Preface

IN MARCH OF 1836 Texas was in an uproar. Independence from Mexico had been declared, one Mexican Army had already been driven from Texas, and preparations were being made for the full-scale war which was undoubtedly soon to come, for an army of six thousand regular Mexican soldiers under Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna had captured San Antonio, and laid siege to the little mission San Antonio de Padua, commonly known as the Alamo. Inside were 187 valiant Texans, under Colonel William B. Travis.

At the town of Gonzales, a few miles away, men from all over the state were banding together to form an army which would attempt to defeat the Republic of Mexico and the self-styled "Napoleon of the West." Among the recruits from the little village of Bastrop was a boy named John Holland Jenkins. Although only thirteen years old, he was remarkably tall and stout and could easily pass for a man. The outcome of the siege at the Alamo had particular importance for him—his stepfather was one of the Texans in Colonel Travis' band. On March 7 tidings came that the Alamo had fallen; every one of the Texans had been killed by the Mexicans. The cries of anguish from the wives and children of the thirty-two men from Gonzales who had been killed left a deep and lasting impression on the youthful mind of John Jenkins.

In a few days the Commander-in-Chief, Sam Houston,

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arrived, organized the army, and began the retreat which ended with the Battle of San Jacinto and victory for the Republic of Texas. Jenkins did not participate in the battle, however, because he had been detailed by Colonel Burleson to return home and move his now twice-widowed mother and his brothers and sister to safety. Thus at the age of thirteen John Jenkins became the man of the family, but he was equal to the job.

After the Texas victory and capture of Santa Anna, Jenkins took his mother and family back to their home in Bastrop County, and successfully protected them through all the hardships and dangers of pioneer life. Bastrop then was actually beyond the frontier. There was as much danger of Indian attack from the east as from the west—and the little settlement received far more than its share of raids and thefts from the hostiles.

The story of those Indian depredations and the Mexican invasions is recounted in this book. After Texas became a thriving and populated state of the Union, and Jenkins had retired with his wife to a quiet life on his farm, he was requested by his children and neighbors to set down his recollections of early Texas. He began by writing, with the help of his daughter-in-law, a series of articles made up of his own personal reminiscences of life in pioneer Texas. These were published in the *Bastrop Advertiser* during 1884 and 1885. He then began to collect the reminiscences of other old Texans—Captain Rufus Perry, John Morgan, Captain Dan Grady, Captain Claudius Buster, William Clopton, Captain Samuel Highsmith, Judge N. W. Eastland, and many others. Most of these were published by the *Advertiser* at various times between 1884 and 1889. Jenkins' death on November 30, 1890, ended his research, but he had already contributed much toward the preservation of historical data of colonial Texas.

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John Holland Jenkins was born on September 16, 1822, near Demopolis, Marengo County, Alabama. At the age of six or seven he moved with his parents, Edward and Sarah (Parrent) Jenkins, to Texas as members of Stephen F. Austin's Third, or Little, Colony. The family first lived with the William Bartons on Barton Creek, near Rosanky, while Edward Jenkins and Thomas H. Mays were surveying a league of land for the Jenkinses, which was granted to each emigrant family. In the spring of 1830 they began their new life on their league, which lay on the west bank of the Colorado River, about thirty-five miles below Austin.

Indian depredations were constant, and young John frequently saw the savages skulking about. Occasionally a band of Indians claiming to be friendly would appear to trade with the colonists, but more often than not it would be found the next day that some livestock or other property was missing. Then, in 1833, while working out in a field, Edward Jenkins was murdered, supposedly by marauding Indians, although no conclusive proof was ever found. This left the widowed mother, who was four months' pregnant, with three defenseless children. She was forced to move into the town of Bastrop with friends and sell half of her husband's land.

Bastrop then was a thriving settlement. It was one of the largest towns in Texas, for at that time Houston, Austin, and Dallas had not even been laid out. Located where the Old San Antonio Road crossed the Colorado River, it was in one of the most fertile and beautiful areas in Texas. Stephen F. Austin, speaking of the Bastrop area, recorded in his journal:

Tuesday, August 7 (1821). Came to the Colorado River—poor, gravelly ridges and near the river heavy pine timber, grapes in immense quantities on low vines, red, large, and well flavored, good for Red wine. The Colorado River is sometimes less than the Brazos, banks very high—generally clear of over-

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flow—bottom and banks gravelly, water very clear and well tasted, current brisk, the river very much resembles Cumberland River, except that there are no rocks and it is some larger.

The bottom where the road crosses is about five miles, mostly high prairie, clear of overflow, land rich, timber Pecan, Ash, Oak, Cedar, abundance of fish.*

The town of Bastrop was established about 1829, when Martin Wells settled there with his sons, and grew steadily until 1839, when Austin was laid out and made capital of the Republic. From that time on, progress in Bastrop was small.

In 1835 Mrs. Jenkins remarried—to James Northcross, a Methodist minister from Virginia. They had one son.

After Northcross' death in the Alamo, John Jenkins took his mother and the rest of the family back to their half-league of land across the river from Bastrop, where he cared for his mother until her death in 1840, and raised his younger brothers and sister. On October 29, 1845, he married Mary Jane Foster, daughter of another old pioneer family. They had six sons and one daughter.

Much of the material in the Jenkins reminiscences has appeared in other works, usually without acknowledgment, but the memoirs themselves present such an interesting and enlightening view on pioneer life in early Texas that publication in full is long overdue.

The book has its shortcomings. The original reminiscences are rough and loosely connected, words and names are frequently misspelled, and there are some confusing grammatical errors. It seemed desirable, however, to preserve the original flavor of the narrative; hence revision has consisted mainly in correcting spelling and grammar and rearranging the

* E. C. Barker (ed.), "Journal of Stephen F. Austin on His First Trip to Texas, 1821," *Texas Historical Quarterly*, VII.

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articles for the sake of continuity. Critical and explanatory notes have been added.

Noah Smithwick was used as much as possible for comparison of accounts, rather than John Henry Brown, Frank Brown, James DeShields, or J. W. Wilbarger. Smithwick moved to California in 1861 and lived there the rest of his life. Hence there is little chance of his narrative having been influenced by Jenkins, who was first to attempt to assemble a history of the Indian hostilities in Texas. The two Browns, DeShields, and Wilbarger, however, used Jenkins' reminiscences freely and many of their narratives are exact repetitions of the Jenkins accounts. Wilbarger, particularly, quotes Jenkins word-for-word without acknowledgment.

It is hoped that the succeeding pages will not only be of value to the historian as a reference but will also prove as entertaining and as exciting to those who are interested in understanding and reliving the lives of their forefathers as it has to this young Texan.

JOHN HOLMES JENKINS, III

Beaumont, Texas

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