

# HOUSTON, TEXAS IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

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It was a fine day in 1860 and the town of Houston was awakening . . . a water vendor was busy sprinkling Main Street to provide Houstonians relief from the dust . . . theater-goers, who had the previous evening attended a performance of Clark's Dramatic Troup at Perkins Hall, were rising and preparing for a new day . . . and the formation of a baseball club was all the talk of the sporting set.

In the twenty-four years since the Allen brothers had the dream of building a great city on the banks of Buffalo Bayou, Houston had grown into a town of 4,845 people. Edward H. Cushing, the editor of the *Houston Telegraph* climbed to the top of a two-story brick building and gave us a view of the city in 1859 . . . "from the feet of the beholder, the city stretches away for a mile in three directions, where in the fourth, the green prairie dotted here and there with white houses and covered with the beauty of spring, is bounded by the timber of Brays Bayou." Houston was also the hub of the small Texas railroad system that totaled approximately 350 miles.

In Texas in 1861, there was divided opinion against the state seceding from the Union but not so in Houston. Although some "submissionists" opposed secession and others desired to restore the Texas Republic, the people were against Lincoln and voted 1,084 to 144 to cast their lot with the Confederacy.

On the day the news reached Houston that Ft. Sumter had fallen, a salute was fired on the courthouse square and \$5,000 was raised for immediate military needs. Rebel yells filled the streets of the town when it was announced Virginia had joined her sister southern states in the fight for independence.

The military authorities in Houston and Harris County immediately began to build camps to train the eager young men ready to defend their beloved southland. Camp Van Dorn, near Harrisburg, was the major training camp in the area and was the drill site for twenty companies. The 4th and 5th Regiments of

Hood's Texas Brigade trained there and Terry's Texas Rangers assembled there also.

By the end of April 1861, "The Confederate Guards," "The Turner Rifles," "The Bayou City Guards" plus an artillery unit were ready to leave Houston and join in the fight.

The ranks of the "Bayou City Guards" were filled with young men from the prominent families in the city and they, as other southern men, looked on the war as a lark. Everyone knew that one Rebel was the equal of ten Yankees. Because of their social status, the "Guards" were presented a box of kid gloves and christened "the Kid Glove Gentry." As this bunch of "dandies" marched up Main Street on their way to war, they proudly displayed their kid gloves on their bayonets. No one at the time knew that these young men were to gain lasting fame as Company A, 5th Texas Regiment, Hood's Texas Brigade.

The *Houston Telegraph* tells of the whole town turning out to "say farewell" to those outfits leaving for the far-flung battlefields. The first group to actually leave Houston was a cavalry company formed by Captain Ike Stafford and it served on the Rio Grande at Ft. Bliss.

The "Turner Rifles," stationed in Galveston, were the first Houston troops to exchange shots with the enemy when on August 3, 1861, they were attacked by the Federal gunboat *South Carolina*. Other troops to come from Houston were the "Confederate Grays" who served under Texan Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh, later at Vicksburg and after Vicksburg on the west side of the Mississippi River. Captain Proudfoot's infantry was stationed at Ringgold Barracks, a main crossing point on the Rio Grande River. Captain Schnieder's riflemen were at the Galveston Batteries and there were at least nine more companies formed in Houston. Finally when the "Davis Guards," the heroes of the battle of Sabine Pass, Texas, were recruited from among the Houston and Galveston dockworkers, the *Houston Telegraph* declared, "We now think Houston and Harris County have done enough.

The balance of her men are needed for home service. We think under the circumstances it will be but right to ask the remainder of our volunteer forces to stay at home and give the rest of the state a chance." By April of 1862, the "Telegraph" estimated that fifteen percent of Houston's population had joined the armed forces of the Confederacy.

