

THOMAS MCCLURE RICE
And
ELIZABETH WILSON RICE

“Elizabeth, pack up the children and belongings. We’re going to Texas!” Thomas McClure Rice had heard the call for settlers to come to Texas while living in the Rainbow community just outside of Marietta, Washington County, Ohio. Thomas was probably born there about 1801 and was the only son of Nathan and Jemima (McClure) Rice with two older and two younger sisters. Family legend says that Thomas’ middle name was taken from his mother’s maiden name, as was the custom of the day. His wife, Elizabeth Wilson Rice emigrated with her family from Ireland in 1818.

This beautiful area where the Ohio and Muskingum Rivers converge was the first organized American settlement in the Northwest Territory. The town of Marietta was formed in 1788 by a group of veterans of the Revolutionary War. It was named after Marie Antoinette, the French Queen who had aided the young country in its battle for independence from Great Britain. Ohio was admitted as a slave-free state in 1803. In a few short years, the area was a major riverboat community, with busy steamboat building yards, brick factories and sawmills.

Thomas and Elizabeth married in Marietta on September 28, 1824. Before migrating to Texas, Thomas and Elizabeth had four children. James and Mary L. were born between 1825 and 1829. No confirmed birth dates are available for either. Mary L. may have been named after Thomas’ oldest sister, Luceba. Oliver Hugh was born in 1830 and was named after Thomas’ grandfather and Elizabeth’s father. William Wilson, born in 1835, carried his mother’s maiden name. All four of these children were born in Ohio (from census records).

Thomas did not inherit any land from his father, only his father’s clothes. (Nathan died in 1841.) During this time in history, the eldest son usually inherited the land. Thomas was the middle of four sisters, no brothers. Why did they leave Ohio? Who did they make the long trip to Texas with? How long did it take them? Did they travel as a family by riverboat to New Orleans then to Galveston or did they journey overland by oxen cart? We may never know for sure. Thomas could have come to Texas alone and later sent for Elizabeth and the children or he could have made the long trip back to Ohio to get them.

Thomas was in Texas as early as August 1836 when he joined the militia in Captain Holmes’ Kentucky volunteers formed at Velasco. The 1840 Fort Bend County tax rolls lists Thomas Rice owning one saddle horse. Later in 1841, he is included in a newspaper listing of persons delinquent in their taxes in Fort Bend County, owing \$1.25. Thomas and his family soon moved to DeWitt County where Thomas Richard was born on February 11, 1842. Just seven short months later, Thomas would lose his life fighting to keep Texas free.

The events leading to Thomas McClure Rice’s death had their beginnings at the Battle of San Jacinto. Sam Houston’s forces caught Santa Anna napping and the war was over. Texas had won its independence from Mexico. Bargaining for his life, the Mexican General recognized the sovereignty of Texas and ordered all Mexican troops to evacuate Texas.

Shortly thereafter, Mexico declared void all acts agreed upon while Santa Anna was a prisoner. Even though the United States recognized the new Republic of Texas, Mexico refused. Mexico maintained that Texas was still its northern-most territory.

Over the next few years, Mexican belligerency was highlighted by several invasions into Texas. In March 1842, Santa Anna directed General Vasquez to raid Texas and capture San Antonio for a few days. The Mexican Army sacked San Antonio and retreated back into Mexico as planned. This practice invasion then was followed by a well-organized one six months later. Santa Anna entrusted General Adrian Woll with organizing and leading this invasion army. Woll's army consisted of 1400 well-armed, well-trained soldiers plus another 200 Indian scouts. On August 31st, Woll's army crossed the Rio Grande and marched towards the often-beleaguered San Antonio. Instead of traveling the traditional invasion route, Woll's forces approached San Antonio from the west. The Mexican army then encircled San Antonio. After a few small skirmishes, 62 Texans were captured and made prisoner. Woll's orders were to hold San Antonio and the surrounding area and await reinforcements. Alas, the reinforcements were bogged down on the Rio Grande and never arrived.

Meanwhile, news of the Mexican invasion spread like wildfire. A captured Mexican spy confessed the invasion to Sam Houston confirming the rumors. Throughout Texas, hearts ached for the citizens of San Antonio. This little town was widely known as the center of Texas suffering and well termed as "a slaughter pen."

