

# A Legacy of Love

Living Legacy Performance Copy

**Jane Long**

## **The Character:**

According to J.C. Clopper's Journal and Book of Memorabilia:

"In person, she is tall...a beautiful figure...with the energies of masculine vigor yet moving with a grace that is truly and wholly feminine -- her countenance tho' not expressive of the fire of genius...is highly interesting -- her features are regular -- her aspect smiling -- her eyes sparkling, her tongue not too pliant for a female...very engaging in all her conversation... -- now she will fascinate her auditor by the ease and fluency with which she can descant upon general topics -- addressed by the beau, the fop or gallant, he does not find her out of her forte -- a gay widow of about 35 she is agreeable where and when and as the manner and disposition of her company requires."

**Accent:** Southern Belle (Virginia/Mississippi)

## **Costuming:**

Relatively plain, dark-colored dress circa 1830 with white lace collar and trim, high button shoes, hair braided and put up

## **The Stage Setting:**

Frontier parlor interior circa 1830 - small Victorian table and two chairs with tatted white antimacassars and table cover; plain crockery vase with arrangement of native Texas wild flowers; hand-made gardener's basket with more wild flowers on table

## **Off-stage Intro:**

"The Texas of today is the progeny of many proud traditions. A fierce sense of independence gained from the valor and heroism of men who valued freedom over life itself is one such tradition. But of perhaps even greater value are the traditions of dignity in times of hardship, strength in times of tragedy and civilization in the midst of wilderness that have been nurtured by the women of Texas. In all our history, no woman exemplifies these qualities more than the wife of one of Texas' first freedom fighters and the woman known as The Mother of Texas, Ms. Jane Long."

## Intro Visual:

Sepia-toned portrait of actor in costume with "The Living Legacy of" and character signature across bottom, flanked by Texas flags

**The Scene Opens** with Jane adding flowers to the arrangement in the vase.

My goodness, that man does go on, doesn't he? If I didn't know better, I'd think he was trying to turn my head. But fortunately I learned a long time ago to never completely trust the flattery of gentlemen callers or predictions of Texas weather. And I have had considerable experience with both.

I'm not entirely sure how I feel about being called "The Mother of Texas." I'm deeply flattered, of course, but the role I played in the history of Texas is not something I did by intent or design. At first, I was just a headstrong young girl head-over-heels in love with a husband I would have followed to the ends of the earth. Then later I was simply head-over-heels in love with Texas and just could not bear to live anywhere else. How that entitles me to such a grand appellation, I do not know, but I am nonetheless honored to have been asked to share my story with you here this morning. *(finishes arranging flowers and steps away from table, lighting on table and chairs dims)*

*(Support Visuals: plantation, Virginia countryside, family portrait if possible, etc.)* I was born Jane Wilkinson, in 1798 on the Truman Place Plantation in Charles County, Maryland, the seventh daughter in a family of ten children. I never really knew my father, as he died the year after my birth, but ours was a family of some means and I was raised with all the genteel refinements of a proper Southern belle. *(SV: period drawings of Southern Belles, map of Mississippi with Washington, then Natchez highlighted)* When I was thirteen, my mother moved the family to Washington, Mississippi, in order that we might be near relatives on my father's side. A year later, she, too, was taken from me and I went to live with my sister and her husband on a plantation near Natchez. I was growing up faster than I knew. Dramatic change and tragedy have a way of doing that to a person.

*(SV: drawings of wounded soldiers being tended)* In 1815, at the end of the War of 1812, soldiers wounded in the Battle of New Orleans began to filter

into Natchez. As there was no hospital in the community, these soldiers were quartered and cared for by local families. My sister's family took in one such soldier and arranged for a physician to come by and tend to his wounds. *(SV out)* I shall never forget that doctor's first visit...or any of his subsequent visits, for that matter.

