

FOLDABLE | IMPORTANT FOLKS of the TEXAS REVOLUTION

Which PEOPLE were the Most Important? Why?

TEKS 7.3(B) | Explain the roles played by significant individuals during the Texas Revolution, including George Childress, Lorenzo de Zavala, James Fannin, Sam Houston, Antonio López de Santa Anna, Juan Seguín, and William B. Travis. Also: James Bonham, James Bowie, Martín Perfecto de Cos, David Crockett, Susanna Dickinson, José María (Gregorio) Esparza, Ben Milam, José Antonio Navarro, and Erastus “Deaf” Smith.

George Childress

George Childress was born on January 8, 1804 in Nashville, Tennessee. Childress and his son left for Texas in late 1835 after the death of his wife and settled in his uncle's colony. There he set up his law practice. In February, he and his uncle were chosen to attend the Convention of 1836 to discuss the pending conflict with Mexico. He and five others were chosen to draft the Declaration of Independence from Mexico. As chairman of the committee, he is acknowledged as being the principle author of the document. His life after the revolution was a struggle as he failed three times to establish a law practice successful enough to support his family. Distraught by his inability to earn a living, George Childress committed suicide at his home in Galveston on October 6, 1841. Five years later, Childress County was named after him in recognition of his service to the Republic of Texas.

Lorenzo de Zavala

Lorenzo de Zavala played a pivotal role in Texas' battle for independence from Mexico. De Zavala served in the Mexican Congress (1822–1824), the Mexican Senate (1824–1826), Secretary of the Treasury, and minister to France. He resigned as minister due to his opposition to Santa Anna. He moved to Texas where he became active in the independence movement. As a delegate to the Convention of 1836, de Zavala signed the Texas Declaration of Independence. An experienced politician, de Zavala was named Vice President of the new Republic of Texas. Because of health problems, he resigned as Vice President in October, 1836, and died a month later. He is also credited with the design of the first flag of the Republic of Texas.

James Fannin

James Fannin was born in early 1804 in Georgia. He entered the US Military Academy at West Point in 1819 and remained for just over two years. He came to Texas in 1834 and settled with his wife and two daughters at Valesco. Soon after his arrival, he became active in the cause for independence from Mexico. He participated in the Battle of Gonzales and later helped lead the Texas forces in the Battle of Concepcion. In early 1836, Fannin was stationed in Goliad with 400 soldiers. He received orders from Sam Houston on March 14 to retreat to Victoria. Partly through indecision and partly due to circumstances, Fannin delayed the retreat for five days. Due to the delay, Fannin and his troops were captured by General Urrea at Goliad on March 20 and executed on the orders of Santa Anna seven days later. "Remember Goliad" became a Texas battle cry along with "Remember the Alamo."

Sam Houston

Sam Houston was born in Virginia, but the family later moved to Tennessee. In 1809 he ran away from home and lived with the Cherokee Indians. In 1827 he was elected governor of Tennessee. Around 1829, he came to Texas and proved invaluable as Texas worked to draft a constitution and declare independence from Mexico. Houston took command of the Texas army. He led his men on the "Runaway Scrape" in March-April 1836 to stay clear of Santa Anna's troops, recruit and train more men for his fledgling army, and buy time until he was ready to meet the "Napoleon of the West" on a battlefield of his choosing. He became a hero at the Battle of San Jacinto where Santa Anna was defeated. Houston became the first President of the Republic of Texas. In 1845, he supported annexation of Texas by the United States, and Texas became the twenty-eighth state. He then served as a U.S. Senator from Texas and was elected Governor of Texas in 1859. He is the only person to serve as governor of two states: Texas and Tennessee. When he voiced his opposition to secession and refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy, he was replaced as governor. He retired to Huntsville in 1862 where he died July 26, 1863.

Antonio López de Santa Anna

Antonio López de Santa Anna, soldier and President of Mexico was born in Veracruz, Mexico, on February 21, 1794. He joined the Spanish Army in 1810. He fought in Texas against the Gutierrez-Magee expedition and was cited for bravery. It was during this time that he witnessed the execution of prisoners from the Battle of Medina near San Antonio de Béxar. He would shift his position from a loyal Spanish officer to an insurgent leader by joining forces with Agustín de Iturbide. He would turn against Iturbide in December 1822 and called for a republic to be established. Santa Anna became the military governor of Veracruz and defended Mexico against Spain at the Battle of Tampico in 1829. As the hero of Tampico, Santa Anna became President of Mexico in 1833 after leading a revolt against Mexican President Bustamante in 1832.

