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MORE STUDIES IN BROWNSVILLE HISTORY

**EDITED BY
MILO KEARNEY**

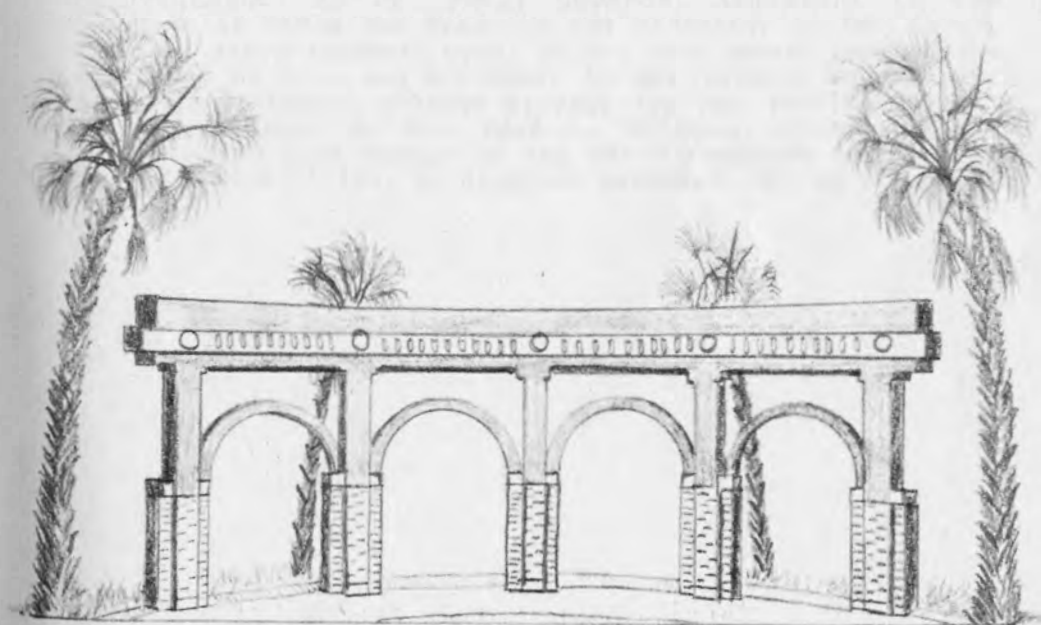


PAN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AT BROWNSVILLE



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Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
 I. Hispanic Period	
A. Resacas and Bancos in Brownsville History-- Antonio N. Zavaleta.....	3
B. An American "Melting Pot" in the Coahuiltecan Homeland -- Roberto Mario Salmón.....	32
C. De la Garzas, Ballis, and the Political History of the Region that would later become Cameron County--Milo Kearney.....	39
D. The Corridos of Mexico and South Texas: Modern Variations on Medieval Themes--George K. Green.....	69
 Folklore:	
A. O Todo o Nada--Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda...	82
B. Así Paga el Diablo--Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda.....	86
 II. Mexican-American War Period	
A. Point Isabel and the Mexican War--A.A. Champion and Henry G. Krausse, Jr.....	93
B. An Historic Hail to the Chief--Alan Hollander.....	102
C. Papers and Personalities of Frontier Journalism (1830's to 1890's)--A.A. Champion (with Mary Champion Hengglar, Consuelo Champion, and Vivian Kearney).....	112
D. The Miller Hotel in the Antebellum Period-- A.A. Champion.....	163
 Folklore:	
La Comadre Muerte--Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda.....	169

III. Civil War Period

A. The Texas-Mexico Border, 1858-1867, along the Lower Rio Grande Valley during the Decade of the American Civil War and the French Intervention in Mexico--Barry M. Cohen.....	175
B. The Impact of the Civil War on the Rio Grande--David Johnston.....	190
C. Brownsville and the Blockade--Charles M. Robinson III.....	207
D. John Warren Hunter-The Fall of Brownsville, 1863--edited and introduced by Roberto Mario Salmón.....	214
E. Bagdad: 'Lost City' of the Rio Grande--Allan Hollander.....	229
F. Are there Tunnels under Brownsville?--Allan Hollander.....	237
Folklore: El Belga -- Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda	246

IV. Late 19th Century

A. Brownsville City Cemetery--Robert B. Vezzetti.....	251
B. The Palm Grove-Rabb Plantation--Ruby Wooldridge.....	257
C. The Ongoing Saga of the 'Rio Bravo'--Allan Hollander.....	261
D. History of the Esperanza Ranch:A Significant Agricultural and Scientific Site, Brownsville, Texas--Raymond W. Neck.....	267
E. Faith and Saints in Mexican-American Folk Religion--Mark Glazer.....	275

Folklore:

The Fort Brown Ghosts and other Phantasms--Allan Hollander.....	285
---	-----

V. Start of the 20th Century

A. Lawlessness in Cameron County and the City of Brownsville: 1900 to 1912--William V. Wilkenson.....	295
B. Las Playas Washington y Boca Chica--Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda.....	306
C. Golden Years of the Rail--Alan Hollander	309
D. The Murder of Joe Crixell--Ralph Schmeling	318
E. The Plan of San Diego and the Lower Rio Grande Valley--Jake Watts.....	322
F. The Olmito Train and the Universal Struggle--Mimosa Stephenson and Olive Rathjen.....	347

Folklore:

A. Saludo Presidencial--Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda.....	355
B. The Encounter--Peter Gawenda.....	358
C. Los Dados--Peter Gawenda.....	362

VI. Since World War I

A. A Tribute to Sam Perl, 1898-1980--Harriett Denise Joseph.....	367
B. El Chubasco del '33--Manuel Medrano..	375
C. Cameron County's Public Schools in 1935--Peter B. Gawenda.....	381
D. The Founding of Charro Days--Ruby A. Wooldridge and Robert B. Vezzetti.....	390
E. Snake King of the Rio Grande--Alan Hollander	394
F. The Populist Revolt of M.M. Vicars--Anthony K. Knopp.....	405
G. Las Ferias en Matamoros en 1962--Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda.....	413
H. Winning Political Office in Cameron County, 1876-1988: The Mexican-American Case--Norman Binder and Frank J. García.....	423

Folklore:

Aprendiz de Brujo--Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda.....	439
--	-----

Illustrations

	<u>Page</u>
Title Page design--by Charlie Becker	cover
Brownsville Stage Coach--by Peter Gawenda	frontspiece
Hispanic Period--by Milo Kearney	1
River Front--by Cynthia Pierce	31
Vaquero Indio--by Peter Gawenda	38
Early Homes--by Cynthia Pierce	68
Corrido Singer--by Peter Gawenda	81
O Todo o Nada--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	85
Asi Paga el Diablo--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	89
Mexican-American War Period--by Milo Kearney	91
El Mexiquito, Point Isabel--by Charlie Becker	101
Zachary Taylor--by Bob Angell	111
Newspaper Office--by Peter Gawenda	162
Rip Ford--by Charlie Becker	168
Comadre Muerte--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	171
Civil War Period--by Milo Kearney	173
Cannon Convoy--by Cynthia Pierce	189
Gorgas Building, Fort Brown--by Cynthia Pierce	206
Ft. Brown Army Hospital--by Charlie Becker	213
Charles Stillman--by Charlie Becker	228
A Two-wheeler in Bagdad--By Peter Gawenda	236
Tunnel Entrance at Casa Mata--by Peter Gawenda	245
El Belga--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	248
Late 19th Century--by Milo Kearney	249
City Cemetery--by Gary Hatcher	256
Frank Rabb Home--by Charlie Becker	260
Remains of the "Rio Bravo"--by Peter Gawenda	266
Pre-1900 Home--by Charlie Becker	274
Virgen de San Juan--by Vivian Kearney	284
Ft. Brown Ghost--by Bob Angell	292
Start of the 20th Century--by Milo Kearney	293
Bandidos--by Cynthia Pierce	305
Washington and Boca Chica Beaches--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	308
Train Engine--by Bob Angell	317
Joe Crixell--by Charlie Becker	321
Point Isabel, Early 1900's--by Charlie Becker	346
Trains at Brownsville Station--by Peter Gawenda	354
Saludo Presidencial--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	357
The Encounter--by Peter Gawenda	361
Los Dados--by Peter Gawenda	364
Since World War I--by Milo Kearney	365
R.R. Engine and Steamboat--Cynthia Pierce	374
1933 Hurricane, Scene 1--by Charlie Becker	380

1933 Hurricane, Scene 2--by Charlie Becker	389
Charro Days 1975--by Milo Kearney	393
Snake King--by Peter Gawenda	404
Fishing Boat--by Charlie Becker	412
Ferias en Matamoros--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	422
Political Rally--by Cynthia Pierce	438
Aprendiz de Brujo--by Jaime A. Garza Salinas (Garsal)	442
Brownsville Houses--by Cynthia Pierce	Endpiece

Hispanic Period



"RESACAS AND BANCOS IN BROWNSVILLE HISTORY"

by

Antonio N. Zavaleta

INTRODUCTION

The area north and south of the Rio Grande River, in the vicinity of Brownsville, Texas, is one of the most historically and culturally significant areas along the river, and yet its history has been poorly documented. Both Horgan in Great River, (1) and Fehrenbach in Lone Star (2) described the importance of the historical events along the lower river and their significance in Brownsville's history.

The Rio Grande River is more than 2000 miles long and traverses many diverse landforms, but the section of the river near Brownsville is the most historically unknown because the river has changed its course frequently over the centuries. As it flows southeastward, from the limestone escarpment near Rio Grande City to the west, the river spills into the Lower Rio Grande River Valley and meanders through an ancient fan-shaped delta system. The unique geography and geologic history of the Rio Grande River has produced features which today play a major role in the discovery of Brownsville's history. The earliest Spanish settlers called the numerous bodies of water they found esteros. Today we call these beautiful natural resources resacas. To the geographer, however they are ox-bow lakes typical of meandering rivers. A variation of resacas are those bodies of water most recently cut off by the river's meanders, called bancos. While resacas and bancos are valuable real estate, in contemporary urban Brownsville, they have an even greater value in that they hold the remains of both the pre-historic and early historic peoples of the lower river area. This paper attempts to "scratch the surface" of the hidden information and cultural resource that lie beneath our resacas. Figure 1 represents the modern river delta system along with its major meanderbelt resacas.

The present geography of the lower Texas coast near Brownsville may be easily described as a river delta system. Its associated water-ways meander through a coastal esturine and empty into the Gulf of Mexico.

However, a more scientific description of the

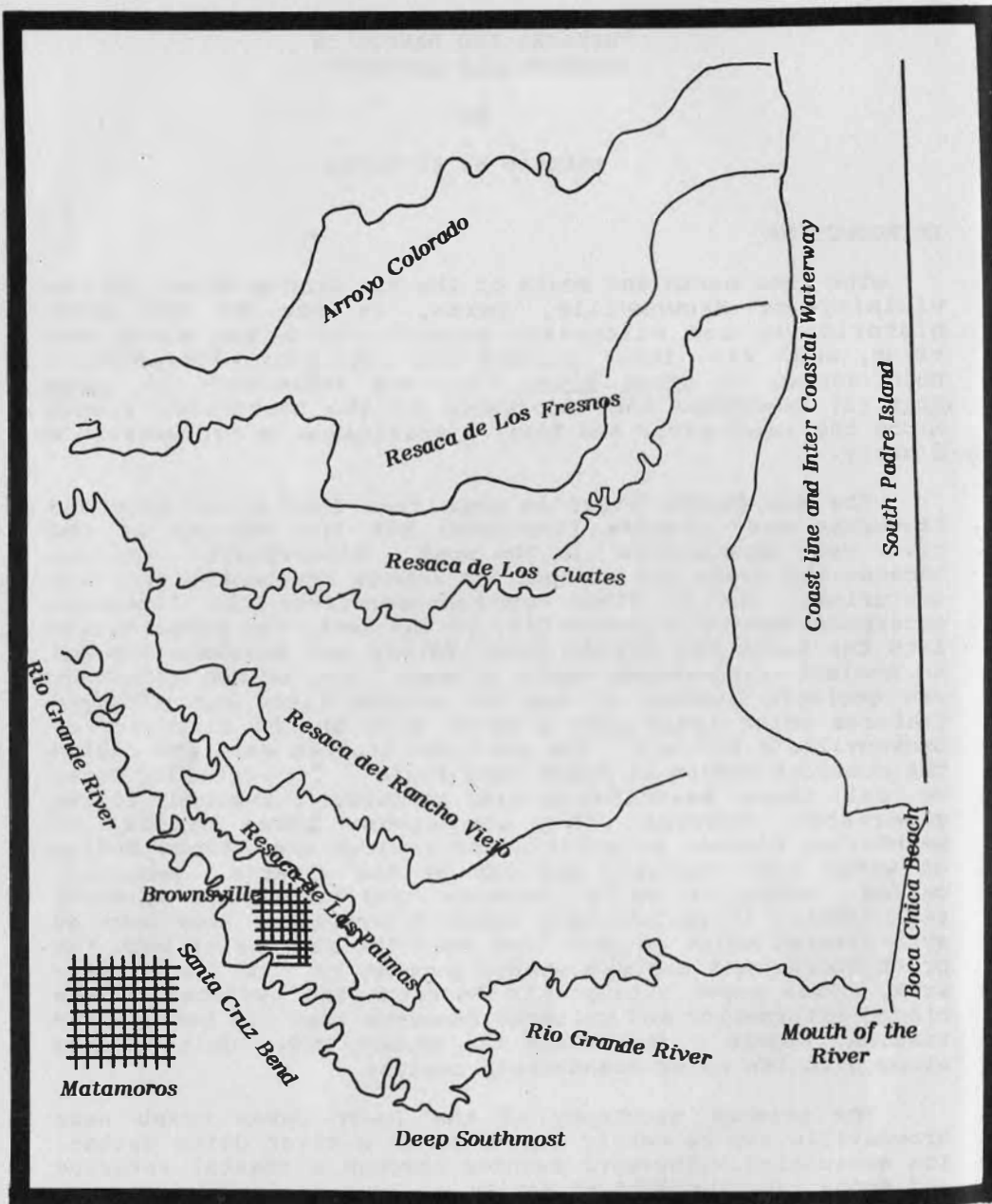


FIGURE 1

MAP OF THE RIO GRANDE RIVER DELTA INCLUDING THE MAJOR RESACAS

geomorphology and geology of the river and it's associated water-ways is appropriate for a complete understanding of the role the river has played in the historical and cultural significance of the area around Brownsville.

While the Rio Grande and Arroyo Colorado are the major fluvial features in the area, they are associated with both active and abandoned stream courses of the Rio Grande. These stream courses (water-ways) are geologically called meanderbelts, and represent the changes in a river's course over long periods of time. The evidence of channel changes in a river are meander cutoffs which become oxbow lakes. Over thousands of years of alternating wet and dry periods, the older oxbow lakes have filled up with mud and plant debris, and can only be detected by advanced geologic techniques. In the Rio Grande Valley area, there is evidence of these ancient meanderbelts as far north as Willacy County and an approximately equal distance to the south in Mexico.

The Rio Grande River has been a very active river throughout the period covering the Pleistocene, Holocene, and up to the present, a period of over 20,000 years. The northern meanderbelt system near Raymondville is the oldest and least detectable, while the meanderbelts below the Arroyo Colorado, in the area of San Benito, Los Fresnos and Rancho Viejo, are younger geologically. The resacas in the Brownsville area, those closest to the present location of the river, are the most recently formed resacas. Figure 2, describes the geological features of the river delta and the meander belt systems in the Brownsville area.

Little is known about the geology of river activity in northeastern Mexico. Some mapping does exist, and there are aerial photographs of the northeasternmost quadrant of Tamaulipas available, however, geological interpretation has not been conducted. We do know from studying the action of meandering rivers, that over the millennia, their movement is "whip" like. Therefore, the main river channel has undoubtedly moved alternately north and south and north again from its present location. Esteros and resacas, as far south as 30 miles into Mexico, were once part of the main channel of the Rio Grande River. The same can be said for meanderbelts which are known to have existed as far north as Raymondville.

The area south of Los Fresnos to the river is the most important for evidence of pre-historic human occupation. Within this area, there are at least four well-defined meanderbelts (resacas) with bands of delta sediment between them. The bands are as much as five miles wide to as narrow



FIGURE 2

MAP OF THE GEOLOGIC FEATURES OF THE RIO GRANDE RIVER
DELTA INCLUDING MEANDERBELTS

as a few hundred yards wide. From north to south lie Resaca Los Fresnos, Resaca de los Cuates, Resaca del Rancho Viejo, and Resaca de las Palmas. These meanderbelts were part of the active river channel in its "modern" period, as recently as 4,500 years B.P.(before the present). Resacas even more approximate to the river, such as those in urban Brownsville, like the Town Resaca and the Fort Brown resaca, and the bancos, are of even more recent origin.

For thousands of years the Rio Grande has filled its estuarine systems with mud and sand from up-river, and today the historically identifiable river delta system is approximately 50 miles wide (counting Mexico). It is estimated that during the early Pleistocene inter-glacial periods, the level of the Gulf of Mexico was approximately 400 feet above the present level. This fact would have placed the coast line and the mouth of the river somewhere in Starr County to the west. During times of glacial advances, the shoreline was on the present continental shelf. Only after the end of the last glacial age did the sea attain its present level. Geologists therefore believe that the present Rio Grande delta is not older than 4,500 years. As unbelievable as it may seem, human habitation in the river delta area 5,000 years ago was not only possible but probable. Therefore, it is completely conceivable that "Paleo-Indians," the ancestors of "modern" pre-historic Indians, witnessed the final rise of the level of the Gulf and the formation of the modern river delta.

The most recent system of meanderbelts, which form the resaca system today, have undergone much less alluvial activity than past systems. Geologists estimate that in the last 5,000 years the river's deposition of sand and silt by the river into the delta has been reduced dramatically. In fact, the same is true for the modern era.

More than 300 square miles of the area around Brownsville is dominated by well-preserved meanderbelt resacas. While most are inactive and filled in, only occasional hurricane activity reactivates the resaca systems outside of the urban areas. During dry spells, the resacas become filled with vegetation and remain inactive until the next tropical storm.

It is clear that the Rio Grande River and its associated water-ways have played a major role in the drama of pre-historic and historic human occupation in the delta area. The riverine resacas and the esturine marshes produce a very high biomass of both flora and fauna, which supported human occupation for the last several thousand years. As will be

described later, human occupation in the delta was believed to have been dense due to the availability of fresh water, food, and vegetation for construction materials. Early historic occupants also found similar natural resource available to them, and settlement was facilitated by resource accessibility.

Clearly, the present and former river channel and all associated bodies of water, including lakes, esteros, resacas, and bancos, are major cultural and historical resources, which must be protected. A complete understanding of the archaeology and history of the area around Brownsville cannot be completely understood without the recovery, preservation, and interpretation of material on the river and its associated water-ways (3).

From the time of the original European settlements, in the lower delta area in the 1750's, the river was characterized by its elaborate system of ox-bow lakes, first called esteros by the Spaniards, and now called resacas. As described above, an oxbow lake is formed when the meander of a river is "cut-off" from the main channel during a flood stage. As the river "rolls," it changes its course leaving behind isolated bodies of water and interconnected water-ways, characteristic of the area south of the Arroyo Colorado to the Rio Grande River. These riverine and esturine systems were the life blood of the people in the area. The water supported the coastal Indians with food, as they camped along the resaca banks, and in early historic times, these same bodies of water supported cattle ranching activities as the ranch complexes were built along the same banks. It was not until the middle of the 20th century that the river's channel was "permanently" fixed by the construction of dams up-river. While fixed for the future, the river's former course has left us a tremendously rich legacy of pre-historic and historic material to examine and interpret.

In pre-historic times, the lower river was home to numerous bands of hunting and gathering people, collectively known as Coahuiltecan (4). Although the native cultures of the Rio Grande delta were known to have been prosperous and plentiful, anthropologists and historians have not studied them in detail, considering them to be insignificant in comparison to the "high cultures" of the American Southwest and Central Mexico.

Historical settlements, on the other hand, began approximately two hundred and fifty years ago. The first permanent Spanish settlements in the lower river area came

relatively late in the chronological scheme of things. The establishment of Nuevo Santander in the 1750's by Escandon was some 200 years after the initial discovery and exploration of the mouth of the river by Alonso de Piñeda (5).

The settlement of Matamoros, Tamaulipas came even later, since the original Spanish settlers considered the coast to be uninhabitable. The documented history we do have indicates that activity along the river, since its settlement, has been continuous and intense since the early 17th century. In fact, the river was the primary means of transportation and movement in the development of the lower river area from the beginning of the 19th century until shortly after the turn of the 20th century, a period of approximately 100 years. During their evolution, all settlements were linked to and by the river and its waterways.

Clearly then, it is important to note that the river, in the area of Brownsville, has a record of pre-historic occupation, and four hundred years of historic interest, including more than 200 years of fairly active settlement, 100 years of major military activity, and approximately 100 years of intense farming and ranching, in which the past and present channels of the river have played a significant role.

Given the well documented pre-historic and historic activity along the lower river, the search for and the preservation of pre-historic cultural and historical resource material is established and warranted.

PREHISTORIC RESOURCE

That part of coastal Texas which encompasses the mouth of the Rio Grande River, and its present and former course, is the lower and westernmost section of the West Gulf Coastal Lowland Province (6). This coastal lowland area, is approximately 50 miles wide, and serves as the demarcation of a major pre-historic geo-cultural resource area. The geo-cultural area, to which the pre-historic residents of Brownsville belonged, extended beyond the Rio Grande delta to as far north as the Nueces River, near present day Corpus Christi, and to as far south as San Fernando to the south. The Rio Grande River did not serve as a cultural barrier to pre-historic peoples, but was simply a major geographical feature in their lives. Therefore, the cultural groups, to which the pre-historic peoples of the

lower river system belonged, ranged both north and south of the present day location of the river.

Several noted archaeologists took interest in this cultural resource area in the 1950's, and the work of T.N. Campbell (7) and R. MacNeish (8) remain the definitive descriptions of coastal native peoples in the Lower Rio Grande River area. Along with the work of Newcomb (9), anthropologists sought to more clearly define the cultural complex of the coastal Coahuiltecan peoples, who exploited the resaca system in the river delta area described above. Newcomb described them as a nomadic people, who made their living by hunting, fishing, and food-gathering. Associated with the southern section of the Texas coast were numerous small nomadic bands that were widely distributed over southern Texas and northeastern Mexico, and several hundred band names have been recorded for them. Another anthropologist of the same era, Ruecking, (10) sought to synthesize these little known coastal bands into an identifiable cultural complex. He recognized three different clusters of Coahuiltecan bands along the Texas coast. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, on both sides of the river, he identified the "Carrizo Cluster" for which 51 band names are on record.

While these scattered bands of nomadic hunters and gatherers were the second wave of pre-historic people to inhabit lower Texas coast, Sjoberg (11) points out that by the middle of the 18th century, Lipan Apache groups had been pushed by the Comanche down into the southern tip of Texas, constituting the most recent wave.

Evidence of substantial human occupation in the lower river area, is available in both the archaeological and the historical records. For example, the Spanish explorer, Alonso de Piñeda, is believed to have been the first European to describe the area around the mouth of the river. He reported the frequency of Indian "villages" along the river and thought the natives to be friendly and receptive to the Spaniards (12).

The anthropologists who described the native peoples of the lower river delta in the 1950's, indicated that there had been very little archaeological investigation in the southern section of the Texas coast, and that most of that which did exist, was confined to the extreme south, especially the delta of the Rio Grande. As Campbell states, "The fact that we know anything at all about the pre-historic peoples of the river is due to the personal interest of A.E. Anderson, a civil engineer and surveyor from Brownsville, who began in

1908 to collect and record specimens of artifacts from Indian sites he discovered on both sides of the Rio Grande. Over the years Anderson collected thousands of specimens from several hundred sites, and in 1945 his collection was deposited with the University of Texas " (13)

Anderson reported sites associated with clay dunes on the coast and with the abandoned channels of the Rio Grande. According to the data gathered by Anderson, the resacas and bancos of the river represent the most fruitful location for pre-historic artifact in the coastal Rio Grande Valley area.

In the 1930's, the archaeologist Sayles (14) defined the cultural complex associated with the resacas and bancos around Brownsville, calling it the "Brownsville Phase." He believed that the pre-historic people of Brownsville had grown out of a "Tamaulipecan root" and regarded this culture to be identifiable with the historic Tamaulipecan Indians.

This cultural comparison with northern Mexican native stock is compatible with MacNeish's work and findings in the 1950's. MacNeish published his first report on the area in 1947, using materials from the Anderson collection. He assigned the principal types of artifacts in the collection to the "Brownsville Complex" which he believed to have remained the same from approximately A.D. 1000 to the 1820's. Soon after 1820, the last native peoples of the Valley were pushed south and west into Mexico. The various investigators of the first half of this century described the Brownsville pre-historic culture as extending along the coast and inland for approximately 30 to 40 miles from the Arroyo Colorado in the north to the Rio San Fernando in the south.

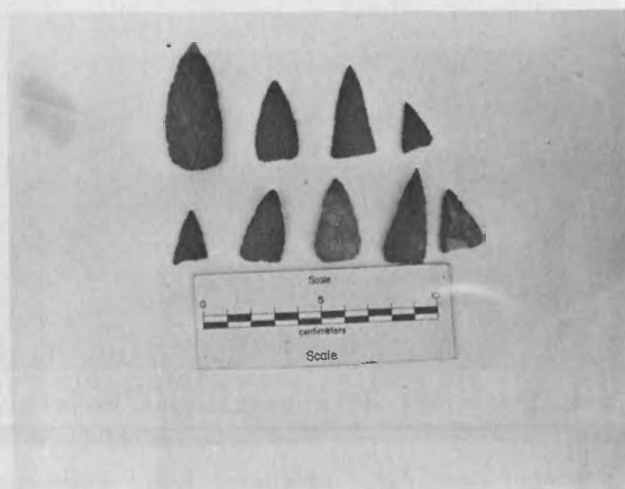
It is archaeologically significant that the existence of certain trade items in the Anderson collection led MacNeish to hypothesize the existence of a late pre-historic trade route between the Huastecan areas of southern Tamaulipas and northern San Luis Potosi/Vera Cruz, and the Caddoan area of East Texas. This trade route is believed to have passed through Brownsville in pre-historic times and would have been a major link between the Native American cultures of Meso-America and North America (15).

The archaeological, and ethnohistoric, study of the lower river was generated by the existence of the Anderson collection. The interest subsided in the early 1960's, during which time a new group of Texas archaeologists were becoming interested in the archaeology of the Lower Rio Grande River Valley.



FIGURE 3

SHELL ARTIFACTS FROM THE ANDERSON COLLECTION



All photographs of Anderson Collection taken by Author

FIGURE 4

LITHIC ARTIFACTS FROM THE ANDERSON COLLECTION

In the late 1960's, Thomas Hester (16) excavated the Floyd Morris and Ayala sites in the river delta, bringing into play the first of several very significant burials to be discovered and excavated. These excavations yielded the first human remains of the Brownsville resaca culture.

In 1971 a four month re-identification survey of the Anderson sites was undertaken. Many of these sites were located along resacas adjacent to the present course of the river. The idea was to ascertain if any of the original Anderson sites could still be located after years of weathering, disturbance, and heavy agricultural and urban development. The results of the survey pointed to the "vast archaeological potential" of the lower Rio Grande delta. Although previously identified Anderson sites were found to have "scanty material," the actual number of pre-historic Indian sites in Brownsville and the surrounding area was greatly increased by the survey. Prewitt (17) located and recorded 79 Indian sites in this intensive survey of the eastern one-third of Cameron County, adding to the archives 38 new archaeological sites. By the middle 1970's, information existed on at least 225 archaeological sites in Cameron County.

The artifacts from the Anderson Collection are of two basic types: (1) marine (figure 3) and (2) lithic and pottery (figures 4 and 5). By far, the marine artifacts are the most numerous. These include marine-shell tools and ornaments manufactured from conch shell, handaxes, scrapers, tinklers, beads, disks, sockets, plugs for drills, fish hooks, pendants, gouges, and band ornaments. The wide range of marine artifacts indicate a broad usage, including subsistence, ornamentation, and possibly trade items (18).

Much less common are flint projectile points, knives, scrapers, drills, hammerstones, pumice stonepipes, rubbing stones, pottery (primarily Huastecan from Tamaulipas, figure 6), and bone tools and ornaments. With the exception of the bone and shell, the raw material for stone and pottery items is lacking in the coastal region. There are no consolidated geologic sediments as a source for raw lithic material existing in Cameron County. In addition, the sandy soil does not provide a good temper for pottery, although a few shards containing sand have been found (19).

In summary, it is clear that the archaeology of the Brownsville, Texas, Lower Rio Grande River delta is of major significance to our understanding of its pre-historic peoples. All authors working in the area have agreed that



FIGURE 9

REMAINS OF SUNKEN GUNBOAT ON THE RIVER BELOW
THE GATEWAY BRIDGE IN 1987

little has been done and that much more needs to be done in order to more fully understand the pre-historic cultures of the area. In addition, our knowledge of the Brownsville "Focus," "Complex," "Phase," or whatever you wish to call it, is based almost entirely upon surface collections. That is, what we think we know about the pre-historic peoples of Brownsville is based on sketchy material, and hence, the archaeology of the area is in very rudimentary condition. However, enough is known about the area as a whole to suggest the main patterns of cultural development. Professor Campbell summed up the sentiment of the lower river by saying, "We need systematic archaeological surveys in the more poorly known areas. We also need extensive excavation at a large number of sites, followed by detailed publications. The current rapid industrial development of the coastal area makes it imperative that a program of research be implemented before the best archaeological sites are destroyed." These words were published by my anthropology professor in the late 1950's, and to date they have not been heeded, scores of pre-historic sites continue to be lost every year, as they fall victim to the plow or the house foundation.

HISTORICAL RESOURCE

In his examination of the significance of historical remains in cultural interpretation, Campbell recognized that although some field work has been done, there is relatively little publication on historic sites along the lower Texas coast. The lower river area, located just north of the present site of Brownsville to the mouth of the river, is one of the most historically significant along the lower Texas coast.

As recently as the early 1970's, late pre-historic and early historic materials were readily located near resacas, bancos, and the clay dunes, characteristic of the salt flats to the east of Brownsville. The Prewitt survey mentioned above, indicated the continued pre-historic/historic significance of many of the "unusual" land forms in our area associated with the coast and the river (20).

The movement and changes in the river's course is of major significance in the understanding of the local history, which has evolved along its banks and waterways. In the early 1850's, shortly after the southern boundary of the United States was established at the river, the federal

government commissioned a land survey to be conducted along the entire length and breadth of the river (21). This historic survey is referred to as the Emory Survey of 1853, and is an invaluable resource to persons interested in researching historical and geographical features along the river. A copy of the two volume Emory Survey publication is located in the Hunter Room of the Oliviera Library at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, Texas. Of comparable value is an original set of International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) maps of the river dated, 1898, also found in the Hunter Room (22).

Together with the Emory survey of 1853, the IBWC maps of 1898, contemporary USGS maps, and aerial photographs, it is possible to reconstruct the changes in the river's course in the area of Brownsville from the early 1800's to the present, a period of almost 200 years, (23). Therefore, the complete settlement and history of Brownsville, as well as a significant portion of the history of Matamoros can be plotted. When the location of Anderson's pre-historic sites are added to the picture, we have a holistic view of the movements and location of human activity in the Brownsville area encompassing the last 1000 years.

The historical activity along the river and its environs above and below the location of Brownsville generally pivots around what was called the Santa Cruz Bend. Reference to a map of the river indicates a major "hair pin" bend in the river exactly at the point where the Gateway Bridge is presently located. It was around this bend in the river that Fort Brown was established and subsequently, Brownsville was built. While most of the land on the north bank was still "monte" at the end of the Mexican American War (1848), ranching, cattle grazing, and river docking were established activities along the "bend" (24).

The original Spanish settlers in the area called the bodies of water esteros, and in fact Matamoros' original name was San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos. It was later changed to Congregacion de Nuestra Señora del Refugio de los Esteros (Refugio); both names make reference to resacas. It was generally along the banks of the esteros that settlements were established. Therefore, the earliest maps of our area depict estero locations and their ranches, with many bearing the same name (25).

Careful examination of the river's course from above Brownsville and continuing down river to its mouth of the river reveals a tremendously rich history of ranching life

that is virtually unknown in the historical literature. Right above Brownsville along the river, for example, approximately where Villa Nueva is located, we find the "Los Dulces Nombres" ranch. While the existence of the ranch is indicated on the 1898 IBWC map, there are no physical remains of it today. However, the map indicates that it was located right on the river channel. A "foot survey" of the area revealed a characteristic stand of dead, full grown, Washingtonian palms on the site confirming the former occupation of the area, which is today a cotton field (26).

It should also be noted, that in his early 20th century land survey efforts, A.E. Anderson located the remains of countless Indian occupation sites throughout the river delta area. Just up-river from Brownsville, the "Limeño Estero," (the label estero indicates its antiquity) is a very old section of the river, which Anderson identified as the location of a pre-historic Indian camp. A century and a half of heavy agricultural activity and urbanization has eliminated the surface evidence of pre-historic occupation sites, although sub-surface evidence of occupation is still present in many areas of undisturbed sub-soils (27).

Brownsville natives are familiar with the "Las Prietas" area of town, located to the west along the Military Highway. It is presently called Garden Park. While numerous stories exist as to the origin of the name, the 1898 map indicates that there was a "Las Prietas" ranch in the area at the turn of the century. Examination of historic maps indicate that there was a shift in the river's course in the Las Prietas area sometime between 1853 and 1898. By the turn of the century, the river had "cut out" the Phillips Banco in the Garden Park area, which did not exist in the middle of the 19th century. It would stand to reason that the field search for historical river related artifact in this area should be conducted along the banks of the Phillips Banco and not along the present river bank. In 1850, the Phillips Banco was the main channel of the Rio Grande River (28).

Even more recent changes in the river's course can be seen continuing down-river in the direction of Brownsville. The Morales Banco is located in the Riverside area of Brownsville south of the PUB pump station. The banco is not found on the 1898 map, implying that it must have been part of the main river channel at the turn of the century. Therefore, sometime between 1900 and the 1950's, flooding and continued river channel change "cut out" the Morales Banco from the present day main river channel (29).

The Treviño-Canales Baño is a major feature of urban

Brownsville that we see as we enter the Amigoland area from Palm Blvd. It was an active part of the main river channel in 1853, as it can be identified on the Emory maps, but was "cut out" by 1898. River movement has been documentable in this area since at least 1800, and the fact that the Treviño-Canales Banco was part of the main river up until the later part of the 19th century makes it a living part of river movement and the location of possible historically significant material. This expansive banco, which extends over a mile in the present Riverside-Amigoland area of Brownsville, is an area marked for urban development in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Any proposed earth moving activity in the area of the banco should be accompanied by careful observation for historical elements (30). Figure 7 presents an 1989 IBWC map indicating the location of the river channel in 1853, today the Treviño-Canales Banco.

The Santa Cruz Bend, as mentioned earlier, was a point of reference for the early development of Brownsville, and as such, the river channel above and below the bend are of major historical significance. From the location of the B&M Bridge, the first bridge built on the Rio Grande around 1900, to the location of the Fort Texas breastworks (1845) near Riverview Golfcourse, several maps indicate the former location of numerous features. There were "jetties" located on both the Mexican and U.S. sides of the river. Several river ferries operated on the river including the "Freeport Ferry", and at least three sunken riverboats are identified, with the remains of one still locatable. The maps also show numerous 19th century houses and buildings once directly located along the river (31). Figure 8 represents a section of a comparative map of the river and jetties indicating the variation in the river course during the 19th century as well as the location of sunken boats and river bank buildings.

The remnants of a sunken gunboat at approximately the same location as the houses are of considerable historical significance. The bow of the gunboat is clearly visible above water. This vestige of the era of river transportation, is probably the only physical boat wreck still in existence on the Rio Grande River. Although the debris has received little attention from the local populace, it should be regarded as a structure of major historical significance and representative of a former way of life along the river (32). Figure 9 is a photo of the remains of the sunken gunboat (see figure 8) as it looked in March of 1987.

The Fort Brown Resaca complex is located in the same

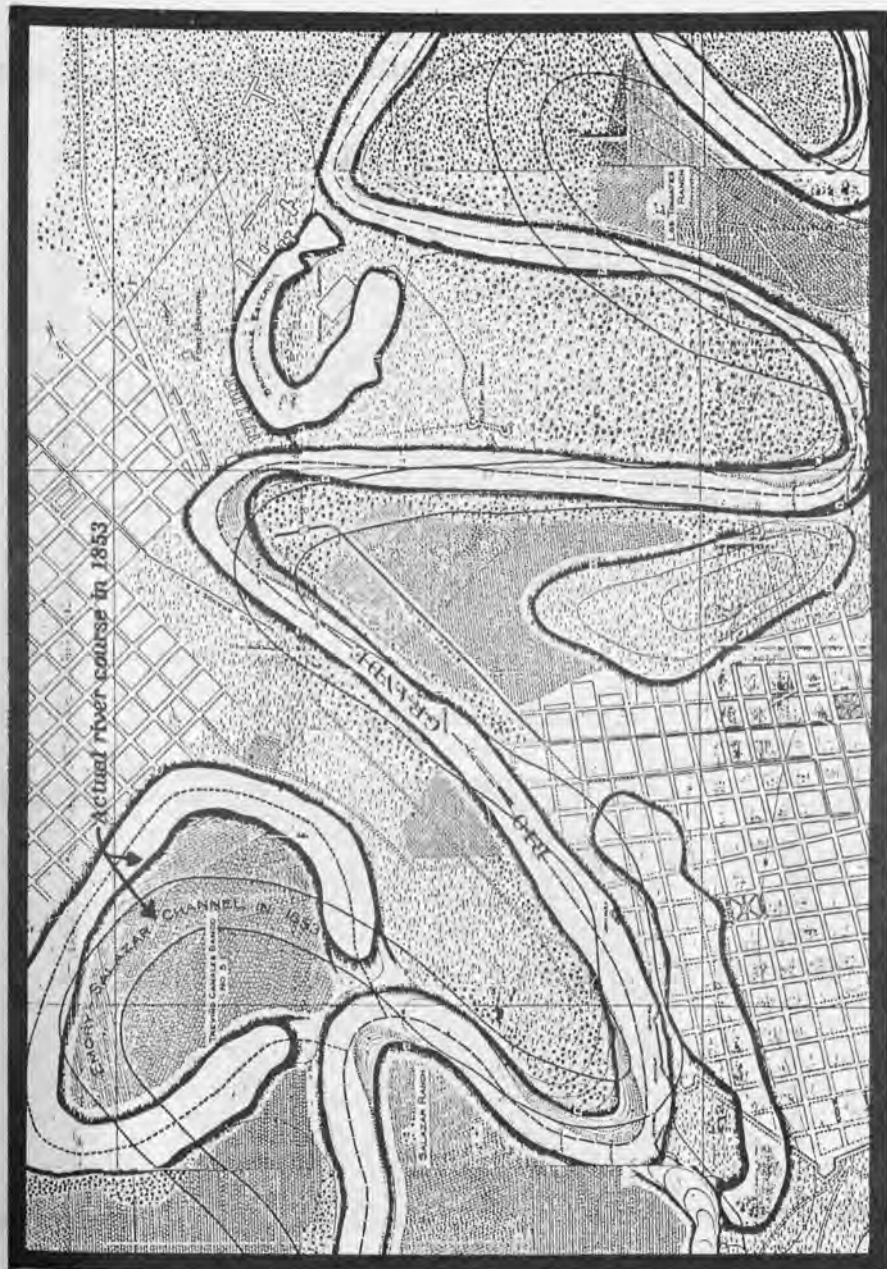


FIGURE 7

IBWC 1898 MAP OF THE RIVER CHANNELS IN THE AREA
OF THE SANTA CRUZ BEND

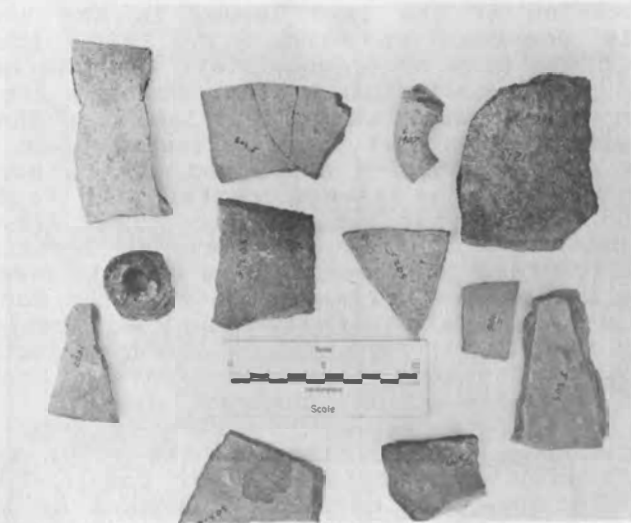


FIGURE 5

CERAMIC SHARD ARTIFACT FROM
THE ANDERSON COLLECTION



FIGURE 6

HUASTECAN POT FROM THE ANDERSON COLLECTION

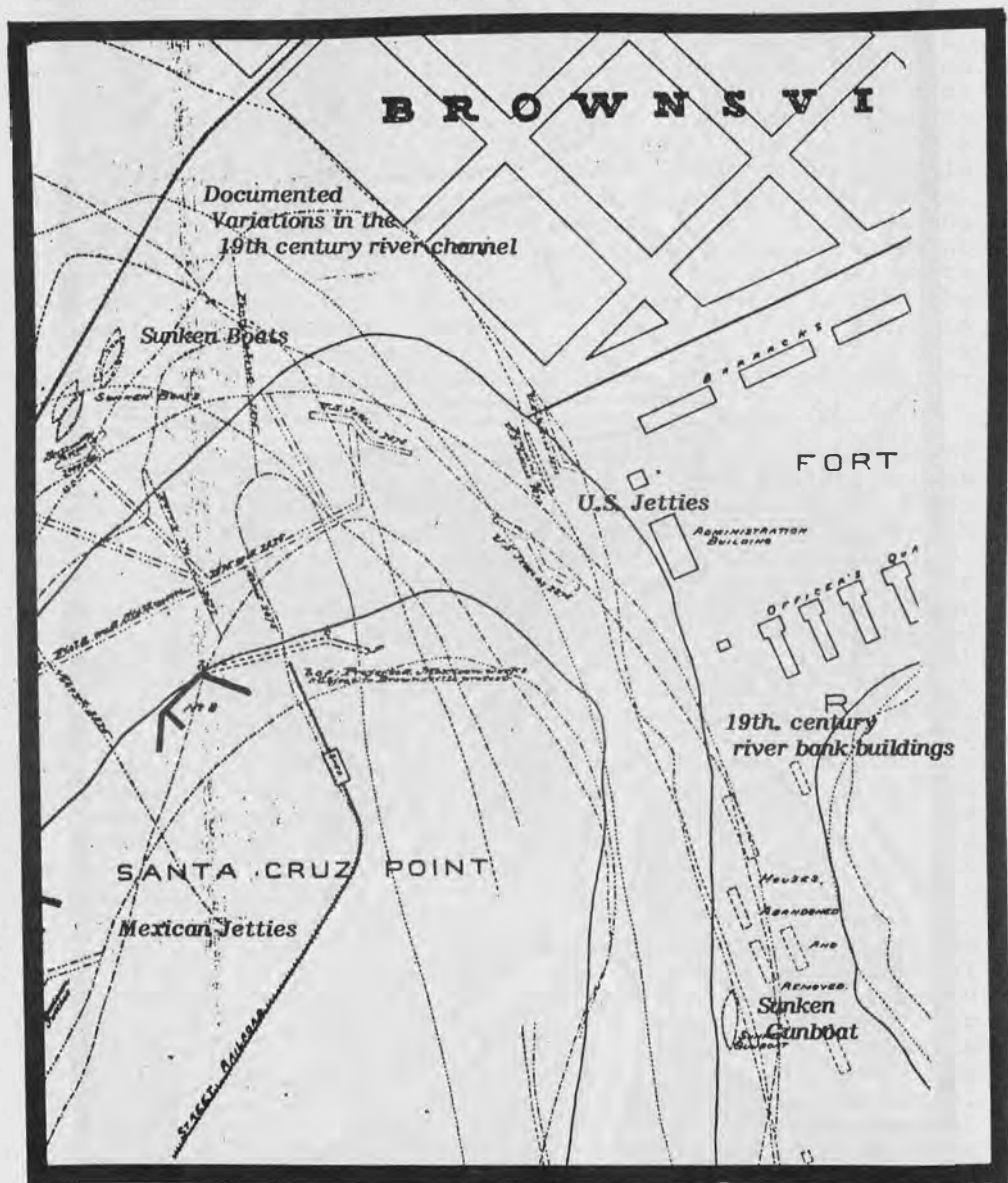


FIGURE 8

**IBWC 1898 MAP OF RIVER CHANNEL CHANGE AND
SHORE FEATURES IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY**

area as the Cruz Bend. The complex includes a main body of water and several disconnected bancos to the south of the present location of the IBWC levee, in the area of the Brownsville Compress and the R.E. Smith property (now belonging to the City of Brownsville). As can best be reconstructed, these resaca/banco complexes have not been part of the main river channel since the 1840's. The original Fort Texas (pre-dates Fort Brown) breastworks is set near the river as it makes a deep bend to the south. This southward turn of the river creates the land for the Riverview Golf course. In the past, the river flowed through the Fort Brown Resaca, past the present location of the Brownsville Compress (note resaca beds behind levee, and East Brownsville Little League field), and past the Santa Rosalia Cemetery, a path that approximates the location of the present day IBWC levee (33). Figure 10, is a section of the Cameron County Precinct #2 map indicating the relative position of the major bancos discussed.

