

County historians celebrate Susanna Dickinson

The Caldwell County Genealogical and Historical Society celebrates the memory of one its greatest historical figures on Tuesday, Aug. 5 at 6:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall of Church of the Annunciation, 301 S. Walnut in Luling. The event is free to the public. Native son and Texas archivist/author/historian Donaly Brice will discuss the life of this important figure (remembered as the Messenger of the Alamo), and Lockhart songwriter Fletcher Clark will present his epic ballad "There Must Be a Good Man in Texas." Together they presented this program last February for the Annual Meeting of Friends of the Joseph and Susanna Hannig Museum in Austin, commemorating Susanna's 200th birthday.

Dickinson is known throughout history as the Messenger of the Alamo. She and her infant daughter Angelina (Babe of the Alamo) were the two sole Anglo survivors of the Alamo, dispatched by Mexican general Santa Anna to deliver his demand for capitulation to Texian general Sam Houston. Susanna and her husband Almeron Dickinson, a fallen hero of the Alamo, were among the earliest settlers in the Green

DeWitt Colony, centered in Gonzales. The Dickinson League awarded to them was located in what is now westernmost Caldwell County bordered by the San Marcos River. Many years after being first widowed, Susanna returned to Lockhart. There she operated a boarding house, then met and wed young Joseph Hannig. The couple sold all her holdings as a stake to move to Austin, there prosperously to establish residence and a furniture business.

"My friend Becky (former Caldwell County Judge Rebecca Hawener) asked me to accompany her to her board meeting for the museum in Austin," said Clark. "It is properly the Friends of the O. Henry and Susanna Dickinson and Joseph Hannig Museums, as the two historic residences share the same site on East Fifth St. I was captivated by the history of this courageous woman whose winding path included three other husbands between her frontier beginning in Gonzales and her ultimate prominence in the nineteenth century Texas capital. This led to my writing 'There Must Be a Good Man in Texas.' It started as a simple folk ballad, but the range of her long life de-



manded a work of greater scope and depth. I began by thinking I would write something akin to Marty Robbins' song 'El Paso,' and I ended up with something more closely resembling Longfellow's 'Evangeline!'"

Brice, who grew up in Lockhart, has recently announced his retirement after a distinguished career with the Archives Division of the Texas State Library. (Clark credits Brice with much of the background source documents of Susanna's tale.) He is the author of four books on Texas history, including *The Great Comanche Raid: Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic*. He has also written a number of historical articles that have been published in *The Plum Creek Almanac* and *The East Texas Historical Journal*. He is a member of the East Texas Historical Association, the West Texas Historical Association, the Southern Historical Association and the Texas Historical Association, who elected him as a Fellow in 2010. A charter member of the Genealogical Society and its former president for eight years, Brice is past chairman of the Caldwell County Historical Commission, of which he has been a member since its organization in 1974. He has presented many speeches, lectures and papers throughout his distinguished career to many historical and genealogical groups throughout Texas.

Clark's genealogy also traces back through Caldwell County. His namesakes, father A. F. Clark, Jr. MD and grandfather A. F. Clark, Sr. MD, were both born in Prairie Lea; his paternal grandmother Bird Ella Shanklin was from Fentress. Clark was raised in San Antonio and began playing music professionally while still at Robert E. Lee High School. At Williams College in Massachusetts, although an economics major, he studied composition with an old-school composer who had himself studied with Paul Hindemith, Walter Piston and Ralph Vaughn Williams. Clark's career includes his long association in the 1970's with Austin's legendary concert hall Armadillo World Headquarters (and his band Balcones Fault); his longtime association with the Kerrville Folk Festi-

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val as sideman for songwriters Steven Fromholz, Bobby Bridger, Rusty Wier, Kenneth Threadgill, et al.; and his current focus as a performing singer-songwriter and producer for Armadillo Records. Moving to Lockhart in 2008, he produces and hosts Evenings with the Songwriter at the historic Dr. Eugene Clark Library (the oldest in Texas). Now in its fourth successful season on the last Tuesday of each month, the free series brings noted songwriters to share their songs and experiences while exploring the art and craft of

songwriting.

Clark regularly shares his music at Lockhart's Emmanuel Episcopal Church (the oldest in Texas), where he met fellow musicians Brice and Judge Todd Blometh, supporters of his Evenings with the Songwriter series. (Hawener is also a member of that congregation.) Clark has written a number of songs of faith, which he has collected into his Personal Hymnal, *Open Up the Doors*.

Brice's wife, Clare, is active in the Caldwell County Historical Commission and the opera-

tion of the Caldwell County Museum.

"Right after the first of the year, Clare mentioned that the woman who had been acting as docent for the museum was recovering from a foot injury and they needed someone else to take over receiving guests and giving tours, which I did for fifteen weeks," Clark said. "I found myself steeped in history - writing the Susanna Dickinson piece, and then the ballad Caldwell County Jail (the old jail houses this museum). I also had written a song called Back to Caldwell County which recounts my family's history. So over the course of this upcoming evening, all three songs will explicate both history and genealogy. I am grateful for this occasion to understand personal rather than institutional history."