

# **The Threads of Texas History**

**By Bill Hobby**

**One hundred and seventy-five years ago Texas won independence from Mexico. We would not be celebrating that anniversary but for Sam Houston's victory at San Jacinto, so the San Jacinto Rule is in effect.**

**The San Jacinto Rule forbids speakers from talking about the Texas Revolution longer than the eighteen minutes it took Sam Houston to win it at San Jacinto. Let's take a few of those minutes to explore some of the threads that run through Texas history and tie it together in unexpected ways.**

**There's no better place to start than Sam Houston. His family spans American history. At the suggestion of his mentor Andrew Jackson, Houston, on his way to Washington for his first session as a Tennessee congressman in 1823, stopped at Monticello to meet Thomas Jefferson. In other words, a veteran of the War of 1812 and an acquaintance of the third President of the United States, of the Marquis de Lafayette and Alexander de Tocqueville, was the father of a States Senator from Texas who served within my lifetime.**

**Senator Andrew Jackson Houston held the same seat his father held. The Houston seat was later held by Lyndon Baines Johnson, whose great-grandfather Brother George Washington Baines helped baptize Sam Houston (1854). Told that immersion in Rocky Creek would wash away all his sins, Houston said "I hope so, but if they were all washed away, the Lord help the fish down below."**

**How's that for a thread of history?**

**LBJ's father, Sam Ealy Johnson, was in the Texas House with my grandfather I. W. Culp in the early 1920s. Houston's great-great-grandson, Price Daniel III, was Speaker of the Texas House while I was Lieutenant Governor. Speaker Daniel was a descendant of Texas Governors and Senators on both sides of his family.**

**How's that for a thread of history?**

**Picking up another thread, Thomas J. Rusk was elected to the U.S. Senate at the same time as Sam Houston. Senator Rusk's law partner's great-great-granddaughter is Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison.**

**But let's get back to my favorite subject---Sam Houston.**

**In April, 1832, Houston, then a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, went to Washington to get some stimulus for the Cherokees from the Great White Father (Andrew Jackson).**

**Congressman William Stanbery of Ohio insulted Houston (and Jackson) in a speech on the floor of the House and ignored Houston's challenges. Bad career move. After a convivial dinner with some of his Congressional buddies (including the Speaker of the House) on April 13, Houston encountered Stanbery on Connecticut Avenue. Armed with his signature hickory stick, Houston, beat Stanbery to the ground.**

**Stanbery tried to shoot Houston but the gun didn't go off. For some reason, that made Houston mad, so he raised Stanbery's legs and beat him severely about his nether regions.**

**When Houston violated Stanbery he doubtless violated the Constitution (Article I, Section 6) which says that a Congressman "shall not be questioned in any other place" for a speech made on the floor of Congress. Out of deference to the ladies in the audience at the trial nobody specified the "other place".**

**Houston was a violent man. Had his dinner companions not intervened, the Governor of Ohio would have had to call a special election.**

**Houston was arrested and tried. While awaiting trial Houston, clad in his Indian garb, had dinner with Andrew Jackson at the White House. Jackson told Houston to get a proper suit for the trial. Houston said he couldn't afford a suit so Jackson bought him one.**

**The prominent Baltimore lawyer Houston had hired was too ill or drunk to make the closing argument so Houston summed up. He must have done pretty well. Houston was convicted but he got off with a brief sentence. The Speaker pronounced judgment by saying "I reprimand you.", then went on to other business.**

**Three words is a pretty brief sentence.**

**The drunk lawyer is better known to history as the songwriter Francis Scott Key.**

**How's that for a thread of history?**

**When Houston returned to Texas he wrote President Jackson thanking him for his support and hospitality. In that letter Houston prophesied his own role in Texas' independence from Mexico and its subsequent admission to the Union by writing "I shall lay before you a new Estremadura."**

**A group of legislators called on Governor Houston on March 16, 1861, and told him he had to swear a loyalty oath to the Confederacy. They met in Houston's office—the first room on the left as you enter the Mansion.**

**Houston refused in these words:**

**"Fellow-Citizens, in the name of your rights and liberties, which I believe have been trampled upon, I refuse to take this oath. In the name of the nationality of Texas, which has been betrayed by the Convention I refuse to take this oath. In the name of the Constitution of Texas, I refuse to take this oath. In the name of my own conscience and manhood, which this Convention would degrade by dragging me before it, to pander to the malice of my enemies ... I refuse to take this oath."**

