

Research Report

Uncle Sam Houston?

a work in progress by Larry Kraus
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The Family Story

Samuel Houston (Congressman, Governor of Tennessee, General of the Texas Militia and President of the Republic of Texas) married Elizabeth H. "Eliza" Allen in Sumner County, Tennessee in 1829. There is no shortage of Allen family lines in Tennessee at the time that have not been connected to William Allen (c1760 Virginia) so on the surface there appears no reason to investigate farther. However, the story has been told among descendants of Peter Allen, son of William Allen, that Houston visited Peter Allen in Arkansas on his way to Texas in 1833. And further, he was either engaged or he married "one of the Allen girls".

How could Samuel Houston come to know Peter Allen, what Allen girl did he marry and was she related to William Allen?

The Life of Sam Houston

Samuel Houston was born March 2nd 1773 near Lexington Virginia, the fifth child (and fifth son) of Samuel and Elizabeth (Paxton) Houston, on their plantation in sight of Timber Ridge Church, Rockbridge County, Virginia. When he was thirteen years old, his father died; some months later, in the spring of 1807, he emigrated with his mother, five brothers, and three sisters to Blount County in Eastern Tennessee, where the family established a farm near Maryville on a tributary of Baker's Creek.

Rebelling at his older brothers' attempts to make him work on the farm and in the family's store in Maryville, Houston ran away from home as an adolescent in 1809 to dwell among the Cherokees, who lived across the Tennessee River. Between intermittent visits to Maryville, he sojourned for three years with the band of Chief Oolooteka, who adopted him and gave him the Indian name Colonneh, or "the Raven." Houston viewed Oolooteka as his "Indian Father" and the Cherokees much as a surrogate family. At age eighteen he left the Cherokees to set up a school, so that he could earn money to repay debts.

After war broke out with the British, he joined the United States Army as a twentyyearold private, on March 24th 1813. Within four months he received a promotion to ensign of the infantry; in late December he was given a commission as a third lieutenant. As part of Andrew Jackson's army, he fought at the battle of Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River on March 26th 1814. During the engagement he received three nearfatal wounds. One of them, from a rifle ball in his right shoulder, never completely healed. For his valor at Horseshoe Bend, Houston won the attention of General Andrew Jackson, who thereafter became his benefactor. Houston, in



return, revered Jackson and became a staunch Jacksonian Democrat.

While convalescing, he was promoted to second lieutenant and traveled extensively-to Washington, New Orleans, New York, and points between. While stationed in Nashville, he was detailed in late 1817 as sub-Indian agent to the Cherokees. In that capacity, he assisted Oolooteka and his clan in their removal to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River, as stipulated by the Treaty of 1816. Houston, by then first lieutenant, resigned from the army on March 1st 1818, and shortly thereafter from his position as subagent, following difficulties with Secretary of War John C. Calhoun.

Still in poor health, Houston read law in Nashville for six months during 1818 in the office of Judge James Trimble. He subsequently opened a law practice in Lebanon, Tennessee. With Jackson's endorsement, he became adjutant general (with the rank of colonel) of the state militia through appointment by Governor Joseph McMinn. In late 1818, Houston was elected attorney general of the District of Nashville, where he took up residence. After returning to private practice in Nashville by late 1821, he was elected major general of the state militia by his fellow officers.

Houston's rapid rise in public office continued in 1823, when, as a member of Jackson's political circle, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives from the Ninth Tennessee District. As a member of Congress, he worked mightily, though unsuccessfully, for the election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1824.

Since 1824, Houston had been a frequent house guest of Robert Allen of Gallatin, Tennessee. Allen and his brother John had been officers with Andrew Jackson during the War of 1812, and had met young Sam while on campaign against the Creeks in 1814, and at the Hermitage on many occasions since. Their friendship continued over the years, and from 1819 to 1827 Robert served as congressman, two of his terms alongside the future governor.

