

GÉRARD DÔLE

QUEST FOR RELICS



TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY ANITA CONRADE

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ARTIFACTS RELATED TO THE ALAMO BATTLE
AND THE TEXAS REVOLUTION



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ALAMO DEFENDERS RARE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Alamo defender Charles Despallier from Rapides Parish, Louisiana, cherished this small French accordion. When the fighting lulled for a moment, he probably squeezed it accompanied by David Crockett's fiddle and John McGregor's bagpipe.



Charles Despallier's accordion.

I took my first trip to the U.S.A. in the summer of 1964, through a program of international cross-cultural education offered by the Experiment in International Living. Home stays being the focus of every Experiment program, I had the chance and privilege to spend the month of August with the Beal family of Huntsville, Alabama. Caroline and Jim, 25 and 32 years of age respectively, went out of their way to make me feel at home. Caroline's brother Richard, bound for Maracaibo, Venezuela, from New Orleans, left me his room in their house. Tirelessly, Caroline and Jim brought me to museums, famous Civil

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War battlefields, and various other places of historical interest.

Jim and I also indulged our shared passion for collecting things, traveling miles to visit antique dealers. My father René Dôle had filled our apartment on the French Riviera with Napoleonic trophies: helmets, caps, uniforms, swords, firearms, since, as we already know, a glorious great-uncle to the Dôles, Charles Gouget, had begun his military career in 1805 and had gone on to take part in all of Napoleon Bonaparte's subsequent campaigns.

Understanding my deep interest in the military past of France and the United States, Jim Beal looked in the phone directory and contacted a collector of antique militaria. This man was in his late seventies, and made his home in Madison County, Alabama, on a secluded rural estate. He welcomed us warmly and showed us through the collection he had been amassing since childhood. A couple of days earlier, I had visited Davy Crockett's cabin in Limestone.

The battle of the Alamo was fresh in my mind: Jim's mother Mrs. Kirkland (who lived in Austin and wrote historical novels about Texas) had given me a couple of books about it upon my arrival. Naively, I asked our host if he'd be willing to part with any of his relics of the Texas War of Independence. He smiled, rubbed his chin, then went to a drawer and took out one of the large fixed-blade knives first popularized by Colonel James "Jim" Bowie in the early 19th century. That knife, quite similar to the weapon wielded by the hero of the Alamo, was all he could offer for sale at the moment. The price he asked me was reasonable and I acquired it.

Now, as we were ready to leave, the old collector had a sudden idea. He asked us to wait, climbed upstairs and came back with a small, battered accordion. He explained me that he had bought it a long time ago at a public auction in Natchitoches, Louisiana. The auctioneer called it a *Flutina*, claiming that it had been played during the siege of Fort Alamo "In all honesty, I don't know if

his assertion was true or not," our host added, "but the squeezebox you see here is actually contemporary with the tragic defeat." The next minute, he handed me an image made on glass which he had bought at the same auction. It showed tree young Southern belles posing in their Sunday best. One held a small accordion in all points similar to the musical instrument I had before my eyes. My bewilderment seemed to amuse the old collector. He gave a little chuckle and commented briefly: "The French loved its flute-like sound up there on the Cane River in the 1850s."

Cane River! The name rang a bell. It had featured in *Plantation Parade*, a book I had studied the year before in Nice, with my English tutor Mrs. Mascle. I'd been intrigued by the description:

Several hundred miles inland, toward the hills and quick-flowing creeks of the 'American' part of the state, there presses an edge of South Louisiana. The land takes on a slight roll; the soil shows a new hue, a red bordering on

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orange; through it cuts a dreaming stream, Cane River. A short distance off, the scene is that of almost any other part of the rural South—the homes, the casual accents, the ways of the sunburned hill folk who trace back to England or Ireland or Scotland. But the people of Cane River are French in language and in manner, with a hint of Spain and other mingling; and the places in which they live are those of Louisianans of a century and more ago. On the river banks lies the oldest town in Louisiana, Natchitoches, founded in 1714, four years earlier than Orleans. Spain's holdings then lay not far to the west; the French established a post here to hold back unwelcome prowlers. Whatever the rulers felt, the two people met and mixed.

(Harnett T. Kane. Plantation Parade.)

But that day in Madison County, I was able to buy neither the accordion nor the ambrotype, to my great regret. The purchase of the Bowie knife had used up my pocket money, and I was too shy to ask Jim for a loan.



*Charles Despallier's accordion base
with its spoon shaped air valve.*

Two weeks later, I left Huntsville and the Beal family, boarding a Greyhound bus to New York City, whence I flew back to France. All along the way, the Alamo flutina (as I had come to name it) and the picture of the Cane River belles were vividly present in my mind.

On my return to Nice, I presented the Bowie Knife to my father. He was so pleased with it that he was quite willing to buy me the accordion and the ambrotype for Christmas. Thrilled, I immediately telephoned Jim. "Don't worry, I'll take care of everything, Gérard," my distant friend assured me.

A padded envelope containing the precious ambrotype arrived a week before New Year's Eve. But no invoice came afterwards.

Time passed. In early spring, I received a notification by mail from French Customs. A package had arrived from the USA. My squeezebox, no doubt. I rushed to the Nice airport. Jim Beal, a mechanical engineer with NASA, had carefully wrapped the accordion and shipped it in a heavy cardboard box. This was fortunate, because the parcel had been half crushed on its way to France.

A pair of customs inspectors unpacked the box as I watched, peering at the contents suspiciously. The accordion was taken apart and scrutinized as if it held dangerous or forbidden substances. Eventually, finding nothing of the kind, they thrust the various

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pieces back into the cardboard box and brought it to a cashier, with whom I settled the customs fees. The Alamo flutina was mine at last.

Back home, I did my best to reconstruct the unfortunate instrument, and this is when I realized that a thin piece of paper bearing the name of its original owner rested inside in a small compartment next to the reeds bank. But in all sincerity, it took me years to realize its full historical preciousness.



