

**CAPTAIN PETER F. TUMLINSON:
TEXIAN RANGER and MASON**

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Texas, a land of plenty and opportunity fraught with adventure and peril mirrored the lifetime of one of the "Old 300" of Austin's colony: Captain Peter Frank Tumlinson. He was a Texian Ranger, Freemason and direct lineal ancestor of my family who greatly influenced Texas in its early history as a man of honor and respect by all whosoever knew him.

Peter F. Tumlinson, son of John Jackson Tumlinson Sr. and Elizabeth (Plemmons) Tumlinson, was born 16 November 1802 in Lincoln County, North Carolina. His parents left North Carolina for Tennessee. They moved on to Illinois and then again picked up stakes to settle along the banks of the Petite Jean River, in a place that was ultimately to be called Tumlinson Township, near present-day Fort Smith, Arkansas.¹

This was not, however, the end of their journey westward. A new land beckoned and offered a new choice: Stephen F. Austin's colonization program in Texas. Peter's commentary of their entry into Texas is published in the *Atascosa Journal* and reprinted in the 11 April 1878 issue of the *Galveston Daily News*.²

Initially, the Tumlinson clan journeyed to the falls of the Brazos River and shortly thereafter on to the Colorado River district near Montezuma in 1821. These early frontier settlements were close to present day Columbus, Texas. In 1823, John Jackson Tumlinson Sr. was elected the first alcalde or civil magistrate of the Colorado district. The community needs of protection from murder and theft was urgent during the first absence of Stephen F. Austin in Mexico City. John Jackson Tumlinson Sr. "was instrumental in organizing the first group of Rangers. On 27 January 1823 he and Robert Kuykendall wrote to Governor Trespacios asking permission to raise an armed mounted group of 15 men. The Governor approved the request on 31 January and the first Company of Rangers was organized on 5 May 1823."³

By the summer of 1823, John Jackson Tumlinson Sr. requested a visit to the Governor of Coahuila and Bejar to procure ammunition for a ranging company to secure the Colorado district. On his journey to the Governor's Palace in San Antonio, he was fatally wounded by a band of Hueco Indians just outside present-day Seguin. A traveling companion Mr. Joseph Newman escaped. Baker wrote what transpired afterwards in *The Scrapbook of Texas*:

Diligent search was made for Captain Tumlinson's body but it was never found. A little while after this a party of thirteen Waco Indians were discovered approaching the settlements, and it was supposed to be the same party who killed Captain Tumlinson, the news communicated to his son Captain John Jackson Jr., who raised a company of eleven young boys and went in pursuit of them, His youngest brother, Joseph Tumlinson, was dispatched in advance to spy out the position of the enemy. He discovered they were encamped about fifteen miles above where the town of Columbus now stands, on the East Side of the river, near the bank of a deep ravine. The Captain then, with his men, had advanced cautiously and late in the evening reached the vicinity of the Indian camp, where they concealed themselves. Their plan was to defer the attack until morning, and the firing of Captain Tumlinson's gun was to be the signal for the onset. But his brother Joseph, at twelve, was a little nearer the Indian Camp than the rest, seeing an Indian in fair shooting distance, could not resist the temptation to take a "pop" at him, and fired away. The Indian uttered a loud "wah!" and fell dead. Seeing this, the rest of the boys opened fire, and with such fatal effect that in a few moments twelve of the thirteen Indians soon lay dead upon the ground. The remaining one sprang like a frightened deer and made his escape.⁴

Stephen F. Austin had tried to dissuade them from further violence so as not to anger the local tribes of the district but to no avail. Even though this tragedy came before the time of the founding of Texas Rangers by Stephen F. Austin, it had a timeless effect upon the descendants of this Tumlinson clan who were Texas Rangers from 1823 to 1969. John Jackson Tumlinson Sr. is considered by many Texas Ranger historians to be the first killed in the line of duty. Texas Rangers date the anniversary year of their organization to this tragic event.⁵

