

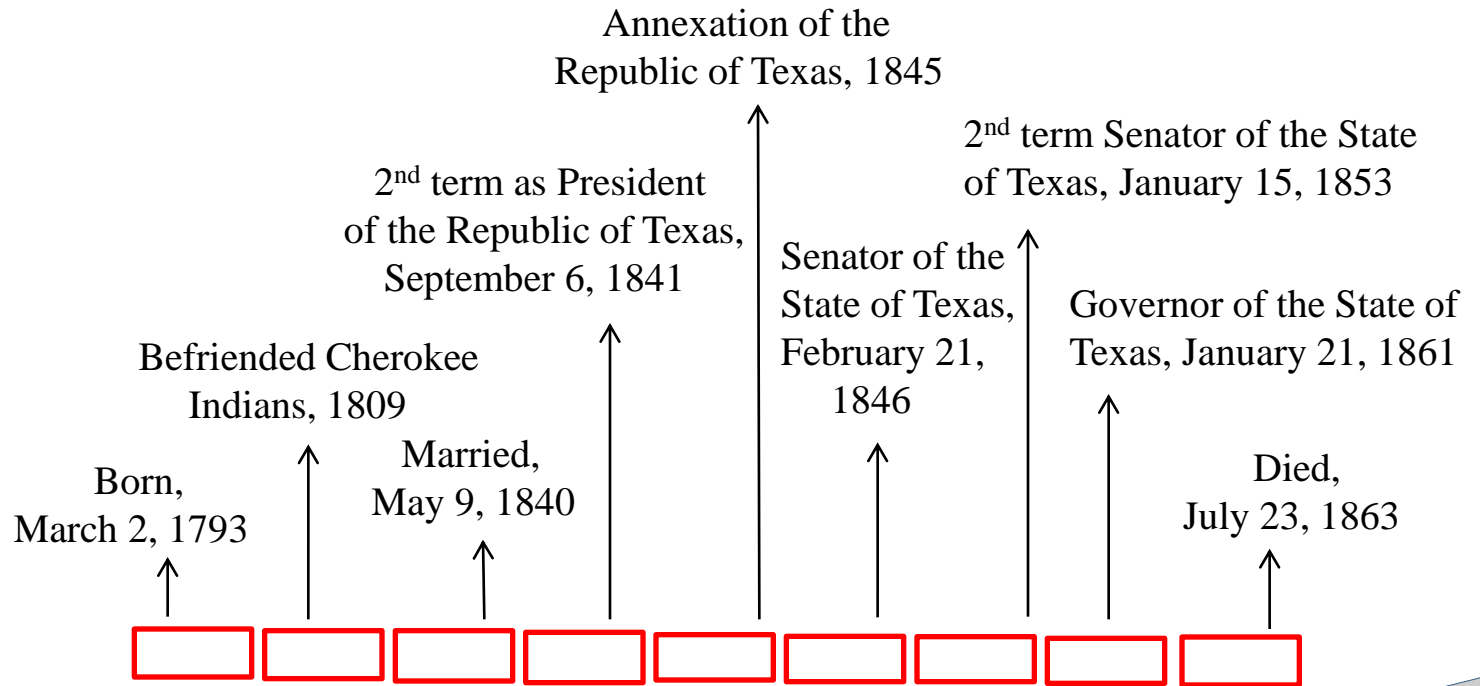
The Life of Sam Houston and the Course of Texas History

By Madge Thornall Roberts



The following slides provide an account of Sam Houston's private life and role as a politician.

The timeline presents a snapshot of the events in his life and Texas History.





1836

On May 22, 1836, a dirty little trading schooner, the *Flora*, sailed into the Mississippi River port of New Orleans. Throngs of people lined the levee and the wharf. Rumors had spread that the little vessel carried Sam Houston, the hero of San Jacinto, on board. He was, some said, a dying man. The crowd had come to catch a glimpse of him.