Historic maps indicate that as the river reached its northernmost point near the Fort Brown Complex, there were several buildings situated along the bank of the river, including houses, artillery barracks, and other unnamed structures. A change in the river's course, southeast of Fort Brown, produced the Lozano Banco. In fact, careful examination and excavation of the north bank of the Lozano Banco reveals extensive Fort Brown refuse. It is likely that before the turn of the century, the U.S. Army dumped their garbage into the river southeast of Brownsville (34). (See location of the Lozano Banco on figures 10 and 7).

The "Los Tomates" and the "Jeronimo" Bancos were also contiguous parts of the river channel along with the Lozano Banco in the early 1800's. Interestingly, examination of the river channel on the Emory Survey map indicates a course similar to what exists today. Therefore, we have one example of the river changing its course to the north between 1853 and 1898. Between 1898 and the present, the river "rolled" back to the south, "cutting off" the three bancos, which are clearly depicted on the 1898 maps. The area below the Santa Cruz Bend has seen major river transportation activity over the last 150 years. Since these three bancos have been part of the main course of the river as recently as 1850, their banks and beds are likely to contain the buried remains of life on the river in early Brownsville (35). Figure 11 is a section of the IBWC 1898 map indicating the river course; marked sections are today the Lozano, Los Tomates, and Geronimo bancos.

Historical ranch sites and associated resacas and bancos



FIGURE 10

CAMERON COUNTY PRECINCT NO. 2 MAP INDICATING THE RELATIVE POSITIONS OF RESACAS AND BANCOS IN THE BROWNSVILLE AREA

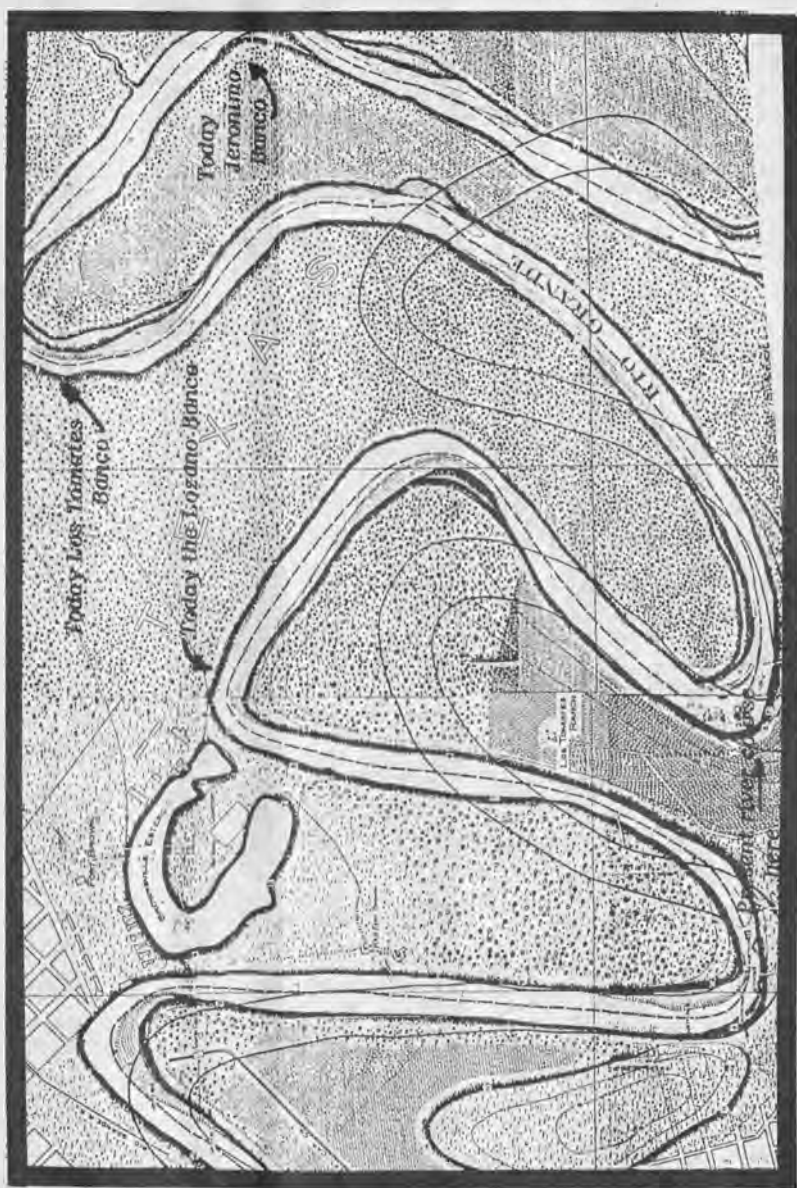


FIGURE 11

IBWC 1898 MAP INDICATING THE TURN OF THE CENTURY
RIVER COURSE BELOW THE SANTA CRUZ BEND

continue to be found south along the river, until the river's rich agricultural land gives way to the salt flats and clay dunes adjoining the sands of the Gulf of Mexico near Boca Chica beach.

The Borregos Banco in Brownsville's deep Southmost area, was once a northern loop of the river, though "cut out" sometime after 1900. A personal interview with long time resident and historian of the Borregos area, Mrs. Julia Monsees, indicates that the "old pump house" was once located right along the river. Today the river is located approximately one-quarter of a mile to the south (36).

The Southmost "dip" of the river is historically significant in that substantial agricultural and ranching efforts have dotted the area for over 150 years. In addition, the land southeast, along the river to the mouth, was known to have had a heavy concentration of pre-historic Indian sites. The English, and Piper farms, the Brulay, Rabb and Southmost plantations, and the Santo Tomas, El Arenal, and San Rafael ranches, were all located in the river's southernmost dip (37).

Beyond the location of the Longoreno Banco, the river once again turns northward before its last eastward bend to the Gulf of Mexico and its terminus. The San Joaquin ranch, the San Miguel ranch and banco, and the El Salado ranch and estero are all located in the upward swing of the river. Changes in the river channel since 1853 have produced both the San Miguel and the Las Comas bancos. The Las Comas banco is the former location of the Los Naranjos estero at the northward point near the present location of State Highway 4. From this point the river begins its final eastward turn toward Boca Chica beach (38). Figure 12, is a section of the IBWC 1898 map indicating the deep southmost bend of the river and associated ranch sites.

The last few miles of river are among its most historically significant and yet least known. We believe, for example, that the Spanish explorer Alonso de Pineda sailed upriver through this area as early as 1519, briefly describing Indian life. In addition, we know and understand the historical significance of the military activity in the area over a period of 150 years. But little or nothing is truly known about "common every day" ranch and river life in this significant section of the river. The last few miles of the river are no less significant than those closer to urban Brownsville. The Los Naranjos, El Sauce, San Martin, Old Palmito, Palmito, Old Tulosa, La Huasteca, and White's Ranch were all located in the river's last miles. Finally, the

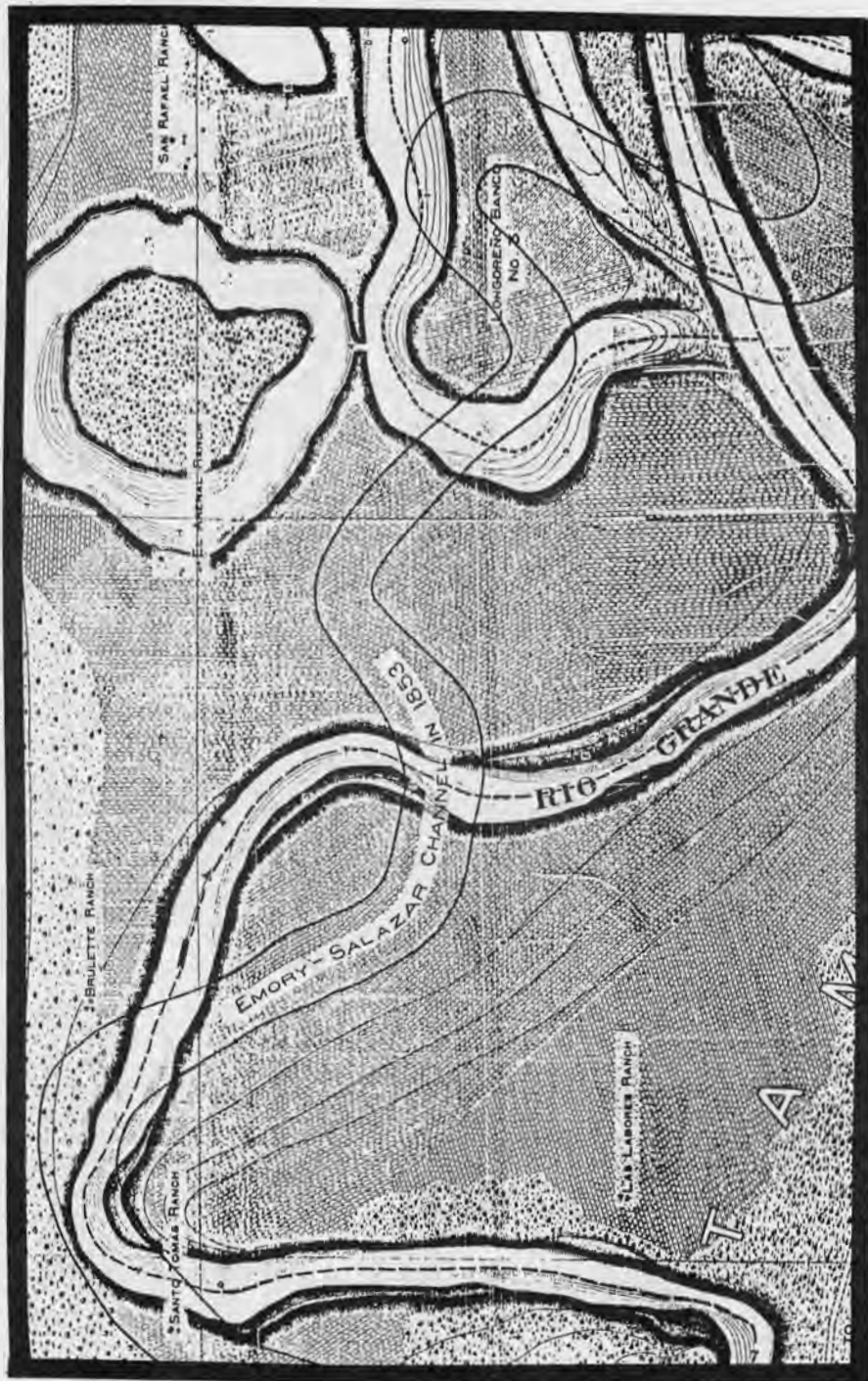


FIGURE 12

IBWC 1898 MAP INDICATING THE LOCATION OF HISTORIC
RANCH SITES IN THE "DEEP SOUTHMOST" BEND
OF THE RIVER

remnants of the infamous river towns of Clarksville and Bagdad, once located at the mouth of the river, wait patiently for their past to be uncovered, documented, and interpreted.

SUMMARY

This examination of the historic importance of resacas and bancos in Brownsville's history is not intended to be exhaustive, in fact, it barely introduces the subject to the reader. What it intends to do is whet the appetite of the interested historian to think about the invaluable resource we have in our resacas and bancos, and to act. That is, to take action in the discovery and documentation of so much of Brownsville's history which remains untapped.

We know about the famous battles and other familiar facts that make our area unique in Texas and U. S. history, but a whole world of ordinary day-to-day information about the lives of the Indians who lived here, as well as our early ranching ancestry is yet to be described. The river has changed its course dramatically in the last 200 years, providing a natural resource for pre-historic Indian camp sites and historic ranch sites which beg to be discovered and preserved as a part of our history and cultural heritage.

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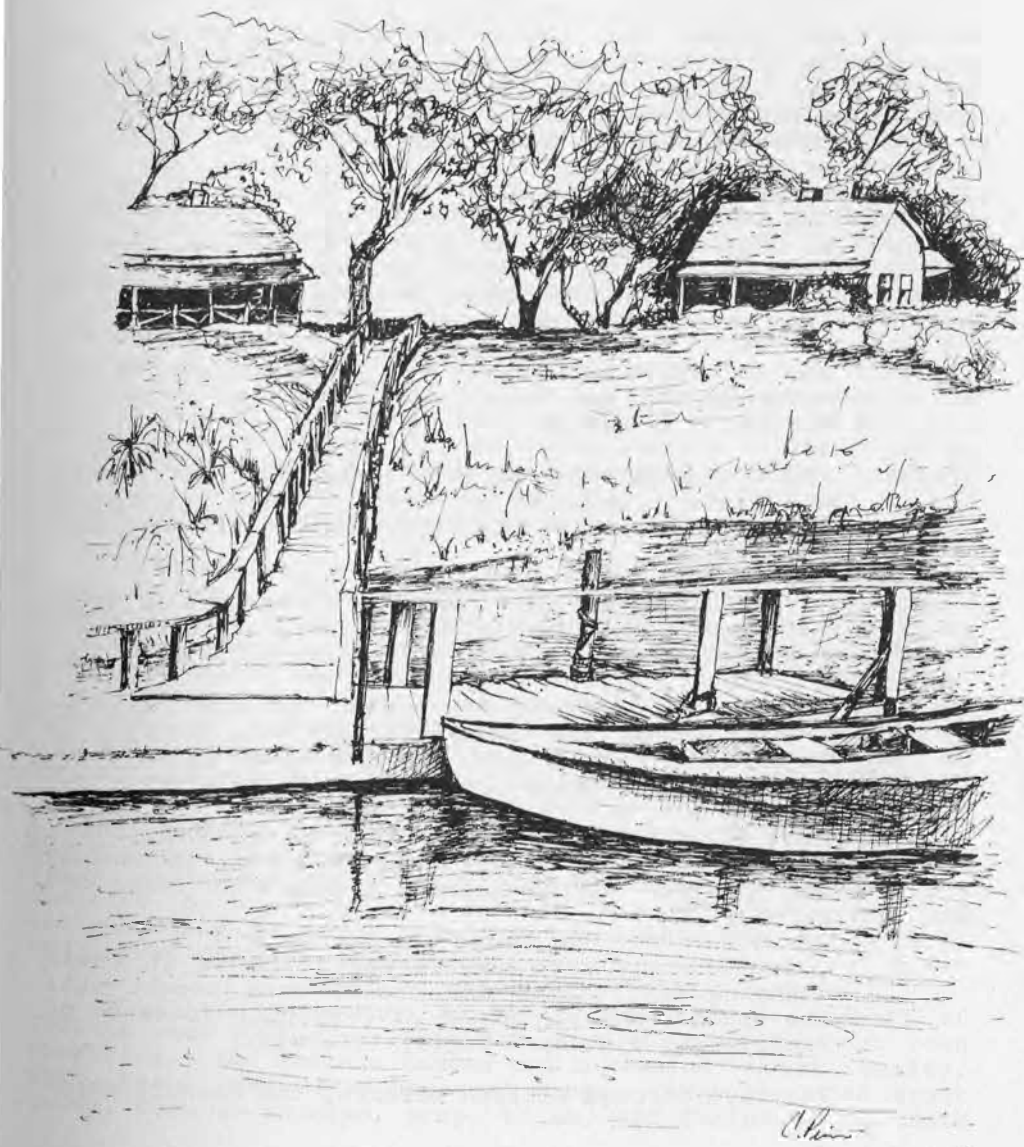
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AN AMERICAN "MELTING POT"
IN THE COAHUILTECAN HOMELAND

BY

Roberto Mario Salmón

In the past few years various ethnohistorical observations of Coahuiltecan culture have been published. I will briefly evaluate relations between Coahuiltecan and Spanish-Mexican settlers, their rapid intermixture and the physical environment where they roamed. We know, thanks to the works of Swanton, Newcomb, and Elizondo-Garza, that they utilized the Western Gulf area of Texas by nomadic hunting and gathering, and by some cultivation on a relatively low land-people ratio. However, as global events impinged on their environment, the Coahuiltecan were also quick to take advantage of the Spanish colonial society. Based on this lead, I offer the following survey:

1. The Coahuiltecan rate of intermixture varied according to the type, frequency, and extent of Spanish colonialism.
2. After Spanish intervention, intertribal warfare and population shifts in South Texas increased significantly, directly impacting Coahuiltecan band life.
3. To maintain community identity, Coahuiltecan bands adjusted to Spanish-Mexican activity and ecological impacts by altering their migration patterns.
4. While many Indians in Texas resisted Spanish institutions, the Coahuiltecan were eventually drawn to its protection, even offering to serve as indios amigos against other Texas Indians.
5. Even though Coahuiltecan sporadically withdrew from the missions, particularly during epidemics, the program of Christian conversion remained strong.
6. Coahuiltecan were active participants in their changing environment and chose, even sought out, the Spanish-Mexican sense of community (because of familiarity with band-family lifeways).
7. Finally, through mission efforts, the Coahuiltecan

were exposed to an ongoing frontier mestizaje (race mixture) that defied classification on the frontiers of northern New Spain.

The alloyage of Coahuiltecan culture was not a simple process. It did not consist of an even replacement of the "people's" traditions with Spanish-Mexican customs. On the contrary, there was a resistance to what the outsiders had to offer. When land and other resources were regarded as desirable, through a variety of interrelations ranging from friendship to spiritual involvement, the Coahuiltecan used the new frontier people as much as they in turn were used.

Beginning in the late 1600s, Spanish missionaries sought to incorporate Indian bands in the congregation of their communities by Indian acceptance of the mission fathers, as well as by the imposition of work routines and church attendance. In contrast, secular officials urged their incorporation through the organization of Indians into auxiliary fighting forces, their work contributions in agrarian or livestock centers, and sometimes their financial contributions in the form of tribute, the redistribution of Indian land, and the encouragement of mestizaje. These were both firm programs that molded a distinctive Tejano breed by the 1790s. Hence, we have an eighteenth century "melting pot" in Texas that incorporated some 3,000 Indians in and around eight established mission sites.¹

International events of the eighteenth century clearly impacted the demographic ebb and flow of Indians in Texas. Spaniards and their Mexican allies, motivated by political strategy, encouraged factional interests and sectional identities among northern Indian people. Thinking that these interests could be used against the Apaches and Comanches specifically, Spanish agents in Texas implemented divide-and-conquer tactics that they hoped would eventually defeat, or collect and provision Indian bands at or near mission sites. The resulting population shifts tore at the delicate lifeway of the "people," Lipan Apaches especially destroyed or appropriated their goods and made Coahuiltecan migration a risky business. By the early 1700s, some 467 Coahuiltecan families, no longer able to counter Indian raiding, abandoned their hunting-gathering existence and joined the Spaniards in and around Texas urban centers.²

In urban areas such as San Antonio, large numbers of Indians were needed to keep the missions and adjacent town operating. The Indians tended and harvested wheat, barley, corn, beans, and other assorted crops. They produced trade goods, such as candles, soap, tiles, and clothing, in craft

shops. They also tended local livestock and performed such tasks as shearing, spinning, tanning or blacksmithing. They were, indeed, a large component of Spanish colonial society. To quote Herbert Eugene Bolton, "civilizations was imparted at the missions through religious instruction, through industrial training, and by means of rudimentary teaching in arts and letters."³ In some missions, however, as at San Antonio de Valero, mulattoes, mestizos, castas and even españoles were also counted as industrial or religious trainees. One finds in San Antonio of 1789 that these "trainees" made up some 27 percent of the 2,000 or so civilian pobladores (settlers).⁴

On the military front, the Coahuiltecas who accepted Christianity and much of the developing culture helped to check the expansion of hostile Indian raiding. In the decades following the 1730s, when relations between Comanches and Tejanos were at their worst, mission Indians such as the Coahuiltecas served as indios amigos (Indian auxiliaries). On foot, and in their own fighting corps, they distinguished themselves on several campaigns.⁵ Still, Comanche boldness was such that in the summer of 1825, some 200 Comanche warriors, along with their camp followers, rode into San Antonio and stayed for a week, entering Tejano homes, insulting the residents, and carrying off whatever they fancied. Between 1828-1834, Laredo's population declined significantly. The local alcalde attributed it to the "barbarous" Comanches.⁶

The indios amigos role of some Coahuiltecas does not in itself explain the success Spaniards had in the ongoing process of mestizaje. That development can also be attributed to the changing conditions that characterized the decades following Mexican Independence. After 1821, Mexico's failure to strengthen military defenses posed a significant problem. Furthermore, policies of the Mexican government, the effect of the war of independence on the mission economies, a shortage of priests, and ideological opposition to the missions all contributed to the complexity of Tejano relations. In fact, a 1790s program called secularization moved so quickly that a potpourri of vested interests moved in on mission lands. In 1794, missions Concepcion, San Jose, San Juan Capistrano, and San Francisco de la Espada were partially secularized with their few remaining common lands allotted to resident Coahuiltecan families.

Secularization meant the replacement of religious missionary orders with parish-supported priests (secular clergy), who would be responsible for preservation of the faith. As missions became parishes, Indian would cease being

"wards of the state" and become parishioners. Notwithstanding, parishioners would assume support for the priest through the payment of tithes and other fees. Secularization also held that Indian communal property, which had been held in trust by the mission fathers, would be returned to the Indians, and any surplus would be returned to the private sector. The shortage of resident Indians in the missions made that shift in title much easier. Completely secularized in 1793, for example, the mission of San Antonio de Valero was absorbed as the town parish with the remaining Indians assimilating into the mixed blood population of Bexar County.

In the end, a distinctive frontier community, toughened by the environment surrounding them, absorbed the Coahuiltecan and their cultural baggage. Spanish attempts to introduce Christianity were serious and effective. Obviously global economic interests influenced their policy and affected local civilian/missionary relations. But the major emphasis of what the Spaniards sought to achieve in Texas was defined as religious conversion, and when certain forces interfered with that emphasis the resulting conflict was generally resolved in favor of the mission fathers. The clearest example of that conversion occurred among the small band peoples of Texas. In contrast, the decades following Mexican Independence proceeded with very different objectives. In 1822, the Mexican government sought to integrate Indians politically by affirming the equality of all Mexicans, without mentioning Indians specifically. Of course, constitutional decrees and government mandates did not eliminate racial prejudice, but in Texas of the eighteenth century social categorization had already developed to accomodate Indians.

Coahuiltecan and other Indians like them, were the first true Tejanos. They were absorbed into a toughened frontier culture, a culture in the process of modernization, however complex and imperfectly transmitted. This new civilization ushered them into a world where specialization of labor, differentiation of social roles, governmental specialities, and supremacy of the state predominated. In these respects, the Coahuiltecan are an early part of the "melting pot."

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Missions	Inhabitants	Number of families and Date
San Antonio Valero	Sanas, Payaez, and Vanos	49 (1716)
Concepcion De Acuna	Sanipaos, Facanes, y otros castas	91 (1716)
San Jose de Aguayo	Pampopas, Mesquite y otros	114 (1720)
San Juan Capistrano	Pampas Cujanes y otros	34 (1716)

San Francisco de la Espada	Pacos Maraquitos, y otros	46 (1716)
Espiritu Santo	Cujanes y Carancahuaces, xaraanames, y otros	87 (1720)
Nuestra Senora del Rosario	Cujanes y Carancahuacs	33 (1754)
Nuestra Senora del Refugio	Carancahuaces	62 (1791)
TOTAL:		515 families

Taken from original Copia del Informe General, Misiones de la provincia de tejas, December 30, 1793, AGI, Guadalajara 578.



De la Garzas, Ballis, and the Political History
of the Region that would later become Cameron County

by

Milo Kearney

When Brownsville and its surrounding Cameron County were founded in 1848, their coastal tabula was anything but rasa. The plaque on the Brownsville Art League Building telling us that William Neale lived in this southern colonial house from 1834 stands as one reminder of the pre-Brownsville history of the region. While it is true that down to 1848 local government had been located on the south side of the Rio Grande River, there was a settlement on the north bank that had already come to grips with various political problems and that set the scene for Cameron County history proper. Indeed, such was the nature of the sequence of these early political dilemmas that each solution would lead on to the next problem. This chain of events, in a true epic structure, drew the local population inexorably on to its dramatic involvement in the Mexican-American War, a shift of national identity, & the founding of Brownsville.

One issue developed from the very first establishment of ranches in the area. This was the question of whether the Spanish Crown had allotted the new tracts fairly or had shown favoritism to a few influential families. Already in the earlier settlement of Reynosa south of the river, Spanish Crown inspectors had questioned the equity of the distribution of land there, while a commission in 1757 had disclosed that six intermarried families were then controlling most of the land and local offices in that town.¹ Local talk claimed that this favor shown to these few families by the Crown was given in exchange for cooperation in countering foreign attempts to penetrate the area.² The six families involved included names important in the settlement of the north bank of the Rio Grande, most notably the Hinojosas and Ballis.³ The land at Camargo, farther upriver on the south bank, was better distributed.⁴

When the area north of the river was opened to claims in 1767, much of it was granted in large land tracts to a similarly restricted number of leading families of Reynosa or Camargo.⁵ The two families which rapidly came to dominate the north bank of the lower Rio Grande, extending there the vast holdings already under criticism in Reynosa, were the Ballis of Reynosa & the de la Garzas of Camargo. The Ballis' holdings bounded on both east and west those of the de la

Garzas, which were located on more than one-third of the future Cameron County.⁶

The de la Garza Espiritu Santo grant, on which Brownsville would later develop, was originally given to José Salvador de la Garza in 1781.⁷ His herds had multiplied to the point that they could no longer be provided for on his lands at Camargo, and so they now found an outlet on the Espiritu Santo grant.⁸ The ranch came to be called the Rancho Viejo, and its headquarters were located for defensive purposes against Indian attacks at the inside bend of a horseshoe resaca to the west of the later Brownsville.⁹

The Ballis came to hold grants amounting to roughly a third of the entire left bank of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, due to the efforts of Rosa María Hinojosa, the widow of Capitán José María Balli, on behalf of her three sons, Juan José, Padre Nicolas, and José María, nicknamed Chico.¹⁰ From her husband came the La Feria grant (fifteen miles north from the river running from the present western limit of Cameron County through the town of La Feria) and from her father Capitán Juan José de Hinojosa came the Llano Grande grant (fifteen miles north from the river running on west from the La Feria grant). Both of these grants had been made in 1778 and were confirmed in 1790.¹¹ Farther up the valley and away from the river, the San Salvador del Tule grant was in the hands of Juan José by 1798, while Las Casteñas Ranch was obtained for Chico.¹² To the east, Padre Nicolás came to hold the southern end of Santiago Island, later named Padre Island for the priest. About fifteen miles from the southern tip, he established his Santa Cruz Ranch.¹³ However, by his death in 1829, Padre Balli was the owner of the La Feria and the Llano Grande grants, plus a Las Casteñas and a Guadalupe grant, in addition to his island ranch.¹⁴ So the pattern of immense holdings concentrated in a few hands was spread north of the river as well.

While many of these families did not at first actually live on their north bank ranches, using them initially just to hold the spill-over from their growing herds south of the river,¹⁵ some eventually came to do so. Of the de la Garza clan, María Antonia Margarita de la Garza, the second daughter of the José Salvador de la Garza who had obtained the grant, moved with her husband, Capitán Pedro López Prieto, and their children first to the new town of Congregación del Refugio (the later Matamoros) and then to a ranch of the Espiritu Santo grant in the region of the later Cameron County.¹⁶ Other members of the family may have lived part of the time on these ranches, too, for they were active in Refugio across the river. About 1843, Estefana

Goseascochea Cavazos de Cortina (granddaughter of José Salvador de la Garza) moved to her ranch (the Rancho Viejo) on the old Espíritu Santo grant.¹⁷ Estefana's youngest son, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, lived during the early 1840s at the Rancho del Carmen, on the river road west of the site of the later Brownsville.

Of the Ballí clan, Rosa María Hinojosa de Ballí, while living mainly in Reynosa, threw a big three-day fiesta about 1794 at her La Feria Ranch in honor of the return of her son Padre Nicolás from his studies in Spain.¹⁹ It was in the family chapel at the same La Feria Ranch that Padre Nicolás performed his first wedding.²⁰ Although Padre Nicolás lived mainly in Refugio, he stayed at the La Feria ranch often enough to own a house there, as well as keeping a statue of the Virgen de la Soledad and communion equipment on hand.²¹ Furthermore, the padre's duties as resident priest of the area from 1800 to 1829 included the religious ministry of all the ranches on both sides of the river up to Reynosa.²² The padre also built a mission for the Karankawa Indians on Padre Island, where he personally worked to convert them.²³ In 1810, he was living at his Rancho Santa Cruz, twenty-six miles north of the southern tip of the island.²⁴ Later, the Padre's nephew, Chico's son Juan José Ballí II moved with his family to live at the La Feria Ranch.²⁵ So there was a resident population on the north bank, including members of the de la Garza and Ballí families.

As the ranches grew, towns also began to spring up on the north bank. Earliest of all was Port Isabel on the protected coast of the Laguna Madre, facing an opening through the Brazos de Santiago between the southern tip of Padre Island and Boca Chica Beach. Long before it was authorized for use as a port, indeed as far back as 1777, under the name of Fróntón de Santa Isabel, this was a popular local resort town.²⁶ However, it may be that until a hurricane destroyed the first site, this was located originally across at the southern tip of Padre Island.²⁷ After the death of José Salvador de la Garza in 1790, his elder daughter Javiera set up a village along with her Santa Rita Ranch on her section of the Espíritu Santo grant.²⁸ Also, the town of Santa María on the river sprang up in this early period around one of the Ballí ranches.²⁹ And near the present town of Progreso on the Rio Grande south of La Feria, a village named Toluca had appeared by 1836.³⁰

With such vast family holdings north as well as south of the river, the revolutionary experiments with less elitist government which were sweeping over Western society at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century

could not have left the residents of the rancho left bank indifferent. As provincial and underpopulated as the region may have been, criticism of the concentration of wealth had already crept into the records at Reynosa as noted above. There can be no doubt of the land hunger of many of the poorer residents of the area, for as soon as Mexico won its independence, the settlers who had helped to defend the region from the Indians called on the new government to grant them unoccupied local lands. Nor were their expectations in vain, for the Governor of Tamaulipas immediately granted five leagues of land to all those involved who had livestock but still no land of their own.³¹

And yet, the restrictions placed on Mexicans by Spanish rule were also widely resented even by the Mexican criollo elite. So when Padre Hidalgo gave his Grito de Dolores on 10 September 1810 and led his Indians on a rampage of murder and looting against the establishment in Central Mexico, the rancheros of this remote area may well have been ambivalent in their feelings, but they could hardly have been unmoved. Nor, as revolution broke out in Texas to the north & up the Rio Grande to the north-west, could they easily escape from being involved on one side or the other.

There is some evidence that the de la Garza clan held loyal to the Spanish viceregal government during Padre Hidalgo's revolt. While Nuevo Santander, the province in which the lower Rio Grande Valley was located, was the first to declare publically for the Revolution, Refugio itself held faithful to Spain under alcaldes Matías Morales in 1810 and José de Jesús Solís in the following year.³² At this time, a Trinidad de la Garza was to wed to a Santos Morales in Refugio and subsequently bear him a son José Marcelino (baptized 23 Feb 1810), a son Martín (baptized 5 Feb 1813), and a daughter María Juana (baptized 30 Jan 1814), so that a marriage bond may have tied the de la Garzas to Mayor Morales.³³ Furthermore, in 1811 by popular demand, José Domingo de la Garza was named as Justicia Mayor.³⁴ The de la Garza family had in the past already exercised some influence in the government the town, for in 1801 José de Goseascochea, wed since 1787 to María Xaviera (the elder daughter of José Salvador de la Garza), had held the post of alcalde of Refugio, the third man to fill this position.³⁵ This same José de Goseascochea paid with his life for his opposition to Padre Hidalgo's rebellion. A captain in the Spanish Army and the highest ranking officer of the Cavalry Militia of Province and Frontier, he opposed Hidalgo's rebellion and joined the royalist forces of Governor Manuel Salcedo of Texas in San Antonio.³⁶ As such, he was taken prisoner by the rebel Republican Army of the North and on 1 April 1813

was one of the captives marched out with Salcedo to Salado Creek by Capitán Antonio Delgado, there to have their throats slit.³⁷ Likewise, his brother-in-law Capitán Pedro López Prieto, married to María Antonia Margarita (second daughter of José Salvador de la Garza), led the defense of Camargo from the Carrizo Indians during rebellion in 1812.³⁸

The sentiments of the Ballí family regarding the Hidalgo revolt are less clear, but there are hints of some sympathy for the rebel cause. One of the local residents who openly joined the insurrection was José María Villarreal, who fought under the 1810 pro-Hidalgo rebel Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara when the latter returned to Texas as part of a filibuster movement in 1812.³⁹ The José María Villarreal in question was a possible descendent of the José María Villarreal whose daughter Francisca Rosalia de Villarreal in 1759 had married Juan Antonio Ballí, uncle to Padre Nicolás Ballí (so that the Padre may have been a first cousin to the insurrectionary).⁴⁰ It might also be noted that José María Villarreal was wed to Ignacia Cantú.⁴¹ Since in 1815 a Rosa María Ballí was wife of a Santiago Cantú of Matamoros, there exists a possibility of a further marriage link between José María Villarreal and Padre Nicolás.⁴² The closeness between the two clans seems to have continued down, for around the mid-19th century, a Viviana Ballí married a Ponciano Villarreal.⁴³ Some historians suspect that when Juan José Ballí was arrested and incarcerated at San Carlos Prison in 1803, it might have been for possible involvement in undercover plotting to overthrow Spanish rule.⁴⁴ Juan José was dead by the time of Hidalgo's Revolt, and his brother Padre Ballí was the most conspicuous spokesman of the family. The fact that he was a clergyman is of interest in light of the appeal Padre Hidalgo's revolt held especially for those clergymen who sympathized with the lower classes all over Mexico, even though Hidalgo's revolt was condemned by the official Church establishment. The Ballís had been playing a leading role in the life of Refugio. In 1802, Padre Ballí's brother Juan José had acted as its alcalde, while in 1804 his brother José María (Chico) had held that post.⁴⁵ The Padre himself had officiated in the town's first chapel - built with the financial support of his mother - over its first religious service, and had erected other stone buildings beside his home in the town.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he would direct a town census in 1820.⁴⁷ In 1820 he would also begin to gather materials to build the town's cathedral, and to solicit the alcalde's help in the construction effort.⁴⁸ Had Padre Ballí been known for anti-Hidalgo sentiments, it might seem curious that in 1826, at a time when Padre Ballí's prestige seems to have been especially strong in Refugio that the town would be renamed for one of the priests who did follow Padre Hidalgo - Padre

Mariano Morelos.⁴⁹ And yet, this might have been merely an adaptation to changing times, for Manuel López Prieto (son of María Antonia Margarita de la Garza) was influential in this name change as a delegate to the state legislature of Tamaulipas.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, there are other indications of a pro-Hidalgo feeling among the Ballís.

The leading priest on the Rio Grande participating in Hidalgo's Revolt was Padre José Antonio Gutiérrez de Lara of Revilla (later renamed Guerrero) upstream on the south bank of the river.⁵¹ Padre José Antonio was, like Padre Ballí, of a leading land-holding family, which had founded the same town of Revilla. In conjunction with the efforts of his brother, José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara, he travelled up and down the Rio Grande in the autumn of 1810, rallying support for the revolt. He met with such success that the deposed Governor of Nuevo Santander wrote of revolution and terror raging among the river settlers. And yet, even though Padre José Antonio personally spread the agitation all the way from Laredo down to Revilla, Mier, Camargo, and Reynosa, there is no mention of any contact with Padre Ballí. In fact, Ballí was no longer in Refugio, which had taken an anti-Hidalgo stand.⁵² It seems significant that Padre Ballí at this time (although clearly a conscientious and dedicated priest) abandoned his religious duties and retired from Refugio to his ranch on Santiago Island.⁵³ Only when the political crisis ended did he return to his ranch of San Juan de los Esteros outside Refugio.⁵⁴ Could this move have been motivated by a lack of political solidarity with the anti-Hidalgo stance of Refugio? This would seem the most logical explanation. It has been suggested that this decision may have been a practical business move to oversee the transfer of his cattle and horses to the island to protect them from rustling in the breakdown of law and order.⁵⁵ It is true that the wild Indians were taking advantage of the confusion to raid the ranches and drive off a good amount of the stock.⁵⁶ However, it would have afforded better protection from the wild Indians, who lived mainly to the north, to have concentrated his stock at his mighty ranch of San Juan de los Esteros, outside of Refugio. Of course, the Padre may have feared the effects on his stock of a spillover of civil warfare to the area of that town, although his move in that case seems somewhat overcautious. It has also been suggested that he moved to the island because the uproar of Hidalgo's Revolt made it impossible for him to continue his duties as the parish priest.⁵⁷ However, this explanation seems even less likely. The area around Refugio appears to have maintained its anti-Hidalgo stance without challenge so that there should have been no disruption of religious services. In fact, there is no break in the parish records of Refugio

at this time; they were maintained without the assistance of Padre Ballí presumably by Padre José Felipe de la Garza y Guerra, mentioned as curate of Refugio in 1811.⁵⁸ Here again it is notable that a de la Garza (although not necessarily a relative of the main local ranching family) seems not to have fled. Nor would it follow as a matter of course that the Padre would leave for the island even had his religious duties been interrupted, for he would have had ample work to occupy him on his local ranch of San Juan de los Esteros. It is also noteworthy that this ranch of San Juan de los Esteros outside Refugio was totally abandoned by the Ballís at this time, and that it was dilapidated, with papers missing (due to plunder of the ranch by the locals?), by the time they returned. Such an important document as the Ballí deed to Santiago Island had been left behind (and was consequently lost), bespeaking great haste or confusion in the Padre's departure from Refugio.⁵⁹

Furthermore, whereas prior to Padre Hidalgo's revolt, the Ballís had been emerging as one of the leading families in the municipal government (Padre Ballí's two brothers both acting as alcaldes in that period), the family never again provided a town mayor after that revolt, despite its prominent position in the area.⁶⁰ However, after the successful break with Spain in 1821, Francisco Ballí (presumably Padre Nicolas' cousin José Francisco) acted as town councilman in 1823 and 1824.⁶¹ This compares with the political fortune of the rebel José María Villarreal (the presumed relative of Padre Ballí mentioned above), who entered the council only when the new liberal rebel government in Spain brought in by Rafael Riego's Revolt necessitated a new election in Refugio to conform to the new Spanish Constitution. With that turn of events, José María Villarreal became First Councilman for both the rest of 1820 and again in 1821.⁶² With Mexico's independence, José María Villarreal remained a presence in Refugio's town government, acting as Mayor in 1826 and 1831.⁶³ In contrast, Blas María de la Garza VI went on to act as Mayor of Matamoros in 1815, and a José Domingo de la Garza (of possible relationship to the north bank ranch magnates) was Mayor in 1816.⁶⁴ The town would presumably have wanted to please the Spanish authorities (at a time they were pushing for permission for a port) by putting loyalists into the municipal positions.

If there is a strong hint of a pro-Hidalgo sentiment among the Ballís, it is quite clear that the de la Garzas showed an opposition to the Hidalgo revolt which helped to keep the region loyal to Spain. The economic sphere around Congregación del Refugio held loyal to Spain in the midst of rebellions to the north, south, and west. The belated grant

of a port to Refugio in 1820 might well have been forthcoming even then due in part to Crown gratitude for this support. Whether because of the relative youth of the area's settlements, and/or because of the dominant hold of the great families (conceivably due to respect for their leadership), a political stand had been made in favor of the established order.

The subsequent independence movement of 1821 was a very different sort of a situation. Instead of representing an attack on the Mexican power elite, this was led by that privileged class which was trying to ward off the liberal influences of the new parliamentary government proclaimed in the midst of Riego's Revolt in Spain. The more recent independence movement also gave the Mexican criollo elite the chance to throw off some of the irritating restrictions which Spain had imposed on Mexican trade and economic growth. These restrictions were felt as much in the Lower Rio Grande Valley as anywhere where Spain prohibited foreign trade of any kind except with the mother country. This had obliged the local ranchers to trade illegally, and doubtless somewhat nervously, in horses with the Americans, while commerce in bulkier goods such as wool, cotton, or salt, was virtually stymied by having to go only through Veracruz to Spain.⁶⁵ It must have been especially galling to be located at the mouth of a major river pouring into the Gulf and not be allowed to draw on its potential for making money.

On the eve of these developments of 1821, both de la Garzas and Ballis were cooperating closely with the Spanish regime. In 1820, María Guadalupe de la Garza (first cousin of the late Blas María de la Garza V) wed Felipe Roque de la Portilla, "teniente" in the Spanish militia, in a wedding officiated by Padre José Nicolas Balli.⁶⁶ At the eleventh hour, on 9 November 1820, alcalde Juan José de Chapa of Refugio received an authorization from the Spanish Crown to open a port at the mouth of the "Rio Bravo del Norte" (the Rio Grande).⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the great families must have heaved a collective sigh of relief for the greater trading flexibility given them when on 22 November 1821, alcalde Pedro José García of Refugio headed the ceremony of swearing loyalty to the new independent Mexico of the "Plan de Iguala."⁶⁸

The development of the Lower Rio Grande at once began to accelerate. The new port of Baghdad on the south side of the river had already started to function in 1820.⁶⁹ Then in 1821, Refugio was organized as a Mexican municipality.⁷⁰ In 1832, a new road linked Matamoros (as Refugio was by then called) to San Patricio on the Nueces River, facilitating

trade with Texas.⁷¹ In 1835 was built the market of Matamoros that would eventually evolve into the Mercado Juárez.⁷² However, to really take off, the entire northern frontier needed a population build-up and a capital investment which in that period could only be provided from the United States. The issue of whether to encourage this American presence rapidly became a political hot potato, with the northern-based Federalists in support of such a policy and the southern-based Centralists staunchly opposed to it as a danger both to Mexican sovereignty and to the power of their own Centralist Party. Here again the local residents found themselves faced with a thorny issue.

The initial reaction which prevailed was to urge American investment and settlement. In 1826, Tamaulipas declared that foreigners could benefit from colonization privileges if they brought fifty families to northern Tamaulipas or a hundred families deeper into the state.⁷³ Soon an American presence became noticeable on the lower Rio Grande. By 1832, at least two percent of the people in Matamoros were Anglos; there were 300 foreign residents in a town which would grow to 16,372 inhabitants five years later.⁷⁴ A few notable names among these Anglo immigrants might be mentioned. In 1825, Francis Stillman captained a ship that brought hay and oats from Hartford, Connecticut to Brazos de Santiago and left with a cargo of wool.⁷⁵ In 1828, his son Charles Stillman settled in Matamoros to handle the Rio Grande end of their trade.⁷⁶ From 1829 into 1831 Stephen F. Austin's cousin Henry Austin ran a ship, the Ariel, up and down the Rio Grande in a newly-popular river route from New Orleans to Baghdad and thence to Mier, from which a land route would be continued on to Mexico City.⁷⁷ John ("Juan") Southwell directed the newspaper El Mercurio del Puerto de Matamoros in 1834 and 1835.⁷⁸ In 1834, the Mexican government gave John Stryker, resident of Matamoros, title to a part of the north bank of the Rio Grande across from the town, formed by a recent shift in the river to the south, under the name of the "Banco de Santa Rita."⁷⁹ In times of military occupation of Matamoros, Americans tended to take refuge at Santa Rita, so that it developed into the first permanent Anglophone settlement on the Lower Rio Grande.⁸⁰ And in 1836, Captain Ruben M. Potter, a retired army officer, was a resident of Matamoros, while Robert Love was a hat manufacturer in the town.⁸¹

The great families had the most to win economically from inviting in the American presence. It was the next logical step after breaking away from Spanish economic restrictions by their rapid acceptance of Mexican independence. But they also potentially stood to lose the most, should the American

factor prove subversive. In their attitudes on this issue, there is again a hint of a distinction in opinion between the de la Garzas and the Ballís. The Ballís, who had seemed less tied to the traditional structure in 1810, now seemed more inclined not to rock the boat, while there is a suggestion that the de la Garzas now became the more innovative of the two dominant families. There is good reason why this should have been the case. The de la Garza holdings were more secure geographically vis-a-vis American elements than were the more exposed Ballí lands, at least the Padre Island property.

