

July 2026

Between Woke and Whitewash

Issue 33



Tales of Texas Newsletter



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This issue of Tales of Texas is about our Centennial Celebration in July 1876

Comments? Please email me at:
DarylLott.Texas@gmail.com
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America's 100th

The Centennial That Lost Its Smile

When Americans awoke on July 4, 1876, they expected a birthday unlike any other the nation had ever known. One hundred years had passed since the Declaration of Independence. Across the country church bells rang, cannons thundered, bands played patriotic music, and communities gathered beneath fluttering flags. In Philadelphia, the great Centennial Exposition showcased American's astonishing progress. Visitors marveled at new inventions, towering machinery, and exhibits celebrating a nation that had survived revolution, civil war, and reunion.

There was every reason to celebrate. Yet even as speeches praised the nation's first century, troubling reports were already moving eastward by telegraph.

Only days earlier, on June 25 and 26, Lieutenant Colonel George Custer and more than 260 men of the 7th Cavalry had been overwhelmed along the banks of Montana's Little Bighorn River by Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors. Because of the remoteness of the battlefield, news traveled slowly. Newspapers across the nation now carried the stunning reports, casting a shadow over the Centennial festivities.

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The timing could hardly have been more dramatic.

As Americans celebrated one hundred years of freedom, they were reminded that their nation remained unfinished. Painful Reconstruction after the Civil War was drawing to a close. The western frontier remained contested. The promises and contradictions of American expansion were on full display.

For many Texans, the news carried a more personal significance. After the Civil War, Custer spent much of his military career in Texas. He arrived in August 1865 as a brevet major general with a division of Union cavalry.

He established his headquarters at Liendo Plantation, where he and his wife, Libbie, remained for several months while federal forces supervised the transition from Confederate to Federal authority in Texas. The plantation, just northwest of Houston near Brenham, was a favorite stopping place of Sam Houston as he visited with the owners, the Groce family. It also holds the historical significance of receiving the first cotton gin in Texas, among other things.

Custer's flamboyant personality, flowing blonde hair, and Civil War reputation as the "Boy General" made him one of the nation's best-known soldiers.

In November 1868, Custer and the 7th attacked Chief Black Kettle's Southern Cheyenne village along the Washita River in present-day Oklahoma. Black Kettle was in winter quarters and did not believe the U.S. Army moved aggressively in snowy and bitter conditions. Americans celebrated Custer's victory as a hard-fought battle. He lost 22 men KIA there, including Captain Louis Hamilton, the grandson of Alexander Hamilton. Chief Black Kettle and his wife were also killed in the battle. Whether viewed as a desperate victory or another tragic episode in the Indian Wars, the campaign ensured that Custer's name was fully embedded in the nation's consciousness.



Brevet Major General
Lt Colonel
G. A. Custer
7th Cavalry



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Chief Sitting Bull
Buffalo Bill

For many Americans, Custer became a fallen hero at Little Bighorn. Public outrage fueled calls for a stronger military campaign against the Plains tribes, a response that ultimately accelerated the end of Native American resistance on the northern plains.

History, however, invites us to look beyond simple heroes and villains.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn was a tragedy for the soldiers who died, for the Indians fighting to preserve their way of life, and for a nation struggling to reconcile its ideals with its actions. Both courage and suffering were present on that battlefield.

Perhaps that is the lasting lesson of America's Centennial.

National anniversaries naturally celebrate victories, but history is not tidy. Even during moments of great joy, sorrow often walks alongside celebration. The Fourth of July in 1876 reminds us that a nation's story is not written in parades and speeches, but also in sacrifice, disappointment, and the difficult work of becoming what it claims to be.

As we celebrate our 250th Independence Day this year, we can be grateful for the blessing handed down by those who came before us while remembering that every generation inherits unfinished work. The founders understood that liberty would require constant vigilance. One hundred years later, the Centennial generation learned that lesson anew.

Two hundred and fifty years after the Declaration of Independence, it remains just as true.

I have written a special 250th Anniversary essay about our first 250 years as a nation and where we might go from here. If you enjoy history essays, you should like it.

The essay appears in *The Blues* magazine's July 2026 issue. Please [click here](#) for the magazine's home page and navigate to the July issue. It is in my monthly column, "Daryl's Deliberations." It's the largest police oriented magazine in the country with over a million impressions.



In my new novel *Isobel's Song*, I place fictional characters inside these very days. The protagonist is a young woman. This in and of itself is unusual because the story is not a romance, Hallmark movie formula, or “chick lit.”

Most of the characters are actual historical figures, including the females of the era.

Another thing about so many of our ancestors is that they relied on their Christian or Jewish faith to guide them through the hazards of life.

The novel is available in Kindle, paperback, hardback, and audiobook (Amazon & Audible). We are not trying to sell a book so much as we are trying to get a message out that our ancestors sacrificed much to leave Texas to us. Regardless of our race or gender, we can be proud of Texas, the First Texans, and all those who came to Texas thinking about the future.

The illustration above is from *Isobel's Song* and includes the link to the Amazon listing.