Mrs. Maverick
Texas Pioneer, Frontier Wife, Mother, Nation Builder

top – Comanche Lookout by Arthur T. Lee
bottom – Sam Maverick Jr. & Co. by Carl von Iwonski

an oldfashionedhistory™ by Bill Kitchens
We've all heard a good deal about an adventurous fellow named “Maverick”, so much so that it might lead skeptics to doubt the whole "Maverick" legend. Well, there really was a Maverick – Sam Maverick, a larger than life Texas patriarch. Even more surprising, there was a Mrs. Maverick - Mary Ann Adams Maverick, who rode off into the western sunset with Sam, and into legend herself.
This is a story of America and an American family - Texas pioneers who helped tame a wild land and build a great nation. It is only a small part of the larger story that began before them, and continues...to what end we do not know, that depends on us. We could enter at many points, but we will enter the story on a fine spring day in 1836 with the chance meeting of two riders in the countryside just north of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Tuscaloosa was a relatively new town (though the capitol of the very new state of Alabama at the time) built at the shoals of the Black Warrior River where the steamboats dropped off their cargoes and passengers, and turned around to head back down river to Mobile and the Gulf of Mexico.

The, not so young, man was stopping in Tuscaloosa for a while on family business, but he was really on his way home to South Carolina from Texas. Only a few weeks before, he had been hauled up in front of a firing squad in San Antonio, a very close call in a life of close calls. Perhaps that experience had caused him to think, “Is this to be the end of Sam Maverick?” Perhaps he had begun to think of settling down, marrying and having a family like other men.

Mary Ann Adams may have been thinking of the same things, as young women of eighteen frequently do. Love, marriage, children, yes; but fear, hardship, grief, and loneliness, probably not. Young women even on the frontier seldom thought of such things, but found the strength to face them, as Mary did. Perhaps the pioneer spirit, and the strength to match, were born into such people. Certainly, Mary had her share of strength and she was already having to draw on it since her father died.

Mary’s father, William Adams, had come to the southern frontier in search of greater opportunity than he would have had in the settled areas, but he didn’t expect it to be handed to him. Adams joined up with Andy Jackson’s volunteers and fought the British at the Battle of New Orleans, freeing up a large part of new America for settlement. Adams settled across the river from the new town of Tuscaloosa and began building a plantation and law practice. Mary was still a young girl, still living in a crude log cabin, when a fever took her father.
It was tough after that, but the family hung together and managed, and before Sam rode up, they had moved into a new house.

Mary might not have been considered a beauty in some circles, back in the wealthy Virginia society, for instance, where her parents came from. She might have been considered a little tall, and a little large boned. But riding through the newly settled land, confidently tall and straight, in her new green muslin dress, she must have been very beautiful. More importantly, as time would tell, she proved to be an extremely strong and durable woman, and a fine Christian lady.

Those traits must have been apparent to Sam Maverick. At thirty three, Maverick was quite a bit older than Mary Adams, and already had more than one man's share of adventure under his belt. In the summer of 1836 though, he seemed to have settled his course in life, and Mary was to be part of it. They were married in August of that year, at the home of Mary's widowed mother three miles north of Tuscaloosa. An entry in Mary's diary on the day of their marriage indicates that she was not totally unaware of what she was getting into with Sam Maverick. She wrote, "I was married to Samuel A. Maverick, late of South Carolina, now a Texan." A Texan indeed!

Samuel Augustus Maverick ("Gus" to his father), was born in South Carolina, the son of a wealthy businessman and planter of old Quaker heritage. He was educated in the law at Yale, and seemed predestined for a stellar political career. But events, as they say, intervened. Issues that were to break apart the country in a few decades were already bubbling up in the political discourse there in South Carolina in the early 1830's. And the Maverick's were, ironically, mavericks on those issues.

One day, the elder Sam Maverick was making a speech in opposition to his neighbor John C. Calhoun's position favoring nullification and secession. A young rowdy in the crowd began heckling Mr. Sam. Well, what was there for young Sam to do but challenge the fellow to a duel. After slightly wounding his erstwhile adversary, Sam loaded up the fellow, carried him to the Maverick plantation, Montpelier, and saw to his recovery.
Even after so gentlemanly a fracas, it seemed advisable for Sam to leave Montpelier (r), and South Carolina. It was apparent by then that his anti-secession views would not take him far in South Carolina politics.

