



Tales of Texas

NEWSLETTER



February 2024

This issue of Tales of Texas details a true "First Texan" who wrote the Constitution of 1824 among other things, including designing our first flag which appears in the masthead.

It's the story of the first vice-president of Texas, Lorenzo De Zavala.

The two photos, by the author, in the masthead are the first Republic of Texas flag and replicas of the Twin Sisters cannons at San Jacinto Battleground. Other photos in this edition are from Texas Parks and History websites or taken by the author.

Comments? Go to website listed below.

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Native-Born Mexican

Lorenzo de Zavala was born in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico in 1788. This is important because under the Empresario contracts of Stephen F. Austin, only native-born Mexicans could settle land in Texas within twenty-five miles of the coast. De Zavala's native roots in Mexico gave him a ring-side seat to history.

Revolutionary Spirit

The Texas Revolution really started in 1821. Mexico overthrew the Spanish Crown in that year and began a period of instability that reaches to this present day. The first question of any revolution is, "Who is going to be in charge after the revolution succeeds?" In both the U.S.A. and Mexico, the question revolved around the issue of *federalism*. Federalism simply means power is shared between national and state governments.

The Constitution of the United States puts forth the limits of national and state governments which result in confusion to this day as anybody who watches the legal wranglings of Texas and the federal government along the Rio Grande can attest. The American Civil War was one result of the federalism question (slavery being the issue) in the U.S.A.

Mexico had two sides in the continuing question after 1821: *Centralistas* and *Federalistas*. Lorenzo de Zavala stepped onto the world stage as a knowledgeable student of government.



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*Zavala Point As Seen
From Top of Monument*



Lorenzo De Zavala
Vice President of Texas

De Zavala crafted the Constitution of 1824 which is a *Federalista* document. It meant the states would exercise dominant local control, especially in the administration of real property. Modern day Leftists propose the document was pro-slavery since it did not prohibit it. Slavery was already illegal in Mexico, so De Zavala, an abolitionist, ignored it. The primary ingredient of the document was states' rights. This was the document Anglos swore allegiance to when entering Mexico.

De Zavala was appointed a Mexican senator and then a Mexican governor. In 1835, Lorenzo became the Mexican ambassador to France. He was fluent in Spanish, English, and French. When Santa Anna, a friend and fellow *federalista*, switched sides to the *nationalistas*, De Zavala resigned and joined the Texians who were campaigning for the Constitution of 1824. The Texians hoped to be a full member state under Mexico City with the self-governance supplied by the document. Santa Anna's flip-flop ignited a full-blown civil war in Mexico of which Texas was only one state.

De Zavala was appointed to the Vice-Presidency of Texas. Due to his native birth, he was allowed to own property within twenty-five miles of the coast. He had one property in present day Harris County consisting of 177 acres on Zavala Point. You may be wondering where Zavala Point is or was. If you've ever been to the San Jacinto Battleground, you saw it. If you eat seafood at the Monument Inn, you have a perfect vantage point. The Lynchburg Ferry runs from the Battlefield/Monument Inn side of Buffalo Bayou to Zavala Point on the other side. De Zavala, the Allen Brothers, Juan Seguin, and others saw Galveston as being too vulnerable to hurricanes, so they sought property on Buffalo Bayou farther inland.

In random chance, Santa Anna chased the government of Texas from Harrisburg to Galveston and set up his camp at the confluence of Buffalo Bayou and the San Jacinto River. He set his camp up opposite the home of his one-time friend, Lorenzo de Zavala. Sam Houston, of course, caught up with Santa Anna and cut the Mexican's avenue of escape. De Zavala offered his home as a hospital for the Texas Army during the battle. The first casualty taken there was Colonel James Neil, the first commander of the Alamo. Travis relieved him so he could attend to ill family members in Mina, Texas. Neil was wounded in the artillery duel on San Jacinto's first day of battle.



