The Toughest Bar in Texas

A look at the lawyers and future Supreme Court judges who fought at the Alamo and San Jacinto.

BY DYLAN O. DRUMMOND

You can’t buy a drink in the toughest bar in Texas. You can’t even visit it. That’s because it was never formally established in brick and mortar but was instead an association forged by blood, bravery, and sacrifice. The toughest bar in Texas was—and still is—the sacred brotherhood of Texas’ earliest attorneys and future Supreme Court judges who fought at the Alamo and at San Jacinto.

Six lawyers perished at the Alamo in March 1836:
(1) Chief Justice James T. Collinworth;
(2) Peter James Bailey;
(3) James Butler Bonham;
(4) Daniel William Cloud;
(5) Green Berry “Ben” Jameson; and
(6) William Barret Travis

They ranged in age from their early 20s to their mid-40s. Three of them came to Texas with Davy Crockett, and one was the chief engineer of the Alamo. And another among them was one of the greatest and most renowned Texans to ever live. Together, they formed the short-lived but eternally famed “Alamo Bar Association.”

Seven more Texan attorneys served in combat the following month in the boggy marshes of the San Jacinto Battleground to ensure that the Texas Supreme Court—upon which they would serve—could someday be founded:

(1) Chief Justice James T. Collinworth;
(2) Chief Justice Thomas J. Rusk;
(3) Associate Justice Edward T. Branch;
(4) Associate Justice Benjamin Cromwell Franklin;
(5) Associate Justice James W. Robinson;
(6) Associate Justice Richardson “Dick” Scurry; and
(7) Associate Justice Robert McNalpin “Three-Legged Willie” Williamson

They included the court’s first chief justice, the first chief justice to preside over a court session and write an opinion, and the first judge in the Republic of Texas. Two were signers of both the Texas Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Republic of Texas. Another buried the remains of Col. James Fannin and his fallen troops, and later led the final charge at San Jacinto that won the day against Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna’s forces. Yet another was made the first commander of the newly formed Texas Rangers and may have even been the original inspiration for the infamous maxim, “Never bring a knife to a gunfight!” In every sense, these seven men were both the literal and figurative faces of San Jacinto justice that Santa Anna wilted beneath.

Together, these 13 Texan heroes each trod a unique path in their journey to the Alamo and San Jacinto battlefields, but all earned the perpetual respect of future Texans and attorneys through their shared valor. Only through the gallant sacrifice of the Alamo Bar defenders would the San Jacinto veterans later become giants in both Texas law and politics.

To read more about these Texan legal legends, please see “The Toughest Bar in Texas: The Alamo Bar Association” and “San Jacinto Justice: The Republic Supreme Court Justits Who Won Texas Independence,” posted with permission at texasbar.com/texashistory.

Notes
1. “I Go the Whole Hog in the Cause of Texas”: Lawyers at the Alamo, 71 Tex. B.J. 210, 210 (March 2008) [hereinafter Whole Hog].
7. Supreme Court Judges, 65 Tex. L. Rev. at 310, 314; Supreme Court History, at 7; Stephen L. Moore, Eighteen Minutes: The Battle of San Jacinto and the Texas Independence Campaign 95 (2004) [hereinafter Eighteen Minutes]; see James D. Lynch, The Bench and Bar of Texas 66 (1886) [hereinafter Bench and Bar].
8. Bench and Bar, at 66.
10. Eighteen Minutes, at 80, Supreme Court Judges, 65 Tex. L. Rev. at 364.

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