*Charles Despallier's accordion keyboard
and reed banks with a scrap of paper bearing his name.*

The Texas Revolution brought with it the call to arms. A group of volunteers founded a militia at a meeting held in the grand coffee room of Banks's Arcade in New Orleans on the evening of October 13, 1835, calling themselves the *New Orleans Greys*. Blaz Despallier, the eldest of the three sons of Bernard Martin Despallier and Maria Cadida Grande from Rapides Parish, Louisiana, then about twenty-six years old, seems to have joined the Greys. Presumably, to celebrate his recruitment, he acquired a French accordion—a total novelty at the

time—in a music shop of the Vieux Carré.

Blaz Despallier took part in the battle of Bexar on December of the same year with Captain Breece's Greys. After the fall of the town, he became a scout for Colonel Travis but fell ill. By then, his younger brother Charles, who was twenty at the time, had enlisted as a volunteer. Charles must have reached

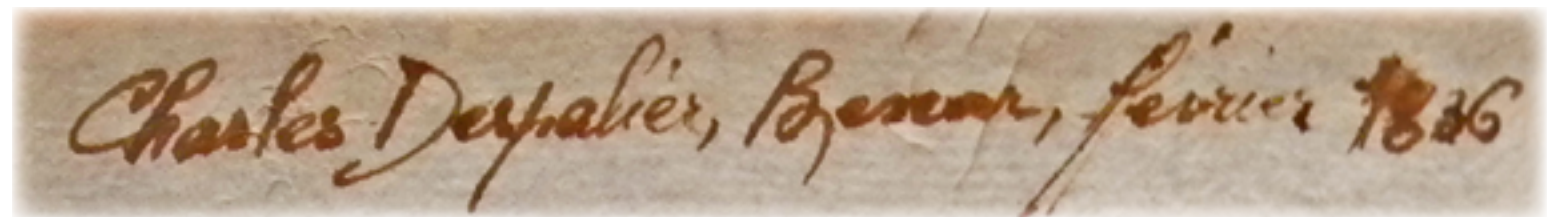
Bexar in December as Blaz was honorably discharged due to illness. It may be the case that Charles and Blaz lived together for a short time in Bexar because many years later, Theodore Gentilz, a French painter, noted that a Madam Candelaria was cooking for “two French brothers from Nacogdoches [Natchitoches?], the brothers *Despalier*.” Before riding back home to Rapides Parish, Louisiana, Braz presumably presented Charles with his accordion to pass time away.

A Texian garrison of 104 men had taken the Alamo. Travis was ordered to recruit 100 volunteers and reinforce it. Young Charles Despalier was probably acting as either of both a scout and messenger for Travis, taking over his brother's Texian rebel cause.

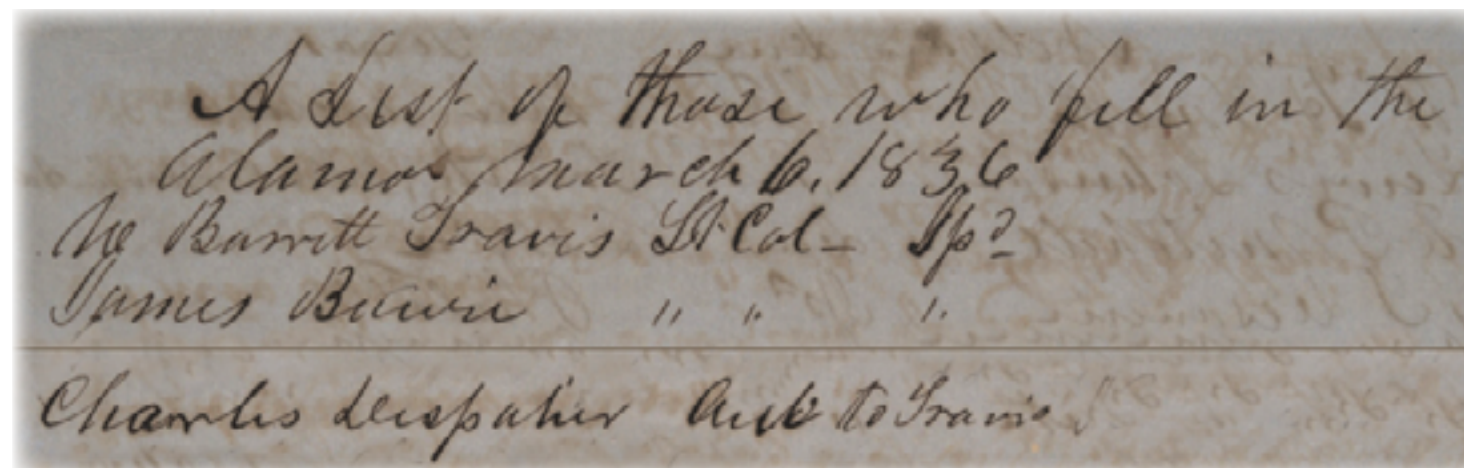
On March 6, 1836, the thirteenth day of the siege, the Mexican army broke through, and all defenders or so were killed, including Charles Despallier. One cannot know how the last hours of the Alamo might

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have been like but, making another leap in logic, we may suggest that, some time before the end, Charles Despallier entrusted Mrs. Susannah Dickinson, the wife of a blacksmith who served as artilleryman in the garrison, with his precious accordion. He may also have asked his black servant (because his father, Bernard Martin Despallier, was a slave owner, it is likely he traveled with a valet), to return it to Blaz, then ailing at the Pineville family plantation in Rapides Parish, Louisiana. A third possibility is that one of the slaves owned by Bowie or Travis rescued the instrument before the Mexicans looted the fort. Records show both men's servants were also at the Alamo.



The spelling of the name scribbled in French on this scrap of paper glued on the reeds bank of the Alamo accordion, raises an enigma: “Despalier” should be written Despallier with two L. However, on Colonel Gray’s *“List of those who fell in the Alamo, March 6, 1836,”* five lines of which are reproduced beneath, we read Despalier spelled with one L only. San Antonian painter Theodore Gentilz does the same. To complicate things furthermore, in a letter dated June 22, 1835, James Bowie writes: “Mr. Dispalier.”



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Late 1850s, 6th plate ambrotype (reversed) of three unidentified girls from Cane River, Louisiana.