General Houston lay on a pallet on the open deck, his shattered ankle covered with blood. One of the first to reach him was William Christy, an old friend who had served with him in the United States Army. A band struck up a welcome march as the crowd surged forward to help carry the wounded man off the ship.



May 22,
1836



Margaret Lea, [page ii](#)



Sam Houston, [page 247](#)

In the group who had come with Professor McLean was Margaret Lea, a seventeen-year-old student from Alabama. Margaret was particularly impressed with the wounded hero and the speech he made.

Aside to one of her friends she confided, “I have a strange feeling that one day I will meet this man.”



1840

Houston left the affairs of the Texas Republic to others and went to Alabama for his bride. He took a ship to Mobile where he changed to a steamer which would take him to Selma.



*Engagement cameo-circa 1839.
Now in the San Jacinto
Museum of History.*



*Home of Henry Clinton Lea in Alabama where Margaret
and Sam Houston were married, May 9, 1840.*

([page 34](#))



1840

The ceremony was performed by the Reverend Peter Crawford of the Siloam Baptist Church.

Among the wedding gifts was a quilt that Nancy had recently made for Margaret to take with her to Texas. ([page 27](#))

“Ladies and Gentlemen: I wish to give a toast, hoping that all may agree with me and with my sentiments also. I drink to the long and vigorous life of the Republic of Texas, to the wisdom of her rulers, both now and in the future, to the success of all finding homes within her borders, to the happiness and content of her citizens, and last but not least, to the beauty and virtue of her daughters.” ([page 37](#))



1840

The Houstons reached Texas in June as the *New York* steamed around the Gulf Coast to give Margaret her first glimpse of the Republic. ([page 38](#))

The little boat continued on until it reached a small landing on the bayou and Margaret viewed her first sight of the city which had been named for her husband. The main street in Houston City extended out from the landing. On this street were two large hotels, and the building which had served as the former capitol was located about one-fourth of a mile from the landing. Some other streets were built parallel and at right angles to Main Street, but they were chiefly designated with stakes. ([page 39](#))



A contemporary photograph of the Woodland Home, [page 224](#).

