



John Neely Bryan

Like Sam Houston, John Neely Bryan grew up in Tennessee but about fifteen years later. John was lucky because his parents believed in getting an education, so he was sent to school. When John turned 17-years old, he went to work at Ebenezer Hill's print shop in Fayetteville, Tennessee, where Mr. Hill encouraged him to read; John chose law books to read.

In 1833, when he was 23-years old, his entire life changed – John became seriously ill with cholera. Because of the debilitating effects of the disease, John's doctor advised him to spend more time outdoors. And, like Sam Houston before him, John left white civilization behind him and went to live with the Indians.

For four years, John wandered among the tribes in Arkansas, trading with them and learning their languages. Next, he moved to a trading post on the Red River near where Denison is today to work for a trader by the name of John Coffee.

John made many trips up and down the Red River and into Texas. Then, in 1841, a group of 400-500 men formed a ranging party to clear north Texas of Indians. After finding no Indians, part of the group decided to establish a fort – Bird's Fort was built in the area now known as Irving. It is during his stay at Bird's Fort that John met his future bride, Margaret Beeman.

After helping build the fort, John started east in November, 1841, and came to a spot on the Trinity River where he apparently got a vision of a city. He felt he had found the farthest north a steamboat could come on the Trinity River and that the spot could become the commercial center of north Texas. He claimed a headright of 640 acres and laid out the streets of his new city of Dallas.

A TEKS supportive *Curriculum Guide* for pre-and post-performance studies and activities is provided to teachers for visits from John Neely Bryan.

Portrayed by Bob Heinonen