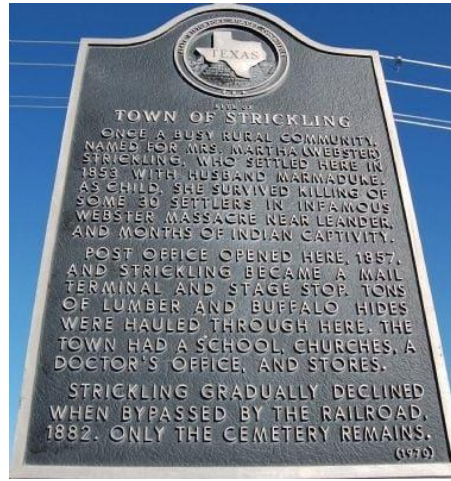
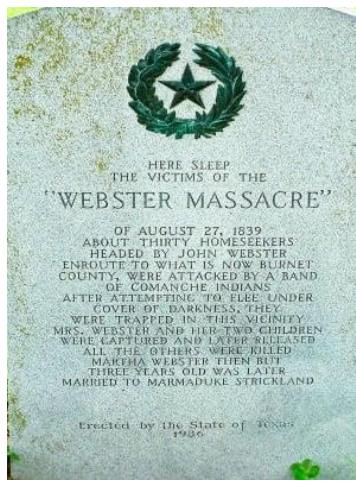


The Webster Massacre of 1839

Martha Virginia WEBSTER Strickling (aka Strickland) Simmons (ca. 1835–1927)

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Artist rendition of Martha Webster Strickling Simmons from the *San Antonio Express*, April 27, 1913, 15. Image courtesy of the *San Antonio Express* and [The Portal to Texas History](#) and included in accordance with [Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107](#).

Photo of memorial at the burial place of those who died in the Webster party, erected by the State of Texas in 1936. Martha Simmons claimed the date listed for the attack, August 27, 1839, was incorrect and that it happened in mid-June 1839. Her mother's account cited the attack date as October 1, 1893. Image courtesy of *Frontier Times*, available on the Internet and included in accordance with [Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107](#).

The [Texas Historical Commission](#) erected a historical marker for the town of Strickling in 1970 near Burnet, Texas, and credits her as the town's namesake.

Simmons, Martha Virginia Webster Strickling (ca. 1835–1927). Martha Virginia Webster Strickling Simmons was a survivor of a [Comanche](#) attack, often referred to as the [Webster Massacre](#), and co-founded the town of [Strickling, Texas](#). Likely born in Harrison County, Virginia (now West Virginia), in approximately 1835, she was the daughter of John Webster and Dorothy "Dolly" (Fletcher) Webster. Much of what historians know about Martha's early life as well as her family's experience during the attack and in captivity are based on Martha's account, published in the early twentieth century, and her mother's 1843 published narrative, which differed in some details.

According to Martha, her father brought his family to Galveston, Texas, in November 1836. Her father reportedly served in the Texas army (see [ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS](#)) from January 1837 to March 1839, although it is difficult to confirm his service. In April 1838 John Webster obtained a first-class headright [land grant](#) certificate originally held by Charles Cavenah and had land surveyed on the north fork of the San Gabriel River in present-day Burnet County in June 1838. During the following year, the family lived in the area of Hornsby Bend and Webberville (also, called Webber's Prairie), a region raided by Comanches in early 1839. The family may have delayed moving to their land after the survey because of Comanche activity in the area, including the [battle of Brushy Creek](#) and the [battle of the San Gabriels](#).

Between June and October 1839, four-year-old Martha and her family left Hornsby Bend with a party of thirteen men. According to her mother, the group reached the Webster's land around sunset on the fourth day but retreated soon after their arrival because they learned Comanches were nearby. The Webster party retreated to Brushy Creek near present-day Leander in Williamson County. There they formed their wagons into a hollow rectangle and made their last stand. Martha remembered later that chiefs Guadalupe, Yellow Wolf, and [Buffalo Hump](#) broke and kept pieces of the hilt of her father's sword. Martha, her mother, and her ten-year-old brother, Booker Webster, were the only survivors and taken prisoner.