Sam came down to Lawrence County, Alabama to run his widowed sister’s plantation; but that arrangement didn’t last long, even though it proved fateful. She soon remarried, and Sam was off to Texas by 1835. Maverick roamed around Matagorda for a while looking for land, but he came down with a fever. Going inland in search of a healthier place, he wandered into San Antonio and immediately fell in love with it. San Antonio was a very dubious destination for one’s health in those days though. Hardly had he arrived, when an army of ‘Texains’ under Steven F. Austin laid siege to the town.

Spain had welcomed Americans to settle in Texas; the Spanish had never been able to develop Texas because of the ferocity of the Kiowa and Comanche Indians. Since the re-introduction of horses into North America by the Spanish, the Plains Indians, who lived mostly as raiders, were able to sweep down into Texas at will, devastating most of the Spanish attempts at settlement. Only San Antonio and a few other larger settlements held out.

Large land grants were awarded to American entrepreneurs like Austin to promote American settlement. These are shown on Austin’s 1837 Map of Texas (r). But the rapid influx of American settlers, and offers from the US to buy Texas, soon alarmed the Spanish authorities and they tried to shut off immigration.

During the period following the Napoleonic Wars, which crippled Spain’s military power, Mexico revolted against Spain (with considerable help from the American settlers). Eventually, in 1821, Mexico was established as a constitutional republic.
The new Mexican government continued the dealings with American “Impresarios” for settlement, but concerns over the ‘Americanization’ of Texas only grew. New conflicts arose also – over slavery (which the new government opposed), religious freedom, taxes, land ownership.

When Gen. Santa Anna overthrew the Mexican government and established a dictatorship, a wide spread civil war broke out, lasting decades. Several Mexican states and localities declared independence. The Texas Americans, or Texians as they first were known, also decided to break away from Mexico.

San Antonio was already a town fortified against Indian attacks, most recently the Apache, but Santa Anna’s military fortified it further against the American rebels. The military had long before taken over the old Catholic mission, Misión San Antonio de Valero, better known as the Alamo, for their garrison. The Alamo mission complex, of which only the chapel is usually depicted, was also a fortified complex with thick walls, battlements, gun ports and artillery emplacements.

All Norte Americanos living in San Antonio were immediately suspected as spies. Sam Maverick and a Mr. Smith were actually hauled up before a firing squad. Only the entreaties of Mrs. Smith saved them, and they were expelled from town, or escaped, it is unclear which. The Commandante of San Antonio had been right though, Maverick had been spying out the Mexican defenses.

His information, and brash confidence, helped persuade Austin to attack the fortified and numerically superior Mexican army force. Maverick guided the advance party of Texians and rebel Mexicans and took part in some of the heaviest fighting. After five days of fierce house to house fighting, the remaining Mexican force, under French mercenary Gen. Cos, ran up a white flag over the Alamo.

After the Texian victory, due in no small part to the newcomer, Maverick was elected a delegate to Washington-on-the-Brazos, the convention where Texas became the Republic of Texas. That honor undoubtedly saved his life.
Santa Anna, heading a large and professionally trained army (with an officer corps heavily populated by mercenary veterans of the Napoleonic Wars), soon surrounded the Texians holed up in the Alamo. Reluctant to leave his comrades, Maverick delayed his departure for the Convention. Finally he and another delegate slipped out to serve both as delegates to the Convention and emissaries for aid to their beleaguered comrades. By then, though, there was no time for rescue. Before Col. Travis’ letter could be read at Washington-on-the-Brazos, 150 soggy miles distant, Santa Anna already had his revenge, retaking the Alamo and killing all the storied defenders – Travis, Crockett, Bowie, and the rest.

Theodore Gentilz’s 1895 rendering of the “Storming of the Alamo”, based upon interviews with witnesses and inspection of the site prior to restoration in 1850, is held to be one of the most accurate depictions of the Alamo mission/garrison complex.

Maverick and the other delegate from San Antonio, Jose Antonio Navarro, signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, but Santa Anna was not through with the Texians. He continued his quest to crush the rebels, burning all their settlements, farms and plantations as he swept up toward Washington-on-the-Brazos just northwest of present day Houston. It was the American’s time now, though, to settle scores. Gen. Sam Houston and his newly formed Army of the Republic of Texas fell on Santa Anna, defeating and capturing him at San Jacinto, just outside Houston. In return for his freedom, Santa Anna recognized the Republic of Texas; but never gave it peace.