I remember it was in January, one of those days so crisp and clear that the whole world seems clean and new. I was getting ready for school, a young ladies finishing academy as we called it in those days and, as usual, I was late. *(mimes putting on bonnet in mirror)* I remember being in front of the mirror adjusting the most beautiful green silk bonnet, which my Uncle James had given me, when my maid, Kian, came to me in a most agitated state. I don't believe I had ever seen her so excited.

Kian said that the doctor had come to tend our house guest and that nothing else would do but that I stay and meet him. She said, in fact, that I must stay and meet him because he was the handsomest man in the world. And, although she was only seven years old at the time, I had never heard her say such a thing and I simply *had* to stay and see for myself. And you know what? She was absolutely right!

*SV: James Long portrait)* He was tall and trim and had the bearing of a true Southern gentleman. He was young, too, in his early twenties at the oldest, but carried himself with the deportment of a man who has no need to impress anyone. His voice was strong and sure, and his eyes were the most penetrating I had ever seen.

We were completely alone when we met there in my sister's parlor, with no one to provide proper introductions, yet within minutes it was as if we had known each other forever. His name was James Long, and I was in love with him already. *(SV out) (moves back to table, spot on one chair comes up, she sits and mimes playing backgammon and staring with enchantment at her unseen opponent)*

We sat at a table by the window and played backgammon all morning in a state of complete enchantment. Time stood still, and in the whole world there was naught but the table, the game and the two of us. James insisted that we play for a forfeit, a pair of gloves it was, and I do believe that he deliberately lost so that he would have reason to see me again. *(stands and moves away from table, spot fades)*

He called the next day to present the gloves and when I refused to accept them as a gaming debt he insisted on presenting them as a gift. He helped me try them on, and his strong but delicate touch gave me goose flesh. Then he said the most extraordinary thing. (*slowly extends hand as though being held ad ring placed upon it*) He said that he wished that "the hand that gave might go with the gift." In my day that was tantamount to a proposal of marriage!

*very animated, with schoolgirl excitement*) I knew what was in my heart. I knew I was in love with him. But I was only sixteen years old, the year was 1815 and we really *had* only just met. So James proceeded to court me in the traditional way. He continued to call almost every day. And, after a respectable period of courtship, he went to my Uncle, who was sort of the patriarch of the family at that point, and asked for my hand in marriage. But my Uncle refused his permission, giving my age as the reason. My sister and brother-in-law concurred in this, but I was still determined to marry James somehow. I pouted, I cried and pleaded until I was quite certain they were all as miserable as I was.

Then James came up with the solution. It was a solution he was reluctant to offer, as it went against the wishes of my family, but our love for each other overpowered his sense of propriety. He pointed out that under Mississippi law I had the right, as an orphan, to select my own guardian. So the solution was simple. I selected James as my guardian and we were married.

It was a beautiful ceremony and the happiest day of my life, despite the reluctant presence of my disapproving relatives. (*thoughtful;y*) And looking back on it, I have often felt that it was somehow fitting that James and I had to overcome the adversity of my family in order to be married, for being together despite adversity was to become one of the most salient features of our married life.

(*SV: colonial style plantation house and grounds*) A few months after we were married, James and I acquired a plantation at a place called Walnut Hills, overlooking the Mississippi River. It was a beautiful old colonial home in a magnificent grove of trees, with broad lawns and old-fashioned gardens. We spent two of the happiest years of our life there and our first daughter, Ann, was born there in 1816. It was an idyllic life, but somehow

it just wasn't for us. James was very ambitious -- and very adventurous (features which I found most attractive, by the way) -- and the placid, predictable life of a Mississippi planter just didn't suit him -- or myself, for that matter!

So we sold the plantation to a man named Vick who started a town named Vicksburg -- and we moved back to Natchez, where James went into the mercantile business. *(SV fade out)* Then, in 1819, events occurred which were to change our lives forever.

