Strong Women 2/25/13

Strong women play a large part in my historical fiction. I am lucky to have supreme role models in my ancestors and in the women that share my world. They are giants of will and perseverance. They guide me as I create my fiction’s characters.

My great-great-great-great grandmother, Rhoda, became a widow in 1815. Her war veteran husband’s will, coin and goods, added up to $7. Four young children lived in her cabin. The 1820 US census listed her as a head-of-household. Few women found themselves on that list. When the Choctaw left their ‘treaty’ land in 1820, Rhoda packed up those children and left for what became Copia County, Mississippi. Again, the Copia County tax rolls listed her as head-of-household, just as rare there. Together they carved out a home in that forested wilderness.

Her son, Ike, married Pretia in Mississippi but by around 1845 they immigrated to the Republic of Texas. By the time of the Civil War, she lived on the edge of settled areas of America. On this frontier, Pretia birthed and raised 11 children. She endured all the travails of frontier life that women lived and survived. She helped found towns, turns a republic into a state, holds on through Reconstruction, resists the depredations of Indians and outlaws, and keeps house under the harshest of conditions.

My wife is also a pioneer. Becoming an adult in the early ‘70’s, she broke a number of glass ceilings, did what was then (and now for that matter) a man’s job in a man’s world, all while managing her two boy children – me and my son – and being an all-around great human being.

The list is not yet complete. There are all the mom’s, dentists, business owners, teachers, writers, nurses, doctors, and others too many to list. They enrich my world and my art.

All of these influence my character creating. In spirit or in truth, they lean over my shoulder as I write, correcting me, guiding me, and giving me ‘real’ female characters.