It was a bittersweet victory for Sam Maverick. Just before the battle, he had come down with fever and chills, probably malarial fever, which was rampant in those parts, and he was not able to place his own life again on the line in that battle for Texas.
No one ever doubted Maverick’s courage or criticized him for “escaping” death at the Alamo; that is, no one else. There is a fairly common emotional syndrome, nowadays called “Survivors Guilt”, that often leads sufferers into extremes of risk or effort in a search for atonement for having lived when others died. Though Maverick was an adventurous and hardy soul to begin with, his later life seemed obsessed with a “duty to poor Texas” – at all costs to himself, and his family.

Maverick returned to the US to recover, though, and found himself in another campaign in Tuscaloosa a short while later. Of that campaign, far less is known. Tuscaloosa, end of the line for the riverboats coming up from he Gulf, was on the way from Texas up to the Tennessee Valley and sister Elizabeth's plantation, and on up to South Carolina, where he was headed.

"While riding along a country road near Tuscaloosa, he met, also on horseback, a lovely blue-eyed blond woman in a green muslin dress, Mary Ann Adams", their granddaughter Rena Maverick Green wrote in her book Samuel Maverick, Texan. They met, they married. Unfortunately there are no images of the young Maverick couple, so imagination will have to suffice.

They spent the first year and a half of their marriage shuttling back and forth between families and having their first child, Sam Jr. Taking a huge gamble and turning down flat the offer of his father's estate, Sam, Mary, and the baby, along with Mary's fifteen year old brother Robert, returned to Texas in the cold, wet winter of 37/38. A bad case of "Texas fever" people said.

Maverick seemed to have been a carrier of that strange malady. Shortly after the Maverick’s wedding, another of Mary's brothers, William, had set out for San Antonio. But then, "Texas fever" was pretty much epidemic in Alabama in those days.

Another epidemic ruled their choice of times to travel. Deciding to go overland, any attempt to cross, in the summer, the Mississippi, the Sabine, and the innumerable lesser streams, bayous and swamps that lay in their path would surely have brought fever and possibly death to their enterprise.
So, on December 7, 1837 the party set out from Tuscaloosa. The three Mavericks, Robert Adams, their servants (ok, their slaves - four men, armed and loyal, two women, four children), a carriage, a Kentucky wagon, three extra saddle horses and a filly.

Mrs. Maverick reported in her memoirs that all went well, for a time. Then winter set in. Rain, mud, swollen streams, howling wind, numbing cold, and more mud marked the next few weeks. Mary's welcome to Texas was just about as auspicious as Sam's. But they plodded, pushed and heaved their way through it.

They reached a Major Sutherland’s hospitable spread on the Navidad River west of Houston (or what would become the city of Houston) but still some distance from San Antonio, on February the fourth. And there they stayed until late spring.

Except Sam. He went on ahead to San Antonio, then down to New Orleans, and a few other places. Shopping for furniture for their new home, taking care of business matters, Texas politics - lots to do. There were always lots of things for San Maverick to do. But he wrote to Mary from San Antonio: "Oh, how I long for repose from this rambling adventurous life in the sweet, delicious comforts of home...". He was always good to write home.

Spring came, Sam returned, and the Maverick party set out for the last leg of their journey. Though the weather was fine now there were other dangers to encounter. The newly and sparsely settled lands they traveled through were still subject to Indian attack. Settlers, in fact, were being killed all around them.

A band of seventeen Tonkawas rode up to the Maverick column on the trail, affecting friendship. They carried fresh scalps (and other "putrefying" body parts) however, ostensibly from a battle with the Comanches. Mrs. Maverick described a moment of that adventure in her memoirs: "I was frightened almost to death, but tried not to show my alarm. They rode up to the carriage window and asked to see the 'papoose'. First one, then another came, and I held up my little Sammy, and smiled at their compliments. But I took care to have my pistol and bowie knife visible..."(Yep, Sam Maverick, it appears, was a pretty good judge of women).
The Maverick party consisted of six heavily armed men, not to mention a determined female, and the Indians drifted off peacefully, after keeping a close eye on the convoy for several days. One of the slaves, Griffin, had stood by the Maverick tent armed with gun and axe taunting the last couple of followers to try something.

So they made their way to their new home in San Antonio, finally, in June of 1838. Sam had immediately fallen in love with San Antonio, but it was not so with everyone. One visitor in those days described the town as being very picturesque – from a distance, with its white washed houses; but up close it was simply a collection of squat adobe buildings, many in badly deteriorated condition; muddy streets when it rained, and dusty when it didn’t.