John Allen, an imperious planter and horsebreeder of high repute in Tennessee, lived in "a stately mansion" on the bluffs of the Cumberland River, some twenty miles northeast of Nashville, and Houston, at times in the company of Jackson or members of the Junto, was wont to visit him and attend the almost weekly races. On one of those visits in 1824 he first met Eliza, who at almost fifteen was the eldest of John's progeny. A slender blonde, Eliza was already an excellent horsewoman, and her vivacious charm and equestrian skill made a deep impression on Houston.

In 1825 he was returned to Congress for a second and final term. In the summer of 1825, Robert Allen wrote Houston a curious missive, apologizing for being as yet unable to repay a hundred dollars the congressman has loaned him. "Can't you come up to Gallatin and spend a week?" he inquired, nonchalantly noting that "there are some, no doubt, that would like to see you killed." Such men were, however, not to be taken seriously, for they were cowards: "Nobody doubts Sam Houston's bravery, many his discretion." This was fully a year before Houston's scrape with John Erwin reached the serious stage, and Allen's use of the word "discretion," in the context of the times, hints strongly at his bachelor friend's womanizing. No matter the threats, Houston returned to Allen's home often. Over the years his attraction to Eliza grew, and the allure of an alliance of the powerful Allen clan was surely not absent from his calculations. His eye was trained on Eliza with the full approbation of her parents. The match, no matter the difference in age, would be a good one for both parties. The Allens were of the genteel "Old Tennessee" elite, a family well-connected in politics, social circles and the planter economy, and Andrew

Jackson's most promising protege was obviously destined for greatness. It appeared to be an auspicious pairing. So, quite naturally, a "low-intensity" courtship of Eliza continued, and as governor, the suitor was in Tennessee full-time, permitting him the luxury of watching his nearby bride-to-be blossom.

In 1827, ever the Jackson protégé, Houston was elected governor of Tennessee. He was thirty-four years of age, extremely ambitious, and in the thick of tumultuous Tennessee politics.

In 1828 Houston made two fateful decisions. He would marry and he would seek re-election - in that order. In November, Houston wrote gleefully to his cousin that "I am not married but it may be the case in a few weeks." This was an odd bit of news indeed, for no engagement had yet been announced. It might have appeared "indecent haste" on his part, since in polite society engagements were commonly a year or more long. It soon seemed that his marriage plans had gone awry.

Early in December, in a letter to Tennessee congressman John Marable, he hinted of serious problems in his affair of the heart. "I have as usual 'small blow ups' " he wrote; "What the devil is the matter with the gals I can't say, but there has been hell to pay." He did not elaborate, but his relationship with Eliza was obviously less than tranquil. It had indeed been 'a small blow up' for just a few weeks later, in Gallatin, the governor and Eliza exchanged rings and formally announced their engagement, causing much benign excitement in the state - enhancing Houston's chances for re-election. Their wedding, scheduled a mere month later, would be the social affair of the season, but it also set gossips' tongues moving like windmills. Surely something was amiss.

Eliza, now eighteen, was, in the words of a relative, "not pretty, but dignified, graceful and queenly in her appearance." She had apparently been courted by other hopefuls, but had rejected their intentions, for perhaps not "of the heart." One of the most recurrent themes in the literature dealing with Houston and Eliza is that he had a rival for her affections.

In any event, the impending nuptials hugely pleased Andrew Jackson and his wife, whose wedding present was Rachel's own prized sterling flatware, a testimony of the bond between Houston and the Jacksons.

On January 22nd 1829, at age of thirty-seven and near the end of his first term, he married 19 year-old Eliza Allen. The wedding took place in her father's mansion at the 880-acre Allen plantation, Allenwood, on the Cumberland River three miles south of Gallatin, Tennessee. It was a candlelight service presided over by the Reverend William Hume, and scores of distinguished guests were present; " a cavalcade worthy of a monarch," according to one report.