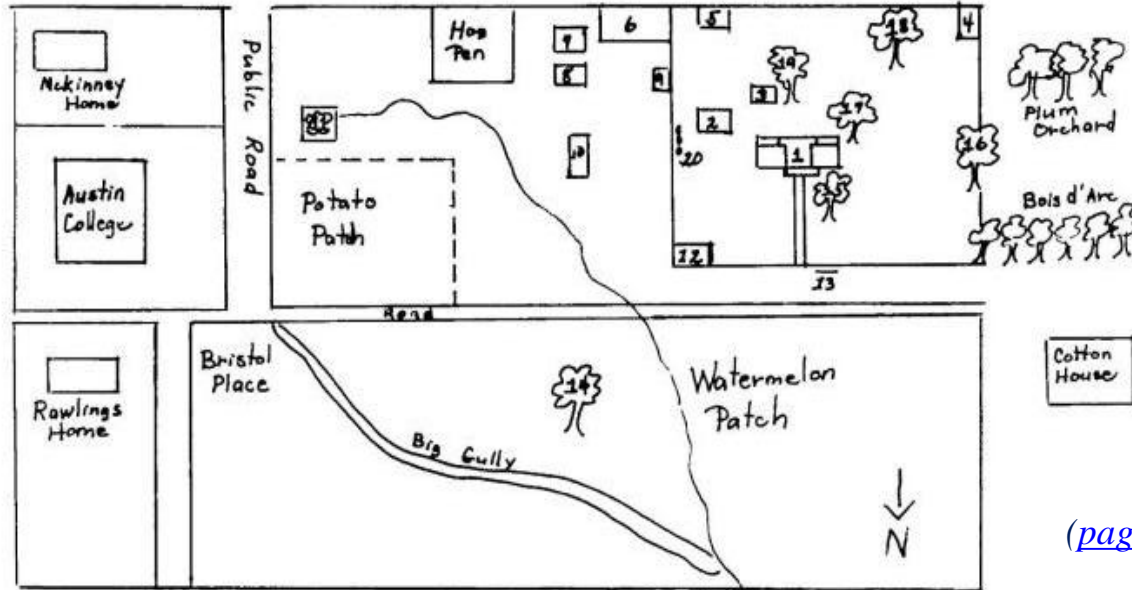


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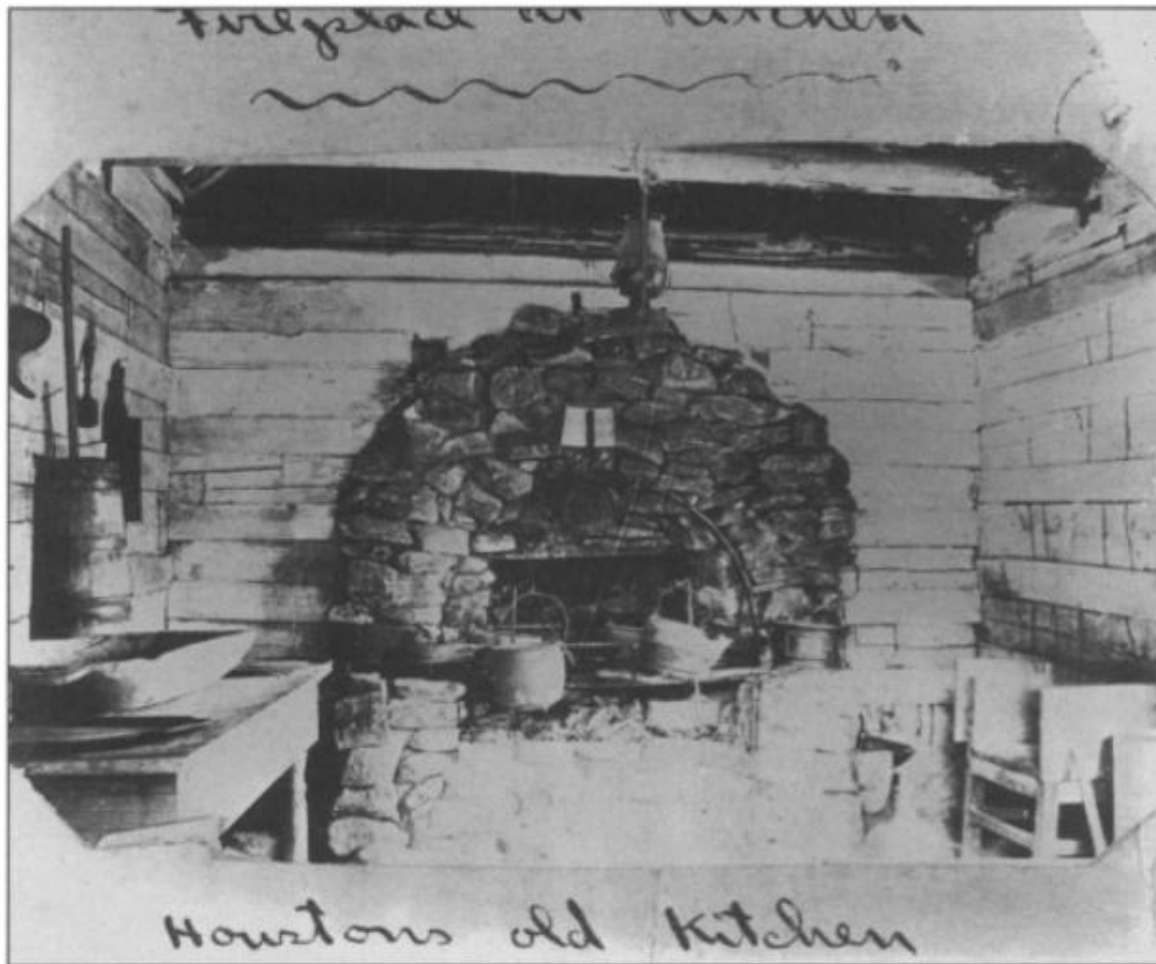
MAP OF HOUSTON'S WOODLAND HOME, HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS as it was when they lived there
(From a diagram drawn by Mrs. W. A. Leigh)



