

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Fifty-Seven

General Sam Houston

LESSON IDEA

To show the importance of Sam Houston's leadership in winning Texan independence from Mexico and in paving the way for Texan statehood.

PREPARATION

Be prepared to discuss the effect the siege of the Alamo had on the morale of the Texans.

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“REMEMBER the Alamo!” was the cry that sent Texans racing toward the Mexican barricades on the plains of San Jacinto, rifles loaded and bayonets ready. Though outnumbered and outgunned, they stormed the enemy stronghold, sending General Santa Anna's troops into confusion and terror. Leading the Texans' charge was General Sam Houston, the rugged frontier fighter whose love for freedom drove his army to victory.

But Sam Houston's story does not begin nor end at this battle, for at one time or another in his life, he was everything from the adopted son of a proud Cherokee Indian Chief to a United States Senator from Texas. Houston was a man who fitted well into the age in which he lived. He was a big rugged man — an adventurer — who was willing to risk everything for the cause in which he believed. From the beginning, Houston was restless, never content to stay in one place or work at one job very long. As a teenager he ran away from his Tennessee home to live with the Cherokee Indians, but later returned to become a schoolmaster. His fighting career began in 1813 when a group of

American soldiers marched into Maryville to recruit Tennessee men to fight the British in the War of 1812.

Almost immediately Houston took the silver dollar from the top of one soldier's drum — an indication in those days that you were willing to enlist — and ran home to get his mother's consent. Before he left, she gave him the family musket and a stern warning about its use in battle. “Never disgrace it,” she said, “for I had rather all my sons fill one honorable grave than that one of them should turn his back to save his life. Go, and remember that while the door of my cabin is open to brave men, it is eternally shut to all cowards.” In addition to the musket, she placed a ring on his finger with the admonition that he should always live his life according to the single word inscribed inside the ring. [Can you guess what that word was? We'll find out later in our story.]

SO WITH A MUSKET slung over his shoulder, a ring on his finger, and a shiny silver dollar in his pocket, Sam Houston marched off, expecting to be sent into battle against the British, who at that time were threatening our coastlines. As it turned out, Houston first saw action under the command of General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend against a band of Creek Indians who were fighting for the British.

In leading one furious charge against the savage enemy, Houston was struck by a Creek arrow, but this failed to stop him. A friend yanked the arrow out, bringing with it both blood and flesh, and

Houston limped through the rest of the battle, firing his pistol and swinging his sword. Later in the day, in another skirmish, one musket ball shattered his right arm and another hit him in the shoulder. Still, Houston refused to give up. His friends dragged his mangled body from the battleground; and although the doctors who examined him gave him up for dead, eventually he received proper medical care and served five more years in the army.

While in the service, Houston decided he would become a lawyer. So upon his release, he travelled to Nashville, Tennessee, to study law under the expert guidance of a prominent judge who outlined an eighteen-month study plan for him. Houston finished the course in only six months and became a lawyer in the town of Lebanon, not far from Nashville.

He soon became deeply involved in politics, and in 1823 he ran unopposed for the Congressional seat from his district. After serving as a U.S. Representative for four years, he gave up his seat in Congress to become Governor of Tennessee.

But the most exciting time of his life began when Houston moved to Nacogdoches, Texas, in 1833 to practice law. He immediately immersed himself in Texas politics. That was the same year that General Santa Anna overthrew the President of Mexico, established himself as dictator, and abolished the rights which Texans had enjoyed under the 1824 Mexican constitution. Houston and his fellow Texans were justifiably worried about Santa Anna's intentions toward them. They knew he was a depraved ruler — a man whose addiction to opium gave him delusions of grandeur — and a man who forsook his wife to pursue young beauties. This is the character of the man the Texans faced in 1836, when with an army of 5000 men he marched into Texas to crush their fight for independence.

Ultimately, it would be up to Sam Houston, as Commander-in-Chief of the Texas Army, to provide the leadership to destroy the hopes of this arrogant and immoral despot.

After the tiny Texan force at the Alamo was wiped out by Santa Anna's troops, many Texans were panic-stricken. They feared their bid for independence from Mexican domination had been lost. The government leaders had fled from their

temporary refuge at Harrisburg to Galveston Island to escape the rampaging Mexican troops. Meanwhile, General Houston was busily gathering recruits to face Santa Anna, the self-proclaimed "Napoleon of the Western World."

Some of Houston's army was stationed at Goliad under the command of James Fannin. But Houston knew it was futile to defend the fortress, and ordered Fannin to evacuate it. Fannin, hoping to give Houston time to gather a larger army, refused to leave. Tragically, less than a week later, hordes of Mexicans under the command of General José Urrea forced Fannin to surrender. General Urrea had no intention of killing his prisoners, but soon received orders from Santa Anna to wipe out all of them. Reluctantly, he obeyed. On March 27, 1836, the unfortunate men were marched before a line of Mexican riflemen to be shot like cattle. During the chaos of the slaughter, twenty-eight men escaped to tell what had happened at Goliad. The 342 men who were killed were not even given a decent burial. Their bodies were placed in a pile and set afire — just as had been done at the Alamo. [*How does Santa Anna's treatment of prisoners of war compare with the atrocities by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong against our soldiers who fought in Vietnam?*]

WHEN WORD reached Sam Houston of the massacre at Goliad, he had managed to recruit approximately 800 men to pit against the thousands of troops under Santa Anna. It appeared to be a hopeless situation for the Texans, but fortunately for Houston and for Texas, Santa Anna's over-confidence and pride blinded him. Believing that the battle at the Alamo and the butchery at Goliad had all but ended the Texans' "rebellion," Santa Anna split up his forces, sending them off in different directions with orders to burn and pillage the countryside. He himself, with a force of 1200 men, galloped off toward Galveston Island, where he hoped to massacre the Texas "government."

Santa Anna's failure to take his entire force with him toward Galveston Island cost him the battle. He had no idea where Sam Houston was, but Houston's scouts were keeping a close watch on every move he made. As soon as Houston realized

