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## **Hill/Finger Lecture Series presents**

*A Texas Legacy*

Nina Hendee

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I really love Texas history because of a great Texas legacy that was my fourth grade social studies teacher. Her name was Suzanne Gilson, and I thought she was the meanest woman alive. She decided that every Friday of the entire school year we would write a two-page Texas history book report. We started school on the Tuesday after Labor Day and our first book report was due on Friday. She was so strict she counted off 10 points for a misplaced comma. I made a 30 on my first book report and it was a very long year – 38 weeks. But guess what happened? I fell in love with this place that we call Texas. She left a great legacy because she was amazing and she had a passion for our heritage.

One day I didn't get to the library in time to check out a little thin book—the books had to be 75 pages long or longer. I didn't get there in time, so I had to check out a big, thick book of 218 pages. It was called *Gail Borden, Pioneer* by a historian named Clarence Wharton. If you've never read any of Clarence Wharton's works, you need to grab one. It was amazing and I fell in love with our state. Gail Borden came to Texas because he got a letter in the mail. The letter was from a school chum, basically his best friend and the letter said, "Move to Texas. I am going to start a colony. I need a land surveyor." It was signed, "Your best friend, Stephen F. Austin." So, he got on a ship, and he sailed to Texas. Now, his brother Tom Borden had already been to Texas to survey for Stephen F. Austin, so they got on a ship together.

At that time, sea voyages were treacherous, and it was a terrible trip. It was supposed to take about three weeks, and it took three months before they finally got to Galveston, Texas. While they were on the ship, a child on the ship got sick from drinking spoiled milk, and it upset Gail Borden tremendously. He landed in Galveston, Texas, and he met a man named Dr. Ashbel Smith, and he said, "Dr. Smith, I will find a way to put milk in a can." Dr. Smith said "There is a little problem with that. There are no cans," and Gail Borden said, "Well, I bet I can do this." He did it. He tried to can milk, and he failed, and he did something remarkable—especially by today's standards—he tried again and again and he tried for 22 years to can milk. He knew he had a good idea, and he kept trying until he finally succeeded. When the milk wouldn't sell, he started adding sugar and he added so much sugar, the product ended up being half milk and half sugar. That product is called Gail Borden's Eagle Brand Sweetened Condensed Milk. Stephen F. Austin's best friend is the Borden milkman. He started the Borden Milk Company that is still going in Spring Branch today. You can still buy Eagle Brand Sweetened Condensed Milk. I encourage you to do so and take the top off the can and just eat it straight out of the can. It's good stuff. Gail Borden was quite the inventor. He also tried to develop a condensed meat biscuit but that product was a failure.

So after he landed in Galveston, he made his way to a town called San Felipe just about 40 miles west of here. He started surveying Austin's colony. It was a difficult task, but he had just

invented this land surveying tool that he patented in 1821, and it was so accurate they still use it today in the year 2007.

The land surveyor had to give you a legal document that said you owned the land. Twenty thousand people came to Texas in a year and Gail Borden wrote so many documents that his hand started hurting. Although he was a young man, he became crippled and they think that Gail Borden had a disease that we call carpal tunnel syndrome. Because he could not open or close his hand, he got on a ship and he sailed 370 miles to New Orleans. He bought a printing press and hauled it all the way back to San Felipe. He started printing our land documents on a printing press and the milkman was the first printer in Texas.

He printed the document that is so near and dear to my heart. He printed the Texas Declaration of Independence which was signed at Washington-on-the-Brazos on March 2, 1836. Because the milkman had a printing press, he went to the people of San Felipe and said, "I can start a newspaper." A small newspaper had been tried, and it had failed miserably. Gail Borden, along with his friend Mr. Baker, started the *Texas Telegraph and Register*, and the milkman was the first newspaperman in Texas. He went to Stephen F. Austin and said, "I have an accurate surveying tool. Would you like me to draw you a map?" The first topographical map of Texas was drawn by the milkman, and did you know that map is still accurate today if you take into account we have sunk several feet. The milkman was the first mapmaker in Texas.