The newlyweds spent their marriage night in John Allen's capacious home - in separate rooms - and departed the next day, forced by a severe storm to overnight at the home of Robert Martins, on the Nashville Road. There, it had been claimed, Eliza unexpectedly and explosively told Mrs. Martin "that she hates her husband." Yet others soon described the Houstons as "an affectionate couple." Then they settled into rooms at the Nashville Inn, probably on January 26.

On January 30th 1829 Houston announced his candidacy for re-election of Governor of Tennessee. His reelection was almost assured as the Democrats strengthened themselves in national politics. It would seem that relations between the newlyweds deteriorated immediately,

and probably for a variety of reasons. One reason, logic suggest, was the Nashville Inn itself. It was routinely clogged with Houston's drinking buddies and fellow political hacks and, given his strong proclivities for spirits and the fact that he was furtively campaigning. The Inn may have provided a rude awakening for the sheltered young plantation girl.

Then on April 9th 1829 the marriage ended after only eleven weeks and amid much mystery. Eliza packed her bags and abandoned the inn and her husband less than three months after exchanging marriage vows, and fled back to her stunned family. Rumors of infidelity and alcoholism ran rampant. Both parties maintained a lifelong silence about the affair.

Surprisingly accurate gossip about the governor's marital problems was rife even before Eliza bolted. Andrew Jackson, for one, was pessimistic. The president immediately grasped what a separation or divorce would mean for Houston's carefully nurtured political career. The crisis, then, did not come from out of the blue, for Jackson learned of it a full week before Eliza's flight, and from a third party. More intriguing, the president felt he knew enough about it to assess the blame as Houston's. What followed was a rambling and chaotic letter from Houston to his father-in-law; a letter brimming with hints, yet empty conclusions. This letter represents Houston's only record of his separation from Eliza. Among other words, he claimed "she was cold to me and I thought she did not love me."

The most famous - and least clear - letter that Sam Houston ever wrote followed Eliza home and landed on the Allen's like a second bombshell. He implied that Eliza's flight was inappropriate, thought not necessarily without reason. The letter indicates that Houston had been jealous. He admitted he that he had questioned his wife's virtue, but that then he had abruptly changed his mind, and had told her that he believed her faithful. "Eliza stands acquitted by me." The distraught husband asked that John Allen intervene. He was permitted to see Eliza briefly in her father's parlor where he begged for her forgiveness. On bended knee, "with tears streaming down his face" he pleaded for her to return to Nashville with him." However, she refused.

Anguished, Sam Houston rode back to Nashville and shut himself up in his rooms at the inn, giving himself over to self-pity and "liberal doses of John Barleycorn."

News of the separation spread like gunsmoke in a battle, for the Allen family lost little time in making public "that their chaste daughter had been wronged." What the curious are left with, corroborated by Houston's chaotic letter to John Allen, is the matter of his jealousy, which appears indisputable. His penchant for alcohol influenced his behavior considerably. She claimed "he is a demented man."

Tennesseans of the age were not forgiving of such embarrassment on part of their chief executive. This was a scandal, one in which a great Tennessee family had suffered public humiliation. Houston was burned in effigy at Gallatin, and mobs in Nashville became "so threatening that local militia units were called out." Houston was "deeply mortified, but refused to explain this matter." After a few besotted days Houston decided that his only course of action was to resign the governorship. One week later on April 16th Houston resigned his office. William Hall, Speaker of the House, succeeded him and was known as the "accidental governor."

Houston's bridges - matrimonial and political - were burned, and one week later on April 23, in disguise and flanked by two friends, he left the Nashville Inn and walked nervously through the

morning crowds. Later, he boarded a small southbound steamer, the Red Rover and departed to the frontier. He fled west across the Mississippi River to Indian Territory. By this action Houston, a possible heir apparent to Andrew Jackson, may well have given up an opportunity to run eventually for president of the United States.

