



# Tales of Texas

## NEWSLETTER



### Happy Veteran's Day

The inaugural issue of *Tales of Texas* fittingly opens with a fantastic tale of brave veterans and their connections to Texas.

It's the story of the Battle of Galveston and one family's legacy stemming from the lesser known, but important engagement.

The two photos in the masthead are Houston's Flag at San Jacinto and Burnside Bridge at Antietam Battlefield. All photos are in public domain or in the author's personal collection with the exception of the 1894 Opera House; it is from the Facebook page of the 1894 Opera House.

Comments? Go to website listed below.

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### New Year's Eve 1862

BOOOOMMMMM!!!!!!! The explosion of the *U.S.S. Westfield* and the capture of the *U.S.S. Harriet Lane* set off a chain of events that would resonate across America, entangling a diverse array of elements including a sword, Sioux warriors, Masonic funerals, pirates, exhumations, the Philippine Islands, a renowned theater star, the Medal of Honor, and the ever-present government "red tape." The narrative unfolds in Galveston, Texas on New Year's Eve, 1862 and New Year's Day, 1863.

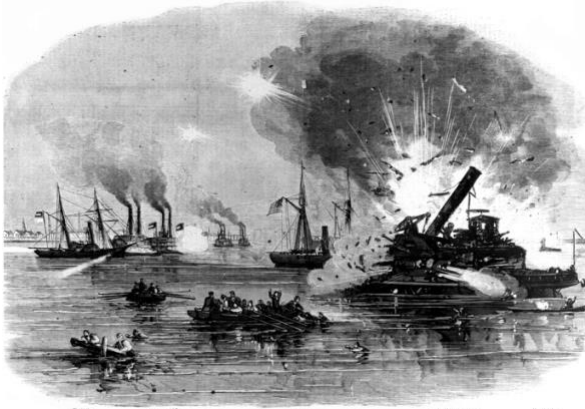
### Galveston, Texas

The *Westfield's* devastating detonation lit up the Galveston night, showering the port with seawater, debris, and the courageous figures of the *Westfield's* crew. The blast was the miserable crescendo of the U.S. Navy's disastrous attempt to keep Galveston in Union hands. The Union's defeat ensured the island would not return to federal authority until "Juneteenth" 1865.

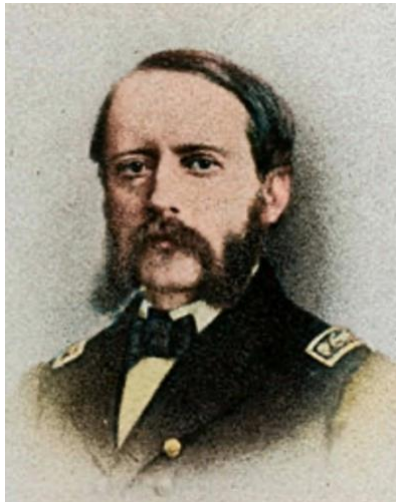
The Battle of Galveston was a significant engagement of land and sea forces beginning with the *U.S.S. Harriet Lane* finding herself stranded in the muddy waters just off the port's piers. She was mired in the silt after Confederate gunners hit her anchor hoist causing the anchor to plunge into the seabed, trapping the former flagship of Admiral David Farragut. Her captain, Commander J.M. Wainwright II, of the United States Navy, fought fiercely to repel Texas cavalry troopers, but he lost both his life and his ship.



# Tales of Texas



*USS Westfield Explodes*



CMDR Jonathan M.  
Wainwright II, USN  
*USS Harriet Lane*

The loss of the *Harriet Lane* marked the introduction of a remarkable family legacy that spanned nearly a century, characterized by daring exploits that often seem beyond belief. Captain Wainwright and his first officer, Lieutenant Commander Edward Lea, boldly fought Confederate boarders until their noble fall. Mr. Lea's father, a Confederate major on his general's staff, played a significant role in the tale as he was present during the battle.

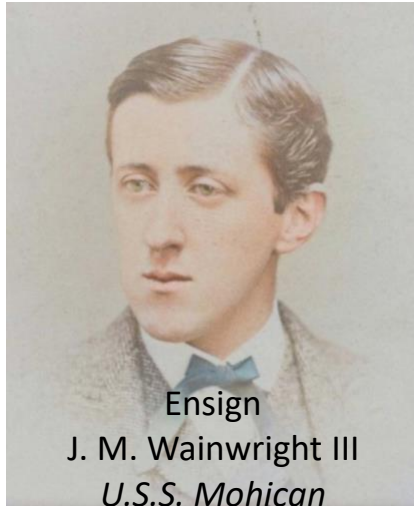
In a poignant and futile attempt to secure aid for his son before the younger Lea's passing on the deck of the *Harriet Lane*, Major Lea then found himself in an agonizing predicament concerning the remains of his son. Despite being adversaries in battle, he requested that his son and Captain Wainwright be buried with Masonic and full military honors. Confederate General Magruder approved the request, and the Confederate Army and Masonic Lodge of Galveston officiated their burial in Trinity Episcopal Cemetery on Broadway in Galveston.

