



Tales of Texas

NEWSLETTER



July 2024

This issue of Tales of Texas has as its setting, Nacogdoches, Texas, the site of a critical battle in the cause of Texas independence.

The headline photo above is of a replica of the "Old Stone Fort" on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University.

Comments? Go to website listed below.

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Nacogdoches

Nacogdoches, Caddo legend has it, derives its name from one of two twin sons of an old chief. The dying chief called the twins to his bedside and told them to walk for three days, one to the west and the other to the east. Nacogdoches walked to the west and Natchitoches walked to the east. The villages, the story goes, bear their names today.

El Camino Real

The Spanish military and missionaries used the old Indian pathways and connected Nacogdoches to San Antonio and points south toward Mexico City via "*El Camino Real*" or "The King's Highway". Initially, the Catholic priests who represented the Church called the area "*el poblado de Angelina.*" An Indian maiden the priests named "Angelina" acted as their guide. The priests only spoke Spanish, so they didn't know her real name. They gave her the name "Angelina",

Meaning "Little Angel". They called the area, the village (*el poblado*) of Angelina. They named the local river for her as well. Today the modern Texas county is still called Angelina County.

During the days of Anglo colonization under Stephen F. Austin, the area was also called "The Redlands" due to the sandy soil. In the 1820s and 30's, Nacogdoches was the first town of any size many pioneers encountered. Immigration from Tennessee, the Carolinas, Kentucky, and Virginia used a new mode of travel: the steamboat. Steamboats carried immigrants like Sam Houston from



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Author &
Grandsons
Old Stone Fort



Marker "Ancient Paths" at
Old Stone Fort

the East on rivers through towns like Nashville and Cincinnati. General Houston entered Texas by way of steamboat and then went overland from the Indian Territory (Oklahoma) across the Red and through 180 miles of forest before arriving in Nacogdoches, the first town of any size. Crockett came the same way.

Just before Houston's arrival in 1832, the Mexican government became wary of armed Texians. On one hand, they granted permission to populate Texas to them if they defended Mexico from the Comanches. On the other hand, Mexico was embroiled in a civil war soon after their independence from Spain (1821) and the armed militias that protected Mexico from hostile Indians could be a dagger aimed at Mexico City. The Mexican government outlawed the Texian Militia, but the Mexican Army was split between "*Centralistas & Federalistas*" or National vs States' Rights.

When Colonel Piedras in Nacogdoches ordered all Texian groups to disarm, there was trouble in Texas.

Jim Bowie acted as commander of the Texian Militia, entering Nacogdoches and telling Colonel Piedras, a *Centralista*, that the Texian Militia aligned itself with the *Federalista*, General Santa Anna (he hadn't flipped sides yet) and they "wouldn't be turnin' in no guns."

The colonel wasn't impressed with the knife fightin' Texian and unleashed a force of a hundred cavalry

troopers on the Texians. The fighting evolved into a full-scale battle that raged from house to house and the Texians took the Old Stone Fort. As night fell, the Mexican cavalry retreated to the Angelina River under the cover of darkness. Bowie gave chase and a running gun battle ensued on the riverbanks. Before it was over, forty-seven Mexican troopers lay dead.



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Bowie Statue
Texarkana, Texas



Lincoln & Brody
S.F.A.S.U.
Nacogdoches

Colonel Piedras escaped to a house in Nacogdoches, but he was captured. His *soldados* flipped sides and Bowie took Piedras as a prisoner.

There were 300 *soldados* that surrendered to the Texians. Bowie had them march to San Antonio where they were released. Bowie sent Piedras to San Felipe where he was taken into custody by Stephen F. Austin. Austin, in turn, sent Piedras out of Texas to Mexico City.

All this activity left East Texas with no Mexican presence. Nacogdoches and the Texian Militia were clear of *Centralista* army units. The townspeople and pioneers of Nacogdoches and the Redlands were free to organize themselves without interference.

It was at this hour, General Houston arrived in Texas for the first time. He sought out his old friends from Tennessee, now in Nacogdoches, Adolphus and Eva Sterne, and they helped set him up. The next three and a half years Houston, Austin, Bowie, and Travis worked for self-governance within Mexico, but Mexico was simply too unstable to accommodate the self-governance goals of Texas and four other Mexican states in rebellion.

The Battle of Nacogdoches was over with forty-seven *soldados* and four Texians dead.

Today, Texans can and should visit Nacogdoches, a modern Texas college town. There is a life size replica of the “Old Stone Fort” which houses a museum dedicated to the Republic of Texas and local East Texas history. Nacogdoches has been a critical part of Texas since 1779, its official founding, and before that as an Indian village. As always, God Bless Texas.