

WILLIAM DOUGLAS WALLACH, PIONEER HYDROGRAPHER OF TEXAS

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W. D. Wallach (1812-71)

A recent issue of the *Southwest Review*¹ gives an account of some phases of the life of William Douglas Wallach (1812-71), noted editor of the *Washington Evening Star* (1853-67), and at an earlier period (1838-45) surveyor and newspaper editor in Texas. To an historian of scientific work and exploration in Early Texas, the career of Wallach is of especial interest. Almost the first hydrographic work on inland coast-wise waters of the State was done by Wallach² in his survey of part of Matagorda Bay, 1839 (at the request and expense of the Board of Aldermen of Matagorda.) William Kennedy³ mentions the existence of the chart made by Wallach (published by the Board of Aldermen of Matagorda), but does not reproduce it in his fine work on the geography, natural history, and topography of Texas. Wallach's report (dated "Matagorda, March

¹Geiser, S. W., "Southwestern Siftings, I. William Douglas Wallach". *Southwest Review*, 29, 1944, 291-97.

²In the fall of 1828, Capt. Alexander Thompson, of the *Schr. Louisiana* (Mexican Navy) made a survey of the port of Galveston. His map, entitled, "Survey of

25, 1839") gave a chart of the Paso Cavallo, "drawn from notes of a trigonometric survey . . .; also a sketch of that part of Matagorda Bay lying between [Matagorda] and the anchorage [eight and one-half miles down the bay], which shows the results of an examination made . . ., with the plan of such works as I recommend for the improvement of navigation in that vicinity." Wallach sounded the bay (reducing the soundings on his chart to low water), and arranged the beacons. As Kennedy states, "the report which accompanies the chart is useful for the explanation it conveys, and is extremely curious as well as instructive, in regard to the evidence it supplies of the rapid changes produced by the combined action of the winds and waters upon the coast of Texas'."

It is worth noting that Wallach's work preceded that of the U.S. Coast Survey by nearly a decade. Texas was annexed at the end of 1845; and late in that year the Survey first began its triangulation and topographic work on the Texas coast. The work was continued over the years, and was well advanced toward completion at the outbreak of the Civil War in April, 1861. The work of primary triangulation was begun (as would be expected) in the Galveston Bay region, and progressively advanced (with later secondary triangulation, topographic work, and hydrography)

the Port of Galveston, made by order of the Mexican Government in 1828, by Alexander Thompson," is printed as an inset-map, accompanying the pamphlet, "City of Galveston, on Galveston Island, in Texas: with a History of the Title of the Proprietor . . ." (New Orleans, 1837.) The *Austin Papers* print letters (17 Nov. 1828 and 6 Dec. 1828) from Thompson to Stephen F. Austin and a letter from Austin to Commodore David Porter (16 Feb. 1829) mentions Thompson's work in Galveston Bay in the fall of 1828. The *Texas Almanac* (1860, p. 165) mentions Thompson as a lieutenant in the Texas Navy in the years 1835-38; but of what ship there is no information. Jim Dan Hill (*The Texas Navy* . . ., 1937) makes no mention of Alexander Thompson. Perhaps this is due to several Texas Capitol fires, which made Navy materials very fragmentary. If any hydrographic or topographic surveys were made by the ships of the Texas Navy under Commodore E. W. Moore, no record exists of them, so far as I know.

²Kennedy, William, *Texas; its Geography, Natural History, and Topography*. (New York: Benjamin and Young, 62 John Street; . . . 1844). I have not secured access to the Wallach chart, after extended search.

³This shifting of bar and channel on Texan passes and entrances frequently is mentioned in the early reports of the Superintendent of the U.S. Coast Survey, 1848-59.

southward and westward toward the mouth of the Rio Grande⁵.

Since Wallach's life and career in the city of Washington subsequent to his Texas sojourn are adequately covered in my former paper, the present note deals primarily with his earlier life, and his years in Texas.

Wallach seems to have come to Texas in 1838, at the age of twenty-six. He had been born in the city of Washington in the year 1812. He was the eldest son of Richard Wallach, a prominent lawyer of that city⁶. On his maternal side he was grandson of Colonel Charles Simms of Alexandria, Va., formerly of Washington's staff in the Revolutionary War, lawyer of General Washington, witness of his Will, and a pall-bearer at Washington's funeral⁷.

William Douglas Wallach received his education at Columbian College in Washington (1829-32?), training himself for later work as a civil engineer. He left college without a degree, to work on surveys of railroads in Massachusetts⁸. After a year or so, he returned to Virginia and did surveyor's work on (probably) the Richmond, Frederick & Potomac and the Richmond & Petersburg railroads. At

⁵It is interesting to note the work done by the U.S. Coast Survey on Matagorda Bay subsequently to Wallach's work. James S. Williams (1853) made a reconnaissance of Matagorda Bay, and Gustavus Wilhelm Wurdemann made hourly tidal observations at the Matagorda entrance (Paso Cavallo). Samuel Augustus Gilbert worked on the triangulation and topography of the bay (1855-57). Malcolm Station, also (1855-56); and J. A. Sullivan for a part of the season of 1856 made topographic plane-table surveys of Matagorda Peninsula and the mainland. Hydrography of the bay and Paso Cavallo was conducted by Lt. John C. Febiger, U.S.N., in the U.S.C.S. Schr. *Arago* (1857), and by Lt. W. Ronckendorff, U.S.N., in the *Arago* in 1860. In 1859 A. W. Muldaur worked on the hydrography of Matagorda Bay.

