

Grigsby Families in the Texas Revolution [a presentation at the Triennial]

*by Dr. Don Grigsby, Ph.D. and
Dr. Michelle Grigsby, Ph.D.*

There were two branches of the Grigsby family (that descended from Immigrant John Grigsby) who played historic roles in the 1835/1836 struggle for independence of the “Tejas” territory from the newly independent country of Mexico. “Tejas” (pronounced *Tay-hahs*) was the Indian word for "friend," and was adopted by the Spanish explorers and missionaries to describe the frontier area (Indian Territory) of Spanish Colonial

Mexico. This border area between Spanish Colonial Mexico and the United States of America had long been in dispute.

To understand the nature of the conflict in Mexico, it is useful to examine the political struggle of the nation of Mexico itself. From 1810 to 1821, Mexico had fought a Revolutionary War against the country of Spain for their independence. In 1821, that independence was finally won. As a new nation, the formation of a government was necessary; however, the question regarding which type of government was yet unanswered. Would it be one with a strong federal government which would pass laws deciding issues for the individual states, or would it be one that served as the head of a loose confederation of mostly independent states? Debate over this question would continue for the next decade in Mexico. Residents of the Tejas Territory were advocates of the area becoming a state of Mexico, but supported the idea of a limited federal government—preferring instead to govern themselves for the most part. Many politicians in Mexico, however, were concerned that the Tejas Territory, with its rapidly growing population of former citizens of the United States of America, would be easy prey for the U.S. to annex.

Therefore, they argued for a strong central government, and for Tejas not to be granted independent statehood; but to instead have its territory combined with an established Mexican state.

The Spanish—and after 1821, the Mexican—government had had difficulty inducing any of their citizens to settle in the Tejas Territory due to its frontier nature and hostile Native American population. However, the depression in the U.S. economy during the 1820's and the offer of large bounties of land to anyone willing to risk settling in the Tejas Territory, attracted many American citizens who were already used to the hardships of frontier life, and were struggling financially and eager for a fresh start on a large piece of land. Moses Austin and his son, Steven F. Austin, had been among the earliest settlers in Tejas, bringing with them a colony of 300 families. They did so with the permission of and a land grant from the Mexican government. In 1828, Joseph Grigsby [(4), Nathaniel (3), James (2), Immigrant John Grigsby (1)] brought his large family and their slaves to Tejas to claim his land grant of 4,608 acres on Walnut Creek—a branch of the Neches River—in what would become Jefferson County, Texas.

In 1834 Daniel Parker also brought a colony of families—most belonging to his Pilgrim Baptist Church congregation—to Tejas from Illinois. Within that group was the family of John Grigsby (5), [*conjecture* John (4), James (3), Charles (2), Immigrant John Grigsby (1)], including his son Crawford Grigsby (6). The colony settled in the area which is now Palestine, Texas.

From 1821 to 1836, the Anglo-Tejano population in Tejas exploded from 7,000 to between 35,000 and 50,000. In reaction to this growing immigration, the Mexican political forces that feared losing Tejas to the U.S., had enacted a law in 1830 prohibiting any future admission of U.S. citizens for the purpose of settlement in Mexico. This, of course, angered former U.S. citizens residing in Tejas because many of their friends and relatives had already sold their homes and begun the long and dangerous journey to join them. Steven F. Austin traveled to Mexico City to advocate for a change in the law. However, Santa Anna refused Austin an audience and instead had him imprisoned for the next eighteen months. Anglo-Tejanos were now more than angered, they were outraged.

Joseph Grigsby's mother, Elizabeth Butler, was one of four Butler sisters who married Enoch and Nathaniel Grigsby (brothers), Barrick Travis, and Jacob Smith. Jacob Smith's daughter married James Butler Bonham. Four grandsons from three of the four Butler sisters would play an active part in the story of the Alamo in Bexar County Tejas/Texas.