Santa Anna promised to restore the Constitution of 1824, but abandoned his Federalist supporters and became a Centralist in 1834, a move that angered many Mexican states. When the state of Zacatecas refused to comply with his orders, he attacked with his army in bloody retribution. Once Zacatecas had fallen, Santa Anna's glance shifted northward to Texas. He arrived in San Antonio on February 23, 1836, and laid siege to the Alamo. On March 6, 1836, the Alamo fell before dawn to the Mexican Army. After the fall of the Alamo, Santa Anna headed eastward to what is now Houston. There he was defeated and captured by General Sam Houston on April 21, 1836, at the Battle of San Jacinto. He was released six months later as part of the Treaties of Velasco. In 1838 he rose against the French, losing a leg in battle, once again gaining popularity. He led the Mexican Armies against the United States in the Mexican War (1846-1848). One of the major causes of this war was the annexation of Texas into the United States in 1845. After his defeat, Santa Anna would see Mexico lose half of its territory to the United States. He went into exile until 1853 when he returned to power. Two years later, Santa Anna would sell a small portion of land to the United States known as the Gadsden Purchase, a move that ended his political career. He died of old age in Mexico City on June 21, 1876.

Juan Seguín

Texas patriot, political and military leader Juan Nepomuceno Seguín was born in San Antonio on October 27, 1806. Juan was encouraged to read and write even though he had very little formal schooling. Seguín entered politics at a very young age, being elected to the town government in 1828, later serving as both mayor and political chief of the Department of Béxar. In 1835, Seguín entered into military service opposing the Centralist government following the battle of Gonzales; he was given a captain's commission by Stephen F. Austin. Seguín would raise a company of 37 to support the revolution. His company served as scouts and also helped gather supplies for the army. In the Battle of Béxar, his company took part in the assault against General Cos' troops. He entered the Alamo when Santa Anna arrived but was sent out as a courier. At Gonzales, he organized another company that would serve as the rear guard of Sam Houston's army and would take an active role at the Battle of San Jacinto leading a group of Tejanos. After the defeat of Santa Anna, his company observed the Mexican Army's retreat and accepted the surrender of San Antonio in June 1836. In February 1837, Seguín would direct the burial of the remains of the Alamo defenders as the military commander of San Antonio. Seguín went on to serve in the Texas Senate from 1837 to 1840 and then as mayor of San Antonio from 1840 to 1842. Because of conflicts with American settlers and his connections with Mexican business, Seguín resigned as mayor and returned to Mexico in 1842. He fought against the United States in the Mexican War (1846-1848) but returned to Texas after the war, and spent the last 20 years of his life in Nuevo Laredo, where he died in 1890.

William B. Travis

William Barret Travis, co-commander of the Alamo, was born on August 9, 1809, in South Carolina. Travis would leave his wife, son and unborn daughter in 1831 to start a new life in Texas. He arrived in 1831 and established a law practice in Anahuac on Galveston Bay. Travis met men associated with the war party, a group of militants opposing the Law of April 6, 1830. In 1832, Travis was retained to help secure the return of runaway slaves being held by the commander of the Mexican garrison at Anahuac. Travis and his law partner were jailed, but were soon released after protestors outnumbered the garrison. Travis moved his law practice to San Felipe and was elected to the town council. Meanwhile, Travis' wife traveled to Texas in the fall of 1835 in order to get her husband's signature on divorce papers. She left their son, Charles, with him. Travis arranged for Charles to stay with another family as he was caught up in the Texas Revolution. Travis participated in the Grass Fight near Béxar. He accepted a commission of lieutenant colonel of the cavalry and arrived in San Antonio in January 1836 with 29 men to reinforce the Alamo. He shared command of the Alamo with James Bowie until Bowie fell ill on February 24th. After General Santa Anna's arrival in San Antonio on February 23, Travis penned letters to the provisional government of Texas at Washington-on-the-Brazos explaining their situation and requesting reinforcements. The most famous of these letters was written on February 24, 1836, and began, "To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World..." which brought attention and support for the Texas cause. However, it was too late to help the men at the Alamo. After being under siege for 13 days, Travis was killed early on the morning of March 6 as the Mexican army attacked the compound. According to his slave, Joe, Travis was shot through the head early in the battle as he directed fire on the north wall. His body was burned with those of the other defenders. His valiant death as a defender of the Alamo elevated Travis to a Texas hero. Travis County (Austin) is named in his honor.

James Bonham

James Butler Bonham was born on February 20, 1807 in Saluda County, South Carolina. He attended college, but did not graduate. He studied law and began practicing in Pendleton, South Carolina, in 1830. On October 17, 1835, Bonham led a rally to support the Texan cause in Mobile, Alabama. Two weeks later, he helped organize the volunteer company of Mobile Grays. He was in Texas by November of 1835. Bonham was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Texas cavalry and declined all payment for his service. On February 1, 1836, he was unsuccessful in becoming a Béxar garrison delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He was sent to get help for the Alamo on February 16, 1836 and returned on March 3, 1836. Bonham would be the last man to arrive at the Alamo before the battle. He died with the other defenders on March 6, 1836.

