

### Three Important Flags of Texas: Troutman Flag, Gonzales Flag, and 1824 Flag

Through the ages people have used flags, pennants, or other insignia as a silent testimony to their ideologies. The Texas Revolution is no exception. During the period around the Texas Revolution, the Texians and their allies used many flags including the Troutman Flag, the Gonzales Flag, and the 1824 Flag. These flags were all used to visually represent a common cause -- Liberty.

The Troutman Flag, which was made of white silk, had on its obverse (front side) a five-pointed blue star over the phrase, "LIBERTY or DEATH." On the reverse (back side) was the Latin phrase, "UBI LIBERTAS HABITAT, IBI NOSTRA PATRIA EST" (where liberty dwells, there is our fatherland). Joanna Troutman (1818-1879) sewed the flag named after her in 1835 at the age of eighteen. Joanna gave this flag to the Georgia Battalion as it traveled through Baldwin County, Georgia, on its way to support the cause of liberty in Texas. The flag was unfurled at Velasco, Texas (near modern Freeport) on January 8, 1836, atop the American Hotel. The Georgia Battalion later carried it to Goliad, where it was raised by Colonel James W. Fannin, Jr. as the national flag. However, the flag was soon torn to shreds by the wind because of its delicacy.

The Troutman Flag represents the sacrifice that people were willing to make for the greater cause of Liberty. The Latin phrase on the reverse, "UBI LIBERTAS HABITAT, IBI NOSTRA PATRIA EST," reveals the mindset of the men of the Georgia Battalion who marched under the flag. Their allegiance was not tied to a geographical location, such as their home state of Georgia, but to an ideal – Liberty. Although we are uncertain of the origin of the Latin phrase, it is similar to a quote by Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations* 5.37.108, "Patria est ubicumque est bene" (the fatherland is where I am well). The Latin phrase on the flag shows that the country that provides liberty is where people thrive.

The phrase "LIBERTY or DEATH" on the obverse expresses the value of giving your all for the sake of liberty, even unto death. This phrase was used as a rallying cry during the American Revolution by American patriots like Patrick Henry. In his famous speech before the House of Burgesses, Patrick Henry declared, "Give me Liberty or give me Death!" His speech lit the fires of revolution. The men of the Georgia Battalion were similarly willing to give up their lives so that other people might enjoy liberty. Eventually, the Georgia Battalion along with Fannin and his men lost their lives following the Battle of Goliad.

The Gonzales Flag represented similar values to the Troutman Flag. The Gonzales Flag was originally made for the Texians by Sara DeWitt and her daughter out of a wedding dress. The flag displayed a star and a cannon, which had been loaned by the Mexican government to the Texians so that they could defend themselves from Indian raids. Antonio López de Santa Anna, the dictator of Mexico, had dissolved the constitution in Mexico. Santa Anna wanted to show that he had ultimate authority over the Texians by taking away

their mechanism of defense, the cannon. So Santa Anna sent some men to retrieve the cannon. But when the Mexicans arrived at Gonzales they faced eighteen militiamen, who obstructed their way to Gonzales. Santa Anna's Captain Castañeda demanded that the cannon be returned, but the Texians refused. The Texians rallied together under the Gonzales Flag and executed a surprise attack on the Mexicans. The Mexicans were outnumbered and outgunned, so the Texians won the battle. The battle at Gonzales was the first military engagement of the Texas Revolution.

What is the significance of this flag? The Texians response to the Mexicans of "come and take it!", which has the same as the ancient Greek phrase, "Molon Labe!" This quote is attributed to Leonidas I in response to Xerxes I of Persia at the Battle of Thermopylae. Xerxes I of Persia commanded Leonidas I to lay down his arms, and Leonidas responded with, "Molon Labe!". The Texians demonstrated that Santa Anna was not in authority over them and that they were resolved to remain free, even if it meant fighting a superior enemy.

Similar to the Gonzales Flag, the 1824 Flag represented the Texians loyalty to liberty under the Mexican Constitution and not to Santa Anna. In October 1835 Captain Philip Dimmitt designed the 1824 Flag. It was made to be like the Mexican flag but with a reminder in the middle that the Texians were not loyal to Antonio López de Santa Anna, but to the Mexican Constitution established in 1824. This flag was different from other Texas Revolutionary flags because it was not made for a specific militia, and there were more than one of them. It is generally thought that the 1824 Flag was flown at the Alamo, but we are not certain because we do not have contemporary accounts of the flag at the Alamo. The Battle of the Alamo, which lasted from February 26 to March 6, 1836, ended in the deaths of almost two hundred Alamo heroes

The 1824 Flag was a vivid symbol of the Texians' loyalty to the Mexican constitution, and a reminder that the Texians were not loyal to Antonio López de Santa Anna. All of the men at the Alamo fought for a unified cause, for individual liberty. These heroes were willing to die so that we might have individual liberty. This echoes all the way back through history to the American Revolutionary War, and even farther back, to the ancient Greeks and the Romans.

So why are all of these flags important? If we know our history we can remember the things that truly matter, the things that we should fight for. Every generation has a choice to make and a battle to fight. Will we choose to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of liberty, or will we sacrifice liberty for ourselves (our comfort and security)? Through the Troutman Flag, we can see that liberty was so important to the Georgians that they were willing to sacrifice their lives so that other people might attain it. The Gonzales Flag shows us what it looks like to resolve to be free, no matter the cost. The 1824 Flag shows us that individual liberty is secured by written constitution and not by any one leader. These people believed something that we as a culture have lost. They truly believed that freedom was such an extraordinary treasure that it would be an honor to die to attain it. I personally never want to forget the lives that have been sacrificed so that my generation and the generations to come can enjoy the liberties we have.

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