Nathaniel Grigsby m. Elizabeth <i>Butler</i>	Enoch Grigsby m. Mary “Molly” <i>Butler</i>	Barrick Travis m. Anna <i>Butler</i>	Jacob Smith m. Sarah <i>Butler</i>
Joseph Grigsby m. Sarah <i>Graham</i>		Mark Butler Travis m. Jemima <i>Stollworth</i>	Sophia <i>Smith</i> m. James Bonham
Nathaniel Grigsby	Enoch Grigsby	William Barret Travis	James Butler Bonham

With Santa Anna's extralegal rise to absolute ruler of Mexico, the political storm brewing in Tejas in 1835 mirrored the storm that had blown in the American Colonies in response to the oppression by the English government; as well as that which would blow again in 1860, when the Southern States demanded that governmental power be vested primarily in the individual states rather than in the central government due to what they believed were abuses of the federal government. Texas was destined to win one, and lose one.

Joseph Grigsby's sons Nathaniel (30 years of age) and Enoch (20 years of age), who were named after their grandfather and great-uncle, joined the Jasper County Volunteers under Capt. Chesher. In 1835, the Jasper Company of Volunteers marched to the Bexar County village of San Antonio and joined with other Tejas forces under the command of Ben Milam before attacking the Mexican Detachment. After fierce house to house and hand to hand fighting in which Ben Milam was killed, the Mexican Garrison was defeated. Mexican General Cos and his remaining detachment were paroled upon his promise to retreat to a location south of the Rio Grande River and never to return north to take up arms against Tejas again.

After the "Battle of San Antonio," or "Siege of Bexar" as it is called by some, when the Alamo was no longer in Mexican hands, the Jasper County Volunteers and most of the other units were disbanded and the soldiers returned to their homes. Over the next few months, Anglo-Americans continued to flow into Tejas. These included William Travis and James Bonham, both young lawyers from Alabama, and a returning James Bowie.

Rumors were heard that President of Mexico Gen. Santa Anna was at Saltillo, Mexico, on his way toward Monterrey and the Rio Grande River with a large army intent on killing the Anglo-Tejano rebels and reclaiming the territory and maintaining it under Mexican rule. Col. William B. Travis was convinced that the Alamo must be held to prevent General Santa Anna from advancing north and east of San Antonio to destroy Anglo-Tejano settlements, and to provide time for a Texas army to be raised to defeat the Mexican army. He hoped it would be raised and come in time for the defense of the Alamo.

General Sam Houston had traveled to New Orleans for medical treatment and could not be reached to approve orders to mount a defense of the Alamo at San Antonio. His last orders had been to take the Alamo, dispatch the Mexican Garrison, and then abandon the fort. Col. Travis called for Texans to join in the defense of the Alamo, and sent riders in all directions in an attempt to raise an armed force. Without a direct order from General Sam Houston, however, many were reluctant to heed the request of Col. Travis.

Col. James Butler Bonham rode to the Fort at Goliad with a request that the 300 troops there come to the aid of those at the Alamo. Although Col. James Fannin was reluctant to march without orders from Gen. Sam Houston, he was finally convinced to go the defense of the Alamo. Only a few miles into their journey, a heavy rainstorm caused wagons and cannons to become mired in the mud. Col. Fannin would not agree to abandon the cannons and supply wagons in order to continue on foot to San Antonio, and returned to the fort at Goliad instead.

Col. Bonham, along with two others, rode back to San Antonio to deliver the bad news to Col. Travis. When they reached the Alamo, it was already surrounded by the army of Gen. Santa Anna. Col. Bonham alone was willing to ride through the enemy lines and hail of bullets to reach the fort, which he did, in order to deliver the bad news for the defenders of the Alamo.

A few brave stragglers, including Davy Crocket and his small group of Tennessee men, made their way to the fort containing less than 200 in all, to resist the Mexican army of several thousand. Col. William Travis and the other defenders refused an offer to surrender believing that any time they could hold Gen. Santa Anna in San Antonio, would be crucial for Anglo-Texans under Gen. Sam Houston to gather a force hopefully sufficient to defeat Santa Anna, and save Tejas from subjugation. Travis and the other defenders did not know that General Santa Anna had given orders before crossing the Rio Grande to give no quarter to any of the rebel Anglo-Tejanos. The defenders of the Alamo would have been killed whether they had surrendered or whether they fought.