Still, it had a river running through it, and in time stone bridges and parks along the riverside; but that was in the future.

Of course, it also had the Alamo, which irresistibly drew Sam. As soon as possible, Sam built them a new wood frame home across the plaza from the Alamo ruins. He had the lumber hauled in. Until then, living conditions were primitive. Mary made the drawing above of the Alamo Chapel as it was when they arrived in San Antonio. It stayed in that ruined condition for many years.

If Mary had expected to find adventure in Texas, she was not to be disappointed. San Antonio was under almost constant attack from some quarter. Sam rode as a volunteer with the Texas Rangers, or their predecessors actually, the “Minute Men” under the youthful but redoubtable Capt. Jack Hays. In those days, Sam always had a “war horse” saddled and loaded with guns and ammunition, water and food. When the cathedral bell rang they would ride off to rescue some ranch or wagon train under attack, or try to overtake fleeing Comanches and rescue survivors of a massacre taken hostage. Mrs. Maverick never knew if Sam would ride back, but he always did.
The Maverick home became something of a haven for those rough and ready men as Mary patched up their bullet, knife and arrow wounds, and tended to captives they’d rescued from the Indians. All that, of course, was in addition to taking care of her own growing family, leading San Antonio’s social life (what little there was of it), and occasionally having to face down rowdies herself. Yet, she wrote he mother, “I can find nothing to regret – but the distance which separates us from so many dear friends.”

Sometimes the fighting came right to her front door. In March of 1840, a band of Comanches attacked San Antonio. Well, actually San Antonio attacked the Indians. A band of Comanches had ridden into town to barter ransom for fifteen white captives. Some of the townspeople didn’t like the terms though, or the condition of the ‘sample’ captive – a fifteen year old girl who’d had her nose burned off, among other barbaric tortures.

The townspeople decided to trade some of the captors for the other captives. Mary understood that sentiment; she described the poor girl’s condition as “sickening to behold, and made one’s blood boil for vengeance”. Mary had been watching the proceedings from her front yard when the fighting broke out. She was transfixed by the scene - until she saw a knife wielding brave coming for her. She barely made it inside and barred the front door. Turning around, Mary saw her husband and brother pouring over a land survey totally unaware of the battle going on out front; or that out back their cook, a black man armed with a skillet, was fending off the Comanche from a couple of the Maverick kids.

The gritty cook and the kids came through unscathed, but over forty people died that day (including one Comanche behind the Maverick house). The other white captives were never heard from again.

Despite all their hardships, the Mavericks thrived during those early years in San Antonio. Sam was elected Mayor of San Antonio in ’39. He was a leading figure in the state legislature and a leader in promoting the annexation of Texas to the US. But, for reasons including slavery, relations with Mexico, conflict with England over the Oregon boundary, that did not happen right away.
Their second child, another son (whose middle name was Antonio) born in ‘39, was the first full blooded Norte Americano child born in the city. Daughter Agatha was born in ‘41 and they continued to do a pretty good job of populating San Antonio all by themselves. Sam junior seemed like his father, remarkable in health, stamina, and courage. But the others needed a lot of nursing through different crises and Mary had her hands full..

By 1842, Maverick was said to be the largest landowner in Texas. Sam, however, disdained the usual cattle ranching business, being more interested in land speculation. Receiving a herd of cattle as payment on a debt, he put them on his place at Matagorda and forgot about them for years. As his herd proliferated, local folks began to regard the unbranded offspring, known locally as "Maverick's", as a natural resource free for the taking. When Maverick’s plans did get around to the herd, he sent some cowhands to round up unbranded steers and nearly touched off a range war. That incident put new laws on the books in Texas and "maverick" into the nation's vocabulary.

But things never went along well for long at a stretch. Only a couple of years after the Comanche episode it was the Mexican army again. Word came to town that Mexican soldiers were crossing the Rio Grande and heading toward San Antonio. In what was known as “the Runaway Scrape of ‘42”, most of the Texians abandoned San Antonio and that whole section of Texas, and fled to safer locations.

It was a harrowing and hard experience – bad weather, miserable living conditions for most of the time they traveled, until they reached a place they felt safe. It took the Minute Men (many of whom, like Sam, had to escort their families to safety) a little time to raise a sufficient force to tackle the Mexicans. When Capt. Hays, Maverick, and the others returned to San Antonio, the homes and businesses of the Texians were ruined and the Mexican Army gone.