In that year the United States ended its dispute with Spain over the boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase by giving up all claims on Texas in return for Spain ceding Florida to the United States. Many Americans, especially in Mississippi and Louisiana, were outraged by this arrangement. Even the men who had negotiated the Louisiana Purchase were of the opinion that Texas had been included, and now it had just been given away. Feelings ran so strong in Natchez that a mass meeting was held that spring for the purpose of organizing an invasion to free Texas from Spain. *(pause)* And James was chosen to lead it.

*(SV: period drawings of Texas landscapes)* James was already in love with Texas from the stories brought back by earlier expeditions. He had visions of carving out a storybook future for us in the thick forests and rich farmlands -- a future to be won through daring and courage. Such notions may seem very unrealistic to you today, but you must realize that we lived in very different times. After all, our fathers had just brought forth a new nation through daring and courage. James pledged everything we owned to the venture and began to make plans.

*(SV out)* I was carrying our second child at the time so, as badly as I wanted to, I could not follow him into Texas right away. I made him a flag to carry with him -- a flag for his new republic, of red and white stripes with a white star against a red ground in one corner -- and I vowed to follow him as soon as possible. Separating from him was unbearable.

After the baby was born, I left the children with my sister and went to join James. *(SV: map showing Natchez and Nacogdoches & period drawing of men in meeting)* He and 300 men had set up headquarters in Nacogdoches, where they had formed a provisional government and issued a

declaration of independence. It took me over two months to get there. (SV out)

I arrived in Nacogdoches the second week in October and as far as I was concerned, it was paradise, for my James was there. (SV: *two views old stone fort*) I felt safe and warm in the old stone fort and could have been happy there for a long time, but it was not to be. James had for some time been trying to enlist the aid of the pirate Jean Lafitte in the struggle for independence, but his responses had been noncommittal. By the time I arrived in Nacogdoches, James had already made plans to visit Lafitte at his headquarters on Galveston Island to try again. We were only together for two weeks before he left. (SV out)

The Spanish, meanwhile, were not about to let James' declaration go unchallenged. At the end of September, a force of 550 men had left San Antonio with orders to drive us out. James received word of this the day before he was to reach Galveston. He sent word for his outposts to converge on Nacogdoches, but it was too late. The Spanish had already defeated several of them.

James hurried back to Nacogdoches and arrived just two days ahead of the Spanish. While James had been gone, Indians had attacked and inflicted heavy casualties. We had no choice but to retreat back into the United States, while the Spanish raided and burned every American ranch and home they could find. (SV: *map showing Nacogdoches and Point Bolivar*) But some of James' men, from an outpost which had not come under attack, managed to retreat to Point Bolivar, across the bay from Galveston Island, and established themselves there. (SV out)

Once safely across the border, James and I received even worse news. Soon after I had left, our baby had died. You can't imagine the overwhelming sense of guilt I felt upon hearing that news. It was one of the worst feelings I ever had to endure. I left at once for my sister's while James left for Point Bolivar to reorganize his men.

Once James saw his men well established, he returned to raise financing to renew his efforts. By the time he succeeded in raising enough money, it was spring time. We felt renewed along with the season and decided to return to Bolivar together.

(SV: *costal wild flowers in bloom*) (SFX: *surf and sea birds*) When we arrived, the flowers were in bloom, the weather mild and the game

plentiful. Again Texas seemed like paradise and we decided to settle there permanently. After a few weeks, we returned to Louisiana, gathered up Ann and Kian, and returned to Texas to stay.

*(SV: map showing Bolivar and La Bahia)* We arrived back at Bolivar December of 1820, and found the men waiting for the arrival of more volunteers and making plans to attack the Spanish garrison at La Bahia. I set up house and we celebrated our first Christmas in Texas.

In February, we received word that San Antonio and La Bahia had declared in favor of independence and that the Mexican government was sending a large force to put them down. James felt a diversionary action was necessary to keep the cause alive and, in September, set sail with fifty two men bound for La Bahia. They were to be gone for three weeks. *(SV out)* Before he left James made me promise to stay there until his return and, of course, I said I would.