Houston and Harris County listed only twenty-one manufacturers in 1860. As events continued to unfold, the city's small but thriving business community began to mobilize on a wartime footing. By 1862, the local merchants were beginning to enter into new lines of endeavor to fill the needs of the military and civilian populations. Merchant Frank Faby established a soap and candle factory and two flour mills were constructed (one could produce the grand sum of twenty-four barrels of flour a day). Two iron and brass foundries were started. John Kennedy leased his three-story building on Travis Street, just north of Congress Ave., for use by the Ordnance Department as a percussion cap factory and arsenal, filled with cannon, small arms and ammunition. A heavy guard was posted both day and night.

The following comes to us from the *Wartime Journal* of John E. T. Milsaps and illustrates the total dedication to the Confederacy by Texans of all ages. "I was ten years old when I commenced working in the C. S. Government cartridge factory in Houston and kept at it steadily for two or more years, learning to do almost everything that had to be done: such as roll, fill with powder, fold, dip, make into packages, cut and crimp, etc. Almost cut the end of my left thumb off on one occasion when trimming bullets on a machine." Many of Houston's young girls and boys worked in the factory.

A large Quartermaster Depot was located in Houston. Items produced there were shoes, uniforms, tents, tin goods and wagon equipage. It was because of this facility that it had been said, "Kirby Smith's troops were probably the best dressed in the Confederacy."

Houston was the home of the most productive tannery in the entire department. Giselman's processed 300 hides a week and had shops for manufacturing common varieties of harness, sole and upper shoe leather and the only glue factory of any consequence in the southwest.

In June of 1862, the war effort in Houston suffered a disastrous setback as fire destroyed the Alexander McGowen foundry. The foundry was engaged in filling large Confederate contracts.

Houston was the home of a military hospital that housed the wounded or veterans suffering from small pox or yellow fever. It was reported that citizens living within earshot of this facility spent many a sleepless night listening to the cries of anguish from these men. There was a soldiers' home in Houston named "Houston Hall" and even late in the war, it was possible to feed and lodge 492 men overnight.

The city was visited by such serious diseases as cholera, dengue fever, small pox and the yellow fever epidemic of 1862.

The Bayou City had a Prisoner of War Camp and among the 1,000 prisoners held there were 350 men from the Battle of Galveston. The camp was housed in four long rows of cowsheds near the railroad yards at the foot of Main Street.

Houston was never the site of a battle but served as a center for administration and distribution. It was because of this and by virtue of being so far from the major fighting that Houston received many Southerners from other Confederate states. The eastern and central sections of Texas became a miniature version of the Confederacy, as refugees from Louisiana and Mississippi found themselves living with new arrivals from Arkansas, Tennessee and some as distant as Virginia. Houston became a major center for resettlement. In 1862, the local newspaper declared, "that every hotel was filled from garret to basement" and "that there were enough new settlers in place to whip any Yankee force." Then to compound the overcrowded conditions, Galveston's citizens poured into Houston with the fall of that city to Federal forces. They came crowded to the gunwales in boats up Buffalo Bayou, in wagons filled with household goods that displayed Texas and Confederate flags and "in and on" railway coaches. Houston tightened

her belt and opened her arms.

Colonel Arthur James Lyon Freemantle, of Her Majesty's Coldstream Guards, during his three-month visit to the Confederacy, described Houston "as a very pretty town and much better than I expected. The main street boasts so many well-built iron and brick houses." But as the influx of refugees continued, the lots and alleys became filled with ugly shanties.

On Christmas Eve 1862, a curious thing was taking place on the wharves at the foot of Main Street in Houston. Guards patrolled the area and there was mystery in the air. The steamboats *Bayou City* and *Neptune* were the scene of much activity as stevedores lined their decks with bales of cotton. When the ships slipped their moorings and cleared the docks, to the average citizen they appeared to be ordinary Galveston-bound freighters but behind the bales of cotton crouched artillerymen and sharpshooters, silently in their wakes steamed the *Lucy Gwinn* and the *John F. Carr* loaded with infantry on their way to free Galveston from the Yankees. Details of the New Year's Eve battle and the glorious victory at Galveston reached Houston on January 2, 1863 and did much to raise the spirits of the population.

