

Southwest Texas

LIVE!

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Feature

Writer

Violent history of Dead Man's Pass marked for posterity by ranch owners



(LIVE! photo/Bill Sontag)

Susan Hildreth's seventh-grade Texas History class joined Sam Houston IV, far right, in celebrating Val Verde County's most recent historical marker produced by the Texas Historical Commission. Dead Man's Pass Ranch, a spread specializing in carefully managed trophy white-tailed deer and elk, is named for the pass, and owners Mike and Jeanne McGee promoted the marker's importance to educate travelers.

Mike McGee, Houston businessman and owner of Dead Man's Pass Ranch, brought a project of local heritage to fruition, Friday (Oct. 12), shedding vanishing light on a good ol' blood-n'-guts tale of Val Verde County history. Thanks to McGee, glimpses of the story are told on a Texas Historical Commission marker, eight miles north of Comstock on State Highway 163.

McGee and his wife, Jeanne, owners of the 2,300-acre big game ranch north of Comstock, brought together a mix of teachers, history students, ranch employees, and one historical figure's descendant to commemorate a brutal chapter in regional frontier history. Sam Houston IV, direct descendant of the Texas pioneer and military hero who forged the Republic of Texas, journeyed from Katy, Texas, to participate with the McGee's and the seventh-grade Texas History class from Comstock in marking Dead Man's Pass as an intriguing site to educate travelers.

The roadside recognition marker, prompted by McGee, arranged by the Val Verde County Historical Commission, and produced by the Texas Historical Commission, briefly tells tales of Indian raids and plundering bandits wreaking bloody havoc on fortune-seekers headed for the California Gold Rush, pioneers, travelers and soldiers. Local historian Douglas Braudaway,

preparer of the marker's text, tells readers that the dangerous pass was a risky road into the latter half of the 19th century.



(LIVE! photo/Bill Sontag)

The Texas Historical Commission plaque, marking Dead Man's Pass Ranch offers clues to the rough history of bloodshed visited on travelers and military units traveling the road from San Antonio to El Paso. The marker may be seen on the east side of State Highway 163, eight miles north of Comstock beside a gate to Dead Man's Pass Ranch.

To the Comstock students, taught by Susan Hildreth, Houston read passages from a collector's item book in his library, *Life on the Range and on the Trail*, published in 1936, the centennial year of the Republic of Texas. Authors R.J. "Bob" Lauderdale and John Doak describe hardships much as those sustained by travelers through Dead Man's Pass. Houston encouraged passion for the lessons of history. "What is history?" Houston thundered. "Does anyone know what history is? It's what you're doing today. You, right now, are part of history!"

Houston, 76, is a great grandson of Sam Houston, leader of the Texas Army in its war for independence from Mexico, first president of the Republic of Texas, U.S. senator when statehood was granted in 1845, and finally seventh governor of Texas.

Not surprisingly, Sam Houston IV's degree is in history and is from the University of Houston, but he is a native of Claremore, Okla., and his business life was constructed of steel. "It was all in sales. I worked for Armco Steel, U.S. Steel and several other companies for 50 years," he told LIVE! Houston has also been active in the U.S. Army Reserve (now retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel), the Bicentennial Commission of the U.S. Constitution, Sons of the Republic of Texas, and Knights of San Jacinto. But Houston says the title of which is most proud – bestowed when he was born in 1931 – is Ka-La-Na or "Little Coloneh." The first Sam Houston was known by his Cherokee family as Coloneh, "The Raven."

The history degree and his personal passion for teaching children comes with Houston's family pedigree, and he puts both to use in reaching out to students across the state at opportunities such as the unveiling of the Dead Man's Pass marker. He urged the 15 seventh-graders to ask their parents to slow and stop when historic markers are spotted along Texas Highways.



