

VICTORIA ADVOCATE

YOUR WORLD. HERE. NOW.

- AUGUST 28, 2007

Battle of Medina garners renewed interest

August 17, 2007 - Posted at 12:00 a.m.

Some long-neglected Texas history is getting well-deserved attention.

For years the Battle of Medina, sometimes referred to as the first Texas revolution, was mostly overshadowed by the events at Gonzales, the Alamo, Goliad and San Jacinto that had occurred during the Texas Revolution of 1836.

Adding to the renewed interest has been the publication of a book by Austin author and historian Dan Arellano in which he describes the battle as having been the "Mother of All Wars in Texas," one that took place 23 years before the Texas Revolution near the Atascosa County community of Leming.

The battle between the Republican Army of the North and the victorious Spanish Royalists on Aug. 18, 1813, has also been described as the biggest and bloodiest ever fought for freedom in Texas.

With Saturday being the 194th anniversary of the battle, there will be a "Tejano Battle of Medina Memorial Service" beginning at 5 p.m. at the fairgrounds in Pleasanton with speakers including Texas State Historian J.F. de la Teja, who is a professor of history at Texas State University in San Marcos; Andres Tijerina, professor of history at Austin Community College; and Arellano. There will also be a special guest appearance by historian Robert Thonhoff of Karnes City, who generated some renewed interest in the Battle of Medina in 1985 when he edited and annotated a book, "Forgotten Battlefield of the First Texas Revolution," by the late Ted Swartz.

More recent emphasis has been generated by the efforts of Arellano and his book, "Tejano Roots, a Family Legend." He spent 10 years doing research and writing the book about his family connections and the events that were occurring during that time in early Texas.

The battle was between the Republican Army of the North involving the Gutierrez-Magee Expedition of some 400 American volunteers, along with 900 to 1,000 Tejanos and 200 to 300 Lipan, Coushatta and Karankawa Indians, against the Spanish Royalist army led by Gen. Joaquin de Arredondo.

On April 6, 1813, Arellano notes, the Tejano population had declared themselves free and independent.

The Battle of Medina took place on August 18, with the Spanish Royalists virtually slaughtering the opposition and ending the attempt to free Texas from Spanish rule.

"Over a thousand Tejanos were killed in this one battle alone," Arellano says, calling the Battle of Medina part of the forgotten history of the Tejanos with "these first sons and daughters of the state of Texas being unknown and unrecognized for their ultimate sacrifice."

He further notes that of those who fought the Royalists, only about 100 would survive. Another 327 Tejanos were executed in San Antonio after the battle and 100 more as they fled toward Louisiana.

The Royalists lost only 55 men in ambushing the opposition in the Battle of Medina.

Except for historical markers in the vicinity, there is little today to indicate where the battlefield is

located, there also having been some controversy over the years as to the exact location and where the casualties were buried in a mass grave nine years later by order of Jose Felix Trespalacios, first governor of Texas under the newly established Republic of Mexico.

There is much more to this story, including the longest siege in American military history at Goliad's Presidio La Bahia during the winter of 1812-1813, all this occurring during the same period that Joseph Bonaparte was on a rampage in Europe and the United States was at war with England.

This was not a time in Texas to be forgotten.

Henry Wolff Jr. is a longtime Victoria Advocate columnist. He can be reached at wolfhaus@txcr.net.