

James Bowie, An American Pioneer



(1796 – 1836)

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James Bowie was a great American pioneer. There is confusion when James was born. One story said Burke County, Georgia in 1796. Another story said Elliott Springs, Tennessee in 1795. A third story said James Bowie was born in Logan County, Kentucky in 1796. He had four brothers and five sisters.

When James was very young he moved with his family to Louisiana. He showed at a very young age that he was not afraid of anything. He loved adventure. He had a good education. He could speak in English, French and Spanish.

James Bowie was young but he became a very smart business man. He became rich. At the age of 19, he cut down trees and sold the timber in New Orleans. A little later he became partners with two of his brothers, John and Rezin Bowie, in starting sugar milling plantations in Louisiana. They sold this business for thousands of dollars. James and his brothers also imported negro slaves for the pirate Jean LaFitte. This is called slave trading. This was illegal even if owning them was not. This lasted for three years.

The famous "Bowie knife" was actually designed by his brother Rezin but James made it famous because of his fighting. He got in a bloody fight in Natchez, Mississippi with two men in 1828. He killed them with the knife. James did get wounded but recovered.

One day he got bored with the slave trading and headed west to San Antonio. San Antonio was in the Texas province. It was 1828. There he met Ursula Veramendi. They got married in 1831. She was the daughter of Don Juan Martin Veramendi who was the Lieutenant Governor of Texas and Coahuila. This was all part of

the Mexican State. James Bowie led the governor's army against the Comanches.

In 1832, James Bowie returned to Texas. He was present for the Battle of Nacogdoches. It is unclear what his role was.

James and Ursula Bowie may have had zero, one or two children. It is unclear. Bowie went away on a business trip in 1833. When he came back he found that all the Veramendi Family had died of a cholera epidemic. His wife and children died too.

In 1835 Anglo-American colonists living in the Mexican province of Texas did not like the Mexican rules that were placed on them. They started to fight against the Mexican government. This was the start of the Texas Revolution. It was October 2, 1835.

James Bowie had become a Mexican citizen while married to Ursula. Because of this, the Texas government would not let James be a leader in the army during the Texas Revolution. He became a leader of the volunteers for the Texas government. They were called the Texans. They attacked a Mexican mule train. They won the battle. This is called the Grass Fight because the mule train was carrying grass seeds. James was also a leader at the Battle of Concepcion near San Antonio.

James Bowie and the Texans surrounded San Antonio on December 7, 1835. Bowie led the command after the army leader was killed. They took the town.

General Santa Anna returned to San Antonio with 7,000 Mexican soldiers on February 23, 1836. James Bowie was in charge of the volunteer soldiers in San Antonio and William Travis

was in charge of the regular army soldiers. Bowie and Travis had about 200 men. Bowie and Travis took cover in the Alamo.

James Bowie and William Travis would not give up the Alamo. Santa Anna was not going to leave San Antonio. Santa Anna attacked the Alamo but the Texans would not give up. On March 6, 1836 the Mexican army fired their canons and stormed the Alamo. The Mexican army won the battle. 189 Texans died at the Alamo and 1500 Mexicans died.

William Travis was killed. James Bowie did not die fighting with the volunteers. He became sick before the battle started with typhoid and was in bed. Another report says Bowie had pneumonia. It is believed James Bowie was killed by Mexican soldiers while he lay in his bed. The story is told that he did kill two Mexican soldiers before others were able to kill him.

James Bowie was a great American pioneer. He was a great adventurer. He was fearless. He played a big role in getting Texas its independence.

Reference List

Internet sites

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<http://www.lajunction.com/people/bowie.htm>

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Book

The James Black Story, taken from "The Old Town Speaks,"
by Charlean Moss Williams.
(James Black was the blacksmith that made the Bowie knife.)

Encyclopedia Britannica



Battle at the Alamo.
March 6, 1836



James Bowie Sick with typhoid defending himself from Mexican soldiers.

Bowie Knife →