The musical instrument shown on the picture could possibly be Charles Despallier's accordion.

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David Crockett's fiddle is on display at the Witte Museum of San Antonio. The following passage is written on the inside, in faint pencil: "This fiddle is my property, Davy Crockett, Franklin County, Tenn. Feb. 14, 1819."



David Crockett's Fiddle.

David Crockett became a folk hero whose accomplishments were popularized in stage plays and almanacs in his own lifetime. After his death, he continued to be credited with brazen acts of colossal proportions. As historian Cecil Howse asserted in *A Man of Multiple Identity*, he also "was a fiddler, caller and dancer at the old square dances."

A first-hand recollection of David Crockett's fiddling skills can be found in *Life of Robert Hall, Indian Fighter and Veteran of Three Great Wars*. Hall tells of Crockett entertaining fellow woodsmen at a log-rolling in Tennessee before leaving for Texas:

He sent a negro for a fiddle, and he played a tune that sometimes soothes my old tired brain even to this day. That was the last big frolic that grand old Davy Crockett ever had in the land he loved so well.

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A second account comes from Mrs. Andrea Castañón de Villanueva (1803?-1899), a Mexican woman of worthy service during the 1840s in San Antonio de Bexar. Better known as Madam Candelaria after marrying Mr. Candelario Villanueva, her reminiscences varied from time to time. In her old age she settled on the story that she was in the Alamo to nurse James Bowie and that he was killed in her arms. Today, most historians are in disagreement over her claim, but her contemporaries believed her, and she had regular visitors eager to hear her tell of what she had seen. One year or so before her death, a local newspaper man quoted Madam Candelaria, describing a hotel she had kept, which “was always at the disposal of Houston, Austin, Travis, Lamar and such other daring spirits as were at that time committing themselves to the cause of Texas Freedom.” She also commented on David Crockett’s fiddling:

This man came to San Antonio only a few days before the invasion. The Americans extended him a warm welcome. They made

bonfires in the streets and Colonel Crockett must have made a great speech, for I never heard so much cheering and hurrahing in all my life. They had supper at my hotel and there was lots of singing, story telling and some drinking. Crockett played the fiddle and he played well if I am any judge of music.

The cornerstone of the legend of Colonel Crockett playing the violin inside the old mission’s walls during the 13-day siege is buried in the reminiscences of Mrs. Susannah Dickinson who endured the siege of the Alamo and witnessed its fall.

The following lines were published in *History of Texas*, thirty-nine years after the battle.

I knew Colonels Crockett, Bowie and Travis well. Col. Crockett was a performer on the violin, and often during the siege took it up and played his favorite tunes.



Madam Candelaria, 1898.

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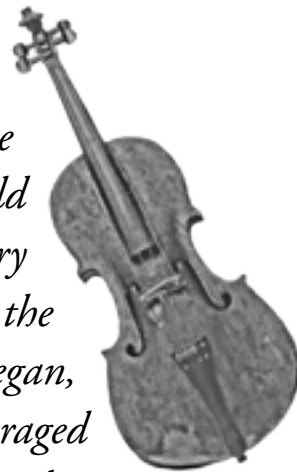


David Crockett fiddling for Jim Bowie nailed to his bed of pain at the Alamo.

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Another piece of evidence of Crockett's fiddling can be found in Amelia Williams' *Critical Study of the Siege of the Alamo*. For her doctoral dissertation, she interviewed Susanna Sterling, granddaughter of Susannah Dickinson. Mrs. Sterling, close to 70 years old at the time, related stories about the Alamo her grandmother had entertained her with while she was young. Amelia Williams wrote:

Mrs. Dickenson (sic), one of the survivors of the massacre, told that Colonel Crockett was very popular with all the soldiers at the Alamo and after the siege began, constantly cheered and encouraged the men. She also said that Crockett often 'played tunes on his fiddle' when the fighting was not brisk; and that sometimes he played in competition with John McGregor's bagpipes.



Mrs. Susan Sterling told me that in her childhood she spent much time with her grandmother, who told and retold to her many stories of the Alamo. The one story that never failed to amuse her was the account of the musical contest between David Crockett and John McGregor. She said that when the fighting would lull, and the Texans had time for rest and relaxation, John McGregor and David Crockett would give a sort of musical concert, or rather a musical competition, to see which one could make the best music, or the most noise—David with his fiddle and John with his bagpipes. She said McGregor always won so far as noise was concerned, for he made 'strange, dreadful sound' with his queer instrument.



Understandably, experts remain cautious about the violin on display at the Witte Museum of San Antonio.

Charles Kennon Quin, once mayor of the city, loaned this piece of personal property to the museum in 1934 and donated

it sixteen years later. He had received it as a gift from Mr. T.S. Quinn (no relation) a violinmaker from Russellville, Alabama. Before presenting the venerable musical relic to the mayor, T.S. Quinn had replaced the violin's tailpiece, fingerboard, and bridge; re-bored holes to adjust new pegs; and put on a new set of strings, restoring it to playing condition. Nevertheless, the Russellville craftsman preserved the original tailpiece and fingerboard, as well as two small rattlesnake tails which had been found inside the violin, and sent them to the mayor at the same time.

Today's historians consider it a vintage instrument assembled from pre-existent parts of a fiddle believed to have once belonged to the Alamo defender. Even if David Crockett once owned this violin on display at the museum, it can hardly be the instrument, or more exactly its composite, that he supposedly carried to the Alamo. It may be that the Colonel owned more than one, a belief asserted by owners of other Crockett's fiddles.

In a note placed right beneath this paragraph, Amelia Williams came back to that unusual musical contest:

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This early XIXth century bagpipe stock, confused with an ivory scarf ring by an unknown treasure hunter, was unearthed long ago from the original mission Alamo compound.



The Alamo old ivory bagpipe stock.

A stock is a short hollow part of a bagpipe that connects the bag to a drone, chanter, or blowpipe. Usually stocks are tubular in form. The stock is “tied in” to the bag, with the bag material being pushed into a groove on the lower surface of the stock by means of wrapping it with a strong cord.