Upon hearing of the invasion, Colonel Matthew "Old Paint" Caldwell rallied his troops and rode to Salado Creek where he met up with Jack Hays and a company of Rangers. Meanwhile, Captain Dawson had rallied about 15 men and was picking up more as he rode to join Caldwell's forces. Their numbers grew as they scurried towards San Antonio. They picked up two men at the McAhron Ferry and another two between O'Quinn and Black Jack. At Mulberry, they were joined by another four and at Plum Grove another two. At Woods Prairie, near West Point, another six were added to this small army. After passing Woods Prairie another man caught up and then two more. Among these numbers were four volunteers from DeWitt County, including Thomas McClure Rice. Others joined as they rode until the numbers totaled 53, counting Captain Dawson.

Not waiting for Dawson's volunteers, Caldwell and Hays devised a plan. Caldwell would send Hays and his Rangers into San Antonio, do some shooting and some yelling, and ride back out again. They hoped that the Mexicans would chase Hays and his Rangers who would lead them into an ambush. The ambush worked perfectly resulting in 60 Mexicans killed and at least 200 wounded. Caldwell only lost one man.

The victory would have been even greater except that Woll had held some of his forces in reserve. This maneuver proved beneficial to Woll but disastrous for Captain Dawson and his men. Dawson, upon hearing the battle, hurried his men to join Caldwell. As Dawson rushed in, he found himself surrounded by Woll's rear guard. Dawson and his men scurried to the only cover available, a small grove of mesquite brush. The Mexicans quickly brought up their artillery and caught the Texians in a deadly crossfire of grapeshot and ball, mowing them down like grain before a reaper. This was the action that cost Thomas McClure Rice his life. Of the 53 caught in this deadly crossfire, 36 were killed, 15 were captured and 2 managed somehow to escape.

Thomas was about 41 years old when he died. In 1854, Elizabeth received \$80.75 from the State of Texas for her husband's three weeks pay for military service (\$15.75) and horse (\$65.00). Affidavits

from Richard Chisholm, Jacob A. Miller, and Samuel Anders state that they knew Thomas personally and that he was killed at the massacre of Capt. Dawson's company in the Woll Campaign of September 1842. Six years later, the patriots of this Battle of Salado Creek were given a military burial in a concrete vault on Monument Hill in La Grange in the presence of Sam Houston and a great concourse of dignitaries and citizens from all over Texas. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission now own this historic park.

When their father was killed, James and Mary were between 13 and 15 years old, Oliver was 12, William Wilson was 7 and Thomas Richard was only 7 months old. Elizabeth now had to rear and care for all five children alone.

The 1850 census of DeWitt County lists Elizabeth Rice, age 45, born Ireland, with sons Oliver, age 20, born Ohio and Thomas, age 8, born Texas. James and William are not found on the 1850 census in DeWitt or surrounding counties. They may have been on a trail drive at the time the census was taken. Mary L., age 20, born Ohio, is on the 1850 Wharton County census with husband, Joseph A. Newman, age 22, sons Asa, age 4, born Texas and L. G. (Leander Green), age 1, born Texas. Elizabeth died before December 10, 1859. She was less than 54 years old. On this date, a Release of Claim to the Estate of Elizabeth Rice from James Rice to William Rice was executed.

Even though Elizabeth was entitled to land from the Republic of Texas after Thomas' death, no records of her receiving land can be found. After a careful review of the Texas General Land Office records under the name of Elizabeth Rice, it is my conclusion that the Elizabeth Rice who received a land grant and resided in Lavaca County is not our Elizabeth Rice, widow of Thomas McClure Rice.

Elizabeth is believed to be buried in the old Clinton Cemetery just outside of Cuero, Texas. In her honor, the Thomas McClure Rice Association placed a plaque there in 1995 that reads as follows:

In memory of ELIZABETH WILSON RICE, a pioneer Texian

Born in Ireland in 1805, Elizabeth Wilson immigrated to Ohio about 1818 where she married THOMAS MCCLURE RICE in 1824.

Answering General Sam Houston's call to help gain freedom for Texas, in 1836 Elizabeth, Thomas and their four children came to Texas. They settled and farmed near Little Brushy Creek, DeWitt County, where their fifth child was born in 1842.

On September 18, 1842, Elizabeth and her children were suddenly without husband and father as Thomas was killed in action in the Battle of Salado Creek. In 1848 with then President Sam Houston officiating, Thomas was among the Texian soldiers enshrined on Monument Hill in LaGrange.

Elizabeth lived in DeWitt County until she died in 1859 and is believed buried in Clinton Cemetery.

The sacrifice and legacy of Elizabeth and Thomas Rice will always serve their hundreds of descendants and the people of Texas.

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