



**Peg Leg: The Improbable Life of a Texas Hero,
Thomas William Ward, 1807-1872 (Watson
Caulfield and Mary Maxwell Arnold Republic of
Texas)**

David C. Humphrey

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Irish-born Thomas William (“Peg Leg”) Ward ventured to Texas in 1835 to fight in the Texas Revolution, but in his first day of action his right leg was hit by Mexican cannon fire in and amputated. Four years later he lost his right arm to cannon fire in an accident. Though confronted with an unending problem of mobility and tormented by pain in his residual leg, Ward surmounted his horrific injuries to become a notable public figure.

Ward’s public career spanned three decades and a multiplicity of responsibilities—military officer, three-time mayor of Austin, presidential appointments as U.S. Consul to Panama and a federal customs official in Texas—but it was as Texas land commissioner during the 1840s that he particularly made his mark. At a time when land was the principal asset of the Texas republic and the magnet that attracted immigrants, he fought to remedy the land system’s many defects and to fulfill the promise of free land to those who settled and fought for Texas.

If Ward had a remarkable career, his life was nonetheless troubled by symptoms comparable to those experienced by recent war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder—a hair-trigger temper, an impulse to violence, and marital discord. His wife, Susan Ward, though deeply in love with him at the start, eventually left him and accused him in two bitterly fought court cases of verbal, psychological, and physical abuse. To many of his fellow Texans, however, Ward remained a hero who had sacrificed his leg for a noble cause—independence from Mexico.

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