About this time, Peter returned to Arkansas, so as to aid his pregnant sister-in-law. In a luckless turn of events, Peter's eldest brother Thomas Carney Tumlinson Sr. met the same fate as his father in being murdered by Indians. In 1834, Peter returned to Texas with Tinnie Tidwell and two children to settle around Jonesboro and did business in Lamar, Red River, Shelby, Grimes and Montgomery Counties. Unfortunately, not long after his return from Arkansas, his bride Tinnie passed away. Sometime afterwards in Georgia, again on family business, he met his second wife, a widow residing in Shelby County, Harriet Jane West, who he married in 1835. At this time Peter served in a Ranger Company under Captain Matt Nolan. Harriet Jane West McEnvale had one daughter, Emily McEnvale, by a previous marriage. Harriet was the sister of James West, also a Texas Ranger. Together Peter and Harriet had seven children: twins Joseph and Catherine, Harriet, Peter Jr., James, Sara Jane, and Joel Walker who later married Emily McEnvale. Joseph, later known as Sheriff Joe, was the first sheriff of Dimmit County. At least three of Peter's sons were Texas Rangers.⁶

During the Texas Revolution Peter traveled with a company of cavalry from San Augustine to San Jacinto. In fact, his cousin George Washington Tumlinson, born in 1814 in Missouri, perished weeks before at the hands of Mexican troops led by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana Perez de Lebron during the defense of the garrison at Mission de Valero during the Battle of the Alamo. George volunteered with a ranging group of thirty-two from Gonzales when the call came from William B. Travis to defend the Alamo. George served as a Private artilleryman in Captain Cary's Company of Gonzales rangers. "These men, chiefly husbands and fathers, owning their own homes,

voluntarily organized and passed through the lines of an enemy four to six thousand strong, to join 150 of their countrymen and neighbors, in a fortress doomed to destruction.” Before this conflict, John Jackson Jr., brother of Peter, “ commissioned by the Provisional Government in November 1835 to form a company of rangers for the protection of an area northwest of current Austin ... is considered one of the earliest official Texas Ranger captains.” He served in the siege and battle of Bejar along with his cousin George W. Tumlinson. In the Battle of San Jacinto, Captain John Jackson Tumlinson Jr. served in Company F under Captain Heard and was widely known as an official participant in the conflict. Joseph Tumlinson “ ... answered the call to arms by enrolling in Captain Lockhart’s Company of Spies and was at Gonzales when the news came that the Alamo had fallen and its defenders had been destroyed. He left Gonzales with the Texas Army and served to the date of his discharge, 1 July 1836.” According to family legend, Peter Tumlinson was “ ... in the battle of San Jacinto and was present when General Santa Anna was led before General Sam Houston. All three were Free Masons and Grandpa told me some of what he saw and heard at this meeting of General Houston and Santa Anna. Whether or not this had anything to do with Santa Anna’s release and he was allowed to return to Mexico, unharmed, I don’t know.” Peter Tumlinson recounted this event to his grandson Peter Tumlinson Bell and Peter Tumlinson Bell to Verner Lee Bell retold it in a conversation. The three brothers, John Jackson Jr., Joseph and Peter, though not all were present at the time of the surrender of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana to General Samuel Houston, each felt avenged at the defeat of his forces by the Texian Army. Peter was listed as having served honorably in the Army of the Republic of Texas, according to pension records. His duty under muster roll of Captain Scurlock’s on 4 July 1836 was finished out by August to be

discharged under Captain Richard Hopper's command on 4 October 1836. One note of good fortune that came out of the conflict was that Joseph Tumlinson and Elizabeth Newman met the day after the battle and wed shortly thereafter. She was the daughter of the man who had been with Joseph's father when he is slain.⁷

From 1845 to 1846, Peter Tumlinson returned to San Augustine and delivered mail by horseback; while on his routes he braved the perils of roadside bandits and Indians. By 1850 Peter moved again and this time settled in Atascosa County. At the time, the Texas Legislature passed a law of establishing county seats closer to the center of the county, and Peter served as a county commissioner to choose the county seat. It would become Pleasanton. He established a successful ranching and real estate broker career nearby in Verdi around the banks of Gallinas Creek near present day Leming. Also located in this area is the family plot, called Tumlinson Cemetery, where several of Peter Tumlinson's grandchildren and fellow Texas Ranger Joel Marion Walker are buried. This section of land is an area close to the homestead of the Tumlinson Clan who had settled into the area. He acquired this property consisting of 480 acres through his service to the Texas Republic. As indicated in the recorded tax receipts, he owned fifteen horses and sixty head of cattle and various numbers of hogs, sheep and oxen.⁸