Best remembered as “The Alamo Bagpiper,” John McGregor was probably born in Dull, Scotland, Dec. 1, 1797. At the age of twelve, he emigrated with his father, Thomas, sailing from Oban, Argyll on June 8, 1808, and arriving at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island two months later, on Aug. 6. It has been established that he had been given title to a piece of land in Burnet's Texas colony, in present-day Cherokee County, Texas, which he had farmed for a few years before going off to San Antonio de Bexar as a soldier. A single man, he joined the volunteer rebel army in 1835 as an artilleryman. He took part in the siege of Bexar and later served in the Alamo garrison as a second sergeant in Capt. William R. Carey's artillery company. He probably commanded a battery of guns on the walls.

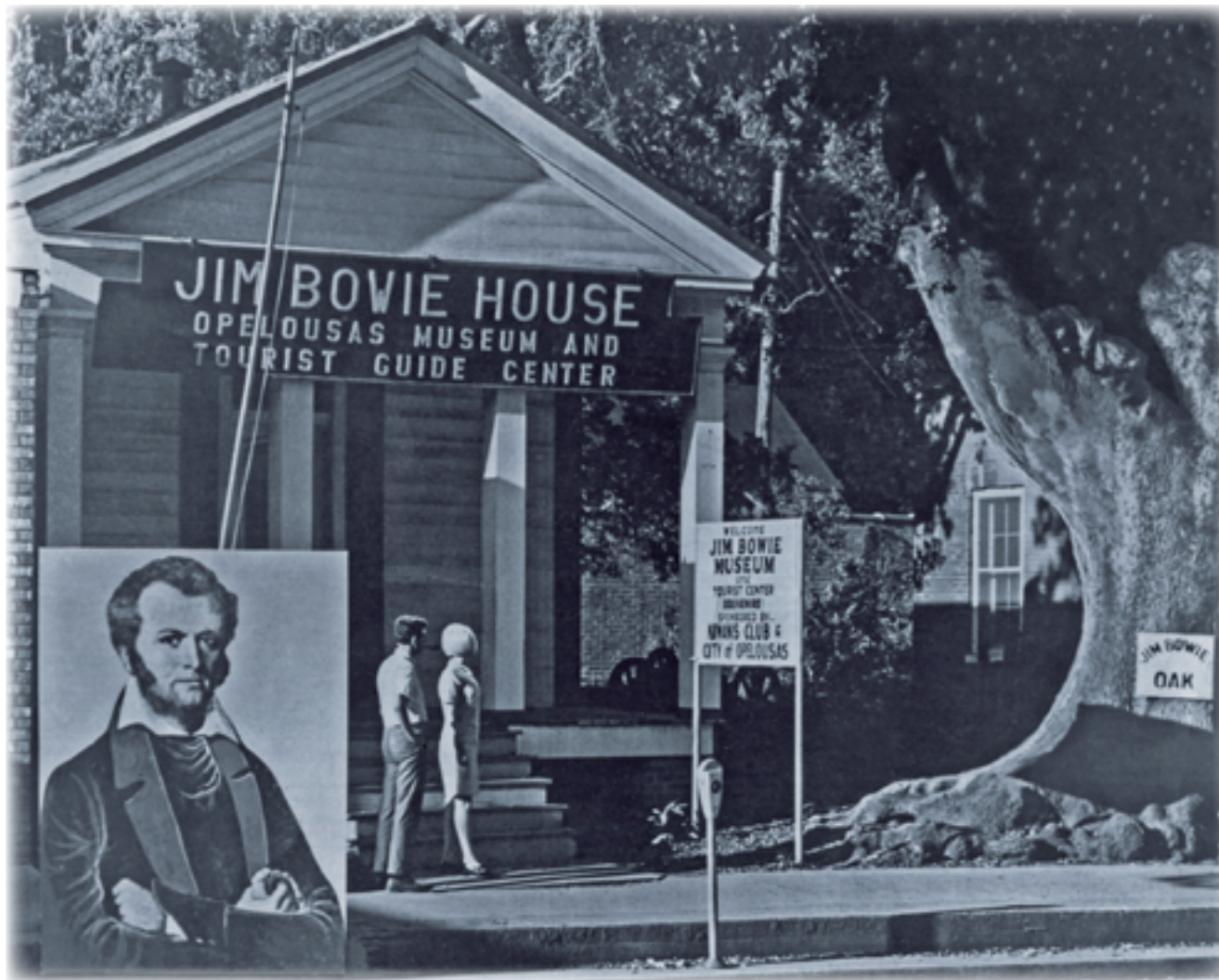
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The Death of the Red Deer, with McIntyre and McGregor, Stalker and Piper to the Duke of Atholl, 1821.

“John McGregor [an homonym of the Alamo defender], was a celebrated piper in his day, and is still able to play the old pipe with wonderful efficiency. He gained the prize pipe in July 1811 at Edinburgh and was for many years piper to the Duke of Atholl.” *The Perthshire Courier*, Scotland, 1857.

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Jim Bowie House and Oak, Opelousas, Louisiana.

“The Jim Bowie Museum is one of the many interesting tourist attractions in the Opelousas, La., area. Insert at bottom left is of the Alamo hero, Jim Bowie, who also gained fame for his Bowie knife.” Compliments of Louisiana Tourist Development Commission, Baton Rouge, La.
Date used: March 30, 1969.

In the summer of 1975 I embarked on a liner bound for New York, then travelled by rail south to Louisiana. During my two-month stay in the Bayou Country, I became acquainted with such renowned Cajun players as Dennis McGee, the Balfa Brothers, Nathan Abshire, Sady Courville, and Cyprien Landreneau. A lifelong friendship also began with two men of exception: Marc Savoy and Michael Doucet.

On the occasion of a Sunday accordion contest held in Church Point, I met Clary Johnson, tailor and musician, who introduced me to his famed neighbor Hadley Castille. The talented fiddler lived in Opelousas, St. Landry Parish, next to the Jim Bowie Courtyard. It was established on the site of what was believed to be a blacksmith shop once owned by the young adventurer. Next to it, shaded by a giant live oak tree over 350 years old, stood the Jim Bowie House. It served as a museum of the early life of the legendary Alamo commander-in-chief.

