

Deep Roots
by Wilma Heberling
Texas Heroes

Presented at Tartan Day at the Alamo, 2008

Good Evening:

To quote an often seen T-shirt slogan: I wasn't born in Texas, but I got here as soon as I could!" I was, in fact, born in Scotland, and I am honored, tonight to be asked to pay tribute to the heroes of the Alamo.

It is not my intent to relive the historic Siege...I leave that to those much more qualified than I am... The DRT who preserve and protect the Shrine, and authors such as Walter Lord in his *A Time to Stand* and Carl Peterson, who covers it in his book *Now's the Day and Now's the Hour*.

Because it is Tartan Day, I am limiting myself to a few of Scottish descent and four who were born in Scotland. I would also like to help you understand the tremendous contribution Scots and those of Scottish descent have made to the development and growth of Texas.

First, who were the heroes of the Alamo? The answer is, of course, every single person who died fighting for the freedom of Texas, but I will single some out.

There was James Bowie, a descendant of the Maryland Bowies who emigrated from Stirling, in Scotland. The name comes from the Gaelic, Boughe, but became anglicized. His ancestors originated in the Hebridean Islands. Jim Bowie was born in Kentucky, and made his way to Texas following the trail of the soldier adventurer. He was a leading participant in the battle of Concepcion, and was in charge of a volunteer force during the Siege by Santa Anna's forces. At the time of the fall of the Alamo, however, he was confined to his cot with pneumonia, and that is where he was when he was killed.

David Crocket, better known as "Davie," is another well-known hero. His ancestors were Ulster-Scots—sometimes known as "Scotch/Irish." These are Scots who either left Scotland on their own for Northern Ireland or were transported there by the likes of Oliver Cromwell. His father fought in the American War for Independence. Crocket was well known in his native Tennessee. He was hardly only the "mountain man" of Disney fame. He had served as a Congressman before he came to Texas after his congressional defeat in 1835. In a famous parting speech he said, "Since you have chosen to elect a man with a timber toe to succeed me, you may all go to Hell, and I will go to Texas!" There he enrolled as a volunteer. He followed Col. William Travis, who was a Whig, like Crocket. We may not know all the reasons that drew Crocket to the Alamo, but that is where he died, a true Texas hero, defending Texas freedom.

Not so well-known are the four native-born Scottish defenders. Richard Ballentine was born in Scotland and immigrated to Alabama with his family. From there he sailed to

Texas on board the *Santiago*, on Dec 9th, 1835. He and the other passengers signed a statement declaring, "We have left every endearment at our respective places of abode in the U.S.A. to maintain and defend our brethren, at peril of our lives, liberties and fortunes." He joined the volunteers defending the freedom of Texas, and died during the Siege of the Alamo. He was 22 when he died.

Isaac Robinson was born in Scotland and came to Texas from Louisiana. He took part in the Siege of Bexar. He later served in the Alamo garrison as a 4th sergeant in the artillery. He was 28 when he died here, at the Alamo.

David Wilson was born in Scotland and lived in Nacogdoches with his wife Ophelia. He became a volunteer with Captain Dimmit's troop, and remained at the Alamo after Dimmit left. He fought courageously for Texas and died aged 29.

Last, there was John MacGreggor. Born in Aberfeldy, in Perth, Scotland and forever etched in memory as "the Piper of the Alamo. Some speculate that he left Scotland as a result of the Highland Clearances, when Highlanders were forcibly removed from their land to make way for sheep. Whatever the truth, he also settled in Nacodoches. He was a sergeant in Captain Carey's Artillery Co. It is thought he accompanied Crocket and his Tennessee volunteers to the Alamo. That is where he died, March 6, 1836, aged 28.

There were others of course, many of them: James Burns, Robert Campbell, James Ewing, John Forsyth, Andrew Harrison, Jesse MacCoy, William MacDowell, James Robertson, William Sutherland, David Wilson and the great-grand uncle of Ellis Buchanan, the President of the San Antonio Scottish Society, James Buchanan.

These and the other 180 plus men who died fighting a force of about thousands, are who we honor this Tartan Day evening. We also pay tribute to all the Scots who carved their niche in this great state. Huge numbers did not come here in waves of several hundreds at a time, like the Germans did, but they made their mark.

We should remember that almost half of Texas 254 counties are named after Scots. That our other heroes like Sam Houston and Steven Austin, called "The Father of Texas," are of Scottish descent. That our Capitol in Austin was not only financed by but partially built by Scottish stone-masons. That the blood, sweat and tears of Scots raised Texas cattle and farmed Texas land, they ran the government and settled the prairies. We must remember them all because they are at the heart of Texas greatness. But most of all, tonight, we will remember the heroes and "Remember the Alamo."

Thank you very much.