

# FYI on Texas History by Bob Heinonen

A Free E-Mail Newsletter from Texas Heroes Issue 27 February 15, 2005



*Helen Garrison as  
Cynthia Ann Parker*

## OLD RIP FORD

With this issue, the series *The Life and Times of Rip Ford* is complete. When I first wrote this series, it was published over a period of three years; the project started as a few articles but it expanded because it is just not easy to tell about Rip Ford in a small way. If you have missed any issues and would like copies, go to [www.texasheroes.net](http://www.texasheroes.net) then click on [Tales, Trails & Eateries](#). On the next screen, click on [Texas Tales](#) and then [The Life and Times of Rip Ford](#). All 27 articles are available for you to read and/or print.

## BECOMING A TEXAS HERO

I won't call this a trend but I will tell you that in the last month I have had four students walk up to me after a performance to ask me how they could join **Texas Heroes** as a performer. I have had to answer them with a business answer....you have to be eighteen years of age to join **Texas Heroes**. My question to you is, "How do I redirect them to something they can do right now to proactively fulfill their interest in teaching Texas history?" They are excited about making Texas history come alive. We need to provide them a venue. What is it? Tell me.

## LEGENDS OF TEXAS

Legend: "The Yellow Rose of Texas" was written by a slave

This month's legend was recently addressed by Anne Dingus in **Texas Monthly** magazine. She says, "*The original lyrics were scribbled on a scrap of paper sometime in the spring of 1836, around the time of the Battle of San Jacinto, signed only with the initials "J. K." Because the song contained lines such as "She's the sweetest rose of color/This darky ever knew," historians theorize that the songwriter was a black man. Beyond that, J. K.'s identity has remained a mystery, but several investigations have looked into the identity of his "yellow rose." Some writers claim that she was a heroic indentured servant who kept Santa Anna "entertained" inside his tent while the Texians steamrolled his army. Though a freedwoman named Emily West was indeed present at San Jacinto, there is no reliable evidence that she ever dallied with the Mexican general or that she was ever J. K.'s "yellow rose."*

Here are the original words to "The Yellow Rose of Texas":

There's a yellow rose in Texas  
That I am going to see  
No other darky knows her  
No one only me  
She cried so when I left her  
It like to broke my heart  
And if I ever more find her  
We nevermore will part.

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Chorus:

She's the sweetest rose of color  
This darky ever knew  
Her eyes are bright as diamonds  
They sparkle like the dew  
You may talk about dearest May  
And sing of Rosa Lee  
But the yellow rose of Texas  
Beats the belles of Tennessee.

Where the Rio Grande is flowing  
And the starry skies are bright  
She walks along the river  
In the quiet summer night

She thinks if I remember  
When we parted long ago  
I promised to come back again  
And not to leave her so.  
Oh now I am agoing to find her  
For my heart is full of woe  
And we will sing the song together  
We sung so long ago  
We will play the banjo gaily  
And will sing the song of yore  
And the yellow rose of Texas  
Shall be mine forevermore.

-J.K.

What I find interesting is that the version that follows is the one I learned and it is totally different than the original. I guess this verse is more politically correct.

The Yellow Rose of Texas  
is the girl I'm going to see.  
There is no one can miss her  
not half as much as me.  
You can talk about your Clementine  
and sing of Rosa Lee,  
but the Yellow Rose of Texas  
now she's the girl for me.

# ***THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RIP FORD***

## **Part 20: The Epitaph**

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Old Rip Ford lived a long, illustrious and contentious life. T. R. Fehrenbach gives his impression of John Salmon “Rip” Ford:

“Over the next five decades [1836-1886], he was to be the only man in Texas history who was involved in a major way in every action or controversy of his time. He was to be one of the fantastic, but forgotten, figures of the old frontier. Ford was star-following, pragmatic, restless, and apparently without an ideology of any kind. He was impatient, brilliant, and erratic — and yet compulsively self-disciplined when he had to be. He had prejudices but no philosophy. Above all, he instinctively went where the action was...”

...He shed roles easily, as popular ideas changed. Yet this leaves his image unclear, because Ford was a man of major strengths. Profane to the point of ingenuity, an inveterate gambler, free with both “his money and his pistol,” Ford was a great captain, a leader of men, and a diplomat of considerable skill. He lived great times; he was the last of his line, and he died poor. Most of the great frontier captains did the same.”<sup>1</sup>

A doctor, a lawyer, a surveyor, an explorer, a politician, a Texas ranger, a Confederate officer, a warrior for causes, a publisher, a playwright, a husband, a father, a historian, a man of God: John Salmon Ford was all of these.

Now you know of the life and times of Old Rip Ford.

*Bob Heinonen is the founder of Texas Heroes and has been portraying Rip Ford since 1993.*

<sup>1</sup> Lone Star by T. R. Fehrenbach, American Legacy Press, New York, NY 1983, pp 374