In reference to Captain Peter Tumlinson's initiation into Freemasonry, Grand Lodge of Texas records note that Peter Tumlinson was initiated 30 September 1851, passed 15 November 1851 and raised 17 January 1852 in Cameron Lodge No. 76 at Yorktown. Joseph Tumlinson was listed as a charter member of Cameron Lodge No. 76. Afterwards, Peter demitted in 1853 and affiliated as a Charter Member of Pleasanton Lodge No. 283. On 19 October 1865, the "... first meeting was called by R.W. Sir H.M. Daugherty DDGM of the 18th Masonic District of the Most Worshipful

Grand Lodge of Texas for the purpose of organizing Pleasanton Lodge U.D.” At this meeting, Peter Tumlinson was listed as being present as the Charter Treasurer and member at formation of the Pleasanton Lodge U.D. This meeting established that the bylaws of Alamo Lodge No. 44 would “ ... be adopted for rule and government of Pleasanton Lodge U.D. during the ensuing Masonic year. The Lodge decides that regular stated meetings are to be held on the last Saturday of the month at Six o’clock p.m.”. At a previous meeting of Alamo Lodge No. 44, the original petition for the formation of Pleasanton Lodge No. 283 was given to and recommendations for to be “presented to the Grand Master to grant dispensation to organize Pleasanton Lodge”.⁹

These actual minutes of Alamo Lodge No. 44 state the following:

4

March 1865

The Committee on application from the Brethren of the town of Pleasanton Atascosa County Texas asking recommendation to open a new Lodge in said Town, made the following report which was unanimously eared to wit.

Alamo Lodge Room No 44 March 4th/65

To the WM. Wardens & Brethren of Alamo Lodge No 44- We the undersigned committee appreciated at your regular meeting in January to inquire into the priority of recommending the of Sundry Brethren of Atascosa County; addresses to the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Texas, and praying for a Dispensation to open a new Lodge in the Town of Pleasanton Atascosa County, beg leave to report that They have duly examined the three Brothers recommended in said petition for the first Master & Wardens and find these well skilled in the Work of the Three Degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry and capable of conferring the same on those duly authorized to receive them. We also have ascertained that they have an acceptable and safe Room to work in, and that Alamo Lodge is the nearest Lodge to the Town of Pleasanton and that said Pleasanton is not more the Ten Miles from any other Lodge. F.P. Frankel Chairman Committee”¹⁰

Peter was also instrumental in securing the land for the Pleasanton Lodge No. 283. The records state that “ ... the Lodge agreed to accept the proposition of Brother Peter F. Tumlinson for the purchase of property in Pleasanton known as Conway Place and to pay

him One Hundred and Fifty dollars for the same. Fifty dollars between this and Christmas and the remaining One Hundred when it may suit the convenience of the Lodge.”¹¹

Many brethren of Pleasanton Lodge No. 283 were pillars of the community who not only participated in the local government but also upheld the law. One of the first members, by petition for affiliation 25 November 1865, includes a Joel Maurice Walker, who passed away 20 March 1867, as seen in the Lodge records; as well, he is the namesake of Peter’s last son born in 1851 in Atascosa County. The earliest Worshipful Masters included the County Judge W.H. Smith and County Clerk A.G. Martin of Pleasanton. A.G. Martin was the first elected Worshipful Master of Pleasanton Lodge No. 283. They were listed on Peter’s application, in that official capacity, for a pension in his service to the Republic of Texas. A close fraternal brotherhood is highlighted among those who were charter and initial members of the Pleasanton Lodge No. 283 in the following instance. There was a close friendship that Peter had with both Joel Maurice and Second Lieutenant Joel Marion Walker, fellow Texas Rangers, who together would take up the challenge against armed marauders and nomadic tribes of warlike Indians. These “Masonic Rangers” rode together with Captain Peter in his company of Texas Rangers. They included Peter’s brother Joseph Tumlinson, who according to Grand Lodge of Texas records, later demitted to Pleasanton No. 283 in 1871 from Coletto Lodge No. 124 after its demise that same year. He was initiated 13 May 1848, passed 10 March and raised as Master Mason in Victoria Lodge No. 40 in 14 May 1849. He demitted 14 August 1851 to Cameron Lodge No. 76 of Yorktown meanwhile being listed as a charter member beforehand in 1850. Then, by 1852, Joseph affiliated with Coletto Lodge No. 124 in the same township. The years 1867 and 1868 saw Joseph serving as Junior Warden of the Lodge. Finally, Joseph is served as Worshipful Master when John Jackson Tumlinson Jr. was initiated, passed and raised in 1869. He was a “rancher who continuously served as a minuteman and Texas Ranger with his relatives in security of the area.... He also was involved in the infamous Sutton-Taylor Feud of DeWitt County and formed a group