(page 384)

KEY

- | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Woodland Home | 6. Stable | 11. Spring house | 16. Poplar tree |
| 2. Kitchen | 7. Overseer's cabin | 12. Office | 17. Pecan tree planted
by Houston |
| 3. Smokehouse | 8. Corn Crib | 13. Horse Rack | 18. Apple tree |
| 4. Privy | 9. Wood pile | 14. Wild plum tree | 19. Pear tree |
| 5. Hen house | 10. Servants' Cabin | 15. Catalpa tree | 20. Climbing roses |



The kitchen of the Woodland Home, [page 179](#).



1809

The Cherokee Indians

Sam would stay with the Cherokees for the next three years. He became a favorite of the chief, who gave him the name of “The Raven.” ([page 3](#))

A family story is told that whenever Houston was ready to leave Washington, he would send word to his Indian friends at Livingston as to the time he would reach home and ask them to visit. By this time, Margaret had long since overcome her fear of the Indians and would lay in supplies of all kinds.

The Indians would come riding up in single file. Houston would greet them and they would sit in a circle on the lawn and feast on beef ribs from a large washtub. Neighbors reported that this would happen at least once a year, and that the Indians would bring trinkets and gifts. Houston would sometimes dress in Indian garb and smoke the peace pipe with them. ([page 259](#))



Life & Career

1823

In short succession he became a colonel and then adjutant general of the state militia. He was elected attorney general of the Nashville district and in 1823, was elected as congressman to serve in Washington, D.C., with Senator Andrew Jackson. In a few more years Jackson was president and Sam Houston was governor of Tennessee.

On September 7, 1840, Houston was re-elected to serve in the Fifth Congress of Texas.

In early April, 1841, Houston was once again nominated for the presidency of the Republic of Texas.

Margaret, at the age of twenty-two became the first lady of Texas when her husband was elected president of the Republic on September 6, 1841, by a three-to-one margin over Burnet. Edward Burleson was elected vice-president. ([page 63](#))

Margaret would have many opportunities to reflect on the words “my country calls.”



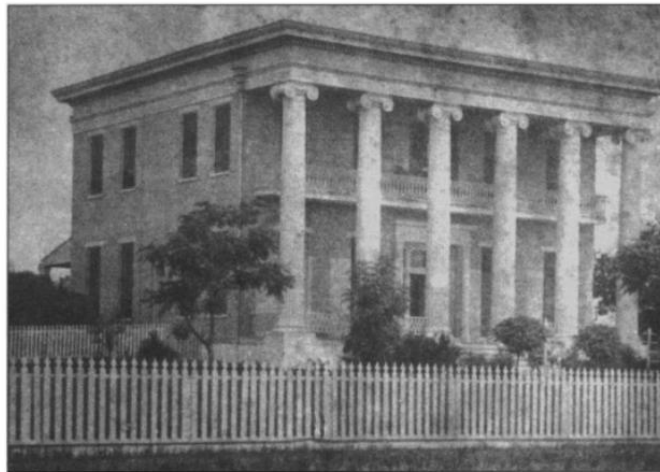
1842

Things were not doing well with the young Republic. War with Mexico was threatening. In March, a small Mexican army invaded Texas. They took possession of San Antonio, stayed there for two days, and then for some reason returned home.

Sketch by Gustave Behne of Sam Houston's Lodgings in Austin during his second term as President of the Republic of Texas. Houston wrote: "This is a correct drawing of the House occupied by the President in 1841." ([page 92](#))



In the early fall of 1842, the capital of the Republic of Texas was once again moved. The Brazos is the largest of the inland streams of Texas, and the little town of Washington was built on a bluff and could not be seen from the river. Washington-on-the-Brazos was still a primitive, frontier town.



