



WITH BOWIE AT THE ALAMO



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AT THE

ALAMO

**FREDERICK
WEST**

This book is dedicated
to my dear wife,
Bess,
with love and gratitude

WITH BOWIE AT THE ALAMO

Frederick West

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REVIEWS

WITH BOWIE AT THE ALAMO

FREDERICK WEST

West displays a talent for the 'you are there' feel throughout this exciting book, presenting the reader with such memorable characters, brave and venal, good and bad, that one cannot help but love or hate them and sometimes both. The research and the accuracy of the events portrayed show this gifted writer's ability to take dry facts and make them come alive for the reader, drawing us into the yarn he spins. There's never a dull moment as we join them on their destined rendezvous with San'tana.”

Gayle Farmer, author of *Secret Lives*

History comes alive in *With Bowie at the Alamo*, a gripping yarn that takes a young man across America, finally arriving at the Alamo in time for the historic battle. Follow his exciting adventures. Be there, when he joins Jim Bowie. Vivid descriptions and superb dialogue make this tale unforgettable.

Barry Metcalf, author of *Nightmare in Alice Springs*

With Bowie at the Alamo is a brilliant read in which Frederick West successfully weaves his endearing fictional characters into events in history and the lives of important historical figures. A real page turner from the start and a must-read for anyone interested in adventure and history.

KymJade, author of *Spirit Stealers*

WITH BOWIE AT THE ALAMO

FREDERICK WEST

In Frederick West's debut novel, the story of young James Thomas and his family intertwines with the story of the nascent Republic of Texas. The leading characters move from Kentucky, and West uses James as an *everyman* reader stand-in through whom we meet many of the great names from the Lone Star State's history: Colonel Travis, Sam Houston, Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett all get ample space to strut and speechify. We see a great many of its epic formative battles, including the famous last stand at the Alamo and the largely forgotten slaughter of Texan prisoners by the Mexicans at Goliad.

This is a long book, but it never feels like one, as West's engaging, assured prose style pulls the many strands of his story steadily forward to conclusions the reader will already know: the Mexicans under General Santa Anna ... a delightfully hissable villain who steals every scene he's in ... overrun the Alamo, but the Texans eventually win their freedom from Mexico and establish their short-lived republic. It's a tribute to West's abilities that nothing in his novel feels like a foregone conclusion—characters grope along day to day, not knowing how things will turn out. Once he lights out from his home and Betsy, the love of his life, James becomes a scout and a Texas Ranger and has many adventures, and through them West is able to convey a wonderful and well-researched sense of time and place. Although narrower in scope, this novel is a worthy companion to Michener's *Texas*. It is a rich, informative reading experience, well recommended.

Steve Donoghue, The Historical Novel Society

Originally reviewed under the title **Things Worth Fighting For.**

It is with gratitude and pride that we give special recognition and thanks to the following for their contribution to the cover art for **With Bowie At The Alamo**:

The Plan of the Alamo, by Jose Juan Sanches-Navarro, 1836.

This beautifully rendered manuscript map, part of an official military report on the fall of the Alamo, clearly shows where the Mexicans had positioned their cannons (at R and V) and the line of attack of troops under General Cos (S).

The Dodson Flag – the first *Lonestar*

Designed and made by Sarah Dodson for her husband, Archelaus, a member of the Robinson Company in 1835, it is recognized as the first *Lone Star* flag.

The Picture of The Alamo

The picture of the Alamo was provided by Michael F. Fitzpatrick from an interpretive sign standing outside the mission and depicting the Alamo in 1836.

The Portrait of Colonel Jim Bowie

The portrait of **Jim Bowie** is the only known oil painting done from real life.

The Portrait of the President of Mexico

Portrait of **General D. Antonio Lopez De Santa Anna**, President of the Republic of Mexico, by A. Hoffy

The Reverse of the State Seal – The 1961 Reverse

The Daughters of the Republic of Texas proposed a design for the reverse of the State Seal that was adopted by the Fifty-Seventh Legislature, Second Called Session, and on August 26, 1961, Governor Price Daniel approved this concurrent resolution.

