
Texas Ranger Tales

by Mike Cox

You'd think some heavy equipment operator would have found Steinheimer's gold by now.

One of Texas' more colorful treasure tales is the backstory of one of Texas' more significant but least known military confrontations: The fight between a group of Texas Rangers and a party led by one Manuel Flores in May 1839.

When Texas scouts cut a suspicious north-bound trail in South Central Texas, they surmised a party of Mexican or Indian raiders was moving through the young Republic and probably up to no good.

Soldiers and Rangers—there wasn't a lot of difference in those early days—began following the riders. On a bluff on the South San Gabriel, in what is now Williamson County, the Rangers caught up with Flores. Gunfire quickly ensued. Flores died of a rifle ball through his heart. Two of his men also fell. The rest hit the brush like so many quail, leaving their remuda and supply-laden pack animals behind.

In dividing the spoils, the Rangers found documents in Flores' saddlebags that proved up a Mexican plot to regain its lost territory by forming an alliance with Texas Indians, particularly the Cherokees. Flores, who had fought for Texas during the revolution, had become an agent for the Mexican government.

Historians have discovered no conclusive evidence that the Cherokees were being anything more than polite in talking with the Mexicans. But the paperwork brought to light by the Rangers solidified the anti-Indian sentiments of President Mirabeau B. Lamar. Texas troops soon defeated the Cherokees and ran the survivors out of Texas.

Fighting had been the last thing on the mind of German-born Karl Steinheimer. Heir Steinhemier had

been a lot of things, a pirate's colleague, an unsuccessful filibuster and highly successful miner who made a fortune in the Mexican interior, but he was not particularly interested in Texas-Mexican relations.

In receipt of a promising letter from a woman in St. Louis who he had courted but not won, Steinheimer had been on his way to Missouri intent on rekindling the romance. With ten mule loads of silver and gold, he felt the lady he fancied might be much more receptive to his advances than before.

Steinheimer had thrown in with Flores only because in Indian country there was strength in numbers.

When the Texans advanced on Flores, Steinheimer, as the saying goes, had no dog in the fight. He felt his proper place was back in old St. Louie, but he was not going to be able to separate himself from the difficulties of the moment while trailing a team of 10 pack animals heavily laden with silver and gold.

He buried the gold, cleverly marking the spot by driving a brass stake into an oak tree, and headed out on his own.

He'd had the right idea about how dangerous it was to travel in Texas. Indians soon waylaid him. Though suffering a severe wound, he managed to escape. As soon as he could, he wrote a long letter to the lady in St. Louis, filling her in on his career since they had last visited. He also told her where he had buried his fortune. Not long after penning this missive, Steinheimer died of his wounds.

The lady in St. Louis got his letter and some years later, the story goes, dispatched a party to find her "inheritance." They didn't find it. And, as is the case with most treasures, no one else has either.