To consider the de la Garza case first, it is to be noted that the second husband of María Guadalupe de la Garza (first cousin of Blas María de la Garza V), Teniente Felipe Roque de la Portilla, has been called the first empresario of Texas for his role in the colonizing of San Marcos in 1807.⁸² This original settlement at San Marcos, which due to Indian attack lasted only until 1812, was peopled from Refugio (along with Mier and Camargo) and was conceived as a bulwark against American intrusion into Texas.⁸³ But when that attempt failed, there is indication that the family was not unready to welcome immigration from the United States. This would have been logical in light of their natural interest in profiting from the development of their lands on the north bank of the Rio Grande. Francisca Cavazos (widow in 1802 of Blas María de la Garza V and heiress of his portion of the Espíritu Santo grant) in the 1810s and 1820s brought tenants on to her land, settling them around her ranch at San José on the Espíritu Santo grant, all the way from the Arroyo Colorado to the coast.⁸⁴ In 1817, she sold ten sitios of cattle on the grant to Capitán Miguel Paredes.⁸⁵ In 1826, she sold to Matamoros the land immediately across the Rio Grande from that town, which wanted to use it for ejidos (town commons, or pasture land immediately outside the town), reserving an improved plot in the midst of the new ejido for herself.⁸⁶ The town subsequently leased plots of this land to various settlers, while some squatters moved in as well.⁸⁷ One of these was William Neale, an Englishman who, after leaving service in the Mexican navy, in 1834 moved into a house here (which today houses the Brownsville Art League) and ran a stagecoach line from Matamoros to Boca del Rio.⁸⁸ It might further be noted that the alcalde of Refugio in 1822, the period when the American influx was being welcomed in, was a Domingo de la Garza, while in 1834, when the pro-immigration Federalist Valentín Gómez Farías was President in Mexico, a Juan José de la Garza acted as alcalde segundo in Matamoros.⁸⁹

The de la Garzas in general worked well with this new Anglo element. Adolphus Glaevecke, who came to the Rio Grande Valley in 1836, married into the de la Garza clan.⁹⁰ James Power, who came to the area in 1827, married Dolores de la Portilla, daughter by his first wife of Felipe Roque, whose second wife was Maria Guadalupe de la Garza, (first cousin of Blas Maria de la Garza V); and after Dolores' death Power remarried to her sister Tomasita. Power's daughter by Dolores, likewise named Dolores, wed John Welder. Felipe Roque de la Portilla even got involved with settling Americans in lands to the north, assisting Power and James Heweston in obtaining permission from the Mexican government in 1834 to establish the colony of Refugio, Texas.⁹¹ Maria Guadalupe de la Garza's nephew-in-law and first cousin once removed Blas Maria de la Garza Falcon VII settled with his family nearby, in the Kleburg or Nueces County region.⁹² Indeed, the family supplied the Texas rebels under Dimmitt in Refugio, Texas, with provisions, and Felipe Roque's son Francisco de la Portilla was killed while serving under Dimmitt's command at Goliad in 1836. The same year, Felipe Roque led the rest of his family out of the war zone back to Matamoros, as a result of which his land holding in Texas was subsequently lost.⁹³

In contrast with the relatively smooth and seemingly profitable adjustment of the de la Garzas to the American-linked development of the lower Rio Grande, the Balli family had good reason for feeling reticence over the growing foreign presence. Since 1817, Jean Lafitte and his pirate band had raided and stopped at the coastal islands from Galveston (where they established their headquarters) to the southern end of Padre Island. Port Isabel was frequently visited by Lafitte, who had his own well dug at near-by Laguna Vista for resupplying his pirate vessels with fresh water.⁹⁴ Padre Balli must have felt threatened by this aggressive presence, which about twice a year threw drinking orgies and made contact with the local Mexican families, trading their goods for provisions.⁹⁵ Lafitte had not respected Spanish sovereignty when he had taken over Galveston Island (indeed, frequently preying on Spanish merchant ships), and there was no guarantee that this French freebooter, with his American connections, might not fancy grabbing the Padre's Island as well. The situation must have been exacerbated by the interest shown by Refugio, Tamaulipas, in developing trade with foreigners, including Lafitte's pirates.

This irritation must have been made all the greater by another developer (who was, furthermore, linked to the de la Garzas). In 1823, Martin De Leon, a local rancher, opened a

port at Brazos Santiago at the southern end of Padre Island.⁹⁶ De León was from Burgos, Nuevo Santander, Mexico, the educated scion of a highborn family from Burgos, Spain. Both a military Captain and an experienced businessman, he counted himself a friend of Guadalupe Victoria (Federalist hero of the Independencia and first President of Mexico), of General Félix de la Garza (the commanding officer in Tamaulipas),⁹⁷ and of Pedro José de la Garza (chief quartermaster at Padilla, capital of Tamaulipas). He was married to Patricia de la Garza and living in Refugio in 1805.⁹⁸ His son Silvestre would later marry Rosalia de la Garza.⁹⁹ In 1807, De León had moved to Texas, settling eventually on the Nueces River, near the later San Patricio.¹⁰⁰ In 1823, while in New Orleans, he had come to an understanding with a pirate leader named Raimond La Fou. De Leon offered to use his influence to win a pardon from the Mexican government for the freebooting of La Fou, who in return was to deliver goods to De León's Texas colony. Accordingly, La Fou transported De León to Brazos de Santiago, where he waited to see if De León was able to deliver on his part of the bargain, which he was (thanks to his de la Garza connections).¹⁰¹ It was in this period that Martín de León launched the port of Santiago de los Brazos, before moving back to Texas in 1824 with permission to found his colony of Victoria, named for his friend Presidente Guadalupe Victoria.¹⁰² Then in 1827, doubtless attracted by the growing trade, Rafael García, a citizen of Matamoros, applied for (and in 1839 obtained) the grant of Port Isabel.¹⁰³ To compound the Ballís' predicament (since the Ballí deed to Padre Island had been lost at Rancho San Juan de los Esteros during its abandonment in 1810), the family was enduring a long wait for the state of Tamaulipas to reconfirm its title - a process completed only in 1829.¹⁰⁴ Nor were the Ballís allowed to take possession of their property until the issue was settled.¹⁰⁵ Only at this point, in 1829, did they repossess the island.

Lafitte died in 1826, but the foreign threat to the Ballí island ranch was not alleviated, for soon the Laguna Madre west of Padre Island became a zone of naval confrontation between rebel Texan elements and the Mexican authorities. This posed a potential threat to the interests of Juan José Ballí II, left as heir to his padre uncle at the latter's death in 1829.¹⁰⁶ Juan José II's brother José María Ballí II, who might have come in for a portion of this inheritance, had died already on 8 May 1813.¹⁰⁷ In April, 1835, a shoot-out occurred between an American sloop-of-war and a Mexican sloop-of-war near Port Isabel, an incident repeated on the same spot the following September.¹⁰⁸ Sixteen days later, General Martín Perfecto de Cos transported five

hundred soldiers up the Laguna Madre to crush the Texas rebels.¹⁰⁹ When he was repulsed, the Texans then seized control of the port of Copano (near the northern tip of Padre Island), and from there, with four armed schooners they so threatened the security of the Laguna Madre that when Antonio López de Santa Anna led a new army into Texas in 1836, he felt obliged to follow a land route.¹¹⁰ Feeling overly secure in this domination of the Laguna Madre, Fernando de León (son of the empresario Martín de León, who had developed both the trade at Brazos de Santiago and the American-settled colony of Victoria, Texas) joined with his sister's husband José María de Carvajal in bringing arms and supplies from New Orleans for the Texas rebels in November 1835. However, the Mexican navy was not so cowed in the region that it failed to intercept de León's ship off Matagorda Bay. Both Fernando de León and José María de Carvajal were brought under arrest to Brazos de Santiago.¹¹¹ Fernando's son managed to escape, as is hardly surprising seeing he was being held prisoner on the very spot his father had developed. To prevent José María from following Fernando's example, the authorities transferred him to a prison in Matamoros, but he too soon managed to find his way back to Texas.¹¹² Presumably, influence and bribery facilitated the escape of both men.¹¹³ Thus a family intermarried with the de la Garzas and with a vested interest in south Padre Island was now clearly allied with the Texas rebels who were threatening the Ballí holdings there.

In April, 1837, an American man-of-war raided the Port Isabel area again and, in another episode involving exchange of fire between American and Mexican ships, towed away two detained American schooners.¹¹⁴ The dangers involved in trying to maintain the ranch on Padre Island grew still greater with the founding of Corpus Christi, Texas, a trading post near the northern tip of the island, at the end of the 1830s.¹¹⁵ As hostilities continued between Texas and Mexico, the disputed area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande Valley became a no-man's land, where smugglers and outlaw bands flourished.¹¹⁶ This left the Ballí's Rancho Santa Cruz on Padre Island especially exposed to attack. However, even the non-insular holdings of the Ballís north of the river were more exposed (as farther north) than the de la Garza ranches, which were directly across the river from the protection of Matamoros. When in 1842, the Mexican General Adrián Woll made an official call for Mexican nationals to abandon all lands north of the river, the Ballís were among those ranchers who complied and abandoned their left bank holdings, although not their claim to them.¹¹⁷ Not all ranchers were absent from the area in the period between 1842 and the Mexican-American War; the Ramírez family for one has

a tradition that maintains that Juan Antonio Ramírez was on hand when Zachary Taylor moved into the area and that he lent a horse-drawn carriage to Taylor at the time Fort Brown was being constructed.¹¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the same Juan Antonio Ramírez was the son of Marcela de la Garza and a grandson of Dolores de la Garza.¹¹⁹ Marcela herself was the daughter of José Antonio de la Garza and the sister of Agustín de la Garza.¹²⁰ Eugenio Ramírez, born in 1763, had married María Rita de la Garza Falcón, born in 1778 in Mier.¹²¹

Since Adrián Woll, a French-born general in the Mexican army, was linked to Antonio López de Santa Anna (under whom he had served in Texas), and since it was President Santa Anna's order he was promulgating in 1842, this again raises political questions. The fact that the Ballís responded to this call from an anti-immigration Centralist government, while José Antonio Ramírez, with his three-quarters de la Garza blood, seems not to have done so, more firmly establishes the possibility that a political dichotomy existed between Ballís and de la Garzas. In this generation the Ballís shifted from their earlier seemingly liberal sympathies to a more conservative political leaning while the de la Garzas, who had earlier been more traditionalist, in this generation seem to have developed liberal inclinations more typical of nortenos of the period. This question is of all the more interest in light of the civil war which had by this time erupted in the lower Rio Grande Valley between supporters of the two political persuasions.

In 1839, a group of Rio Grande Valley Federalists, exasperated with the restrictive Centralist government in Mexico City, decided to establish a Republic of the Rio Grande. Manuel Payno, sent in 1839 by the Mexican government to found a maritime customs house in Matamoros, noted that the town was living off smuggling due to unreasonable customs laws. Payno also showed an awareness of the anti-Centralist sentiment aroused by President Anastasio Bustamante's recent tax hike and by his lack of support in fighting the wild Indians.¹²² The military forces of the rebellion were formed at Lipantitlan on the Nueces River by the Valley lawyer Antonio Canales.¹²³ One early plan was to make Camargo (the home base of the de la Garzas) the capital of the new nation. Another hint of a de la Garza connection is the fact that Canales took along as counselor José María de Carvajal, the above-mentioned son-in-law of the Martín de León who had launched the port at Brazos de Santiago and subsequently founded the largely American-settled colony of Victoria, Texas.¹²⁴ Carvajal's son José María, Jr. had become or would be the husband of General Antonio Canales' daughter

Mamela.¹²⁵ Carvajal's brother-in-law, Silvestre de León, was married to a Rosalia de la Garza.¹²⁶ The entire de León clan, including Carvajal, had been terrorized into abandoning their holdings at Victoria, Texas, after the safe establishment of the Texas Republic.¹²⁷ And yet Carvajal had remained an impassioned Federalist and rebel, and now had even helped to recruit from the Texas President Mirabeau B. Lamar a force of Texans to fight in Canales' army.¹²⁸ If the north bank ranch-holding de la Garzas were supportive of this first Republic of the Rio Grande, it would explain why de la Garzas, who had held the post of alcalde of Matamoros six times down to 1840 (Blas Maria VI in 1815; Jose Domingo in 1816, 1822, 1829, and 1838; Juan Jose in 1834; and Pedro in 1840), never held it again after the discrediting of the revolt until 1886.¹²⁹

The first task facing Canales was to clear the Rio Grande Valley down to the Gulf. Carvajal had just built a castle at Villanueva, across the little San Juan River from Camargo proper. This stronghold was intended to be the official residence for the new executive.¹³⁰ However, in the path of Cardenas' establishment of a capital at Camargo lay a loyalist garrison under General Pavón at Revilla (Guerrero) that had first to be eliminated. Pavón, alerted to the approach of Canales' 600-man force, retreated in October 1839 toward Matamoros, perhaps with the intention of joining his 500 men to the 1,500 soldiers under General Canalizo in Matamoros. However, Canales caught up with him near Mier. In the subsequent battle of Alcantro Creek, Carvajal fought with such spirit that he suffered a permanently shattered arm.¹³¹ Pavón surrendered, opening Canales' path to Matamoros.¹³²

Unfortunately for the plans of secession, the best potential military leader, Carvajal, was eliminated from the scene for the time being by his wound, while General Canales proved to be a most unsatisfactory general, not because of his criticized habit of leading his forces from behind (as was common enough practice at the time and maybe only prudent), but because he was slow-moving, inconsistent, impulsive, and indecisive. Repeatedly, he hesitated to engage his main forces in battle. After a rest of over a month at Mier, he led his troops against Matamoros, only to change his plans after a show of resistance there. Instead, he marched off against Monterrey. He also retreated from there after set-backs and headed for Laredo. Here, in January 1840, the Republic of the Rio Grande was officially established, with a constitution, a flag, and a two-room capitol building in Laredo. Jesús Cárdenas was inaugurated as President that same month in Revilla. Several weeks later, Canales suffered a defeat on the south bank of the

river upstream from Laredo, but in the summer of 1840 Canales struck back by capturing Ciudad Victoria. This victory emboldened Canales to try an attack on Saltillo, but he was repulsed and followed by General Mariano Arista to Camargo. Here Canales was obliged to surrender and abandon the scheme of an independent Rio Grande nation.¹³³

General Canales and the other rebels were forgiven by a Mexican government that needed them at this point for help in Mexico's military clashes with the Republic of Texas. Already in 1842, Canales was cooperating with a Mexican national army under General Woll that campaigned into Texan territory. Canales also helped to turn back the Texan retaliatory raid to the Rio Grande that followed.¹³⁴ From this point, the fatal experiment of inviting American involvement to develop the Valley was drawing to its dramatic conclusion, and the locals were tardily coming together to try to ward off conquest by the United States. Yet when that conquest did come, in 1846, once again a distinction in the reaction of the great families seems to be detectable. It is perhaps natural that the de la Garzas, who had already been more positive regarding the Anglo presence, should have come to an easier accommodation with American citizenship than did the Ballís, whose holdings had already been so endangered by the advent of the Anglos.

The Ballís had already evacuated to their holdings on the south bank of the river by the time of the Mexican-American War, and so accommodation with the American occupation was geographically more difficult for them. Furthermore, another Padre José Nicolás Ballí, who had taken the place of his venerable late relative of the same name as parish priest in Matamoros, acted as chaplain for General Arista's army in the war. He was drowned in the Rio Grande in May 1846 when his boat sank, presumably in the panicked recrossing of Arista's army after the Mexican defeat at the Battle of the Resaca de la Guerra (de la Palma).¹³⁵ However, in the American reorganization of the left bank, the Ballís supported an urban plan doomed to failure, the short-lived town of Santa Rita, the Anglo settlement started earlier by John Stryker on the north landing of the Rio. This was set up in 1848 as the first county seat of the new Cameron County, and Juan José Ballí served as justice of the peace as well as being named a Road Commissioner for the route from Santa Rita to the upper part of Cameron County. In this appointment he joined a line-up of mainly Anglo dignitaries including Israel Bigelow as chief justice, Thomas King, Edward Weyman, and A. A. Salinas as commissioners, Madison Stephens as sheriff, Gaspar Glaevecke as constable, Thomas Stansbury as county clerk, and Darius Bacon as district

clerk. Juan José Ballí also stood bond for the swearing into office of Adolphus Glaevecke on 11 September 1848.¹³⁶ However, before the year was out, the problem with flooding caused the county seat to be shifted north to the higher ground of Brownsville, established and dominated by a partly different set of people.¹³⁷ The Ballís subsequently ran into difficulties in seeking American recognition of their title to Padre Island, the La Barreta Grant and other land in Brooks and Kennedy Counties, in a legal case which still remains in dispute. Ballí family tradition records that in the period following the Mexican-American War, young Clemente Ballí (son of José Francisco Ballí, grandson of Juan Antonio Ballí, the uncle of the famous Padre Nicolás Ballí) ventured to check on the Ballís' Barreta Ranch, only to be caught by bandits supposedly sent by land grabbers. He was held north of Raymondville, tied to his wagon wheel, whipped, and left for dead.¹³⁸

In contrast, the de la Garzas were in a better position to win recognition of their holdings from the American government. It may be true that Juan Nepomuceno Cortina (the youngest son of Estefana Goseascochea - herself the daughter of Francisca Xaviera de la Garza) fought against Taylor's army as one of the men under General Arista, and he certainly proved a long-standing leader in opposition to the American occupation. It is also certain that Pedro Hinojosa (son of Mamerta de la Garza Falcon) fought against the Americans in the Mexican-American War.¹³⁹ However, the rest of the family rapidly accepted the change in nationality. Estefana Goseascochea and all her family moved to their ranches on the Espíritu Santo grant, to establish their claim to American citizenship.¹⁴⁰ Juan's elder brother José María Cortina was elected to the post of Tax Assessor for the new Cameron County. While Sabas Cavazos, son of Estefana Goseascochea was appointed a Cameron County Road Commissioner in 1848.¹⁴¹ It is true that American courts decided against the de la Garza title to the area on which the town of Brownsville was built. Nonetheless, working with the new system, Estefana Goseascochea managed to retain the bulk of the family's lands intact.¹⁴²

As to the leaders of the 1839-1841 Republic of the Rio Grande scheme, Antonio Canales fought against General Taylor in the Mexican-American War and subsequently settled south of the river.¹⁴³ Although José María de Carvajal also fought against Taylor's army, he afterwards settled in Brownsville, where he became a charter member of its masonic lodge. The zig-zag of his career brought him at last back south of the river, where he served as Governor of Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí before dying at Soto la Marina in 1874.¹⁴⁴

And so a chain of cause and effect had led from the first replanting of the Spanish flag over Valley settlement to the establishment of the American flag there. And with each spin of the historical wheel, the two dominant ranchero families of the north bank seem to have found themselves on opposite sides of the current issue. As protests against the disproportionate holdings granted to the great families in the area arose with the first land distribution, the de la Garzas apparently tightened their connection with the Spanish establishment, some of them serving in the military, others marrying their daughters to leading Spanish officers. At the same time, the Ballís produced one family member suspected of sympathies with liberal change and another who dedicated his life to ministering to the religious needs of rich and poor alike. The build-up of criticism of the system found its culmination in Padre Hidalgo's Revolt, which was met by opposition from the de la Garzas, but by seeming sympathy from the Ballís. The scare this revolt put into the conservative interests combined with the advent of liberal government in Spain to produce the independence of Mexico in 1821, seen as a rapid "fait accompli," as far as the Valley was concerned. This Mexican independence in turn opened the doors to the call for developing the Valley with American help. This at once opened up the Valley with American help. Immediately the debate was launched over the desirability of bringing in American influence, which seems to have been guardedly encouraged by the de la Garza clan, while the Ballís apparently opposed it. When Centralist governments in Mexico City tried to halt the growing American connection, local exasperation was a factor in the scheme to set up a Republic of the Rio Grande. While the possibility of some de la Garza support for this scheme is indicated, no such sympathy from the Ballís seems to be suggested. However, the increased ferment and instability which this revolt brought to the Valley only gave added encouragement to the United States to occupy the region. And when the U.S. took over, the la Garzas were able to maintain their position to a good extent in the new system, while the Ballís' interests more notably suffered.

Despite the seeming diversity of political sentiment between these two great families, there was no apparent personal disagreement. The two families remained on good terms with each other to the point that in 1830 Juan José Ballí II married Candida de la Garza (daughter of Juan José de la Garza).¹⁴⁵ On 11 September 1848, Sabas Cavazos (son of Estefana Gocascochea of the de la Garza clan) stood bond for Juan José Ballí when he was sworn in as justice of the peace.¹⁴⁶ Indeed all of the leading families of the area were more or less intermarried. This fact, based on the lack

of population of the region in this early period, must have played a role in keeping the local inhabitants from breaking into the factional fighting that typified the neighboring communities.

How can one explain this odd historical pattern, where de la Garzas and Ballis seemed fated to represent the two sides of every major political issue of the period and region they dominated? Thomas Mann in Buddenbrooks speculated that there is a sort of law that influences the change from one generation to the next within a great family. Surely it is just as true that families pass on their own particular traits. Euripides traced the influence of one generation on the next in his cycle of plays about the family of Agamemnon, and William Faulkner's Snopes family demonstrates continuing characteristics over the span of a century. The de la Garza family was planted in Mexico about 1550 by a Spanish noble and military captain from the Province of Huelva, Marcos Alonso Garza y Arcón, who launched the family interest in the developing norteño frontier. Marcos' descendants continued to excel in his combination of a military career with estate holdings. Marcos' great-grandson Blas de la Garza Falcón III rose to the post of Governor.¹⁴⁷ Blas María de la Garza Falcón did such an exceptional job of giving Camargo a prosperous start that his superior, José de Escandón, acknowledged his outstanding abilities.¹⁴⁸ It is small wonder that two centuries of this type of family accomplishment in a frontier region full of challenges should have produced a clan marked by a practical sense of how to preserve and expand their business holdings. This is not to say that the family was lacking a spiritual side, as we are reminded by the fact that the curate of Refugio in the year 1811 was José Felipe de la Garza y Guerra.¹⁴⁹ Nor was it lacking in revolutionary idealism, not only later in the person of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina with his de la Garza blood, but already in the revolutionary year of 1811, when protesters officially demanded that José Domingo de la Garza be named to replace the existing governmental authority.¹⁵⁰ Yet the general impression of sober practicality remains.

The Ballí heritage was equally proud, but in a slightly different way. It too had included great businessmen, ranchers, and military officers. This family had been founded in Mexico in 1574 by Pedro Ballí, a gifted man of education whose seemingly Italian-rooted line of Verona had found its way to Strasbourg, where Pedro had been apprenticed to his printer father.¹⁵¹ Raised in this international spirit, typical of the intellectual, Pedro had continued his family's peregrination by moving across France and Spain to Mexico.¹⁵² Here he held the post of official printer to

his Majesty Felipe II.¹⁵³ The line continued its intellectual bent, for at the end of the 16th century, Juan Bautista Ballí's Oración en Laudanza de la Jurisprudencia Pronunciada en la Apertura de Cursos de la Real Universidad de México was published.¹⁵³ The extended clan has also included a Dr. Eusebio Ballí, a forerunner of immunization who died in 1816, and a Dr. Luis Ballí, author of several books in the early twentieth century.¹⁵⁵ The Ballí spiritual orientation was tied to a practical economic and military interest (Padre Nicolás Ballís father and brother were both capitanes but was never engulfed by it, as evidenced by the religious vocation of the two Padre Ballís in the early 19th century. In this line of literati was surely born the idealism that so often guides men of the spirit, and occasionally in directions contrary to pragmatic considerations.

The contrast between the spirit of Caliban and of Ariel, between the practical and the ethereal as presented by Shakespeare's The Tempest, has long intrigued the imagination of Latin America, most notably in the speculations on the theme made in 1900 by the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó in his essay "Ariel". Thus it seems appropriate that the hispanic period of the region later to become Cameron County should be so curiously connected with a political distinction, albeit ever so fine, between generally practical de la Garzas and more frequently Arielian Ballís.

Pan American University at Brownsville

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- 151 "Ballí Family," a typed manuscript of Ballí family - researched genealogy, quoted with the kind permission of Macedonio Ballí.
- 152 "Pasajeros Emigrados de Indias, en Sevilla a Nueva España, XV de Julio de 1569," Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Spain.
- 153 "Presentado en México a 18 de Abril de 1572 años ante el Sr. Inquisidor Moya de Contreras," Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Spain.
- 154 Juan Bautista Ballí Oración en la Jurisprudencia Pronunciada en la Apertura de Cursos de la Real Univeridad de México México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1596), in the Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Spain.
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THE CORRIDOS OF MEXICO AND SOUTH TEXAS:
MODERN VARIATIONS ON MEDIEVAL THEMES

by

George K. Green

Corridos are a type of popular Mexican and Mexican-American poetry that is undeniably of medieval Spanish origin. The corrido varies only very slightly from the medieval romance, a verse form that has been well-known and widely studied for centuries throughout the Hispanic World and also among the Sephardic communities of the Middle East. The corrido shares with the romance its most essential feature: the combining of narrative and lyrical subgenres in the telling of a story of great emotional impact -- what the distinguished Spanish critic and collector of folk poetry Ramón Menéndez Pidal termed "lo épico-lírico."¹ In one of their very most typical forms, both corridos and romances present a tale of strife, either actual armed conflict or a socio-political controversy that threatens to lead to force of arms. As such, they remain true to the essential character of the Reconquista, the historical period in which these forms of arte menor first came to light. The Middle Ages on the Iberian Peninsula were, of course, noteworthy for the centuries-long struggle between the Christians in the North of Spain and the Moors in the Center and South. However, almost equally prominent was the strife between Catholic kingdoms, most especially Castile and León; and of hardly lesser importance were the blood feuds between families.

The Poema del Mio Cid, the oldest known major literary work of medieval Spain, differs only slightly in its essential poetic form from today's border corridos. In its principal themes of conflict we find equally close analogies between the ancient cantar de gesta and the corridos of our region. The medieval epic relates three episodes from the life of the Spanish national hero that involve conflicts of differing natures: (1) bloody battles with the Moorish invaders of the Iberian Peninsula, (2) conflict between the Castilian knights that carried the brunt of the battles with the Moors and the Leonese courtiers that are presented as preferring court intrigue to warfare, and (3) the Cid's rather stoic acceptance of the unjust authority of King Alfonso VI of Castile with its latent possibilities for violent conflict that are never realized.

Américo Paredes in his well-known book on a specific

border corrido, "El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez," views the armed struggle for his rights by an individual Mexican American "with his pistol in his hand" to be the central theme of the border corrido.

Border conflict dominates as a theme. The old ballad subjects, dealing mostly with the everyday activities of the Rio Grande folk, lose much of their interest. Ballads are received from Greater Mexico, from Cuba, and even from the United States, but their themes, mostly proletarian, are not imitated. The local ballads all take on the complexion of conflict.²

Paredes, in the work mentioned, considered the ballad of armed border conflict to be the dominant theme of local corridos, which (he thought) went into a period of eclipse in the 1930's with the lessening of Anglo-Hispanic cultural conflicts.

If the concept of "conflict" is, however, extended to include all types of socio-political tension, it can encompass a wide variety of corrido themes, many of them hardly in desuetude including the battle between the sexes, tension between teachers and students, and political topics. Corridos have recently been employed in Brownsville as oral and written campaign literature by candidates for local political office. The use of the corrido as a medium of political protest in Mexico in the recent period of crises has been so extensive and so effective that it is now rumored -- and widely believed by Mexicans -- that the Mexican Federal Government has strictly prohibited corridos about the current Mexican President, De la Madrid, or the present PRI candidate for the Mexican presidency, Salinas. The corrido of open political attack tends toward the subgenre of the corrido chusco, which does not shrink from the use of obscene language or images. Such corridos were particularly widespread during the generally unpopular presidencies of Echeverría and López Portillo. Among these, there exists an anonymous corrido of 1982 attacking both of these Mexican presidents, from which we quote four quatrains:

En el sexenio pasado
un loco nos gobernó,
dejándonos bien fregados
y a todos nos rechingó

Hoy otro loco en los Pinos

como perrito amistoso
gobierna con desatino
con su sistema mañoso.

Loco, menso, peligroso,
nuevamente en el poder.
Resultado: desastroso,
nos acabó de joder.

López Portillo ha creído
ser sabio y omnipotente,
y es un pendejo engreído,
un peligroso demente.³

This corrido follows the most typical pattern of eight-syllable verses grouped into quatrains with only the second and the fourth verses rhyming and with a new rhyme scheme in each new quatrain.

Another political subgenre of the corrido is the ballad about President Kennedy, who was and continues to be viewed by Hispanics as a hero who struggled to improve the lot of the minority population of the United States. An extensive collection of these corridos was published by Dan William Dickey of the University of Texas at Austin in 1978. We quote four quatrains from one of them:

Johnny Kennedy se ha muerto
sin comprender la razón,
solo una mano asesina
de un hombre sin corazón.

Kennedy llegó a este estado
como invitado de honor,
lo trataban como hermano
sin recelo y sin rencor.

Kennedy con su familia
también el Gobernador,
con una dulce sonrisa
saludaba a su nación.

Cuando una mano asesina
de un balcón le disparó,
Kennedy murió en seguida
y por poco, el Gobernador.⁴

One might point out that this is, strictly speaking, not a corrido but rather a romance, inasmuch as the rhyme scheme does not vary from stanza to stanza but rather employs an

assonant rhyme based upon the single vowel "o" that is continued in the even-numbered verses throughout the poem.

On yet another theme of conflict, a Matamoros student attending Pan American University at Brownsville has written a tongue-in-cheek corrido about the sufferings of students at the hands of heartless professors who require entirely too much work from the members of their classes.

Retemalpasado siempre
está el pobre estudiante;
se pasa todo el semestre
en puro estudio constante

Es mucho lo que él estudia
para toditas las pruebas;
pero de nada le sirve;
de todos modos reprueba.

Son bastantes los trabajos
que necesita entregar:
hasta que a él le parece
que el aula fuera su hogar

El que quiera buena nota,
sí tendrá que trabajar,
porque aunque lo barbeara
el profe no se la da.

Grande es su desilusión;
pues, ni con lo que estudió
sufrió y se las malpasó
las materias aprobó.

El estudiante modelo
en ningún caso desiste;
aunque nunca nada entienda,
siempre a las clases asiste.

El profesor no lo entiende;
le da bastante tareas
Se pasa todo el semestre
con las prisas y carreas.

Nadie sabe lo que él sufre
aguantando profesores
con sus chistes y sus bromas
sin irse a los corredores.

Sueña con las vacaciones:
mucho quiere descansar,
de todo a que el profesor
lo ha hecho corretear.

Cuándo llegará el día
que su carrera termine,
que acabe ya de estudiar?
Por fin, disfrutar el cine!⁵

The professor, for his part, is somewhat inclined to
reply in kind:

Los estudiantes se excusan
por problemas personales:
--Una tía se murió;
por eso, no vine antes.

--Tuvimos un accidente
con el carro aquí delante.
--He estado muy muy enfermo;
por eso, no pude antes.

Inventan unas excusas:
la lista es inacabable.
Uno quisiera creer
lo que es muy poco probable.⁶

The battle between the sexes is yet another conflictive
theme in the corrido that has also been a recurring theme of
romances. In "La Martina," a husband returns home to find
his wife with another man. The husband then complains to the
wife's parents:

Y la tomó de la mano
y a sus papás la llevó:
--Suegros, aquí está Martina
que una traición me jugó.

--Llévatela tú, mi yerno,
la iglesia te la entregó;
y si ella te ha traicionado,
la culpa no tengo yo.

When the parents deny responsibility for their
daughter's actions, the husband shoots her three times
in a conclusion reminiscent of Calderón's dramas on the
theme of family honor:

Hincadita de rodillas
no más tres tiros le dio;
y el amigo del caballo,
ni por la silla volvió.⁷

Again we note that the rhyme scheme of this corrido is, in fact, that of a romance.

Another recurring tale of conflict between the sexes involves the jilted young woman, who drinks a toast with her lover on the occasion of his upcoming wedding with another woman. The wine, however, contains poison. "Moriana," a romance viejo, is preserved in the folklore of much of the Spanish-speaking world. The version we quote below, however, is ironically a corrido, although contained in a collection of romances.

Moriana, Moriana,
¿qué me diste en este vino,
que por las riendas lo tengo,
y no veo a mi rocino?

Moriana, en el estrado,
¿qué me diste en este trago,
que por las riendas lo tengo,
y no veo a mi caballo?⁸

Behind the recurring and multiple themes of conflict in the corridos and romances are to be found a number of traditional Hispanic values. Perhaps the most obvious is that of manhood conceived in a rather special way, el machismo. In relation to the theme of manhood, a number of objects, actions, images, and poetic conventions are of symbolic if not ritualistic importance. In both the medieval cantar de gesta and the modern corrido, horse and weapons are the main emblems of the fighter. Almost a thousand years after the death in 1099 of Rodrigo Díaz de Bivár, el Cid Campeador, the name of his horse, Babieca, and the names of his best swords, Tizón and Colada, are still remembered in the popular oral tradition of the romance in vast regions of the Hispanic World. Yet another such symbol was the emblem of the Cid's chief lieutenant and cousin Alvar Fáñez, la lanza fardida, the lance carved from an oak sapling with its point carefully hardened over a campfire. Analogously, the corridos about Gregorio Cortez make reference to the hero's mare, which much like Babieca was able to outrun any other horse of the day. The sword and lance of the romances viejos of medieval Spain are replaced by the pistol and 30-30 Winchester in the corrido of the Mexican Revolution and in the corrido of the border hero. More than one corrido has

been devoted to Pancho Villa's horse, Sieteleguas, so named for his fabled ability to gallop seven leagues without stopping or faltering.

Sieteleguas, el caballo
que Villa más estimaba,
cuando oía silbar los trenes
se paraba y relinchaba.⁹

Villa's men are remembered in folklore for their kaki uniforms and ten-gallon hats, but also most especially for their 30-30's.

Carabinas treinta treinta,
que cargamos los rebeldes;
Qué viva el señor Madero!
desde el veinte de noviembre.¹⁰

Equal significance is accorded horse and weapons in the corridos about duels fought in the traspacios of cantinas between borrachos.

Valente ya anda borracho,
y andaba escandalizando;
con esta cuarenta y cinco
no respeta ningún grado.

El mayor le contestó:
--Sea por el amor de Dios;
la tuya es cuarenta y cinco;
la mía quema treinta y dos.

Ya Valente anda borracho
en su caballo montado
con la pistola en la mano
y a las muchachas besando.¹¹

In the Mexican corrido, the hero's horse is sometimes killed in the act of saving its owner, as in "El Prieto Azabache":

Con tres balazos de mÅuser,
corriste, Azabache, salvando mi vida;
lo que tÅ has hecho conmigo,
caballo amigo, no se me olvida.¹²

In the "Corrido de Nacho Bernal", both rider and horse are killed:

Cuando el gobierno llegó,
se le fueron como rayo,
matando a Ignacio Bernal¹³
y también a su caballo.

Yet other traditional symbols of manhood in the corrido are the full mustache, leather clothing, and an appropriate hat. In the Poema del Mio Cid, the analogous symbol was the Cid's beard.

Usaba bigote en cuadro abultado,
su paño al cuello enredado,
calzones de manta, chamarra de cuero;
traía punteado el sombrero.¹⁴

Here we find yet another metrical variant of the corrido form: a quatrain of eleven-syllable verses rather than the customary octosilabos.

One common image for the manly hero that has become a poetic convention in the Mexican corrido is the comparison with a rooster.

Gabino Barrera murió
como mueren los hombres que son hombres;
por una morena perdió
como pierden los gallos en los tapados.¹⁵

This stanza presents an unusual variant form in which twelve-syllable verses alternate with the more traditional eight-syllable lines: it shows a very slight resemblance to the seguidilla of Andalusia in which verses of varying lengths alternate, though these are usually of 5 and 7 syllables or 5 and 6 syllables.

One poetic convention common in corridos that is inherited from the medieval cantar de gesta is the initial battle cry of the hero that begins with the words "Yo soy". For example, in the first cantar of the Poema del Mio Cid at the outset of the battle with Fâriz and Galve, we find the Cid challenging the Moors with the words "Yo so(y) Roy Diaz, el Cid de Bivar Campeador".¹⁶ This convention is employed repeatedly in border corridos about Gregorio Cortez.

Tiró con rumbo a Gonzales
sin ningún timidez:
--Sígame, rinches cobardes,
yo soy Gregorio Cortez.¹⁷

Similarly, in the blood feud between Valente Quintero and the mayor, Valente cries out, "Yo soy hombre de valor." In a recently collected corrido from Brownsville about Jacinto Treviño, the gunman taunts the rangers in similar fashion:

¡Entrenle, rinches cobardes!
el pleito no es con un niño.
¿Quieren conocer su padre?
¡Yo soy Jacinto Treviño!¹⁸

The third verse is an oblique insult of the classic Hispanic pattern: the implication is that the rangers are sons of prostitutes.

Apart from the evident theme of manhood, a second important societal value reflected in the corrido and romance tradition is the Hispanic family with its strong ties between man and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Again, there are close analogies with the medieval cantar de gesta. One of the most famous verses in the Poema del Cid refers to the hero's leave-taking from his wife after he has been exiled from Castile: the image is that of the fingernail being torn from the flesh. Two of the heroes of border corridos, Gregorio Cortez and Jacinto Treviño, take up arms against the rinches only after their brother is killed by an American.

Yet other Hispanic societal values continually reflected in those works of arte menor are the love of the home region or state (el terruño or patria chica), which is a constant theme of the corrido; the importance of keeping one's word (cumplir la palabra): failure to do so often leads to bloody vengeance; and, finally, the lack of automatic respect for legal authority per se: the Hispanic retains the highest degree of respect for parental authority, personal alliances, and established patriarchs and elders; but constituted authority is often not held in equal esteem.

A recently collected corrido reflects two of these societal values: feelings for the terruño and lack of automatic respect for constituted authority. A smuggler threatens to shoot a custom's house official if he does not accept a bribe, and when he does continue to refuse the mordida, the smuggler shoots him and escapes back across the border.

FRONTERAS DE TAMAULIPAS

Fronteras de Tamaulipas,
¿quién no las conoce bien?,
donde los hombres se burlan
de la muerte y de la ley.

Voy a contarles de un caso
que no se ha aclarado bien,
de un hombre contrabandista
y un teniente coronel.

Los dos eran desconfiados:
querían conocerse bien;
los dos eran muy astutos,
pero eran de buena ley.

El teniente coronel,
con mucho honor militar,
le dijo: --Te equivocaste;
a mí no me vas a comprar.

No te olvides lo que soy,
jefe de división aduanal.
Luego aquel contrabandista
se comenzó a cacajear.

--Mire usted, mi coronel
ya me canse de alegar:
o acepta usted mi dinero
o aquí lo voy a matar.

Los dos guardaron silencio:
Tal vez pensaron igual.
Luego se oyó una descarga
que al coronel le fue a dar.

Luego que ya lo mató
la frontera fue a cruzar.
Resultó que era tejano;
no lo han podido agarrar.

Matamoros, Tamaulipas,
nunca dejas de ser
la ciudad más bullanguera
el puerto de mi querer.²⁰

Curiously, the poetic form is again, strictly speaking, not entirely that of the corrido but rather closer to the romance. The first three quatrains that form the introduction

have assonant rhyme based on the vowel "e". The body of the poem has a continuous rhyme scheme based on the vowel "a" for five quatrains. The final quatrain returns to the assonance of the initial stanza.

Such modern variants on medieval poetic forms seem likely to continue in vogue as long as our border community continues to maintain and to take pride in the highly traditional societal values that our border corridos so clearly reflect.

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ENDNOTES

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3. Anonymous mimeographed sheet with the date of March, 1982.
4. Dan William Dickey. The Kennedy Corridos: A Study of the Ballads of a Mexican-American Hero. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978, pp. 109-110.
5. Poem written as a homework assignment for Spanish 3304.60 at Pan American University at Brownsville by Rosa Elena M. Sierra in the summer of 1985.
6. De cosecha propia.
7. Antonio Salgado Herrera. Los Máximos Corridos Mexicanos. Mexico: Anaya, 1985, pp. 101-102.
8. Menéndez Pidal. Op. cit., p. 19.
9. Raúl Bonoratt. Corridos mexicanos. Mexico: Editores Mexicanos Unidos, 1987, p. 28.
10. Ibidem, p. 33.

11. Ibidem, p. 41.
12. Ibidem, p. 67.
13. Ibidem, p. 73.
14. Ibidem, p. 78.
15. Ibidem, p. 79.
16. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, editor. Poema del Mio Cid. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1966, p. 145.
17. Paredes, Op. cit., p. 155.
18. Handwritten corrido recently collected in Brownsville by Ricardo Garrido, a graduate student at Pan American University at Brownsville.
19. Poema del Mio Cid. Edition cited, p. 126.
20. Handwritten corrido recently collected by Ricardo Garrido of Brownsville, Texas.



O Todo o Nada

Leyenda Matamorenses

por

Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda

Sí yo fuera un narrador pedante que quisiera pasar por erudito, en lugar del llamado "O todo o nada", habría hecho decir al fantasma de esta leyenda "Aut Caesar, aut nihil" que fuera la divisa de César Borgia, aunque el otro César no anduvo de ambiciones menos escaso, pues prefirió "ser el primero entre los bárbaros y no el segundo en Roma"; pero como prefiero seguir el consejo de Don Quijote al garzón titiritero, hablaré con llaneza y el fantasma dirá --como en efecto dicen que dice-- "O todo o nada," llanamente.

Y prosigue la llaneza, pues el hecho aconteció y acontecerá en una parte de esa zona geográfica de México que se llama la llanura tamaulipeca, en un lugar no determinado, pero sí cercano a la H. Matamoros.

En esta llanura, a trechos, crece una vegetación cerrada y chaparra, por analogía con los montículos aislados rematados en punta roma, que los matamorenses llaman "mogotes", así' hay algunos denominados diversamente: "Mogote de Santiago", "Mogote prieto", "Mogote escondido", etc.

En uno de esos mogotes, cuyo nombre no sé y cuya ubicación ignoro, pero sí sé, porque varios de mis paisanos me lo aseguran, existe en los alrededores de Matamoros, sucede lo que sucede. Y lo que sucede es que cuando algún caminante, bracero repatriado, contrabandista, o simplemente caminante perdido, se interna en dicho mogote, encuéntrase de pronto, en un claro, un viejo guayín abandonado y al acercarse curioso ve con júbilo que dicho vehículo está no sólo, lleno, sino copeteado de pesos fuertes, blancos, pesados, de aquellos del siglo XIX. Pero... (el imprescindible "pero") si el hallador trata de embolsarse algunos, una fuerza misteriosa se lo impide al tiempo mismo que una no menos misteriosa voz se escucha que imperativa dice: "O todo o nada." E inútiles y vanas son cuantas artimañas o tretas se intenten para apoderarse de parte del mogotoso tesoro, siempre la fuerza misteriosa lo impide y siempre la misteriosa voz ordena: "O todo o nada." Algunos ha habido que, con rapidez asombrosa han logrado hacer llegar a sus bolsillos algunos de esos pesos, entonces sucede algo

inaudito; los pesos rompen el bolsillo y rodando y rodando y quebrantando las leyes de la gravitación universal suben orondos por el eje del guayín o por las ruedas y se colocan tintineando entre sus compañeros, únicamente que el tintineo suena a risa burlona.

Con espanto los tímidos o por fin desalentados valientes, salen del mogote e inmediatamente van en busca de un tiro de caballos, mulas o hasta borricos si no hay más --usted haría lo mismo-- y regresan esperanzados y contentos. Pero...(otra vez el imprescindible "pero") recorren días y noches y hasta meses y años enteros todos los mogotes habidos y por haber en la llanura matamorenses y nunca jamás vuelven a encontrar el mogote del guayín de pesos.

Cuentan los viejos de la región que los pesos y el guayín pertenecían a un padre rico que los dejó como herencia a dos hermanos recomendándoles se los repartieran por partes iguales la mitad del dinero para cada uno y que del guayín hicieran dos "arañas" o volantas, mas los dos hijos ambiciosos los dos dijeron: "O todo o nada" y jugaron a los dados su respectiva parte, que ganó el menor y partió de Matamoras, sin que nunca más se supiera de él, que el perdidoso también se fué, ignorándose hasta la fecha su paradero. Otros viejos desmienten a los anteriores y afirman que si bien se trata de herencia, esta era entre cuatro hermanos, tres hermanas y un hermano, el cual, una noche desapareció con el guayín y los pesos y hasta el día se oye hablar del coche y las monedas, no se sabe el paradero del infiel, aunque todos suponen que está achicharrándose lentamente en un sitio un poquito nada más caluroso que la H. Matamoras.

