

June 5th Letter from Frances Menefee Sutherland

Throughout June of 1836, Texan settlers who had fled their homes as part of the Runaway Scrape returned to their homesteads. Many returned to homes that had been burned by the advancing armies or ransacked either by soldiers searching for provisions or unscrupulous settlers taking advantage of the chaos created by war. This letter from Frances Menefee Sutherland to her sister Sarah "Sally" Menefee Norment in Tennessee, shows the condition of life in Texas immediately following the revolution.

June 5, 1836

[Dear Sister]

I received your kind letter of some time in March but never has it been my power to answer it till now, and now what I must say (O God support me). Yes sister, I must say to you, I have lost my William. O, yes he is gone. My poor boy is gone, gone from me. The sixth day of march in the morning he was slain in the Alamo, in San Antonio, Then his poor body committed to the flames. Oh, Sally, can you sympathise with and pray for me that I may have grace to help in this great time of trouble. he was there a volunteer, when the Mexican army came there. At the approach of thousands of enemies they had to retreat into the Alamo where they were quickly surrounded by the enemy. Poor Fellows! The Mexican kept nearly continual firing on them for thirteen days. Then scaled the walls and killed every man in the fort but two black men. Dear Sister, I think the situation a sufficient excuse for not answering your letter sooner. When I received your letter I had been away from home with a distracted mind and had been wandering about ever since till three weeks ago this day we got back to our home where we found nothing in the world worth speaking of not one mouthful of anything to eat, but a little we brought home with us. God only knows how we will make out. I will try to compose my mind while I give you a short history of a few months back.

The American army was on our frontier. We thought prudent to stay at home and did so until the General thought proper to retreat. We, being on the frontier, were compelled to go. (I speak for all) We went to the Colorado, forty miles, there we expected to stay. The army camping on the same river, but after some time the General thought proper to retreat farther and of course we had to go too. We proceeded to the Brazos River. There stopped a few days but dread and fear caused another start, there Mr. Sutherland quit us and joined the army. William Heard was in also with a good many more of our citizens, however, we went on for several miles and again stopped, hoping we would not have to go farther but something [one] over there that week brought in the news that the Mexican army was crossing the Brazos not more than forty miles behind us.

Again we started and travelled two days then heard the army was twenty miles behind. (I wish you could know how the people all did as they kept going about trying to get somewhere, but no person knew where he was trying to get too). Several weeks passed on without any certain account from the army. All this time you could hardly guess my feelings. My poor William gone, Sutherland in the army. Me with my three daughters and my poor Thomas wondering about, no knowing what to do or where to go. You will guess my feelings were dreadful but even the Lord supported me and was on our side for I think I may boldly say the Lord fought our battles. Only to think how many thousands of musket and cannon balls were flying there over our army and so few touched. I think that seven was all that died of their wounds. Some say our army fought double their number and who dares say that the Lord was not on our side. Mr. Sutherland's horse was killed under him but the Lord preserved his life and brought him back to his family. he found me at the mouth of the Sabine from there we all returned home. I pray that God will still continue our friend and bless us with peace again.

I will now say that our relations are only in tolerable health, tho' none very sick. Poor Mother went the rounds, not very well all the time. I was afraid that she would not hold out to get back again but she is much better. She stopped at Brother Williams and I expect that she will stay there all summer. Sister Martha lives there. We are still trying to raise something to eat but I fear we will miss it.

Brother Thomas's house was burnt with stable and corn crib. Mr. Sutherland's ware house was also his house at the bay but if we can have peace and can have preaching I wont care for the loss of what property is gone.

[Mrs. George Sutherland]

SOURCE: SOURCE: John H. Jenkins, ed., *Papers of the Texas Revolution*. (10 vols.; Austin: Presidial Press, 1973), 7:24-26.