Every time Gail Borden saw a problem, he saw a solution, and he worked so hard for solutions—like so many have. We have such an amazing city but when the Allen brothers came and decided to build our town in this mosquito-infested swamp, what were they thinking? They needed streets, so they contacted Gail Borden and asked him to come and survey. They already had a name. The name they picked out was Houston after the hero of San Jacinto. They went to Sam Houston and said, "We're going to build a town, and we're going to name this town for you." Sam Houston was a very arrogant man, and so at this point in his life he changed the way that he wrote his name. First, he would write Sam the way we would with a big cursive "S" and a lowercase "a" and a lowercase "m," but after this town was named for him, he started signing his name in a very distinct way—a big cursive "S" and then he capitalized the "A." He left a space between the capital "S" and the capital "A," then the lowercase "m," and then he wrote Houston. And he would introduce himself, "I am Houston." Sam Houston not only signed his name "I Am Houston" for two years—his first term as the president of our nation, the Republic of Texas—but he called himself, "I Am Houston." He lost that reelection bid two years later, and his friends convinced him that was a tad bit arrogant, and he went back to signing his name "Sam." I have an "I Am Houston" signature that is a very rare, wonderful document.

Gail Borden saw solutions to problems. After I read that book about him I ended up loving Texas history and I ended up loving Suzanne Gilson. She was not the meanest woman on earth; she was just very, very old. She collected dirt. She had dirt in her window behind her desk, and as fourth graders if we were really, really good, Mrs. Gilson would let us touch her dirt. If you were not good, Mrs. Gilson had a ruler, and it was metal, and she was very fast, and she would pop you on the hand. And guess what? We were very, very good. She would climb on her desk with dirt, and she would look at us, and she would say, "Fourth graders, this is dirt from the Alamo." And we would look at Mrs. Gilson like, "Oh, you must get a life." But by the end of the fourth grade year, we knew what she meant about the dirt from the Alamo. People just like us came and fought and died for our freedom in the Alamo, and they were just like we are today as Texans.

We are people from all over the world that value freedom. They were people from all over the world, 17 foreign countries were represented by the individuals in the Alamo. One person that fought and died for you in the Alamo was born in Texas. One-third of the people that died for your freedom in the Alamo were born in Mexico. They bought your freedom from a bloody, brutal dictator. It was worth their lives. Wow. It is an amazing people that will die for someone else's freedom from a bloody, brutal dictator.

I ended up loving Texas, and when it came time for us to open our restaurant, *Taste of Texas* was the perfect name. And I learned from that wonderful woman that there had been six flags to fly over this amazing place. The first flag that flew was the one that flew, by far, the longest. For 297 years, we belonged to Spain. Most of our traditions and most of our laws are Spanish-based because for almost 300 hundred years we were Spain. For five years right in the middle of that time, Texas belonged to France. La Salle's men landed, and they were starving to death, and they were shipwrecked. You know they brought La Salle's sailing ship out of Matagorda Bay. There are 1 million artifacts right now in Texas museums from when we were French Texas. The museum in Victoria is incredible—our French Texas heritage. Well, La Salle was murdered mainly because of the cannibals, and Texas went back to Spain. Then, for almost 15 years, Texas belonged to Mexico. For 297 years we were Spain; five years we were France; almost 15 years we were Mexico.

