



# Erastus Smith

1787-1837



# Early Life



- Smith was born in New York, and suffered a chronic lung ailment as an infant, possibly being the cause of him going Deaf.
  - However, his deafness may have just been a progressive condition
- He was labeled Erastus “Deaf” Smith by some, and was not completely Deaf and could follow one-on-one conversations, but he did struggle with group discussions.
- When he was a teen, Erastus’ family moved to the Mississippi Territory to start a farm.
  - Although he didn’t enjoy farming, he did enjoy hunting and fishing, and his childhood on the farm helped him work as a scout, hunting guide and land surveyor in the future.

# Moving to Texas and Starting a Family

- In 1817, Erastus visited Texas for the first time. After loving the territory, he returned four years later, staying for good.
  - Mexico had just gained its independence from Spain at this point, putting the Texas Territory under the control of the Mexican Government.
- Erastus married Guadeloupe, a Spanish widow, within a year, making him a Mexican citizen.
  - The couple had four children together, and Smith happily embraced the Mexican language and customs.



# Tensions on the Rise



- Tension between Texas and Mexico ran high, eventually causing a war to break out in 1835.
  - After the Mexican Army became suspicious of Erastus, they surrounded him while he was traveling to visit his family.
  - Because of this, Smith fled to a Texas revolution camp and enlisted as a volunteer in Stephen Austin's Army.
  - He then led many missions behind enemy lines, and became a prominent figure in the Texas Revolution.
  - Due to Smith's keen eye, deep knowledge of the land, ability to find trails and his overall bravery, the commander of the Texas Regular Army, Sam Houston's, attention was caught. Smith was made Houston's personal spy.

# Rising in the Ranks

- Smith eventually led his own company and volunteers, becoming involved in many significant events, including leading the charge to destroy an important bridge.
- Erastus was asked if he thought his deafness was a hindrance in his military work, and he was said to have replied, *“No, I sometimes think it is an advantage -- I have learned to keep a sharp outlook and I am never disturbed by the whistling of a ball (bullet) -- I don’t hear the bark till I feel the bite.”*



# Smith's Retirement, Passing, and Memorial's

- When he retired from the military, Erastus moved to Richmond, TX and began a new land transactions business with John Borden of Borden Dairy farm.
  - However, this venture was cut short when Smith died of consumption at the age of 50, thought to be brought on by the wet, cold Gulf coast weather.
- Smith has had many things put in place to make sure that he was not forgotten in history:
  - Sam Houston commissioned Thomas Jefferson to paint Erastus Smith's portrait, a large painting can currently be seen at the Texas State Capitol depicting one of his many military actions, his image was on the \$5 bill for the *Republic of Texas* circa 1840, and one of the largest counties in Texas now bears his name. More recently, a Deaf Smith Country Cookbook was published, a film called *Deaf Smith and Johnny* was created, and a biography entitled, Deaf Smith: Incredible Texas Spy was written, which has become a collector's item. There's also a peanut butter brand named after Erastus!

# Sources

Gallaudet University Web site: <http://www.gallaudet.edu>

Great Deaf Americans (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) by Matthew Scott Moore and Robert F. Panara

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<https://truewestmagazine.com>