

Stories of Texas Women: The Ride of Katie Jennings

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Listen my children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of...Katie Jennings. While the name might not be as well known or poetic as Paul Revere, the story of Katie Jennings and her ride to warn Texan settlers of the coming of the Mexican army is just as legendary. Set against the backdrop of the runaway scrape, the experiences of Katie and the rest of the Jennings family embody the experiences of the women of Texas during this tumultuous period.

As news of the fall of the Alamo and the ensuing advance of the Mexican army began to



The Sam Houston Oak in Gonzales, Texas. Library of Congress
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spread across Texas, the citizens of Texas, fearful

of being caught in the path of the Mexican army,

left their homesteads fleeing in the wake of the

Texas army. On March 13th, General Sam

Houston ordered the evacuation of the town of

Gonzales. The buildings of the town were

subsequently burned so as to not fall into Mexican

hands. San Felipe de Austin met a similar fate.

Seeking to stay ahead of Santa Anna, the provisional government that had been meeting in

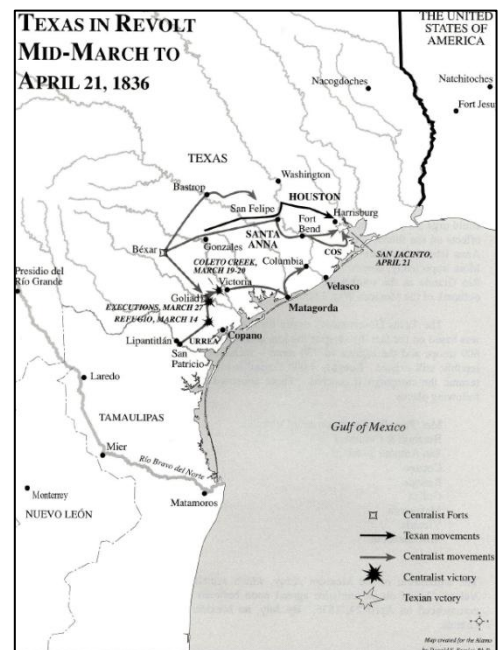
Washington-on-the-Brazos fled to Harrisburg, New Washington and finally Galveston.

Word of the siege of the Alamo had reached Bastrop on February 26th. Jesse Billingsley accordingly organized a company of volunteers who set off to Gonzales to join others who were assembling to march to the aid of the men of the Alamo. Among the 189 Alamo defenders was Gordon C. Jennings, a resident of Bastrop and oldest member of the Alamo garrison. He left his

wife Catherine, three children and two step-sons behind in Bastrop. The eldest of these step-sons, Willis Avery, joined Billingsley's company leaving his pregnant wife and young child.

Despite the fact that much of the Bastrop colony was beginning to flee eastward as part of the Runaway Scrape, Catherine Jennings and a number of other colonists stayed put. On March 24th a division of the Mexican army commanded by General Gaona departed San Antonio on the march to Nacogdoches. They arrived at Bastrop, located on the banks of the Colorado River, on April 12th. While the city had been evacuated, the Jennings and some other holdouts remained. Catherine Jennings, hearing the news that the Mexican army was in close proximity, decided at last to evacuate her family. As the rest of the family loaded possessions in a wagon, Catherine placed her ten year old daughter Katie on a horse and sent her to warn the neighbors that the Mexican army was nearby. Catherine told her not to return home as the family would be gone, but to travel with a neighboring family until they met up somewhere along the trail.

Catherine and the rest of the Jennings family, including her pregnant daughter-in-law, set off for San Felipe de Austin. Along the way, the daughter-in-law gave birth, but the family did not halt their exodus. They eventually made their way to the refugee camps along the Trinity River. Exactly when Katie managed to rejoin the family is not known, but she was with the family when they returned to their Bastrop home following the Battle of San Jacinto and the end of the Texas Revolution.



Catherine's husband Gordon perished at the Alamo alongside the other defenders there. Catherine never remarried but instead managed the homestead herself until her death in 1867. Katie Jennings married Casper Whisler in February 1842. The two moved to the new colony of Honey Creek, near present day McKinney. On Christmas Day 1842 the new settlement was attacked by Indians and the men of the colony were all killed. Katie had been out gathering water of the time of the attack and hid in the creek bed until the attackers left before making her way to help.

On February 18, 1843 Katie married her neighbor Sylvester Lockwood and the two moved to Travis County. The family was financially prosperous here with multiple business interests. Katie passed away on February 28, 1911. According to her obituary, she left behind six children, 42 grandchildren, 100 great-grandchildren and ten great-great-grandchildren. Quite the legacy for this remarkable Texas woman!

SOURCES

"A Tribute to the Lockwoods." Speech given by Bea Mitchell at the DRT ceremony in the Lockwood cemetery installing "Citizen of Texas" plaques on their headstones. June 11, 1988. Gordon C. Jennings Vertical File. Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library Collection, Alamo Research Center, San Antonio, TX.

"A Woman of the Alamo." By Lee Spencer for the Alamo Heroes Chapter of the DRT. January 4, 1994. Gordon C. Jennings Vertical File. Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library Collection, Alamo Research Center, San Antonio, TX.

"Obituary of Katherine Lockwood." 1911. Gordon C. Jennings Vertical File. Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library Collection, Alamo Research Center, San Antonio, TX.