



# Forsaken Patriot: The Strange Life and Times of Samuel May Williams of Texas

*Gordon Blocker, Marshall Riggan*

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## **NEW HISTORY BOOK REVEALS UNKNOWN TEXAS HERO**

He came to the western frontier under a cloud and under an assumed name, a man seriously in debt, fleeing a murder indictment with nothing but the clothes on his back and a beautiful woman some called a “Devil” on his arm. His name was Samuel May Williams. And in time, although he would risk all in the service of Texas, he would become the most controversial, the most hated, and the most misunderstood character to walk the pages of Texas history.

Sam was the son and grandson of sea captains, and as a young man, sailed as Supercargo on his family’s Baltimore Clipper, venturing to Buenos Aires where he stayed for awhile learning Spanish and the perils and possibilities of doing business in a country torn by revolution - skills that would serve him well later when he would find himself center stage in the conflicts between Texas and Mexico. Still in his early twenties, he settled for a few years in New Orleans where he became fluent in the French language, made and lost a fortune speculating in land recently obtained from France in the Louisiana Purchase. It was in New Orleans that he was rumored to have killed a man in a dispute over a woman, perhaps the woman that historians have identified as either an actress, the wife of a circus owner or a high-born Cuban lady. Together, pursued by the law and debtors, he and this woman escaped to the wilderness of early 19th century Texas.

Because of his adventurous spirit, his business acumen and his gift of languages, Sam Williams became indispensable to Stephen F. Austin, first as his assistant, then later as Austin’s partner. Together, they created what has been called the “most successful colonization movement in American history.” As time passed, Williams became the major bureaucrat in Anglo-American Texas, a man of considerable substance.

During the Texas Revolution, Williams continued his entrepreneurial ways and to many it seemed he was lining his pockets at the Colony’s expense. Yet, behind the scenes, he was purchasing warships and recruiting officers and men for the Texas Navy, ships which assured victory over Santa Anna at San Jacinto and without which Texas could never have won and maintained its Independence. Williams purchased the ships and armed them on his own credit, a debt that would not be repaid in his lifetime. His life was interwoven with some of the great men of the time, the gentleman pirate Jean Laffite, Sam Houston, Stephen Austin, José Navarro, Juan Seguín, Antonio López de Santa Anna. After the Mexican general was defeated at San Jacinto, Williams saved him from an angry mob and hid him away, even though Santa Anna had earlier placed a price on Sam’s head for seeking to steal away Texas from Mexico.

*Forsaken Patriot* is the story of a remarkable life, a man who was viewed by many as a scoundrel and by others as a patriot. Father of the Texas Navy, he also built a mercantile empire, created the first bank in Texas, and spearheaded development of the port city of Galveston which, in his time, was the richest city per capita in the United States. Yet, while so many of his peers, like Sam Houston, Stephen Austin, even Jean Lafitte, went on to be memorialized, Sam Williams went on to be forgotten. After all he accomplished for Texas, it is ironic that no street, school, park, county, building or monument in the city or in the state bears his name. Even the pirate Laffite has an elementary school, several streets and a city named after him. Unlike

the other major players in Texas history, Sam Williams passed from our memory into the shadows from which he came. [739]

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