Martha's memoir, published in the *San Antonio Express* on April 27, 1913, described her days in captivity. She remembered she was whipped for crying, burned with hot coals, and thrown into the river with a rope tied around her, then pulled back out. She also alluded to the "awful suffering" of her mother. Martha, her mother, and her brother were separated and traveled with different groups for several weeks.

According to her mother, Dolly and Martha escaped twice. The first time, after about a month into captivity, Dolly, Martha, and Booker, fled during an opportune moment. They lived briefly with a group of Caddos, Mexicans, and formerly enslaved African Americans until Comanche traders learned of the Websters' location and traded horses for their return.

Dolly and Martha Webster escaped again in the days leading up to the [Council House Fight](#), which happened in San Antonio on March 19, 1840. Martha's brother chose not to go with them. After dark, on March 15, Dolly fled on foot with her daughter and traveled for approximately twelve days. Martha's mother carried her most of the way since she was not strong enough to walk for long distances. Martha and Dolly were tired, weak, and near starvation when a train of Mexican oxcart drivers found them about three miles from San Antonio and carried them into the city. A few days later, they were reunited with her brother, who was among those exchanged for the Comanche prisoners captured during the Council House Fight.

Dolly and Martha Webster returned to Virginia, where Dolly Webster died on July 29, 1845. Martha's brother stayed in Texas and attended school. He enlisted in the army in May 1847 and served with the First Texas Mounted Volunteers in the [Mexican War](#). He died in Mexico City on January 16, 1848.

Martha returned to Texas with her uncle, Paulser Flesher, in 1849 and reclaimed her parents' headrights, including one certificate issued in her mother's name. Martha initially lived in Bastrop, then **she returned to her father's land in Burnet County in 1852**. On February 3, 1853, Martha Webster married Marmaduke D. Strickling (often spelled Strickland), a stockman, in Burnet County.

On the north fork of the San Gabriel, the couple developed the rural town of Strickling, which had a post office by 1857 and a terminal for the Austin-to-Lampasas [stagecoach line](#) by the 1870s. She and her husband also deeded land for a Methodist church in Strickling in 1861.

The Stricklings had seven children: Mahala, Sarah, Laura, Mary, Roberta, John T., and Marmaduke D. At some point the family lived in Lampasas and by 1860 had moved to Williamson County, Texas. Martha's husband died on August 12, 1865, after which she returned to Burnet County.

On June 3, 1868, Martha married Charles Munroe Simmons, a farmer and former Union soldier, in Burnet County. In approximately 1872 the family moved to a farm in Gillespie County, where they stayed for about ten years. Martha and Charles Simmons had four children: Ellen Abigale, Charles Augustus, Louis Monroe, and George Washington. Charles Simmons applied for a military pension as an invalid in 1882 and died in approximately 1889. In February 1889 Martha petitioned the [Texas legislature](#) and Governor [Sul Ross](#) for relief. She applied for a widow's pension in November 1900 in Oregon, where her daughter lived, but census records show Martha lived with her sons in Rough and Ready, California, between 1900 and 1920. During this time, she shared her experiences several times with newspapers.

At the age of ninety-one, Martha Strickling Simmons died on November 21, 1927, in Alameda, California.

Memorials have been placed at the site where the Webster party were buried by Martha and Thomas and [Charles K. Reese](#), the brothers of two victims, and by the [Texas Centennial](#) Commission in 1936. The [Texas Historical Commission](#) also erected a historical marker for the town of Strickling in 1970 near Burnet, Texas, and credits her as the town's namesake.

For more information, There is a 34 page booklet: *A Narrative of the Captivity and Suffering of Dolly Webster Among the Camanche Indians in Texas: With an Account of the Massacre of John Webster and His Party, as Related by Mrs. Webster*