known as the Tumlinson Regulators on the side of the Suttons.” The following is an eyewitness description of Joe Tumlinson during the feud. He wore “ ... a gun on each shoulder and two Smith & Wesson’s (No.3) in his belt ... he has a frost of about sixty winters on his head, and green spectacles on his nose, and, it is said, can see with his naked eye further than any hawk this side of the Rio Grande.” His descendants would serve as upholding the law in the following capacities, from 1898 to 1969; they were Rangers, Sheriffs, Customs Agents and Border Patrol Officers. The names of these upright Texas lawmen were Milam Wright, William L. Wright, Charles H. Wright and E. A. Wright known to others as “Dogie” who published many fine accounts of Texas history. Peter Tumlinson’s first son became the first Sheriff of Dimmit County and was known as “Sheriff Joe.” Captain Peter’s Ranger Company covered a large part of the brush country of west Atascosa and east Medina Counties all the way to the Leona River just south of Fort Inge. The Brothers Tumlinson certainly affected the history of the Texas Freemasonry in its earliest years. They served their communities as Texas Rangers and also as Minutemen. A tradition of upright Masonic and civic-minded service was to be defended and upheld by subsequent generations of the Tumlinson family. “As of 1973, twenty-three members of the clan had served as Texas peace officers and a total of sixteen of them Texas Rangers and nine were known to have been Masons.”¹²

Peter’s service to his local citizenry mirrors a long and courageous established history with the Texas Rangers as a “Captain of a Frontier Ranger Scout Company from about 1836 to about 1876. He is ... stationed first at Goliad, then Brownsville, Fort Ewel, and Fort Enge near Uvalde and later stationed on the head of the Llano River.” From the earliest years in the Rangers into the period of the Frontier Battalion Rangers, Captain Peter’s career is an example brilliant of distinguished duty to this brotherhood of Texas lawmen. Such a traverse area was always infested with numerous confrontations with ravaging Comanches who came down upon the inhabitants of the region like locusts.

There were a number of such killings by Indians, cattle rustlers and thieves that illegally trafficked in herds of cattle into Mexico stolen across the border of the Rio Grande from Texas ranches. On one occasion Peter and his men rode into nearby McMullen County to successfully catch raiders who had killed all the members of the Stringfield family. Moreover, Captain Peter F. Tumlinson and his three sons fought His Excellency Senor Don Juan Nepucenemo Cortina. Later General of the Mexican army and Lord Mayor of Matamoras, he “ ... liked beefsteak. —Especially if it was on the hoof and had a Texas flavor ... and since a man’s tastes usually are copied by his admirers, even in the matter of sirloins, so did Don Juan’s troopers. ” Don Juan Cortina, a member of a well-known wealthy Mexican family loyal to Texas, was trying to establish his own rule over the lower Rio Grande Valley near Brownsville by means of gruesome and ghastly attacks upon the citizens in the Rio Grande City in 1859. He aligned himself with the rustlers and desperadoes of the region who continued their raids across the border well up until 1875.¹³

Since the border was not protected by either a local or state government, a called up company of Texas Rangers under Captains Peter Tumlinson and Tobin, fought to establish the peace and halt the seditious acts of Cortinas and his men. Sam H. Tumlinson describes such an account in *Tumlinson A Genealogy*:

It was late in 1859 that the border area from Brownsville north along the Rio Grande to Laredo was left unprotected by removal of Federal Troops ... In September he struck Rio Grande City without warning, killed citizens, looted the town and took control. All along the border his bandits repeated this action and Cortina soon held control over the area from Laredo to Brownsville.

Initially, two small Texas Rangers companies led by Captain Peter Tumlinson, or “Old Uncle Pete” as he was often called, went to the area. Later Major Ford arrived with more Texas volunteers. Federal troops returned to the area. After several encounters with the Mexicans Cortina was forced back to Rio Grande City where he decided to make a stand. He was defeated. According to Major Ford, Peter used his rifle most effectively in this fight ... on the north side of the Rio Grande Cortina was

again recruiting men and drawing supplies from Mexican sources south of the river. He planned to capture a steamer the *Ranchero*, which would soon make its own way down river from Rio Grande City loaded with valuable freight, over \$300,000 in coin and a number of passengers. About thirty-six miles up river from Brownsville the Rio Grande made a sharp horseshoe shaped bend and here Cortina planned to attack and capture the *Ranchero*.