Mary and the children didn’t return to San Antonio for several years, until after the US annexation of Texas and the Mexican War. The family settled in on DeCros Point near Matagorda on the coast, in the vicinity, in fact, of the Battle of San Jacinto.
They liked it there, especially Mary and the children. They enjoyed the coast, the climate, and the neighbors; including many old friends and relations from Alabama who had found their cure for Texas Fever in Matagoda. Mary wrote that Matagorda had the “most cultivated society in Texas”. Sam though, had to return frequently to San Antonio both because of his land dealings, and as a practicing member of the Texas Bar. One trip was particularly fateful.

Santa Anna sent one of his French mercenaries, Gen. Woll, with around 1400 troops on a raid to disrupt Texas. Woll found the Americans unprepared and he attacked San Antonio during the session of district court. This time it was Sam, and a large part of the Texas judiciary and bar, including Mary’s uncle, who were holed up in San Antonio against an overwhelming force (holed up in the Maverick’s own home). This was not to be The Alamo II however.

After a brief fire fight, Woll offered them honorable terms of surrender – to be held as prisoners of war. Maverick was against it, but the majority voted for surrender. There was some "confusion" about the terms of surrender however. The prisoners, now totaling 176, were marched out of town in a rapid retreat ahead of a growing force of Minute Men, including Mary’s two brothers, who were already taking a toll on Woll’s forces and blocking his plan to march on Austin.

Due to conflicts among the Minute Men leadership, much to Jack Hays disgust, Woll, with his prisoners, escaped back across the border. The prisoners were marched deep into Mexico, with several dying on the way.

Another bitter turn of fate claimed another member of the Maverick household. Immediately upon learning of Sam’s capture, Mary had sent out their faithful Griffin with money hoping to ransom Sam. Griffin fell in with a small group of Minute Men on their way to join up with the main body, but they ran into Mexican troops first. Griffin fought fiercely to the death, along with most of the rest. The survivors joined the other San Antonio prisoners on their march. Sam lamented Griffin as “my brother in arms”.

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Of all the hardships and separations the Mavericks were to endure, this was certainly one of the most bitter. Time wore on as hopes of early release were dashed over and over. Conditions in the Perote Prison near Vera Cruz were bad, mortality among the prisoners was high. The prisoners tried to escape but failed. As punishment, in the notorious White Bean Lottery, one in ten of the prisoners was selected for execution.

Remarkably though, in their letters to each other, Sam and Mary each seemed intent on outdoing the other in reassurance and optimism. Sam wrote at the end of December '42: "Beloved wife, A gentleman now calls to stay only two minutes. I therefore can only say that I am in first rate good health, better than you ever saw me and have hopes of being set at liberty in a few weeks...".

Another letter read: “Be lively and laugh, dearest, and take care of my little blue eyed one, my Agatha, and my Sam, and my Lew, and God be with you and help the brave, and love to all,...”.

Mary was equally upbeat in her letters to Sam. But to her diary she confided her “loneliness – sickness – anxiety & sorrow too deep for expression”. She was then only twenty four years old, in a very precarious position, and with three young children and a fourth on the way (Augusta, named for Sam, was born while he was in captivity). Yet, she had reservoirs of strength and their letters are remarkable for the extraordinary love and commitment they show, and for the faith in God they display. That faith would be tested even more in years to come, but in other ways.

Finally, after about eight months captivity, Sam was released and made his way home. That though, was yet another blow for him. If it had not been for Mary and the children, he probably would not have left his companions again. Only three prisoners, those with connections and influence in the US, were released. Gen. Waddy Thompson, the US Minister to Mexico was a cousin, and a friend of Sam’s father. But Sam’s life was not exclusively his own to command. Mary wrote in her diary that Sam felt ashamed when he met the friends and family of the other prisoners.
Back in Texas, he worked for the release of the others, and railed against the Texas government that had seemingly forgotten them. They were held long months more before Thompson secured their release. Far fewer returned than had set out under Woll, but the number did include Mary’s uncle. Perhaps even that was a miracle though. Gen. Woll later showed some American critics a letter from Santa Anna ordering the execution of all armed rebels. Woll was a cagey player who fell in and out of favor with Santa Anna and other Mexican power brokers for decades. In his old age, joining up with the French puppet “Emperor” Maximilian’s ill fated attempt to conquer Mexico (during the American Civil War, when the US was not in a position to enforce the Monroe Doctrine) finally ended his Mexican intrigues.

