

Revolution & the Republic of Texas

Remarks to the Lubbock Lions Club, 27 February 2007 by Robert W. Pratt
Most timeline data and event description comes from lsjunction.com & wikipedia.org

1832

June 26 – The first bloodshed of the Texas Revolution takes place at Velasco when Texans, transporting a cannon from Brazoria to Anahuac, are challenged by Mexican forces at Velasco. The Mexicans surrender on June 29.

1835

Oct. 2 – Mexican troops attempt to retrieve a cannon that had been given to Gonzales colonists for protection from Indian attack. The skirmish that ensues as Gonzales residents dare the Mexicans to "come and take it" is considered the opening battle of the Texas Revolution.

1835

Nov. 1 – A "consultation" convenes at San Felipe; on Nov. 7 the delegates agree to establish a provisional government.

1835

Nov. 8 - The Grass Fight near San Antonio was won by the Texans under Jim Bowie and Ed Burleson.

Toward the end of November 1835, it was reported to the Texans around San Antonio that a shipment of silver was coming from Mexico. According the report, the silver was being transported on a train of pack mules on its way to pay the soldiers of Mexican General Cos, who then occupied the town. The Texas scouts kept a close watch for the convoy so that the payload might be intercepted.

On the morning of 28 November, Erastus (Deaf) Smith, while on patrol, discovered some mules with packs approaching. Supposing this to be the expected train, he reported his discovery to the Texan camp. A group under Jim Bowie was first to intercept the mule train and a skirmish began. As reinforcements under Colonel Ed Burleson arrived, the fight was well underway. The Texans pursued as the enemy dispersed, thus ending the celebrated "grass fight".

The Mexicans abandoned their mules as they fled. However, the Texans soon found that the packs were filled with grass, rather than the expected silver. As the Texans later learned from their captives, the Mexicans had gone out the night before to gather grass to feed their horses.

The Texans lost one man and two wounded during the fight. The Mexican loss was much larger. *(Intel has always been key to effective warfare.)*

1836

March 2 – The Texas Declaration of Independence is adopted at Washington-on-the-Brazos.

The Texas Declaration of Independence was produced, literally, overnight.

Immediately upon the assemblage of the Convention of 1836 on March 1, a committee of five of its delegates were appointed to draft the document. The committee, consisting of George C. Childress, Edward Conrad, James Gaines, Bailey Hardeman, and Collin McKinney, prepared the declaration in record time. It was briefly reviewed, then adopted by the delegates of the convention the following day.

The document parallels somewhat that of the United States, signed almost sixty years earlier. It contains statements on the function and responsibility of government, followed by a list of grievances. Finally, it concludes by declaring Texas a free and independent republic.

The Declaration read, in part:

When a government has ceased to protect the lives, liberty and property of the people, from whom its legitimate powers are derived, and for the advancement of whose happiness it was instituted, and so far from being a guarantee for the enjoyment of those inestimable and inalienable rights, becomes an instrument in the hands of evil rulers for their oppression.

When the Federal Republican Constitution of their country, which they have sworn to support, no longer has a substantial existence, and the whole nature of their government has been forcibly changed, without their consent, from a restricted federative republic, composed of sovereign states, to a consolidated central military despotism, in which every interest is disregarded but that of the army and the priesthood, both the eternal enemies of civil liberty, the ever-ready minions of power, and the usual instruments of tyrants.

When, long after the spirit of the constitution has departed, moderation is at length so far lost by those in power, that even the semblance of freedom is removed, and the forms themselves of the constitution discontinued, and so far from their petitions and remonstrances being regarded, the agents who bear them are thrown into dungeons, and mercenary armies sent forth to force a new government upon them at the point of the bayonet.

When, in consequence of such acts of malfeasance and abdication on the part of the government, anarchy prevails, and civil society is dissolved into its original elements. In such a crisis, the first law of nature, **the right of self-preservation, the inherent and inalienable rights of the people to appeal to first principles, and take their political affairs into their own hands in extreme cases, enjoins it as a right towards themselves, and a sacred obligation to their posterity, to abolish such government, and create another in its stead, calculated to rescue them from impending dangers, and to secure their future welfare and happiness.**

Nations, as well as individuals, are amenable for their acts to the public opinion of mankind. **A statement of a part of our grievances is therefore submitted to an impartial world, in justification of the hazardous but unavoidable step now taken, of severing our political connection with the Mexican people, and assuming an independent attitude among the nations of the earth.**

The Mexican government, by its colonization laws, invited and induced the Anglo-American population of Texas to colonize its wilderness under the pledged faith of a written constitution, that they should continue to enjoy that constitutional liberty and republican government to which they had been habituated in the land of their birth, the United States of America.