Major Ford, with his Rangers in route from Rio Grande City for mustering out at Brownsville and the Steamer *Ranchero* all arrived at ... Bolsa Bend at the same time. When the *Ranchero* entered the bend it came under fire from some three hundred Mexicans placed there by Cortinas. Major Ford reacted at once by preparing to send his men across the river and engage the Mexicans. Major Tobin, who had replaced Ford as result of an election of officers, and Captain Tumlinson both used firearms and gave no orders (i.e. they were not in authority) and that Captain Tumlinson lectured Ford for being in the field without a gun. According to Ford Captain Tumlinson was a brave old frontiersman who had seen much service and was not concerned about questions of military import.

The fight lasted an hour and fifteen minutes. The Mexicans were driven from the field with the loss of twenty-nine killed and forty wounded. The Rangers lost one man killed and four wounded. This result even though the Mexicans numbered three hundred strong and were in place before the fight started while the Rangers, numbering only forty-eight men, had to cross the river and advance while under fire from the Mexicans.¹⁴

What author D.E. Kilgore calls them is “the fighting Tumlinsons” in the book *A Ranger Legacy* in depicting this specific account of the Tumlinson clan. Major Ford, in aforethought, also notes that Tumlinson as a Captain who labors “... under the impression that a Texas Ranger was a nondescript creature who needed no discipline and the less restraint imposed upon him the better he could fight....” Peter later re-established his Ranger Company to cover the defense of Sabinal Canyon. This order was given by the newly elected state Governor Sam Houston, his General and Commander in Chief during the years of the Republic. Incidents such as these kept Captain Peter away from his personal affairs. Peter F. Tumlinson earned his title of Captain “... by initiative and performance rather than by official appointment. Minutemen groups were assembled on the spot ... in response to specific threats and the Captain was elected by majority vote ... except where an identifiable Captain raised the company.”¹⁵

Each company consisted of no fewer than twenty nor more than fifty-six men who were to elect their own officers and be ready in an instant to be called up for duty. Volunteers for Ranger duty were granted certain tax exemptions. They were exempt from poll tax, taxes on a saddle horse and from the performance of road duty. According to records in the Texas General Land Office, Peter was accorded a pension and land in 1875 for services to the Republic and State of Texas in capacity as a soldier and Texas Ranger. Many "Masonic Rangers" of prominence are from this period and included John Henry Moore, Lafayette Lodge No. 34, James H. Callahan and Creed Taylor of Coletto Lodge No. 124, Edwin Burleson, McFarland Lodge No. 3 and finally Daniel Boone Friar of Victoria Lodge No. 40. Captain Peter F. Tumlinson was an equal to these Masons in embracing the principle of upholding the law. No matter whether Indian uprising or cattle rustlers, Peter and his company of Rangers answered the call to service to protect public and property so that peace and harmony should prevail.¹⁶

Being the oldest living son, Peter took it upon himself to be the patriarch of the family. After his brother's death, Peter adopted his brother John Jackson Jr.'s orphaned child Amanda. He provided for her welfare through the administration of his late brother's estate for her benefit. In a sense, this act speaks volumes of his actions and conduct as a man, a brother and a Mason. As he constantly lent his assistance, as evidenced by census records, Peter's household always included the persons outside his immediate family.¹⁷

"Both Peter and his wife Harriet were deeply religious. He wrote to his grandchildren urging them to attend church and choose friends from the church. Jake English wrote of Aunt Harriet shouting in the First Baptist Church." Such accounts as there are concerning his personal life showed him to be a warm-hearted family man. As he was in declining health, Peter and Harriet Tumlinson moved in 1876 to Carrizo Springs to be closer to his daughter, Sarah Jane Tumlinson Bell. Peter died a few years later in 1882. Harriet died sometime later in 1897.

Both are buried in Mount Hope Cemetery of Carrizo Springs, Texas among the many Texian Rangers and Masons like himself who served their country and state with loyalty, passion and fervor.¹⁸

These words from author Sam H. Tumlinson pay the due homage and respect to our extraordinary ancestor as “... a diplomat, a man of integrity, a competent military leader, an attorney, a devoted father and husband devoid of self enrichment schemes. Peter was committed to assisting his fellow travelers. We his descendants would take pride ... in preserving the memory of this man — our honored forefather.”¹⁹

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- ¹¹ Minutes of Pleasanton Lodge No. 283, 19 October 1865, 6.
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