

Texas President Called Oklahoma Home

While no U.S. President has ever called Oklahoma his birthplace, three men who would later serve as president all crossed paths on the frontier of Three Forks. At the time, the stockade of Fort Gibson, a few trading posts, the Creek Indian Agency, and some small homesteads were all that made up the Three Forks area. But it was a place where three men lived for a time and no doubt gained experience that would serve them when they later became president. They were Sam Houston, Zachary Taylor and Jefferson Davis.

The first to arrive in the Three Forks area was Sam Houston. Called “The Raven” by his Cherokee friends, Houston had left a rising political career in Tennessee after resigning abruptly from the office of Governor in that state. He moved west to escape the scandal of a failed marriage to live among the Cherokees he had grown up with back in Tennessee.

Houston married a Cherokee woman, Dianna Rogers, and established a trading post and home that he named Wigwam Neosho.



Wigwam Neosho

The site of his trading post was near present-day Okay and from his home he could watch the riverboat traffic on both the Verdigris and Neosho (now Grand) Rivers where they flow into the Arkansas.

He surely also would have noticed the growing stream of settlers traveling southward along the Texas Road which forded the Arkansas River near his home.

On his arrival in Indian Territory, Houston almost immediately plunged into tribal affairs, often advising the commander at Fort Gibson on dealings with the Indians. His Cherokee friends

asked him to travel with their second chief Blackcoat to Washington to address issues of Indian sovereignty.

After working with the Cherokee three years, Houston left Indian Territory and Dianna for a new life in Texas. He later sent for Dianna to join him, but she refused, not feeling she would fit in the white world and not wanting to leave her own people.

Houston quickly involved himself in the volatile politics of Texas. Being officially a part of Mexico, the Texas territory was rapidly being settled by Americans who clamored for independence. Houston, who had served in the military during the War of 1812, was appointed general in a growing Texas army.



The Grand River near the site of Wigwam Neosho

He served as a delegate to the Convention that declared Texas independence in 1836. Houston was promptly named commander of all the Texas forces. Just over a month later, Houston and his men defeated Mexican General Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto which decisively won Texas independence from Mexico.

In the fall of that same year, Sam Houston was elected first president of the Republic of Texas. He served two terms as president and the town of Houston was established as the Republic's capital. After Texas joined the Union in 1845, Houston represented the state as a Senator.

He fell from political favor, however, because he opposed Texas' secession from the Union to join the Confederacy. Houston was removed from office in 1861 and died just two years later in July 1863. His son Temple Houston was a prominent lawyer in Oklahoma Territory in later years.

*Find this and other fascinating bits of history in my book
Glimpses of Our Past: Life Along the Rivers*