The island remained in Confederate hands until General Gordon Granger arrived on June 19, 1865, and placed Texas under the administration of the U.S. Army. Later that year, Captain Wainwright's remains were exhumed from Galveston and repatriated to Manhattan, where he was laid to rest beside his parents, Bishop J.M. Wainwright I, and his wife, Amelia. Maria, Captain Wainwright's late wife whose passing left him a widower with four children, was exhumed in Philadelphia, and reinterred alongside her husband and his parents at the same time.

The Wainwright Family legacy is nothing short of legendary. When their mother passed away in 1854, a physician friend of the family in Philadelphia, Dr. Edward Peace, and his wife Anna, themselves newlyweds, provided unwavering care for the four Wainwright children as their father served in the Navy. Such saintly figures, even today, who support military dependents during their parents' deployment often go unnoticed as unsung heroes. The Wainwright case serves as testimony of their virtuous contributions.



# Tales of Texas



The eldest son, J. M. Wainwright III, following in his father's footsteps, embarked on a naval career at just fourteen years old. Following his graduation from the Naval Academy, he found himself engaged in a battle with pirates off the Pacific Coast of Mexico in 1870. Tragically, he met a fate eerily reminiscent of his father's, losing his life after being shot on the water near the pirate hideout. Although his name is enshrined on a tablet in the Naval Academy chapel, the heroic ensign was not buried there. The *New York Herald* and the Wainwright family papers recorded that he was buried in Manhattan with his parents and grandparents.

The eldest daughter, Elizabeth or "Lizzie" was twelve when her father died. Lizzie pursued her education and ventured to the homeland of her late mother in war torn Virginia. She married a Virginian, Nathaniel Burwell, whose family partnered with General Daniel Morgan of American Revolutionary War fame and built the Burwell-Morgan Mill, which still stands today. Together with her husband, Lizzie dedicated herself to the reconstruction of their community until her untimely death at the age of 32 due to illness. She rests with her husband in Virginia.



Major R. P. P. Wainwright

The third child, Robert P. P. Wainwright, orphaned at ten, later pursued admission to West Point, where he graduated as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the U.S. Cavalry. He served with distinction in the Sioux War of 1876 in the First Cavalry, not the ill-fated Seventh. He rose through the ranks of the Cavalry and attained the rank of major in the Spanish-American War where he led a cavalry charge in Cuba at the Battle of Santiago. Major Wainwright was on active duty in Manilla when he contracted a tropical disease and died there in 1902. He rests in Arlington National Cemetery.

The youngest member of the Wainwright family was Marie, who was only nine when her father died. Marie received an excellent education under the care of her guardian, Dr. Peace. Her passion for theater led her to study acting and singing in Paris and London showcasing exceptional talent. She met and married an actor, W. H. Slaughter, and it appears that she suffered a reversal of fortune. Some of the background details of this intriguing story have come to light by examining the letters of Mr. Slaughter and Dr. Peace regarding the children's survivor benefits.



# Tales of Texas



Marie Wainwright  
As "Viola"



1894 Opera House  
Galveston

Mr. Slaughter applied to the Pension Commissioner on behalf of Marie for back payments owed to his wife. Dr. Peace supplied all the supporting documents in the original 1863 application. The pension was approved in Philadelphia and the monthly stipend of \$54 was granted, but then, without warning, it ceased. The authorities in Washington indicated that the file lacked a supporting document but never advised Dr. Peace what, exactly, was missing. Frustrated by bureaucratic hurdles, Dr. Peace abandoned his efforts, citing the "red tape" as an insurmountable obstacle, a phrase quoted directly from the governmental archive.

Mr. Slaughter sought Marie's back payments from the Pension Bureau and discovered the missing document was the official record of Captain Wainwright's death. In an apparent governmental lapse, the Department of Interior, the department responsible for pensions at the time, never received notification from the Navy Department of Captain Wainwright's death. Consequently, Marie's claim was denied due to the notification arriving after the five-year limit, a perplexing bureaucratic oversight.