Just about the time Mexico won its independence from Spain, the world was in one of the largest financial crises it had ever seen, the Panic of 1819. Moses Austin, who was known as the father of lead mining lost his fortune in that panic. He made his way to Texas and looked at this land and said, "Remarkable land; why no settlers?" He made his way down to Mexico and asked the the governor, "Governor Martinez, may I bring settlers into this vastly unpopulated land you call Tejas?" Governor Martinez said, "Absolutely not. Have you not heard that the Spanish tried to settle Texas for almost 300 years? Twelve missions have been tried, and they have failed. The Indians massacre the settlers. You can't settle Texas. It is a wild place. Go home." We had some really amazing, peaceful Indians in Texas, but we had some Indians in Texas that were called savages for a reason. They would savage people. So, Moses Austin headed for home, and on the way home he met a friend, the Baron of Bastrop. His friend is one of the most interesting characters in all of Texas history. I love the Baron of Bastrop because—he wasn't a baron; he just gave himself that name. He was friends with Governor Martinez, and he told Moses Austin, "I will go and talk to Governor Martinez. I will receive permission to settle Texas. He is my friend." Moses Austin headed for home, back to Missouri. On his way home, he got caught in a freak March snowstorm very near Fredericksburg, Texas, and he caught pneumonia. By the time he got back to Missouri, he had pneumonia, and he soon died. On his deathbed he asked his son, Stephen F. Austin, the father of Texas, to take up his claim to settle Texas.

Stephen F. Austin was a brilliant young man. He went right past Governor Martinez to the brand new president of Mexico. He asked and received permission to settle Texas. He was told he could grant huge pieces of land as an "empresario". Mexico finally won her independence from Spain. She had a rock-solid constitution that was patterned after the United States constitution. It brought freedom for Mexico, but Mexico's political turmoil was unbelievable. She had nine presidents in 10 years. One president only lasted 24 minutes. The ninth president was Mexico's first dictator, and he was a very cruel man. He came to Mexico, and he started breaking the laws. The Mexican people went to him and said, "Hold it. You're breaking our law, our constitution."

President Bustamante had them shot. He was a very cruel dictator. Bustamante came to power and sent his troops into Texas, and he started changing the laws for these Texian settlers.

When the Texians came, they came from all over the world—just like we come today. My favorite part of Texas, my favorite part of Houston, Texas, is that we speak 91 languages in the Houston Independent School District. We are people from all over the world, and so were they. They came seeking freedom. Well, they were promised a lot, and when they got to Texas they expected that they might receive 50 to 100 acres of land. When they made their way to San Felipe and received their land grants, they were granted a league and sometimes a labor of land. The “Old 300” received 4428 acres of land apiece. Oh my. They came from all over the world and they were told if they moved to Texas they would receive free land, and guess what—this is shocking—their land was not free. The government lied about property taxes. Some things never change. They owed \$32.60 per league of land, and that was huge money back then. You might have \$4 to your name when you came to Texas because the world was in a financial crisis, but they had years to pay their property taxes, and people poured in from all over the world. When they got here they found a very, very rough land, but three square miles for each one that came. We have a friend whose family came with the “Old 300” and I have copies of their land documents. They had five children and when they came to Texas this one family received 9½ leagues of land. So, you can understand why people came from all over the world.

Trouble began in Mexico, and Bustamante sent the troops into Texas, and they started changing the law. The first law they changed, they said, “We want more taxes and tariffs.” Well, the Texians had never liked the taxing thing, and they said, “But wait, we’re paying this \$32.60, and you lied about taxes.” They said, “More taxes and tariffs.” That was a problem. Bustamante’s troops came back and said, “Oh, by the way, no more trials.” And the Texians said, “If we are accused of a crime you just can’t throw us in jail,” and Bustamante’s army said, “No more trials.” The Texians started revolting. They came back and said, if you will worship only this way—guess what? These people were just like we are—we worship so many different ways. It’s one of our strengths. Bustamante’s army came back and said, “You signed a contract and you promised you would worship the way of the Mexican government,” and the Texians said, “We’re from all over the world. It’s okay to be different,” and trouble began.

Truly the straw that broke the camel’s back was when Bustamante passed the Immigration Law of April 6, 1830. The immigration law said no more immigration to Texas. He cut off all immigration. There were families coming like our families come today. Bustamante cut off immigration, and the settlers were livid. They went spinning into orbit. They went to Stephen F. Austin and said, “Our rights and freedoms as Mexicans have been removed. We must fight.” Stephen F. Austin said, “We don’t have to fight. Bustamante has fallen from power. His chief of staff is coming to power. His chief of staff is going to restore our freedom, our constitution of 1824.”