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I went home with Hadley, who was happy to show me around the monument. Among the Bowie artifacts on display were a hunting gun and a powder horn. Both had been loaned, years ago, by an aging downtown merchant, Leonce Roos. Tongue-in-cheek, Hadley spoke of him as “an antique collector, a whimsical dealer, a cotton buyer, and a vintage money safe enthusiast.”

Next morning, I parked my rented Chevrolet at 214 N. Main Street, in Opelousas. Here is how two local journalists described Roos’s den in 1949:

Antiques Galore In Leonce Roos’ Store...

The Roos shop is the mecca for tourists from all sections of the United States. Leonce Roos, one of Opelousas’ most popular bachelors, started collecting antiques ‘years ago’ and he bought the present Antique Shop for the express purpose. ‘Funny how a country boy like me can amass such a collection,’ he



Leonce Roos Antique Shop, Yambilee City, Opelousas, La., 1949.

**“Greatest hobbyist in United States,
who often refuses to sell
but always willing to show his collections.”**

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chuckles, and that is as far as you learn about the 'where and how' of his shop. But Roos is proud of his antiques and he is always ready to show them, many of which are so precious they are kept under lock and key.

James and Lillian Bourdier
Morning Advocate Magazine,
Opelousas, La., September 11, 1949.



Leonce Roos Building, 214 N. Main Street, Opelousas, La. Dec. 2011.

This downtown merchant's building was built in 1900 by Pascal Delbueno as a grocery store. Later it became the site of Leonce Roos Antiques. In the 1950s, the shop's windows were filled with thousands of marvels that made the delight of the passers-by. But Mr. Roos was famous for not selling most of these collectibles, as the price tag would simply read, "Not for sale."

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Still unaware that the warehouse-sized building was too small to hold Mr. Roos's collections, I rang a bell and the door silently swung open on well-oiled hinges. I found myself face-to-face with a fine-looking old lady, peering at me over a pair of gold rimmed spectacles. I could sense a deep sadness about her, mingled with great benevolence. I bowed politely, and told her my name. She, in turn, introduced herself as Miss Gertie Deshotel. Next, I explained with a smile that I had traveled all the way from Paris to Louisiana, mentioning that the shop had been recommended to me by Hadley Castille, who was still overjoyed by the violin he'd bought from Mr. Roos.

I then confided that my mother owned a large antique shop in Nice, on the French Riviera. It was filled with hundreds and hundreds of pieces of precious chinaware—Havilland, Carlsbad Austria, royal Saxony and Dresden—more than enough to set the tables of every wealthy family in the Principality of Monaco and Monte-Carlo. I, too, was a collector of antiques, having started at the age of ten.

But like my father, whose ancestor Captain Gouget had served Napoleon in France and Joseph Bonaparte in America, I fancied French and American militaria. Miss Deshotel nodded with sincere satisfaction. Mr. Roos was confined to his bed by illness that day, and she deemed me worthy of appreciating his collection.

Allowing my eyes to wander, I realized that a single afternoon would never suffice to admire the thousands of large and small pieces on display, a collection amassed over

decades. So I quickened my pace as I roamed through the aisles, saluting, in passing, such illustrious men as Charlemagne, Duguesclin, King Louis XIV, Lafayette, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and General Robert E. Lee, gazing down from portrait plates mounted in heavy gold casing or ebony frames.

When I returned to Miss Gertie, she was sitting at her desk, tidying up stacks of important papers.



Freight bill, Texas and New Orleans Railroad Co.

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“Did you enjoy the visit, Mr. Dôle?” she asked.

Instead of answering, I stifled a shout of surprise, for a framed piece of sheet music hanging right over her head had just caught my eye. It was dated 1874, and I read “David Crockett. March.” How odd! It was adorned with a mustachioed portrait of my hero, the king of the wild frontier, wearing a fur hat topped by a raccoon which bore an expression resembling that of a pussycat stalking a mouse.

Fortunately, my hostess had dropped her pencil just as she asked the question, and I had regained my composure by the time she straightened back up.

“Did you enjoy the visit?” she repeated, looking directly at me.

“Enormously... yes. Thank you, Miss,” I faltered, making an effort to express my gratitude as eloquently as possible. “This collection of thousands and thousands of wonderful pieces would turn more than one amateur green with envy,” said I at last.

Gertie Deshotel nodded with satisfaction at my answer, remarking, “A



Davy Crockett. March. Boston, 1874.

pity Mr. Roos is absent, or he would have taken you around himself. He is so proud of his collections that he always delights in showing them, especially to well-informed visitors. Only a few of these items are ever sold, and Mr. Roos plans to put an end to that practice soon, too. ‘I want to make it

into a museum,’ he keeps repeating, ‘and when I do I won't sell one piece.’”

She paused, and then added with genuine concern:

“Your mother's shop must be filled with treasures too, I imagine.”

“That's right, Miss. There are many antiques to be found on the French Riviera. In the 1920s, it was fashionable for millionaires to winter there, in splendidly furnished mansions. This explains the number of profitable estate sales, now that most of these wealthy people are gone.”

“I see. Was it the same in Monte-Carlo?”

“More or less. Gambling prevailed, you see.”

“How sad!”

“Indeed. I have been told that money games accounted more than 95 percent of Monaco's annual revenue in those days. As it happens, my father works for the Société des Bains de Mer, which still runs the roulette wheels. He is in charge of the maintenance of the Casino, as well as the magnificent 1900 opera building.”

“Much better! I love bel canto.”

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“I enjoy it too. Moreover, my father’s professional responsibilities include the technical organization of galas chaired by Prince Rainier, Grace Kelly’s husband and Aristote Onassis’s best friend.”

“Really?”

“Yes. But what my dad loves best is to roll up his sleeves and spend the night polishing Napoleonic relics.”

Miss Deshotel giggled. “He sounds just as fanatical about his collection as Mr. Roos is.”

The ice was broken. Although I understood that there was practically nothing for sale in this crazy place, I thought that the time had come to try my luck.

“I’m afraid I omitted to give you the reason for my visit, Miss Deshotel,” said I.