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General Manuel Castrillon
At San Jacinto



De Zavala Plaza
At San Jacinto

As the De Zavala family grew, more people passed away at the home joining Castrillon and Lorenzo in the little cemetery. In 1925, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas made arrangements to have the remains of all the burials at the cemetery relocated across the bayou on the battleground. As the ceremony started, a De Zavala grandson, Victor, interrupted the proceedings on the grounds he didn't want the burials disturbed. The Settegast Funeral Home put the bodies back at Zavala Point. In 1939, the United States Government purchased the property to be used as an ordinance depot. They put a chain link fence around the cemetery. In 1964, the Milray Corporation bought the property and wanted to do something with the cemetery. The land was sinking.

During the two-day Battle of San Jacinto, the Texans suffered nine dead and multiple casualties, including Sam Houston. His ankle was shattered and caused him grievous pain. In a land with no antibiotics or antiseptics, the wound could easily be mortal.

The Mexican side had hundreds of dead and wounded. The Texans offered no burials of the Mexican dead for two reasons: 1) they had no equipment or tools, and 2) if the Mexicans were given a Christian burial when they denied such to Texan casualties at Goliad and the Alamo, the men wouldn't stand for it.

Lorenzo de Zavala had a friend fighting for the Mexican Army, General Manuel Castrillon. General Castrillon, we believe, was one of the generals opposed to Santa Anna's "No Quarter" edicts. After Santa Anna fled the field on the back of a fast horse, General Castrillon folded his arms across his chest in defiance of the Texan onslaught and his commander's cowardice. Texan troops struck him down as he stood beside the Mexican cannon. De Zavala requested General Castrillon's body from Sam Houston, who consented. De Zavala and his son, Lorenzo, Jr., took the remains and buried the general near the Zavala home across the bayou.

General Castrillon would become the first person buried in the De Zavala Cemetery and the only Mexican given a Christian burial at San Jacinto.

About six months later, De Zavala was rowing his small boat across Buffalo Bayou where the ferry is today. The boat capsized and De Zavala swam back to shore. He developed an infection, again no antibiotics available, and died as a result of being in the cold water.



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Markers
(NOT Remains)
At San Jacinto

In 1968, the Texas Legislature voted to remove the cemetery from Zavala Point to the battleground. Local funeral homes in Houston and Pasadena were consulted to make the move. The funeral directors studied the situation. Zavala Point sank nearly *seven feet* due to subsidence since the burials. It was their professional opinion that there would be no remains to move due to the saturation of the area. However, the Schlitzberger Company managed to move all the markers to the battleground in that same year. The De Zavala Family was given permission to use the new ground as their family cemetery. Anyone buried there is from that grant.

Subsidence in the entire SE Harris County area of Baytown and the San Jacinto Battleground is the cause of the loss of so much of our history, including prehistoric artifacts. The famous “Surrender Oak” under which Houston and Santa Anna parlayed as Lorenzo De Zavala acted as interpreter was lost to the water in 1924.

If one goes to the present-day ferry crossing and takes about an hour to observe the barge and ship traffic, one will see first-hand why the city of Houston is where it is and what attracted farsighted men such as Lorenzo De Zavala, Juan Seguin, and the Allen Brothers. Buffalo Bayou is known as the Houston Ship Channel there.



View of Zavala Point
From Monument Inn

Lorenzo De Zavala, Texas Hero, is much more than a footnote in Texas History. He reasoned out the issue of federalism and sided with the people over a murderous dictator. Today’s Leftist attacks on his Constitution of 1824 make him appear as a pro-slavery advocate when there could be nothing further from the truth. His constitution failed because it lacked support from the Catholic Church and the Army, both of which did not want to share power with the people.

Daniel Potter’s archaeological report to UTSA (1991) is cited throughout this edition. It’s fortunate for us that modern construction projects require archeological supervision. Thanks to Mr. Potter for his work!