

Miss Adina De Zavala, Angel of the Alamo

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Miss Adina Emilia De Zavala was born in Harris County, Texas, on November 28, 1861, first-born child of Augustine and Julia (Tyrrell) De Zavala. Adina's grandfather on her father's side was Lorenzo De Zavala, who served as the first vice-president of the Republic of Texas and is credited with designing the flag of Texas.

When Adina was born, her family lived at De Zavala Point on Buffalo Bayou, near the place where the Battle of San Jacinto had been fought. Her father, Augustine, was a rancher and had served as a captain in the navy of the Confederated States of America during the Civil War. Her mother, Julia, had been born in Dublin, Ireland, and had gone to school in Galveston.

Adina's family relocated to Galveston and she, like her mother, was educated there, attending Ursuline Academy from 1871 to 1873. Around that time, her family moved again, this time to a ranch not far from Locke Hill, a community north of San Antonio.

In 1879, Adina became a student at Sam Houston Normal Institute—now Sam Houston State University—in Huntsville, Texas, and she was a member of that school's first graduating class in 1881. She also attended a music school located in Chillicothe, Missouri, before taking a position as a high school teacher in Terrell, Texas, where she worked from 1884 until 1886. Adina then returned to San Antonio, where her family still resided, and she taught there at the elementary level from 1887 to 1907.

During this period of her life, Adina helped start one of Texas' first patriotic societies of women. The group became a chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (or DRT) in 1893; they called themselves the De Zavala Chapter in honor of Adina's grandfather Lorenzo. The attentions of the De Zavala Chapter focused on the Alamo, originally founded as Mission San Antonio De Valero in 1718, and four other missions located south of San Antonio.

In the mid-1880s, the Alamo property belonged to a wholesale grocery firm named the Hugo and Schmeltzer Company. In 1903, DRT member Clara Driscoll, daughter of a wealthy Texas rancher and oilman, succeeded in purchasing the property, at no small personal expense. The state of Texas bought it from her in 1905 and entrusted it to the DRT. However, Adina De Zavala and Clara Driscoll found themselves leading opposing factions in a battle to determine the fate of the Alamo.

Driscoll's group believed that the building was not built until after the famous 1836 battle and thus wanted to demolish much of the walls in favor of setting up a park which would highlight the 18th-century chapel. De Zavala's faction, on the other hand, felt that all of the original structure must be preserved, and De Zavala especially insisted upon the greater historical significance of the barracks versus the chapel.

The courts originally ruled in Driscoll's favor. When the danger of destruction loomed in 1908, Adina De Zavala hired several men to help her guard the Alamo and then barred herself inside the barracks in protest for three days. Her highly public protest in defense of the Alamo attracted national media attention. Although the upper story of the convent was removed on the Lieutenant Governor's order in 1913, Miss Adina nevertheless was responsible for saving much of the structure from complete demolition. The De Zavala Chapter did not fare as well: it was severed from the DRT in 1910. Not until 1994 did that organization make peace with the past, dedicating a commemorative DRT marker at Adina's San

Antonio gravesite. Later that same year, additional markers were placed at the Alamo by the DRT, in memory of both De Zavala and Clara Driscoll, and by the Bexar County Historical Commission, in recognition of De Zavala.

Though the Alamo was Adina's most visible and famous project, it was far from her only excursion into the preservation of historic places and events. She was the driving force behind a movement on behalf of the Spanish Governor's Palace in San Antonio; the state of Texas finally purchased the building in 1928 and restored it, as well as a variety of other buildings in the area, including the home of Jose Antonio Navarro, one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence.

She collaborated in the creation of the Texas Historical and Landmarks Association in 1912; this organization placed markers at thirty-eight Texas sites of recognized historical significance before disbanding in 1955, the same year as Adina De Zavala's death. Many public schools in Texas are named after Texas heroes because of her efforts, and it is largely due to her efforts that Texas Independence Day is recognized as a holiday on March 2.

Adina was appointed to the Texas Historical Board in 1923. She was an original member of both the Texas State Historical Association, which recognized her as an honorary life fellow in 1945, and the Committee of One Hundred, which planned the Texas centennial celebration. She was also a member of the Texas Centennial Committee's advisory board. An inspired supporter of history and women's organizations, she held further memberships in the Texas Women's Press Association, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Philosophical Society of Texas, and the Texas Folklore Society, along with many others.

Adina authored one book, several pamphlets, and many newspaper articles, most focused on the history of the Alamo or the history of Texas. In her role as a teacher, she wrote a short play in 1900 called "The Six National Flags that Have Floated Over Texas," which helped open her students to the state's diverse cultural heritage.

Adina De Zavala died on March 1, 1955, at the age of 93. After funeral services held on March 5 in St. Joseph's Church in San Antonio, her casket, draped with the Texas flag, was carried past the Alamo in tribute and finally laid to rest in her family's plot at St. Mary's Cemetery. Adina had never married, had no children, and was the sole remaining member of her family. She willed her considerable estate, more than \$10,000, to the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word for the purposes of establishing a girls' vocational school and a boys' town. On April 27, 1955, the State Legislature of Texas adopted a resolution in honor of her memory, declaring that she "worked faithfully through word, deed, and action to support and perpetuate the history of the State and the highest traditions of Texas."

In a 1936 interview for *The Latch String*, Adina De Zavala told Madeline McBurnett "that no monument that could be erected by the hands of man could be as great or sacred as the Alamo itself" (24). This belief aptly illustrates the legacy of historical respect and preservation which she willed to all Texans.

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