**Maybe Governor Houston had a problem with taking the disloyalty oath because he had already sworn, as required by the Texas Constitution, to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States and of this State, so help me God."**

**When all else fails, read the directions.**

**A lot of Texans had just died in a long and bloody war to secede from Mexico and be admitted to the United States. Then the Texas Legislature decided that a lot more Texans should die to secede from the United States.**

**Not good thinking! Sam Houston knew better.**

**Houston just wasn't Texan enough for the Texas Legislature, so they kicked him out of office twice for supporting the Union---first from the U.S. Senate for opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act, then from the Governor's office for opposing secession.**

**History did not deal kindly with the losers in Texas' two wars of secession. When Sam Houston turned Santa Anna loose after San Jacinto Santa Anna returned to Mexico. Not yet cured of warfare, he had a leg shot off in the Pastry War (1838) with the French. (Who else would you fight a Pastry War with?)**

**Santa Anna leg buried his leg with full military honors in a Mexico City Cathedral and replaced it with a cork leg. The cork leg was captured by the Illinois National Guard during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and is now in the National Guard Museum in Springfield, Illinois.**

**The Mexican government tried to get the leg back several times but Illinois wouldn't give it back. The Mexicans must have lost interest. They didn't even bother to bribe Governor Blagojevich. The Emperor of the West was last seen selling chewing gum in New York in the 1850s.**

**History dealt even less kindly with Robert E. Lee. They made him a college president.**

**Houston's personal life was at least as colorful as his political life. While serving under Andrew Jackson at Horseshoe Bend in 1814 Houston was wounded in the groin by an arrow. The wound never healed and may have caused the breakup of his eleven-week marriage to Eliza Allen when he was governor of Tennessee in 1827.**

**Now let's pick up another thread of history. Benjamin Franklin, a founder of the United States, had a grandson who tried to keep Texas from becoming one of them.**

**Franklin's grandson, Richard Bache, followed his grandfather into the family business as postmaster in Philadelphia. Bache first appears in Texas history when Houston assigned him to guard the captive Santa Anna after San Jacinto.**

He next appears as a state senator from Galveston and the only member of the 1845 Texas annexation convention to vote against joining the Union.

Why did Bache vote against joining the Union?

- Maybe he was drunk. When he ran for the Senate from Galveston an opponent said he was drunk and Bache promptly fell off the platform.
- Maybe he wanted to avoid extradition. As postmaster he went missing from Philadelphia in a big hurry because \$50,000 had gone missing from the Post Office.
- Maybe he wanted to save his brother-in-law George Mifflin Dallas, vice-president of the United States, the bother of presiding over a couple of Texas senators. I can identify with that. (You remember Vice-President Dallas. They named some little town up near Fort Worth for him.)
- Maybe Bache was prophetic. All the other delegates voted to join the Union, but they didn't mean it. They voted to secede sixteen years later.

How's that for a thread of history?

As William Faulkner wrote in *Requiem for a Nun*, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Well, I don't hear any more musket fire. The Twin Sisters from Ohio are silent. But I hear terrified shouts of "Me no Alamo!" and "Me no Goliad!"

The San Jacinto Rule has kicked in. The battle is over.

Texas is free—and so are you. Good day!

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[http://www.hobbycomm.com/wph/TexasHistory/Threads\\_Tx\\_History/Threads\\_of\\_History.pdf](http://www.hobbycomm.com/wph/TexasHistory/Threads_Tx_History/Threads_of_History.pdf)

## Bibliography

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*The Eagle and the Raven*, by James A. Michener. State House Press, Austin. ca. 1990.

## Notes

Page	Text, source
1	stopped at Monticello, Haley, 35-6.
1	baptize Sam Houston, Haley, 331-5.
1	Sam Ealy Johnson, I. W. Culp, <a href="http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/legis/leaders/">http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/legis/leaders/</a>
2	Thomas J. Rusk, Author's conversation w/Sen. Hutchison, 2005.
2	Stanbery episode, Houston trial, Haley 79-89.
4	Pastry War, <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastry_War">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastry_War</a>
5	Santa Anna, cork leg, <a href="http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexwar/santa-anna-leg.htm">http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexwar/santa-anna-leg.htm</a>
4	Santa Anna, chewing gum, <a href="http://www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/chewgum.htm">http://www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/chewgum.htm</a>
4,5	Richard Bache, Spaw, <i>The Texas Senate</i> .