

10-1974

The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836: an Appraisal

Archie P. McDonald

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Tell us how this article helped you.

Recommended Citation

McDonald, Archie P. (1974) "The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836: an Appraisal," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 12: Iss. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol12/iss2/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Texas Historical Journal by an authorized administrator of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu.

**THE PAPERS OF THE TEXAS REVOLUTION,
1835-1836: AN APPRAISAL**

by Archie P. McDonald

"Rich folks and libraries," a colleague commented when he saw the *Papers of the Texas Revolution* sprawled upon my desk. The litter of brown wrapping paper lay on the desk, cascaded to the floor, and bulged from the waste can in testimony to an eagerness to be at the books as soon as they arrived. The reality of his comment was obvious—ten such exquisitely printed and bound volumes, since they would have to be obtained as a set for usefulness, would limit the purchasers to the interested persons and institutions with \$115.00 in their book budget. Hopefully, every public and many private libraries will stock this magnificent collection. It is conceivable that some future paperback edition will bring the price to a point of feasibility for all interested students of the period, but in the meantime it is hoped that they will at least have access to a set because it is obviously the most important publication on Texas history of its kind in years, perhaps ever. Indeed, it is a source of some curiosity just why this was not done long ago, and a good guess is that it took the unique chemistry of a Jay Matthews and a John Jenkins coming together with all factors being just right to make it happen.

These men are not strangers to those who follow Texas historical publications. Brigadier General Jay A. Matthews has been for years associated with a journal devoted to the subject for which it was named, *Texas Military History*, now called *Military History of Texas and the Southwest*, which was a literary arm of the Texas National Guard Association. It began publishing in 1961 as a slender, blue-backed journal and has grown into a handsome, well-edited quarterly which more than adequately serves the subject area it staked out for itself. And John Holmes Jenkins is on its board of editors.

Jenkins entered the field of Texas letters in 1958 when he edited *Recollections of Early Texas, The Memoirs of John Holland Jenkins*, which was published by the University of Texas Press and it is presently in its third printing. In the years since he has been responsible for producing a rich bibliography of Texana through his imprint identification, The Pemberton Press, and is a national leader in the used book business through the Jenkins Company, headquartered in Austin. They have gotten together on this project, Matthews as publisher under the auspices of the Presidial Press and Jenkins as General Editor. Matthews promises that other works on Texas military history will be published by Presidial, but it will be hard to surpass this initial offering.

The project was a long time in the making—six years—but it has justified the efforts of publisher and editor. It may not be as complete and exhaustive as the *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, but it performs the same service for the Texas Revolution as that weighty collection did for the American Civil War. That war was longer, involved literally several million more people, and its records were kept in a more orderly, history-conscious fashion. Without the OR'S, as they are familiarly known, modern scholars would be unimaginably hindered in their study. Until now this has been the unfortunate condition for students of the Texas Revolution, at least partially. That qualification is necessary because some of the material in the *Papers of the Texas Revolution* was drawn from previously published collections. But even if all the items reproduced here had been carefully preserved over the last fourteen decades in environmentally protective archives, which they certainly were not, that is not to say they were "available" in the complete definition of the word. Many were housed in Austin in the University of Texas Archives or in the Archives Division of the Texas State Library, but because of Texas' geography they were hard for

many people to get at, even if they happened to be residents of Texas. In this form the archives can go to any public or private institution or individual who wishes to acquire them.

The idea for this project grew out of a conversation between the publisher and James Day when the latter was serving as Archivist for the Texas State Library. As is often the case, the scope changed with its own momentum as the work progressed, but either way it is to Day's credit that he found and encouraged a publisher to undertake an endeavor of this magnitude. The addition of Jenkins as General Editor and of Maj. Gen. Thomas S. Bishop, Dorman H. Winfrey, Malcolm D. McClean, Robert Cotner, Robert Weddle, Charles Corkan, Richard Santos, John Kinney, and of course Day as advisory editors brought in men of energy and significance to insure that the work would not only be done but done well. These are familiar names to those who deal with archives and history in Texas.

Jenkins' contribution is obviously the most significant. He has combined here the love of a native son, the skill of a good historian, the astuteness of a good businessman. He realized both the importance and the limitations of the work, knew when to go on and when to quit. After all, in the name of completeness he could have taken another twenty years to get it out and denied the availability of these papers to potential users for that long; happily he has come into print with the work as complete as circumstance and six years work can make it, and is realistic enough to know that there are other items still in the limbo of private hands, yet romantic enough to hope that this work will bring them out for the rest of us to see. Jenkins believes that the work will prove useful because it prints several thousand letters and documents on the Texas Revolution which have never been published previously in any form, it reprints hundreds of others that were printed during the revolutionary period but have been subsequently lost for research purposes due to rarity of the original publication or obscurity of its location, and because it includes material from modern works, combining for the first time a nearly complete primary source collection on the revolution. The end dates for inclusion were January 1, 1835, and October 22, 1836, Sam Houston's inaugural date as President of the Republic of Texas.