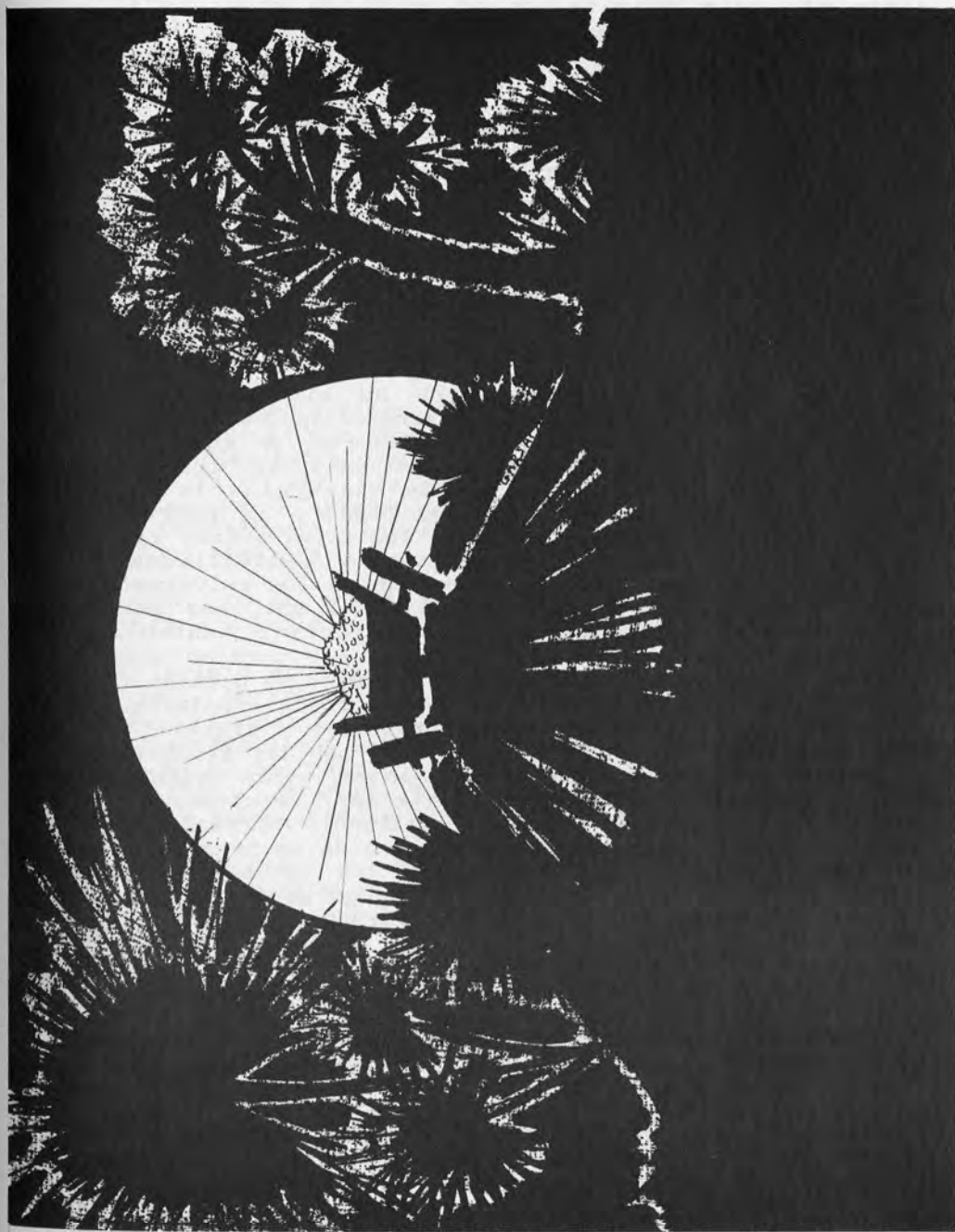
Sea lo que fuere, lo importante es apoderarse del tesoro y cavilando sobre el asunto varias noches, he encontrado un método que me parece hacedero y práctico. Y como no soy egoísta, en seguida lo publico. Sencilísimo. Cuestión de entrenamiento. Provéanse de un guayín del mismo tamaño y peso que el del tesoro enmogotado y tire de él el primer día; el segundo día póngale un peso fuerte del mismo tamaño, cuño Y peso de los que contiene el guayín y jale siquiera una distancia de medio kilómetro; al día siguiente añada otro peso de la misma plata fuerte y jale seiscientos metros y así todos los días siga echando peso tras peso y tirando kilómetro tras kilómetro hasta que llegue a arrastrar con toda facilidad el guayín lleno de pesos por decenas de kilómetros; cuando ya pueda hacerlo --todo es cuestión de entrenamiento-- busque en toda la región de Matamoras mogote por mogote y cuando menos lo espere, dará con el guayín de los pesos y entonces, al llevárselo todo la fuerza misteriosa no se lo

impedirá y el mandato de "O todo o nada" será cumplido.

Al leer lo anterior seguramente muchos, muchísimos se entrenarán y el año próximo afluirán a Matamoros, además de los ochenta mil braceros de cada año, ochocientos mil buscadores del tesoro del guayín. A los cuales finalmente dígoles: No se preocupen por alojamiento; en la actualidad se construyen ochocientos mil hoteles en la H. Matamoros Tamps.

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros

Addendum: It might be noted that this tradition of a rich padre having left behind a cursed treasure may have been inspired by the reputed greed of some of the late 18th century missionaries to the area. Eliseo Paredes reports that among these churchmen were some who managed considerable landed interests for their own benefit, who practiced usury, and who lived in great comfort while leaving their missions abandoned. Eliseo Paredes Manzano, Homenaje a los Fundadores de la Heróica, Leal e Invicta Matamoros en el Sesquicentenario de su Nuevo Nombre (Matamoros: Impresos Alfa, S.A., 1976), pp. 34-35.



Así paga el Diablo

Leyenda Matamorense

por

Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda

Sucedió en Matamoros. Para mayor fidelidad, en la H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas, México. Y fue en el siglo diecinueve, sin precisar, pues mientras una abuelita afirmaba que aconteció a principios del siglo. Otras aseguraban que a mediados y no faltan las que aseveran que en el último tercio. El caso es que todas están de acuerdo en lo sustancial de la aventura de Abundio el violinista.

Los músicos de entonces--y no era rara excepción Abundio--, como aún no estaban sindicalizados, pasaban la pena adiposa para subsistir. En Matamoros, en aquellos días pequeño pueblucho, tocaban sólo ocasionalmente; cuando algún personaje o personajillo partía de viaje, iba la murga a despedirlo ejecutando "Las Golondrinas"; al regresar lo recibían con "Las Dianas"; estaban los filarmónicos al tanto de los días onomásticos de señores y señoritos para tocarles "Las Mañanitas"; se enteraban de los aniversarios y hacían lo mismo. Unos cuantos bailes al año, una que otra boda rumbosa, escasos bautizos de postín, contadísimas "serenatas" --previo permiso municipal-- y termine usted la cuenta. Epoca dura, sobre todo en invierno se pasaban varias noches en blanco, de tertulia en alguna fonda --todavía no se llamaban restaurantes-- que tenían su "piquera" --un rinconcito con rejas, donde se servían bebidas alcohólicas-- y como en aquel entonces y en este ahora, sobra quién invite a libar y escasea quien lo haga a comer, resultaba que los músicos, en su inmensa mayoría --y Abundio el violinista no era la excepción-- se retiraban en la alta noche a sus casas con los intestinos sin sólidos, y los estómagos a medio llenar o llenos por completo, de líquidos espirituosos. Una de tales ocasiones iba Abundio dando traspiés. Y entre uno y otro invocó:

--Si el Diablo me lo pide, al Diablo le tocó.

Tras lo cual, sin haber obstáculo a su paso, dió con su figura y su violín sobre el lúteo pavimento.

No se sabe --y creo que nunca se sabrá-- el lapso que estuvo en la rúa, peor puede conjeturarse que no fue largo. Un personaje-- las abuelas lo describen como alto, esbelto,

carilargo, ojos oblicuos de esclerótica roja, de mirar llamante, pobladas cejas, prominente nariz aguileña, mostachos a la borgoña, barbilla mentoneana, orejas de lobo, alto sombrero de copa que apenas disimula algo así como unos apéndices parecidos a caprina encornadura, negra capa española con esclavina roja, capa que oculta en el siniestro lado el espadín y por la parte media posterior no menos largo rabo y borceguíes que calzan pezuñas --levantó a nuestro violinista, mandándole:

--Abundio, ven a tocar.

Y en seguida lo ayudó a subir a un coche cercano que Abundio no supo como llegó hasta allí.

--A mi baile --ordenó el de la capa rojinegra.

Y el coche se arrancó con rumbo para Abundio desconocido, tan pronto le parecía que iban para el barrio de la "Anacahuíta", o para la "Garita de Puertas Verdes" o bien para el "Estero Seco". Paró por fin el coche descendiendo nuestros personajes en un vasto salón tan vasto que allí estaban todos, absolutamente todos los habitantes de Matamoros, sin faltar uno siquiera.

--Empieza a tocar, Abundio-- ordenó el de la capa rojinegra-- y hazlo "vivace", "fortísimo" y "molto feroce".

Principió Abundio a tocar su violín y dió comienzo la zarabanda. Formáronse las parejas y aquello fué un continuo danzar...y tocar. Al rato Abundio se cansó, pero vino inmediatamente el de la capa rojinegra y le propinó tremendos azotes con el oculto rabo, faena para la cual puso el rabo al descubierto y lo mismo hacía con los que se cansaban de bailar. Y así pasáronse horas de música, bailes y azotes.

Por fin cantó el gallo y se escuchó lejano tañer de campana. Como arte de birlo birloque desaparecieron piso, techo y personas del inmenso salón y con ellos todos los danzantes que, repiten las abuelas y no se cansan de repetir, eran todos, absolutamente todos los habitantes de Matamoros, sin faltar uno solo siquiera.

De regreso en el coche, Abundio todo molido de cansancio y de los rabizurrigazos tuvo la curiosidad de indagar al de la rojinegra capa y díjole:

Comprendo que en su baile danzaran Don Fulano, que dicen mandó a matar a su suegra para quedarse con una herencia; que esté Zutano el prestamista, que no falte Perengano, hijo del

dueño de la postas que asalta enmascarado las diligencias de su propio padre, que estén los dueños de la taberna y de la lechería que bautizan sin estar ordenados, que bailen Doña Nachita que le quitó el novio a su hermana mayor y otros y otras muchas que por prudencia callo, pero que dancen todos, absolutamente todos los habitantes de Matamoros, sin faltar uno siquiera...

Complaciente, el de la capa bicolor sentenció:

--No les has visto la lengua: negra y rayada la tienen.

Y esto diciendo puso una reluciente moneda que parecía onza de oro en la diestra del violinista y al mismo tiempo de tremendo puntapié de la hendida pezuña, lo arrojó del coche, yendo nuestro cuitado a yacer en el mismo sitio donde lo botara el supradicho traspiés.

Al levantarse Abundio y ver la moneda, encontróse que era un peso falso, del plomo más pesado que se conoce.

Desde entonces, cuentan las abuelitas que Abundio antes de libar licores, entre una y otra libación y después de cada libación, recitaba una cuarteta que decía:

"Obedece esto que hablo

y evitarás cosas feas:

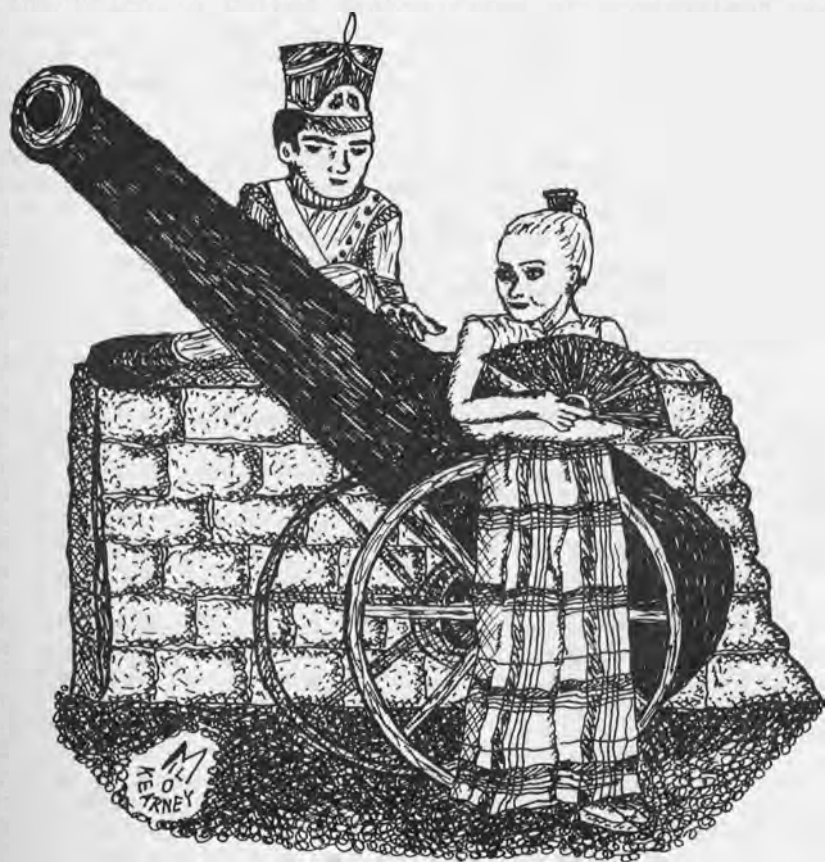
jamás invoques al Diablo

aunque en el Diablo no creas."

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros



Mexican-American War Period



POINT ISABEL AND THE MEXICAN WAR

by

A. A. Champion and Henry G. Krausse, Jr.

Few of us today are aware that the first American stronghold in the Lower Rio Grande Valley was established in Port Isabel. Fort Polk, which antedated Fort Brown by nearly two weeks, played a critical role at the time of the opening battles of the Mexican War.

In the spring of 1846, following the annexation of Texas into the Union, a United States "army of occupation" under the command of General Zachary Taylor was sent to this area to secure the left bank of the Rio Grande as the southern boundary of Texas, one which the government of Mexico did not recognize.

On March 24, 1846 the advance of Taylor's army arrived at Fronzon de Santa Ysabel, the name by which the present site of Port Isabel was known. At the same time a fleet of transports laden with provisions for the army arrived on the scene and commenced landing its cargo. General Taylor recognized that this site, which he named Point Isabel, with its 20-foot high bluff reaching out into the bay, was an ideal location for his main supply base, and ordered the fortification of the base's perimeter.¹

As soon as sufficient supplies were landed to fill a wagon train, General Taylor joined the main body of his troops encamped on the Matamoros road, and continued the march, arriving on March 28 at "a site opposite Matamoros," where the army established its main camp. It was here that Taylor's engineers began to raise a fortification that later became known as Fort Brown.²

During the following month constant communication was maintained between the base at Point Isabel and the camp opposite Matamoros. The army had to be clothed, transported, doctored and armed, and the troops were entirely dependent upon the stores of supplies being accumulated at Point Isabel. The landing process was slow and difficult, for the transports could not enter the shallow harbor. Small steam lighters shuttled between the ships out at sea and the landing at Point Isabel, where civilians brought from Corpus Christi unloaded the boats at the wharf and moved the cargoes up to the base.³

In those years supply of the armed forces was shared by the Quartermaster, Subsistence and Ordnance departments. Subsistence was responsible for the procurement of the rations and the administration of the depot; Ordnance, for supplying the troops with weapons of war, guns, ammunition, sabers, etc.; and Quartermaster, for the clothing, equipment and transportation. It was this latter responsibility that made the Quartermaster General the key figure in maintaining the lifelines of the army.⁴

Immense supplies of pork, beef, flour, corn, hay, oats, as well as boxed supplies initially lay in open storage on the depot grounds until rude, canvas-roofed sheds were erected for their protection. A train of some 300 wagons pulled by oxen and mules regularly left the depot with supplies for the camp opposite Matamoros, travelling over swamps, grassy prairies and across two resacas. Mexican resistance was no problem, for the army's movements were only occasionally harassed by hostile local ranchers.

As the month of April was ending, however, contacts with Mexican army patrols commenced. On April 25 a body of Mexican cavalry crossed the Rio Grande some 18 miles above Taylor's camp and ambushed Captain Seth Thornton's reconnaissance patrol of 63 dragoons (mounted infantry), killing, wounding or capturing all the Americans. Three days later the Mexican cavalry surprised Captain Sam Walker's troop of Texas Rangers on the Point Isabel road, cutting the wagon communication with the main force opposite Matamoros. Captain Walker made a hurried retreat to the depot.⁵

News of these attacks threw Point Isabel into a state of great anxiety. Major John Munroe, the base commander, armed every available man, including some of the crewmen from ships in the harbor, raising the defense force to about 500, only a small portion of whom were army regulars. The situation of both the American stations now became critical. On April 30 Captain Walker volunteered to communicate with General Taylor and inform him of the situation of the Point Isabel depot, in which were stored the army's essential supplies.⁶

Upon learning the facts, Taylor ordered most of his units to prepare to march to Point Isabel. His object was two-fold; to protect the supply point, and to bring back supplies. Major Jacob Brown, commanding the 7th Infantry Regiment, was left to hold the fort, with a garrison of 600 men. On May 1 Taylor moved out with the remaining force of 2,000 men, organized in two brigades under Colonels Twiggs and Belknap, to the relief of the base at point Isabel. The following morning this force arrived at its destination and

encamped outside the entrenchments at the depot. For the next five days the troops labored on the fortifications, with battalions of each brigade taking turns at pick-and-shovel duty under the supervision of their immediate officers.⁷

Captain John Sanders of the U.S. Military Engineers had laid out the original line of defences by building a strong bastion on top of the ridge, about one thousand feet from the edge of the bluff. From this point breastworks extended down the slope to the northwest and northeast to the shores of the bay. The fortification faced inland, with its back resting on the bluff and the shore. It enclosed an area of about 50 acres. To this General Taylor made additions and adjustments so as to strengthen the line and extend the entrenchments, but it was impossible properly to fortify the base with the means at hand in the time allowed.⁸

The fortification had not been completed when at dawn of May 3 the batteries at Matamoros opened fire on the American camp on the river. Lieutenant U. S. Grant wrote that he was awakened in his tent at the seashore by the sound of cannon in the direction of the fort on the Rio Grande. He remarked that there were no possible means of obtaining news from that garrison, and information from outside could not be other than unfavorable. He wondered what General Taylor's feelings were during this period of suspense; but for himself, a young second lieutenant who had never heard a hostile shot before, he felt sorry he had enlisted.⁹

Captain Walker reported that a large body of enemy troops was formed on the road to Matamoros, apparently awaiting the return of the American army to the river camp. Captain Charles May, with a force of dragoons was sent to escort Captain Walker, who carried a message for Major Brown at the fort on the river. Captain May and his troops remained at some distance while Walker alone entered Major Brown's camp. On the morning of May 4 the army at Point Isabel heard a cry of "the enemy is advancing!" The long roll was beaten; the troops were formed and immediately marched out to meet the enemy. The cloud of dust which had caused the alarm proved to be Captain May's dragoons returning from their mission. He had awaited Captain Walker until dawn and then returned to Point Isabel. Walker returned the following morning with the news that everything was well at the fort on the river.¹⁰

On the afternoon of May 7 the army marched out of the Point Isabel depot, with a train of 300 loaded wagons bringing up the rear.

On the afternoon of the following day, May 8, the two armies met at Palo Alto prairie (about four miles south of Los Fresnos) and engaged in combat. It was an artillery duel, and the noise of the cannonade was clearly heard at the depot in Point Isabel. Again there was a period of anguished waiting, with no news from the battlefield. At noon the same day Commodore David Conner's Gulf Squadron anchored off Brazos de Santiago Pass. Major Munroe, worried that a possible defeat of our army could invite an attack on the garrison, asked the Commodore for help. Conner responded by sending to his assistance a force of 500 sailors and Marines who took positions within the fort.¹¹

At noon of May 9 a detachment of the 2nd Dragoons marched into the depot escorting the wounded of the Palo Alto battle. Forty-one disabled men and three officers were brought in to the base hospital. Among them was the mortally wounded Major Samuel Ringgold who, as commander of the horse artillery battery, had performed brilliantly at Palo Alto.

That same day the American army again met the enemy at Resaca de la Palma, where Taylor's forces completely routed the Mexican troops, who retreated in disorder back across the Rio Grande. That battlefield has now been engulfed by Brownsville's northern residential subdivisions and apartment buildings.

On the morning of May 10 General Taylor returned to Point Isabel with his staff. With them was the distinguished prisoner, General De La Vega, who had won the Americans' admiration and respect for the gallant manner in which he had conducted himself at Resaca de la Palma. The main purpose of Taylor's visit was to confer with Commodore Conner on a plan for a joint expedition to ascend the Rio Grande and cooperate in an assault upon Matamoros, an operation which never materialized.

The conference is memorable more because of a humorous sidelight than for the routine decisions the two leaders made. The general was notorious for his disdain of military pomp or spit-and-polish. He believed in dressing comfortably, and in the South Texas heat he habitually dressed in loose cotton clothing (no doubt horrifying the West Pointers), his uniform kept packed away. Commodore Conner, from his flagship anchored off Brazos de Santiago, sent word that he would call on the general. As a contemporary chronicler put it, "General Taylor, knowing that naval officers habitually wore all the uniform the law allowed on all all occasions of ceremony, thought it would only be civil to receive his guest in the same style. His

uniform was got out, brushed up, and put on in advance of the visit. Commodore Conner, knowing the general's aversion to the wearing of the uniform, and feeling that it would be regarded as a compliment should he meet him in civilian dress, left off his uniform for that occasion. The meeting was said to have been embarrassing to both, and the conversation was principally apologetic.¹²

Orders No. 60, Fort Polk, Texas, May 12, 1846, read:

"As a mark of respect to the Chief Magistrate of the Republic (President James K. Polk), the work constructed at this place, to cover the main depot of the army, will be known as "Fort Polk."

"The Commanding general takes this occasion to express his satisfaction with the disposition made for the defense and protection of this point so vitally important to the efficiency and security of the army. To Major Munroe, the commanding officer; Captain Sanders of the Engineers; Majors Thomas and McRee, and Captains Sibley and Hill of the Quartermaster Dept; Captain Ramsey of the Ordnance and Lt. Montgomery of the Subsistence departments, credit is especially due for their zeal and activity. The General returns his thanks to the numerous citizens who volunteered their services in defense of the depot. Their assistance added materially to the strength, and to his confidence in its ability to resist an attack. The reinforcement from the brig Lawrence, under Lt. Renschaw, and a large force of seamen and Marines so promptly furnished by the Squadron on its arrival require a special acknowledgment to Commodore Conner and Commander Mercer of the Navy. The Army is deeply grateful for the support and cooperation from a kindred branch of the public service." (Signed by General Taylor)

Fort Polk became the base hospital and as many sick soldiers as could be cared for were sent there. Surgeon Robert C. Wood, General Taylor's son-in-law and confidant, was in charge. For the rest of the year 1846 a regular correspondence was kept up between them. General Taylor had become very popular all over the country. Thurlow Weed, editor of the Albany Journal and prominent leader, predicted his election to the presidency. General Taylor did not take kindly to Weed's suggestion. To his brother he remarked that such an idea never entered his head, nor was it likely to enter the head of any sane person. To Dr. Wood he wrote that they need fear no interference from him for that high office, which he would decline if proffered and he could reach it without opposition. Dr. Wood, however, kept fostering Taylor's political candidacy. He collected clippings of

newspapers and editorials and forwarded them to the general's headquarters. He must have been quite persuasive, for General Zachary Taylor went on to become the twelfth president of the United States.¹³

Few fortifications can claim to have been built by such a distinguished group of officers as those who took part in erecting the earthworks of Point Isabel. There were at Point Isabel, from May 2 to May 7, 1846 more than 160 young West Pointers who led their men to the earthen embankments and made use of their theoretical knowledge of building fortifications. Many of them distinguished themselves in the war with Mexico, and a few years later had to make the terrible decision as to remaining in the Old Army of the United States or resigning and joining the Army of the Confederacy.

Among those junior officers who survived the Mexican campaign and later remained loyal to the Union, forty-six attained general officer grades, including, to name only a few, U.S. Grant, George Gordon Meade, George H. Thomas, Don Carlos Buell, C. F. Smith, and Abner Doubleday, the latter better known for having invented baseball. Among those who opted for the Confederate cause, twenty-three became general officers, including James Longstreet, Edmund Kirby-Smith, John C. Pemberton, John Bankhead Magruder and Theo H. Holmes.

A biographer of General Robert E. Lee (who joined Taylor's army after these initial engagements) put it this way: "With General Taylor's army at Point Isabel at that time there were many subordinate officers fighting under a common flag who were destined to become familiar to the public fourteen years later by the skill and courage with which they fought each other. Their swords then drawn for victory against a common foe were to be pointed against each other's breasts, and those who had slept beneath the same blanket, drank from the same canteen, and formed those ties of steel which are strongest when pledged amid common dangers, around a common mess table, were to be marshalled under the banners of opposing armies."¹⁴

Fort Polk had a short life. It was turned over by the War Department in February 1850 to the Treasury Department, which used it for U.S. Customs collection operations. Since it played such an important part in the birth of Point Isabel, its memory should be preserved. Nothing remains today to indicate its location. Every bit of it has totally disappeared. Its earthen walls, the breastworks, redoubts and bastion have long since completely eroded and levelled off. A large portion of the ground upon which it stood has

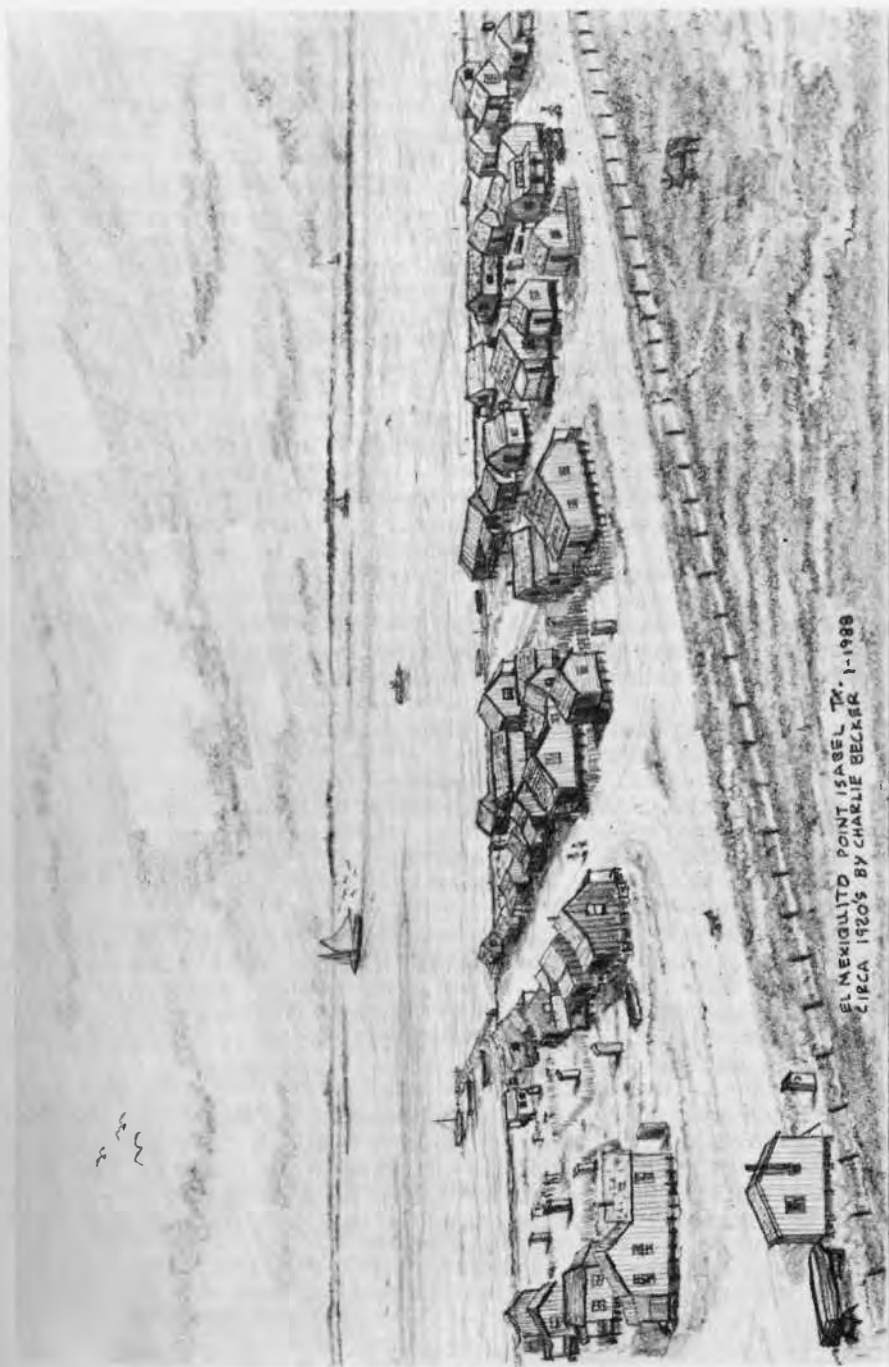
slid into the sea, and the topsoil of the small section remaining has been scraped down several feet and is now occupied by modern buildings and paved streets.

Fortunately, one important landmark remains - a fitting monument to the memory of old Fort Polk. The graceful lines of the lighthouse tower, erected in 1853 within the fort's bastion, today is the undisputed symbol of Point Isabel.

ENDNOTES

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- 6 John S. Jenkins, History of the War Between the United States and Mexico (Auburn, N.Y.: Derby, Miller and Co.), p. 99.
- 7 G. W. Smith, op. cit., Ch. 2, Note 19, p. 472.
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EL MEXIGUITO POINT ISABEL TX. 1-1988
CIRCA 1920'S BY CHARLIE BECKER

SKETCH FROM A PHOTO COURTESY OF MANUEL GAVITO

An Historic Hail to The Chief

by

Alan Hollander

Similiar to the occasional hurricane that whips through the Valley, the presidential presence has also brought the sometimes turbulent, sometimes soothing breezes of the nation's highest office to this area. However, 36 Chief Executives left their marks in history before one actually made landfall here. This was marked by Lyndon Johnson's visit to Harlingen on September twenty-first of 1967 after Hurricane Beulah reminded us all of the awesome power of nature.

Brownsville's first presidential visit occurred with a reelection campaign swing by Jimmy Carter, the 39th President, in November of 1980. However, many who eventually aspired to the White House either paid the Valley a visit or, in one case, actually became President due to his exploits in this remote part of the country.

There were seven in all. Four Presidents, one President-elect, and two who would be President, all felt the salty, humid Rio Grande Valley air on their skin.

"Ready for 'Rough and Ready?'"

Due to the conflict with Mexico over the annexation of Texas, President James Knox Polk sent General Zachary Taylor to the Republic of Texas to repel any invasion by Mexicans. This order came in May, 1845 and in July of that same year, Taylor with an army of 4,000 men arrived at Corpus Christi.

On February 6, 1865, General Taylor received another communication, one that instructed him to move forward with force to the Rio Grande, which put Taylor (who was named "Old Rough and Ready" by his troops during the 1830's Seminole Wars in Florida) into local history books as the first man to become President to visit this area.

On March 24, 1846, his army camped in what is now Los Fresnos. From this vantage point, Taylor established a supply base at Point Isabel. On March 28, Taylor and his troops arrived on the banks of the Rio Grande, the site of present-day Brownsville, 16 days after his departure from Corpus Christi.

Here fields were cleared, and Taylor's men immediately went to work laying out a small earthen fort in the form of an irregular six-pointed star. It was called Fort Texas by Taylor's men. In the Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, who was Second Lieutenant in Taylor's army, an account of Taylor's arrival and the beginnings of the fort is related:

"About the middle of the month of March the advance of the army reached the Rio Grande and went into the camp near the banks of the river opposite the city of Matamoros and almost under the guns of a small fort at the lower end of town. There was not at that time a single habitation from Corpus Christi until the Rio Grande was reached. The work of fortifying was commenced at once. The fort was laid out by engineers, but the work was done by the soldiers under the supervision of their officers, the chief engineer retaining the general directions. . . ."

When Taylor learned that the Mexican General Mariano Arista had crossed the Rio Grande eight miles below their camp, he decided to march to Point Isabel to protect his source of supplies. He left 500 men under the command of Major Jacob Brown at the fort. On May 3, The Mexicans bombarded the fort, inflicting wounds on Brown that eventually killed him on May 9. His death provided a name for the fort and the town which sprung up around it.

On May 7, Taylor moved his army out of the Point Isabel base to aid his forces at the fort. The next day, they were confronted by General Arista and his army at Palo Alto, just northeast of present-day Brownsville. The battle continued until the evening, when General Arista moved his army back to the Resaca de la Palma. Here Taylor's army met him in battle on May 9. Taylor was victorious.

Due to these battles, President Polk declared war, beginning the Mexican-American war.

Arista retreated across the river and soon evacuated the city of Matamoros. Taylor crossed and took possession of it. General Taylor requested light steamships and other supplies so that he could navigate the Rio Grande to Camargo, from which he planned to invade Monterrey.

From May to the end of August, Taylor's army remained idle, awaiting supplies. This frustrated Taylor as he expresses in the following letter dated June 30, 1846 from Matamoros, Mexico:

". . .The weather here has been dreadful for many days, raining and blowing a gale for some time which with bad tents and muddy ground to pitch them on, has made us all quite miserable, as well as added to the sick list-I have felt very much for the poor fellows who were wounded. . .as well as the sick everywhere. . ."

"The Rio Grande is now very high, up to the top of its banks in many places, and might now be navigated with boats of the largest size. . ., but unfortunately we have none here up to this time of any description, nor are we likely to have; this campaign must be a failure owing to the ignorance of some in regard to matters, and the imbecility of others, for all of which I shall be made the scapegoat. . ."

It was during this period that Taylor received word from the Secretary of War that he had been selected as Commander of the Army of the Rio Grande, a position that he did not desire:

". . .I was not anxious (for the position) . . .and consider the honor greatly overbalanced. . .I neither wished or expected (the appointment). . .and . . .would have avoided it had I been consulted in the matter. . ."

However, the supplies did eventually arrive and in late August of 1846, Taylor proceeded to Camargo. He was victorious in his plans, winning the battle of Monterrey and Buena Vista (near Saltillo).

On November 17, 1847, Taylor found himself aboard the steam boat Colonel Cross, writing a letter to his friend surgeon R.C. Wood in New Orleans. The note was written on a boat, so that, ". . . you will hardly be able to read it."

Taylor wrote of his return to this area:

". . .I reached Camargo on the 13th and left there on the 15th for Matamoros, which place I expect to reach this evening or tomorrow morning, and where I shall await the result of my application to leave the country. . .on the first good vessel for new Orleans. . ."

During this waiting period in Matamoros (present-day

Brownsville), and previously in Monterrey, Taylor learned that the Whig party wanted him as their candidate for President. As with his appointment of Commander, he was reluctant. However, according to a historical newspaper account written in 1942, it is stated that it is a matter of Congressional record that Zachary Taylor received and accepted his nomination for the Presidency of the United States at Brazos Santiago, off Point Isabel, before departing for New Orleans.

Taylor, a war hero, was elected the 12th President of the United States in 1849.

The Travels of Ulysses

Ulysses S. Grant, as a second lieutenant, came to this area with Zachary Taylor. He disapproved of the Mexican-American War, but felt it was his duty as a military man to go where his country asked.

Coming from West Point, Grant was sent to the Republic of Texas with a dose of consumption. He recalled in his memoirs:

" . . .I have often thought that my life was saved, and my health restored by exercise and exposure (to the fresh air), enforced by an administrative act, and a war, both of which I disapproved. . ."

On his way from Corpus Christi to Matamoros, Grant commented on the wild countryside he encountered on the long march:

" . . .A few days out of Corpus Christi, the immense herd of wild horses. . . was seen. . .I have no idea that they could all have been corralled in the State of Rhode Island, or Delaware, at one time. . ."

Grant gives a vivid account of the Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, both of which he participated in:

" . . .What General Taylor's feelings were. . .I do not know; but for myself, a young second lieutenant who had never heard a hostile gun before, I felt sorry I had enlisted...

" . . .The road from Point Isabel to Matamoros is over an open, rolling, treeless prairie, until the timber that borders the banks of

the Rio Grande is reached. . . (it) was struck six or eight miles out from the beseiged garrison (Fort Texas, or, later, Fort Brown), at a point known as Palo Alto--'Tall trees' or 'woods'.

"Early on the afternoon of the 8th of May as Palo Alto was approached, an army, certainly outnumbering our little force, was seen, drawn up in a line of battles just in front of the timber. Their bayonets and spearheads glistened in the sunlight formidably. . .

"As I looked down that long line of about 3000 armed men (The American Army), advancing toward a larger force (the Mexican Army) also armed, I thought what a fearful responsibility General Taylor must feel. . .

"The infantry stood... watching the effect of our shots upon the enemy...It could be seen that the 18-pounders and the howitzers did a great deal of execution. On our side there was little or no loss as we occupied this position. During this battle, Major Ringgold...was mortally wounded...

". . .Just at dusk it became evident that the Mexicans were falling back. We again advanced. . . In this last move there was a brisk fire upon our troops... One cannon-ball passed through our ranks, not far from me. It took off the head of an enlisted man, and the under jaw of Captain Page. . .while the splinters from the musket of the killed soldier, and his brains and bones, knocked down two or three others...

"Our casualties for the day were nine killed and 47 wounded..."

The following day, Grant participated in the Battle of Resaca de la Palma:

". . .I got pretty close without knowing it. The balls commenced to whistle very thick overhead, cutting the limbs of the chaparral right and left...

". . .The battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma seemed to us engaged, as pretty important affairs; but we had only a faint conception of their magnitude until they were fought over in the North by the press and the reports came back to us..."

Grant occupied his time peacefully in Matamoros while

waiting for supplies so that the troops could be sent to Carmago;

" . . .The time was whiled away pleasantly enough at Matamoros. . .It is probable that all the most important people of the territory occupied by our army left their homes before we got there, but with those remaining the best relations apparently existed. . ."

Grant later participated in the Battle of Monterrey, and the campaign against Mexico City. Grant returned with the rank of Captain and used the skills he learned here to become a hero of the American Civil War. This fame led him to become the 18th President of the United States from 1869 to 1877.

Another piece of knowledge that U.S. Grant picked up from his stay in the Brownsville area was the inherent problems that one encountered by using mules for transportation of supplies:

" . . .I am not aware of ever having used a profane expletive in my life; but I would have the charity to excuse those who may have done so, if they were in charge of a train of Mexican pack mules at the time."

Two Big Events

It was almost 75 years until another President chose to visit the Rio Grande Valley. The Brownsville paper, dated Wednesday November 3, 1920, had headlines that read, "Harding Victory Sweeping--President--Elect To Visit Brownsville Next Week."

Warren G. Harding arrived in Brownsville on November 6, 1920 on a special train. He was the guest of R.B. Creager, the Republican national committeeman from Texas and a close personal friend of Harding, the soon-to-be 29th President of the United States. Creager related in the 1920 newspaper account. "(He is) coming to enjoy a complete rest after the campaign and there will be no program of entertainment of speechmaking." This same account goes on to say that Harding and his party would be occupying themselves with hunting, bathing, and fishing at Point Isabel and golfing at the Brownsville Country Club.

Harding stayed in the Creager homes in Brownsville and Point Isabel. A reception was given for him at Point Isabel

and a triumphal arch made of reeds and flowers was erected there.

He did get in some fishing, but adverse weather set in, which resulted in almost impassable roads. Because of these conditions, Harding had to return to Brownsville.

Although Creager said that there would be no program of entertainment or speechmaking, Brownsville would not let the President-elect get away without some merrymaking. When he arrived, Harding was met at the depot by a large group of townpeople and was escorted from the depot to the Creager home by a large number of cars and a band. There was also a big parade. It started on Levee Street, proceeded to Palm Boulevard, turned on Elizabeth Street and ended at the parade grounds at Fort Brown. Here, Harding addressed 60,000 people who came to see the President-elect from all over the Valley and Mexico.

Brownsville Resident, Joe Vivier was 18 years old at the time of Harding's visit. "I remember seeing a picture of Harding on the door of Creager's house, which is located where the downtown H.E.B. now stands." related Vivier.

"My family, like most Brownsville people of the day, owned a summer home in Port Isabel, a close distance from Creager's Port Isabel home. The Secret Service agents wanted to rent our home but my father refused. "I was only a teenage boy and was more interested in baseball than politics, but I do remember that it was a big deal," he concluded.

The next presidential visit was not properly a visit. In fact, he never set foot on land. However, it is true that the 32nd President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt spent a night anchored between the jetties near Port Isabel in 1938, one year into his second term.

Jesus Cuellar of Brownsville was in the Coast Guard at the time and vividly remembers the incident:

"Roosevelt was near Galveston and made a sudden decision that he wanted to go to Port Isabel--it was a real last minute thing. We didn't even get eight hours notice that he was coming. Roosevelt loved the sea, he was, at one time, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Due to the suddenness of the trip, the Secret Service would not let him come ashore, but I was lucky I was one of three people who got to see him. Our Coast Guard

station had one 36-foot lifeboat and a smaller one. I, with commanding officer Valent and a man named Aguilar, went out on the large lifeboat to meet him. We didn't go on board, but we partrolled around the yacht all night, until he left the next morning. His vessel was a converted Coast Guard Cutter named the Potomac. We sailed up and got about 12 feet from him. Roosevelt was sitting on a lounge chair on the quarterdeck under a canopy. I remember that he was wearing a safari hat. I took three pictures which was against regulations, but I couldn't help it. I don't know where they are today. There was a great deal of security. Two four-stacker World War I destroyers guarded the entrance to the jetties and no interviews were granted although the Coast Guard phones were flooded with calls."

There is a rumor that Roosevelt caught a fish and sent it to the Queen Isabel Hotel to be prepared. "To my knowledge, that is not true," added Cuellar. "Dignitaries invited him ashore, but it couldn't be done. No one was allowed near that ship. I was only 18 at the time but I'll remember that experience as long as I live. Roosevelt was a great man," he concluded.

Hurricanes and Campaign Swings

It took a disaster to get another president to the Rio Grande Valley. After Hurricane Beulah wreaked havoc on this area on September 20, 1967, the 36th President, Lyndon B. Johnson was prompted to come down and take a look around, making him the first active President to visit the Valley on September 28.

Nixon and Ford found no reason to tour the Valley but Jimmy Carter, the 39th President chose Brownsville for a last-minute "campaign" stop on Saturday, November 1, 1980, becoming the first office-holding President to visit Brownsville on campaign.

Reagan was here twice; once campaigning for the Presidency in 1980, and the second time on October 2, 1984 as President, campaigning for re-election.

What Happened to the Presidents?

If most of these men knew what fate held in store for them, they most likely would have taken other directions.

Taylor was an undistinguished President, had little understanding of foreign affairs, and blundered badly on several occasions. While laying the cornerstone for the Washington Monument in 1850, Taylor sat for hours in the hot sun, then drank ice water and ate cherries with iced milk. He suffered a cholera attack and died five days later while still in office.

Grant, although a great Civil War general, was a President whose administration was filled with corruption. While Grant remained untouched, he did little to correct this situation. Although he won re-election, more scandals plummeted his reputation, and the country went into an economic panic in 1873. After the presidency, he went into bankruptcy and died of throat cancer in 1885.

Although popular in his day, Warren G. Harding is regarded by many historians to be the country's worst President, although he was hard working and well-intentioned. He failed to act decisively on the corruption in his administration, which led to the infamous Teapot Dome scandal. He suffered a heart attack followed by bronchopneumonia while still holding office in 1923 and died, soon afterwards, from a cerebral hemorrhage.

Roosevelt is better regarded by history. He died from a stroke in 1945 while still in his fourth term.

Johnson and Carter served stormy and trouble-ridden terms. Johnson died in 1973. Carter is living in relative solitude in Plains, Georgia. The accomplishments of President Reagan remain to be seen with the passage of time.

Regardless of how the world regards the performance of any of these seven men, they added another colorful chapter to the massive volumes of the Valley's past.