Early in 1863, the people of Houston collected \$3,000 and gave generously from their dwindling resources to aid the sick and poor huddled in their city.

During this period in 1863, every able-bodied man in Houston had gone into the army. Houston's fine Volunteer Fire Department existed in name only. There was a hook and ladder outfit, along with an old-fashioned machine that had a pump worked by two side-arms . . . having at their ends long bars which were worked up and down by ten to fifteen men. It was determined to detail a number of Negroes to act as firemen. It was a major happening to attend a fire in wartime Houston. Crowds quickly gathered to watch the spectacle as the firemen threw their hearts and souls into their work and they never seemed to grow weary. Periodically, a little whiskey was handed around in a bucket and they partook of it. This was sufficient to keep them on the go and under a full head of steam for hours. They sang while battling the fires and on one occasion, the company rolled to a fire and went into action. John Cook, known

as "Big John" because of his great size, possessed a fine voice and was the choir leader. In time with the pumping bars . . . John would sing a verse alone and then the gathered spectators would join in. It turned into a great side-show. One verse would go: "If I had a wife and she wouldn't dress fine . . . Whiskey Oh! Whiskey! . . . I'd leave this world and climb a pine . . . Whiskey Oh! Whiskey!" Big John would boom out, "If I had a wife who wouldn't dress fine" and the assembled crowd would answer "Whiskey Oh! Whiskey." It was grand! There were at least fifty verses to the song.

Houston had become the headquarters for the District of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. It was the nerve center of the Trans-Mississippi Department. Gray-uniformed officers galloped along the streets, sabers rattling, as they rode toward the arsenal or the various headquarters and bureaus.

To protect the town from invasion by water, dirt breastworks were thrown up on the north side of Buffalo Bayou near the Galveston Railway Depot. The completed fortifications were too difficult to occupy and became known as "Ft. Humbug."

The *Houston Telegraph* reported that the patriotism of the citizens seems inexhaustible. Their contributions to every new concert, fair or festival seemed to exceed the previous event. Many families donated cherished possessions to be sold at lottery to aid the Confederacy. At one such function, the items included two sewing machines, a five octave melodeon, a guitar, an "elegant white crepe" shawl, two acres of land near town, a gold watch with chain, a ship's model and an oil painting.

As the blockade tightened and the war continued, the citizens of Houston experienced shortages and rising prices of 300 to 400 per cent. They substituted dried okra for coffee, used castor bean oil or palma christi bean oil for their lamps and wrapping paper for stationary. As the war progressed and paper stock became scarce, the local newspaper came out on every color of paper imaginable . . . blue, green, yellow, etc.

Butter climbed from 25¢ a pound to \$9.00 . . . corn had risen from 67¢ a bushel to \$25.00 . . . potatoes from \$1.75 a bushel to \$20.00 . . . flour sold at \$50.00 a 100 pound sack . . . salt, toward the end, was scarce at any

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price . . . garters were \$30.00 a pair and boots cost \$100.00 a pair.

Houstonians wrote "Letters to the Editor" registering their feelings on the daily happenings around and about wartime Houston. One example was a recipe for making candles from alum, saltpeter, tallow and water. "If anyone, after giving this a trial, goes in darkness", the lady writer concludes, "it is because their deeds are evil." Another letter was from a young Second Lieutenant, stationed at a nearby encampment. He thanked J. T. Cyrus for a cask of molasses, P. W. Gray for a donation and A. Whitaker and company for a present. He then added, "But no thanks to the 'hide-bound scoundrel' that asked \$12.00 for one ounce of quinine to break a soldier's chill."

In December of 1864, it was again reported that the Yankees were coming. New military companies, including men past age, exempts and squads of boys, were being drilled for possible combat.

In late 1864 and early 1865, the people of Houston raised \$6,000 in donations to buy a battery of guns. The *Houston Telegraph* reported, "The people of Houston are arousing and organizing for the coming fray, they understand well that their city is the tempting bait that is luring the enemy on. In attacking Brownsville, Aransas and Velasco, he is but attacking the outposts of Houston."