James Bowie

James Bowie was a sugar planter, land speculator and a respected Texian leader. He was born on April 10, 1796, in Logan County, Kentucky. Bowie left home at the age of 15 and made a living by floating lumber to market and operating a sugar plantation with his brother. James became involved in the slave trade with pirate Jean Lafitte. Lafitte provided Bowie with captured slaves from ships in the Caribbean. Bowie would then sell the slaves to plantation owners. James Bowie was also involved in a series of fraudulent land grants in Arkansas. Bowie became well known for the large knife that he carried. Bowie arrived in Texas on January 1, 1830. On February 20, Bowie took the oath of allegiance to Mexico and traveled to San Antonio de Béxar. He was baptized in the Catholic Church and married the daughter of a prominent San Antonio family. Bowie's wife and in-laws died of cholera in September 1833. At the time Bowie was ill with yellow fever and unaware of their deaths. At the outbreak of the Texas Revolution, Bowie took part in the Battle of Concepción in October 1835. Later during the Siege of Béxar he served under General Stephen F. Austin. Colonel Bowie received direct instructions from Sam Houston to ride to Béxar to destroy the Alamo. After arriving, he and the garrison commander (Travis) determined that the Alamo should be defended. Colonel Bowie shared command of the Alamo garrison with Lt. Col. William B. Travis until February 24, 1836, when he became ill and was bedridden. James Bowie died in his sick bed on the morning of March 6, 1836 with the rest of the Alamo garrison.

Martín Perfecto de Cos

Mexican general Martín Perfecto de Cos was born in Veracruz in 1800. He rose through the ranks of the Army beginning in the 1820s as a cadet and by 1833 was a brigadier general. In September 1835 he was sent to Anahuac to investigate the refusal to pay duties to Mexico by the colonists. He dispersed the State legislature of Coahuila y Tejas and landed 300 men on the coast of Texas. His purpose was to end the resistance in Texas. In December 1835 Texas insurgents attack Béxar after a long siege and he surrendered. He was released with the pledge that he would not oppose the Federal Constitution of 1824. Cos returned in 1836 with General Santa Anna and led a column that attacked the Alamo. At San Jacinto he was taken prisoner again. In the Mexican War, Cos commanded the troops at Tuxpan. Cos died in Veracruz on October 1, 1854.

David Crockett

Frontiersman, politician, and Alamo defender, David Crockett was born in Tennessee on August 17, 1786. He rose from humble beginnings to become a United States Congressman from his home state of Tennessee. In 1813, David Crockett enlisted as a scout and would reenlist several more times in the militia, each time rising in rank. In 1817, Crockett became a justice of the peace. It was also during this time that he decided to run for the Tennessee legislature and was elected to two terms in 1821 and 1823. He then decided to run for the United States Congress and was elected in 1827. He would be reelected to Congress two more times. During his years in Congress, many books and plays were being written based on his exploits as a frontiersman. Crockett was on his way to possibly becoming president. In 1835 he lost his congressional seat and decided to leave Tennessee behind to explore Texas. On his way to Texas, he made his famous remark: "Since you have chosen to elect a man with a timber toe to succeed me, you may all go to hell and I will go to Texas." David Crockett arrived in Texas on January 9, 1836, with the prospects of moving his family there, but found himself in the middle of a revolution. He joined the Texas Army and was sent to San Antonio de Béxar to defend the Alamo. David Crockett died on the morning of March 6, 1836 fighting alongside the rest of the Alamo defenders.

Susanna Dickinson

Susanna Wilkerson was born in 1814 in Bolivar, Tennessee. She married Almeron Dickinson on May 24, 1829 and moved to Texas with him. Susannah and Almeron had a daughter, Angelina on December 14, 1834. After Almeron left Gonzales to fight at the Siege of Béxar, their home was broken into by a group of men. Future Alamo courier, Launcelot Smith came to her rescue. Almeron returned home and brought Susannah and Angelina to San Antonio. They entered the Alamo on February 23, 1836. Prior to the final battle on March 6, 1836, Colonel Travis, the Alamo commander gave fourteen-month-old Angelina a ring. Although Susannah was shot in the leg, she and her daughter were among the survivors of the battle of the Alamo. Afterwards General Santa Anna issued Susannah a blanket and two pesos and sent her on her way. On the trip to Gonzales she and Angelina met up with Travis' slave Joe. Susannah delivered the news of the fall of the Alamo to General Sam Houston. She would retell her experiences at the Alamo many times over the course of her life.