CITY OF
MATAMOROS
1846



Papers and Personalities of Frontier Journalism
(1830's to 1890's)

by

A.A. Champion
with Mary Champion Henggler, Consuelo Champion,
and Vivian Kearney

Many energetic figures of the last century shaped the history of journalism in South Texas and Matamoros, Mexico. These carvers and commentators of our border society were a restless, itinerant sort. This is certainly true of Samuel Bangs, a romantic, once famous and now almost forgotten figure. Samuel Bangs can be considered the father of early printing and journalism of Northern Mexico as well as of South Texas. He is best remembered in Monterrey's museum in the Governor's Palace where his small handpress is proudly displayed.¹

Born in Boston about 1794, Bangs learned his trade in this city as had his famous predecessor, Benajamin Franklin. Little else is known about Bangs' early childhood and education. In 1816, while in Baltimore, his wanderlust started becoming apparent. He signed up with the adventurous Navarro, General Mina and Padre Mier to free Mexico from Spanish rule.² The small flotilla landed at the pirate colony on Galveston Island. When Luis Aury had recruited some of these brigands, they sailed towards the mouth of the Rio Grande. Here Mina issued a proclamation on April 12, 1817 from the flagship Cleopatra, which gave Bangs, who had joined the venture as a printer, his first assignment.³ The valley's first press release was thus printed on a press that did not rest on land but swayed to and from with the waves of the Gulf, perhaps foreshadowing its subsequent turbulent journalistic history. Royalists shortly put an end to the expedition after it had landed at Soto La Marina and the young Bangs was captured.⁴ Now he was forced to print royalist propaganda, which he did remarkably well.⁵ So highly did his work recommend him that he became the official printer for the government of Coahuila in 1821, after Mexico's Independence. He then was the official printer for the State of Nuevo Leon and finally for the Free State of Tamaulipas in Victoria.⁶

Leaving the government press at Tamaulipas in 1824 in the hands of another capable printer, Godwin B. Cotten, Bangs returned to his native Boston. In 1827, he and his family were to be found in Victoria, Tamaulipas. Here he

manufactured and sold printing material and presses.⁷

Since Matamoros was developed long before towns on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, its publishing history likewise started a lot earlier and its public had a variety of papers to choose from by the early 1830's. This happened in spite of Henry Austin's bitter disparagement. When it was opened up to foreign commerce in 1823, Matamoros started carrying on its sea traffic with New Orleans, New York and other American sea-ports. United States citizens started building their business residences there.⁸ Henry Austin, a cousin of the famous developer, then tried to bring in a new system of transportation by steamboat, using the Rio Grande.⁹ He was frustrated in his attempts due to difficulties in transporting cargos from the beach to warehouses. Thus he declared in anger that it did not matter whether the printing press that he had in his cargo reached Matamoros or not; he couldn't sell it there anyways since no one in the town could read.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Noticioso appeared in 1831 and the Procurador del Pueblo, published by Vicente de la Parra appeared one year later. El Federalista de Matamoros and the Arcos de Matamoros appeared in 1833, the latter printed by Antonio Gonzales Dávila. As political mouthpieces, these early papers were either filled with lively revolutionary proclamations and plans or more staid announcements of the leading political party's laws. In any case, Matamoros' start in journalism with four newspapers by 1833 gives credit to its reading public.

When Bangs returned to Tamaulipas in 1827, Godwin B. Cotten left, first to go to New Orleans, then to Texas. In San Felipe de Austin he started the Texas Gazette, popularly known as the "Cotton Plant". Although sold to Robert M. Williamson and later to D. W. Wathony, Godwin Cotten remained in connection with the Texas Gazette until 1834.¹¹

In 1834 Samuel Bangs was trying a new adventure. He secured a grant of land bordering on the Colorado and farmed it unsuccessfully for a while. He then returned to Victoria, Mexico in 1835.¹²

There he found a growing community. There were now 5,000 Spanish style buildings, clean streets and a principal plaza. Here he set up La Prensa Libre de Bangs (Bangs Free Press) from which he issued El Volcán, a local news weekly.¹³ This was sold the following year to the government of Nuevo Leon. When his first wife died in Victoria, Bangs again got the urge to travel. He took his children to New Orleans and then to Mobile, Alabama. There the sister of Henry R. and George H. French, Caroline French, became his second wife. Her

brothers and the Samuel Bangs family proceeded to Galveston in 1839.¹⁴ In Galveston Samuel Bangs resumed his printing business on the third year of the Republic and also of the founding of that city. When he had landed there twenty-two years earlier, it had been a small settlement of cut-throats and pirates. Now it was ready for a newspaper and on April 15, 1839, Bangs started the Daily Galvestonian. This was to last for three years, being suspended on April 17, 1842 when the Daily News was begun. George H. French, Samuel Bangs' brother-in-law was listed as the publisher and editor on the earliest surviving issue of the Daily News (April 19, 1842).¹⁵ This probably means that Bangs at least indirectly founded the paper, but he never acknowledged his involvement. In 1842 Bangs and French together started the Galveston News, a newspaper that may well have shaped the later influential Dallas Morning News.¹⁶ That same year, however, before the September tropical storm season, Bangs and French gave up their interests in the Galveston News and started the Commercial Chronicle with links to the Houston Telegraph and the San Luis Advocate. Later, in 1845, Samuel Bangs started the Daily Globe with A.F. Neale. This publication was suspended by the threat of a coming war between the United States and Mexico.¹⁷

Meanwhile, back in Matamoros, George Fisher, a native of Serbia but a naturalized Mexican citizen involved with Matamoros printing since 1831, started the publication of the Mercurio del Puerto de Matamoros in August, 1834. The printer was John Southwell, an Englishman, who would twenty years later, with the founding of Brownsville, print several of Brownsville's papers such as the Rio Bravo.¹⁸

The Mercurio of November 27, 1834 told its readers that its pages were dedicated to a "compendium of grievances for committed injustices and arbitrary measures, resounding from all parts of the country." The article pleaded that the supreme authorities guard everyone's free exercise of constitutional rights, recommending that all follow the newspaper's motto: "Concordia res Parvae Crescunt, Discordia Maximae Dilabuntur" (With cooperation small enterprises grow, with discord, the greatest fall apart).¹⁹

After the fourth year of its publication, John Southwell withdrew as the printer of El Mercurio. He was followed by Vincente de la Parra and later by Antonio A. Castañeda.²⁰ Then in 1838 the Mercurio was suspended. Pedro Castañeda, the last of the Mercurio's publishers began El Ancla that same year. It appeared every Friday, just as had the Mercurio. El Ancla's motto was "quid leges sine moribus vanae proficiunt" (whatever news you pick without care does no good).²¹ This

newspaper, like the Mercurio lasted to its fourth year which did better than Don Vicente de la Parra's La Brisa. This paper started in 1839 and lasted only one year as did the Eco del Norte de Tamaulipas.

On September 17, 1841 El Ancla gave way to El Honor Nacional with an explanation that it had changed ownership and direction with the new political administration of the Republic. The first press that put out El Honor Nacional, which rapidly became the town's leading paper, belonged to Don Vicente de la Parra and was located on First and Calle de Terán. The instability of the times was reflected by the fact that with its third number, El Honor Nacional had changed printers; it was then printed by Antonio Castañeda, still at the same address. In three months it had yet another publisher, Don Martín Salazar and a new address: First Calle de Michoacán.²² In 1842, the Provisional had two directors in quick succession: Castañeda and Salazar. It first appeared in February 1842 and was to appear every Friday as had all the newspapers in Matamoros for the previous ten years.²³ 1843 saw the start of two more newspapers in Matamoros: El Latino de Tejas and El Justo Medio. In 1846 there were five newspapers being published in Matamoros: El Aguila del Norte, La Gaceta, La Esperanza, El Monitor Republicano and El Boletín de la División del Norte.²⁴

On the Texas side, all eyes in July 1845 were turned to Corpus Christi with the arrival of General Taylor and the United States troops to that Gulf city. Samuel Bangs also migrated here, where the action was, to launch the Corpus Christi Gazette on January 1, 1846.²⁵ Mr. Seymour, Dr. George W. Fletcher, a local physician and José de Alba, the Spanish editor of the Gazette and an important member of the Spanish-speaking colony in Corpus Christi, were Bangs' associates. The Gazette was small but it had four pages to the issue. Woodcuts decorated the ads, while the type was new and good and demonstrated Bangs' experience at printing.²⁶

When General Taylor marched his army to the Rio Grande, however, Corpus Christi's days of prosperity were over. After printing the 14th number of the Gazette, Bangs sold its press to José de Alba and planned to leave the almost deserted town. He associated himself next with Gideon K. Lewis, a former editor of The Galveston News. Upon their arrival at the mouth of the Rio Grande, Bangs and Lewis announced that the Rio Grande Herald was to be published.²⁷ Then they abandoned for some reason the name of Rio Grande Herald and decided upon the Reveille. Perhaps they thought that this title was more appropriate in the war

circumstances.²⁸

The 1846-1848 war between Mexico and the United States was, in fact, the first war in history to be reported adequately in the daily press.²⁹ It was realized that trained reporters were needed who had run of the campus but no ties to any part of the army.³⁰ Several newspapers from farther up north sent their reporters to the scene when General Taylor occupied Matamoros. New Orleans papers especially were giving organized coverage to America's first expeditionary forces.³¹ Although communications were inadequate, by combining train, relay horses and the new invention of the telegraph, these reporters managed to get the news out. Early coverage was also obtained by the New York Sun, the Baltimore Sun, the Philadelphia Ledger, the Picayune, and the Charleston Courier. These systems tended to use New Orleans as their news center and sometimes managed to outrun the mails by as much as thirty hours.³² Other newspapers, in the free and easy fashion of the day, helped themselves liberally to the fruits of this pioneer journalistic enterprise.³³

James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald was one of the reporters who used this new express line. Another was C. M. Haile, formerly of the Plaquemine Gazette who came to report on the battle of Palo Alto on May 6, 1846 together with Hugh McLeod, a civilian aide to General Taylor³⁴ whose own journalistic enterprise in Matamoros is discussed below. James L. Frennor of the New Orleans Delta landed at Fort Polk (Point Isabel) just too late for the battles. The New Orleans Picayune's chief, George Wilkins Kendall took an even longer time, traveling overland. That newspaper sent out four more men. Two were sent out by the New Orleans Delta in June 1846: John Peoples and J. G. Tobin.³⁵

It is interesting to note that just before the war escalated to shooting intensity, Captain Lumsden of the Picayune started raising a company of Louisiana volunteers. These probably became C. V. Jackson's regiment that were mustered out of General Taylor's army the following July. Also, there was a company of printers under the name of the 'Press Gang' which left Philadelphia in June for the Rio Grande Valley, forming a calvary regiment. The following year the regiment of Virginia volunteers also included a reliable number of printers.³⁶

The writing of these reporters became less gaudy, more fact-filled and crisper than before.³⁷ Perhaps in nostalgia for their former colorfulness, however, reporters, especially, it seems, those of the New Orleans Delta, liked

to used pseudonyms. Fleanor of the Delta used two different pen names - first "Corporal" then "Mustang". John Peoples signed himself "Chaparral" while J. G. Tobin wrote as "Tobin's Knapsack".³⁸ The following poem, praising this new, more modern press appeared in The American Flag of August 18, 1847.

"Would ye that glorious genius know
who breathed on man to bless
who tinges with a radiant glow
the wings of passing time to show
our pathway? Tis the press
Oh! may it ever be prepared
our liberties and rights to guard
that "stick" and "bar" when virtue yields
suffice in danger for our shields."³⁸

The first name for the American Flag, the newspaper that ran the above poem was a lengthy and solemn Republic of the Rio Grande and Friend of the People. It was edited by Hugh McLeod and appeared not only to provide Taylor's men with news briefs in their own language, but also as a part of McLeod's dream of a new border republic.³⁹

Hugh McLeod had quit the United States Army in 1836 and come down to Texas to help that state secede from the Mexican Republic.⁴⁰ In the South Texas Rio Grande region in 1846, he began to work wards the possibility of the Northern states of Mexico seceding from the Republic of Mexico and helping them form a separate government. Fifteen years later, he was to be a leader in the cause of Texas' secession from the American Union.

On June 1, 1846, the small newsheet called Republic of Rio Grande and Friend of the American People was printed by Isaac Neville Fleeson, previously assistant printer at the Corpus Christi Gazette. It used the press of the now defunct Boletin (This newspaper had been suspended as had all other Matamoros papers upon the American occupation of the city). McLeod's paper was to appear weekly or more often, as the circumstances might require. McLeod was to be the editor for the English as well as the Spanish section which was entitled Republica de Rio Grande y Amiga de los Pueblos.⁴¹

In the first number McLeod wrote an article about "the Republic of the Sierra Madre", which was to be the name for the entity comprised of the Northern Mexican states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Chihuahua. The article set forth the expediency and practicality of such a secession, and

McLeod announced that it was well received by Matamorians. After the second number of the paper, which appeared five days later, McLeod further noted that "the Mexicans read it with much avidity". However, after the third issue of June 12, 1846, McLeod suddenly deserted the enterprise although Fleeson, the printer, did not.

Fleeson engaged W. G. Dryden to publish the Republic with him up to its eighth number, dated June 30, 1846. Then Mr. Dryden left.⁴² Fleeson then hired John H. Peoples who had come to Matamoros as a war correspondent for the New Orleans Delta.⁴³

Meanwhile, Samuel Bangs and Gideon K. Lewis prepared to print the Reveille, previously planned as The Rio Grande Herald.⁴⁴ Its first number came out on June 24, 1846 and it was to appear on a semi-weekly basis, on Monday and Friday in both English and Spanish. Larger in size than its competitor, (The Republic of the Rio Grande and Friend of the People) the Reveille took as its epigraph President Monroe's historic statement: "The people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny".⁴⁵ Bangs then saluted the reading public with the following statement:

"In the present crisis everything relating to Mexico must be peculiarly interesting. The citizens of the United States have been brought by the inevitable force of circumstances in the closest proximity with people essentially different in race, in manners and religion. All the information necessary to the formation of just ideas and a proper appreciation of their character will be eagerly sought by the reflective and intelligent portion of the American population. It will be a primary object with the publishers to convey through the medium of the Reveille a correct knowledge of the resources of the country and of the physical and moral conditions of the people, to do everything in fine to supply the desideratum created by the comparative ignorance with pervades all classes in relation to Mexico. The publishers have formed such connection in the United States as will keep them well supplied with useful matter as well as the current news of the day and they pledge themselves that no pains will be spared on their part to make their paper one of general utility and interest, that they will bestow their time and unremitting attention to it in order to render it worthy of extensive patronage."⁴⁶

Perhaps this statement by the competitor influenced the Republic's editorial policy, but whatever the case may be, on July 4th, 1846 what should have been the ninth number of the Republic of the Rio Grande and the Friend of the People appeared as the ninth number of the American Flag. I. N. Fleeson and John H. Peoples explained the revised title with this comment:

"Not feeling ourselves altogether qualified to work out a Republic on the Rio Grande and further the object of our illustrious predecessor, we have pulled down the colors of the Republic of the Rio Grande and in their place hoisted the American Flag under whose folds we hope to battle here until the bugle sounds for the war, when, to use a borrowed sentence, we will drop our "shooting sticks" still in defense of the American Flag. We shall endeavor to make it worthy of the name it bears. The character of the paper is American and its columns devoted to their interests and to the interests of her citizens, soldiers and sojourners here and shall place before the reader, in every number, such items of news as may be received from the United States and the interior of Mexico, with all matters of local interests."⁴⁷

The new American Flag was not able to obtain a competent Spanish compositor and thus was compelled to drop further publication of the Spanish section.

This seems strange in a Spanish-speaking city, but Matamoros, a city of approximately 15,000 before the war,⁴⁸ lost one-half of its population of that time. Many had withdrawn to the interior of Mexico and those who remained were largely of the lower class. Within a single month of Taylor's arrival, it had become an American city. Settlers from the United States followed the regiments and merchants swarmed in with stocks of goods.⁴⁹ This picture is well caught by advertising in the American Flag. Among other establishments were:

The Matamoros Lunch House of Judges of Good Liquor - a special - a Supply of London Porter in Print Bottles

The Italian Fonda (Iturbide Street), the Best Cooks and Cleanliness.

Mrs. S. Foyle's Goods. Calico Prints. Domestic Goods, Mosquito Netting, etc.

For Gentlemen's Clothing. Tengman and Fellows, Late of Mobile.

Mrs. Hamblin's American Hotel. Every delicacy Served in Superior Style.

Then there were places such as The Grande Spanish Saloon or Dan Murphy's Ten Pin Alley where the army privates probably felt more at home.⁵⁰

Surprisingly, considering all the business that sprang up to cater to the men, the army was not staying right in the town of Matamoros. Every other day General Taylor switched two companies in the Main Plaza. The people on guard were to be a "model of discipline and correct deportment". The rest of the forces camped about a mile outside the city along the river banks. Officers were to allow their men to go into town only for short leaves and in small parties. At least this was the order of the day at first. Later, when thousands of volunteers arrived, the picture changed.⁵¹

Soon there were problems for Bangs' Reveille. Like the American Flag it was also forced to drop its Spanish page, which had been entitled La Diana de Matamoros. Then a Mexican publisher, using Bangs' press issued a separate paper called El Liberal. This practice of leasing his press to other papers had been satisfactory to Bangs' business arrangements before.⁵² Now, however, El Liberal came out voicing the Mexican viewpoint of the war to an amazing degree. The New Orleans Picayune remarked that merely allowing it to exist was ample evidence of the American respect for the freedom of the press. But there was a limit to this type of tolerance. After a particularly strident article of July 16, supporting the "pretensions of Mexico" in the war, General Twiggs, the military governor of Matamoros, closed Bangs' office and lodged Bangs in jail.

Bangs told the court that he had had no part in the authorship or publication of the offending article, having merely rented his press. El Liberal was suspended permanently and the Reveille, exonerated, was permitted to resume publication.

Bangs, however, did not continue putting out the Reveille and proceeded to use his press for job printing only. He felt that sales would suffer since the reputation of the Reveille as well as his own loyalty had been questioned. Also his partner, Lewis, had meanwhile joined the Texas. Besides, he realized that Matamoros would

probably not need two English language newspapers much longer as the main body of the army was rapidly being moved to Monterrey.⁵³

Not keeping up with these kaleidescopic publishing changes, the New Orleans Tropic commented on the erroneous belief that the United States Government had ordered General Taylor to suppress the publication of the Republic of the Rio Grande.

"Suppress the publication of a newspaper! Verily, the administration is striking boldly at the liberties of the people and we should say 'setting the coulter rather too deep for a new country". It is very possible the Whig press will have to be suppressed soon as its avowed purpose is a revolution of our own 'Government' which is probably more treasonable in the eye of the holder of the spoils, than encouraging a revolution in Mexico! We hope, for the honor of our country, that the Cabinet has not conceived such a foolish thing as to attempt to suppress the Republic of the Rio Grande.⁵⁴

The American Flag corrected the error with the following explanation:

"General Taylor never interfered with the 'liberty of the press' as far as the Republic of the Rio Grande was concerned, either to cause its suppression or to change the name of the paper. The Republic of the Rio Grande was started by General McLeod and our humble self to advocate certain policies. McLeod was called away, and in assuming the editorial charge of the paper, we felt an inability to carry out its design, as we lacked two very important requisites to their accomplishment: his knowledge of the subject to be discussed and his ability to discuss them. A less conspicuous position was more expedient to confine ourselves to what our mind could encompass and we could plainly see through, which was the noting of matters and things as they daily occurred before us. This induced us to change the name of the paper and nothing else. Whatever may have been General Taylor's opinion as to the course of the paper, he never expressed, to our knowledge, any concern about it, not so much even as that he was aware of its existence."⁵⁵

Fleeson and Peoples stayed with the American Flag as publishers until its 30th issue, dated September 5, 1846. Then the 31st number had as its publishers Fleeson and Joseph R. Palmer. Peoples had decided to sail from Brazos Santiago to New Orleans from where he wrote of:

" . . .his joy at the prospect of being soon wafted to a land of iced juleps and such good things. . .the (steamer) 'Telegraph' is raising steam, and the faster she takes me from here, the better. O! it makes my heart leap to see the sails conceive and grow big-bellied with the wanton wind."

To which Fleeson noted: "It should have shocked our modesty to look at them."⁵⁶ Peoples became the first publisher of an English language newspaper in Vera Cruz, Mexico. At every stand made by the army, he used his press and published the American Star: first at Jalapa, then at Puebla and finally in Mexico City.⁵⁷ Joseph R. Palmer, Fleeson's new partner, was a Connecticut printer who also sometimes wielded a clever pen. He remained with Fleeson for the following two years.

The American Flag, just as the American citizens of Matamoros, chafed under the strict American military rule of General Taylor. On September 19, 1846, it voiced the following complaint:

"The office of the American Flag has been removed to Chapel Square (Plaza de la Capilla), south side and will remain. . .until the United States Quartermaster requires us to again be removed or the American army retakes the city. The publication of this morning's paper has been held back in consequence of the disarrangements attendant upon the removal of the printing office, and the Flag will hereafter be issued regularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays."⁵⁸

By mid-September General Taylor got several regiments of volunteers to reinforce his army and they made their preparations to march into Monterrey. Matamoros was then garrisoned by the Third Regiment of Ohio Volunteers and Colonel Newman S. Clarke of the Eighth Infantry was the military governor of the city. When the bulk of the troops had left with Taylor, the new governor halted the sale of alcohol to the remaining soldiers and a severe slump in business resulted.⁵⁹ This gave more cause for grumbling, as evidenced by the American Flag's comment of September 23, 1846.

"Some persons should feel bad if we would become disgusted with the support we are receiving and stop the publication of this paper altogether. . .He is a craven who will not uphold the American Flag. . .The paper is not so much of itself - but the name of the thing."⁶⁰

These complaints could only be aired to the English readers by the American Flag since the Reveille was now defunct. Samuel Bangs was using his press only for job printing. The American Flag's publishers, realizing that much skill and equipment was being wasted, offered to buy Bangs' printing material and pay him for his expertise as a printer. They would also allow him to continue using the press as a job printing press for his own business, giving him free rent and advertising space on the American Flag, which would, in turn, profit by obtaining a larger sheet and Bangs' skill as a printer. It was an offer that Bangs couldn't refuse, and he accepted.⁶¹

The American Flag was moved early in 1847 to Captain Smith's building (known as the Steamboat House on Abasolo Street, next door west of Bigelow's Livery Stable). Fleeson and Palmer announced on January 13th:

"We this morning present our readers with the American Flag in an enlarged form. The patronage heretofore extended to us does not justify the enlargement, but as the increased size presents greater inducements to support, we hope to be remunerated for the additional expense to which we will be subjected in its publication."⁶²

At this time, however, with the general movement of the army towards Vera Cruz, vessels were being occupied for the movement of men and equipment. In fact, every vessel on the coast was chartered in preparation for this great expedition. As no private freight was being handled, the American Flag fast ran out of paper.⁶³ Finally, on February 17, the plant was closed temporarily.

After more than two weeks of silence, the Flag came out again on March 3rd, 1847 with a notice that rather mysteriously avoided the real reason for its suspension:

"After a short slumber, the Flag is again presented to its patrons and solicits a renewal of their generous favors. As so many conjectures were indulged as to the cause we will take the liberty of saying that no one has even the semblance of

truth. On the former plan of publication, we found that our labors went unrewarded, it is now revived under new auspices, and we have every reason to believe tht it will justify us in making it permanent in Matamoros. This is the sole cause of our suspension and, being exceedingly modest, we shall say no more about 'ourselves' but leave a discerning public to imagine the rest."⁶⁴

The paper then resumed a weekly publication.

The Flag went into another flutter when, on May 8, 1847, Brevet Brigadier General William G. Belknap, adjutant and inspector general for all military posts between Monterrey and the mouth of the Rio Grande, stayed in Matamoros for several days and inspected too zealously for comfort.⁶⁵

"His investigation was thorough, as we can attest, for even the American Flag, which all had supposed perfect in all its combinations, and not to be rendered more chaste than it is, was found to contain blemishes displeasing to his eye and necessary to be removed. A hint is as good as a kick to us and we shall regulate the Flag accordingly."⁶⁶

Samuel Bangs left the American Flag at this time to begin building and operating a hotel at Point Isabel.⁶⁷ After a while Bangs figured that there was no future in Port Isabel and he went to Kentucky, where he died of typhoid fever at the age of 53 in 1854.⁶⁸

If one includes the first eight numbers issued under the name of the Republic of the Rio Grande, the American Flag brought out one hundred and two numbers during its first year.⁶⁹ The first number of the second volume, appearing on June 2, 1847, came out with the following statement:

"Slaves to custom, we cannot refrain from announcing the important fact that the last number of this hebdomadal over which we preside concluded the first volume of the American Flag and that the present one is the commencement of a new series ...we were the first to establish a truly free press in Mexico..."⁷⁰

But within three months, on September 4, 1847, the proud enterprise of the American Flag was up for sale:

"FOR SALE: One half interest in the American Flag,

newspaper and printing material will be disposed of on very reasonable terms. The paper has a respectable patronage, and is exceeding its circulation...ill health, requiring a change of climate and more active employment alone induces me to sell.

Isaac Neville Fleson #71

Evidently, however, Fleson did not sell, but remained vigilantly active in correcting inaccuracies as soon as possible. On December 30, 1847, the New Orleans National published an article on John H. Peoples which Edito Fleson immediately refuted thus:

"'The American Flag', said the National, "is now being published in the city of Mexico daily. Mr. Peoples, its propietor, comenced in Matamoros the Flag directly after the city was taken by the Americans. In time he sold out and set up in Vera, Cruz, then at Jalapa, then at Puebla and lastly under the shade of the Palace of the Montezumas." ⁷²

"We can't suffer this, 'said Mr. Fleson, 'and just ask you to correct your statement. The fact may become a matter of history. We claim to have established in connection with General McLeod, now residing in Galveston, the first paper ever printed in the English language in Mexico. A few days after this city (Matamoros) was occupied by our troops, the Republic of the Rio Grande made its appearance with H. McLeod and I. N. Fleson as editors and publishers. After issuing the third number, Mr. McLeod deserted us, and we became associated with Mr. Dryden, connected with whom we published the Republic of the Rio Grande to its twelfth number, when Mr. Dryden deserted us. Left alone and not being competent to the task of carrying out the main design for which the paper was established (to advocate the departation of the northern states from the Mexican Confederacy and the erection of a new republic, styled Republica de Rio Grande), we changed the name of the paper to the present style, the American Flag, and it was some time after this change that we became associated with Mr. Peoples, a gentleman, whom we highly esteem and from whose glory we would be the last to detract. But we have some little ambition and cannot give up, even to a friend, the only

glory we ever expect to acquire. The first to establish a free press in Mexico, we have stood by it without faltering. The first to raise the American Flag, we have upheld it when stouter arms have shrunk from the task and would let it be hauled down in the very midst of the enemy.

'He who steals my purse, steals trash,
But he who robs us of our good name, etc...!"

On the occasion of the publication of the third volume of the American Flag, on June 3, 1848 appeared this notice, probably from Joseph R. Palmer:

"For two long years have we labored to make it the instrument of good to ourselves and others and (spurning all notions of mockish modesty, as unworthy of the candid mind), we believe we have labored to some purpose...we have, for some time had in contemplation to enlarge or otherwise to improve but cannot do so until we receive an increase in patronage...The Flag will hereafter be published simultaneously in Matamoros and the promising County of Cameron (Brownsville had as yet not been established) until such time as we can permanently locate on the opposite side of the river."⁷⁴

Matamoros' sister city on the American side was about to emerge, and would have a newspaper of its own as a christening present.

On June 17, 1848, news was received in Matamoros that the treaty of peace between Mexico and the United States had been signed. This was announced with a roar of artillery and a ringing of church bells.⁷⁵

On June 24th, the American Flag published the following article, again pertaining to a nascent Brownsville.

"The Quartermaster's Department is busily engaged in erecting buildings and temporary sheds on the opposite bank of the river, in preparation for the transfer of quarters from this city. The place selected for the new quarters (later named Fort Brown Reservation) which we suppose will remain a permanent military establishment, is about 1/4 of a mile above Fort Brown (old earthworks) on an elevated ridge beyond reach of high water. This place will give a start to our new city of Athens,

as our embryo city is to be christened."⁷⁶

The following diatribe was probably instrumental in giving Brownsville its actual name. Tentatively, the name of the citizen who wrote it remains anonymous. This letter to the editor appeared in the next issue of the American Flag.

You are rather too fast in giving a name to the location of the Quartermaster Depot on the other side. Furthermore, it is not intended that any private buildings shall be erected at that point. But should it chance that a town springs up there, a national name for it would be more fitting than the stale and worn-out name of Athens - a name given to so many country post offices and 'cross-roads' in the United States that a letter directed to Athens generally makes the circuit of the whole Union in search of its destination. Brownsville occurs to me to be the most appropriate name for this place, in memory of the gallant Major Brown, who fell in defense of the spot on which it is located."⁷⁷

July editorials continued on the theme of moving to the other side of the river with ever increasing details and excitement,⁷⁸ but on July 29, 1848 in volume III, number 219 of the American Flag, editor Joseph R. Palmer had the following mournful eulogy to announce:

"With emotions of sorrow, the most profound, we record the death of our friend and associate, Isaac Neville Fleeson. He breathed his last on Wednesday (June 28th) at half past two in the morning. He had, for many years, been a victim of that relentless destroyer, Pulmonary Consumption and, for a length of time before death finally came to his relief, suffered with a heroism and fortitude which have never been surpassed. Forewarned as he and his friends were of his approaching dissolution, his decease has created a sensation in our little community unknown to it before. His virtues were not few, and they were silently exercised, without parade or ostentation; his abilities were of no mean order, and they were put in requisition more for the benefit of others than for himself. Scrupulously exact in all his dealings with men, he acquired a reputation for probity and honesty which was never impeached. Understanding well the relation existing between

man and his fellowmen, and inheriting a moral courage which never faltered, he observed his duties in his intercourse with all, and to the satisfaction of all. He possessed an elevated and noble mind, and instinctively shuddered at every action which did not spring from pure and honorable motives. In all respects it may be said with perfect truth, that he was a proper man. He now sleeps immediately beneath the American Flag in Fort Brown on the very frontier of his country and as its graceful folds meet the eye of the adventurer upon the bosom of the great river which separates the two Republics, he may know that it shadows the grave of one who, while living, worshipped it with all the idolatry of a soul replete with patriotism.⁷⁹

Although the American Flag continued to publish for fifteen weeks following the death of I. N. Fleeson, there is a break in the files. The calendar shows that the issue came out regularly, but the issues for these weeks cannot be found.

This is an unfortunate lapse; it covers a historic time when the American Flag moved to Brownsville, as well as the inauguration of new ownership. With the next number that can be found, on November 22, 1848, Edwin B. Scarborough appears as editor and publisher. Lota M. Spell corroborates this sequence of events; in her Pioneer Printer,⁸⁰ she talks about the Flag "whose editor died the last of July, was removed to Brownsville, where E. B. Scarborough succeeded him." Thus, the American Flag has the title of Brownsville's first paper. As such it was used as an advertising medium for some of the town's first developers, including Stillman, Belden and Shannon.⁸¹

Another name that crops up at this time with the early papers is that of Simon Missina. He was a Texas editor, lawyer and general promoter, who came to Matamoros early in 1847. He acquired some interests in lands in and around Point Isabel and soon actively helped in the development of the town. He was editor of the American Flag for a while. He convinced Samuel Bangs to establish residence at the Point and publish a newspaper there. This Bangs did with the help of R. A. de Villiers, a New Orleans printer. They called their paper the Texas Ranger and announced its purpose to be the same as that of the Republic of the Rio Grande (the American Flag's previous title) to champion the cause of the Republic of the Sierra Madre.⁸²

At this point several communities on the Texas side of

the Rio Grande vied for prominence and all antedated Brownsville: Point Isabel, Brazos Santiago, Freeport (also called Shannondale), Mansfield, and Santa Rita. As street and town lots were laid out adjoining the Fort Brown Reservation, a ferry connected the Quartermaster's fence to the Mexican shore, and buildings were erected by prominent merchants, the number of people coming to expand its population assured the dominance of Brownsville over all the other embryonic settlements in South Texas.⁸³

One of those new buildings erected in Brownsville was a printing office building that Scarborough later testified was done by Mussina who also purchased the materials for the American Flag. The actual move of the paper to Brownsville seems to have been in October, 1848. If Mussina was the proprietor, Scarborough was definitely the publisher who managed the establishment and he paid no rent. Scarborough apparently did a good job in managing the office from October 1848 to October 1849 as receipts and expenditures (about \$1,700 each) balanced each other.⁸⁴ However, as mentioned before, the file of the American Flag was not kept intact after its move to Brownsville while it is still complete for its two year period in Matamoros.⁸⁵

Scarborough's interest in the Flag lessened through 1849 and soon, while still publishing that paper, he was also putting out a Spanish language weekly called El Centinela. The concern, exactly reversing that of publishers in Matamoros earlier, was that American citizens of Mexican extraction (who were definitely the majority in this case) should have a paper in their own language and be able to understand the new laws affecting them, after the treaty of Guadalupe ending the Mexican-American War had been signed.⁸⁶

On October 13, 1849, Scarborough announced his departure from the American Flag, saying:

"After this date we shall have more time to devote to our small sheet, El Centinela. We have received such patronage as will enable us to enlarge it. We are grateful for this support and shall try to make it worthy of the sympathy of our patrons."⁸⁷

Joseph R. Palmer was probably left with full control of the American Flag as evidenced from the style and tone of an editorial of September 26, 1849.

"As editors of this daily for the last three

years, we have worked, however weak our efforts, for the welfare of all this region. For us there has been no boundary, in evidence of which we refer you to the column of our paper. . ."

He also wrote:

"The Matamorians have treated us most kindly. It was in their city that our small sheet saw its first light, and as long as its columns remain under our charge, their interests shall receive the same consideration as ours. . ." ⁸⁸

The little Centinela was converted to a carefully organized, spicy, attractive four page paper called The Rio Grande Sentinel when, on June 2, 1850, Palmer joined with Scarborough in its publication. Put out from Palmer's Literary Depot next door to the Miller Hotel, it also carried a Spanish section named Centinela de Rio Grande. ⁸⁹ Antonio Yznaga edited that section. He had worked before with the American Star, the official organ of General Scott in Mexico City. ⁹⁰

As mentioned above, Brownsville acquired an early position of prominence, not going through the usual obscurity of a typical new town. The treaty of peace after the Mexican War worked towards that development, as well as its natural position, which, among other things, quickly gave Brownsville enough population of a full-fledged town identity. ⁹¹

The new town of Brownsville did not lack intense political strife. As could have been predicted by such a rapid coming into existence, disputes sprang up between the municipal corporation and people who had developed the townsite. Unfortunately this is again a space of town history whose details are left blank for us by the loss of the American Flag issues which would have discussed the situation. Scarborough seems to have sided with the city's claim, not surprisingly, since he was an alderman on the town's common council.

Palmer suspended the publication of the American Flag on March 26, 1851 which he had the authority to do since he owned the paper. Scarborough was leased the press which he might have used to enlarge his Rio Grande Sentinel. The Sentinel then had the Brownsville reading turf all to itself until a new competitor appeared on the scene the following August.

This was called the Rio Bravo. It was formed because a

group of prominent Brownsville merchants had been accused and were actually sympathizing with J. M. J. Carbajal, a revolutionary Mexican general.⁹² His project was the reappearance of the dream called Republic of "Sierra Madre" that had been advanced before by Hugh McLeod's Republic of the Rio Grande and Friend of the People, and Bangs' and Villeirs' Point Isabel paper, the Texas Ranger. The editors and publishers of the Rio Bravo were Ovid F. Johnson who had come to the Valley with other New York land speculators and Francis J. Parker, from Kentucky, who was taken out of the army in 1846. They issued an extra before the first number of August 18th, and by August 27th, 1851, their first number announced that they had finally received their necessary material from New Orleans with exception of an appropriate head. They also hoped that their honest efforts to deserve patronage and confidence would be appreciated.⁹³

Carbajal's fight enriched Brownsville merchants by allowing the introduction of a great deal of smuggled merchandise into Mexico, but within the year he was defeated and the Rio Bravo, championing his cause, faded away. The revolution did cause some damage to the buildings of Matamoros, which henceforth took on the title of Heroic.⁹⁴

At this point, Scarborough stopped the publication of the Rio Grande Sentinel and restarted the American Flag with a new calendar; Volume 1, no. 1 appeared on December 27, 1851. It was to come out on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and the motto declared: "Devoted to the interests of no party or clique, independent in all things; neutral in none." Recapitulating that when the paper first came to Brownsville the place was an uninhabited waste and that the American Flag had nevertheless continued until nine months ago, he explained that he was now unfurling the Flag to the kindly breeze of public favor in order to make known the feelings he would advocate in his column.

"At all times, but especially at the present moment, the position we occupy on the map of our country is invested with deep interest. We shall frown upon all attempts, from whatever sources they may emanate, to excite internal strife and unhappy commotions with a friendly nation, and we will never permit our column to be prostituted to the selfish ends of individuals or of cliques, to the disregard of public prosperity. . ."

A Spanish section entitled La Bandera Americana made this second edition of the American Flag bilingual.⁹⁵

In 1852 the publishing picture in Brownsville included the American Flag, the Rio Bravo and Modern American. Little is known about Modern American. From 1853 until 1859 the American Flag lost its other two competitors and had no other contenders for the Brownsville reading public. Scarborough continued as owner, publisher and editor, probably giving Joseph R. Palmer the task of editing the Flag during his temporary absences while he served several terms in the Texas Senate.⁹⁶

As to the Spanish reading material in Brownsville at this time, shortly after the American Flag resumed publication its Spanish section, La Bandera Americana was also restored. Then the year 1855 saw the appearance of a totally Spanish language newspaper in Brownsville, the Rayo Federal. A group of Liberal party exiled Mexican politicians, two of which were quite prominent figures, published this new venture. One was Don Melchor Ocampo and the other was Don Ponciano Arriaga. Ocampo had fled first to New Orleans in company with Don Benito Juarez, and then he became the foreign minister who concluded the Ocampo-Lane treaty between the United States and Mexico. Both used the Rayo Federal to criticise the dictatorship of President Santa Anna and the command of General Woll, who headed the Matamoros garrison. The strictness with which Woll commanded the soldiers in Matamoros was displayed in a Lady Godiva-like incident. The wife of a captain who had recently been exiled to Brownsville for his Liberal sympathies was caught distributing the Rayo Federal in Mexico. Woll ordered that her hair be shorn and that she should parade the principal streets in men's clothes, riding a donkey.⁹⁷

The Boletín Extraordinario also appeared at this time in Brownsville. However, it was not a full fledged paper but a medium of propaganda of the Mexican parties for the Spanish speakers of Brownsville.⁹⁸

Apparently Scarborough was asked the question: "Will the Flag be sold?" more times than he cared to hear, for on March, 16, 1859, he came out with an editorial expounding on the matter:

"Within the past week we have had the above and most important question propounded more times than we care to state. In order that all who are interested may have the benefit of the reply of him who, almost unaided has kept his 'little pet' afloat for the past ten years, we here print it. In answer we have to say that we do not know whether it will or will not. It certainly will not

unless a guarantee can be had that its present galley slave can obtain a sufficiency thereby to relieve him of his debts and afford him some few weeks rest, nor until present patrons of the paper are secured in the amount of their patronage. That done, and then the Flag will be sold. We feel that we need rest both mental and physical, and would welcome the occasion that would afford it, if but temporarily. We see no hope of the realization of this wish, however, and fear that the only chance for the sale of the Flag will be by the hammer of the sheriff. Not an impossible event but one which, judging from its past and present support, is quite an improbable one."⁹⁹

A month later Scarborough's cry for rest was granted and his hedging prediction came true, for in April 22, 1859 he finally did decide to sell the American Flag with all its printing paraphernalia to Joseph R. Palmer. The equipment included presses, types, cases, stands, books, papers and ink cards. The agreement included an understanding that Scarborough would not engage in conducting or establishing another newspaper in Brownsville for two years.¹⁰⁰

On the following day, all the Flag's above-mentioned property was leased to Somers Kinney, a relative of the founder of Corpus Christi and James R. Barnard. Kinney in turn left the Flag shortly although he would return to the area in 1865 to participate with Henry A. Maltby in the Matamoros and Brownsville venture called the Ranchero. Barnard had published the Tampico Sentinel in 1847. Later he helped John N. Peoples put out the Vera Cruz paper called the American Eagle. He also cooperated with Peoples in Jalapa, Puebla and Mexico City, putting out the American Star. When the war ended, Peoples started the Nueces Valley in Corpus Christi.¹⁰¹

The Kinney and Barnard combination lasted through the three months that it took for the Cortina War to run its course and this started a few months after the new editors had taken over the American Flag. Perhaps discouraged by the tension, Kinney and Barnard gave over the Flag to H. A. Gallup. This twenty-five year old Connecticut lawyer stayed with the paper for a little over a year until the Civil War started.¹⁰²

The 40-year-old Scarborough decided to revive the Rio Grande Sentinel late 1860, fudging a little on his promised term of a two year silence. Perhaps this contributed to a less careful journalism since the The Rio Grande Sentinel was

criticized for that at the time.

With the Civil War, the Rio Grande Sentinel felt the restrictions imposed by Lincoln's blockade of ships of war and with it of all of Brownsville's sea traffic. Scarborough decided to suspend the paper temporarily after the 40th number, dated June 26, 1861, rather than to reduce the size of an already small sheet for lack of paper. He also explained that his duties as a candidate to the Secession Convention needed to be fulfilled and that he would later continue the publication of the Sentinel. However, he died shortly after, and the plan was never realized.¹⁰³

When Texas seceded in February, 1861, there was a danger of a confrontation between the United States troops stationed in the Valley area and the Texas State troops sent down to Brownsville. However, the United States troops took down their American flag and took off for the North.¹⁰⁴

Gallup, now the editor of the American Flag decided to leave with the Union troops. He did profit by the publication notices for the election of delegates to the Secession Convention and by listing secession ordinances, but his heart was with the North.¹⁰⁵

Now came the time for the newspaper to haul down its symbol. When the American Flag changed editorship to John Tabor, a lawyer from South Carolina, its name changed too: it became the Fort Brown Flag. This led a Confederate newspaperman to comment: "When secession swept the board, it hauled down American and ran up Fort Brown." "This," he added, "was rendered necessary by the suicidal idea of the rebels in ignoring the time-honored emblem of the law, order, liberty and Constitution."¹⁰⁶

Joseph R. Palmer took over some interests of the Fort Brown Flag but gave Tabor full control over its publication. For two months it appeared as a weekly, every Thursday, without any Spanish section.¹⁰⁷ After two months, La Bandera appeared, with the Fort Brown Flag on its verso. As such, it was a mouthpiece for the Confederacy and was distributed to foreign countries.¹⁰⁸

This arrangement was not to last too long, however. It was wartime and in early November, 1863, General Bee of the Texas troops who commanded Fort Brown panicked when he found out that the Federal troops had landed at Brazos Santiago. He ordered the burning of Fort Brown and part of Brownsville. Many Brownsville residents, especially those with Confederate leanings, went to Matamoras. That included John Tabor, who

abandoned the Bandera and the Fort Brown Flag.¹⁰⁹

This was to be the last of the paper that had been known as the American Flag but that was later relegated to the back page of a single-sheet Spanish-language paper. Holding the historical honor of being Brownsville's first newspaper, it had started in Matamoros with the brave words: "Long may it wave over the land of the free and home of the brave." It ended with a slightly disrespectful obituary. "The flag went up or under, we never could ascertain which!"¹¹⁰

Thus, during the first three months of Federal occupation, which was to last from November 6, 1863 to July 30, 1864, there was no newspaper published in Brownsville. Then in early March, 1864, G. G. Carman found an old printing press, perhaps belonging to the defunct Rio Bravo. Losing no time, he issued the first number of the Loyal National Union Journal on March 5, 1864. This was to continue until July and the withdrawal of the Federal troops.¹¹¹ E. F. Clewell and Theodore A. Steeter were with Carman on this venture and the trio declared themselves proud to have started the first loyal paper in Texas.¹¹²

Carman declared: "We have started a paper which shall be devoted, as far as we can make it, to the interests of the army, the people and the election of Abraham Lincoln to next Presidency of our noble republic."¹¹³ Official news and notices that would pass the major general's scrutiny could be obtained from other papers' dispatches. The Journal would be a welcome visitor, the editorial went to say, in every camp, and deserving enough of interest for the soldiers to sent it home. It was to be in favor of the Union, the Constitution, and the War, Reconstruction and the reduced pride of tobacco.¹¹⁴ The neatness of the inside of the paper evoked pride, although the outside evidenced clogged type that probably was neglected since the War of Carabajal.

While Brownsville was ruled by the Federal troops, strict order was kept and even petty larceny became an enormous crime and was seldom committed.¹¹⁵ This was no mean feat to accomplish with the melange of soldier population (approximately 4,000-twice the size as the civilian population),¹¹⁶ former citizens who came back from Matamoros, workers from Mexico and escapees from the Southern Confederacy, from their spouses or from justice.

In July 1864 the Federal troops were withdrawn from Brownsville to give more men to other fighting areas. A small force was left on Brazos Island, close to the Rio

Grande.¹¹⁷ In Brownsville, however, the Confederate forces took over until the end of the war.

