

FYI on Texas History by Bob Heinonen

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Bob Heinonen as
Isaac Cline who tells
the story of the 1900
Galveston hurricane

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THE TEXAS HEROES EXPERIENCE

This next school year will bring an exciting new interactive concept to **Texas Heroes'** performances in schools. Students will be able to e-mail questions and comments to most characters that have been visitors to their schools, and the students will receive a response from the performer. The list of characters participating in this unique experience will be announced in August. Fees will be raised from the current \$175 per performance to \$225. Start budgeting for the **Texas Heroes Experience** now and let your students participate in this unique edutainment event!

LEGENDS OF TEXAS

Legend: A slave girl was entertaining Santa Anna in his tent at San Jacinto when Sam Houston attacked on April 21, 1836.

Often referred to as the "Yellow Rose of Texas," Emily West was a beautiful mulatto woman who may have been distracting General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna in his tent at the time the Battle of San Jacinto started thus delaying Santa Anna in getting his troops organized to defend themselves. The outcome of the 18-minute battle was that over 600 Mexican soldiers were killed and the Texians won independence from Mexico.

In an article by Jeff Dunn in *The Compass Rose*, a periodical of the Special Collections at The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, we learn that Emily D. West was not actually a slave but was from New York and had a one year contract to provide housekeeping services for James Morgan. "In December 1834, he [Morgan] purchased Clopper's Point, a peninsula between upper Galveston Bay and the mouth of the San Jacinto River, now called Morgan's Point." He intended to build a town there called "New Washington." He had contracted with fourteen workers in New York to help him build the town and apparently contracted with Emily West at the same time. They arrived at Galveston Bay in December, 1835, five months before the Battle of San Jacinto.

During Santa Anna's attempts to catch the new Texian government officials in April, 1836, he "arrived at New Washington on April 18, burned Morgan's buildings on April 20, and advanced toward Lynch's ferry before encountering Houston's army.... One of Morgan's employees, a young free black from New Haven, Connecticut, named George Cooper, stated in a affidavit many years later that he was taken by the Mexicans from New Washington and witnessed the battle. Emily D. West had a similar story, as indicated from a passport application she filed with the Texan government in 1837. This application, attested to by San Jacinto veteran Isaac Moreland for its truthfulness, and now housed in the State Archives, states that she was a free woman who emigrated with Morgan to Texas in 1835 from New York 'and was now anxious to return and wishes a passport.' Moreland also states: 'Her free papers were lost at San Jacinto as I am informed and believe in April of --36.'"

(continued on page two)

(continued from page one)

It seems that Emily West was probably at the Battle of San Jacinto, but was she with Santa Anna? “In July 1842, English ethnologist William Bollaert came to the town of Houston on tour. During his visit he wrote in his diary the following verbatim account from an unpublished letter written by Sam Houston to a friend:

‘The Battle of San Jacinto was probably lost to the Mexicans, owing to the influence of a Mulatta girl (Emily) belonging to Col. Morgan who was closeted in the tent with g’l Santana, at the time the cry was made”the Enemy! They come! They come! + detailed Santana so long, that order could not be restored readily again.’

Bollaert’s diary entry quoting this letter of Sam Houston’s remained unknown until 1951 when Joe Frantz published his book on Gail Borden in which he quotes from Bollaert’s diary which he found in the Newberry Library in Chicago. In 1956, the entire diary was published.

So is the legend true? It appears Emily West was there, she was beautiful, and Santa Anna was known as a womanizer. Santa Anna was certain Houston would not attack until sunrise on the 22nd, so he thought he had plenty of time for rest and relaxation. We may never be able to prove it, but, based on the known facts, it does make sense that it actually happened. Now the question is, “Did Sam Houston know of this tryst beforehand and take advantage of it?” Obviously he knew of it after fact, but did he know of it before the fact?