

Alamo survivor refused to settle for less than the best

Submitted by jcht2010 on Wed, 03/02/2016



By Jessica Coleman
Staff Writer

“I am not interested in the redemption of someone who lived a perfectly pious life,” said songwriter Fletcher Clark, and that is exactly what the story of Susanna Dickinson is – a story of redemption and overcoming odds. On Feb. 26, her story was told in Jackson County, in a program called Songs of Susanna, written by Clark and author/historian Donaly E. Brice. Sixty people gathered in the Historic Texana Church at Brackenridge Park and heard the story of a survivor who refused to settle for less than happiness.

The program, Songs of Susanna, presented by the Jackson County Historical Commission, led the

audience through the life of Susanna Dickinson, a survivor of the Alamo who was personally spared by Santa Anna, who also survived the runaway scrape, married five times, and finally found happiness in Austin’s high society with a man 20 years her junior. The two-hour presentation, told in song and in lecture, didn’t skip over the hard times or romanticize Susanna’s misadventures and moral failings. It led listeners through the life of a woman who was a victim of abuse by one husband, widowed twice, and was allegedly unfaithful to one. Being labeled an adulteress in Susanna’s time was not often a thing one recovered from socially, but Dickinson found another love and only continued to climb the social ladder. The love of her life according to everyone who knew them, was her fifth and final husband, Joseph Hanning.

Clark’s epic ballad, There Must be a Good Man in Texas, told the story of her many romances and adventures through the eyes of Susanna herself, and Brice’s lecture, backed by his extensive research of Susanna and Texas history, painted as complete a picture as could be painted of a woman who, despite being an astute businesswoman and legend of the Alamo, was illiterate until her death and therefore left no first person written accounts of her life. Edna resident Connie Mosely, who attended the show, said she was amazed at how different life was for women in the 19th century, including the fact that reading wasn’t something everybody had the opportunity to learn to do.

“Coming to realize that women in that day had a very hard time making a living and making ends meet. And for them to be illiterate, too, it’s mind boggling.” Mosely added that she hopes more programs like this one will come to Jackson County in the near future. “In all of the hardships and the husbands that she had – some died, some she divorced, one divorced her, she eventually found that ‘right man,’ and became very proper and very respected in society,” said Brice. “What she was when she died, that, to me, makes her a brighter star in my book than most.” Dickinson preceded Hanning in death, and he so loved her that although he remarried, he left instructions that he be buried beside his beloved Susanna when he died 10 years later. Clark has also written an album of hymns, available on his website www.FletcherClark3.com. Brice has written or co-written four books, all historical non-fiction, all of which are available on Amazon.com.