In this expectation they have been cruelly disappointed, inasmuch as the Mexican nation has acquiesced in the late changes made in the government by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who having overturned the constitution of his country, now offers us the cruel alternative, either to abandon our homes, acquired by so many privations, or submit to the most intolerable of all tyranny, the combined despotism of the sword and the priesthood.

It has sacrificed our welfare to the state of Coahuila, by which our interests have been continually depressed through a jealous and partial course of legislation, carried on at a far distant seat of government, by a hostile majority, in an unknown tongue, and this too, notwithstanding we have petitioned in the humblest terms for the establishment of a separate state government, and have, in accordance with the provisions of the national constitution, presented to the general Congress a republican constitution, which was, without just cause, contemptuously rejected.

It incarcerated in a dungeon, for a long time, one of our citizens, for no other cause but a zealous endeavor to procure the acceptance of our constitution, and the establishment of a state government.

It has failed and refused to secure, on a firm basis, the right of trial by jury, that palladium of civil liberty, and only safe guarantee for the life, liberty, and property of the citizen. [By the way, your city is embarking upon this same course with civil fines for red light cameras – no trial by jury.]

It has failed to establish any public system of education, although possessed of almost boundless resources, (the public domain,) and although it is an axiom in political science, that unless a people are educated and enlightened, it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity for self government.

It has suffered the military commandants, stationed among us, to exercise arbitrary acts of oppression and tyranny, thus trampling upon the most sacred rights of the citizens, and rendering the military superior to the civil power.

It has dissolved, by force of arms, the state Congress of Coahuila and Texas, and obliged our representatives to fly for their lives from the seat of government, thus depriving us of the fundamental political right of representation.

It has demanded the surrender of a number of our citizens, and ordered military detachments to seize and carry them into the Interior for trial, in contempt of the civil authorities, and in defiance of the laws and the constitution.

It has made piratical attacks upon our commerce, by commissioning foreign desperadoes, and authorizing them to seize our vessels, and convey the property of our citizens to far distant ports for confiscation.

It denies us the right of worshipping the Almighty according to the dictates of our own conscience, by the support of a national religion, calculated to promote the temporal interest of its human functionaries, rather than the glory of the true and living God.

It has demanded us to deliver up our arms, which are essential to our defence, the rightful property of freemen, and formidable only to tyrannical governments.

It has invaded our country both by sea and by land, with intent to lay waste our territory, and drive us from our homes; and has now a large mercenary army advancing, to carry on against us a war of extermination.

It has, through its emissaries, incited the merciless savage, with the tomahawk and scalping knife, to massacre the inhabitants of our defenseless frontiers.

It hath been, during the whole time of our connection with it, the contemptible sport and victim of successive military revolutions, and hath continually exhibited every characteristic of a weak, corrupt, and tyrannical government.

These, and other grievances, were patiently borne by the people of Texas, untill they reached that point at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue. We then took up arms in defence of the national constitution. We appealed to our Mexican brethren for assistance. Our appeal has been made in vain. Though months have elapsed, no sympathetic response has yet been heard from the Interior.

We are, therefore, forced to the melancholy conclusion, that the Mexican people have acquiesced in the destruction of their liberty, and the substitution therfor of a military government; that they are unfit to be free, and incapable of self government.

The necessity of self-preservation, therefore, now decrees our eternal political separation.

We, therefore, the delegates with plenary powers of the people of Texas, in solemn convention assembled, appealing to a candid world for the necessities of our condition, do hereby resolve and declare, that our political connection with the Mexican nation has forever ended, and that the people of Texas do now constitute a free, Sovereign, and independent republic, and are fully invested with all the rights and attributes which properly belong to independent nations; and, conscious of the rectitude of our intentions, we fearlessly and confidently commit the issue to the decision of the Supreme arbiter of the destinies of nations.

1836

While this is happening, William Barret Travis and almost two hundred other defenders found themselves surrounded at the Alamo Mission in San Antonio in late February of 1836. Refusing to surrender, they held off the invading armies of Mexican Dictator Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna for almost two weeks.

The letter below was written by Travis soon after the Mexicans first appeared in the area around San Antonio.

Commandancy of the Alamo, Bexar, Fby. 24th, 1836

To the People of Texas & all Americans in the world.

Fellow Citizens & Compatriots: I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna. I have sustained a continual bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man.