He made his way to the lodge of Oolooteka in present day Oklahoma to live once again in self-imposed exile among the Cherokees, this time for three years. Among the Indians he tried to reestablish his tranquility. He dressed Indianstyle and, although he corresponded with Andrew Jackson, initially secluded himself from contacts with white society. Initially, too, he drank so heavily that he reportedly earned the nickname "Big Drunk." He quickly became active in Indian affairs, especially in helping to keep peace between the various tribes in Indian Territory. He was granted Cherokee citizenship and often acted as a tribal emissary. Under Cherokee law, he married Diana [Tiana] Rogers Gentry, an Indian woman of mixed blood. Together, they established a residence and trading post called Wigwam Neosho on the Neosho River near Fort Gibson.

Gradually reinvolving himself in the white world, he made various trips east to Tennessee, Washington, and New York. In December 1831, while on the Arkansas River, Houston encountered Alexis de Tocqueville, the latter on his famous travels in the United States.

Leaving Diana and his life among the Indians, Houston traveled through Arkansas and crossed the Red River into Mexican Texas on December 2nd 1832. His "true motives" for entering Texas have been the source of much speculation. Whether he did so to negotiate a land grant for the Cherokee nation, simply as a land speculator, as an agent provocateur for American expansion intent on wresting Texas from Mexico, or as someone scheming to establish an independent nation, Houston saw Texas as his "land of promise."

He quickly became embroiled in the Anglo-Texans' politics of rebellion. He served as a delegate from Nacogdoches at the Convention of 1833 in San Felipe, where he sided with the more radical faction under the leadership of William H. Wharton. He also pursued a law practice in Nacogdoches and filed for a divorce from Eliza, which was finally granted in 1837. In September 1835 he chaired a mass meeting in Nacogdoches to consider the possibility of convening a consultation. By October, Houston had expressed his belief that war between Texas and the central government was inevitable. That month he became commander in chief of troops for the Department of Nacogdoches and called for volunteers to begin the "work of liberty." He served as a delegate from Nacogdoches to the Consultation of 1835, which deliberated in Columbia in October and at San Felipe in November. On November 12th the Consultation appointed Houston major general of the Texas army.

During February 1836, Houston and John Forbes, as commissioners for the provisional government, negotiated a treaty with the Cherokee Indians in East Texas, thus strategically establishing peace on that front. In March, Houston served as a delegate from Refugio to the convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos, where, on his birthday, March 2nd, the assembly adopted the Texas Declaration of Independence. Two days later Houston received the appointment of major general of the Army of Texas from the convention, with instructions to organize the republic's military forces.

After joining his army in Gonzales, Houston and his troops retreated eastward as the Mexican army under Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna swept across Texas. This campaign caused

Houston much anguish because the Texan rebels suffered from a general lack of discipline. He likewise fretted when the citizenry fled in the so-called Runaway Scrape. Despite these problems, Houston and his men defeated Santa Anna's forces at the decisive battle of San Jacinto on the afternoon of April 21st, 1836. During this engagement, his horse, Saracen, was shot beneath him, and Houston was wounded severely just above the right ankle. The capture of Santa Anna the next day made the victory complete.

Riding the wave of popularity as "Old Sam Jacinto," Houston became the first regularly elected president of the Republic of Texas, defeating Stephen F. Austin. During his two presidential terms he successfully guided the new ship of state through many trials and tribulations. The town of Houston was founded in 1836, named in his honor, and served as the capital of the republic during most of his first administration. During this term Houston sought to demilitarize Texas by cannily furloughing much of the army. In late 1836, Houston sent Santa Anna, then a prisoner of war, to Washington to seek the annexation of Texas to the United States. Although Houston favored annexation, his initial efforts to bring Texas into the Union proved futile, and he formally withdrew the offer by the end of his first term.

After leaving office because the Constitution of the Republic of Texas barred a president from succeeding himself, Houston served in the Texas House of Representatives as a congressman from San Augustine from 1839 to 1841. He was in the forefront of the opposition to President Mirabeau B. Lamar, who had been Houston's vice president. Houston particularly criticized Lamar's expansionist tendencies and harsh measures toward the Indians.