Henry Alonso Maltby, a Corpus Christi publisher and editor, was one of those who returned with the Confederate forces, settling in Brownsville towards the end of 1864. Originally from Ohio, he was a handsome six footer, whose education had ended when he was fourteen, but whose associates judged as a highly educated man. He had published the Ranchero in Corpus Christi from October 22, 1859. When the Federals invaded Corpus Christi he moved to Santa Margarita, a few miles inland, then to Brownsville, then to Matamoros until Maximilian's empire was defeated, at which time he came back to Brownsville.¹¹⁸ The issues of the Ranchero followed him, for the one dated January 22, 1864, Vol iii, No. 51 was issued from Santa Margarita, while Vol. iii, No. 49 of December 17, 1865 came from Brownsville.¹¹⁹ Issues of the Ranchero continued from Brownsville until May 1865. The Confederates won the last battle of the war fought in May, 1865 at Palmito Ranch, 12 miles from Brownsville, but their victory was only temporary, as shortly afterwards United States troops would re-enter Brownsville.¹²⁰

Thus on May 24 the first number of the Daily Ranchero with Maltby and Kinney as editors and publishers came out from the Matamoros side, even before they had set up their new offices there.¹²¹ Colonel Miguel de la Peña, editor of the Monitor of the Frontier, the leading Matamoros paper of the time, welcomed the new Daily Ranchero.

"This able English-language paper will hereafter be published in our city. Its editor, Mr. Maltby is a gentleman of much ability and an excellent writer. May fortune, which is not always unkind to merit, pour in upon him in an ever increasing stream. We extend to Mr. Maltby an embrace of good fellowship."¹²²

What had been the fate of Matamoros papers since the close of the Mexican War? Brownsville had replaced Matamoros before as the great entry of trade with Northern Mexico with its Brazos Santiago sea-port.¹²³ In 1861, however, with the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States and the blockade of Southern ports, Matamoros again came into its own as a port, being used as the back door of the Confederacy. Cotton was taken from the Southern states, hauled down overland to the Rio Grande, brought into Mexico and shipped out of the neutral port of Bagdad at the mouth of the Rio Grande. Matamoros grew quickly with this trade. Skyrocketing rents, new housing and higher living expenses

drew in a large number of speculators from the Union, the Confederacy, England, France and Germany. This influx of foreigners was so great that an English language newspaper soon was printed for its benefit - the Matamoras Morning Call.¹²⁴

In 1864 Emperor Maximilian ascended the Mexican throne supported by French forces. Therefore in that year the Imperial army ruled in Matamoras. Back in 1860-1862 Matamoras had also seen a period of intense local disturbance called the War of the Rojos and Crinolinos.¹²⁵ Thus, the northern frontier town of Mexico had its share of events to discuss and report during the 1846-1866 period and many newspapers appeared to do the job. El Amigo del Pueblo was issued in 1848, El Bien Público in 1849. This last newspaper had Don Andres Treviño as its publisher in its first year, then Carlos Velazo in 1850 and Martin Salazar in 1851. La Bandera Mexicana, started in 1851, was published at the same time that the Bandera Americana was being issued in Brownsville. El Chiste by E. Salazar appeared and El Boletín de Noticias, with a B. Salazar for editor and Eleuterio S. Vela as printer, appeared in 1857. El Ranchero appeared in 1858 in Matamoras without any connection to Maltby's Ranchero, and in 1859 there was an El Jaque.¹²⁶ In 1863 El Guardia Nacional was issued to voice the official views of the Government of the State of Tamaulipas and there is also mention of an El Monitor.¹²⁷ El Comercio, believed to be bilingual, came into being at the port. As mentioned earlier, the Matamoras Morning Call appeared to inform the many foreigners, and that was in 1864. The Monitor de la Frontera edited by Don Miguel de la Peña was another bilingual paper, calling its English section the Monitor of the Frontier. This appeared every Saturday, while a Spanish language paper, El Orden, by Don Mariano Rojas came out every Thursday. Still another bilingual paper, albeit short lived, was El Expreso Cotidiano with an English section titled the Daily Express. Then there were two other Spanish language papers in Matamoras: La Zona Libre and the Boletín de la Segunda Linea.¹²⁸

In May 1865, as noted earlier, appeared Maltby's the Daily Ranchero, continuing its publication in Matamoras until June 1866. In September 1865 a Spanish section using the skills of David V. Whiting appeared. David's brother, William H., was associated with him. The latter was arrested in Brownsville and told by the commanding general that he would be rearrested if he ever crossed to the Texas side again. Perhaps this unfriendliness was due to the fact that the Ranchero, while in Matamoras, criticised the Reconstruction policies of the United States government and

attacked personalities, both in the U.S. army and in the Juárez faction in Mexico, supporting Maximilian's empire. Thus it was that when the empire crumbled and General Mejía, the commander of the Imperial forces, evacuated the city in June 1866, Maltby came back quickly to Texas.¹²⁹

Brownsville therefore got Vol.II, No. 25 of the Daily Ranchero on September 25, 1866 with this greeting:

"Salutatory or what you please!

Having just emerged from the last ditch of the great rebellion and planted our banner on the (northern) side of the river, we shall be expected to salute the public. This is what we now do with the best grace possible under the circumstances, and in order to show our sincerity, shall endeavor to feather our nest from the tail end of the American bird at this tail end of its dominions.

Whether we left the crumbling empire of Maximilian from necessity or choice is not altogether a debatable question. It is enough that we are here, and that we came in a hurry. At most, we need but say, in justification of our exodus from the Aztec land of God and Liberty, to green, green, greenback bank of the Bravo, that we bowed in meek and hasty submission to the inexorable logic of events. There was a toppling, tumbling and crashing of empires and we essayed to depart; there was a roar and rattle of republican anarchy run mad, and we stood not upon the order of our going - whilst there was light, probably from heaven, to show us the way, the lurid fires of a pandemonium burned the soles of our feet, and we went, at once.

In saluting the public on the occasion of our reappearance in new dress, new form and entirely new auspices, we. . . say that, for the past, we have no regrets to make known, no apologies to offer. It certainly would not look well in us to regret having published facts, and it would reflect no credit on the Rio Grande public to be offered an apology for having been told the truth. If we have ought to regret, it is not for having performed more fully our duty whilst the Ranchero was being published under the reign of the empire. It is true that we spared the rioters, robbers and assassins on the border, and treated far too mildly those devils in human form who glory in human misery, but this was no fault of ours, for we

always went the full length of the imperial tether by which we were held.

Feeling ourselves relieved from all restraint, we hope to make amends by telling the whole truth in the future, though it were to shame. . ."130

Maltby further declared that the paper would not be neutral but independent in local politics and uncompromisingly opposed to outlaw and anarchy, advocating any measure that would bring law and order.

True to his promise, Maltby did indeed fearlessly express his views, especially against "carpetbaggers" in the era of reconstruction:

"The disenfranchisement of participants in rebellion is no new act, and has been decided in other countries long before it was made a law in this continent, but the result of disenfranchisement, enfranchisement, carpetbaggism and scallawagism is something we thought as peculiarly American, and belonging to no other nation.

The great objection to this is an antagonism to the spirit of free institutions and its usurpation of power not legitimately the property of those who exercise it. In the South, we see the evidence of it exemplified daily, in the usurpation of offices by irresponsible and dishonest men who have nothing but their impudence and the prestige of bayonets to back them. This species of rule is so foreign to anything ever imagined by Americans, that we denounce it in all shapes and forms."131

To house his Brownsville venture, Maltby built the only three-story building in Brownsville, on Elizabeth Street, near the corner of 14th. This, incidentally, is the same building that was first used for the Brownsville Herald in 1892. To print the Ranchero Maltby obtained from R. Hoe and Company the eighth Railway Newspaper Printing Machine made after the patent was issued. It certainly marked progress in the newspaper field, turning out beautiful copies at the rate of 1,000 impressions per hour.132

Immediately after the Civil War, but before Maltby's Ranchero, three other newspapers appeared in Brownsville. There was El Zaragosa, a Spanish language paper that apparently supported the Juárez faction in Mexico at the time when Maximilian ruled Mexico. Then there was a paper with the opposing view, directed against the autonomy of Mexico.

Its calendar began in Brownsville in February 1866, although it is said to have been published in Matamoros in 1864. This was the Rio Grande Courier with Emile P. Claudon as editor and proprietor, and John S. Ford and Mr. Starck, a New York Herald correspondent, as associate editors. The office of this paper was on Elizabeth Street in front of the Miller Hotel. Claudon, a very popular young Frenchman who served as Brownsville's city secretary, made sure that the Rio Grande Courier was a polyglot paper, carrying English, Spanish and French sections. The front page and page two carried the editorial, news and ads in English. Page three was called Le Courrier du Rio Grand with the first three columns in French and the next three in Spanish, while more advertisements appeared in English on the fourth page.¹³³ This arrangement changed in January 1867 when El Correo del Rio Grande consisted only of two pages with Spanish columns on the front page and English and French on the back page.

Beside the Daily Ranchero, the Republican and the Rio Grande Courier, there were two Spanish language dailies in 1867. La Bandera Mexicana appeared in Brownsville on April 22, 1867. It was edited by Mexico's Señor Guillermo Prieto, a talented author and poet, whose poems were often translated into English by William Cullen Bryant and published in the New York Evening Post.¹³⁴ El Mexicano was the other Spanish daily and was published by Don Miguel de la Peña, exiled from Mexico due to his support of the Empire. As noted above, he had earlier published the Monitor de la Frontera in Matamoros. Ten years later, in 1877, he would engage in a duel of honor with Nestor Maxan and thereby lose his life.¹³⁵

The Daily Ranchero and the Rio Grande Courier seem to have carried the competition between them to the point of quarreling as evidenced by the following editorial:

"To our readers: You have been observers for some time past that articles have appeared, from time to time, in the Ranchero of a personal nature to the editors of the Courier and also in the Courier of the same nature towards the editors of the Ranchero. You will have observed also that the tone of these articles have latterly become more bitter and now, in fact, have arrived at a point beyond which gentlemen cannot go on with words, which must become wearisome to you.

The editors, therefore, of both of these papers, having referred this matter to their respective friends for adjustment, have agreed to waive the point as to who has been to blame or most to blame in this matter in the past and to ignore

all that has transpired as cause or basis for a quarrel in the future and will as the infirmities of their nature allow, conduct their papers with courtesy, each to the other and to all the editorial assistants and writers."¹³⁶

So there was an endorsement in Brownsville, Texas, May 4, 1868:

"We, the undersigned, E. R. Hord on the part of the Ranchero and C. B. Combe, on the part of the Courier certify that within is the agreement made this day between the editors of the said papers.

(signed) E. R. Hord
C. B. Combe"¹³⁷

This friction was ended in a surprising way which was reported on August 2, 1868 by the Ranchero's editorial

"By one of those unfortunate circumstances known only to the printing profession, we yesterday purchased and took possession of the printing establishment known as the Rio Grande Courier.

We have tried for a long time to kill our neighbor off but, finding it would not be killed, we resorted to the last alternative, that of buying him up. Now that we have him down, however, it would not be magnanimous to boast. In fact we. . .regret. . .his fallen condition, fallen so that we have not even one newspaper enemy to punish.

Joking aside, the transfer of the Rio Grande Courier to the office of the Ranchero is decidedly an event which the people of Brownsville, at least, will regret for many a day. They will miss him both in the spirit and in the flesh. The Courier was eminently an institution of the Rio Grande of which any place or any people might feel proud. We recognize in Mr. Claudon a superior newspaperman, prompt, energetic and sleepless; faithful, devoted and never-failing. He had battled manfully for our border interests and has merited success. In fact, he has seen a success hitherto unknown in newspapering, when all the circumstances are daily considered, and, though we have measured swords with him time and again. . .If anyone should miss the Courier this morning, he must charge it to our account or to the mutability of human affairs on a fretful border.

"The Rio Grande Courier is dead; but the

victory is not ours, for, in candor, we must admit its editor 'showed sense to the last.'

To those who wish to know why we purchased the printing offices of Mr. Clandon's Courier and Mr. Schlicum's Republican, we will say that that type thief, Charles Johnson, who had worked for both offices has stolen about one half of each; stolen from one and sold to the other, so it became a necessity to buy both off to make the ends meet."¹³⁸

The French section of the defunct Courier was continued for a while by the Ranchero who felt obliged to keep serving the sizable sector who could read that language both in Brownsville and Matamoros. This part of the paper was now entitled: Le Ranchero de Brownsville - Journal Cotidien.¹³⁹ On March 16, 1869, the Ranchero dropped the French section but was so entreated to resume it, that it did so in two months.¹⁴⁰ At this time it was published tri-weekly and its French section had the title of Le Ranchero - Journal Tri-Hebdomadaire. The following August, however, Maltby again dropped the French section, citing pecuniary loss.

Somers Kinney withdrew from the Ranchero on August 27, 1868 and obtained the following editorial from Maltby:

"The many years during which we have trodden the path of our editorial life together have endeared him to us and it is with many regrets that we lose him now. Mr. Kinney probably drives the most vigorous pen of any man in the South. In writing he may be likened to a skillful barber. After having gone over his subject not a hair is left standing, perhaps cutting to the quick a little too often. However, that feature of his writing is not at all a detriment, for every subject fairly needs skinning alive in this area of the world, to attract the least attention and Kinney is just the man to do such jobs.

The Houston Times is the name of the paper which will contain the shadow of Mr. Kinney's thoughts. He leaves his own town with a backing of which he may well be proud and which no man ever carried better.

Mr. Emile P. Claudon accompanies Mr. Kinney also to take a hand at the Times. He successfully published the Courier for two years.

To both goodbye!"¹⁴¹

The Ranchero soon had another paper to keep it company

in the Brownsville area. James Dougherty, a New York printer who had been in the valley since 1852,¹⁴² had received in 1866 a bright new printing office outfit in Brownsville. There was talk of reviving the defunct Fort Brown Flag and Maltby took the opportunity to ask if it was going to be called the Fort Brown Flag, Brownsville Flag or American Flag. Dougherty answered; almost any name will do nowadays as in his loneliness he should hail its resurrection as he would the advent of a long absent friend.¹⁴³

When the Courier was sold, John S. "Rip" Ford who had helped Claudon as editor was now available and so Dougherty, who had just bought up the old Sentinel, had his editor and his printing press to start his new paper. It was to be named Sentinel after all and declared itself pro-Democratic, opposed to the election of General Grant as President of the United States or to the election of Gudmon J. Davis as governor of Texas and to all wild and oppressive measures of the Republican Party or any heresies they might advocate and try to pass into laws.¹⁴⁴

"Rip" Ford, one of the most colorful Lower Rio Grande Valley personalities is probably most well known in his role as Texas Ranger, but he was also a physician, a soldier and very much a newspaperman. Born in South Carolina, raised in Tennessee, he was active in the Mexican War and also in the Civil War as a Secessionist. His journalism career first started in 1845 with Michael Cronin, who had purchased the National Register, which had been founded in 1844 by W. O. Miller. That paper was first located at Washington-on-the-Brazos and then removed to Austin for a number of years. Cronin had previously bought Samuel Bangs' print shop in Galveston and published the Galveston News for a time. Ford dropped his National Register job in 1846 to edit the Austin Texas Democrat and then suspended that paper when he joined the Texas troops in General Scott's campaign in Mexico.¹⁴⁵

Once with the Sentinel, John S. Ford attacked the Reconstruction policies of the government and measures that were oppressive for the valley so vociferously that he was deprived for a time of his right to vote. Then he was almost killed because of his caustic pen.¹⁴⁶

This happened on a Wednesday night, February 16, 1870 when Colonel Ford was playing at billiards in the Miller Hotel. Sheriff Rudolph Krause together with his Deputy, Cruise Carson, both armed, entered the place and started insulting Ford, who continued to play. After finishing the game, Ford walked up to the Sheriff who was by now standing near Siebert's Cigar Stand. The Sheriff renewed his

insults. Colonel Ford caught him by the throat or ears and Krause drew his pistol. Ford would have been killed if the muzzle of the pistol had not been knocked aside just in time, but he was wounded in the hand. Bystanders then separated them. People now expected a general riot to erupt in the town with clashes between friends of the two adversaries.¹⁴⁷

The Ranchero leaned more on Ford's side of the story but commented on the stature of both men:

"Colonel Ford is a man well known in Texas. Though an active man in body and mind, he has grown grey in the service of his country. During a long life, he has been on an eventful border. Beginning with the Republic of Texas, he is one of the few who has braved a thousand dangers.

And what has naturally endeared him to the people is that he always drew his saber to drive the Commanche back or to meet the enemies of Texas or of the United States in honorable warfare. Whether under the banner of Texas, whether with Scott in Mexico or against the bandits and savages on the border, even when seeming to revel in war, he has always been remarkable in one thing, and that is, never to be personally insulting; all of his personal troubles can be numbered in small figures.

The important services which he has given his country endear him to the people who revere, respect and honor him. With such a character and backed by an honorable head of grey hair, it was hardly to be expected that he would be insulted in a public place by the highest conservator of the peace in the County.

Mr. Krause has been residing upon this border since the close of the war and is comparatively unknown in the history of Texas. By military appointment he filled and is filling the office of Sheriff of this County. He has been a good officer while in the discharge of his official duties, but when he forgot himself, and the restrictions and duties which his office demands of him and used insulting language to a citizen and subsequently endeavored to take his life, he most certainly came short of filling that high position which a sheriff should occupy. Dignity, especially of official character, should be borne by those who are charged with the trusts of the public weal. In short, he should be at all times, and at all hours, a conservator of the peace."¹⁴⁸

At this time another newspaper appeared in Brownsville and the Ranchero was not congratulatory of this event. This is its announcement:

"On October 8, 1870, at 4 p.m. a child was born in this city. Most babies are weighed soon after birth for the gratification of parents but as no one appears to father this bantling, we cannot yet report its weight. It is named, we cannot learn by whom, the Brownsville Republican.

Who would expect a baker to open a store for the sale of bread at a time when, and at a place where, no flour is to be had? The mere announcement of the word 'bakery' will not fill the mouths of hungry people nor give much profit or pleasure to anyone. An enterprising association thought fit to start a newspaper in this city at a time when it is practically cut off from all communications with the outer world. By lack of mails, telegraphs or any other facilities for hearing anything from without, we know that there is a dearth of news. Cut off from reasonable exchange of news, even from our neighboring city, Matamoros, we admit that it is difficult for us to supply the demands of our readers for intelligence concerning matters of public interest.

Yet at this particular time, appears a civil little sheet which calls itself the Brownsville Republican. It claims to be put forward by the Republican Publishing Association, whatever that institution may be; but the name of anyone as editor or printer does not appear nor does anyone seem wishful to be responsible in any way for the newspaper. Shrouded in a little mystery yet something is known of its authorship and workshop of this little stranger. Its author owns no printing press, no type, no ink and no paper. It is printed in the office of a contemporary with its type and its ink and upon its paper. There is nothing radical about it except-what appears upon the surface-its political professions.

We have no objection to this - printers will work like other people, for pay; paper may be bought by the ream and the purchaser may use it for any purpose he sees fit. Printing presses, like any other machinery, will do that kind of work for which it is adapted, no matter by whom it is put in motion, nor for what object.

But it is very clear that the Brownsville

Republican is not published for the purpose of furnishing news to the people, for there is none to be had. It is not set in motion for the purpose of employing money in a legitimate enterprise, for no investment of capital has been made. It has simply been set up as a trap to catch official printing by people who were not patriotic enough to risk money in the establishment of a newspaper for the purpose of advertising their political views until hope of pecuniary reward from the State Government is promised. It seems to us if we were to print the 'official organ' we should derive profit therefrom, whether or not we published or edited the sheet designated."

One of the misgivings the Ranchero voiced against the new "baby", the Brownsville Republican, was its lack of accountability, being put out by an anonymous organization. That type of frustration future decades would find very familiar. Then the Ranchero went on to cavil against advertisements appearing in this paper of unclaimed patronage.

"We have a press, type and all things necessary for the printing, and we publish a newspaper in which we are ready to publish official advertisements just as do unofficial ones, if paid to do it. We are selling to do the work ourselves, or that a well-established contemporary should be paid to do it, but we cannot commend a sheet, not founded upon any sound basis, not acknowledged by any known publisher, and the editorial responsibility of which is not announced, as a suitable organ for the publication of official matters in this section.

We do not think that any newspaper is disgraced by publishing official advertisements, and we now announce our willingness to publish such matter but we put no faith in, nor can we commend the setting of a mere trap to catch official patronage."¹⁴⁹

A little later in the month, on October 18, 1870, the Ranchero came out with a surprising announcement about a milestone of its own:

"We have a second hand printing press with material sufficient to print a paper the size of the Daily Ranchero which we will sell for \$700. Terms cash down.

We will also sell the Ranchero office, including one country newspaper cylinder press, one Liberty Jobber and all the news and job material for \$4,000. There is also about \$1,000 in stock such as paper, ink, blanks, one safe, etc., which will be sold at cost. Terms, one half cash, balance to be paid within three years upon such terms as may be agreed.

We are willing to sell because of our intention to engage in other vocations, and will here give the assurance that the first person who accepts the terms takes the shop, be he Greek, Turk, infidel, heretic or any other man.

The rumor that we are printing a Radical (this was the name given to the party opposing the Democratic party) organ for pay is not so, though we recognize the right of any printing office to accept Radical printing, including the official printing, just as they would any other job, for though we were offered the printing of a Radical or Republican sheet, we don't know which, we peremptorily refused to take it; but this is our business and not the business of that meddler of every other man's business. The right we have, but not the inclination."¹⁵⁰

The buyer turned out to be neither Turk, nor Greek nor infidel but (perhaps more unforeseen), two Radical Republicans - Henry Haupt and Dr. B. S. Smith, both members of the Republican Executive Committee of Cameron County. They started publishing the paper in 1871, calling it now the Daily Ranchero and Republican and gave it a Spanish section with the name of El Ranchero Republicano. In 1876, however, Haupt and Smith sold it to J. S. Mansuer who came up with another combination of the Ranchero name, this time the Evening Ranchero. Mansuer was an ex U. S. army officer who had been appointed to a post in the U. S. Customs Service.¹⁵¹

In 1870 the only paper left to voice Democratic sentiments in Brownsville was the Sentinel with Ford. Ford left in December 1873, drawn to Austin by the final clash between Radical Republicans and resurgent Democrats. He was to return the next year and be elected Mayor of Brownsville.¹⁵²

Democratic sentiments also still had a staunch backer in Henry A. Maltby. After the election in the fall of 1874, when Maltby saw that James Dougherty, the previous publisher of the now defunct Sentinel was supporting some of the Radical Republican candidates, he decided to issue the Rio

Grande Democrat.¹⁵³ This was to be published on Wednesdays and Saturdays to foster the interests of the Democratic party.¹⁵⁴ The Spanish section was named El Democrata del Rio Grande. This seems to have been owned and perhaps edited by Don Santiago A. Brito, who had a lengthy term of office as Sheriff of Cameron County and who was eventually killed on duty by unknown gunmen.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps at this point editorship of the Spanish El Democrata was taken over by J. B. Franklin who had previously printed this section and in 1850 had worked on The Sentinel.¹⁵⁶

In 1879 Democrat, the Blue Party, bought out the Ranchero and Republican. The new owners, Stephen Powers, James B. Wells Jr., Alexander Werbiski and Emilio C. Forto now merged with the Democrat that at the time was edited by James P. Wells and M. W. Tarbor. Thus, by another turn of the kaleidoscope, the Ranchero and Republican changed into the Democrat and Ranchero.¹⁵⁷

That same year, August 1879, a new semi-weekly, the Cosmopolitan, was started by Henry St. Clair, a printer from New York, with the help of William Guirey, another young printer from Delaware. St. Clair had probably lost his job with the Ranchero because of the merger and he was not much more optimistic about his new venture. It was contesting the field with the Democrat, a paper with a strong company behind it.¹⁵⁸ However, sometime between 1880 and 1883 it was the Democrat that disappeared and in 1883 the Cosmopolitan had managed to complete four years.¹⁵⁹

At this point, on December 3, 1883, St. Clair and Guirey turned over the Cosmopolitan to several persons who published it under the name of the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company.¹⁶⁰ They gave it over in turn on February 11, 1884 to John S. Ford, a native of Brownsville and a grandson of John Stryker, pioneer Matamoros merchant. He was soon succeeded by James S. Scott, Brownsville lawyer and Democrat. Despite the many management turnovers, Brownsvillians were proud of their Cosmopolitan, as seen in the Journalism article in the Twin Cities, written in 1893 and in the declaration of Scott, who on August 19, 1884 wrote (somewhat disregarding the history of the American Flag)

"With this issue begins the sixth volume of this paper which was founded in 1879 and has therefore been in existence just five years, and is the oldest secular paper published on the Rio Grande frontier. We believe the Ramo de Oliva, the paper published by the Quaker Mission in Matamoros antedates it by a few months. But no one paper

ever published in this section has had so long and successful a career as this; all the others, except the Ranchero, having had many ups and downs during their existence."¹⁶¹

On June 27, 1884 came out a prospectus of the Brownsville Times edited by Major Miller.¹⁶² In mid-September of 1884 appeared the Daily Republican, the third newspaper bearing this name in Brownsville, edited by Major Devine. Both of these newspapers came out with the usual flourishes about developing the resources of the region and attending to its informational needs. The Daily Republican also promised that its editorial page would be vigorously and uncompromisingly Republican.¹⁶³ Another new newspaper, the Argus, 'opened its many eyes' (as expressed by Chatfield's The Twin Cities) in September 1890 and published ten to twelve semi-weekly editions. Chatfield's book also cites a paper called The Rio Grande Valley, published from 1884-1885. It also mentions a newspaper that was started not much before 1893 called The Two Republics, apparently a bilingual venture.

Back in 1884, newspapers in Brownsville lined up on either side of a political contest between two men who, unbelievably, before had been partners in law practice: James G. Wells, Democrat and Robert R. Rentfro, Republican. Rentfro himself became a candidate for Congress on the Republican ticket while Wells was backing the Democratic opposing candidate, William H. Crain.

John Scott, editor of the Cosmopolitan, although a Democrat himself, supported Rentfro. The Daily Republican attacked the Democrat; Crain, and the Brownsville Times attacked Rentfro while the Daily Republican supported him. It was the Brownsville Times and the Daily Republican which appear to have become the most aggressive in their verbal diatribes, even escalating their written insults to a fight in the Brownsville Times office between Major Devine of the Daily Republican and Major Miller of the Brownsville Times. The Cosmopolitan called this the inauguration of the actual campaign and reported that there was no blood spilled from what it had heard; it seemed to have been a rather tame affair.¹⁶⁵ (Perhaps not as exciting as the Ford-Krause fight earlier). Fall 1884 seems to bring to an end the history of the Daily Republican and the Brownsville Times; there is no further notice of either paper after this date.

During the years 1884 and 1885, several Spanish language papers came into being. El Latigo, meaning 'the whip' was the mouthpiece of the Red or Independent Club of Brownsville.

Another was El Mundo, edited and published by Dr. Ygnacio Martinez. He was a cultured gentleman from Tamaulipas who later moved to Laredo, Texas, where he was assassinated while publishing El Pueblo, an anti-Diaz paper. It is believed that his death motivated the Garza revolution. In 1884 El Cronista was also published.

On November 4, 1884, John C. Scott relinquished the management of the Cosmopolitan back to Mr. Guirey.¹⁶⁶ After a few years, Guirey sold the paper to James S. Dougherty, erstwhile publisher of the Sentinel. The latter held it as editor and publisher until his death in 1893. He worked on writing up the news of the day up to a few months prior to his death. At this time his son, William S. Dougherty came to his assistance and assumed the editorial and chief management of the paper at the solicitation of his father. The father was consoled by the idea that his son would perpetuate his work, but handsome, brave and honorable as he was, young Dougherty bowed out after one year of publishing the Cosmopolitan. His assistant, John P. Smithwick, wrote the Cosmopolitan's obituary in his newly created paper, the Metropolitan: The Cosmopolitan which lately went down to the place where all good papers go, lived as other papers have lived, but did not go down in its glory, not even being wrapped up in any sort of banner."¹⁶⁷

What the Metropolitan was referring to was the fact that when Judge Thomas Carson bought the Daily Cosmopolitan from Dougherty the younger, he suppressed its publication, safely stored the printing material and placed its property in a custom house.

Thus it was that Smithwick, who should have been able to buy equipment of the Cosmopolitan had to apply first to Matamoros and finally to Dallas to buy a printing press at a reasonable cost. He then brought out his paper on the 20th of August, 1893, with an announcement that under his direction it would be Democratic.¹⁶⁸ However, after perhaps a couple of months, the Metropolitan faded away, perhaps giving in to the competition of the newly formed Brownsville Herald.

In the 1892 Democratic state convention, Jesse O. Wheeler III who had worked with the Victoria Advocate in Victoria, Texas, met some Brownsville political figures such as Judge James M. Wells, Judge Carson, who was the Mayor of Brownsville and manager of the Stillman interests in the Valley, and John Closner, William Dougherty's brother-in-law who later became the sheriff of Hidalgo County. These prominent Valley men persuaded Wheeler to come to Brownsville

to publish a daily newspaper. They told him that the younger Dougherty who was to assume publication of the Cosmopolitan didn't care a great deal for a newspaper career, which turned out to be quite true.¹⁶⁹ Jesse O. Wheeler's heritage in South Texas went way back. He was born in Victoria only some 200 miles from Brownsville. It was Jesse's grandfather from Vermont who had settled in Victoria long before the Civil War, as a builder, pioneer merchant and banker. Jesse II fought for the secessionist South under General John W. Magruder. He died when his son, Jesse II, was only three years old. A guardian then guided young Jesse and held his estate in trust until he gained his majority. Coming home frequently from his school in Alabama, Jesse invariably sought the office of the local weekly newspaper, the Victoria Advocate. Thence came his decision to be a newspaperman. For several years he was connected with the Victoria Advocate and also with the Victoria Review.

Jesse Wheeler issued the first number of the Brownsville Herald on July 4, 1892. Announcing, amidst the usual salutatory remarks, that his paper would be Democratic to the core but respectful of political opponents' convictions, he wrote: "Having for our natal day one so auspicious - the birth of the nation - we hope may prove an omen of success and that as our lovely little city grows and prospers our paper may expand and Herald our prosperity to the world."

Described as an enterprising young editor by Chatfield, with an equally enterprising wife, Jesse Wheeler had all the intellect and energy needed by a newspaperman of any day. There were no more than an estimated 1,000 English newspaper readers in Brownsville and barely a dozen such families between Brownsville and Corpus Christi or between Brownsville and Rio Grande City. Yet the paper grew with some of Wheeler's definite platforms. Brownsville was not connected to the interior of the United States by rail when Wheeler first took over, so he started a campaign to build a railroad to the Valley which reached fruition in ten years. The St. Louis B & M built a line from Missouri thanks to Wheeler's energies and cooperation from some citizens. Wheeler also dreamed of a great agricultural section in the Valley. He propagandized constantly about the opportunities he believed the valley afforded, and helped establish the rice industry and other crops.¹⁷⁰

Thus by the 1890's what was to be the dominant paper of twentieth-century Brownsville had emerged, and the journalism tradition of this border area had been well established. Its history from the 1830's to the 1890's had been restless to say the least.

To understand the fluctuating scene from an overworked editor's point of view we can, in closing, look back at an editorial by Maltby in October 1870's Ranchero.

"Some unsophisticated people living off the road and unconscious of quite all that has happened in this world may imagine the publication of a newspaper an easy-going business. Simple souls, how mistaken they are. Of all the vocation's extent, this is exceeded by none for trouble, vexation, weariness of body and mind. The editor, like the cook must have his bill of fare ready at the stated seasons. No matter who fails, what occurs, what hits, what misses, the newspaper must come on time. Marriages may intervene, the cradle may diffuse a joy never felt before. Death with its dark mantle may cover the little household and drape every heart with woe, yet the editor, the printer are permitted no respite. It is toil, toil with them. They are caterers to an insatiable appetite, bondmen to inexorable taskmasters, who exact the last 'tale of brick' and the last 'pound of flesh'. They must never flag, like the fated animal in the treadmill, they must tramp, tramp day after day. Stationary, rooted to the ground, fettered like so many Prometheus with the culture of continual existing upon their vitals, they pursue the dull unchanging way, plodding and untiring, they noiselessly toil on, but for them there is no point at which the public cry 'enough'; the sands of life may wane, yet there is no relaxation. They are kept on duty, sentinels on the watchtower until death relieves them."¹⁷¹

Yet, if the newspapers themselves could speak as one entity, they might be more joyful in their continuity and use of St. Clair and Guirey's parting quote when they closed the Cosmopolitan in 1883:

"it may say with the brook:

But men may come
and men may go
But I go on forward."¹⁷²

Endnotes

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- 34 Nichols, Zachary Taylor's Little Army, pp. 108-109.
- 35 Ibid., pp.
- 36 Ibid and New Orleans Picayune, 6 May 1846
- 37 Nichols, Zachary Taylor's Little Army, pp. 108-109.
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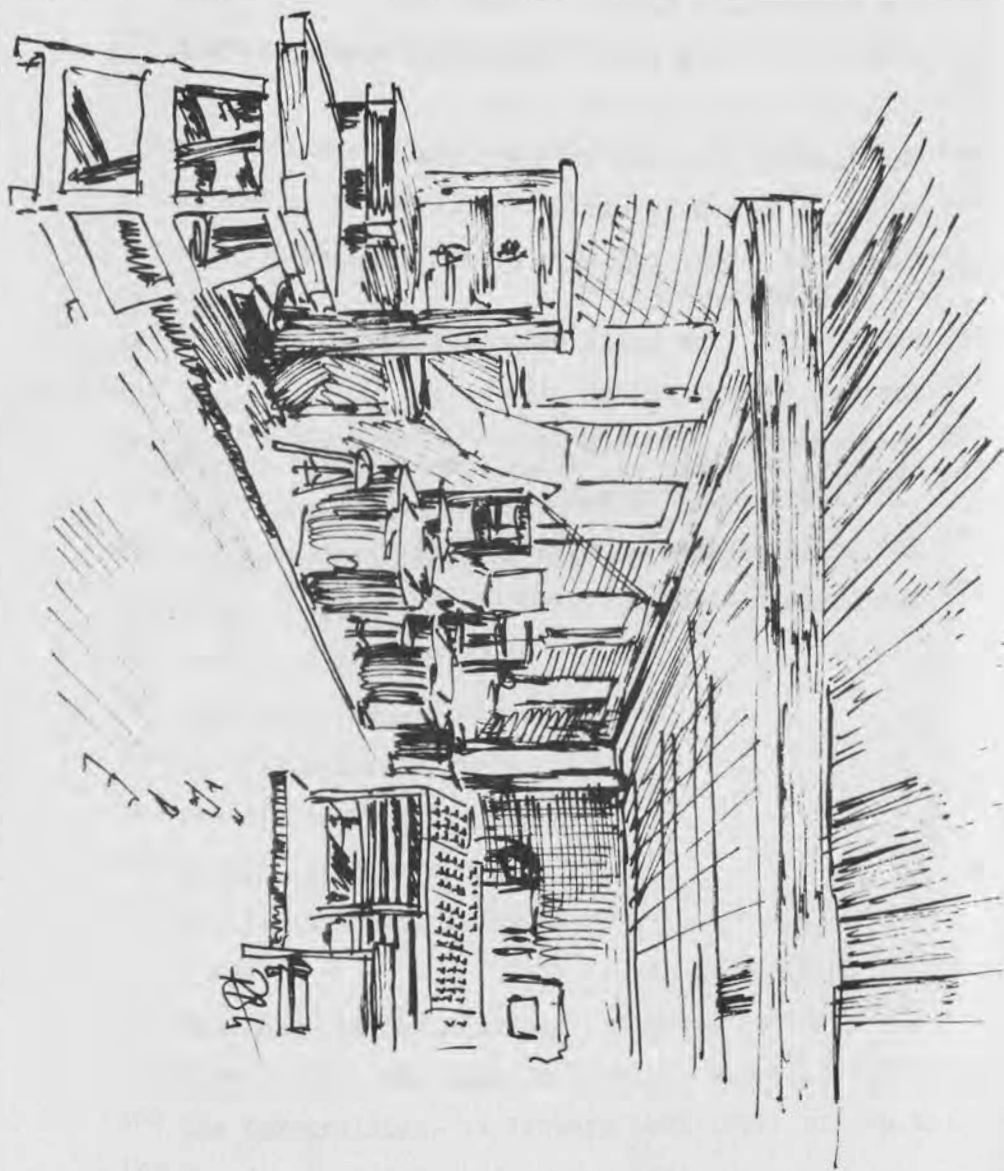
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The Miller Hotel in the Antebellum Period

by

A. A. Champion

Brownsville began to bustle with activity at the close of the war between the United States and Mexico, in 1848. It emerged almost overnight from a desolate waste; the sound and the ring of hammer and saw went on without interruption in the garrison and the town and within a few weeks the place boasted several brick and frame buildings housing mercantile establishments of every description on the river front and the foot of Elizabeth Street.

The Cameron House (later the Miller Hotel) rose gracefully on the corner of what is now 13th and Elizabeth. A two-story frame building with wide verandas fronting on Main Street, it was the most elegant hotel in town, established and operated by two sea captains, John Webb and Henry Miller.

The Cameron did not stand alone in that first year of Brownsville's busy life. There were the Peterson, the Brownsville, The Adams and the Union houses or hotels, besides a curious affair called the "Posada Frankland", offering board and lodging on a steamboat moored in the Rio Grande, within a block of the Cameron House.

Hoods of Rowdies

All accounts agree that the community attracted a large number of men of desperate character. Fresh from the horrors of the late war, there were drifters, deserters, gamblers and others that made Brownsville one of the rowdiest towns, in the wild, wild West. Fortunately, there were a few leaders, men of character and jewels in the rough who remained to forge the foundations of our proud city.

Everyone called the hotel the Webb and Miller House so that the original name of the Cameron House was soon dropped and forgotten, but most of the patrons of the bar amiably called it "Noah's Ark", where the jovial element gathered and the elderly cowmen and steamboaters came to sit and whittle away at Webb and Miller's furniture.

This was the year of the people's rush to the gold fields of California, and Brownsville was rid of the undesirable element, but it also brought through this place large numbers

of gold-seekers on their way to seek their fortunes. The bar was crowded with men, some going and others coming from the far west, with exciting tales of adventure. One of the distinguished men who came through Brownsville and is believed to have been a guest of Webb and Miller's at that time was John James Audubon, the naturalist, who said that the town was one of those places where little work and large profits gave an undue share of leisure, without education or refinement, and was consequently crowded with drinking places and billiard rooms.

There was no town hall or county court house, and some of the official meetings were held at Webb and Miller's. One committee hearing held at the hotel in 1850 resolved that the city marshall be notified to leave the city within forty-eight hours or remain at his own peril. Little things like that passed in the new town quite unnoticed.

The original Webb and Miller's, of course, was not operated as a hotel in the modern sense. It was a restaurant and bar-room with lodgings for a limited number of beds. A lady missionary arrived in Brownsville one night after a long sea voyage and a stage ride from Point Isabel and asked the driver to take her to the best hotel in town. He took her to the house of a German lady who took in lady boarders as, he said, there was no hotel in the town (meaning, perhaps, no hotel for ladies).

The first improvement to the hotel was made five years after its establishment, in 1853. Webb and Miller announced that they had refitted and entirely renovated their long established house and were then prepared to accomodate a limited number of transient and regular boarders. They were induced to prepare their house for the reception of such persons, as travelers had up to then suffered inconveniences in procuring accomodation in Brownsville. Besides, Webb and Miller had at this time some formidable competition. Victor's, on Elizabeth between 11th and 12th Streets, was an excellent restaurant, bar-room and billiard hall with lodgings for a few guests.

The barracks, officers and quarters and other buildings at Fort Brown were finished in early 1850 and immediately occupied by United States troops. The first distinguished field officer to visit Fort Brown after its establishment was General Persifal F. Smith, a distinguished veteran of the War with Mexico. A young first lieutenant in the 7th Infantry then stationed at Fort Brown was Edmund Kirby Smith, later Major General in the Confederate army, who commanded the Trans-Mississippi department, and was better known as the one

who surrendered the last Confederate forces in 1865. Lt. Smith observed that the Texans of Brownsville considered the Bowie knife and the six-shooter as common accessories of wearing apparel. It is common knowledge that the military officers of Fort Brown constantly patronized the Miller Hotel. General Zachary Taylor, Colonel Jeff Davis and Lt. U.S. Grant were here during the Mexican War, but that was before the birth of Brownsville, and they predated the Miller Hotel.

In 1856 a court-martial was convened at Fort Brown which brought in a number of high ranking officers of the U.S. Army, all veterans of the late War with Mexico. Among them was Lt. Colonel Robert E. Lee who, although not holding the highest rank of the group, was, however, universally esteemed and highly respected in the Army. Another member of the court was Major George H. Thomas, who was later to acquire fame as The Rock of Chikamauga in the war between the States. It has been said that these officers met here to discuss Secession, which most likely they did as it was the topic of the day, but certainly not in the sense that they favored it. Of the nine officers who composed this court and who lived to fight in the Civil War only three chose to quit the old army and join the Confederacy. The other six remained with the Union, even Major Thomas, who was a native Southerner. Tradition has it that Colonel Lee, who was an early riser, would occasionally walk over to Webb and Millers which was only a block away from the barracks and have breakfast with Henry Miller who claimed to flip the best flapjacks in the country. Captain Randolph B. Marcy, later to become "Little Mac" McClellan's father-in-law, was with this group and certainly must have joined the others in an excellent meal at Miller's, now and again.

In the early 1850's a large sign nailed to the verandah of the Webb and Miller house, read:

"Take Stage for Brazos Here"

Brazos Santiago was Brownsville's deep water harbor and communication with the "outside world" was by sea. Passengers arriving by Charles Morgan's mail steamers or by other vessels came to Brownsville by stage coach. The speedy stages arrived in front of the hotel, enveloped in a cloud of dust, and were usually hailed by a large gathering of people. The genial Miller was always on hand to welcome the guests, which at different times included ship's officers on shore leave, who mingled with the local rivermen and the important of the town. A large joint of a whale's back adorned the front of the hotel, a reminder of the proprietor's original

avocation and his close connection with the sea.

Henry Miller employed the best cooks, evidently from New Orleans, and the excellence of his cuisine was common in the accounts of his many guests through the long life of the hotel. A great variety of sea food and game were easily available and the preparation of these delicacies was the theme of universal praise.

In 1855, a complimentary dinner was given at Miller's honoring Thomas J. Dirgan, Esquire, American voice-consul of Matamoros, which was reported to have been both sumptuously and creditably served, and the whole affair passed off very pleasantly and harmoniously. The dinner was hosted by R. S. Leman, James G. Browne, A Q Arrington, E. M Anderson, Samuel P Gelston, Elisha Basse, all prominent officials of the city and county.

In the very first year of the hotel's opening a meeting was held at the hotel at the call of County Judge Bigelow, Postmaster Clements, Robert Kingsbury, Edward Dougherty, Artemus H Brown and John Webb, representing the U S Customs, service, the legal profession, the steamboat line, the hotel and the townsite developers, for the purpose of devising means to fence the tract of land recently donated for a public cemetery.

Captain John Webb, one of the partners in the hotel, passed away in 1855, and shortly after Henry Miller acquired the deceased man's interest in the business from the Webb family. Thereafter it became known as the Miller Hotel and operated under this name for the following hundred years, not withstanding the fact that it changed ownership several times. The only exception was during the Civil War when, for a short period, it was named the Sharkey and Champion Hotel.

In the ante bellum days, one of the most colorful habitués of the Miller Hotel and close friend of Henry Miller was Captain Richard King of the Rio Grande steamboat transportation fame. After a few years of skippering one of the river mud-skimmers, he exchanged his cap for a wide brimmed hat and cowhide boots and went out beyond the sand desert and developed one of the most widely known ranches in the United States. Captain King struggled with many trials in building his ranch, and, when called to Brownsville in the interest of his local affairs, he managed to make his stay at the old Miller Hotel of the town's memorable events. The rough-hewn steamboater, brimming with youthful vigor and prosperity, surrounded by a host of his friends, gave Henry Miller a merry old time, and the hostelry sprang alive

with noisy jollification.

The first decade of Brownsville life was one of growth and improvement. Its deep water facilities and the country's low tariffs had wrested the commercial lustre from its sister city across the river and town's streets were crowded with commercial animation. Dark clouds, however, began to appear on the horizon. The recent war had thrown together two distinct peoples which had evolved under entirely different circumstances, customs and laws. One owned the land and the other now wielded the authority and enforced the laws. There was uncertainty in the application of the new laws upon the old land rights and consequently there were clashes and conflicts. The situation became acute and finally there was an explosion. One dark night, Juan N. Cortina, son of the wealthy family owning the large tract upon which Brownsville was established, entered the city at the head of an armed ground of men in true western style, yelling and shooting.

Cortina rode up to the verandah of the Miller Hotel and from that post directed his men in the activities of the night. Five local men were killed in the raid, but there was no looting and burning, and, besides emptying the jail and seizing some arms from a store, that was the extent of the damage. At daylight he led his men out of the terror-stricken city and for several months after he remained in the vicinity intercepting all roads and communications with the town. Finally Major Samuel P. Heintzelman arrived with troops of the First U S Infantry and easily drove Cortina across the river into Mexico. Colonel John S. "Rip" Ford, with a company of Texas Rangers, also arrived to assist Heintzelman. Order, however, was not completely restored as Cortina several times threatened to return. Finally, the Government ordered Colonel Robert E Lee to Brownsville to make an investigation of the trouble.

