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VISITORS GUIDE FANNIN BATTLEGROUND STATE HISTORIC SITE *Fannin, Texas*



Welcome to Fannin Battleground State Historic Site. On March 19 and 20, 1836, the Battle of Coleto Creek was fought here between Texian forces commanded by Col. James W. Fannin and Mexican forces led by Gen. José de Urrea. It was in the climax of what historians call "The Goliad Campaign" during the Texas Revolution. The site, with its impressive stone obelisk, is a memorial to the brave men who helped shape the future of Texas.



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A COMPLICATED LEGACY-WHO WAS JAMES FANNIN?

James Walker Fannin, Jr. remains one of the most confounding and misunderstood leaders of the Texas Revolution. Born in Georgia in 1804, Fannin moved his wife and two daughters to Texas in 1834 and they settled near Velasco.

Fannin entered the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in the summer of 1819 but withdrew in the fall of 1821. In Texas, he considered himself among the best military minds and was a proponent for independence. In the fall of 1835, Fannin enlisted as a volunteer, and was captain of the Brazos Guards at the battle of Gonzales. Along with William B. Travis, James Bowie, and many others, Fannin joined Stephen F. Austin in the march on Bexar and distinguished himself as a scout. He and Bowie led troops in victory at the battle of Concepción. During the siege on Bexar, Fannin advocated for a regular army and took an honorable discharge from the volunteers. Sam Houston, newly appointed commander in chief, commissioned Fannin as a colonel, and he served as an agent of the provisional war government, participating in planning an attack on the Mexican port of Matamoros.

The planned invasion was abandoned, and Fannin was placed in command at Goliad. His ambitions often struck others as arrogance, and Fannin struggled with his role. Overconfident at times, Fannin spent much of the spring of 1836 doubting himself and made several requests to be relieved of command.

Fannin seemed indecisive or unable to follow Houston's orders to retreat and join Texian forces in the field. He abandoned the Presidio La Bahia too late not realizing the Mexican army occupied Goliad. While he fought valiantly when faced with capture, he was compelled to surrender at Coleto Creek and was executed with most of his troops a week later on March 27, 1836.



Col. James Walker Fannin



THE BATTLE SITE

Assigned to the Presidio La Bahia in early 1836, Colonel Fannin led some 400 of his men in improving defenses in preparation for an attack. But after Santa Anna's victory at the Alamo, Houston ordered Fannin to retreat to Victoria. Fannin was indecisive, waiting until March 19 to begin his retreat. He was unaware that Mexican General José de Urrea had already arrived with a sizable force. After a morning fog lifted, Mexican cavalry chased down Fannin's forces on an open prairie near Coleto Creek.

Forming a defensive square, the Texians bravely fought off their attackers. But by nightfall—with seven dead and 28 wounded, including Colonel Fannin—they were surrounded with limited options. On the 20th, with the arrival of Mexican artillery, Fannin realized it would be impossible to continue fighting. He and his officers attempted to negotiate terms of surrender that guaranteed Texian troops would be treated as prisoners of war and paroled to the U.S. Urrea could not affirm such terms but advised he would use his influence with Mexican President General Santa Anna to encourage leniency.

Fannin and his men were marched back to the Presidio La Bahia. Santa Anna ordered the prisoners executed. The Mexican army spared 20 physicians, orderlies, and interpreters, and another 30 or so escaped during the mayhem of the informal firing squads. Deemed a massacre, the execution of Fannin's command on Palm Sunday, 1836, further inflamed the Texian cause. When Sam Houston's troops took the field at San Jacinto, the battle cry rang out "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!"

THE TOWN

Within 15 years of the battle, a town emerged near the site. Initially it was called "Fanning's (sic) Defeat." In 1889, the Gulf, Texas Western and Pacific Railroad established a depot nearby and the town became "Fannin." Soon after, a campaign survivor marked the location of the Texian defense that is the gin screw location today, and in 1913 the battle site was donated to the State of Texas. As the Centennial approached, town residents established a tradition of an annual picnic here to commemorate independence—it is held near the anniversary of the victory at San Jacinto.

AFTERMATH

Like the tragedy of the Alamo, the Goliad campaign and the mass execution of Fannin's men became a loss that led to victory. Texian soldiers fought with a ferocity of men who had everything to lose—and the slaughters at the Alamo and La Bahia were in the minds of Houston's men as they unleashed their own vengeful wrath in victory.

Today, part of the Fannin Battleground site is preserved as a memorial to the soldiers who fought here in 1836. Walk the grounds and honor the place where Fannin was forced to surrender. Remember those that helped forge Texas' path to independence.

Texas Governor Jim Ferguson visits Fannin Battleground, March 3, 1916