Perhaps as a morbid reminder of his erstwhile fellow prisoners, Sam brought home a souvenir – his chain. Sam’s father was delighted with that souvenir and wanted pieces if it. That seems a strange trophy for a large slave holder to relish, but he regarded it as a reminder of his father who had been chained on a British prison ship during the Revolutionary War. Mary was just glad to have Sam back, even if he was to be off soon on another long business trip or scouting the frontier for likely investment property.

Maverick, funded largely by his father (for it was always a family enterprise) continued to purchase large tracts of land, as well as lots in San Antonio. Land speculation had not, so far, paid off for the Mavericks however. Eastern Texas was developing rapidly, but because of the Indian raids, and now the Mexican threat, west Texas was lagging behind. Indeed, Mary’s brothers had tried farming, but had to give it up because of Indian raids.

Despite improvements she enjoyed at DeCros Point, life presented difficulties for Mary. Sam was not much of a disciplinarian, and was away much of the time anyway, so Mary had all those responsibilities too, both for their children and for the slaves and hired help. Disciplining the slaves, though not many of them, was a very disagreeable task for Mary; she was keenly aware of the hostility of most of the slaves, and came to hate the institution of slavery. But, like many people on both sides, black and white, she was powerless to change the situation in which she found herself.
Though Sam managed to return to South Carolina and Alabama surprisingly often, considering the hardships of travel, Mary never saw her mother again - fulfilling her mother's sad prophecy that day in December. They too, of course, kept in close touch by letter.

Conditions began to improve on the west Texas frontier after the admission of Texas into the Union in 1845, and the successful war with Mexico that ensued. Mary wrote, “Thank God, we are now annexed to the United States, and can hope for home and quiet.” Maverick lost some of his land holdings when parts of the Republic of Texas were struck off to become parts of other states, but the vast holdings remaining were much more valuable. Maverick’s extensive knowledge of west Texas and far flung land holdings gave him an advantage in selling land to the US Army for frontier military outposts. He now spent much of his time helping establish a line of frontier forts to defend against his old nemeses the Comanche, Kiowa and Apache.

The US Army took over the Alamo and rebuilt it as a supply depot for its west Texas outposts; people began moving in, and San Antonio began to blossom.

The drawings, from a travel book of the period, show the bustling “Military Plaza”, and picturesque scenes along the San Antonio River that seem to have charmed many a visitor.
The Mavericks decided it was safe to move back to San Antonio in late ‘47. Mary found the town “...much changed since 1842: many strangers had settled here and immigrants were arriving daily.”

Just as things seemed to be looking up for life in San Antonio, another attack came, this time more deadly to the Mavericks – disease. In those days before there was much medical science and little knowledge of the relationship between sanitation and disease, burgeoning population often meant burgeoning disease and death.

Sam was away surveying, past the limits of civilization in what is today Maverick County (Comanche territory then) when Agatha came down with a “fever” of undetermined nature. He had just written to Mary reveling in his robust health out in the wilderness, adding “This is all I ask, God protect my own beloved wife and daughters & my brave boys.” Despite Mary, having long steeped herself in all the health lore of the age, doing all that she knew to do, Agatha died a few tortured days later.

“Oh my God, My God, teach me submission, twas thy will...I endeavor to yield. Oh comfort her poor fond father, who on his return will find this, his favorite earthly treasure gone, gone, – all dead and buried.” Mary confided to her diary.

Sam was devastated, but strove “not to murmur against the will of God”. Another layer of guilt was added to his life, and he did mutter: “Cursed land, and cursed money, I would give all, all, only to see her once more.”. Mary wrote that he was “ever after a sad changed man.”

Sam was so changed that his friend Jack Hays was worried about him and confided to Mary that Sam was “dying by inches” and needed to get away on some adventure. As it happened, Hays had just the adventure in mind – scouting a good trade route to El Paso across some of the most unknown and inhospitable land in America. So, now with Mary’s blessing, Sam was off again on an anticipated 1500 mile, three month long round trip journey. It was to prove worse than the march to Perote Prison in many ways, except that they were prisoners only of their own will to see it through.
Now, Mary had grief compounded by worry about Sam to contend with. She found some solace in her budding friendship and mutual concerns with Susan Hays, Jack Hays' new bride. The two women became like sisters, Mary wrote. Episcopal by preference and there being no Episcopal Church in town, Mary longed for the comfort of church. She began accompanying Susan Hays to the new Methodist church, and became active in church functions and studies in theology and church history. Mary and Sam later devoted much of their energies to establishing an Episcopal Church in town.