Colonel Lee had occasion to renew his acquaintance with friend Miller, and Major Heintzelman recorded in his diary that he had had several dinners at Miller Hotel and enjoyed the best meals he had eaten in many months. Colonel Rip Ford later became one of Brownsville's prominent citizens. The Brownsville citizens honored the three officers with a supper and a ball. Toasts were offered where Rip Ford expressed his "sentiments of preserving the Union". Farthest from his thoughts was the fact that the following year he would be leading a Texan army to demand the surrender of the United States property at Fort Brown, and Colonel Robert E. Lee would resign his commission in the old Army and remark to his brother: "save in the defense of my native State (Virginia), I have no desire ever again to draw my sword".



COLONEL JOHN "RIP" FORD

LA COMADRE MUERTE
LEYENDA MATAMORENSE

por

Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda

Fue' a mediados del siglo diecinueve.

Regalo de un cliente rico agradecido--rara avis!--el mejor caballo de la aldea montaba don José María, recio hombrachón, -médico del poblado y sus contornos. Alazán, de árabe abolengo, buena alzada, finos remos, elegante cuello, crin sedaña, inteligente la mirada, ágil la marcha, suave el trote, veloz la carrera, y, sobre todo rápido y dócil al menor impulso de su dueño.

Don José María y su alazán eran figuras familiares en la comarca. A cualesquier horas, diurnas o nocturnas, en cualquier tiempo, bonacible o borrascoso y a todo lugar, por más lejano que de la aldea estuviese, si de enfermos se trataba, veíanse presurosos acudir caballo y caballero.

Al llamado--una noche agostaña--en la puerta del buen médico, respondió ligero relincho del alazán, como diciendo a su dueño: estoy dispuesto.

La mujer del médico:

---Pocas veces me opongo a que salgas de noche, José María, pues sé que en esto nunca me atiendes, pero esta noche, te ruego que no salgas.

--Ahora no me alegarás mal tiempo; es una noche jubilosa; luce una luna esplendida.

--Sí. pero... se dice... te vas a reir de mí; que se aparece un fantasma: la llorona tal vez; es una mujer vestida de blanco con el pelo suelto. Yo sí lo creo, me lo contó doña...

--Fantasmitas a mí! Bah! ya sabes que la Muerte y yo nos tuteamos; es mi comadre. Y sin más, abrió la puerta, se enteró de la dirección del enfermo y ensilló la cabalgadura.

--José María, ten cuidado--lo despidió la mujer--; yo creo en la aparición, me lo contaron personas serias que no mienten: don Nicanor, el del estanquillo, don Tobías, el sastre, doña Luz, la esposa del alcalde...

El viaje fué a "Los Horcones", ranchería algo distante de la aldea. El buen paso de la cabalgadura hacía que a pocas horas regresara Don José María. La luna se había ocultado y la luz

indecisa de la madrugada todavía no esclarecía bien. Las siluetas de las chozuelas se difumaban en sutil neblina.

Don José María, que olvidó pronto las recomendaciones de su mujer, las recordó subitamente al enfilar por la primer calleja. Sintió el escalofrío del contacto con lo sobrenatural. Había vislumbrado, a mediación de la calleja, algo blanco, como forma de mujer con negra cabellera suelta, que, sin hacer ruido, de prisa caminaba, más bien se deslizaba...

La sorpresa duró breves instantes. Don José María, habituado a observar, notó que el instinto de su caballo nada había percibido; el alazán no modificaba su acostumbrado paso ni daba muestra alguna de extrañeza. Sea lo que fuere, saldré de dudas: si es algo sobrenatural, sabré algo más de lo poco que sé, si es superchería...Y lanzó su cabalgadura al galope hacia la blanca figura que, rápida, se diría etérea, incorpórea, se deslizaba. Llegó presto el alazán a la vera del blanco fantasma y Don José María lo agarrotó...Cesó inmediatamente todo resabio: no cogió su fuerte diestra descarnadas vértebras, sino mórbido cuello.

--Doctor, por piedad!

Era doña Luz, la esposa del Alcalde, que regresaba de amorosa cita de casa de Don Rafaelito.

Don Rafaelito, el cura del lugar.

Don Rafaelito, varón de virtudes que murió en olor de santidad.

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros



Garza 88

Civil War Period



THE TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER, 1858-1867

Along the Lower Rio Grande Valley During the Decade of the American Civil War and the French Intervention in Mexico*

by

Barry M. Cohen

"The French invasion of Mexico was so closely related to the Rebellion as to be essentially part of it,"¹ commented General Philip Sheridan concerning the connection between the American and Mexican Civil Wars. This connection, so readily apparent at the time, has, in general, been ignored by both Mexican and American historians who prefer to concentrate, naturally enough, on the history of their own country, yet who fail to realize the special situation of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Politically the boundary is defined, but the social-economic pattern is so mixed as to be neither the United States nor Mexico, but a world unto itself. Hence, in order to understand how the Valley affected the great events of two countries, we must investigate the impact of these upheavals upon the Valley itself.

In the mid-nineteenth century the Rio Grande could be navigated as far inland as Mier, Mexico. In fact, Richard King and Mifflin Kennedy, the famous ranchers, began their fortunes with a steamship company in the 1840's operating along the river. Settlements along the river formed in pairs. For example, opposite Mier on the Texas side and slightly downriver was the town of Roma. Working from inland towards the mouth of the river came Camargo, Mexico, and Rio Grande City with the Fort Ringgold Barracks, then Reynosa-Edinburg, Matamoros-Brownsville, and at the mouth of the river, Bagdad-Clarksville. These last two cities developed rapidly during the Civil War Period.

The military and political importance of the Valley was due to its position of economic value to both Mexico and the United States. The economic position of northern Mexico was enhanced by the existence of the "Zona Libre" or Free Trade Zone. During a time of domestic crises in Mexico the acting governor of Tamaulipas, Ramón Guerra, declared a Free Trade Zone exempting imported goods from Mexican federal tariffs, provided they were for consumption within the zone.² The zone was eventually confirmed by the Congress on July 30, 1861, and President Juárez extended it across the entire northern border of Mexico. However, a levy of 2 1/2% of the

normal tariff was now required within the zone--the rest to be collected inland if an article was to be taken into the interior.³ On the United States side a law of 1852 allowed the duty-free storage of goods for re-export into Mexico. These conditions encouraged smuggling on both sides and led to diplomatic dispute well into the twentieth century, but it also gave Mexico an advantage in trade which was made good use of during the Civil War.

The first military-political event of consequence of this period occurred during 1858. This was the Cortina raid on Brownsville which took place on September 27, 1858. Juan Nepomuceno Cortina's personal grievances went back to the legal difficulties concerning the Espiritu Santo grant to which he and his aunt, Doña Refugia Cavazos, were parties. Although eventually their title was confirmed, they lost land in order to pay legal fees. The immediate incident which set off the raid took place on July 13, 1858.

Shears ;the city marshal;...saw a man raising merry hell. Mr. Shears in approaching the individual recognized him as Cabrera, a man wanted for horse stealing...Shears went up to him and arrested him. While he was having an argument with his prisoner, he saw that Cabrera was trying to get a large pocket knife. Immediately Mr. Shears pulled out his revolver and struck Cabrera over the head and got the knife thrown on the ground. While tugging with his prisoner, Juan N. Cortina came up riding his horse at a quick gait and demanded from Mr. Shears that he release the prisoner because he was his peon. Words brought on words until Cortina put spurs to his horse with the view of over-riding Mr. Shears. At this juncture of the situation Mr. Shears took a shot at Cortina but hit the pommel of Cortina's saddle which undoubtedly saved him from being killed. Cortina took a shot at Shears and missed him then fired a second shot which took effect in the left shoulder.⁴

After this juncture, Cortina resolved upon large-scale action. Major Heintzelman in his report gives probably the most accurate picture of the raid.

Before daylight on the morning of the 28th of September, Cortina entered the city of Brownsville with a body of mounted men, variously estimated at from forty to eighty . . . The citizens were awakened by firing and cries of "Mueran los Gringos!" ;death to Americans;, and "Viva Mexico!"

The city was already in his possession with sentinels at the corners of the principal streets, and armed men riding about.⁵

Cortina seems, however, to have been concerned only with taking revenge upon his enemies. General José M. J. Carbajal convinced him to cross the river into Mexico. There Cortina issued his first proclamation.

There is no need of fear. Orderly people and honest citizens are inviolable to us in their persons and interests. Our object, as you have seen, has been to chastise the villainy of our enemies which heretofore has gone unpunished.⁶

Texans took small comfort from these remarks because it was believed that Cortina really wanted to reclaim Texas for Mexico. A local guard was set up under Captain Mifflin Kennedy and Francisco Yturria. A volunteer group of Texas Rangers was led by Captain Tobin and John S. Ford became commander of the State Militia assigned to the border while Major Samuel P. Heintzelman commanded regular army troops on the scene.⁷

These groups engaged Cortina in a major battle in Rio Grande City on December 27, 1859, defeating him badly.⁸ But the so-called "Cortina War" was not yet over. Colonel John S. Ford had to escort the steamship Ranchero from Rio Grande City to Brownsville past a Cortina war party during early February, 1860. Robert E. Lee arrived in Brownsville soon after to take command of the federal troops there.

Various evaluations have been made concerning Cortina. One group led by Ford simply regarded him as a cut-throat thief. Others such as Charles W. Goldfinch looked upon Cortina as a red-bearded Robin Hood.⁹ To this historian it seems that Cortina was motivated by a combination of Mexican patriotism and desire for personal gain. At no time, as his enemies charge, did he publicly call for the re-annexation of Texas to Mexico, but rather, according to his second proclamation, placed his faith in Governor Sam Houston to protect the Mexican-Americans.¹⁰ This combination of patriotism and profit motive is also borne out by Cortina's behavior during the French intervention. Juarez recognized Cortina's authority in Matamoros as a matter of necessity rather than right because of the contribution Cortina made to the Liberal treasury. But Cortina also kept his "share."¹¹ The "Cortina War" revealed the instability along the border already existing prior to the Civil War.

With the coming of the American Civil War the Valley assumed further importance. Colonel John S. Ford, who had been appointed to the Confederate (then Texas) Committee of Public Safety, took control of Brazos Santiago on February 23, 1861, while the Federal authorities evacuated Ringgold Barracks in Rio Grande City on March 7, 1861 and Fort Brown on March 20, 1861,¹² since the value of the Rio Grande was quickly realized by the Confederate military. At the opening of the war General Hamilton P. Bee wrote his superior:

My conclusions are that it is of the utmost importance to the Confederacy that Brownsville and the mouth of the Rio Grande should be held by them. shut up and encompassed around as we are, it is the only point through which we can communicate with nations of Europe.¹³

General Bee's observations were borne out as the following communication made at the end of the Civil War shows.

Matamoros is to the Rebellion west of the Mississippi what New York is to the United States--its great commercial and financial center, feeding and clothing the rebellion, arming and equipping, furnishing it materials of war and a specie basis of circulation in Texas that has almost entirely displaced Confederate paper. But it is not alone the Trans-Mississippi: The entire Confederate Government is greatly sustained by resources from this point.¹⁴

It is difficult to determine the amount of goods brought into the Confederacy or exported by it via Matamoros-Bagdad, but in any event the amounts were substantial. One ship, the Love Bird, brought from England 14,200 Enfield rifles, 156 revolvers, 2,0,00 cartridges, and 5,000,00 rifle caps.¹⁵ This cargo may have been sent from England with love, but was traded, not for love, but for cotton.

At the opening of the Civil War the Confederacy withheld cotton from the European market in the hope of forcing diplomatic recognition of the Confederacy. This was done despite the advice of Judah P. Benjamin who wanted to store cotton in Europe to obtain economic credits. By the time the Confederacy began selling cotton abroad, the Union blockade was in effect.

There were four types of cotton to be exported, that belonging to the planter, the cotton contractor, the Confederate Cotton Bureau, and the State Military Board. The

two governmental agencies competed with each other in buying cotton to support the war effort, but neither agency could offer the profits open to the lucky individual speculator. In turn the contractor was in a better position than the others, for he would have access to transportation. A good example is the King-Kennedy Company which transferred to Mexico and handled not only their own cotton, but that of the government agencies as well.¹⁶ Some authorities estimate that half of the entire cotton trade of the Confederacy was carried through Matamoros-Bagdad.¹⁷

The Union blockade and to a lesser extent the French blockade of Mexico created the boom town of Bagdad, for during a period of 1863 the mouth of the Rio Grande was the only portion of the Gulf Coast not under the blockade. Bagdad, a sleepy shanty town still in existence today, had a phenomenal growth:

And Bagdad, on the Texas border, as full of them as an ant-hill is of ants; and the human ants were quite as busy as their insect prototypes. Numerous shanties had been constructed on the sands, out of unplanned boards. Some of these shanties were hotels, some billiard-saloons, and others grog-shops. The beach was piled with cotton bales going out and the goods coming in. The stores were numerous, and crowded with wares....

As great a revolution had taken place in Matamoros as at Bagdad. The heretofore quaint old Spanish town presented the very picture of a busy commercial mart. House-rent was at an enormous figure; the streets, as well as the stores, were piled with bales and boxes of merchandise, and every one you met seemed to be running somewhere, intent on business. Ox and mule teams from the Texas side of the river, were busy hauling the precious staple of the Southern States, which put all this commerce in motion, to Bagdad, for shipment; and anchored off that mushroom village, I had counted, as I landed, no less than sixty sail ships--nearly all of them foreign.¹⁸

Reports of the number of ships at anchor off Bagdad reached as high as three hundred. Not all of these were foreign blockade runners, but some (as many as 71 in 1863) were traders from New York on broken voyage with a transfer in registry to establish their neutrality.¹⁹ Colonel Fremantle of England records in his diary that he observed seventy merchant vessels at Bagdad on April 1, 1863.²⁰ This

number was confirmed by a reporter for the Brownsville Daily Ranchero who noted on May 19, 1863, that there were "seventy vessels, at least with three million dollars invoice" off the Bagdad coast. In late September, 1864, with French troops at Bagdad the number of ships may have been as high as 300.²¹

It is obvious that the Brownsville-Matamoros area was important to the Confederacy. Although in Mexico there was an affinity for the Union, because of economic necessity the Confederacy was tolerated. General Vidaurri, who was in control of the states of northern Mexico, proposed to "detach the Mexican states east of Sierra Madre and unite with Texas and the Confederacy" if either the Mexican federal government or the French challenged his authority.²²

The relations between the Confederacy and Mexico were generally good, but border incidents continued. In March-April of 1861 some Mexican nationals declared against the Confederacy in Zapata County. They hanged the county judge, Vela. This is reputed to have had the backing of Juan N. Cortina. At any rate this led to two battles, one at Clareno Ranch and another at Rio Grande City. There followed a third battle near Carrizo. In all three the Mexicans were bested by the Confederates, and thereafter Cortina was quiet until 1864.²³

Another border incident occurred, however, on April 11, 1863, when some cattle were stolen in Zapata County and taken to Mexico. Captain Santos Benavides led an expedition into Mexico which provoked a protest from the governor of Tamaulipas, Albino Lopez. The governor promised the Confederate authorities that he would stop the cattle thefts.²⁴

Another incident which brought tension to the border had occurred a month earlier. Many pro-Union men had gathered in Matamoros, and, in fact, that city was a source of recruitment for the Union Army. Hostility of the Confederates was aroused as early as November 18, 1861, when the U. S. Consul reported a plot to kidnap him. "I have at last made up my mind to use Mexican politics and fight my way into office."²⁵

On March 6, 1863, the Union steamer Honduras arrived at Bagdad, but due to rough seas did not land until March 10. On board were Colonel E. J. Davis (who later became a Reconstruction governor in Texas) and Captain W. W. Montgomery. On the morning of March 15, 1863, off-duty Confederate soldiers crossed from Texas into Mexico and seized the two men. Davis was released upon the protest of

Governor Lopez, but Montgomery was already hanged.²⁶ Fremantle gives a lurid description of this incident.

Half an hour after parting company with General Bee we came to the spot where Montgomery had been **left**; and sure enough about two hundred yards to the left of the road, we found him.

He had been slightly buried, but his head and arms were above the ground, his arms tied together, the rope still around his neck, but part of it dangling from quite a small mesquite tree. Dogs or wolves had probably scraped the earth from the body; and there was no flesh on the bones. I obtained my first experience of lynch law within three hours of landing in America.

Montgomery ... was in the habit of calling the Confederates all sorts of insulting epithets from the Bagdad bank of the river; and a part of his **renegades** had also crossed over the river and killed some unarmed cotton teamsters, which had roused the fury of the Confederates ...

Col. Duff confessed that the Montgomery affair was wrong, but he added that his boys "**meant well.**"²⁷

Major military activity did not take place until the fall of 1863. From October to December General Nathaniel Banks led a Federal invasion of the Valley with the object of stopping the Confederate cotton trade. Just prior to his arrival on October 27, 1863, a Mexican-American unit of the Confederate Army revolted. This act appears to be tied to the complicated political situation in Mexico rather than to Unionist sentiment.²⁸ At any rate General Banks was able to take Brazos Santiago on November 2, 1863, with some 7,000 troops, many of them Negro. By November 6 the Federals were in Brownsville. Panic took hold of the Confederates and a fire nearly destroyed the town. A home guard was formed, but offered Banks no opposition. On November 9, 1863, Banks announced, "I am in occupation of Brazos Island, Point Isabel, and Brownsville. My most sanguine expectations are more than realized."²⁹ After the Federals established themselves in Brownsville, they sent an expedition to consolidate their control in Rio Grande City. By November 11, 1863, the steamer **Mustang** could carry troops unopposed to Rio Grande City.³⁰

The successful operation of the Federals brought them

into immediate contact with Mexican politics. It almost seemed as if all the rival factions wanted to test the "Yankee," already knowing the "reb" reaction, and willing to let them alone. Two incidents occurred late in December, 1863, and in January, 1864, which required American intervention in Mexico. On December 26, 1863, Governor Serna, one of the many leaders in Matamoros, seized three American businessmen. The governor demanded a force loan of \$5,000 apiece. The United States consul appealed to General Dana to intervene on behalf of the businessmen. The general sent Governor Serna a note stating his intention to protect American citizens. He also began military preparations by taking the ferry boats to cross the river. Governor Serna, hearing of the troop movements, released the captives and proclaimed all Americans exempt from forced "contributions" to the Mexican government.³¹

The second incident took place January 12, 1864, when Consul Pierce again appealed to the American commander, now General Francis J. Hearon, for protection during a battle between Manuel Ruiz and Juan N. Cortina over control of the city. General Heron responded, and this time some forty troops took up positions outside the consulate. The American troops did not side with either Mexican faction and they in turn did not attack the consulate.³²

The Federal expedition made its deepest penetration inland with an attack on Laredo on March 19, 1864. About 200 Unionists were driven back by some 70 Confederates led by Col. Santos Benavides.³³ The next major engagement took place at Las Rucias Ranch near Brownsville on July 25, 1864. By July 30, 1864 the Confederates had retaken Brownsville.³⁴

It was at this point that the chief involvement of Mexico in the Civil War took place, aside of course, from the cotton trade. On September 6, 1864, forces under the command of Juan N. Cortina fired upon Confederates at Palmito Ranch. Three days earlier he had blocked Confederate forage parties. Moreover, there seems to have been an alliance between Federals and Cortina to attack Brownsville. Ford's diplomatic activity was able to forestall any action.³⁵

The last military action of the Civil War took place at Palmetto Ranch just outside of Brownsville near the Gulf Coast. Although General Lee had surrendered on April 9, 1865, the Confederacy of the Trans-Mississippi continued the war.

On the twelfth of May, 1865, a report came in from Captain Robinson of Giddings' regiment that

the Yankees had advanced, and he was engaged with them just below the San Martin Ranch ...

Ford put the question: "General, what do you intend to do?"

"Retreat," the general said.

"You can retreat and go to hell if you wish!" Ford thundered. "Those are my men, and I am going to fight."³⁶

The result was a hollow victory the next day for the Confederacy for within two weeks the Trans-Mississippi army surrendered bringing peace to the South, but not to the Brownsville-Matamoros region. The tumult in Mexico spilled over the border for the next two years.

The political-military activity in Mexico from 1861-67 is much more complicated than that in the United States. As in the States there were two main divisions. The Imperialists were led by the Emperor Maximilian and had the support of the French and Napoleon III until 1867. The Liberals were led by President Juárez who set up a provisional government in the city which now carries his name. On the Tamaulipas border with Texas there were many more faction than two. The Imperialist general, Tomás Mejía, had the support of French troops under French command later augmented by Austrian soldiers. On the Liberal side there were some eighteen changes in the governorship of Tamaulipas by twelve men, many of whom made war upon each other while supporting the Liberal cause.³⁷ Toward 1866 the Liberals divided among themselves in support Benito Juárez and González Ortega.

As the Civil War opened in the United States, Matamoros experienced one of its many civil wars. It should be noted that Matamoros attracted the political leaders of the Mexican state because of its military position and economic advantages. Previous to the American Civil War the political center had been Ciudad Victoria.

In the summer of 1861 Cipriano Guerrero of the Crinolinos (Yellow) Party had won an election over the Rojos (Red) Party candidate, Jesús de la Serna. The state legislature reversed the election decision declaring Serna the victor. This led to armed conflict between the Crinolinos and Rojos. Although Serna was installed as governor on September 1, 1861, it was not until late January of 1862 that order was restored. President Juárez named

Santiago Vidaurri as governor of Tamaulipas. Vidaurri, who was also governor of Nuevo León, in turn appointed General Ignacio Comonfort as governor. He made peace with Serna and Guerrero and established his control in Matamoros.³⁸

The next major upheaval took place as the Federal forces took Brownsville. General José María Cobos crossed into Mexico and immediately imprisoned the legal governor, Manuel Ruiz. Cobos had the aid of Juan N. Cortina, but Cortina turned on Cobos, having him killed and then releasing Manuel Ruiz. Albino López was interim governor for November 6-7, 1863, while Cobos and Cortina intrigued. Meanwhile, de la Serna had returned to politics and declared himself governor. He then removed Cortina, López, and Ruiz and governed until the end of the year when Cortina gained enough strength to re-establish Manuel Ruiz.³⁹

On September 26, 1864, General Tomás Mejía arrived in Matamoros with some 2,000 men. French troops were landed at Bagdad to support the invasion. Although Gen. E. B. Brown, the Federal commander at Brownsville, promised neutrality to both Mejía and the Liberals, it was no secret that Unionists favored the Liberals, now led by Cortina. On the same day that the Neutrality Declaration was made Baron de Brian, commander of the Foreign Legion, protested to Brown that the French troops had been fired upon by the Americans.⁴⁰

In the fall of 1865 the Liberals conducted a major siege of Matamoros. It was broken only by the arrival of two Imperial naval vessels off Bagdad and the dispatch of two companies with a total of 400 men to Matamoros. These were Austrians under the command of Colonel Van Godcolch.⁴¹ One of the ships carrying the men, the **Antonia**, was attacked by Americans.

The first major involvement of Americans in Mexican affairs was the Bagdad raid of January 6-9, 1866. Some 300 Negro troops led by General (Col.) R. Clay Crawford attacked and looted the town of Bagdad. According to William Neale the raid was a drunken free-for-all, but there were political consequences in that the Americans who restored order favored the Liberal side.⁴² Indeed, the consuls of four nations, Spain, England, Prussia, and France, charged that the raid was planned by the U. S. Army.⁴³

The second major involvement of Americans was at the Battle of Santa Gertrudis. On June 15, 1866, General Escobedo won a battle with General Olvera, an Imperialist. Although Escobedo's losses were heavy, he took over 1,000 prisoners as well as the supply train they were guarding.

Nobody knows the true extent of American involvement, although Frank C. Pierce reported that he "personally knew more than fifty Americans who handled the Liberal artillery at Santa Gertrudis."⁴⁴ This battle was decisive against the Imperialists in northern Mexico. Mejía and the foreign troops withdrew from Matamoros on June 23, 1866, and went to Vera Cruz two days later. Mejía was shot with Maximilian at Querétaro.

In some cases American aid to the Liberals was more direct. General Lew Wallace, for example, sent munitions loaded on the J. W. Everman from New York. The shipment was taken to the mouth of the Rio Grande where General Canales received it. The supplies later found their way to General Escobedo.⁴⁵ General Sheridan admitted, "During the winter and spring of 1866 we continued covertly supplying arms and ammunition to the Liberals--sending as many as 30,000 muskets from Baton Rouge alone."⁴⁶ And Sheridan's aim was achieved with the defeat of the Imperial Party in Mexico. "Imperialism had received its death-blow. I doubt very much whether such results could have been achieved without the presence of an American army on the Rio Grande."⁴⁷

Such were the events on the Rio Grande that played a part in the destiny of the two nations in those troubled times.

Texas Southmost College

ENDNOTES

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³See Matias Romero, Mexico and the United States (New York, 1898), p. 433.

⁴Century of Conflict: 1821-1913, edited by John C. Rayburn, Virginia Kemp Rayburn, and Ethel Neale Fry (Waco, 1966), pp. 64-65.

⁵U.S. Congressional Record, 36th Congress, 1st Sess., Ex. Doc. No. 81, pp. 3-4.

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⁷John S. Ford, Rip Ford's Texas, edited by Stephen B. Oates (Austin, 1963), pp. 264-266.

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¹³General Hamilton P. Bee to the Confederate Secretary of War, October 12, 1861, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. IV, pp. 118-119. In further references this work shall be referred to as O.R.A. (Official Records Army) or O.R.N. (Official Records Navy).

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¹⁵Bee to Nelson Clements, October 3, 1863, O.R.N., Series I, Vol. 20, Pt. II, p. 286.

¹⁶Ford, pp. 463-467.

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¹⁸R. Semmes, Memoirs of Service Afloat (Baltimore 1869), pp. 792-793.

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²²Daily Ranchero, March 9, 1861.

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²⁸Frank C. Pierce, A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Re-published Brownsville, 1962), p. 42.

²⁹O.R.A., Vol. 26, Part I, p. 45.

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³⁴Pierce, pp. 48-49.

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³⁶See Ford's Memoirs, p. 389.

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⁴⁰Daily Ranchero, January 18, 1865.

⁴¹Daily Ranchero, November 24, 1865.

⁴²See Century of Conflict, pp. 92-101.

⁴³Daily Ranchero, January 24, 1866

⁴⁴Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, p. 64.

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⁴⁶As quoted in Walter V. Scholes, Mexican Politics During the Juarez Regime (Columbia, Missouri, 1957), p. 110.

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The Impact of the Civil War on the Rio Grande

by

David Johnston

When the Civil War began in 1861, Texas was the only Confederate state bordering a neutral nation. Because the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had declared the Rio Grande an international stream, "...free and common to the vessels and citizens of both countries," the murky river was to become the "backdoor of the Confederacy."¹

During the Civil War, the benefits and consequences of the Rio Grande's cotton trade were to have a greater impact on the local citizens of the Rio Grande than the Southern war effort. Consequently, it was left to the Texas government in Austin and even to the individual Texas citizen to protect the Rio Grande Delta from Union invaders.

With New Orleans over 400 miles to the east of the Rio Grande, the sheer distance of moving large quantities of cotton from the Southeast was impractical. Combined with the long distance was a treacherous 165 mile stretch between Corpus Christi and Brownsville, appropriately called the "Wild Horse Desert".² Because there were no railroads between San Antonio or Corpus Christi to Brownsville, shipping cotton over the "Wild Horse Desert" was limited to slow ox-drawn wagons.³ This stretch was also filled with Mexican raiding parties, many supported by the Union, and local robbers who found it easy to rob the cotton carts on the lonely stretch.⁴ The "Wild Horse Desert" became even more difficult when a two year drought, lasting from 1863 to 1864, caused many streams and water holes to disappear.⁵

Another disadvantage to using Brownsville was the course of the Rio Grande river. Captain William Watson, who was a blockade runner and owner of the light-draught schooner "Rob Roy", described the river in his book The Adventures of a Blockade Runner:

The river flowing through a level country was exceedingly tortuous, and many of the turns were so sharp that the steamer ;Rob Roy;, though of no great length, could not be steered around them, but often had to butt up against the banks, which caused her head to bound off and push her round, and by backing and repeating this several times, she succeeded in getting round the corners. This

showed that it would have been almost impossible to have sailed up, and none seem to have attempted it except some very small vessels, which worked up with the help of oars."⁶

Using the Rio Grande for cotton export was even less advantageous to the Richmond government, since transactions in Matamoros were in specie.⁷ And in the early fall of 1862, the Davis cabinet authorized official agents to purchase cotton with Confederate currency and to resell this cotton, using the profits for the Southern war effort.⁸

Confederate currency was constantly depreciating, so that planters west of the Mississippi chose to by-pass the cotton agents and sell their cotton for gold across the border. The Richmond government felt that the shunning of their agents was causing a devaluation of Confederate currency; consequently, the commanding general of the Confederate States Trans-Mississippi Department, Theophilus H. Homes, declared on October 14, 1862 that all exportation of cotton was to be handled by authorized agents of the Confederate government.⁹

With cotton selling for 6 cents or 7 cents a pound in Galveston compared to 20 to 75 cents a pound in Matamoros, it can be understood why the Confederate government chose to use other ports to buy their cotton. But these same high prices and the use of specie attracted the planter and speculator on to the Rio Grande.¹⁰

When the war broke out, Texas was divided into three areas for military defense. Rip Ford was appointed commander of the Military Department of the Rio Grande. After securing Fort Brown, Rip Ford decided that the depot at Brazos Santiago was indefensible from bombardment and that Fort Brown should be prepared to withstand a siege. To secure the captured military supplies at Brazos Santiago, Rip Ford requested that M. Kenedy & Co., a steamboat operation based in Brownsville, move the supplies to Fort Brown.¹¹

While the Civil War devastated the economies of the Southeast, many individuals in the Lower Rio Grande prospered from the wartime speculation of cotton. Two companies that were to feel the direct impact of this cotton boom were M. Kenedy & Co. and R. King & Co..

The M. Kenedy & Co. was composed¹² of Mifflin Kenedy, Richard King, and Charles Stillman. These men were instrumental in moving cotton from the up river ports of Brownsville and Matamoros to ships waiting off the coast of

Bagdad. When the war started M. Kenedy & Co. was operating the steamers "Grampus II", "Matamoros", "Mexico", "Mustang" and "James Hale".¹³

Another Brownsville company, the R. King & Co., composed of Richard King, Mifflin Kenedy, and Captain Walworth, was a ranching outfit whose influence on the Rio Grande cotton trade centered around its ranch, the Santa Gertrudis.¹⁴ The Santa Gertrudis was about forty miles south of Corpus Christi and was used as a weigh station by cotton carts crossing the "Wild Horse Desert". By March 1862, Pryor Lea, the Texas' military board receiving agent for the Brownsville area, had advised that the ranch be a weigh station for cotton traveling from Goliad to Brownsville.¹⁵

Much of the success of these two companies can be attributed to the fact that each partner managed a separate aspect of the business. Richard King concentrated on the ranching at the Santa Gertrudis, which had over 20,000 head of cattle and 3,000 head of horses in 1861. Captain Kenedy managed the steamboats. Captain Walworth was elected a delegate to the Secession Convention in Austin where he watched out for R. King & Co. interest. Charles Stillman, keeping a close eye on the volatile nature of the border economy, directed the business affairs of the M. Kenedy & Co. from both Brownsville and Matamoros.¹⁶

The transformation and prosperity the cotton boom brought to the local economy can be seen in the journal of the Southern naval hero Admiral Raphael Semmes:

Our little craft carried us safely across the Gulf of Mexico, after a passage of a week, and landed us at a seashore village ;Bagdad;, at the mouth of the Rio Grande ...Numerous shanties had been constructed on the sands, out of unplanned boards. Some of these shanties were hotels, some billiard-saloons, and others grog-shops. The beach was piled with cotton bales going out, and goods coming in. The stores were numerous, and crowded with wares...

As great a revolution had taken place in Matamoros as at Bagdad. The heretofore quaint old Spanish town presented the very picture of a busy commercial mart. House rent was at an enormous figure; the streets, as well as the stores, were piled high with bales and boxes of merchandise, and every one you met seemed to be running somewhere, intent on business. Ox and mule teams from the Texan side of the river were busy hauling the

precious staple of the Southern states, which put all this commerce in motion, to Bagdad for shipment; and anchored off that mushroom village, I had counted, as I landed, no less than sixty vessels-nearly all of them foreign...²⁰

But, with the cotton boom came a Union blockade. In early February, Commander Samuel Swartwout of the United States sloop "Portsmouth" was ordered to blockade the Rio Grande's cotton trade.¹⁸ The excitement this first blockader caused along the Rio Grande is seen in a letter, dated February 25, 1862, from Charles Stillman to Captain King, who was at the Santa Gertrudis:

Yesterday we were all in great glee. Kenedy saw a hundred thousand in his vaults, twelve vessel;s; reported having arrived in the offing, with a prospect of shipping 20,000 bales of cotton a \$5 per bale & 100,000 upwards freight, would repay running expenses. Such was our imaginations, evening set in, a beautiful one too, when up comes another courier announcing the arrival on one of Lincoln;'s; sloops of war the "Portsmouth" of 22 guns, a permanent blockader undoubtedly. The "Matamoros" was at the mouth, with a full cargo for the English "Propeller". The "Mustang" had left that morning with a full load of cotton. The "Matamoros" retreated back to Cobb's Rancho and is waiting orders. This knocks us, cotton and all...You see, "all is Vanity," except cows and mares. A blockader cannot prevent them from having calfs and colts

Your Truly

Chas. Stillman¹⁹

To counter the Union blockade M. Kenedy & Co. developed a scheme where by the company would register their vessels under the Mexican government; then, when a Union naval officer would ask a M. Kenedy & Co. steamboat for a certificate of ownership, the steamboat captain would present papers that showed his vessel being owned by a neutral.²⁰

Throughout the war, events far away from the Rio Grande were to have a great impact on the importance of its military statues. When New Orleans was captured, in April 1862, the Rio Grande's cotton trade was effected. The immediate result of the fall of New Orleans was that the South lost its greatest port, making the Rio Grande's cotton trade to be of

world importance.²¹ Proof of this can be seen in the increase of cargo vessel anchored outside Bagdad:

September	1862	20-----ships
March	1863	60 to 70---ships
March	1863	92-----ships
Late	1864	200 to 300-ships
And	1865 ²²	

But, to counter the presence of Union troops in New Orleans, Rip Ford was ordered in the summer of 1862 to move his troops to Northeast Texas. This order left the Rio Grande with only a handful of troops for defense.²³

When Galveston fell in October 1862, the Confederate government decided there needed to be a shake up in command; therefore, Major General John Bankhead Magruder, fresh from the Peninsula Campaign before Richmond, was appointed in command of the Texas District. After taking back Galveston, Magruder turned his attention to restoring the defense of the Rio Grande.²⁴

Unfortunately, in May, Rip Ford had already been relieved of his command and ordered to Austin to be Chief of the Texas Bureau of Conscription by Colonel McCulloch, Ford's immediate superior. Ford had compromised his command on April 17, 1862 when he had failed to carry out an order to extradite to Mexican officials his close friend Jose Maria Jesus Carbajal, a Mexican revolutionary who after making an unsuccessful attempt to seize Matamoros, in the spring of 1862, had sought asylum in Texas.²⁵ Furthermore, Ford had warned Carbajal of McCulloch's order of expedition, which gave Carbajal a chance to escape to New York.²⁶

In January 1863, Hamilton P. Bee, a political brigadier general from Corpus Christi, was appointed by Magruder as Ford's replacement. Bee was under orders, "to hold the Rio Grande at all hazards."²⁷

As Bee took control of the Rio Grande, again events far away from the muddy river were to have a great effect on it. By 1863, it had become evident to New England textile operators that the Rio Grande had become a major leak in the Union's blockade. Soon the governors of the New England states persuaded Lincoln that a major military expedition to take Brownsville would be needed to blockade the Rio Grande effectively.²⁸

During this time, the firm of M. Kenedy & Co. was negotiating a contract which would make them the sole

supplier to the Confederate forces on the border. Because Matamoros required payment for supplies to be in specie or its cotton equivalent, the Confederacy and its worthless currency were refused credit. The Confederate's cotton agent on the border, Major Siemon Hart, felt that if a solution was not quickly found, he would not be able to maintain troops on the Rio Grande.²⁹

After visiting Brownsville in the middle of April Magruder wrote to General Cooper, the Inspector General at Richmond, on a solution to the problem in gaining supplies:

;I have; discovered that it would not be prudent to depend on any foreign houses for our supplies, if we could procure them with equal economy and certainty from a house having the same credit and means, whose property was in our country, and, therefore, in our power, and King, Kenedy & Stillman, a house in Brownsville, having agreed to furnish supplies at lower rates than any house in Matamoros, I advised Major Hart to enter into a contract with them, which was done through Major Russell, quartermaster, C.S. Army.³⁰

In this contract, signed April 28, 1863, King was required to supply enough cotton branded C.S.A. to cover the costs of the supplies the quartermaster requested. The contract called for 3,000 bales to be delivered, and at a market value of sixty cents a pound each partner could expect to receive close to \$60,000. But while waiting for the cotton to come, the M. Kenedy & Co.³¹ would be expected to make heavy advances of supplies to Bee.

During the summer and fall of 1863, the partners of M. Kenedy & Co. were busy at work. Captain King concentrated on keeping the cotton moving through the drought-stricken "Wild Horse Desert", while Kenedy worked on getting the bales into Mexico, and Stillman oversaw the operation of moving the cotton to the waiting ships outside Bagdad.³²

In the early summer of 1886, the Union set in motion the first stage of their invasion of the Rio Grande. Union troops in Louisiana were to renew activity in hope of drawing Confederate forces away from the Rio Grande. And, as in 1862, Confederate troops were called on October 26, 1863 from the Rio Grande to Northeast Texas to counter Union activity in Louisiana which left Bee with only nineteen men to defend the Rio Grande.³³

With the Rio Grande defenseless, the Union forces made

their move, on November 1. Because of a storm the Union troops did not land until November 3. During these three days, Bee was frantically trying to evacuate Brownsville. Bee, believing a rumor that Union troops had already landed on November 2 and were planning to pillage Brownsville, panicked, dumping his siege guns into the river and burning a large part of the cotton stored at Fort Brown. Bee left Brownsville to fend for itself and retreated across the "Wild Horse Desert", on November 3.³⁴ The Union troops did not enter Brownsville until November 6, where they found a city besieged by looters and disorder. Major General Banks, head of the Union expeditionary forces, quickly restored order in Brownsville by declaring martial law, which was enforced by troops under the command of Major General N.J.T. Dana.³⁵

The Union invasion of the lower Rio Grande did nothing to stop the cotton trade, because the cotton traders simply redirected their product up river to where it was carted on the Mexican side of the border to Matamoros. In a report by Bee, on November 12, the procedures taken to redirect the cotton trade were explained:

I propose to march in three days for Rio Grande City with all the available force I can gather.

I think a demonstration on the river is essential at this time, to show that we do not intend to abandon that line, to encourage our friends, and punish, or at most keep quiet, our enemies. It will also serve to make safe the large trains of cotton now "en route" for Laredo.

I shall hold my position on the Rio Grande as long as it may be prudent--certainly until I am forced away by the Yankees.

I trust that recent events will induce the general to save every bale of cotton possible for the Government.

The confusion here is over, and the trains are all "en route" for Laredo and Eagle Pass.³⁶

The Union occupation of Brownsville did little to stem the flow of cotton between the months of November and December; therefore, General Dana decided to take action against, "a rebel agent, who knows all about trains, and who manages most of them."³⁷ This rebel agent was Captain King, who at the time had a guard of 150 men on his ranch. Because the ranch was over 120 miles away, it would be impractical to take a large Union force over the drought stricken desert and then have to fight a well armed guard; thus, Dana decided to wait until the ranch might be left unprotected.³⁸

The Union's chance to catch King came on Christmas Eve 1863, when Captain James Speed, leading a troop of calvary in the vicinity of the ranch, heard that it was temporarily unprotected. But, when Speed reached the ranch, King, having been warned, had already fled into the desert.³⁹

While the cotton planters and traders could get their cotton to Matamoros, they were beginning to tire of having to ship their cotton through Eagle Pass, where they had to pay tariff in the State of Coahuila and then again in the State of Tamaulipas.⁴⁰ Also, the Union occupation was about to cause M. Kenedy & Co. the loss of its steamships, which were at the time being used to ship supplies for the Union forces.⁴³ The Union was in the process of buying the ships from Matamoros merchants.⁴²

In response to the hardships the Union's blockade was causing, the border inhabitants began to petition Governor Pendleton Murrah, bypassing the Confederacy, to bring back Rip Ford to retake Brownsville.⁴³ Magruder saw that Ford's talents were being wasted at his desk job and requested that Ford be promoted to brigadier general and given the authority to command troops along the Rio Grande. But President Davis and Secretary of War Benjamin felt it would be inappropriate for someone not holding a Confederate commission or of great political influence to be given such rank.⁴⁴

However, Magruder, hearing the pleas of the citizens of Brownsville, decided that it would be in the region's best interest for Ford, even though he had no commission, to lead all troops at San Antonio and to the west and south. On December 22, Magruder confidentially ordered Colonel Ford to head a new volunteer army against Union occupation forces at Fort Brown.⁴⁵

Because of the scarcity of troops, Ford had to issue a personal appeal to the people of Texas. The local nature this army was to have is seen in Ford's call for men:

Headquarters Cavalry of the West
San Antonio, December 27, 1863

Persons desiring to go into service will report to me at San Antonio, without delay, where they will be subsisted and their horses foraged. Those not belonging to companies will be organized here. Companies already organized are requested to report for duty immediately.

It is highly important that the expedition be

organized and placed in the field at once.

The people of the West are invited to turn out. They will be defending their own homes. Shall it be said that a mongrel force of Abolitionists, negroes, plundering Mexicans, and perfidious renegades have been allowed to murder and rob us with impunity? Shall the pages of history record the disgraceful fact, that Texans have tamely and basely submitted to these outrages, and suffered the brand of dishonor to be inflicted upon an unresisting people? For the honor of the State, for the sake of the glorious memories of the past, the hopes of the future, you are called upon to rally to the standard and to wash out the stains of invasion by the blood of your ruthless enemies.