Stephen F. Austin went to Mexico City to talk to the chief of staff, and for three years there was relative peace in Texas while Bustamante fought his chief of staff. His chief of staff—this is shocking to me—he was a politician that lied. He came to power promising to restore the constitution. His first order of business was to burn the constitution of the Mexican people. His name was Antonio López de Santa Anna. Santa Anna came to power and began destroying the Mexican people. Bustamante had murdered 9000 Mexican people in one year. Santa Anna murdered 30,000 Mexican citizens his first year in office. He was a brutal, cruel man. He came

to power, and Stephen F. Austin was his ally. Stephen F. Austin campaigned for Santa Anna because he was promising something he was not going to deliver. Austin went to Mexico City, and he was put in prison, but it wasn't just a prison. During the Spanish Inquisition—the Spanish were exceptionally cruel to the Mexican people—they had dug these series of pits in Mexico City. They called them dungeons, but they were just holes in the ground large enough to lower someone into the pit and keep them there. They could not lie down; they could just stand up, and it was nasty. When it rained, the hole would fill to their neck with water, and there was a metal plate over the top, and they would remove it once a day and lower food and water. It was truly disgusting. Stephen F. Austin was accused of treason, lowered into a pit, and kept there for 90 days. He never recovered. He contracted a lung disease in that hole in the ground, and he never recovered. He got out of prison 19 months later and made his way back to Texas. On September 1, 1835, Stephen F. Austin returned to Texas, and he said to the people of Texas, “Santa Anna is a bloody monster and we must fight him.”

The people of Texas had already formed an army. They had an army of 190 corn farmers. Santa Anna was a brilliant military man and he had the largest Napoleonic army in the world, probably 12,000 soldiers. At this point the Texians had a couple of hundred soldiers, but they were fighting for the most important thing that we will ever have—something that we so take for granted. They were fighting for our freedom, and they were willing to die for our freedom. Well, trouble began on October 2. Skirmishes had taken place, but in a place called Gonzales the Texians had a tiny little cannon. Bustamante had given the settlers this ridiculous little four-pound cannon to protect them from the Indians. The Apaches and Comanches had been raiding Gonzales, and they had massacred everyone in the town three times. They massacred the people, but they didn't burn the town down and so Bustamante had sent this ridiculous little four-pound cannon to protect the settlers from the Indians. The cannon arrived and—guess what? The Indians never returned. They were terrified of that ridiculous little cannon, so if you wanted to live in Texas and be safe, you lived in Gonzales.

Well, Santa Anna got word that the settlers in Gonzales had the ridiculous little cannon, but he didn't know how small it was. He sent Colonel Ugartechea marching to Gonzales to remove the cannon. They ride to Gonzales, and they holler across the river, “Surrender the cannon,” and the Texians reply, “Come and take it!” It was all the protection they had and they were willing to fight for that cannon. A skirmish began, and the Texians didn't have cannon balls, so instead of stuffing it with two finger-widths of gunpowder they stuffed that ridiculous little cannon with 12 inches of gunpowder and chopped up knives and forks and chain and horse shoes. When Santa Anna's well-trained, Napoleonic army marched into town, they were met by these people who were passionate, and they said, “Come and take it.” The cannon was fired, and a Mexican foot soldier was hit in the head with a fork. They were scared to death. They had never been hit by a flying fork. They were a real army. They were scared to death of these people, and they turned and they ran because this was a wild, rag-tag group of people passionate about their freedom. They turned and retreated.

They went back to the Alamo where General Cos held the Alamo. Now Cos was Santa Anna's brother-in-law—he was remarkable. Actually, Cos was a man of great personal integrity. You need to read about him. He was a man of great personal integrity, but Santa Anna despised his brother-in-law. Cos had to send word back to Santa Anna in Mexico and say, “I am sorry, we could not take the cannon. You don't understand. These people do not fight fairly.” Santa Anna was livid.