“I suppose you are in search of antiques to bring back to France for your dear mom,” she replied.

“No, I must admit that I am here for my own collection. I would like to acquire one or more ‘relics’ of Colonel Bowie and other defenders of the Alamo.”



“Antique Galore in Leonce Roos’ Store.”

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“Alas! These are untraceable pieces nowadays. Except for the flintlock rifle and the powder horn that Mr. Roos has temporarily lent to the Jim Bowie House, but they are not for sale. I do not see what we could provide. Unless...”

Gertie Deshotel left her seat abruptly. She hovered for a moment over a nearby cardboard box, and then raised the lid, taking out an old brown paper envelope. Then she ceremoniously spread out its contents on her large writing pad. I looked on, breathless with suspense, as if she were rolling dice. With an indefinable smile, she handed me the envelope, so that I could read the label:

*Authentic Alamo Relics
Ivory Ring – Whistle Brooch
and Buttons.*

My heart started beating wildly. Oh God! Could it be possible? My glance was riveted by the items scattered on the green blotter: a yellowed ivory ring, a clamp of rusted iron, and five tarnished metal discs devoid of decoration. “This

is about all I can show you, I’m afraid,” Gertie Deshotel sighed.

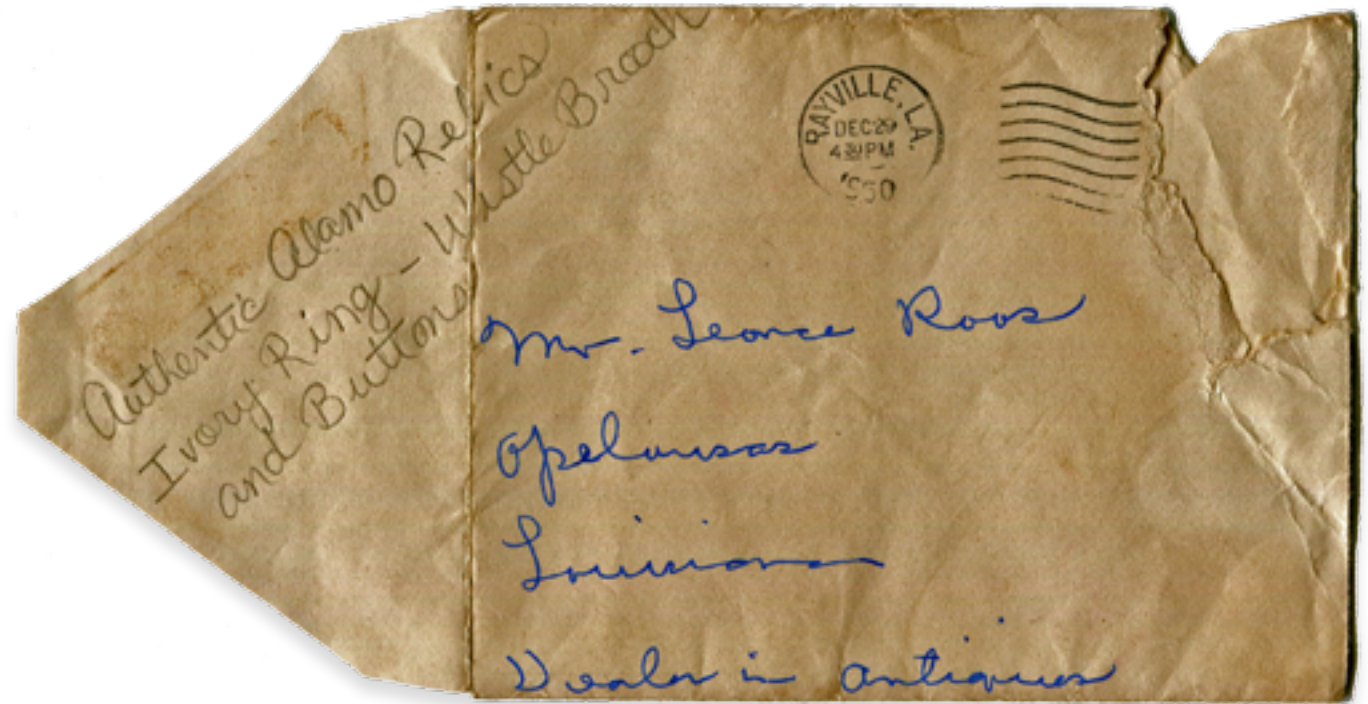
“On the contrary, Miss, this is enormous!” I exclaimed. “If you are willing to sell me these relics, I am eager to buy them!”

“In that case, Mr. Dôle, please allow me to place a telephone call.”

She took up the headset of an old black ebonite telephone, dialed a number

she obviously knew by heart, and engaged the person on the other end of the line in an earnest conversation, pleading my good faith and breeding. Finally, she turned to me and announced: “Mr. Roos wants twenty five dollars for the lot.”

“That’s fine!” I cried, ecstatic at my good fortune. I was fumbling for my wallet. “And please thank Mr. Roos for being so kind.”



The old kraft paper envelope.

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*Alamo bagpipe stock, jaw harp
and military buttons.*

I left the antique shop in a state of euphoria, having come into possession of living memories of the Alamo, extracted from the refuse still piled up in the fort, years and years after the battle. Tejano kids like the three on the 1849 daguerreotype often spent their spare time in burrowing around the fort's ruins. When they had the luck to pick up some palpable traces of the Texians' legendary courage, they toured the hotels, offering the mementos to travellers visiting San Antonio. I was thus now the happy owner of an old bagpipe stock (misidentified as a scarf ring,) a broken jaw harp (mistakenly labeled "brooch"), and five period military buttons.

A few days later, I was pleasantly surprised to be contacted by Leonce Roos in person. I was inside Marc Savoy Music Center in Eunice when the telephone rang. Hadley Castille had undoubtedly told Roos that that was where I spent my mornings. Mr. Roos, courtly, invited me to visit the next Sunday, and I responded enthusiastically, as one can guess.