One of the first known photographs of the Texas Governor's Mansion taken in January 21, 1861. Courtesy of Barker History Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas. ([page 305](#))



1842

Many members of Congress favored an invasion of Mexico. Volunteers were organizing with talk of crossing the border. In the hopes of preventing a war, Houston called for a special session of Congress to meet in Houston City on June 27, 1842.

The legislators refused to listen to his views. In July, they passed a bill for an offensive war against Mexico, and sent a delegation urging Houston to sign the bill into law. The President did not comment, but began a campaign to make the public aware of the condition of the country.

...It is an established fact that if subordination and discipline are not maintained, an armed force is more dangerous to the security of citizens and the liberties of a country than all the external enemies that could invade its rights.

To make offensive war without ample means both in money and men would be the height [sic] of folly and madness, and must result in defeat and disgrace...and lead to the destruction of the army attempting it, and the disgrace of the general leading it. (pages [86](#) & [88](#))

A day before Congress was due to adjourn, Houston vetoed the war bill, and Congress did not try to override it.



1852

The Children of Sam Houston



*Maggie Houston, age 4; Mary Willie Houston, age 2;
Nannie Houston, age 6; circa 1852. ([page 245](#))*

*Courtesy of Sam Houston Regional Library and
Research Center, Liberty, Texas.*



1864/1873



Nettie Houston, January 16, 1873,
before her twenty-first birthday.
([page 364](#))



William Rogers Houston,
about age 6, circa 1864.
([page 366](#))



Temple Lea Houston,
about age 4, circa 1864.
([page 366](#))

*“My beauteous gifts, how carefully
Their tender branches I must train
That each fair plant on earth may be
a household joy!”* ([page 364](#))



1846

Annexation of 1846

On the question of Texas being annexed to the United States, Houston's diplomatic ploy was silence. ([page 105](#))

Confidential letters on the subject were traveling between Jackson and Houston. In January, Jackson had written with a feeble hand, “I tell you in sincerity & friendship, if you will achieve this annexation your name & fame will be enrolled amongst the greatest chieftains of the age.”

On February 21, 1846, Houston and Thomas Jefferson Rusk were elected by a large majority to represent Texas in the United States Senate. ([page 119](#))

Three days later he was in Houston City where he described seeing the United States flag flying in the breeze: “We do really form part, and parcel, of the American Union.”



1853

Seceding from the Union

Houston's term in the Senate expired on March 4, 1853, but two months earlier, on January 15, 1853, he had been re-elected senator and once more accepted the office. Margaret resumed her schedule.

With Lincoln's election, the cry for secession became louder and louder throughout all of Texas.

During these turbulent times, a soldier stationed at Camp Verde near San Antonio visited the Governor's Mansion. His name was Robert E. Lee. It is a strange coincidence of history that a friendship could develop between Lee and the Houstons.

As the Secessionist crisis in Texas worsened, Lee and Houston had similar thoughts. Just before Lee left Texas, he rode over to Austin from San Antonio to say good-bye. He and Houston talked until three in the morning, both very unhappy. Houston told Lee that he would never sign the order for Texas to secede, and Lee said, "If war comes, I will go with Virginia."



1861

Houston warned of the dangers of secession.

“To secede from the Union and set up another government would cause war. If you go to war with the United States, you will never conquer her, as she has the money and the men. If she does not whip you by guns, powder, and steel, she will starve you to death. . . . it will take the flower of the country—the young men.” ([page 294](#))

The election was held on a secession referendum, and on March 3, 1861, the results were announced.

Loud cheering was heard from the capitol. This was followed by the firing of cannons and ringing of bells. A short time later a messenger arrived to announce that Texas had voted to secede. Houston's face turned ashen.



1861

Sam Houston was not a man to give up gracefully, and much to Margaret's dismay, he made one last attempt to save Texas from the Confederate War. The referendum question put to the people had been whether Texas should secede from the Union. Joining the Confederacy had not actually been part of the question. ([page 296](#))

Houston returned to his original plan of re-establishing the Republic of Texas, but the legislature refused to support him and further added salt to the wound by voting that all state officers must take an oath of allegiance to the Confederate Government by March 16, 1861.

