous sign. Ford himself diagnosed it as the old malaria [which he got during the Mexican-American War 35 years earlier]. Soon he was so sick that he had to resign his position at the institute. It was, he declared, the last public office he would ever hold.

“During the Christmas season 1883 Ford realized, perhaps for the first time, that he was an old man, going on sixty-nine now, and what was worse, he was an old man without money and without land: the two most important things in life to an American in the 1880's.”¹

Although poor financially, Old Rip moved his family to San Antonio in 1884 where he concentrated his time promoting Texas history. Twice he had been involved in forming a Texas historical group—once in 1856 and again in 1874 — but both had failed for lack of interest and funding.

“Then in February 1897 Ford received an invitation to attend a meeting in Austin whose purpose was to organize a state historical association. With some reservations about the success of the project, Ford went to the meeting. Soon he was laughing with everyone else at Roberts' ludicrous anecdotes about Thomas J. Rusk and, in general, was having a great time talking history until the Constitutional Committee announced that it planned to make no distinction between members and lady members in the constitution.

“Ford stood up and shouted that there had better be a distinction. Refusal to do so was disgraceful—another victory for the abortive campaign to secure the female equality with the male. The committee, however, was recalcitrant. So Ford, banging his cane on the floor, told the committee what it could do and stalked out of the meeting.”²

Friends of Old Rip went to him and asked him to reconsider. A few days later the new organization received a note for Old Rip:

“I anticipate remaining with the ‘Texas Historical Society’ as long as I can do anything to promote the interests of Texas History.

John S. Ford

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“The executive council [of the newly formed Texas State Historical Association that is our current state historical association] promptly elected Rip to honorary life member”³ Old Rip wrote an article that was included in the second issue of the new organization’s publication which is today known as the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*.

By the end of that same year of 1897, John Salmon Ford died of old age. Old Rip now rests in peace. R.I.P.

Old Rip Ford lived a long, illustrious and contentious life.

Next Month – *Part 27: The Epitaph*

¹ *Rip Ford’s Texas* by John Salmon Ford edited by Stephen B. Oates, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1963, pp xliv

² *Rip Ford’s Texas* by John Salmon Ford edited by Stephen B. Oates, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1963, pp xlvi

³ *Rip Ford’s Texas* by John Salmon Ford edited by Stephen B. Oates, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1963, pp xlvi