As the vice slowly tightened around Houston, law and order began to lose control. Crimes marked by irrational violence were on the increase. One of the most newsworthy was committed at 10:00 a.m. . . . April 6, 1865 in a second-story room of the fashionable Fannin House Hotel. It was there that Colonel George Baylor shot General John Wharton over some bad words that had passed between them. The General was found to be unarmed at the time.

Military discipline was beginning to deteriorate as evidenced by a brace of drumhead Court-Marshalls that sentenced a dozen enlisted men to be shot to death for desertion and cashiered, in absentia, eleven officers for a prolonged absence from duty without leave.

A rumor was being circulated throughout Houston in early May 1865 that General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia had surrendered. The local inhabitants said, "The rumor was a 'dirty Yankee trick' and it showed just how low they could be." But when the *Houston Telegraph* gave the story to its readers that the

end had come in the east . . . Houstonians were shocked.

General Kirby Smith, Commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, reached Houston on May 27, 1865 only to find himself a General without an army. On the 30th, disturbed by the lawlessness and chaos accompanied by the breaking up of the army, he urged Governor Murrah to employ whatever means available to protect public property and to keep the peace.

Confederate troops in Houston had no one to surrender to and concluded to take matters into their own hands. They proceeded to help themselves to everything that belonged to the Confederacy and horses, guns, wagons and ammunition were seized wherever they could be found. Powder and lead were the most prized loot. The ground was covered with powder, loose percussion caps and shells. The wonder of it all is that Houstonians for blocks around were not blown to pieces.

There was one final chapter to be written and this came about on June 20, 1865. Many years ago, an old man gave this eyewitness account of the arrival of Federal troops into Houston. "I was a youngster and was playing in the yard when I heard the noise of music . . . if you can call it

that . . . of a Drum and Fife Corps, anyway, I knew soldiers were coming. I ran to the gate and saw a body of troops, it must have been a full regiment, marching down Fannin Street. Somehow the soldiers did not look just right to me. Their uniforms were not ragged enough, were darker in color than I had seen before and their guns were too shiny. They had a flag that was different from those to which I was accustomed. The troops were part of the 114th Ohio Regiment, along with the 34th Iowa, just arrived by special train from Galveston.

It was at last over. Reconstruction, along with its attending "Carpetbaggers", moved into Houston but even this could not hold the people of the city down for long. In time, they would come back stronger than ever.

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## PAT CLEBURNE CHAPTER #1971

Cleburne, Texas

### *In Memory of our Confederate Ancestors*

| <i>Member</i>               | <i>Ancestor</i>           | <i>State</i> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Georgianne Bailey           | John Washington Berry     | TX           |
| Johnnye Hinkle Blount       | George Washington Hinkle  | AL           |
| Hortense McCorkle Booth     | James Cunningham McCorkle | AL           |
| Rachel Prestridge Boteler   | William Conway Senter     | TX           |
| Carolyn George Burnett      | James Polk Priestly       | TX           |
| Tommye Kirkpatrick Ferguson | William Adam Kirkpatrick  | TX           |
| Beverly Hughett George      | James Polk Priestly       | TX           |
| Jeannette Leary Gibbs       | Thomas Mason Rector       | TX           |
| Bertha Lee Hagler           | James Hiram Hagler        | TX           |
| Truman Cooper Irby          | McDaniel Webb             | TN           |
| Mary Hudson Jackson         | Thomas Jefferson Stockton | MS           |
| Thelma Gore Johnson         | Joseph Gilliam Barker     | GA           |
| Velma Kirkpatrick Jordan    | William Adam Kirkpatrick  | TX           |
| Marie Cox Kelly             | Asbury Cobe Cox           | VA           |
| Mary Field Ray              | Stephen Holland Mulkey    | TX           |
| Beulah Moffeit Reid         | Evan Ray Spencer          | TX           |
| LaVerne Hagler Roddy        | James Hiram Hagler        | TX           |
| Fairy Tidwell Williams      | William M. Calloway       | MS           |