

Williamson County's namesake a Texas hero

By KAREN R. THOMPSON

As a judge of the Republic of Texas, Robert McAlpin Williamson was sent to Shelbyville to hold court during a turbulent period. After setting up court, a man pulled a Bowie knife and stated, "This is the law that governs here!" Williamson quickly displayed a long-barreled pistol and said, "This is the constitution that overrides it!"

Williamson was many things: soldier, lawyer, judge, publisher, orator, father, man of principals and "handicapped."

With his long list of accomplishments, it is hard to believe he was crippled since age 15. His right leg had been drawn back at the knee, causing him to wear a peg leg that required special trousers. Hence the nickname "Three-legged Willie." Even with his disability, he was a superb horseman and could even dance the jig.

As a man of law, it did not take long for Williamson to take up the cause of Texas independence. In Anáhuac, Mexican Commander Juan Davis Bradburn had arrested Patrick Jack and William Barret Travis. Williamson came to their defense. This was only the beginning of his rally for justice.

Williamson and Travis became friends and business associates. In the *Diary of William Barret Travis* at the Texas Archives, Travis mentions Williamson 20 times and Stephen F. Austin 21 times. Williamson was undoubtedly upset about the death of Travis at the Alamo on March 6, 1836, and probably anxious to defend Travis and Texas at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21. He did not let his disability prevent his participation, and he received 640 acres of land for his service.

Williamson wholeheartedly supported annexation to the United States, so much so that he named one of his sons Annexus.

When he came to Texas in 1826, it had only been five

years since Mexico had gained independence from Spain, and the native Indian tribes were beginning to fight against any rulers. The three-way struggle between American settlers, Mexican officials and the native tribes was headed for turmoil. Statehood seemed to be the best solution to the cultural clash.

Texas was admitted as the 28th state, and Feb. 19, 1846, when its last president, Dr. Anson Jones, lowered the Texas flag in Austin and stated, "The Republic is no more," no one was happier than R. M. Williamson.

In 1848, Washington Anderson and James O. Rice circulated two handwritten petitions to form a new county throughout the western part of Milam District.

The suggested name for the county was San Gabriel or Clear Water, but the Texas Legislature decided to honor one of their own, naming the county after Robert McAlpin Williamson.

Since he was well known by reputation, the idea was embraced, and from the beginning Williamson County was known as a county of laws.

Karen Thompson is a seventh-generation Texan, passionate about preserving and recording Texas history. She has written books on Williamson County, Round Rock and Austin. She is manager of archives for Williamson County.

Robert McAlpin Williamson



1804 Born in Georgia to Peter B. and Rebecca Ann McAlpin Williamson and raised by grandfather Micajah Williamson of the 1776 Continental Army

1819 Developed "white leg" (probably polio) at age 15

1823 Admitted to the Georgia Bar at age 19

1826 Settled in San Felipe de Austin

1832 Opposed Mexican despot Bradburn in Anahauc

1835 Delegate from Mina (later known as Bastrop) to first "Consultation"

1835 Appointed Major by S. F. Austin to organize Texas Rangers

1836 Cavalry in the Battle of San Jacinto, April 21

1836-1840 Supreme Court judge of the Republic of Texas

1837 Married Mary Jane Edwards; they eventually had seven children

1840-1845 Served in Congress of the Republic of Texas from Washington County, as a representative and then senator

1846 After Statehood, Senator in first and second Congresses

1859 Died December 22 in Wharton, Texas, at age 55

1891 Life-sized portrait was dedicated in state Senate chamber and still hangs there today

1930 Reinterred to Texas State Cemetery in Austin