

Martha's Story

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Martha Glenn Russell, 1890

The story of an exceptional woman in the frontier days of Johnson County, Texas

On December 24, 1877, Martha Glenn Russell, a 35-year-old widow with 5 young children, moved her family into their new 3-room home in Johnson County, Texas. There she would raise her children and thrive for the remainder of her long life. To fully appreciate Martha's story, we should look back several generations.



Martha's great-grandfather was Revolutionary soldier Private John Crawford (born in Virginia in 1762, died in 1841). He enlisted three times; first in Surrey County, North Carolina in 1778,

When he was only 16 years old; then in 1780; and the third time in 1781 when he was in the battle of Eutaw Springs, which was under the commands of Major General Nathanael Greene and Brigadier General Francis Marion (the famous "Swamp Fox"). This battle--with total casualties of 1,188--was the last major battle in South Carolina and completely broke the British hold in the South, and only six weeks afterwards, Lord Cornwallis surrendered in Yorktown. After his service John Crawford returned home, married, raised a family, and spent the remainder of his life in Tennessee.

Martha's grandfather (John's son) was William Ayers Crawford. He and his wife, Martha Blakely, both were born in 1783. They married in Tennessee and had 11 children. William died in 1834, and his wife Martha died 6 years later in 1840. After both parents died, most of the 11 siblings made their way west, ultimately settling in Saline County, Arkansas.



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Martha's mother Malinda Crawford (the oldest of the 11 siblings, born 1805 - died 1868) married John Glenn (born 1806 - died 1881) in Rhea County, Tennessee, on July 3, 1832. Malinda and John were among Malinda Crawford's siblings who moved from Tennessee to Saline County, Arkansas. Malinda and John had 6 children, with Martha being born in Arkansas in 1842.

In 1867, at age 24, Martha Glenn married Dr. Robert Morrow Russell, age 39, in Saline County, Arkansas. Martha and Robert had 5 children in Arkansas (1868 - 1873). In the spring of 1874 they sold all their property, left the grave of their young daughter Mary, left Martha's family and all their friends, and moved to Marystown in Johnson County, Texas. Martha was pregnant at the time of their move, and in the next 18 months she would face an almost unimaginable series of life events.

In November 1874 her son McHenry was born; 11 months later (on Oct. 2, 1875) he passed away. Then, less than 3 months afterwards her son William Thomas "Tom" was born (on Jan. 18, 1876) -- and two months after that, Martha's husband Robert passed away at the age of 49. And so on March 17, 1876, at age 33, in a frontier community she'd moved to only two years before where Indians still posed a danger, Martha found herself to be a new widow with children ages 8, 6, 5, 3 and 2 months.

And here, Martha displayed the strength and determination passed down to her through all of her ancestors, all the while contending with the emotional challenges of grieving for her husband and one infant son while caring for another infant son and his 4 young brothers and sisters. Martha handled her late husband's estate; she sold his lands and businesses and bought 540 acres of land nearby. And thus we return to the start of this story--she moved her family into their new home on Christmas Eve, 1877, and established Russell Farm. These events are all the more notable in their time because Martha accomplished them as a woman, acting alone.



Martha would live the rest of her life in that same home. Her children, as adults, would move in and out and in again. Her daughter and son-in-law, Hattie and Ed Lace, would remain close to Martha, taking care of her until her death in 1931 at the age of 88. Both Martha and Robert Russell are buried in the Marystown Cemetery. Through the years, portions of the original 540 acres were sold. In 1979, Russell Farm passed from Martha's grandson, William Russell Lace, to his nephew. In 2012, the remaining 30 acres of this historic Texas farm were donated to the City of Burleson by that nephew and his wife--Charlie and Louise Boren.

Russell Farm Art Center

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[Note: The 3-room house that Martha built in 1877 forms the nucleus of the Russell-Boren home that visitors can tour today at Russell Farm Art Center.]