I was by then carrying our third child, which was due in December, and there was plenty to keep me busy preparing for it. *(SFX: sea birds fade out)* Time passed quickly, but three weeks came and went with no word from James. Four, five and six weeks passed and still there was no word. We began to run out of supplies. People began to leave. They pleaded with me to leave with them. *(SFX: blast of wind rises over surf then both fade together)* Winter was coming on. There were no provisions left and no medical supplies either. *(SV: drawings of Karankawas) (SFX: tom-toms)* Seven-foot-tall cannibals, the Karankawa Indians, had taken possession of Galveston Island, within sight of us across the bay. I would have no defense against them. But I had promised James I would wait for him and I intended to do just that. *(SFX: winds rise and take out tom-toms, then fall and remain under) (SV out) (moves into limbo lighting downstage center, gelled cold)*

With mid-winter approaching, Ann, Kian and I said good-bye to the last of the men, watching our last barrel of flour go with them. All we had left were a few surplus muskets, some powder, a few fishhooks and a single fishing line to help us survive. We began to live on birds and fish. Every day I spent hours scanning the horizon watching for James' return. But everyday I saw only the gulls and the waves.

December came in with one of the worst blizzards in Texas history. Galveston Bay froze over. It froze so solid that we watched with

amazement as a bear crossed over from the mainland to Galveston Island, grateful that it had not chosen to come to Point Bolivar. The fort had not been built to withstand weather like that. All we had for shelter was a rotting canvass tent. Kian, who was only fourteen, became desperately ill and I thought I was going to lose her. It was there, huddled in that tent with my little daughter and my critically ill maid, on the 21st of December, that I went into labor. (*SFX: volume of winds rises*)

My memory of that night is not entirely clear, as you might imagine. I'm not sure how long I was in labor, but I do vividly remember that in the midst of it, the canvas roof of the tent gave way. Snow piled in all over me, but all I could do was brush it aside the best I could and try to concentrate on my baby. Somehow I made it happen, giving birth to our third daughter through a veil of cold, wet pain. (*SFX: winds begin to die out*) I wrapped the baby in the driest bit of blanket we had left, cleaned myself up as best I could with snow and lay there until dawn curled up around my baby to keep her from freezing. All I could do for Ann and Kian was worry about them. (*SFX out*) (*lighting warms*)

But by the grace of God we all survived that night. The next day I named my baby Mary James, and set about the business of surviving yet another day. The night had been so cold that fish had been frozen in the ice. Little Ann broke them out and we stored them in a barrel of brine. That fed us for the next few days, including our Christmas dinner.

The day after Christmas, we were visited by a detail of men from Monterrey. They brought me the best Christmas present I ever received; they brought me the news that James was alive! He was imprisoned in Mexico, but he was well. I was deliriously happy, but I still had no idea how long it would be before I might see him again. After a couple of days, the men departed, and the small gifts of food they had given us soon ran out.

We used an old hammock to net some mullet and baited our one fishing line in the hopes of catching something larger. And I did catch something larger -- so large that it started pulling me out to sea and I had to cut it loose. The winter had driven off the birds, so now we had only the oysters left to live on.

(*SFX: tom-toms from far away*) Across the bay, the Krankawas were also getting hungry. (*SV: Krankawas in war canoes*) At least, that's the thought



that went through my mind the day I saw their war canoes heading straight for us. They had surely noticed the lack of activity around our fort and were coming to slaughter any who might be left. I was almost frozen with fright, but I knew my only hope was to convince them that the fort was still occupied. So I ran my red petticoat up the flag pole and loaded our one little cannon. Then I tied Mary James to my back, gathered up Ann and Kian and waited for the lead canoe to come within range. *(SFX: tom-toms getting louder)*

We waited for what seemed like an eternity while the canoes drew closer, and all the while all I could think about was the horrible stories James had told me of the more than 200 Americans these cannibals had already eaten. I was terrified. *(SFX: tom-toms rise to fever pitch)* My stomach was in knots and my hands were shaking, but when the lead canoe finally came within range, I managed to fire, and the little cannon sent a huge boom out over the water. *(SFX: cannon shot, followed by silence)* *(SV: canoe visuals fade out)* The shot missed, but it did the trick. The Indians hesitated for a time, then turned back -- and we survived another day. After that I kept the petticoat flying from the flag pole day and night and fired the cannon every few days just for good measure.