About eight o'clock George W. Chilton arrived with the order from the legislature for Houston to take the Confederate oath.

Houston replied that he could not make such a serious decision immediately; he must have time to think it over. Chilton gave him until the next day.



1861

Leaving Office

A message arrived notifying Houston that he must be present at the capitol at noon to take the oath to the Confederacy. Instead of going to the room where the convention was being held, he entered by the entrance to the basement. He took out his knife and a piece of pine and began whittling. William Mumford Baker, who was present, described the scene:

“. . . the old governor sitting in his chair in the basement of the capitol . . . sorrowfully meditating what it were best to do . . . The officer of the gathering up stairs summoned the old man three times . . . but the man sat silent, immovable, in his chair below, whittling steadily on.” ([page 299](#))

Lieutenant Governor Edward Clark was sworn in as the new chief executive, and Houston left the capitol for the last time.



1863

His political career was now over, and he never recovered from this blow. His children later told of how soon after this event their father became an old man and failed in health.

Soon after the family returned to Huntsville, Houston's health began to fail. His shoulder wound was a running sore, and the pain in his ankle grew worse.

Houston's Indian friends heard that he was ill, and Chief Blount sent a delegation to visit him. Unable to venture too far from home, Houston received them on the porch of the house. The Indians sat in a circle around him and they conversed in Indian language. Houston asked them to sing some of his favorite songs. This they did, and he was greatly touched by their visit. ([page 322](#))



July 26, 1863



Margaret Houston,
[page 247](#)

... we heard his voice in a tone of entreaty, and listening to the feeble sound, we caught the words "Texas! Texas!"

My mother was sitting by his bedside with his hand in hers, and his lips moved again. "Margaret," he said, and the voice we loved was silent forever. ([page 324](#))

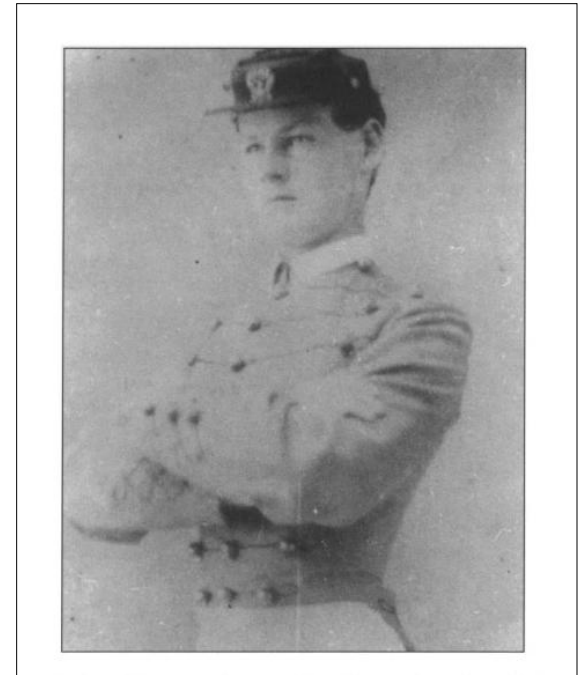
She removed the simple gold ring that Elizabeth Houston had placed on her son's finger more than fifty years before. Margaret held the ring so that her children might see and be inspired by the word that their father had carried with him throughout all his adult life. It was "Honor."



1872



Sam Houston, Jr., age 22, as a medical student at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, in 1868. ([page 354](#))



Andrew Jackson Houston, about age 18, while a cadet at West Point, circa 1872. ([page 365](#))

Sam, Jr., lived up to all of his father's expectations. Exhibiting a mind of his own, not unlike his father, he served bravely with Texas troops during the Civil War, despite strong family objections. After that he became a doctor and gained fame as a writer.



Civil War
1863



*Sketch by Sam Jr. during Civil War - "Night on the Battlefield", 1863.
([page 328](#))*