Sarah R. Farnsworth designed the art for the seal's reverse. This design was unusual because the legislature adopted the art itself as the reverse of the State Seal, as opposed to the usual practice of adopting a description or blazon, which is later rendered by an artist.

Cover design by Omega Publications, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

In all the history of warfare there is no greater example of the folly of committing atrocities against ones enemies than the war for independence by Mexico's northern most province *Tejas*. At the Battle of the Alamo, Santa Anna's order to take no prisoners stiffened Texian resistance. The Mexican army claimed victory in that fight, but their losses of over six hundred dead and over one thousand wounded, crippled their army and caused severe damage to the respect held for Santa Anna, even among his own officers.

Before the slaughter of the Alamo's defenders and the massacre of the Texian prisoners at Goliad, Santa Anna's reputation outside Texas was that of a crafty and capable general. Afterwards he was thought a cruel and inhumane barbarian. Until those atrocities, most Texians opposed a complete separation from the mother country and wanted only to restore the Mexican Constitution of 1824 which Santa Anna had arbitrarily abandoned.

Almost all those prisoners killed at Goliad were volunteers from The United States and not native Texians nor established colonists. Had Santa Anna shown those men normal courtesies extended to prisoners of war in those days—granted parole on their promise not to return to the fight—and sent home in humiliation and defeat, his reputation outside Texas would have been enhanced. Much of the support for the Texians in the United States would have collapsed.

The mass murder of those four hundred prisoners had the opposite effect. Santa Anna, and indeed all the Mexican people, were branded with a reputation for brutality and cruelty. The universal rage among the people of Texas and the United States promoted the success of the Texas Revolution when it counted most, after the fighting was over.

The courage and determination of the defenders of the Alamo secured that battle's position as the preeminent symbol of Texas independence, but at the war's climax in the battle of San Jacinto, the cry of "REMEMBER THE ALAMO" was followed by the more resounding shout of "REMEMBER GOLIAD". It was that yell that fired the passions of both Texians (Texans of American descent) and *Tejanos* (Texans of Mexican descent) for revenge. Hearing that reminder of their disgraceful behavior at Goliad sapped the courage from many of the Mexican *soldados* and left them to cower in shame when facing the onslaught of Houston's army.

The story that follows, of the migration by James Thomas, Betsy Lewis and the Tucker family to Texas, is typical of thousands. Their experiences after they arrived were unique.

Chapter 1

Benjamin's Plantation

WIND DRIVEN SNOW burst against Betsy's face. Tiny particles sifted under her collar as she pounded on the back door of the Big House. She wrapped the shawl tighter and raised a hand to knock again. The door clicked open.

"You come in here dis minute, Child. You catch your death!" Bertha swung the door wide. "What ever bring you out in dis weather?"

"Mamma's sick too, now. I gotta see Mrs. Thomas," the girl said, ducking into the warm kitchen and closing the door.

"You wait right here. I get Massa Thomas. He know what to do." The slave hurried out of the room, leaving Betsy shaking off the snow and wiping her nose. In less then a minute, Polly Thomas came into the room.

"What's this? Bertha says your mamma—"

"Yes, Ma'am. She was too sick to get up this morning. I made breakfast for her and Daddy, but they wouldn't eat. Can you help, 'em, Mrs. Thomas?"

"We certainly will, dear." Polly Thomas put her arms around Betsy and drew the girl to her bosom. "Soon as Ben gets here, we'll go over and see what we can do."

Benjamin came in with Bertha right behind him.

"Doc Kratchet said for me to send for him if Steven got worse. Mrs. Lewis coming down makes it 'worse'.

"James!" he shouted.

A lad, near Betsy's thirteen years of age, thrust his head into the kitchen. "What is it, Uncle Ben?"

"Steven's wife has come down with the fever, too." he said. "I need you to go get Doc Kratchet."

"Yes, Sir," James answered.

"Have Grover saddle my big black for you. And mind, you don't break a sweat on him in this cold," the man said then turned his attention to Betsy.

Betsy's father, Steven Lewis, had worked for the Thomas plantation several years supervising production and sale of hemp. Ben and Polly thought of the Lewis's as family.