Then one day just after the first of the year, Kian came running to me all out of breath and saying there were three men on the beach. I was ecstatic, but when I went running out to greet the men...I literally frightened them away. Whether they thought I was an Indian or whether I just looked that bad, I never did know. They ran too fast for me to catch them.

*(SV: sails on the horizon)* But soon afterward, we sighted sails and we waved and shouted until they saw us. The sails belonged to the first of Stephen F. Austin's colonists, bound for the mouth of the Brazos. Our isolation was at an end. They shared their corn meal and venison with us and offered to take us with them. But I felt that I had to stay where I was if I were going to get news of James.

*(SV: period coastal sailing ship)* A few days later a ship bound for Matamoros stopped by. The captain had read in a newspaper that James was in Mexico City and would be there for another year. The captain gallantly offered to take us there and I accepted.

We packed up and got on board, but before we could set sail, (SV: *another coastal sailing ship*) a ship out of New Orleans came by and *that* captain said *he* had heard that James would be sailing from Vera Cruz any day. Then some of his passengers said that *they* had heard that he was doing forced labor in a Mexican silver mine. My hopes were being tossed about like a leaf in a storm. I didn't know what to do, so I had the captain return me to Bolivar. (SV out)

But somehow, my resolve to stay there had been weakened. A few days later a family named Smith came through on their way to a settlement up the San Jacinto River and invited us to come with them. With this many people coming into the area, I felt that word of James could still reach me if I didn't go too far and decided to go with them.

(SV: *period drawing of crude shelter*) It was there, in a crude shelter of old boards and palmetto leaves, that I received the news. It came in a letter from a trader who had passed through a few weeks earlier on his way to Mexico. (SV out) It said James was dead, murdered by a Mexican soldier. My long ordeal was over, along with my hopes, my dreams and the love of my life. I wanted to die. And part of me *did* die that day, never to be revived.

But life, as they say, goes on, and so it did. (SV: *colonial SA montage*) The next year I traveled to *this* lovely city to try to claim the compensation for James' death the Mexican government had promised me. And, while yet another upheaval in the Mexican government dashed those hopes to pieces, living in San Antonio gave me a new perspective. (SFX: *mariachi music*) There was music and gaiety here and I was one of the most available women in town. I was virtually awash in gentlemen callers and, while no one could ever take James' place, the attention did lift my spirits. (SFX: *music out*) (SV out) (*moves back to table and chairs and begins to rearrange flowers*)

I went on from there to gain a headright in Stephen F. Austin's colony and, after a time, set up a boarding house in Brazoria. It was there that Austin announced his support for independence when he returned from prison in Mexico. You could say that the revolution started there in my boarding house. Those were exciting times to be alive, but my excitement was always tinged with the regret that James was not there to share in them.

That regret was always with me. After the war (I hope he won't mind my telling you this), I was honored to receive the attentions of President Houston. There I was being courted by the most dynamic, most powerful and most completely charming man in Texas and yet my heart just would not respond. In all my eighty-two years of life, I never lacked for gentlemen callers, but none ever kindled the love I had felt for James. My life was good, but there was always something missing.

*(SFX: "Eyes of Texas" up slowly)* James had had great dreams -- for us and for Texas. His dreams for us didn't come true, but his dreams for Texas did. In all the life I lived without him, I always felt that I was somehow furthering his dream, helping to settle and civilize a new nation. Texas is a proud part of the United States today partly because of his efforts and his sacrifice. So as you go out and visit this beautiful city, I hope you'll remember the dreamers who fought and died for it...and also, perhaps, the ones they left behind. *(SFX: music climax) (SV: back to opening visual)*