

Grimes, Jesse ^[1]

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by Roger N. Kirkman, 1986.

6 Feb. 1781?–15 Mar. 1866

Jesse Grimes, political and military leader in the Republic of Texas, was born in Duplin County ^[2], the son of Sampson and Bethsheba Winder Grimes. He evidently had little formal education. In January 1813 Grimes was appointed justice of the peace by the state legislature, and in the same year he married Martha Smith. Their children were Robert Henry, Harriet Elizabeth, Alfred Calvin, Rufus, Lucinda, Jacob, Mary Jane, and twins William Ward and Martha Ann; Lucinda, Mary Jane, and William Ward died in childhood. In 1817 Grimes moved his family to Washington County, Ala., where in 1817 he was appointed justice of the peace. His wife died in 1824, shortly after giving birth to twins. Grimes remarried a widow, Rosanna Ward Britton, in Alabama. Their children were Gordon, Harvey, Leonard, Helen, Emily, and Nancy; Gordon and Leonard died in childhood. The entire family moved to Texas, arriving at its eastern border in December 1826. They finally settled at Grimes Prairie in present-day Grimes County (in 1827 a part of Washington County; in 1836 a part of Montgomery County ^[3]).

Grimes's participation in public life in Texas began with his election in 1829 as first lieutenant of the First Company, Battalion of Austin. The following year he was appointed *sindico procurador* of the precinct of Viesca, Department of Bexar. In 1831, he was appointed *regidor* of the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe de Austin. As relations between the centralist government in Mexico City and the Anglo-American and Hispanic populations in outlying departments deteriorated, Grimes emerged on the side of those favoring separation. In 1835, he served as delegate from Washington Municipality to the Consultation at San Felipe and continued as a member of the General Council of the Provisional Government of Texas. In that capacity he signed the Texas declaration of independence ^[4] and its first constitution, both on 17 Mar. 1836. His duties expanded when he was appointed judge of his home district, Washington County, in 1836. After his son, Alfred Calvin, fell at the Alamo, Grimes enrolled a company of volunteers for the Texas Army. At the end of the war, he was seated as a member of the senate representing Washington County at the first congress of the Texas Republic. When Montgomery County was formed out of Washington, Grimes sat as its judge. From 1841 to 1843 he served in the Texas House of Representatives for Montgomery County. He returned to the senate in 1844, continuing to serve after Texas was admitted to the Union (Grimes being one of the floor leaders for annexation) until 1853; he was the senator from Grimes County, formed in 1846 and named for him. Grimes was reelected to the state senate in 1855 and continued in office until 1861.

When Sam Houston ^[5] ran for governor of Texas in 1857, Grimes was nominated for lieutenant governor on Houston's independent ticket, though supported by the Know-Nothings. However, Houston was defeated because of his record in the U.S. Senate as an abolitionist sympathizer. In 1861 Grimes retired from public life, his last actions being in opposition to secession.

Late in life Grimes reflected on his career, commenting particularly on his activity as a judge: "Nobody wanted to be judged. The Texans were like the Israelites when they had no king. Every man done what seemed good in his own eyes. . . . Politically I have ever claimed to be a Democrat but it has been alleged that I am rather of the old fogey order."

The year of Grimes's birth is given as 1788 on his tombstone, but as he was mentioned in the will of his grandfather, Hugh Grimes, written in Duplin County, N.C., on 2 Apr. 1781, that date is erroneous.

Grimes was buried in the John McGinty Cemetery near Navasota, which was eventually abandoned. His remains and those of his second wife were removed to the State Cemetery in Austin.

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Additional resources:

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<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/02171/cah-02171.html> [6]

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