The editors included everything for the period that was known to them with the exception of letters and documents of a personal or business nature not related to the revolution itself, and we will have to trust their judgment on this. They claim to have been as liberal as possible in this selection, considering most letters and documents pertinent if they were written in Texas or by a Texas military figure. The entries are of three varieties, including material printed in full, material printed in part, and citations of material not printed. Some were presented in part because major portions of the letter were not relevant to military history or because the entire letter was not available either in the original or a previously printed form. Nineteenth century newspaper accounts of the revolution have a lot of the latter in them, and often this is the only available testimony that the letter existed. William B. Travis letters are particularly in this condition. Notes are provided but they do not attempt a definitive commentary on all letters. The method of citation will be discussed later. Suffice it here to say that they cite the original manuscript whenever possible, give information relative to published versions when they exist, and give first names and proper spellings when necessary for clarity. Original spellings and grammar are retained however, and when possible printing is from the original.

The principal sources, as is to be expected, are the archival holdings of the Texas State Library and the University of Texas. Both were being reorganized during the period of research, but because of the leadership of Chester Kielman at the university and John Kinney at the state library, the present locations of the quoted documents will

remain permanent and available. Previously published papers of Texas' prominent revolutionaries were also utilized, particularly *The Austin Papers*, edited by Eugene C. Barker and published by the American Historical Association and the University of Texas Press, 1924-1928; *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar*, edited by Charles A. Gulick and others, published by the Texas State Library, 1940-1945; *The Writings of Sam Houston*, edited by Amelia Williams and Eugene C. Barker, published by the University of Texas Press, 1938; and the *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution*, edited by William C. Binckley and published by the American Historical Association, 1936. Unpublished manuscript collections contributed significant materials, especially the Thomas J. Rusk Papers and the Texas Archives, from the University of Texas Archives, and the Nacogdoches Archives, housed in the Texas State Library. But Jenkins' greatest "find" was in the Andrew Jackson Houston Collection. Through the good offices of Houston Daniel and Price Daniel, Sr., the latter especially noted for his interest in both making and appreciating the history of Texas, Jenkins was able to see what precious few historians have ever been permitted to see--the Sam Houston letter file spanning nearly his whole career. Nearly five hundred entries in the work at hand came from this single source. And their value is multiplied because they are for the most part unutilized. We all start fresh with them.

Because of a long standing personal project, it was natural that the Travis items would be of great interest to the present writer. A look at a familiar Travis piece will serve as a good example of the kind of material to be found in these volumes and will illustrate the editor's method. In volume 1 on page 209 there is a letter from William B. Travis to Governor Henry Smith, a part of a rich and voluminous correspondence between the two which began in Travis' years in San Felipe and continued until his death. It is listed as item [337], [TRAVIS to SMITH], and the text of the letter, a preliminary report to Smith on Travis' leading a group of men to Anahuac for the purpose of taking the town from the Mexican commander, Antonio Tenorio follows. Turning to the back of the book, one finds a Key to Location Symbols, for instance Tx would mean an item is to be found in the Texas State Library, Archives Division; TxU-A means it would be in the Library of the University of Texas, Archives Division; TxGR means it would be in the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, and so forth. With that information any item may be located in its original form or at least in the form that Jenkins had to work with. In the case of the letter from Travis to Smith, it was quoted from Brown's *Life of Henry Smith*.

This format is followed through eight and one-third volumes and 4,361 items. In volume nine five revolutionary accounts are reproduced. They include Joseph E. Field, *Three Years in Texas, Including a View of the Texan Revolution . . .*, published in 1836 in Greenefield, Massachusetts by Justin Jones; *Texas, A Brief Account of the Origin, Progress and Present State of the Colonial Settlements of Texas; Together With an Exposition of the Causes Which Have Induced The Existing War With Mexico*, published in 1836 in Nashville by S. Nye & Company; *Journals of the Consultation Held at San Felipe De Austin, October 16, 1835*, published by order of Congress at Houston in 1838; *Journals of the Convention of 1836 at Washington, March 1-17*, published in Houston in 1838; and finally, *Ordinance and Decrees of the Consultation, Provisional Government of Texas and the Convention Which Assembled at Washington March 1, 1836*, also published at Houston in 1838.

Volume ten is the one that makes it all work. It contains a master key to symbols, an extensive bibliography, and a magnificent index done by Matthews. In the index the references are to item numbers, rather than to volume and page, but this should not cause much pain. Longer entries are fortunately divided for convenience into Letters From (LF), Letters To (LT), and Mentioned (M).

When you add it up it is a fine package indeed. In his publisher's foreword, Matthews anticipated that the publication of these *Papers of the Texas Revolution* would bring about important new discoveries, or would be instrumental in resurrecting still missing or unknown items. It need only be added that with tools like this the whole history of Texas must be nurtured.