

HOUSTON, DICK

INTERVIEW

#10462

283

Interview with Dick Houston
Woodward, Oklahoma

Investigator - Linnaeus B. Hancock
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The following information of the life and career of Temple Houston was given by one of his sons, Mr. Dick Houston of Woodward. Dick Houston was only nine years old when his father died so he could not recall so much of his famous father from his own personal recollection.

Temple Houston was left an orphan at the age of nine years. For a time thereafter he lived with a sister. During those several years after being left an orphan Father went to school very little. Eventually when Father was about entering his teens he served as a page for awhile in the United States Senate in Washington, D. C. Thereafter he attended a military academy in the state of Texas. His next schooling when he was yet in his teens was at Baylor in Texas as a student in the law school. The law course there then embraced four years work. Father completed this course in nine months time and was graduated. He was then only nineteen years old. After graduation he wanted to be admitted to the bar in Texas and faced the obstacle of not

being able to qualify because of his age as the age requirement then was twenty-one years. There were only two other young men graduating in law with Father, both of whom were several years beyond their majority. In order for Father to get by the bar examination the idea was conceived to strike an average of the ages of the three young men by which method my father managed to meet the age requirement and was admitted to the Texas bar.

Not so long after his admission to the bar he was elected County Attorney of Brazoria County, Texas, and about 1880 or a year or two later the Governor of Texas appointed him District Attorney with offices at the Panhandle town of Hobestie. In this office Father's jurisdiction included a district of Texas embracing the entire Texas Panhandle. His next location in Texas was at Canadian, a wild cow-town in the Panhandle, where he practiced law for a few years. When the Cherokee Strip opened and the town of Woodward started he moved his law office to Woodward late in the Fall or early Winter of 1893. He was a continuous resident and practicing lawyer of Woodward thereafter and until his untimely death at Woodward, August 16, 1905. At the time of his death he was only forty-four years old.

HOUSTON, DICK.

INTERVIEW.

#10642

3

Taking into account the accomplishments and attainments of my father, Temple Houston, it is most evident that he was a man of extraordinary talent and ability. Within the brief span of forty-four years, notwithstanding handicaps and obstacles, his accomplishments were wonderful. He must have had a great and abiding ambition. That he possessed a high order of intellect certainly cannot be gainsaid. The quality of the man's mind, his attainments and his character would prove that in some respects Father was sort of a genius, and amply compensated, it seems, for his one great failing--the intemperate use of strong drink.

Father was an avid reader of the highest class and order of literature, and would sometimes read intently throughout an entire night in spite of my mother's remonstrances. His brain appeared like a dynamo and was ever active and restless in an eager search for more knowledge. Father was a profound student of the Bible and of Shakespeare and once declared that a comprehensive study of these books was the equivalent of a liberal education to any man so far as literature was concerned.

Father mastered Latin and Greek to the extent that he could converse in these two ancient languages and write them

HOUSTON, DICK.

INTERVIEW.

#10642

4

freely and could speak beautiful Spanish and write it; he could speak with some fluency several native Indian languages, especially the Cheyenne native tongue, and the Cheyennes on coming to Woodward in the early day frequently used to camp in the yard of Father's home and visit with him, whom the Indians regarded as their very good friend. On these occasions it was always the custom of Father to converse with the Cheyennes freely in their native tongue.

All the classics in literature Father had in his library and had studied and read diligently. He made a comprehensive study of the sciences, including astronomy and archaeology for instance. History seemingly he had mastered; and Napoleon and Aaron Burr were Father's favorite characters and his idols in world history. Father's mind was most retentive; and once he read or was told anything it continued with him as a part of his storehouse of abundant knowledge. He never marked a book, apparently being able to turn at will to any section or part of it he wished, so keen was his power of recollection.

Father's eagerness and desire for learning and knowledge seemed an obsession with him, unto the point of near insanity.

HOUSTON, DICK.

INTERVIEW.

#10642

5

It appeared to be sort of a complex with my father as he did so much and such concentrated reading and study that it caused Mother serious concern and anxiety at times. And with all of it, Father would occasionally lament to Mother that it seemed that his mad craving for knowledge was far from satisfied.