The household sprang into action. Bertha filled a jar with chicken broth, and Polly brought extra quilts. Within three hours James returned bringing Doc Kratchet,

but all their efforts failed. The man died during the night and Betsy's mother died the following day.

With both her parents gone, Betsy needed a home and Mrs. Thomas brought her into the Big House to live. She soon became a close companion for their two boys. Over the next three years, people began referring to her as the boys' governess. She was proud of that title.

A group of riders approached the turn-off from the Covington-Lexington Trace into the Thomas Plantation's lane. Among them James Thomas, now in his sixteenth summer, rode beside an older man at the head of the group.

"Thanks for givin' us a hand, James," the older man said. "Tell your uncle, Howdy for me."

"I'll do that, Mr. Hayes," the lad answered. "It's too bad we didn't find your two slaves."

"Blamed abolitionists probably got 'em," the elder replied. "Reckon they're across the river by now."

"By the way," James queried to the whole group, "have any of y'all seen Guy Clinton?" His friend Guy often rode along on these runaway hunts. "We were going 'coon huntin', but I haven't seen hide nor hair of him for all week."

"I seen him over by Rabbit Hash, yesterday," one of them said.

"Rabbit Hash? Wonder what he's doin' over there?" the older man wondered.

"I dunno. I didn't talk to him, but he's probably lookin' for the same two that we were."

"Well, I hope he had better luck than we did."

"Here's where I leave you," James said as they reached the Thomas lane. "Y'all come by!" He raised his hand in a vigorous wave as his friends moved on down the road.

The lane wound across a dry creek bed, up the far side hill. Along the right, a stone fence followed the contour of the hill to the split rail fence encompassing the house grounds.

James saw his two cousins, Little Benjamin, seven, and Daniel, five, rolling hoops on the lawn. They began to scuffle and Betsy hurried down the steps to referee. She took possession of both hoops and shook her finger at the boys.

The familiar rush on seeing Betsy made James uncomfortable, but did not stop him from enjoying those first moments each time he came into her presence. His cheeks colored as he found himself hoping she would remove her bonnet so he could see the sun glint from her coppery, golden hair.

With a sigh, he indulged himself with one final drink from Betsy's beauty as she herded her charges back into the house, stopping to insist they hang their hoops over a peg. With some difficulty, he averted his eyes.

"Evening, Uncle Ben," the lad said, handing his horse's reins to a servant. "Mr. Hayes says to tell you 'Howdy' for him."

"Tom's a good old boy," Benjamin responded. "Y'all do any good findin' those two slaves?"

“Not a bit. It’s like they disappeared off the face of the earth. Mr. Hayes thinks the abolitionists got ‘em and took ‘em over the river.”

“Reckon so,” his uncle said. “I can’t figure where they’re getting across, though. Can’t be Covington. Too many folks got their eyes peeled over that away.”

“I can’t figure it either.”

Betsy stepped onto the porch, smiled quickly to James and then directed her attention to his uncle.

“Bertha says supper’s ready, sir. She’s made one of those sweet-potato pies you like so much.”

“Thank you, Betsy,” the elder Thomas replied, and the girl went back inside.

“Oh, Uncle Ben? Have you seen my little huntin’ knife?” James asked. “I ain’t been able to find it for a week.”

“Boy, you’d lose your head if it wasn’t stuck on.” Ben laughed as they rose to go into the house. “I haven’t seen it. But if it doesn’t turn up, I’ll have Amos make you a new one. Now come on. Let’s go see what the women folk have done up for us.”

The table, set in their custom, held all the food for the meal. Some planters had their meals brought out one course at a time, the servants hovering in the background to satisfy each diner’s every whim.

Not so in the Thomas house. Mrs. Polly Thomas knew the value of contented kitchen help. She did not want Bertha and the kitchen maids standing around hungry while the family enjoyed their lavish meal.

The matron signaled that they could go. Bertha would have supper with her own family and then return with her daughter, after the meal, to clean up and put the dishes away.

With a lengthy, enthusiastic prayer, Benjamin launched the meal and then turned his attention to James.

“Where’d you fellers go today, lookin’ for them two runaway slaves?” Ben asked, slicing a crisp end from the beef roast on his plate.