On May 9th 1840, Houston married twentyoneyearold Margaret Moffette Lea of Marion, Alabama. A strict Baptist, Margaret served as a restraining influence on her husband and especially bridled his drinking. They had eight children. On September 13th 1840 he wrote to his wife Margaret from Nagadoches. In this letter he said...

"My love, what I told you of Miss E... was correct. You may think of the matter - but let it be kept a profound secret - be always guarded - you are 'Houston's Wife' and many would joy to dash our cup of bliss!"

The reference to Miss E... no doubt refers to Eliza Allen, his first wife, and the mystery of the ending of that marriage. In the same year Eliza remarried to Dr. Elmore Douglas.

Houston succeeded Lamar to a second term as president from December 12th 1841, to December 9th 1844. During this administration, Houston stressed financial austerity and drastically reduced government offices and salaries.

When Texas joined the union, Houston became one of its two United States senators, along with Thomas Jefferson Rusk. Houston served in the Senate from February 21st 1846, until March 4th 1859. Beginning with the 1848 election, he was mentioned as a possible candidate for president. He even had a biography published in 1846 by Charles Edwards Lester entitled *Sam Houston and His Republic*, which amounted to campaign publicity. As senator, Houston emerged as an ardent Unionist, true to his association with Andrew Jackson, a stand that made him an increasingly controversial figure. He stridently opposed the rising sectionalism of the antebellum period and delivered eloquent speeches on the issue. A supporter of the 1820 Missouri Compromise, which banned slavery north of latitude 36°30', Houston voted in 1848 for the

Oregon Bill prohibiting the "peculiar institution" in that territory, a vote proslavery Southerners later held against him. Although he was a slave owner who defended slavery in the South, Houston again clashed with his old nemesis who led the proslavery forces when he opposed John C. Calhoun's Southern Address in 1849.

Houston always characterized himself as a Southern man for the Union and opposed any threats of disunity, whether from Northern or Southern agitators. His career in the Senate was effectively ended when, in 1855, the Texas legislature officially condemned his position on the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

As a lame-duck senator, Houston ran for governor of Texas in 1857. He was defeated in a rigorous campaign by the state Democratic party's official nominee, Hardin R. Runnels. Predictably, the state legislature did not reelect Houston to the Senate; instead, in late 1857, it replaced him with John Hemphill. The replacement took place at the end of Houston's term, in 1859.

Out of the Senate, Houston ran a second time for governor in 1859. Because of his name recognition, a temporary lull in the sectional conflict, and other factors, he defeated the incumbent, Runnels, in the August election and assumed office on December 21st. Because of his staunch Unionism, Houston was nearly nominated for the presidency in May 1860 by the National Union party convention in Baltimore, but narrowly lost to John Bell. His possible candidacy received favorable mention by people in many regions of the nation who longed to prevent sectional strife.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States, the clamor of discontent in Texas prompted Houston to call a special session of the state legislature. Adamantly opposed to secession, Houston warned Texans that civil war would result in a Northern victory and destruction of the South, a prophecy that was borne out by future events. The Secession Convention, however, convened a week later and began a series of actions that withdrew Texas from the Union; Houston acquiesced to these events rather than bring civil strife and bloodshed to his beloved state. But when he refused to take the oath of loyalty to the newly formed Confederate States of America, the Texas convention removed him from office on March 16th and replaced him with Lieutenant Governor Edward Clark two days later. Reportedly, during these traumatic days President Lincoln twice offered Houston the use of federal troops to keep him in office and Texas in the Union, offers that Houston declined, again to avoid making Texas a scene of violence. Instead, the Raven—now sixty-eight years of age, weary, with a family of small children, and recognizing the inevitable—again chose exile.