There was this man who wandered through Gonzales on the evening of the battle of October 2—it was his birthday—his name was Old Ben Milam. He had been in a Mexican prison for a year, accused of treason, and he was just getting out of jail. He found out these Texians had kept the cannon, and he found out Cos held the Alamo, and Old Ben Milam was furious. He said, “You will go with Old Ben Milam into San Antonio to take the Alamo from Cos!” The Texians fresh from their victory said, “We’ll go. We’ll fight.” They headed to the Alamo, and on December 2, the first battle of the Alamo took place. Guess what? Only one person died on either side. It was a bloody, brutal battle. It raged for five days. The only person that died was Old Ben Milam. He thought your freedom was worth his life. The Texians knew they could fight, and fight they did. Santa Anna got word that the Alamo had fallen, and he was livid. He sent a letter to his brother in law, General Cos, that starts—“You idiot. I am coming to Texas to take the Alamo myself” signed Santa Anna.

Santa Anna heads for Texas. That’s bad news for Texas. On March 2, The Texas Declaration of Independence was signed. Just four days later, the Alamo fell, and 189 people from 17 countries thought your freedom was worth their life. Davy Crockett was my favorite. He was a United States congressman who got to Texas because he was not reelected. He got tossed as a favor to Andrew Jackson. He came to Texas and died in the Alamo. My favorite Davy Crockett quote was when he lost that reelection bid in August 1835. He said to the people, “You may all go to hell. I am going to Texas.” The Alamo fell. James Bowie died. Oh goodness. What a character he was; 189 died, and it changed it all. Santa Anna thought he had won, but indeed he had not.

The Texians were massacred at Goliad and that really changed it. Santa Anna’s army under General José de Urrea captured the Texian soldiers—about 383 Texians—at Goliad. He was supposed to treat them humanely and release them according to the Articles of War. He had them shot in the back. José de Urrea, a man of immense personal integrity, sent word to Santa Anna before the massacre at Goliad and said, “Do not do this. Do you understand? The world will turn against Mexico if you murder these innocent people!” Santa Anna sent word back and said, “Shoot them. Shoot them in the back, and shoot them on Palm Sunday.” Oh my. The Mexican people love the Lord. He did that to insult the Mexican soldiers. Santa Anna was of Spanish descent, not of Mexican descent. Well, it changed it all—the world did not turn against Mexico. The world turned against one bloody, brutal dictator who was murdering his own people.

Independence was won on April 21 at a place not far from here. If you’ve not been, I encourage you to go to San Jacinto. Wow. In a battle that only lasted 18 minutes, the world changed. Sam Houston decided to attack Santa Anna’s army in broad daylight. That was against the Articles of War. Santa Anna had become very complacent. His vice president had died in Mexico City, and he was falling from power, the first of the 11 times he fell from power. In 18 minutes it was over, and Texas became a nation.

The United States government said never, ever, ever, ever, ever will Texas become a part of the United States. They did not want us, and I don’t blame them. Texas was a mess. Texas had slavery. Texas had massive war debt. Texas had wild people. The U.S. government did not want us, and I don’t blame them. So, for 10 years we were a nation that no one wanted. Ten years later, by one vote in congress—five times the United States Congress voted in that 10 years and they voted “No.” Five times. The congressional record is very comical. One congressman stood up and said, “Hell will freeze before we ever let Texas become a part of the United States.” They

didn't want us. Ten years later it passed by one vote. On February 19, 1846, Anson Jones, the last president of this nation, Texas, lowered the Lone Star flag and raised the United States flag with 28 stars, and he said to the people who were gathered, "The Republic of Texas is no more." There were 2000 to 3000 people gathered in Austin, and there was a stunned silence. These people had given all for this place. The Republic of Texas was no more. They looked as if they were about to cry, but then the United States flag was raised with 28 stars, and a mighty cheer went up, and we became the 28<sup>th</sup> state in the United States.

Ladies and gentleman, we live in a remarkable place.