(LIVE! photo/Bill Sontag)

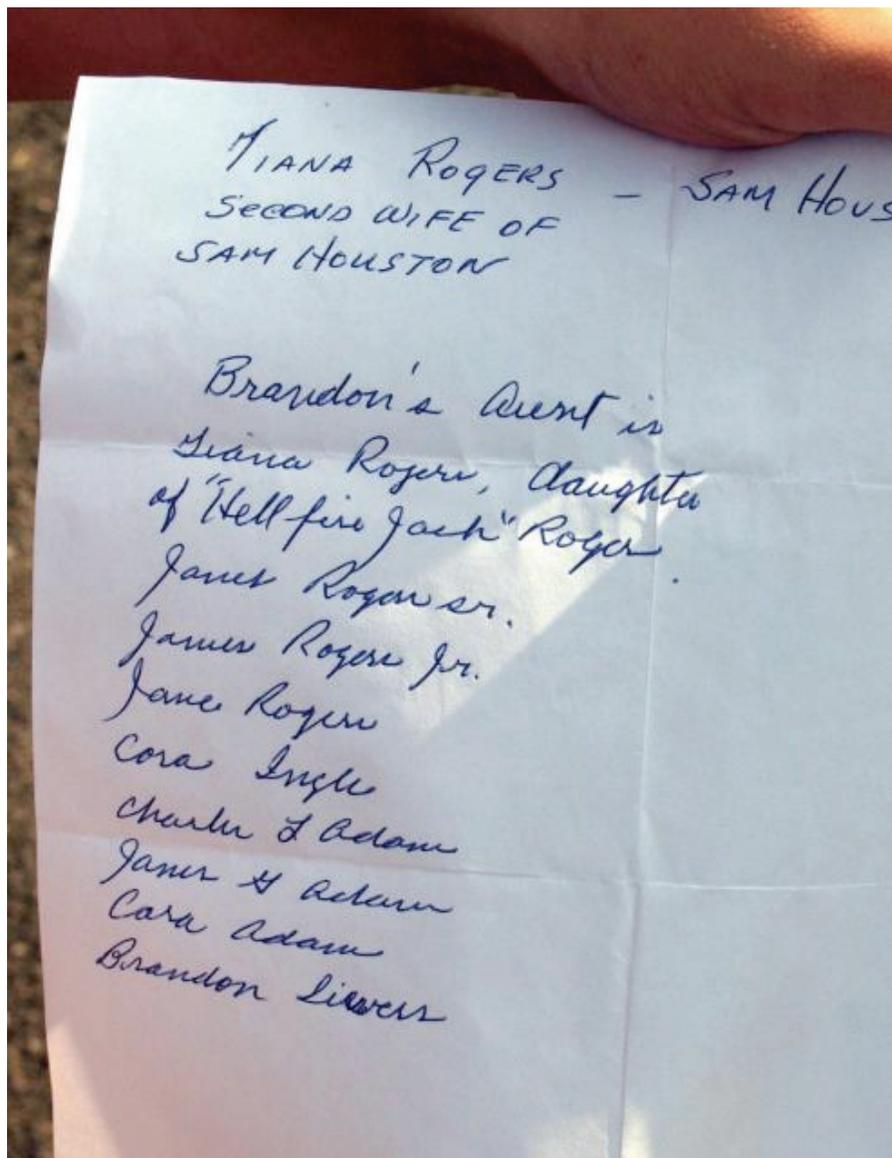
Sam Houston IV exhorts Comstock students and other participants in the marker dedication to nourish a passion for history. Houston is the grandson of Temple Lea Houston, last of eight children born to Sam Houston and his third wife, Margaret. Temple Houston – born when his father, then governor of Texas, was 67 – was also in the first graduating class of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, now Texas A&M University. (LIVE! photo/Bill Sontag)



(LIVE! photo/Bill Sontag)

Brandon Sievers, Del Rio resident and Comstock student, proudly shows Sam Houston IV his connection to General Sam Houston when married to his second wife Tiana Rogers Gentry.

Brandon Sievers' genealogy, shows a connection by marriage to Sam Houston, illustrating that Tiana Rogers Gentry, Houston's second wife was the daughter of "Hellfire Jack" Rogers. Tiana had married an officer named Gentry who was killed, and Houston married her, remaining with her among the Cherokee Indians until 1832 when he came to Texas. She chose to stay behind. Houston married again only when he learned of Tiana Rogers' death. Sievers is related by blood to Rogers.



(LIVE! photo/Bill Sontag)