After leaving the Governor's Mansion, Houston at least verbally supported the Southern cause. Against his father's advice, Sam, Jr., eagerly joined the Confederate Army and was wounded at the battle of Shiloh. Houston moved his wife and other children in the fall of 1862 to Huntsville. Rumors abounded that Houston, though ailing and aged, harbored plans to run again for governor. But on July 26, 1863, after being ill for several weeks, he died, succumbing to pneumonia at age seventy. Dressed in Masonic ceremonial trappings, he was buried in Oakwood Cemetery at Huntsville.

Eliza died in 1862, a year earlier than her first husband, and was buried in an unmarked grave along with her secret, the greatest mystery in the life of Sam Houston.

Analysis

The linkage of Samuel Houston to an Allen family is well documented. Eliza H. Allen, his first wife was the daughter of Colonel John Allen (1776-1833) and Latitia Saunders (1792-1832). John Allen was born 24 Feb 1776 in Pennsylvania and died 19 Mar 1833 in Sumner County, Tennessee. His brother Robert Allen was born June 19th 1778 in Augusta County, Virginia. They were the sons of George Allen born about 1751 in Charles County, Maryland and died in Smith or Sumner Counties, Tennessee. George's father was Thomas Allen born about 1702 in Charles County, Maryland and died about 1770 in Stafford County, Virginia. Thomas' father was Robert Allen born about 1774 in County Atrim, Ireland and died about 1775 in Charles County, Maryland. Latitia was born 27 Feb 1782 in North Carolina and died 29 Nov 1832 in Sumner County, Tennessee.

John and Latitia were married in Gallatin, Sumner County, Tennessee on December 21st 1808. John's brother Robert (19 Jun 1788-19 Aug 1844) was a former colonel under Andrew Jackson during the War of 1812 and congressmen from Tennessee 1819-1827. Robert lived in Carthage, Tennessee from 1804, where he practiced law, and later farmed and engaged in business. He introduced Sam Houston to his niece Eliza Allen when both were in Congress. John has been described as "a peripatetic lawyer, filibusterer, and land speculator," and a "'Well to do planter and close friend of Andrew Jackson." His plantation on the Cumberland River near Gallatin, was often visited by Jackson.

Eliza died in 1862 and is buried in Gallatin Cemetery, Sumner County. Her second marriage was to Dr. Elmore Douglas. She did not want to remarry and requested that her grave not be marked and it wasn't for many years until recently. She is buried with a daughter. Dr. Douglas's grave site is located in the back of the cemetery.

The potential connections are enticing. A family story among the descendants of Peter Allen, son of William Allen, is that Sam Houston married "one of the Allen girls." Colonel John Allen was born 1776 in Pennsylvania and moved to Gallatin, Sumner County, TN in 1807. Houston arrived in Tennessee with his widowed mother in 1807 at the age of thirteen. By the time Colonel John Allen and Sam Houston arrived in Tennessee our William Allen had left Tennessee for Spanish West Florida. Therefore, it seems improbable that Houston and William would have met in Tennessee. Thus far, no link between this Colonel John Allen and William Allen has been found. It is possible that Colonel John Allen is a younger brother of our William. It is also possible that there is no relationship between Colonel John Allen and William Allen. Houston's friendship with Peter Allen may have been wholly independent of his marriage to Eliza Allen.

When Houston left Tennessee he traveled up the Arkansas River in route to the Indian Territory and may well have stopped at the Spadra Landing and visited Peter Allen. He made several trips between Fort Gibson, Oklahoma and Washington D.C. between 1830 and 1833 and undoubtedly traveled the Arkansas River on his trip to Texas in 1833; more opportunities to visit Peter. William died around this time but Houston could have visited other family members in Texas. A number of William's sons (excluding Peter) served under Houston during the Texas War of Independence.

Conclusion

No direct link has been established between the Allen family and Samuel Houston. However, the

fact that Houston married an Allen and had ample opportunity to meet Peter Allen in Arkansas and Peter's brothers in Texas would appear to add some credence to the family story. The circumstantial evidence is sufficient to warrant further research.

Further Reading

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