Three and a half months passed before she saw Sam again. Mercifully, Mary had little knowledge of the fortunes of the expedition during those months. There were occasional run-ins with Comanches, but the seventy armed men of the expedition, equally divided between civilian and army, were too much for the Comanches to take on seriously. The worse enemies were hunger and thirst. Much precious time was lost backtracking to water and detouring around impassable canyons. Pack animals, and eventually riding stock (those the Comanches hadn’t stolen) were eaten; they chewed leather when they couldn’t get anything else. Finally they stumbled into a small village near El Paso after twelve days without food. Fortunately the return trip over another route was better – but only by comparison.

Jack Hays had been right about what Sam needed though. While one member of the expedition went mad from hunger, thirst, and fear, Sam came back invigorated – the least complaining member of the group Hays declared; “more cheerful and hopeful” Mary wrote. Though Sam was now back home and that spate of suffering seemed to satisfy him for awhile, the family faced a bleak prospect going into 1849. The townsfolk were beset with influenza, measles, and scarlet fever. On top of that, they watched uneasily as a cholera epidemic coming up from the coast drew nearer and nearer.

Cholera is an often deadly bacterial disease usually associated with contaminated water supplies. But that cause was unknown to the residents of San Antonio in 1849, most of whom depended upon untreated water from the San Antonio River. It would be another two or three generations before much could be done to head off such an outbreak.
Cholera hit hard, almost every house suffered, and at its peak, the epidemic killed dozens daily. People began fleeing town, getting away from the “bad air” believed responsible. That removal to more rural areas with healthier sources of water helped stem the epidemic. The Mavericks, too, fled for safety, but not before the epidemic claimed their other little girl, six year old Agatha.

“We humbly gave her up, beseeching God to stay the hand of the pestilence, for Lewis and George were both attacked at daylight,” Mary’s diary records. Devastated again, but whether the blow was doubled because it was the second, and last daughter, or halved because they had experienced such grief before is hard to say. Again they took it as God’s will and carried on.

One biographer of the Mavericks noted the “fatalism” in their religion – that every blow was to be accepted as the will of God. That is a deep and contentious theological issue and not suited for this narrative, but there is one point to be made here. It is that there is a decided difference between fatalism and faith. Fatalism is the acceptance of the decrees of fate without complaint, perhaps without hope; or for Christians, acceptance of God’s will without complaint. Faith goes far beyond that however, it is the certainty that death is not the end, even that some plan for good is behind it. We can see that in Mary’s diary entries.

Mary recorded her last conversation with the dying Augusta:

“I took her in my arms and held her in my lap before the fire, and said to her: ‘Gussie, do you know our Father in Heaven?’
‘Oh yes, Mamma,’ she answered earnestly.
She said: ‘I hear them singing, Mamma, put my bonnet on and let me go to church.’ I put the little fresh muslin bonnet on her head. She loved the bonnet and was content – she looked up, listened intently, and said: ‘Do you hear them Mamma?’
‘Gussie, do you want to see God?’
‘Yes, Mamma.’
Do you want to see Tita (Agatha)?
‘Yes Mamma.’ and those were her last words.
Thou wert purity itself my gentle child.
Death had no terrors for thee: Whilst yet in the flesh, thou didst behold thy Father’s face in heaven.”
Such faith may seem strange to many people today, unfortunately, but it was not so rare in earlier days. Such faith was the backbone of this nation and explains how America came about. And such faith and courage is not confined to one place and one time. The story is almost identical to the story of the deaths of the Bodelschwingh children in Imperial Germany a generation later (described in *War Comes to God’s House*), and to faith under persecution in many parts of the world today. British author/philosopher G. K. Chesterton penned some thoughts along similar lines – about the difference between martyrdom and suicide. They both may lead to death, but martyrdom, based upon “Christian courage”, proceeds from a disdain for death. Suicide stems from a contempt for life.

Sadly for both Mavericks, they also lost two good friends in ‘49. Jack Hays and Susan pulled up stakes in San Antonio and went to California; Jack leading a band of 49’ers. John (Jack) Coffee Hays, when barely out of his teens was a frontier surveyor and a leader of the Minute Men, then Captain of Texas Rangers, and further distinguished himself as Colonel of a regiment of Texas Ranger volunteers in the US-Mexican War. Almost immediately upon his arrival in California, he was elected Sheriff of San Francisco County. Hays prospered greatly in California, without, as far as is known, ever panning for gold.

