



# Tales of Texas

## NEWSLETTER



### October 2024

This issue of Tales of Texas details a transplant to Texas. He was from South Carolina and seemed to spread doom and gloom wherever he went.

It's the strange story of Louis T Wigfall, a significant character of Texas in early statehood.

The photo above is the grave of L.T. Wigfall in Galveston.

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### Who Was Louis T. Wigfall?

Louis Wigfall was born into an elite and privileged family in 1816. His parents were in the Planter Class and operated businesses and a plantation around Charleston, South Carolina.

His parents died when he was a boy and he was left in the care of a guardian who home schooled him and sent him off to college at the University of South Carolina. Louis was the type of person who alienated people around him, but at the same time, he was a charismatic public speaker.

Fulfilling the role of spoiled, rich brat, he was in continuous trouble at school. A hard drinker and gambler, he burned through money. The administrators couldn't wait to get to their offices in the morning because Louis greeted them with memos criticizing everything they did. He kept the whole place stirred up, a foreshadowing of things to come.

Louis graduated from school and studied for the South Carolina bar. He passed, a big surprise to those who knew him. The law was boring to him. He had imagined presenting fiery speeches before spell-bound jurors and exonerating well-paying clients. Turned out it was mostly paperwork, but he found out he could stir up men in taverns and meeting halls.

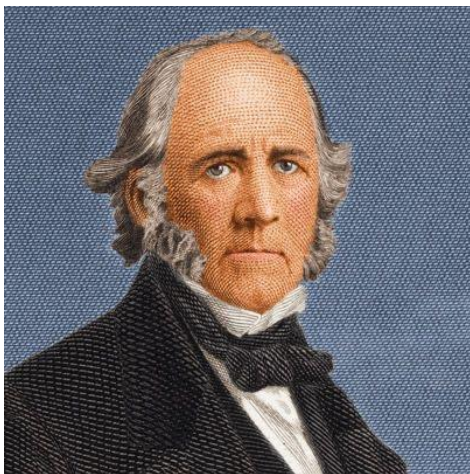
He ran up huge debts and changed his focus to secessionist politics. South Carolina, the hotbed of secession, was not ready to take such a step in 1844 when Louis ran for office.



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*Louis T Wigfall*  
*South Carolina Secessionist*



Senator Sam Houston  
"The Old Chief"

In 1845, the Stars and Stripes added a new star: number twenty-eight for those playing at home. Wigfall lost everything in South Carolina, so he pulled up stakes and moved to Texas.

He steamed to Galveston, and then moved up the trail to Nacogdoches. He joined a law practice there and worked under a man named Bill Ochiltree. For once, he didn't act like he knew everything. He learned the law and became a pretty good trial lawyer in the piney woods.

He couldn't leave well enough alone. His extreme South Carolina roots took hold of him. The Democratic Party's Senator John C. Calhoun (D-SC) had always represented nullification and secession as the radical wing of the party. Wigfall put himself squarely in Calhoun's camp.

The Democratic Party had a moderate wing. This wing was composed of many "First Texans." The very first election the Republic of Texas ever had was in 1836.

Of course, Sam Houston was elected president in that first election. Houston made the decision to run eleven days before the election. What many people don't know about the election is that there was a straw poll conducted on the ballot.

The question pertained to future association of the Republic with the United States. By a whopping 98% margin, the voters shared that they wanted to enter the United States as a state at the next opportunity.

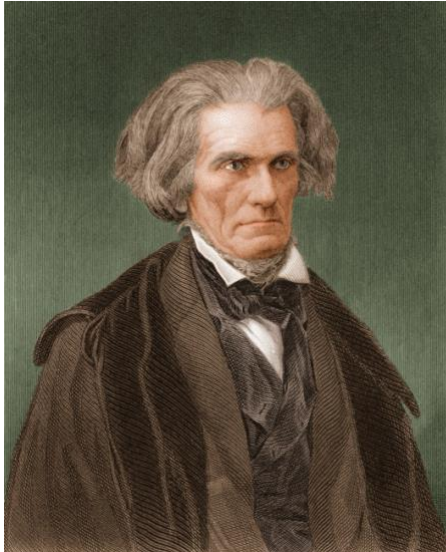
The First Texans loved the Union.

