



Tales of Texas Newsletter



August 2026

This issue of Tales of Texas is about the First Lady of Texas, Margaret Houston. Photo by author of grandson, Independence, Texas

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Margaret Lea Houston Texas Hero

History has a way of celebrating great men while overlooking the remarkable women who walked beside them. Few examples illustrate this better than Margaret Moffette Lea Houston, the devoted wife of General Sam Houston and one of the most influential First Ladies in Texas history.

When Texans think of Sam Houston, they picture the hero of San Jacinto, the first president of the Republic of Texas, governor, senator, and statesman. Yet behind the public figure stood a woman whose quiet faith and steadfast character helped shape the final decades of his life.

Margaret Lea was born on April 11, 1819, in Marion, Alabama, into a respected Southern family. Well educated for her time, she possessed a deep Christian faith that guided every aspect of her life. Friends described her as gracious, intelligent, and gentle, but beneath that gentle spirit lay remarkable courage and conviction.



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When she married Sam Houston in 1840, many questioned the match. Houston was twenty-six years older than Margaret and carried the burdens of a difficult past. He had already experienced political triumphs, personal failures, and a highly publicized first marriage that ended in heartbreak. Few believed such different lives could be joined successfully.

The naysayers were mistaken about Margaret.

Margaret brought stability to Houston's often turbulent life. Her calm presence created the peaceful home he had rarely known. Together they raised eight children while balancing the demands of public service and frontier life.

Perhaps her greatest influence came through her unwavering Christian faith.

Although Houston respected religion throughout much of his life, he postponed making a public profession of faith for many years. Margaret never attempted to force the issue. Instead, she lived her beliefs daily. Her example, her prayers, and her quiet encouragement became a powerful testimony.

Finally, on November 19, 1854, Sam Houston was baptized by immersion at Independence Baptist Church in Independence, Texas, by the Reverend Rufus C. Burleson, president of Baylor University. Houston later remarked that he had delayed baptism because he feared he could not live the Christian life faithfully. Margaret's patient encouragement helped him understand that faith begins not with perfection but with trust in God's grace.

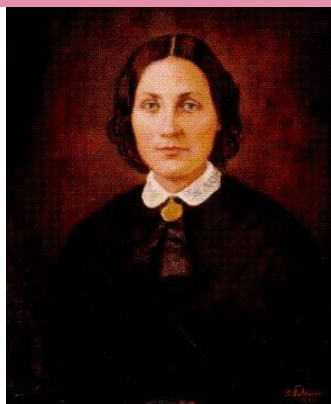
From that day forward, Houston openly acknowledged the importance of his faith. Those who knew him observed a gentler spirit in his later decades, one that reflected both his own spiritual growth and Margaret's enduring influence.

Margaret also stood beside her husband during one of the most difficult political crises in Texas history. In 1861, when Texas voted to secede from the Union, Houston refused to swear allegiance to the Confederacy. Rather than violate the oath he had taken to the United States, he accepted removal from office.

The decision cost him his governorship and ended his political career.



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Margaret Lea
Houston

For Margaret, the consequences were deeply personal. She watched criticism fall upon the man she loved while the nation drifted toward civil war. Through it all, she remained steadfast, supporting him privately even when public opinion turned against him.

Following Houston's removal from office, the family retired to the Steamboat House in Huntsville. There, away from the political battles that had defined much of his life, Margaret devoted herself to caring for her husband as his health steadily declined.