In conversation and in public address Father possessed that unique faculty which enabled him to go from the ridiculous to the sublime with the skill of an artist. His language was artistic, beautiful and faultless. His quaint figures of speech, faultless diction and his melodious voice only added to the man's charming electrifying eloquence and therein lay in great part Father's distinction.

In personal manners this remarkable man, my father, could have been likened unto a Lord Chesterfield. Polite, courtly, gallant and chivalrous he was, especially toward women. His regard for women was actually reverent. My father never inflicted corporal punishment on any of us children that I can recall, but had any of us, to his knowledge, spoken or acted disrespectfully toward any women, surely and certainly he would have administered to us summary

HOUSTON, DICK.

INTERVIEW.

#10642

6

and severe punishment--it seemed that he revered and idolized womenkind.

My father was an eccentric man and this quality of the man was expressed in his dress and in almost every act. He was a large man,--slightly over six feet in height, erect and graceful in carriage but his pace in walking was so short as to be feminine-like and most unusual for any man. Always he wore his black hair long and flowing over his robust shoulders. Seldom ever did he wear anything else but the most high grade and stylish of cowboy boots. A frocktailed coat he always wore. He had a penchant for wearing flashy colored vests and nearly always he wore heavy woolen shirts. Nothing but a large western style hat ever adorned his head.

Father was but a child with reference to his use and handling of money or most anything of material value. Father appeared to have no more appreciation of the value of a dollar than a mere child; he handled money like it was water. He would give anybody anything, even his clothing. My father made a fortune in his comparatively short life, yet died in poverty.

Back in the '80's Father served a term in the State Senate of Texas. While serving in that office and during

HOUSTON, DICK.

INTERVIEW.

#10642

7

a session of the Texas Senate it was through his influence in the Texas Legislature and because of a great speech which he made on the senate floor that the Alamo was preserved to posterity as a historic shrine. When the Confederate Memorial at Galveston, Texas, was dedicated, Father was present and delivered the principal dedicatory address of the occasion.

On a certain occasion Temple Houston delivered the principal address at a banquet in Chicago. In being introduced he was referred to as a son of the famous patriot, General Sam Houston. When Father rose to speak, first he mildly rebuked the person who introduced him for mentioning his father and stated that he wished to have it distinctly understood that he declined always to parade under the cloak of his illustrious father lest it be dragged in the dirt. On the occasion of another public appearance Father declared that, "Iain would I bask in the reflection of a famous name," but he said, too, "every tub should stand on its own bottom."

So it was with my father, Temple Houston. He was always very slow to speak of his father in any manner that might tend in the least to reflect distinction or fame upon

his own life or name and in equal degree did he dislike to have his father's name in such connection mentioned in his presence by any body else. It seemed to embarrass Father to have anyone refer to him admiringly as the son of General Sam Houston.

Father was always for the "under dog" regardless and defended and gave of his professional counsel gratuitously to many a man. He never hesitated to give freely and unflinchingly of his professional services to anyone in trouble and in need of legal advice and aid who was yet unable to pay for it.

When Father defended gratuitously a woman outcast on trial in Woodward during the early days in what has since become a famous speech and which is regarded by the legal profession as a masterpiece of legal literature, he had scarcely a moments advance notice of the part he was to take in the trial. Father had been out of town and had just returned and gone to the court house to file some legal papers when the case was called for trial. Charles Swindall, then a young attorney of Woodward, now practicing law in Oklahoma City, had been appointed by the court to defend the woman. As Father appeared in the court house

HOUSTON, DICK.

INTERVIEW.

#10642

9

Mr. Swindall observed him and immediately went to him and asked him to defend the woman in his, Swindall's, stead. Father readily consented to do it and went into the court room with Swindall to arrange with the court for the change in counsel for the accused. Father then asked the court for a ten minutes recess which was granted, during which time he counseled privately with the woman on trial. At the expiration of the recess, trial of the case was resumed with Father as attorney for the defendant. The speech which Father made to the jury on that occasion was entirely extemporaneous, yet it gained fame everlasting for him and is regarded by the legal profession as a masterpiece of literature and resulted in the acquittal of the unfortunate woman. For nearly a year and a half immediately preceding Temple Houston's death his health was such that he was practically confined to his bed.