It was on September 7 (according to my diary), the day before I recorded the Balfa Brothers in Basile, that Gertie Deshotel led me to the back of the antiques emporium, where Leonce Roos awaited me. Try to imagine my astonishment when I saw him sitting on a sort of fantastical throne that resembled a crouching grizzly bear. He welcomed me in French with a "Bienvenue, mon ami!" Then he jerked a lever on the rustic seat, and a furious grizzly, its fangs bared, immediately leaped out from under his legs. I jumped backwards and my host burst out laughing. When he regained his composure, he said, "This 'grizzly bear chair,' built by a half crazy frontier fiddle player named Seth Kinman, was presented

to Lincoln at the end of the War between the States. It had been booby-trapped by irredentist Southerners, but ole Abe was smart enough to keep his tuches clear of its clutches. When I acquired it, almost a century had elapsed and it had become a harmless chair again – although undeniably weird."



*Seth Kinmann fiddling
on his grizzly-bear chair.*

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Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

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The antiquarian rose and invited me to sit me by his side on a sofa.

“Gertie told me the other day on the phone that your mother runs an antique shop in Nice and your father works for the Prince of Monaco.”

“That’s right, Mr. Roos.”

He nodded and asked:

“What is your dad’s first name, Mr. Dole?”

“Well, he has three: Emile, René, Moïse. His parents used to call him Emile, but my mom preferred René when they married, and he has gone by that name ever since.”

“But what about ‘Moïse’? Is he Jewish, perhaps, like me?”

“No, Mr. Roos. His godfather, a fervent reader of the Good Book, just happened to choose ‘Moïse.’”

“I see.”

I went on:

“Still, historically speaking, in the Middle Ages, Jews were often named for towns, and our family name is typical. I believe my forefathers chose to convert to

Catholicism to preserve their descendants from ceaseless persecutions.”

I paused, and added:

“I’m proud to say that Dad rescued several Jewish families from the Gestapo during World War II.”

“Did he really?”

“Yes, indeed. He supplied them with new identities, complete with official cards and stamps stolen from the Kommandantur offices in Nice.”

“How courageous! He risked the firing squad.”

“Pah! I have never seen my dad act like a coward.”

Leonce Roos nodded once again then declared with a flame in his eyes:

“If Mr. René Dôle were here right now, I would take his hand and kiss it, to thank him for his righteous actions to save the members of my tribe.”

Months went by. I was back in Paris, living a bohemian life in my Saint-Germain-des-Près lodgings. One

morning, while I was editing tapes for Moses Asch at Folkways records, the postman knocked, carrying a parcel postmarked Opelousas. Inside, I found a small cylindrical object, carefully wrapped in thick linen. It was accompanied by a letter in a round, meticulous hand, the same one I had seen on the old brown envelope containing the Alamo relics. It read:

Dear Mr. Dôle,

I am saddened to report you the death of my employer and friend of many years, Mr. Leonce Roos. He passed in his sleep on Wednesday, May 19th. Please keep him in your thoughts and prayers. He was one of the best men I ever met.

Shortly before Mr. Roos left us for a better world, he asked me to send you the attached present, as a token of his affection. It is an old ivory hunting whistle, owned by James Bowie.

According to Mr. Roos’s research, the later-to-be famous ornithologist John James Audubon acquired this whistle in New Orleans, where he lived with his wife during

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the winter of 1821-1822. He used it to call back his dog when he went hunting birds in the countryside. He presented it to James Bowie when he met and befriended him at a ball in Feliciana parish sometimes about 1824-1825.

Mr. Roos said that it was exactly the kind of relic you were looking for, and that you'd love it. I am sure of it too.

Please come say hello when you are in Opelousas again. I enjoyed your visit and so did Mr. Roos, who often recalled your father's brave deeds for the Jewish people.

*Truly yours,
Gertie Deshotel.*

Deeply touched by the old collector's generous gesture, and moved by his early demise, I unwrapped my gift and gave a cry of delight. A small bearded fiddler, wearing a top hat, looked me straight in the eye. So here was the whistle Audubon had allegedly given to Jim Bowie. How incredible! How marvelous!

*
**



John James Audubon.

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James Bowie's hunting whistle.

On Christmas Eve of 2011, thanks to the kindness of the owners of nearby Café Breen, I photographed the now empty rooms of the Roos shop, so dashing in its day. I also paid a visit to Nick Fontenot at the Opelousas City Court. He had known the antiquarian well. When I mentioned the musical relics and hunting whistle Roos had let me have in the 70s, he was not the least surprised. As a cotton broker, Roos travelled Louisiana and Texas extensively, dealing with poor country folks and wealthy plantation owners. He often relieved them of “junk,” valuable in his expert eye alone. Comparing the profusion I had admired in 1975 with the few broken leftovers I had just seen, I understood that the dream

My neighbor, the late Alain Vian, expert in antique musical instruments, gracefully evaluated this whistle. He declared it dated back to the early 1800s and had been handcrafted in Dieppe, Normandy. This large seaport imported and reworked elephant defenses' ivory from Africa.

of a lifetime had collapsed after the great collector's disappearance. Mr. Roos had passed away in Mai 1976, some eight months after my visit, and the museum he had dreamt of had never materialized.



*Leonce Roos' Antique leftovers.
December, 2011.*

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I had to tell Mr. Fontenot about my own “Jim Bowie Jew's harp,” from the hero's Louisiana days. It was presented to me in the late 90s near Opelousas by a woman born nearly a century earlier in Cheneyville on Bayou Boeuf. She told me the story that had come down to her through family belief. The City Court clerk agreed that such oral tradition could not be cited as factual evidence. However, his keen interest

in local history had taught him that around 1820, both Jim Bowie and his brother Rezin owned properties along the Bayou Boeuf, so named for the cattle that came to water at its banks. Their homes were located just downstream of Rapides Parish, where the bayou cuts into the south-west corner of Avoyelles and then flows into St. Landry parish. A general store a few miles away, in Cheneyville, later to be known as Bennett's, recorded purchases made in 1817

by a customer named Jim Bowie. There the young hothead, who boasted of riding “cocodries” through the swamps, could find gambling tables, whiskey, dance, and amusement, sometimes shortened by a deadly knife fight with a jealous rival. And so the threads of a Cheneyville family legend were woven with proof from a general-store ledger to form a tapestry of truth about the treasures I possessed.