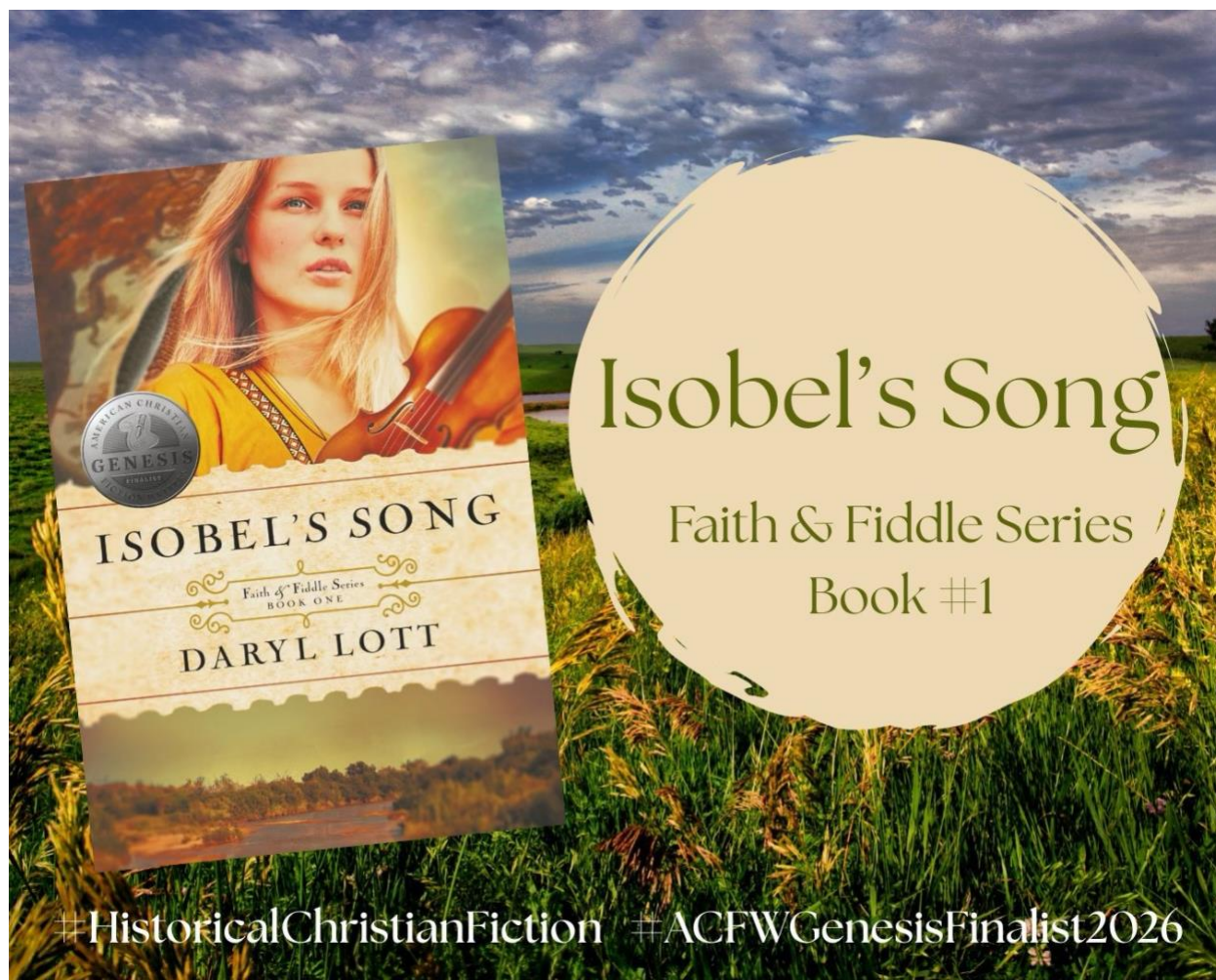
Sam Houston died on July 26, 1863. His reported final words—"Texas... Texas... Margaret..."—beautifully reflected the two great loves that remained with him until the end: his adopted homeland and the faithful wife who had shared the journey.

Margaret lived only another four years, raising their children and preserving the memory of her husband's legacy. She never sought fame for herself, yet historians increasingly recognize that her influence reached far beyond the walls of her home. She strengthened one of Texas's greatest leaders not through political ambition or public speeches, but through unwavering faith, wisdom, and steadfast love.

The year after Sam died, Margaret lost her best friend—her mother Nancy. Nancy Lea lived in Independence, Texas near the church where Sam was baptized. Margaret was in Independence in 1867 when the Yellow Fever Outbreak of 1867 struck. She contracted the deadly disease and passed away in Independence. In those days, people didn't know how the disease spread (mosquitoes) so Margaret was not transported to Huntsville to rest beside her husband.

Instead, Margaret rests with her mother. If readers wish to visit her grave, they are free to do so. She is buried in the church yard cemetery of Independence Baptist Church. This church is still operational today. The bell Nancy purchased in honor of Sam's baptism there is still rung today. If you go on Sunday, you may worship and visit the cemetery. There is a museum there, but it is closed on Sunday. Coincidentally, this is where Baylor University started. The columns of "Old Baylor" are still there as are informative historical markers.

My second book in the "Faith & Fiddle Series" releases on September 7, 2026. Yes, next month. Much of Margaret's story is in that volume as well as her mother. When Margaret and Nancy first arrived after the wedding, they lived in Cedar Point (Baytown). Margaret got malaria and had a miscarriage. The mosquitoes there were too much for her.



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.”

The story springs from my own family’s history as well as yours. Our female ancestors were not who we think they were. They were much stronger. They did not adhere to tropes and modern-day stereotypes. They didn’t have time for such nonsense. They were too busy trying to survive. We stand on the shoulders of giants.

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 launches in March due to the importance of the month to Texas history. It is available in printed book form and audiobook now (Amazon & Audible). The Kindle e-book launches on March 31. 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 and the First Texans.

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