Gregorio Esparza

Alamo defender José María Esparza, better known as Gregorio, was born on February 25, 1802 in San Antonio de Béxar. In October 1835, Esparza enlisted in Juan Seguín's company. He participated in the siege and Battle of Béxar against the Mexican Army. He served until December 10, 1835. When news came of Antonio López de Santa Anna's arrival in San Antonio, the Esparza's were advised to take refuge in the Alamo since they supported the revolt. They entered the Alamo through a window and Gregorio chose to remain and fight even though Tejanos were being allowed to leave. His family remained with him. He manned a cannon and died at his post on March 6, 1836. His family survived the battle.

After the fall of the Alamo, Francisco, a Mexican soldier and Gregorio's brother, asked Santa Anna for his brother's body for burial. Gregorio Esparza was the only Alamo Defender to be given a Christian burial. His son Enrique, an Alamo survivor, would tell the story of what occurred during the battle.

Ben Milam

Ben Milam, soldier, colonizer, and entrepreneur, was born in Frankfort, Kentucky, on October 20, 1788. He had little or no formal schooling. He enlisted in the Kentucky militia and fought for several months in the War of 1812. In 1818 he was in Texas trading with the Comanche Indians on the Colorado River when he met David G. Burnet. The two became friends. In New Orleans in 1819 Milam met James Long, who was planning an expedition to help the revolutionaries in Mexico and Texas gain independence from Spain. Milam and his friends were imprisoned in Mexico City. Through the influence of Joel Poinsett, United States minister, all were released. By the spring of 1824 Milam returned to Mexico, which now had adopted the Constitution of 1824 and had a republican form of government. He was granted Mexican citizenship and commissioned a colonel in the Mexican army in 1824. The Law of April 6, 1830, ended U.S. immigration to Texas. This was one reason why Milam was not able to introduce the required number of settlers specified in his empresario contract, which was due to expire in 1832. In 1835 word came that Antonio López de Santa Anna had overthrown the representative government of Mexico to become dictator and was en route to Texas with an army. Milam headed for the Texas border, which he reached in October 1835, and encountered a company of soldiers. Milam joined them, helped capture Goliad, and then marched with them to join the main army to capture San Antonio. While returning from a scouting mission in the southwest in December 1835, Milam learned that a majority of the army had decided not to attack San Antonio as planned but to go into winter quarters. Convinced that this decision would be a disaster for the cause of independence, Milam made his famous, impassioned plea: "Who will go with old Ben Milam into San Antonio?" Three hundred volunteered, and the attack, which began at dawn on December 5, 1835, ended on December 9 with the surrender of Gen. Martín Perfecto de Cos and the Mexican army (Siege of). Milam did not survive to witness the victory, however. On December 7, 1835, he was shot in the head by a sniper and died instantly.

José Antonio Navarro

José Antonio Navarro, a leading Mexican participant in the Texas Revolution, was born at San Antonio de Béxar on February 27, 1795. Before Texas independence, Navarro was elected to both the Coahuila and Texas state offices. He became one of the three Mexican signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence. Upon his election to the Texas Congress as a representative from Bexar, Navarro sought to advance the rights of Tejanos. He was the sole Hispanic delegate to the Convention of 1845 which was assembled to vote on the American proposal to annex Texas which he favored. After voting in the affirmative, he remained to help write the first state constitution, known as the Constitution of 1845. He was twice elected to the state Senate. In 1846, in recognition of his contributions to Texas over the years, the legislature named the newly established Navarro County in his honor. He died on January 13, 1871.

Erastus (Deaf) Smith

Erastus (Deaf) Smith was born in New York on April 19, 1787. A childhood disease caused him to lose his hearing. Smith arrived in Texas in 1821 and settled near San Antonio. In the fall of 1825 Smith settled about one mile west of the site of present Gonzales, one of the first American settlements west of the Colorado River. At the outbreak of the Texas Revolution, Smith joined Stephen F. Austin's army, which was then besieging San Antonio. Smith took part in the Battle of Concepción on October 28, 1835. He was responsible for the discovery of the Mexican supply train involved in the Grass Fight. During the siege of Béxar, Smith was wounded at almost the same moment that Ben Milam was killed. Smith remained with the army despite his severe wounds. Smith served as a messenger for William B. Travis and carried Travis's letter from the Alamo on February 15, 1836. On March 13 Gen. Sam Houston dispatched Smith back to San Antonio to learn the status of the Alamo garrison. Smith returned with Susanna Dickinson and her daughter, Angelina. During the San Jacinto campaign he captured a Mexican courier bearing important dispatches to Santa Anna, and on April 21, 1836, Houston ordered Smith to destroy Vince's Bridge, reportedly to prevent the retreat of the Mexican army. Smith accomplished the mission and reported to Houston shortly before the battle of San Jacinto. He resigned his commission in the army after San Jacinto but raised and commanded a company of Texas Rangers. After he resigned from ranger service, he moved to Richmond, where he died on November 30, 1837. A monument in Smith's honor marks his grave in Richmond. Deaf Smith County is named in his honor.