The fort at the Alamo was not as it appears today but was the size of several football fields, and one side of the fort was a low wooden wall that a high school high jumper could clear without difficulty. If the defenders of the Alamo were spaced equidistant around the perimeter of the fort they would have had perhaps only one man every thirty feet or more. Spread that thin they could not have been expected to mount much of a defense against several thousand of the enemy. It is not understood why Gen. Santa Anna spent several days surrounding the Alamo before mounting a full scale attack, but when he did in the hours just before dawn, the low wooden wall was breached and Mexican troops poured into the fort. The defenders of the Alamo pulled back into the small structure that we see and think of today as the Alamo. Within half an hour or so after the Mexican attack, the Alamo fell. The Anglo-Tejanos, and the Tejas-Mexicans who fought with them against Gen. Santa Anna's forces, were killed to the last man. Wives and children of a few defenders, and a Negro slave, were spared. Some say that a few defenders at the end of the battle may have slipped over the wall and escaped, but most reports say the defenders were all killed.

After the fall of the Alamo, General Santa Anna marched south to the fort at Goliad. He offered the garrison of 300 under Col. Fannin a chance to surrender and promised clemency if they would do so. Col. Fannin accepted Santa Anna's terms and surrendered their weapons. Gen. Santa Anna then lined the 300 men and Col. Fannin up against the fort wall and executed all but one, who was left to take the warning to Gen. Sam Houston. Leaving the bodies where they fell, he marched on toward San Jacinto. Gen. Sam Houston's army later found the bodies and performed the burial duties.

Gen. Santa Anna was intent upon engaging and defeating the less than 1,000 men under Gen. Sam Houston, as he believed that this was all that stood between him and the scattered undefended communities in Tejas. It was during these days that the first Convention of the Republic of Texas met at Washington on the Brazos and declared Texas an Independent Republic on March 2, 1836; but, declaring independence and winning independence were two entirely different matters.

Frightened because of the fall of the Alamo and the Fort Goliad massacre, Anglo-Tejanos began to flee eastward toward the state of Louisiana in the United States for protection in what has been called "The Great Runaway Scrape." As there were only a few ferries across the Neches and Trinity Rivers between Tejas and Louisiana, it took a long time for the ferry raft to make each trip over and back, creating a bottleneck of thousands waiting to cross. Gen. Houston was intent on distracting Gen. Santa Anna with his movements in order to protect the Anglo-Tejanos as they attempted to escape. When Santa Anna reached San Jacinto, Gen. Houston believed that he had his best chance to face the numerically vastly superior Mexican army. Gen. Houston crossed a stream between the settlers who were attempting to escape and told his troops that they were all going to fight and win, or die, for there was no longer a way to retreat. In the early morning hours, the Texans attacked with cries of "Remember the Alamo" boys and "Remember Goliad." The Mexican Army was asleep as they were not expecting that the Houston force, which had been running from them for days, would suddenly turn and attack. With relatively little resistance, the Mexican troops, including Gen. Santa Anna, broke and ran.

John Grigsby's son, Crawford, was 16 years old when he joined the Rangers as a member of Capt. William Turner Sadler's company. Of the sixteen total companies of Texas Rangers, most were out scouting in order to protect the fleeing Texans when Gen. Sam Houston confronted Gen. Santa Anna. However, 71 Rangers fought in the "Battle of San Jacinto." Six of those, including Texas Ranger Crawford Grigsby, were from Capt. Sadler's Company and temporarily serving under Capt. Hayden Arnold's 2nd Regiment of Volunteers, 1st Infantry Company. Crawford Grigsby's name is engraved on the monument at the San Jacinto Battlefield Park as one of the "Heroes of the Battle of San Jacinto".