Meanwhile, Marie's acting career soared, securing her status as what modern audiences would term an "A-List" actress. She performed on prestigious stages worldwide and became the focal point of the grand opening of the Galveston Opera House in January 1895.

The demand to see Marie was so immense, the entire inventory of 1,684 seats was sold. The citizens of Galveston honored Marie with a ceremony, presenting her with her father's sword which Texas troopers had taken from the *Harriet Lane* some thirty-two years prior. Marie's remarkable career continued into the Hollywood era where she starred in three silent films. She passed away in 1923 and rests in Pennsylvania.



# Tales of Texas



General J. M. Wainwright IV

Major Robert Wainwright, the earlier cited cavalry officer, welcomed a son into the world, whom he named J. M. Wainwright IV. This young man followed in his father's footsteps and entered West Point earning a commission in the U.S. Cavalry. Stationed in Manilla, where his father died, he served under General Douglas MacArthur and soon found himself in the daunting position of leading U.S. forces in the Philippine Islands during World War II.

The Japanese attacked the United States on December 7, 1941, and it soon became clear American forces in the Philippines could not be relieved or resupplied. President Franklin Roosevelt ordered General MacArthur's evacuation in the face of overwhelming odds. The president entrusted Lieutenant General Wainwright with the solemn task of leading the U.S. Army in the Philippines.

After a brave stand on Corregidor, with no viable route to victory, General Wainwright made the agonizing decision to surrender his forces becoming the highest-ranking American officer to enter captivity.

Enduring the harrowing Bataan Death March and cruelty of the Allies' Japanese tormentors, General Wainwright displayed unwavering leadership, with the survival of his men as his utmost concern. In recognition of his extraordinary leadership under such dire circumstances, President Truman awarded him the Medal of Honor and promoted him to the rank of full general.

Following the Japanese surrender, General Wainwright enjoyed a loving reunion with his son, J. M. Wainwright V, a commander in the United States Merchant Marine Service. Returning to the family's maritime ancestral roots, Captain Wainwright courageously navigated his ships through perilous enemy waters, delivering invaluable cargos to the front lines.



CMDR J. M. Wainwright V  
U.S. Merchant Marine Service



# Tales of Texas

After the war, General Wainwright returned to Texas to undergo rehabilitation at Fort Sam Houston Medical Center in San Antonio. He and his comrades had endured profound suffering, and many would require lifelong medical care. General Wainwright passed away in 1953 and rests beside his father in Section One of Arlington National Cemetery.

One can only imagine the fierce pride that would have filled Captain Wainwright's chest as he examined the legacy his progeny left our nation. Their enduring commitment and sacrifice serve as an inspiring illustration of what one family can do. The unwavering love of one's country as the guiding principle of one's conduct transcends generations and geography.

It's easy to imagine Marie accepting her father's sword in sight of the very battlefield where he lost his life. As the same January Gulf breezes her father experienced toyed with her blonde curls, her misty eyes peeled back the memory of the last time she saw her daddy as a little girl of nine. All daddies promise their little girls they will return home as soon as they can, but this little girl couldn't understand why her daddy never came home. Now, the same sword that dangled at her father's side when she last saw him was in her trembling fingers. The heartrending episode opened her broken heart once more. Years of theater training failed her as the affection shown by a former adversary in honor of her heroic father enveloped her and tears flowed while her voice cracked. She knew instinctively that her daddy was proud of her.

The 1894 Opera House, opened by Marie Wainwright, continues to delight Texans of all ages. A short walk around the port will reveal the historic battlefield between the shore and Pelican Island where the *Harriet Lane* met her fate. A quick glance toward Pelican Island reveals the Battleship *Texas* in drydock not far from where the *Westfield* exploded. To this day, the Hendley Building displays defacement due to the retaliatory fire of Captain Wainwright's guns. Most passersby do not realize they are looking at battle damage from the day the Civil War came to Galveston.

Any follower of Texas history must visit Trinity Episcopal Cemetery on Broadway. They may view the grave of Lieutenant Commander Edward Lea, U.S.N. who once shared his resting place with Captain Wainwright. Captain Wainwright's final resting place in Manhattan is not marked with his name, but a cenotaph is near Mr. Lea's grave. The cenotaph, on a memorial to all Union losses at Galveston, symbolizes the beginning of a remarkable legacy that extended far beyond our beloved Galveston Island, reaching across posterity, oceans, and continents.

On this Veterans' Day, it is my prayer that all veterans feel the depth of appreciation their service produces in a grateful nation. The Wainwright Family serves as merely one illustration of countless families with veterans, past or present, akin to yours and mine, embodying the highest ideals of service and sacrifice. May God bless the United States of America and her noble veterans.