Bayou Boeuf and Jim Bowie's purported Jaw Harp.

When Jim Bowie arrived in the area of Bayou Boeuf, the land was cheap, speculation rampant and the settlers, soon to be the landed gentry, a fiercely independent breed who often terminated differences with knives, swordcanes and pistols. African slaves, sometimes legally purchased, sometimes smuggled, were brought in to supply the backbreaking labor required to push back the forest and create large plantations.



Jim Bowie.

MORE TRACES

And to finish with, here are a few other Texas Revolution artifacts that I own.



*Musket Shot and Buttons
From the Goliad Massacre.*

These relics were unearthed near La Bahia and sold to me by Mr. Alfred Rodriguez, owner of the *History Shop of San Antonio*.

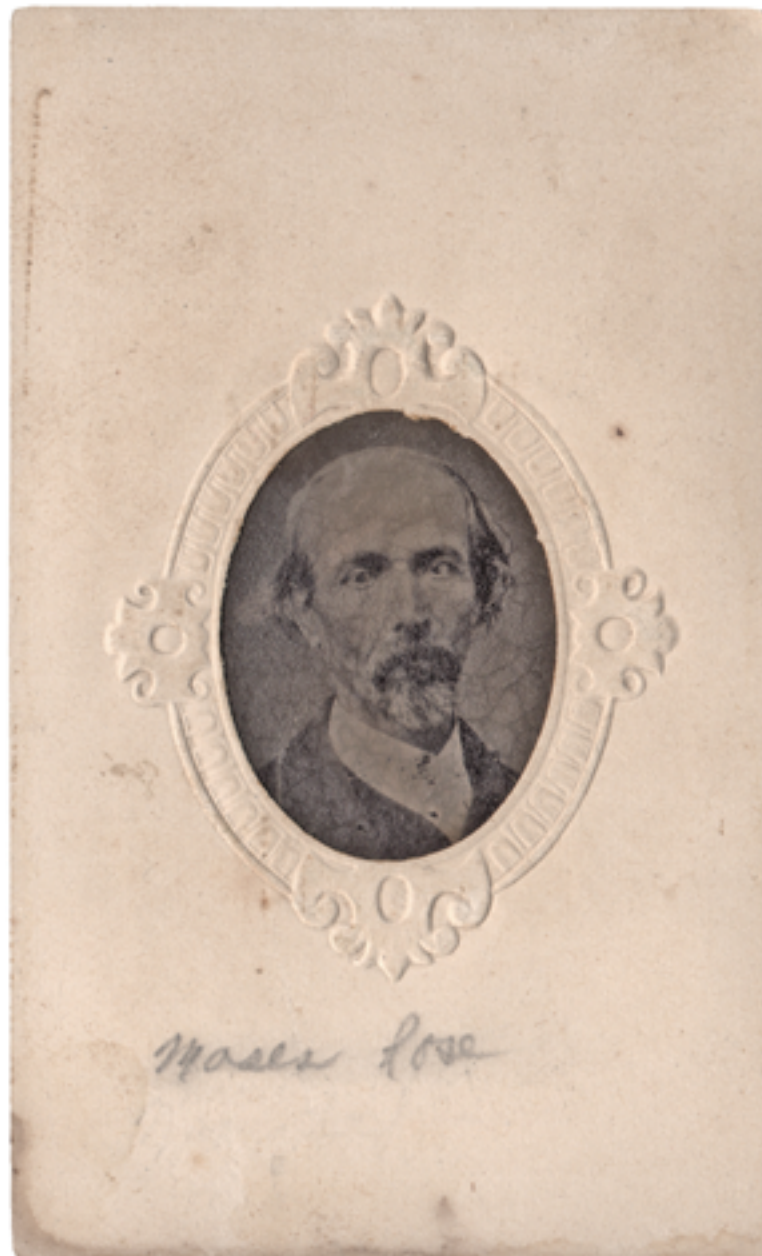


Canonball From the Battle of Coleto.

This cannonball was picked up long ago by locals at Coleto Creek and sold to me by *Hanging Tree Antiques* in Goliad.

MOSES ROSE

The only known alleged picture of Moses Rose is this crude portrait made some time before his death, the date and circumstances of which remain to be fully documented. It is a small ferrotype kept in its period paper sleeve, most likely a partial copy of a larger print produced by a specific earlier photographic process known as daguerreotype or ambrotype. In Reconstruction days, copying old pictures was very common, with many photographers' advertisements extolling the virtue of having old portraits reprinted.



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I bought this precious document in an antique mall of DeSoto Parish, Louisiana, which featured hundreds of items from a wide variety of local dealers. The seller remembered having acquired it in an estate sale in Mansfield, many years earlier. It lay in a thick folder full of photographs and magazine clippings. Its owner was a “French guy,” a newspaperman by trade, he said.

A typewritten label glued on the back reads:

“Venu de France avec un passeport pris sous un nom supposé”

(He came from France with a passport issued under an assumed identity)

Could it be that the local French-speaking journalist whose name the dealer omitted to mention was writing a column about the “soldier of the Alamo” on the occasion of the battle’s centenary? Pity the article was not pinned to the old ferrotype.

Efforts to locate the original newspaper have been fruitless, and in the absence of more conclusive proof, it can only be said that this might be the portrait of William P. Zuber’s mysterious antihero, Moses Rose.



Moses Rose Historical Gravesite.

Even Rose’s final resting place remains controversial. There is no tangible proof that the “Soldier of the Alamo” was buried in the Ferguson Family cemetery, located in the woods about four miles north of Logansport, Louisiana. Few original grave markers remained when Raymond Powell, a member of the DeSoto Parish Historical Society, discovered a tomb marked only with a yucca plant. Mr. Powell convinced himself that it belonged to Moses Rose, for the yucca, “native to South Texas, had to be brought into Louisiana,” he thought. On the debatable strength of this clue, the DeSoto Parish Historical Society nevertheless erected a new granite stone and approved Moses Rose’s supposed gravesite as a Historical Site.

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