



Tennessee woman among Alamo survivors

Story and photographs by Bill Carey

I recently visited the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. In the process, I discovered a lot of people who made the journey West from Tennessee and ended up in the Spanish-mission-turned-fortress.

The most famous Tennessean to have gone to the Alamo was, of course, David Crockett. In 1835, Crockett was defeated in a Congressional race, in part because of the opposition of President Andrew Jackson. Disgusted with Tennessee, Crockett left the Volunteer State with the now-famous parting quote, “You may all go to hell, and I will go to Texas.” (This quote appears on a plaque in front of the Madison County Courthouse in Jackson, making it my favorite plaque in a state that has many of them.)

A few months later, Crockett and some of his friends defended the Alamo under the command of Col. William Travis. Crockett died, and it is unclear today whether he died in combat or was executed as a prisoner of war. He thus became one of about 30 former Tennesseans who died in defense of the Alamo. Others are listed on the Alamo’s official Web site (www.thealamo.org), including Samuel Blair, Robert Campbell and Andrew Jackson Harrison.

I had always believed that all the defenders died during this battle, but on my recent trip to the Alamo, I learned about a native Tennessean who survived the siege. I had never heard of her before, and her name does not appear in the massive Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture. But I can assure you that kids in

Texas learn all about her.

Susanna Wilkinson was born in Tennessee in 1814 and at the age of 15 was married in Hardeman County to a man named Almeron Dickinson. Almeron Dickinson migrated to Texas, served as Col. Travis’ artillery officer and died on the last day of the Alamo siege. Susanna and his 15-month-old daughter, Angelina, were also at the Alamo; their lives were spared by Mexican Gen. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna.



About 30 Tennesseans died in the siege of the Alamo, which today is a popular tourist attraction in San Antonio, Texas.

As the only Anglo survivor among those who defended or took refuge at the Alamo, Susanna Dickinson’s account of events is considered extremely important. According to an 1875 book by James Morphis titled “A History of Texas,” she later said, “The struggle lasted more than two hours, when my husband rushed into the church where I was with my child, and exclaimed: ‘Great God, Sue, the Mexicans are inside our walls! All is lost! If they spare you, save my child.’”

“Then, with a parting kiss, he drew his sword and plunged into the strife, then raging in different portions of the fortifications.”

When she left the Alamo the next day, Susanna Dickinson carried with her a letter from Santa Anna to Sam Houston, commander of all Texan forces (also a Tennessee native). The letter demanded that the rebellion against the Mexican government cease immediately. Upon receiving it in Gonzalez, Texas, Houston did retreat eastward in what Texas history refers to as the Runaway Scrape. But a few weeks later, Houston’s army defeated Santa Anna at San Jacinto, the military event that ensured Texas’ independence.

And what became of Susanna Dickinson? She married and divorced four more times, but her sixth marriage spanned the last 25 years of her life. When she died in 1883, she was known as Mrs. Joseph Hannig.

Susanna Wilkinson, a.k.a. Susanna Dickinson, a.k.a. Mrs. Joseph Hannig, is buried in Lockhart, Texas. But I can assure you that her spirit is alive and well and is recreated at many a living history event. I met and spoke with a depiction of her at the Alamo. ☺



Visitors examine the adobe walls of the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. The city has grown around the old mission.

Tennessee History for Kids

Bill Carey is a Nashville author and executive director of “Tennessee History for Kids,” an online Tennessee history textbook.

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