

NEWS RELEASE

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contact Fletcher Clark

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fletcherclark3@austin.rr.com / 512.376.0340

Historic Songs of Susanna in Edna

(Lockhart) Texas heroine Susanna Dickinson, *Messenger of the Alamo*, is brought to life in *Songs of Susanna*, an historical program of song, verse and lecture by author/historian Donaly Brice and songwriter Fletcher Clark. Clark's epic ballad, *There Must Be a Good Man in Texas*, provides a panoramic tale of Susanna - in itself a microcosm of the emergence of Texas. Presented by the Jackson County Historical Commission, the presentation will take place at 7:00pm, Friday, February 26, 2016 at the Historic Texana Church, 284 Brackenridge Parkway in Edna. Advance tickets are \$10, available at the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce, (361) 782-7146; admission at the door is \$15.

Songs of Susanna follows Susanna (*nee* Wilkerson) in her travels from Tennessee to Gonzales, Texas, with her husband Almeron Dickinson, who would become a fallen hero at the Alamo. As *Messenger of the Alamo*, she carried Santa Anna's demand for capitulation to General Sam Houston, who then prepared his Texian army to join in the 'Runaway Scrape'. After victory at San Jacinto, she found herself widowed and penniless with her infant daughter Angelina, *Babe of the Alamo*. Unskilled and illiterate, she would marry three more men in Houston, seeking in vain that husband who would keep her and her daughter happy and secure. Moving to Lockhart, she would marry her *fifth* husband Joseph Hannig, a young German immigrant half her age. Moving to Austin, ultimately Susanna Wilkerson Dickinson Williams Herring Bellows Hannig would become prosperous and respected.

"Donaly and I were asked to prepare a program for the Friends of the Susanna Dickinson Museum in Austin," said Clark. "For me, what began as a simple folk song about an historical

figure turned into a four-chapter epic ballad of verse and song spanning the challenges she faced – challenges universal to the nineteenth-century frontier women of Texas.” Clark's writing was guided by Brice's research and his access to source materials as Senior Archivist for the Texas State Library. “I asked Donaly and Fletcher to present their program at our 2014 Annual Meeting celebrating Susanna's 200th Birthday, and couldn't have been more pleased with the results,” said Terri Schexnayder, Former President of Friends of the Susanna Dickinson Hannig Museum in Austin. “The combination of Donaly's historic genius and Fletcher's musical magic brought Susanna Dickinson to life that evening.”

Now retired from the Texas State Library, Donaly Brice has written or co-written several books on Texas history, including *The Great Comanche Raid: Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic*, *The Governor's Hounds: The Texas State Police, 1870-1873*, and *Texas Ranger N. O. Reynolds, the Intrepid*. He has also written a number of historical articles that have been published in the *The Plum Creek Almanac* and *The East Texas Historical Journal*. Donaly is a member (and recently named Fellow) of the East Texas Historical Association, the West Texas Historical Association, the Southern Historical Association and the Texas State Historical Association (who elected him as a Fellow of that organization in 2010). He has presented papers and given lectures to many historical and genealogical groups throughout the State of Texas.

Fletcher Clark is a veteran musician and songwriter from the earliest days of the emerging music scene in Austin and its famed concert hall Armadillo World Headquarters. Moving to Lockhart seven years ago, he began sharing music with Donaly Brice at their Emmanuel Episcopal Church (the oldest west of the Mississippi). Fletcher produces and hosts the monthly series *Evenings with the Songwriter* at Lockhart's historic Dr. Eugene Clark Library (the oldest in Texas) exploring the art and craft of guest professional songwriters. The acclaimed series is in its sixth season. He has published his Personal Hymnal, *Open Up the Doors*, and released a CD containing recordings of twelve of the songs. He also composed a complete 'folk mass', and together these form the basis of his musical ministry which he shares with groups and congregations throughout Texas.

The historic Texana Church was built in 1859 in the original town of Texana. According to historical information, the church was visited by Stephen F. Austin, as well as other well known

Texans. Over the years it has held town meetings as well as church services of all types. John Adams Brackenridge helped organize the Texana Presbyterian Church, which was so small that the Brackenridge family accounted for more than half of the congregation. It had been moved to Edna in 1884, and in 2001 it was relocated to Brackenridge Park and restored. A church in the wildwood perfectly describes the new location, which is just a short distance north of its original site in the old town of Texana.

Clark and Brice have brought their program to various Daughters of the Republic of Texas chapters. Nancy Evridge of Brady's Heart of Texas Chapter said, "What an entertaining way to tell the story of Susanna Dickinson! Our luncheon was a huge success thanks to your memorable program!" After their presentation in Burnet for the Janes Wells Woods DRT Chapter, President Krissy Sralla said, "Mr. Clark and Mr. Brice present a riveting portrayal of the life of Susannah Dickinson. Their knowledge of the family and details bring Susanna to life. One can simply close one's eyes and see Texas so many years ago. The stories, poems, and music truly bring history to life!" They presented the program in San Marcos for the Hays County Genealogical Society and in Luling for the Caldwell County Historical and Genealogical Society, prompting author/historian Chuck Parsons to remark, "Once experienced, this program of song and history will not be forgotten. It gives new life to our understanding of our Texas heritage. Clark and Brice working together is indeed a true delight." Well received in Brady, Brice and Clark have been invited back to present their new program on the ***Runaway Scrape***, the story of Texans' fearful flight to the Sabine before the advancing Mexican army of the feared Santa Anna.

"At our presentations, Donaly has some of his books for sale which he graciously autographs, while I sell some of my CDs and the booklet I have published of the ballad, *There Must Be a Good Man in Texas*," said Fletcher Clark. "Being just a poor, wayfaring musician, I am readily accustomed to putting out the tip jars for folks to offer donations to support our work. Often our hosting group can offer us a modest honorarium to defray our travel expenses."

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