“Somebody told Mr. Hayes the abolitionists were floatin’ boats down the Licking at night. So he figured they’d hole up on the bank waiting for dark.”

“Nah, they ain’t gonna do that. We’d catch ‘em for sure.”

“Reckon you’re right,” James said. “We beat the bushes all the way down to Covington and never did see a sign of ‘em.”

“Well, we’re gonna have a meetin’ over at the church house this evening and see if we can’t put a stop to it.”

“Can I go with you?” James asked.

“Not this time. This meetin’ is just for the owners. If we figure out anything to do, though, you can bet you’ll have a hand in it.”

“I sure want to hear what you come up with.”

After dinner, James took a book from the shelf and walked onto the verandah. He seated himself in the hanging swing and glanced at the sun. *Oughta be able to read for a couple of hours.*

A few minutes later, Betsy came out and sat beside him. “Wacha readin’?”

He closed the book on his finger and held it up so she could see the tooled leather cover—*With Old Tippecanoe on the Wabash*.

“The school teacher over at Covington told Uncle Ben about it last winter, and he ordered it from Philadelphia.”

“Tippecanoe? That’s where your grandpa got killed by the Indians wasn’t it?”

“Yeah. This book tells all about it.”

“I don’t even know who my grandfather was,” the girl said absently. “Anyhow, I wanted to ask you something.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

Betsy looked away and then asked quietly, “What are you going to do when you grow up, James?”

“I dunno... Uncle Ben wants me to go back east to one of those big schools in Connecticut or someplace. But—I dunno, I think I’d rather go to sea for a while. How come you ask?”

“Oh, I was just wonderin’.”

“Uncle says they start classes in the fall at those big colleges. He doesn’t want me to go this fall, so I’ve got a whole year to decide.”

Betsy hesitated for a moment, then jumped up, faced James and put her hands on her hips.

“If you go to that college you’ve got a whole year,” she said and stomped her foot. “But I’ll bet you go off to sea. I’ll bet you just take off and not even tell anybody where you are going!”

“Now why would I do a fool thing like that? And how come you are gettin’ so riled up, anyhow?”

“Ain’t you got no sense at all, James Thomas?” The girl leaned toward him. With her lips clamped tight, she let a long breath exit her nose. “We both gotta grow up one of these days.”

“Well, it looks to me like we’re both pretty much grown up already. And besides, what does it matter what I’m gonna do?”

“Well, I’ll just tell you, Mister Thomas.” She sat back down. “There are plenty of young men come around here sparkin’ on me. And before I go tellin’ ‘em what I think about it, I wanta find out what you got in your head.”

“What you mean, ‘sparkin’ on you?’ Who’s been coming around here, anyhow?” James found his mouth standing ajar.

“Just never you mind about who’s been comin’ around,” the girl said. “I ain’t paid ‘em no mind anyway. And I’m not going to ... if you just let me know you want ‘em to stay away.”

“What’s it matter what I want ‘em to do?” James laid his book on the tea table beside the swing and scratched his head. “It don’t matter what I say about it.” He picked up the book again.

“Sure it does.” The girl pulled her chin back. “I’m gonna be grown up and wantin’ a husband before long, and if it ain’t gonna be you, then I gotta do me some lookin’ around. So—what’s it gonna be, James Thomas, are you gonna grow up, too, or are you gonna go runnin’ off to sea?”

“I—I—I always thought we’d get hitched someday, and uh ... or ... somethin’.” James laid the book back on the tea stand—then picked it up.

“I’d wait for you as long as I had to, if it made any sense.” She took a deep breath. “But a girl has got to know if it makes sense or not. If you don’t act like you even care, I can’t just sit around for the rest of my life waitin’ to find out.”

“You know I like you, Betsy,” he said, red creeping into his cheeks. “Always have. But we’re not grown up enough yet to get married. And besides, I ain’t got no money, and you ain’t....”

“Of course not. I’m not sayin’ we ought to get married now. It’s just that I gotta know you’re thinkin’ about it. And you sure ain’t said the right things yet.”

“What do you mean? What do you want to hear outta me?”

“Oh, James!” Betsy jumped to her feet and ran into the house.

He started to follow her, then thought better of it and sat down to the story of Old Tippecanoe.