

## The Death of Sam Houston

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Read by Cheryl Spencer, Library Associate in Special Collections.

This is Cheryl Spencer, Special Collections Associate in the Thomason Room at Newton Gresham Library at Sam Houston State University. Our talk today is about the death of General Sam Houston.

As we celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of General Sam Houston, we are reminded of his love for Huntsville. Sam Houston had made his home in Huntsville off and on for several years. The only home he ever built for Margaret and the children was located in Smedes Valley, just south of downtown Huntsville (now Sam Houston Memorial Park). He owned this home for 13 years (1846-1859). In this home, the Woodlands, four of their eight children were born.

After Sam Houston was deposed as Governor in 1861, he returned to his friends and his beloved Huntsville. His home, the Woodlands, had been sold in 1858 to pay off campaign debts. It was occupied, so he rented the Steamboat house for his family. Sam grieved not only for the state of affairs of the country, but for his son, Sam Jr., who was off fighting for the Confederacy. It is reported he read all the newspapers he could obtain to remain abreast of the dreaded war.

On April 2, 1863, Sam Houston made his will. He willed that his sons obtain a solid and useful education: science, English, Latin, the Holy Scriptures, geography, and history. Margaret was instructed to guide them in their moral upbringing. Executors were his much beloved friends, Thomas Gibbs, Thomas Carothers, J. Carroll Smith, and Anthony Branch.

Sam Houston was ill for five weeks, and on July 26, 1863, at 6:15pm, Sam Houston died quietly in the downstairs bedroom of the Steamboat house. With him was his wife Margaret, his faithful companion Jeff Hamilton, and most of the children. It is reported in several sources that his last words were, "Texas, Margaret, Texas."

The funeral service was held in the upstairs parlor on July 27, 1863, and his body was laid to rest in Oakwood Cemetery during a rainstorm, with Masonic gravesite services. Few attended the service due to the strife of the nation.

An obituary appeared in the *Dallas Herald*, August 5, 1863, which read in part: "Let us not shed tears to his memory due to one who has filled so much of our affections. Let the whole people bury with him whatever of unkindness they had for him."

A very simple slab marker was placed on his grave. In 1936, in observance of the Texas Centennial, a marble marker by sculptor Pompeo Coppini was placed on the grave by the State of Texas. The inscription engraved on the monument is attributed to Andrew Jackson, a long-time friend. It reads: "The World Will Take Care of Houston's Fame"—and so it has.