There were another four children and two deaths during the 1850’s. John Hays lived only a few months: “*July 19th, he had a sudden attack of cholera infantum and died before night – Thy will be done.*” Elizabeth, Mary’s last child, died at two years. But Mary Brown lived into middle age and had a family of her own. That was some solace to Mary, but she was close to Mary Brown in her old age. The last son, Albert, lived into his nineties and was the only one of the siblings to outlast the first, Sam Jr. who died at ninety nine.

Despite many problems, things began to look up for San Antonio and the Mavericks in the eighteen fifties and early sixties. Mary had ended her diary with the death of their last child Elizabeth in 1857. She did record a few notes on important matters after that however.
The Civil War was the next great test of the Mavericks. Sam had always been a Union man, and never deeply invested in slavery. But with his beloved Texas, his old friends and comrades in arms, even so his older sons strongly for secession, he took his place in the forefront as a member of the Secession Commission. Sam Jr. and Lewis Antonio joined the military right away. Then George, when he turned Sixteen early in the War. William reached military age in 1865 at the end of the War and served only briefly.

Sam senior put all that he could into the war effort, financially, politically, and in any service he could render. Mary became the boys’ cheerleader, despite her fears and sorrow, just as she had been Sam’s in Perote Prison and on his other lengthy sojourns – though none of “Papa” Sam’s had been this long and dangerous. She was also the leading cheerleader in San Antonio for the “cause”, leading all the ladies’ aid efforts. They hoped and prayed for the Confederacy, centering their hopes on the South holding out long enough that the North would grow weary of the carnage, oust Lincoln, and let the South go. They were right about the fighting spirit of the South, but they underestimated their fellow Americans in the North.

Miraculously, all four sons came home from the War. Sam Jr. had been in the thick of fighting the whole time, and noted for courage to the point of recklessness. Mary marveled, thankfully, that he suffered only a few “scratches” and seemed to bear a “charmed life”. Lewis and George saw only sporadic fighting but Lewis, promoted to Major by War’s end, was badly wounded. He died shortly after the War, though Mary’s notes indicate that he died from some unspecified “fatal malady” that had already evidenced itself prior to the War, causing him to drop out of college.

After all the suffering and sacrifice, Mary’s summary of the war is quite remarkable: “...with the exception of Allie, who was too young, I sent all my boys to the front, and my prayers went with them, and neither they nor I can ever be ashamed of the sense of honor which led them to battle for the Lost Cause. When the War was was ended, the sentiment was unanimous in our family, that all the old issues had been settled, and that the result of the conflict was right.”

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Interestingly, Jack Hays, whose brother was a Confederate general, had sat out the War. His last battle was in 1860 against marauding Indians.

The next major event in the lives of the Mavericks was the death of “Papa” Sam Maverick. Like the fictional Maverick, Sam was a lucky man. Sam rode his lucky streak a long way and died at the respectable age of sixty-seven in 1870. On sorting through Sam’s effects after his death, Mary came across a piece of her green muslin dress, the one she wore when they met. Sam had secretly kept it all those years.

Who would have thought Sam Maverick such a sentimentalist? Perhaps only Mary, who knew him best. But she wrote that: “I shall make no comment here upon his pure and noble character, or upon the tender feelings which lay deep in his heart…”

Mary lived on until 1898. Her Recollections Assisted by Notes Taken at the Time is an important source work on early Texas history, after all she was in the thick of it. But perhaps the best comment on her life is her own, written just after the above comment on Sam:

Since the death of my beloved husband, not a death has occurred in our family. My five remaining children have married happily, and I am now the mother of ten children again. If Mr. Maverick were to look in upon us today, he would be be gratified at the good will, the good health and the good fortune which have come and remained with us during the ten years past. I am thankful that God has spared me this long, to see my descendants all happy and prosperous – and I hope it will be many years before the pleasant scene I am contemplating shall be marred by misfortune or the hand of death.

That, my dear readers, concludes this short history of the remarkable Mavericks. Thank for coming along.
Listed below are some resources for further reading on them.
Bill Kitchens

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Sources of information on the Mavericks:
*Memoirs of Mary A. Maverick, Edited by Rena Greene Maverick* reprinted by University of Nebraska Press, 1989
*Turn Your Eyes Toward Texas, Pioneers Sam and Mary Maverick* © Paula Mitchell Marks 1989, Texas A&M University Press