As "outsiders" from the Planter Class moved to Texas, the First Texans shrank in proportion. The legislature soon began to pick up loudmouth influencers like Louis Wigfall. People called them "Fire-eaters."

The Fire-eaters ran head-long into moderate U.S. Senator Sam Houston (D-TX).



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Sen. John C Calhoun (D-SC)  
Architect of Secession



Sen. Jefferson Davis (D-MS)

Texas politics was undergoing big changes. Fire-eaters like Wigfall were exercising out-sized influence across the South. Secession was the talk of the day.

A governor's election in 1857 ended with a Wigfall associate and Fire-eater named Runnels winning the race in Texas. The legislature soon ousted Houston from office (remember, senators were appointed – not elected in those days).

Wigfall found himself as a U. S. Senator from Texas.

General Houston, known to the First Texans as the “Old Chief” returned home. He ran for governor in the next election and won. Most Texans, even Fire-eaters, had too much respect for the “Old Chief” to vote against him.

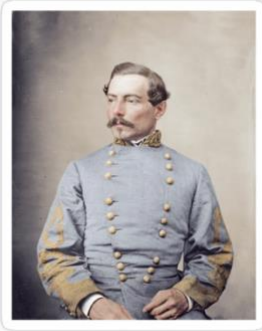
Wigfall had charismatic speaking abilities. His speechifying was something else. I would say, “Second to None” but that wouldn't exactly be right. The “Old Chief” was “Second to None.” Besides everything else, Houston had actually DONE something. Something that took guts and a sword. Wigfall had zero accomplishments.

Governor Houston knew he was near the end of his life. If there was one thing he loved more than Texas, it was the United States of America. He would go on the stump again. He would put on the San Jacinto buckskin and sword. He would use all the good will and political capital he had in a last-ditch effort to keep Texas in his beloved Union.

It was not to be. Too many planters and wannabe planters had moved in.



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General  
P.G.T. Beauregard  
“Defender of Charleston”



“Stars & Stripes”  
The Actual Flag Shot  
Down by SC Gunners

Voters of Texas, over the loud objections of their governor, seceded from the Union in an overwhelming manner. Wigfall, of course, was elated. The transplanted Texan soon headed back to his native South Carolina. He sensed the insurrection he long hoped for would sprout in his hometown of Charleston.

In April 1861, the Confederate State of South Carolina surrounded the U.S. Army and blasted away at Fort Sumter. Wigfall was there. He wormed his way onto the staff of General P.G.T. Beauregard and was there to enjoy every one of the over three thousand shots Confederate gunners fired at the fort.

After two days of continuous bombardment, Wigfall sensed resolve in the fort waning. He was wrong, as usual. He thought Major Anderson, commanding the U.S. Army, had struck the colors.

Actually, the colors were shot down by Confederate artillery, but American soldiers picked the flag up and made a new pole. Wigfall couldn't see all that because the make-shift flagstaff was shorter, and it was stormy weather.

Wigfall devised a scheme that included a leaky boat, two slaves, and a Confederate private. He ordered the two black men to paddle the boat across the stormy harbor while the private bailed water. He tied a white handkerchief to his sword and off they went. Somehow, they made it to the fort. Anderson sent his terms to Beauregard via Wigfall. A little while later, Confederate officers arrived at the fort with the official terms from Beauregard. Everyone was angry with Wigfall's grandstanding.

The Yankees remembered South Carolina as Sherman marched north from Savannah. Sherman couldn't curtail his men's retribution for the heart of the rebellion. Wigfall's South Carolina was destroyed. He survived the war and decided to return to Texas, which had been spared the North's vengeance.

He arrived in Galveston, broke and in bad health. Sam Houston was right when he warned his fellow Texans secession would be their death knell. Wigfall died penniless and his buried in Galveston's Episcopal Cemetery on Broadway.