

# Speaking of Texas

## Courthouse Canvasser

William G.M. Samuel (ca. 1815-1902) moved to San Antonio from Missouri in the 1830s and rapidly became one of the city's most colorful inhabitants. A man of action who fought Indians alongside legendary Texan Big Foot Wallace, Samuel also served in the Mexican War and later in the Confederate Army. When not in the military, Samuel served as a city marshal and as deputy sheriff. A fearless law officer and a dead shot, he quickly rid San Antonio of its worst desperadoes.

But his talents were not limited to marksmanship. Samuel's keen eye and facility with a paintbrush brought him prestige of another kind. His best-known works are four scenes of San Antonio's Main Plaza, probably as viewed from the courthouse windows, that vividly interpret the city's business and social life and, as visual records of the plaza in the mid-1800s, have proved invaluable to historians. In the 1930s, the paintings gained recognition as fine examples of early Texas folk art.

Samuel, who so abhorred growing old that he kept his hair dyed jet black, died in his eighties in 1902. (His death was thought to have been caused by household ammonia, taken as a cure for a tarantula bite.) His plaza paintings are frequently on display at the Witte Museum in San Antonio.

—Elizabeth W. Lewis, Houston

## No Picnic

Texas' first sensational criminal trial took place in Jefferson, at the time the state's second most important port after Galveston. In those days, steamboats landed daily at the Jefferson wharves, offloading people and supplies and taking on Texas cotton. Even in this busy place, a dashing, rich young man and his beautiful, diamond-bedecked lady friend attracted attention.

On January 19, 1877, "Mr. A. Monroe and wife" arrived from Marshall and took a room at the Brooks House.



Dead shot and artist W.G.M. Samuel depicted San Antonio's West Side Main Plaza in 1849 (San Fernando Cathedral in background).

Mr. Monroe was really Abraham Rothschild, the son of a wealthy Cincinnati jewelry family. His companion—no evidence exists of their marriage—was Bessie Moore (born Annie Stone), whose flamboyant and copious jewels would earn her the nickname "Diamond Bessie."

Two days after their arrival, the handsome couple crossed the Big Cypress Creek footbridge with a picnic. Later that afternoon, Rothschild went about his business in town alone. When he left town two days later, no one had seen Bessie since the picnic. Nearly two weeks later, a young woman gathering firewood near the creek discovered a woman's body with a bullet wound at the temple. Suspicious of Rothschild, officials issued an arrest warrant for the mysterious "A. Monroe" for the murder of an "unknown woman." Within a few weeks, investigators had identified the body as Bessie's, and the warrant had been corrected to read "Abe Rothschild."

It took three months to return Rothschild to Jefferson from Cincinnati. Pretrial motions, the absence of witnesses, and attorneys' outside duties delayed the trial until December 1878. Once underway, the trial received widespread newspaper coverage. The jury convicted Rothschild and he was sentenced to hang, but he won a new trial on appeal. Two years later (amid rampant speculation of payoff), a new

jury acquitted him. Marion County records still list Bessie's murder as "unsolved."

Citizens of Jefferson provided Bessie with a grave in Oakwood Cemetery. Today, they keep her legend alive during the town's annual Historic Pilgrimage (May 4-6, 2001) with the play *Diamond Bessie Murder Trial* (performances May 2-6, 2001).

—Laura Bray, San Antonio

## Here's Looking at UT, Kid

When General Robert E. Lee addressed a graduating class at Washington College in Virginia shortly after the end of the Civil War, he closed by reminding the students that "the eyes of the South are upon you." One of the graduates, William Prather, became president of the University of Texas in 1899. When it was Prather's turn to address UT graduates, he remembered the impact of Lee's words and closed his address by saying, "The eyes of Texas are upon you." From then on, Prather often ended his speeches with those words.

The phrase gained popularity with the students, and in 1903, when the University Athletic Association planned a minstrel show, the show's director asked a friend, John Lang Sinclair, to write a special song. Sinclair borrowed President Prather's phrase and put it to the tune of "I've Been Working on the Railroad." Sung by the Glee Club quartet, the song garnered enthusiastic applause, cheers, foot-stomping, and demands for an encore. "The Eyes of Texas" had become the students' favorite song. When President Prather died two years later, his family requested that "The Eyes of Texas" be sung at his funeral.

Copyright questions that arose in the 1970s were eventually cleared, and ownership of its official school song went to the University of Texas.

—Elizabeth W. Lewis, Houston