⁶Richard Wallach died in Washington, 3 December, 1835; he was so conspicuous a public man that his death is noted in *The American Almanac* for 1836. A son, Richard Wallach, jr., (1816-81) followed his father's profession. He was educated in Columbian College [later, George Washington University], was admitted to the bar (1836), was U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia (1849-53), member of the Common Council (1848-49), Mayor of Washington City (1861-68) and *ex-officio* Regent of the Smithsonian Institution (1861-68). Another son, Charles Simms Wallach, was U.S. Consul at Matagorda, Texas, in 1840; while the youngest son, Cuthbert, became a paymaster in the U.S. Navy. These three were the younger brothers of W. D. Wallach.

⁷Washington's Diaries (*esp.* 1786 to 1788, and for 1798) contain a number of references to Colonel Charles Simms.

⁸Probably the Boston & Lowell or the Boston & Providence railroads, which were completed and in use in 1834: there is no record of his employment.

the end of 1835 his father died in Washington. With the completion of the Richmond & Frederick Railroad in 1837, his railroad-engineering experience may have ended; but there is reason to believe that before the end of 1838 (when he came to Texas) he had further experience in surveying on various railroads and canals in Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina⁹.

In 1838 or 1839, Wallach became a contributor to the Matagorda *Bulletin* (established in 1836 by Niles & Jones). Early in the year 1839⁹, he printed his card in the *Colorado Gazette and Advertiser* as a civil engineer, "who will undertake any examination (instrumental or otherwise) connected with proposed improvements; as well as design and superintend the construction of any work or works in the Republic." Among his Texan references he included Anson Jones of Brazoria, Horton & Clements and Simeon Mussina of Matagorda, and Colonel Edwin Morehouse of Houston. Anson Jones had in 1838 been Minister to the United States from the Republic of Texas, and Wallach may have become acquainted with him in Washington. Publication of his card was, of course, subsequent to the completion of Wallach's hydrographic survey of Matagorda Bay, which probably occupied him for at least a month. Samuel Alexander Roberts of Washington-on-the-Brazos (a graduate of West Point, and at one time—1841—Secretary of State of the Republic of Texas under Lamar) introduced Wallach to Lamar (29 September, 1839) as a "civil engineer, formerly of Washington, D.C." who was "now surveying the Colorado River," and "editor of the Matagorda *Bulletin*." The coastal country seems to have offered but little to Wallach in the practice of his profession, for at the beginning of January of the next year (1840) Wallach purchased the *Colo-*

⁹In his professional card, publ. in the Matagorda *Colorado Gazette and Advertiser*, June 6, 1839, Wallach gives as references the following Chief Engineers: Major W. G. McNeill (Charleston & Cincinnati R.R., Charleston, S.C.), Charles B. Fisk (Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Co., Hancock, Md.), G. W. Hughes (Annapolis & Elk Ridge R.R., Annapolis, Md.), Walter G. Wynn (Wilmington & Raleigh R.R., Wilmington, N.C.), Chas. F. M. Garnett (Raleigh & Gaston R.R., Raleigh, N.C.); and Presidents Marshall Parks (Norfolk & Edenton R.R., Norfolk, Va.), and Col. Andrew Joyner (Portsmouth & Roanoke R.R., Portsmouth, Va.)

rado Gazette and Advertiser of Matagorda. This opened up his remarkably interesting journalistic career, which culminated in his purchase and editorship of the Washington *Evening Star*. At first a partisan of Lamar, Wallach lent his support to Sam Houston in the year 1841, which brought down upon his head the "Eatanswill Gazette" type of ex-coriation that so blemished frontier journalism¹⁰.

As to when Wallach returned to the United States, I do not know; his obituary in the Washington *Star* (Dec. 1, 1871) states that it was after Annexation. He already had gained an excellent reputation as an editorial writer. He became a correspondent of the Richmond *Enquirer* while Thomas Ritchie was editor (1804-45). When Mr. Ritchie became the editor of the Washington *Union* (1845-51) Wallach joined the staff of that paper¹¹. He also contributed articles to the *United States Magazine & Democratic Review* in its most brilliant period, as well as to a number of other magazines¹². In 1853 (with W. H. Hope) he purchased the Washington *Evening Star*, and became its sole owner two years later. He retained ownership of the paper until 1867. His home estate, "Montrose" (near Culpeper, Va., purchased in 1857) became his home during his last years, and here he died on 1 December, 1871. Burial took place in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington.

It is interesting to note that none of W. D. Wallach's surviving nieces was aware (1943) of his career in Texas; nor any living person connected with the Washington *Star*. Although his sojourn in Texas was mentioned in his contemporary obituary, the numerous articles touching on Wallach in the semi-centennial issue of the *Star* in 1902 make no mention of his Texas career. He deserves commemoration, however, as one of the pioneer hydrographers of Early Texas, and as a pioneer Texas editor who won renown as a highly successful editor and newspaper man after his departure from Texas.

¹⁰*Southwest Review*, 29, 1944, 297. The author of the quoted passages was probably J. W. Cruger, editor of the "*Centinel*."

¹¹Bryan, W. B., *History of the National Capital*, , v. 2, p. 470.

¹²Washington *Evening Star*, Dec. 1, 1871.