The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise the garrison are to be put to the sword if the fort is taken. I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender nor retreat.

Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism, & of everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch.

The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days.

If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier, who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country.

Victory or Death

William Barret Travis

1836

On March 6, the courageous Texans were overrun and slaughtered by well over 2000 Mexicans. The resulting delay of Santa Anna's eastward movement gave other Texans more time to organize, both politically and militarily.

1836

March 10 – Sam Houston abandons Gonzales and retreats eastward to avoid the advancing Mexican army. Panicky settlers in the area flee as well in an exodus called the Runaway Scrape.

The Runaway Scrape is the period in early 1836 generally beginning with the Siege and Fall of the Alamo and ending with the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21. It was a period of terror and panic among the settlements of Texas, as Santa Anna and the Mexican armies swept eastward from San Antonio, virtually unopposed.

During the runaway, the colonists gathered a few personal possessions, abandoned their homes, and headed eastward under most difficult conditions. Rain and cold weather during the period slowed the settler's eastward progress along the muddy roads and trails. There was widespread hunger and sickness, and many died. News of Santa Anna's atrocities (some true, but some distorted by rumor) added to the frenzy.

1836

March 27 – About 350 Texan prisoners of war, including their commander James Fannin, are executed at Goliad by order of Santa Anna. An estimated 30 Texans escape.

1836

April 21 – In a battle starting about 4:30 p.m. and lasting 18 minutes, Texan troops led by Sam Houston defeat the Mexican army commanded by Santa Anna at San Jacinto near present-day Houston. Houston reports that 630 Mexican troops were killed and 730 were taken prisoner. Of the Texas troops, nine of a force of 910 were killed or mortally wounded, and 30 were less seriously wounded.

1836

May 14 – Santa Anna and Texas' provisional president David Burnet sign two Treaties of Velasco – one public, the other secret – ending the Texas Revolution. The treaties were, however, violated by both sides. Texas' independence was not recognized by Mexico and Texas' boundary was not determined until the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican War, was signed in 1848.

1836

***Sept. 5* – Voters of the new republic chose their first elected officials: Sam Houston becomes president and Antonio Lorenzo de Zavala, vice president. The voters also overwhelmingly approve a referendum requesting annexation by the United States. U.S. President Martin Van Buren refuses to consider it, however, citing fear of war with Mexico and constitutional scruples.**

1836

***Oct.* – The first Congress of the Republic of Texas convenes at Columbia.**

1837

The Republic of Texas is officially recognized by the United States, and later by France, England, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Now, I pose this question to you: Why do we memorialize and celebrate the Alamo far more than the victory on the marshy plains of San Jacinto?

Clearly the Alamo was a waste of manpower, was a military disaster, and was not even authorized by Texas' top leaders.

Yet, to the educated, the word Alamo means so very much.

It's easy to be successful. The act of winning is not that tough. We are more limited by our successes than we are our failures. When we win, we just keep on doing the same thing - though the world around us changes.

But, when we lose, we are often forced into self examination. We are tested as people. And, it is always at this point where we are offered choices: We can either indulge in self-pity and excuse making for our failure, or; we can accept failure but work to become better at our tasks.

We celebrate Alamo because for the same reason that we re-read the words of Travis' famous letter appealing for help: because it is a supreme example of the virtues of courage and self-sacrifice.

It is in the knowing acceptance of ultimate defeat, the loss of their lives, that the men of the Alamo, demonstrated to the world, the supreme nobility of self-government and Liberty, what has become known as: The Great American Experiment.

More than a century later, Barry Goldwater made it clear that the ember of Texas Liberty, and of the Alamo, was still glowing in the hearts of some Americans when he said: **“Extremism, in the defense of Liberty is no vice.”**

Goldwater lost. And the march of international socialism plunged ahead, with a Texan personally creating the modern, soul-destroying, welfare state, and the move toward a society devoid of personal responsibility and commitment to ideals larger than our own personal entertainment or well-being.

Today when someone begins to talk of Liberty, the Constitution, and limits on local, state or federal government power, they are as often scorned, as they are taken seriously.

What a disgusting kick-in-the-face to the spirit of Alamo and Goliad, to the birthing spirit of Texas, and to the sacred honor due to Travis, Bowie, Milam, Fannin, and so many others, known and unknown, who gave everything.

Their sacrifice gave us the opportunity to become the most wealthy and free people in all of human history.

For my part, what little it is, I say: **“I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas. One and indivisible.”**

“Long live Liberty, Long live Texas!”