John S. Ford
Col. Comdg.⁴⁶

Morale was high again on the Rio Grande. The excitement the return of Rip Ford brought can be seen in an endorsement to Ford from Richard King:

...your coming out our way after the Yankees...I believe the people have more confidence in you than anyone else that could have been selected, and I so wrote to General Magruder a long time ago. ...subsist all the men you can bring, ...you can have all of mine if you need it and anything else I have which may be of service to the government.⁴⁷

Because the Confederate's contract with M. Kenedy & Co. had already been fulfilled before Bee's retreat, Rip Ford found himself without supplies, in the winter of 1864. Once more M. Kenedy & Co. was to contract for supplies for the border army.⁴⁸

However, Richard King found that getting cotton from the Confederate Cotton Bureau, which was using most of its cotton for the interior, was almost impossible. At the same time any cotton crossing the border was taken by creditors who had previously delivered supplies to the Confederacy. In this environment Stillman declared in July that he would only deliver supplies if he was paid in cotton or cash on hand, leaving it to King to find cotton for supplies.⁴⁹

When the Confederate forces had retreated in November from the Union invasion of Brownsville, Bee's calvary had "intercepted and turned back all trains loaded with cotton; destroying by fire, from each load, a sufficient number of

bales to enable the teams to cross the sand with the balance."⁵⁰ In the excitement some train bosses opted to hide their cotton in the chaparral in hopes of retrieving it later.⁵¹ Others simply dumped part of their load on the side of the trail and retreated back across the desert. In his Memoirs, Ford describes the retreat:

When the Federals took possession of the lower Rio Grande, many persons in charge of loads of cotton went to an out of the way place and discharged it. Between the Nueces and the lower Rio Grande cotton could be found almost any where, just outside the road and frequently in plots of timber.⁵²

Richard King discovered that the only way he would be able to supply Ford was to use the cotton that had been abandoned on Bee's retreat. It appears that King and Ford worked out a scheme to keep this cotton from the Confederate's creditors by shipping the cotton under the private name of Richard King, who would then sell it under his old name as a private operator.⁵³ The importance of this cotton is seen in a communication by Col. Ford, on July 7, 1864, in which he explains to headquarters his action of impressing cotton found between the Nueces and the Lower Rio Grande:

The failure of the Cotton Bureau to turn over cotton to Capt. Merritt, being in the field without supplies, able to obtain no money, no cotton, and but a very limited amount of supplies from Col. Benavides. It was necessary for my Quartermaster to use the cotton obtained by my men under the control of Colonel Lovenskiold, or I would have been compelled to abandon the country to the enemy. When I moved from the San Fernando a column of six hundred Yankees was marching against Laredo. The disposition of my command has protected the cotton, commerce, and a large extent of country, and I have been able to remain here only by means of the supplies for which the cotton was sold. Necessity dictated the course and results have vindicated it."⁵⁴

On June 27, 1864, Ford began to advance towards Brownsville and, after a brief fight on June 30, drove the Union forces back to Brownsville. On July 28, the Union withdrew its forces eighteen miles downriver, after General Herron had decided that his supply base on the coast was too far away to be adequately protected.⁵⁵

With the Union forces out of Brownsville, the cotton boom quickly resumed on the Lower Rio Grande. But by May it had become evident to the speculators the war would end soon, and trade would then return to its old routes. Therefore, the boom began to subside, and the lower Rio Grande began to return to its slow pre-war pace.⁵⁶

During 1865, two events took place on the Rio Grande that showed the region was very isolated from the major theaters of war, but at the same time very effected by it. The first event was a truce before surrender. In February 1865, Ulysses S. Grant sent to the Rio Grande his personal emissary Major General Lew Wallace to negotiate with Confederate forces. Wallace offered amnesty to the Confederate forces if they would vow loyalty to the United States.⁵⁷ Although the deal fell through, a truce went into effect (on April 9) when both sides recognized that their actions would not be important to the final outcome of the war.⁵⁸

The second event was a battle after surrender. Why the battle was fought some five weeks after Lee's surrender is unclear. However, it is known that the Union forces at Brazos Island were under temporary command of Colonel Theodore H. Barret, who had not seen much action in the Civil War and was anxious to gain some prestige before leaving the army.⁵⁹ Also, Union speculators were busy trying to persuade Barret that Fort Brown could be taken without resistance, since the war was over. The speculators knew that if the town fell, the Union quartermaster would classify any captured cotton as perishable contraband. Cotton classified as such could then be sold at very low prices, allowing the speculators to make a healthy profit.⁶⁰

At the same time, Ford was trying to keep his men, who had not received pay for a year, from sacking the wealth of cotton in Brownsville. Because most of this cotton belonged to King, Kenedy and Stillman, and King had helped Ford, who had been ill during the summer of 1865 with medical expenses and rent payments, Ford would have felt some obligation in protecting a friend's investment.⁶¹

On May 11, Barret ordered 300 men to advance on Brownsville. After a brief fight, Barret's men took Palmito Ranch, about half way between Brazos Santiago and Brownsville.⁶² When news of the battle reached Brownsville, the commanding general in Brownsville General Slaughter decided to retreat; however, Ford deciding to fight declared to General Slaughter, "You can retreat and go to hell if you

wish. These men are mine and I am going to fight."⁶³ In the afternoon of May 13, 1865, Ford met the Union forces at Palmito Hill, and drove them to the coast.⁶⁴

The Civil War greatly affected the local economy and inhabitants of the Rio Grande Valley, transforming the sleepy towns of Matamoros and Brownsville into bustling port cities. When New Orleans fell in April of 1862, anchorage outside of Bagdad increased over 100% by 1865. Admiral Semmes was so impressed with the booming nature of Bagdad that he commented it was as if Bagdad "...really was under the rule of Caliphs."⁶⁵ But with the increase in trade came a Union blockade and an invasion in November 1863. With Union troops in Brownsville, the war was to effect directly the daily lives of the Rio Grande's inhabitants, who although some 2,000 miles from the major theaters of war were often in danger of losing their livelihoods and at times their lives. And when the Union troops were finally driven from Brownsville it was with a local militia financed by Richard King and led by the local hero Rip Ford.

But the lack of a railroad across the 400 mile "Wild Horse Desert," the difficulty of navigating the Rio Grande and the refusal of Confederate currency by Matamoros' "Houses" prevented the Rio Grande Valley from having an impact on the final outcome of the war.

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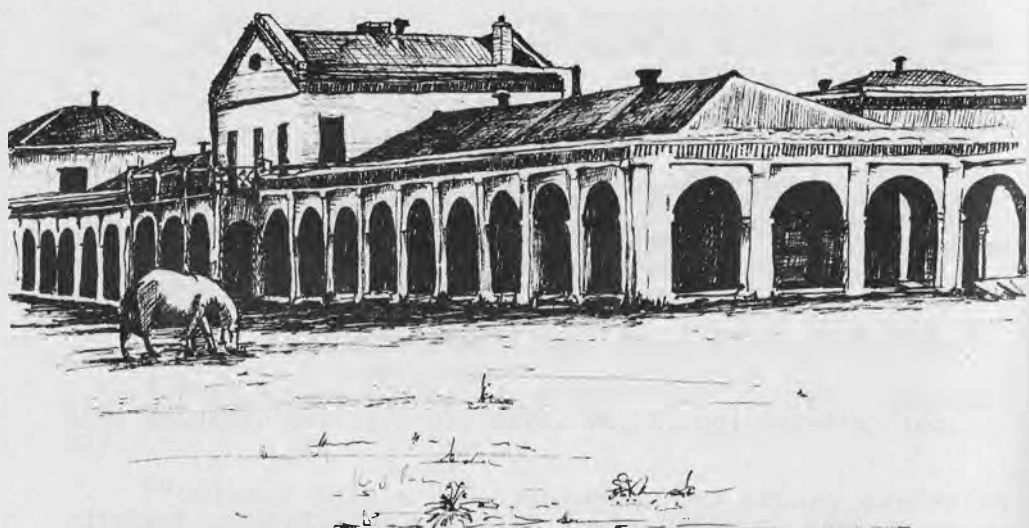
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Brownsville and the Blockade

by

Charles M. Robinson III

As a blockade port in the War between the States, Brownsville's value has been both overrated and underrated. It has never been fully understood.

Brownsville's value was certainly limited. It was separated by distance from key areas of the Confederate war effort. There was no rail transportation. All access to the rest of the South was by wagon over vast reaches of desert. Thus it could never attain the status of the South's main port at Wilmington, North Carolina.

Wilmington had rails and access to the sea. It was conveniently located to Bermuda and the Bahamas, and thence to Europe. It was in direct line running up from Savannah and Charleston to Richmond and the war front. It was protected by some of the worst shoals on the Atlantic Coast. To that natural barrier, the Confederate government added Fort Fisher, a massive defensive work exceeded only by the Great Wall of China. But to write Brownsville off as too remote to be of any value is an oversimplification. Brownsville was, to the trans-Mississippi Confederacy, what Wilmington was to the east. It was only a few miles from the open sea, facing a neutral city, across a river that was half-neutral. And the South ultimately allocated an extraordinarily large military force to defend it.

To consider Brownsville as a blockade port, we must also consider Matamoros, directly across the river in Mexico, and the port of Bagdad, likewise in Mexico, at the mouth of the Rio Grande. These latter two cities were the key factors in Brownsville's ability to function.

Like much of the South, Brownsville was unprepared for war. The defensive works at Fort Brown had eroded from neglect and had to be repaired. Although the aggregate force at Fort Brown and Fort Ringgold was generally about 1,200 men, they suffered from lack of material, and the federal blockade, combined with a misplaced Southern patriotism complicated the matter.

Col. John S. Ford, commander of the forces on the Rio Grande, recalled attempting to obtain powder and caps from a

ship anchored at the mouth of the river. "Some gentleman of the intense Confederate stamp, who had become a resident of Matamoros, came to Brownsville to inform Ford the articles were of Yankee make and not to purchase them," Ford later wrote in the third person. "The reply was:

"I do not care if the powder and caps were made in hell and smelt of brimstone, I will buy them if I can'."

Faced with only a month's provisions and a lack of cash to purchase more, Ford also had to comander the cash receipts from the Cameron County tax assessor-collector.

Slowly, but surely, the problems of supply began working themselves out. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 guaranteed free commerce on the river, and commercial steam navigation from the mouth began almost immediately. For 13 years, this commerce had centered on the Texas side, with steamers running from Point Isabel. They used Bagdad, and from there ran to Matamoros. An 1865 letter to the Union General Lew Wallace summed up the situation which existed throughout the entire war.

"Matamoros is to the rebellion west of the Mississippi what New York is to the United States--its great commercial and financial center, feeding and clothing the rebellion, arming and equipping, furnishing it materials of war and a specie basis of circulation that has almost displaced Confederate paper."

The basis of this boom was Southern cotton. This was transported to Brownsville in wagons from the north, stored in a vast yard approximately where Amigoland Mall now stands, shipped across to Matamoros, and from there, downriver to Bagdad and on to the outside world. All roads converged at King Ranch, at which point, the "Cotton Road" ran south to Brownsville, travelled virtually on a schedule by two fast wagon trains. One headed south with cotton, the other north with consumer goods and war material obtained in exchange. Many people were involved in the trade, since that was the only way to avoid military service. And it was lucrative, not only for speculators but for the government as well, since Confederate customs officers in Brownsville collected a duty both ways. Cotton, which had cost only a few cents in the Confederate interior, traded for 50 cents a pound in Matamoros. By 1863, the price was 80 cents--in gold. By the time it reached New York or Europe, the price was even higher. The cotton yard in Brownsville

held about 10,000 bales at any given time. Many were branded with the government's CSA. Many more had the brands of private owners and shippers.

In an age when Congressional investigations are routine, it is hard to imagine that much of this Confederate cotton went to the United States. But at that time, it was understood that patriotism had to share equally with economic need or convenience. U.S. gold purchased Southern cotton on behalf of the brokers and mills in New York, Boston, Lowell and Philadelphia. No questions were asked. In 1861, only one ship arrived in New York from Matamoros. By 1863, the number had risen to 72, and in the 10-week period from Jan. 1 to March 18, 1864, there were 32 ships. One wagon train was sent directly to Matamoros from New York.

Admiral Raphael Semmes, returning South through Texas after the loss of his warship Alabama, described the Northern influence at Bagdad.

"So unique was this little village, that I might have fancied it, as its name imported, really under the rule of Caliphs, but for certain signs of the Yankee which met my eye. The ubiquity of this people is marvellous. They scent their prey with the unerring instinct of the carrion-bird. I had encountered them all over the world, chasing the omnipotent dollar, notwithstanding the gigantic war they were carrying on at home; and here was this little village of Bagdad on the Texas border, as full of them as an anthill is of ants; and the human ants were quite as busy as their insect prototypes. Numerous shanties had been constructed on the sands, out of unplanned boards, some of these shanties were hotels, some billiard-saloons, and others grog-shops. The beach was piled with cotton bales going out, and goods coming in. The stores were numerous, and crowded with wares. Teamsters cracked their whips in the streets, and horsemen, booted and spurred, galloped hither and thither. The whole panorama looked like some magic scene, which might have been improvised in a night. The population was as heterogeneous as the dwellings. Whites, blacks, mulattos, and Indians were all mixed. But prominent above all stood the Yankee. The shanties were his, and the goods were his. He kept the hotels, marked the billiards, and sold the grog."

By the time Semmes arrived, the United States had made

one great effort to put an end to the Brownsville trade. On Nov. 1, 1863, federal troops under Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks began landing at Brazos Santiago. The Confederate commander at Fort Brown, Gen. Hamilton Bee, had experienced a mutiny only a few days before. He was nervous and suspected the loyalty of much of his command. So when an exaggerated report of federal military strength reached him, he decided to abandon the city.

On the morning of Nov. 3, early risers in Brownsville noted a flurry of activity at Fort Brown. Some rumors said Yankees were coming, while others held that raiders were crossing from Mexico. Then, citizens saw an artillery unit pushing its guns into the river. Some people began to say the army was leaving. Still, most citizens had confidence in the troops. When the cotton yards caught fire, they said it was burned by an advance unit of federal troops. Few, if any, realized that Bee himself had ordered the fire. Reality did not come until the soldiers began burning the fort.

Panic set in. The people packed the ferry landing and fought for places for themselves and their household goods. Mexicans with skiffs charged \$5 in gold per person to transport refugees across. Most men sent their families while they remained behind to supervise shipment of their goods.

When the troops marched out, looting began. Scavengers were cleaning out the burning commissary, when an explosion shook the city "as if heaven and earth had come into collision." People were knocked flat. A boy standing on the bank was blown into the middle of the river and drowned. The fort's magazine had exploded, showering the city with debris. Two entire blocks were completely destroyed.

U.S. forces arrived in the devastated city that afternoon, beginning a seven-month occupation. But instead of halting the cotton trade, they simply forced it upriver to Laredo and Eagle Pass. An attempt to take Laredo was thrown back by Confederate forces under Col. Santos Benavides, who had risen from his sickbed to lead the defense. Ultimately, the federal position in Brownsville itself became untenable and troops withdrew to Brazos Santiago. With Brownsville back in Confederate hands, the local trade resumed. Federals sitting across the river had to watch as cotton headed down on the Mexican side, and consumer goods headed up.

By now, the Mexican side was in the hands of Imperialist forces under Gen. Tomas Mejía. The Republican government under Benito Juárez had remained neutral out of necessity.

The Imperial government of Maximilian depended on continuing war in the United States, in order to consolidate itself in Mexico without U.S. interference. Relations between the Imperialists and the Confederates were cordial.

"As great a revolution had taken place in Matamoros as at Bagdad, " Semmes wrote. "The theretofore quaint old Spanish town presented the very picture of a busy commercial mart. House-rent was at an enormous figure; the streets, as well as the stores, were piled with bales and boxes of merchandise, and everyone you met seemed to be running somewhere, intent on business. Ox and mule teams from the Texan side of the river were busy hauling the precious staple of the Southern States, which put all this commerce in motion, to Bagdad for shipment; anchored off that mushroom village, I had counted, as I landed, no less than sixty sails of ships--nearly all of them foreign..."

By this time, over 20,000 speculators had come through, from the United States, the Confederacy, Great Britain, France and Germany. Buildings rented for thousands of dollars and new construction was continuous. The bulk of the activity was in Mexico, which was considered safer than Brownsville. Whereas hotels in Bagdad and Matamoros were filled as soon as they were built. Semmes noted, "There were no hotels at Brownsville, but I comfortably lodged for the night, with Colonel Beldon, the Collector of the port. The next morning I breakfasted with a large party at a neighboring restaurant, who had assembled thither to welcome me back to my native land; and when the breakfast was over, a coach and four, which was to take me on my way to Shreveport, in Louisiana, drew up at the door. An escort of cavalry had been provided, to accompany me as far as King's Ranch, a point at which the road approaches the coast, and where it was supposed that some of the enemy's gunboats might attempt to ambuscade me."

Brownsville remained in Confederate hands until the end of the war. Once federal authority was reestablished, an ironic twist occurred. Whereas Matamoros had previously fed a civil war in north of the Rio Grande, it was now Brownsville's turn to supply a similar war in the south. The United States was backing Juárez against the Imperialists. Arms and supplies were now being sent to Mexico. The difference was that in the American war, Mexican officials simply allowed it. In the Mexican fighting, U.S. officials were actively aiding the Republicans, and with the sanction of the government.

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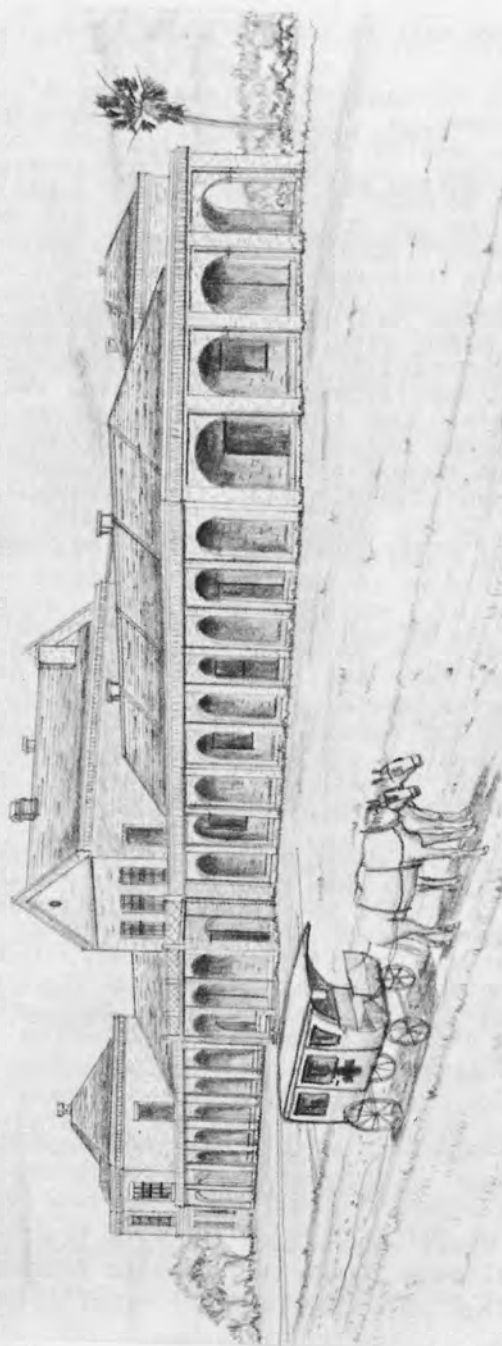
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FORT BELVOIR ARMY HOSPITAL
DRAWN BY CHARLES BECKER 1-1920

THE FALL OF BROWNSVILLE, 1863

by

John Warren Hunter

Edited and Introduced by

Robert Mario Salmon

John Warren Hunter was born in Rogersville, Alabama on August 10, 1846. Along with his father and stepmother, he moved to Texas, eventually settling at Sulphur Bluff in Hopkins County. He was fifteen when the Civil War broke out and after witnessing the hanging of a close friend by Confederate soldiers, he decided he would not serve the Confederacy. But to escape conscription, he found a job as a teamster with a wagon train headed for Brownsville, Texas. Hunter left the train at Brownsville and crossed to Matamoros, like many other young men, where he remained until the end of the war.¹

After the Civil War, Hunter lived for a few years in Lavaca County, Texas. In 1868, he visited Tennessee, where he met and married Mary Ann Calhoun. Then, after some twenty years of unsuccessful farming and teaching, Hunter bought the Menardville Record. He converted it into the Mason Herald in 1892, and ran it for some dozen years. In 1905 he moved to San Angelo and became editor of the San Angelo Standard. Hunter died on January 12, 1915.

As a student of frontier history, Hunter published the Rise and Fall of Mission San Saba (1905) and also founded Hunter's Magazine which, as the Frontier Time, has long been published at Bandera, Texas. As a typescript manuscript housed at the Barker Texas History Library, University of Texas at Austin, this particular account of Hunter's wartime escapades contributes decisively to the body of knowledge about Brownsville-Matamoros as a Confederate lifeline.² Hunter's account follows:

The Fall of Brownsville on the Rio Grande, November 1863

John Warren Hunter

Some two or three years ago, Captain J.B. Polley, who edits an historical page in the San Antonio Express, made the following statement which the reader will observe closes with

a very timely request and most pertinent observation:

A gentleman by the name of R.H. Williams, an Englishman, now a justice of peace in his native land, who claims to have served in Duff's cavalry regiment during the Civil War, has published a book in which he relates some strange stories. One of them is in relation to an alledged scare at Brownsville which, although without foundation in fact, drove the Confederates and their valiant commanders not only to the destruction of all the cotton and stores then on hand, but as well to precipitate an indiscriminate flight. The dates given for the occurrence are in the fall of 1863.

We should like to know something more definite and convincing about this retreat than can be gathered from the book of a foreigner. Will not some of the Trans-Mississippi veterans furnish the information? Just enough is told and hinted at in the book to arouse our curiosity. The history of the war as it relates to the Trans-Mississippi Department has never been published; and it seems a pity it should not be. There must be yet those living who can tell as interesting stories of the doings on the Rio Grande Frontier, and we shall be glad to hear from them.

In Governor Frank Lubbock's Six Decades in Texas, it is stated that in November 1863, an expedition under Generals Banks and Dana landed at Brazos Santiago in bad plight, and that Banks immediately notified his government that the flag of the Union floated over Texas. It is further stated that no opposition was made to the landing of the Federals and that on this advance to Brownsville that post was evacuated, the troops stationed there falling back to the Confederate line of frontier defense, carrying with them an immense quantity of government stores.

Where was that line of frontier defense? And why was there an immense quantity of stores at Brownsville?

The writer does not offer to assume the task of replying fully to Veteran Polley's appeal for information further than a plain statement of facts, nor would he attempt to refute any assertion made by that venerated statesman, soldier, patriot, governor--F.R. Lubbock; on the contrary, he will attempt to narrate events and incidents as he saw them, and state the facts in connection with the fall of Brownsville as they actually occurred.

However, before proceeding with this narrative, it may

be well to mention the particular location of Brownsville and explain the importance of the place as a commercial point for Texas, and as an entrepot of arms and munitions of war for the Southern Confederacy.

As is generally known, Brownsville is situated on the north bank of the Rio Grande, twenty miles west of Point Isabelle and by meandering of the river about forty miles from Bagdad, the point where the Rio Grande debouches into the Mexican Gulf. The City of Matamoros stands on the Mexican side of the river and its main plaza is just one mile from the court house in Brownsville. Before the beginning of the Civil War, Brownsville was a struggling village of little consequence, commercially or otherwise. A small garrison of U.S. regulars occupied the place, which, since Taylor's victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma and the bombardment of Fort Brown, 1846, had never achieved notoriety or public mention other than having been the seat of the so-called Cortina War, during the winter of 1859. The town could boast only a limited number of commercial establishments and four-fifths of the population were Mexicans. The government had erected at vast expense a large number of commodious buildings including a hospital, barracks, commissary, officer's quarter, etc. When Texas withdrew from the Union and cast her lot with her sister states of the South, the U.S. troops were withdrawn from Brownsville, as elsewhere along the Texas frontier, leaving the government buildings intact and these were later occupied by the Confederate forces.

When the Federal blockade went into effect July, 1861, Brownsville was the only port left open to the Southern Confederacy. In a sense, Brownsville was an inland town and while on the banks of a river chartered as being navigable, yet only vessels of shallow draft could reach the city. But the river was shallow. On the opposite bank stood Matamoros, a friendly city on neutral territory. And a short distance below Matamoros was the gulf shore with vessels carrying the flags of different nations lying in the offing waiting for cotton that found its only outlet through Brownsville into Matamoros and thence by wagon to Bagdad at the mouth of the river; the Federal Government being utterly powerless to interfere. Matamoros became a great commercial center. Cotton and other commodities for export poured into her warehouses, and, in trains, hauled to the coast and shipped to Northern and European ports. At the same time, Brownsville became the greatest shipping point in the South. The handsome barracks were tenanted by Confederate soldiers. The elegant officers' quarters were occupied by Confederate officials and their families, between whom and the

authorities on the Mexican side existed the most amicable relations, and in a brief period Brownsville became a city of importance second to none in the state.

For a period of three and a half years, a never ending stream of cotton poured into Brownsville, thence into Matamoros, thence to the wharves of Bagdad. Ox trains, mule trains and trains of Mexican carts, all laden with cotton coming from almost every town in Texas, many from Arkansas and Louisiana wended their weary way to the commercial mecca of the Southwest. Speculation was vast and immense fortunes were accumulated by men in the cotton business.

One instance of many: In 1861, Col. M.T. Johnson of Tarrant County and the Rhine brothers, Jewish merchants of North Texas, formed a partnership and bought all the cotton in the North and East Texas market, paying 10 cents per pound Confederate money, which at that time was current at par. They next bought three hundred wagons, each capable of carrying ten or twelve bales of cotton. Eighteen hundred yoke of oxen--six yoke for each of the three hundred wagons--were purchased with yokes, bows, chains, etc., to draw these three hundred wagons with their freight and over 3000 bales of cotton. They subdivided these into trains of twenty-five wagons with an experienced wagon master in charge of each train. Time, distance, and expense were factors seemingly without reckoning. A train loaded at Pittsburg in East Texas, Sept. 1, 1862, reached Brownsville, July 22, 1863.

For these trains there was no dearth of teamsters before reaching Brownsville. That point once reached, many would escape into Mexico and the return trips were always short on drivers. The outbound trains had no difficulty securing teamsters. The Conscript law was in force and thousands preferred driving an ox team to service in the army. School teachers, college professors, society dudes became ox drivers. They would enlist with Johnson and Rhine who would have them detailed to drive their teams. This firm continued to haul cotton to the Rio Grande until the close of the war, bringing government supplies on each return trip and it was current report that theirs was a species of graft in which they were aided and abetted by those in high authority at Richmond. The vast arms of Confederate money expended and the matter of detailing men to drive their teams at thirty dollars a month, "New Issue," gave color to this conclusion.

All roads from every cotton section of the state in the direction of Brownsville converged at King's Ranch, one hundred and twenty-five miles from Brownsville; and during

the spring, summer, and fall seasons, this long stretch of 125 miles became a broad thoroughfare along which continuously moved two vast unending trains of wagons; the one outward bound with cotton, the other homeward bound with merchandise and army supplies. The government exacted a tithe on every bale and the officers in Brownsville were never slow to collect the government toll, as thousands could testify. In 1863, cotton sold for 80 cents per pound in Matamoros and steadily advanced up to the close of the war. Buyers were numerous. They were there from the great manufacturing centers of Europe, New York, Boston, Lowell, Philadelphia and other northern cities were not without representation. These latter came boldly across into Brownsville, plunked down the Yankee gold, received cotton and no questions were asked.

During these days of frenzied commercialism, communication with the outside world was limited. There was no telegraph service in either city. A daily stage line plied between Brownsville and Austin via San Antonio. Passenger fare on this line was 10 cents a mile (gold) and only twenty-five pounds of baggage was allowed each passenger. But notwithstanding the exorbitant charges, the coaches were always crowded to the limit and the owners of the line made a fortune in three years. New York and London papers, received by way of Bagdad and Tampico were called "late papers" although two to four weeks had elapsed since date of issue.

The route from Matamoros to Bagdad lay over a hard smooth road, and like that between King's Ranch and Brownsville was one vast and almost unbroken line of wagons and carts carrying cotton to the gulf shore and returning with merchandise and stores for the Confederacy. Under the neutrality laws war material was considered contraband, but the Mexican Customs officials were human--very human--and were not always immune against the lure of Confederate gold. Huge cases of Enfield guns labled "Hollow ware," keys and barrels branded "bean flour" a new name for gun powder, and percussion caps bearing the legend "canned goods" with cargoes of lead as "Bat Metal," readily passed inspection and were allowed to cross into Brownsville. Illustration of the volume extent and importance of this Brownsville-Matamoros trade is stated on the best authority that while his army was at Little Rock, Arkansas, General Marmaduke received a shipment of 4,000 Enfield rifles which had been purchased in England, shipped to Brownsville via Bagdad and Matamoros and thence to Little Rock, a distance over land of more than a thousand miles.

The number of bales of cotton that lay in the cotton yard in the bend of the river in the upper suburb of Brownsville, November 1, 1863, was estimated at 10,000. As to the correctness of this estimate the writer cannot vouch. He knows, however, that a large area of ground was covered with this staple, orderly stacked, four to six bales in height with alleys or gang ways at regular intervals. Most of this cotton bore the brand C.S.A., although a large percent belonged to individuals and had their respective brands. At all hours of day and night an armed guard kept watch over this cotton, while on the opposite bend of the river, just below Freeport, a suburb of Matamoros, the cotton bales kept lonely vigil and morning sun often revealed vents and gaps in the well ordered ranks of cotton bales, but the sergeant of the guard was tactician and the river flowed on in silence toward the gulf.

First Note of Alarm

The writer does not remember the number of soldiers stationed in Brownsville November 1, 1863. General H.P. Bee was in command and had probably a regiment or more of troops. During all these months and years, no preparations for the defense of the city had been made. Old Fort Brown had long since been allowed to fall into decay. The Confederate authorities doubtless considered fortifications unnecessary. Point Isabelle and Brazos Island offered no facilities for leading an army of invasion. No vessel of heavy tonnage could cross the bar at either of these points, nor could the smallest gunboat ascent the Rio Grande. Hence, why the fortification? Of the men composing the garrison, few had ever heard the crash of Federal guns. Their duties while stationed at Brownsville consisted in the usual routine of garrison life, standing guard, eating, drinking, gambling, answering roll call, drawing their monthly stipend (specie) and chasing men who were trying to get into Mexico to keep out the army.

At an early hour on the morning of November 3, 1863, a runner brought the startling news that a Federal fleet had appeared off Brazos Santiago, 15 miles distant from Brownsville, and that 50,000 men were being landed, infantry, cavalry and artillery, and that a cavalry force of at least 4,000 troops was approaching the defenseless city. General Bee was the first to receive the intelligence from the lips of a trusted scout and there could be no doubt as to the correctness of the report. Orders were hastily issued and the more observant citizens who chanced to be abroad at that early morning hour detected unmistakable signs of confusion and unusual activity in military circles. Couriers dashed

wildly along the streets. The bugles rang out and drums beat the long roll. "The Yankees are coming," said one. "Cortina has broke lose again," said another. (General Cortina was then in command in Matamoros.) By this time, the affrighted populace began to pour into the streets. Inquiry was on every lip but other than flying rumor, no explanation of the real cause of confusion could be obtained. Wagon trains and ambulances heavily laden were next seen leaving the barracks and commissary buildings under which a body of soldiers marched past armed and equipped. "They are going out to meet the enemy and there is going to be a battle," rang along the sidewalks. An officer passing was asked the meaning of this unusual stir. "I don't know. Ask General Bee," was his curt reply.

Presently a company of artillery men were seen rolling their guns off the high bank into the river. This procedure revealed the true situation. The city was to be abandoned to the hated Yankees without an effort towards defense. The people had expected the brave General Bee and his gallant soldiers to make some show of resistance, and if over-powered to secure at best favorable terms for the non combatant citizens. But when they saw those guns go over the embankment into the river, their hopes went with them. The last gun to go was a fine 64 pounder. Judge Bigelow approached the young artillery officer in command and said: "Lieutenant, what does all this mean?" "I am obeying orders, Sir; ask General Bee," was his reply. About this time dense black volume of smoke began to ascend from the bend of the river just above town. The cotton yard was on fire. A detail of men with flaming torches had hastened through the narrow alleys between the ranks of cotton bales and right and left had scattered the blazing faggots and in a few brief moments the greatest cotton depot in all the South land was wrapped in a surging swirling holocaust of flame.

Rumor was swift to announce that this was the work of a large body of Federal Cavalry which had passed around to a point above the city and had directed their first attack upon the cotton yard. No one suspected, no one believed that the Confederate authorities would burn the stores of cotton in that yard.

The announcement that the cotton yard was burning, and the dense pall of smoke that began to spread over the city threw the people into a state of utmost dismay and excitement. Men, women, and children crowded into the streets begging and pleading to know the worst. Public attention had been directed and fixed upon the burning cotton yard and few had noticed the new peril that was springing up

almost in their very midst. The elegant quarters erected by the government long years ago for her officers and soldiers were situated in the lower edge of the city and the parade ground or reservation fronted on the river just against, and below, the main ferry. These buildings were wooden structures and while the public mind was engrossed and appalled over the burning of the cotton yard and the hasty flight of the hasty flight of the garrison, the cry rang out: "The barracks are on fire--the government buildings are burning." This indeed proved to be true. The costly buildings, soldiers' quarters, officers' residences, hospital, magazine, commissary buildings had all been set on fire by the departing troops and were now flame wrapped, and the panic stricken citizens realized that their city was doomed.

As on all like occasions, the wildest rumors flew with increasing exaggeration from group to congested throng. "Ten thousand drunken negro troops are moving on the city; they were seen three miles from town. They are led by E.J. Davis; the city is to be pillaged and burned and the inhabitants put to the sword in retaliation for the hanging of Colonel Montgomery," was the burden of most imaginative alarmists. And the statement gained credence as it spread with electrical speed and effect over the city.

The rear-guard--if such it may be called --left the city, followed by the fierce imprecations of a maddened, betrayed people whose only safety now lay in sudden and precipitate flight to Matamoros. But the sullen river lay between them and the haven of refuge.

Terrible Scenes at the Ferry

There was but one ferry opposite the city, the Freeport crossing being a mile above and now cut off by the burning cotton yard. On the American side of this ferry opposite to the city, the approach to the ferry landing at the water's edge was through a deep cut in the high bank extending from the river's margin to the level of the street. This cut was thirty or thirty-five feet in width. A small flat boat propelled by oars was usually in service at this ferry but on this occasion a small steamboat was brought into requisition.

By one common impulse this ferry became the objective point of the fleeing terror-stricken citizens. Those wishing to save their most valuable household effects from the impending destruction, found the utmost difficulties in securing means by which to get their chattels to the ferry. Everything in the shape of a vehicle commanded, or rather exacted, the most exorbitant prices, even to the extent that

many gathered a few of their most valued belongings, abandoned their homes and fled to the ferry where the congestion soon became so great that men and women fought for priority in loading their chattels on the boats. Mexican owners of skiffs charged \$5 gold for each passenger that passed over in their frail craft; those availing themselves of this mode of transit being mostly women and children whose fathers and husbands remained to superintend the shipping of their household belongings--a vast stream of which poured into the cut at the ferry until it was filled from the water's edge to the street and even to the curb on the opposite side; a vast accumulation of clothing, bedding, trunks, musical instruments and furniture of every description from the cultured homes of the wealthy, and the cottages of the poor.

When the last squad of soldiers passed beyond the suburbs of the town all order was at an end. The canaille of Brownsville and the Rateros from Matamoros emerged from the dankish precincts of their concealment, and the work of the robber and the incendiary began. The first to be plundered was the burning commissary buildings which contained an immense quantity of government stores. Despite the approaching flames these stores were carried away in large quantities by the howling mob, among whom were many American citizens and a number of deserters from the ranks of the fleeing Confederates. While these government buildings were burning, such was the state of excitement and the intense desire to get across the river that few thought of the magazine, the roof of which was now ablaze. But suddenly there came a crash--a deafening detonation--a concussion as if heaven and earth had come in collision. The magazine had blown up. Men and women on the side walks, in the streets, and those keeping vigil over their effects at the ferry were shocked, stunned, and many thrown to the ground. A scantling nine feet long was hurled across the river and driven with great force through the gable of the Mexican Custom house. A boy standing on the river bank just below the ferry was blown to mid-channel of the stream and drowned.

The force of the explosion filled the air with fiery missiles--burning shingles, lumber, etc., and these showered down over the city. The vast accumulation of household goods in the cut at the ferry took fire and the place soon became a roaring furnace. The buildings, mostly of brick just back of the ferry and fronting on the river took fire and the holocaust threatened to become general all over the city. Women and little children screamed with terror and despair when they saw the flames consuming their possessions in the cut, but there was no remedy, no rescue, and the encroaching

heat drove them from the scene and within a few hours that cut was a smoking Gehenna, filled with twisted iron, the remains of pianos, stoves, sewing machines, and other incombustible matter.

A Reign of Terror

Finding that all authority had vanished and order at an end, the criminal element sallied forth and the spirit of pandemonium became rampant. Every pelado that nursed a grievance real or imaginary against the hated gringo or against a paisano came out in the open and helped swell the ranks of the howling rabble among whom,--be said with shame--were a number of our own countrymen drawn into the vortex by the prospect of spoils. Bodies of mounted Mexicans, yelling demons, swept along the streets, shooting into houses, stores, and the panic stricken throng along the sidewalks. Saloon doors were forced and entered by these mounted bandits who rode up along side the bars, took whatsoever they fancied, shot up the wares and bar fixtures, and retired to make room for others. For an American citizen to show himself in certain quarters of the city meant assassination at the hands of these desperate thieves and rateros. Men were shot down in their homes, in their yards, and on the streets. The city was at the mercy of the thieves, outlaws and murderers, and the grito, "Mueren a los gringos," rang out above the unearthly din. Stores were looted, residences plundered and it will never be known the amount of property carried away or destroyed or the number of lives sacrificed on that fatal day.

The inference must not be drawn that the Americans were the only sufferers on that occasion. The mob had no respect for nationalities and the better element of Mexican citizens suffered alike with their American friends and neighbors, with whom they stood shoulder to shoulder in the attempt to suppress rioting, and in the restoration of order.

Judge Bigelow, an old veteran who had served under General Scott in Mexico and who was yet suffering from an ulcerous wound inflicted by a cooper shot at Contreras, aided by a few bold courageous men, rallied the citizens for defense, and an effort to suppress the prevailing disorder.

A messenger was sent to General Cortina calling for help. "This is your fight; not mine," said the bandit general, but he sent two companies of men to see that no one crossed from the Mexican to the American side of the river.

The mob defied Judge Bigelow and his party. A French

officer serving under Marshall Bazaine then at the head of the French army of invasion in Mexico, and who chanced to be in Brownsville when Bee retreated, was overheard to say to Judge Bigelow, "Your force is sufficient; a mob never fights." The bandits satiated with blood and laden with plunder, were driven out of town, order was partially restored, and Brownsville lay in ruins.

Federals Occupy Brownsville

On November 2, 1863, the Federal fleet carrying Nathaniel P. Banks' army of 5,000 men arrived at Brazos Santiago where, owing to natural barriers, the transport were forced to cast anchor a mile or more from the beach. Two regiments of cavalry were sent ashore as an advance guard, horses and men being forced to swim or wade to the mainland. The infantry came next, wading to their armpits. Governor Jack Hamilton who accompanied the expedition as "Military Governor of Texas" informed the writer that when Banks' men got ashore at Brazos Santiago there was not a dry cartridge in the entire division and that General Bee with one hundred men could have captured the whole army without firing a gun. General Franklin's defeat at Sabine Pass by a mere handful of Confederates on September 9, preceding, would have been collapsed by the complete destruction of Banks' army, if Bee had displayed any qualities of generalship.

Finding it impossible to get the artillery ashore at this point, the transports were moved around to Point Isabelle where the guns were landed and rejoined the army several days after it had reached Brownsville.

On the morning of the 3rd, the great pall of smoke that hung over the city gave Banks to understand that there was unusual commotion in Brownsville, and in the afternoon his scouts reported the Confederate forces in full and hasty flight in the direction of King's Ranch, leaving a path of smoke and flames in their wake. But Banks was in no condition to give pursuit and on the 5th his division entered Brownsville and went into quarters for the winter.

Wanton Destruction of Cotton

As related elsewhere, the road from King's Ranch to Brownsville was lined with cotton trains, slowly, wearily, bearing their fleecy cargoes to market. By order of the Confederate commander, every bale that came within reach of the retreating army this 125 mile stretch was rolled off, the bailing this cut, and the match applied. Word of the approach of these cotton burners outran the fleeing army and

was passed along, even as far as King's Ranch, and many trains escaped by leaving the main road and seeking concealment in the mazes of the dense chapparal that lay to the westward, where they remained unmolested until the gallant army had reached the "line of frontier defense" wherever that may have been--after which some of the trains resumed their course and went into Brownsville, while others crossed into Mexico above the limits of the Federal patrol.

A Pathetic Incident

Illustrative of the terrible suffering entailed by this unwarranted destruction of cotton, the writer will relate one instance of several that came under his immediate observation during that deplorable period:

A few weeks prior to the fall of Brownsville, he had occasion to spend a night at King's Ranch and camped with a train of twenty-five wagons freighted with cotton and enroute to Brownsville. It proved to be a "neighborhood" train, jointly made up and owned by citizens, or more properly speaking, women and children living in one of the counties of Arkansas that bounded on the Red River. Old white haired men, young boys and a few old trusted negro uncles drove the team of this train. One of these old men pointed out one wagon carrying six bales of cotton and drawn by six old plow nags. With the help of her little half-clad children, a mother whose husband was with Lee in Virginia had raised one bale of cotton; another mother in like conditions had raised two bales, another one bale, and yet another two bales--six in all. One had an old wagon, another owned a span of old plow horses, yet another a span, and by hiring another span they were able to fit up a wagon and team jointly and load their cotton for a market nearly a thousand miles away. The old men, ever handy with tools, patched the old wagon, a new spoke here and a new felly there and hewed from the forest timbers with which to fashion them. The old plow "gears" were overhauled with a link in the trace chains where needed and rawhide thongs for repairs of the breeching and buckboards. An aged father, too old to go into the army, volunteered to drive the team, sell the cotton in Brownsville, then worth 80 to 90 cents in gold--purchase shoes for mother and little children, cotton cloth and "factory thread" for the women, and a few pounds of coffee for grandmother and grandsire and other various sundry articles of supply. The entire train, so the writer was informed, was made up this way and in most instances each bale represented a separate ownership, and on the whole this cotton was the product of the sweat and unremitting toil of tender women and little children.

These old men and boys represented the rarest spectacle the writer has ever beheld among his own countrymen. The men were unshaven, unshorn and there was not a whole garment of apparel in the whole company. The scant garments they wore hung about them in rags, strings, strips, and streamers, and when they moved about each bore the appearance of a bundle of old rags and tatters in motion,

But these old men and boys were cheerful and happy. They had been on the road several months; no evil had befallen them; grass was good; their teams were in fair condition--and they were within one hundred and twenty-five miles of Brownsville--the promised land of so many fond hopes, where past toils and hardships would be forgotten, their rags replaced by respectable attire, and supplies purchased for the dependent loved ones at home.

They day after the fall of Brownsville, the writer, with others, had occasion to go out some distance along the road leading to King's Ranch and over which the retreating column of Confederates had passed the day before. The air was yet laden with the odor of burning cotton and the pall of smoke that hung over the landscape. The dismantled wagons, and the half-consumed, yet burning bales, the forlorn and woeful look of the teamsters,--all these gave mute evidence of the fearful ravages under the thin guise of expediency. But the saddest spectacle was yet in store. On Jackass Prairie, four miles from Brownsville, and in full view of the church spires of the two cities, they came upon the camp of those people from Arkansas with whom the writer had camped but a few weeks before at King's Ranch. General Bee's forces had met them at this point, and with ears closed to all pleading in behalf of the Southern mothers who had planted, cultivated and gathered this cotton with their own fair, tender hands while their men folk were away fighting with Lee and Jackson--despite all this, their cotton was rolled off, the ties cut, the torch applied, and the troops pushed forward to the next train. The writer found these old men sitting around as if in a stupor, while the boys wandered aimlessly about, silent, morose, and as if trying to comprehend the enormity of the calamity that had engulfed them in the general ruin. With tears coursing down his venerable face one of these old fathers said: "The loss falls so heavily on so many. They had toiled so hard and so long and they are so poor and needy. And to think we were so near our journey's end. I don't know how we can ever go back home. To go back empty will be awful--and besides, as you see, we have nothing to wear and winter is near and in all our company there is not so much as two dollars. I don't know why General Bee would

want to burn our cotton."

Laredo the Confederate Gateway

The occupation of Brownsville during the winter of 1863, failed in its main Federal objective--to cut off the cotton shipments into Mexico. True the arrival of Bank's army checked the movement for a brief season, but when the spring of '64 opened, the road leading to Laredo were thronged with cotton trains, and the little village high up on the Rio Grande suddenly sprang into prominence as the greatest cotton shipping point in the South. The Federals sent an expedition from Brownsville against this point, but Benavides with his regiment of cavalry, nearly all Mexicans--drove the enemy back, and the cotton trade continued in its increasing volume until the evacuation of Brownsville in 1864.

Hunter goes on to say that the destruction was not wholly General Bee's fault as he received orders from higher up on what to do. He believes Bee took no graft but died a poor honest man. Also, he says Williams' Border Ruffians was an authentic account except for a few minor names.¿

Pan American Univeristy at Edinburg

ENDNOTES

¹Walter Prescott Webb, Editor-in-Chief, The Handbook of Texas, V. 1 (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1952), 865-66.

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CHARLES STILLMAN CIRCA 1847 (from GEORGE W.
BRACKENRIDGE BY SIBLEY)

Bagdad

"Lost City" Of The Rio Grande

by

Alan Hollander

The old priest did not mince words. Except for a twinge of sorrow over the death of some individuals, he could not hide his glee. "El castigo de Dios," he said. A raging storm in 1867 was God's punishment upon the Gomorrah of the Rio Grande. The priest was Rev. P. F. Parisot and the city was Bagdad. It was devastated as a killer hurricane wiped it off the face of the earth. Decadent? Sinful? All existing accounts (and there are very few) would tend to suport this. But there was more, much more.

Bagdad was a city that is very much part of the heritage of the Rio Grande Valley. Located on the mouth of the river in Mexico it played a key role in the history of the Civil War and Mexico. Founded in 1840 as a port for Matamoros it acquired its name from North Americans who called it Bagdad because of its desert-like apperance. Previously, it was simply called Boca del Rio (Mouth of the River).

An early account of this city can be found in a newspaper of the day called American Flag. In 1847 editors of this publication commented on "the inventive genius of its people who could live and acquire money without performing any labor or showing any visible signs of gaining a living." They explained that "Their invention was merely to attract all who came to the mouth of the river into Bagdad where money was extracted by means of liquor, decoctions, cards, dice, threats, smiles and caresses, or, these failing, by more potent means, such as club, dirk and pistol." This newspaper went on to say that "Seabathing was the greatest attraction of this new city and is undoubtedly the most, and possibly the only, innocent diversion offered in this town of 'commerce' where fandangos were held every night and women, beautiful as 'houris,' exhibited their charms without the least reserve."

For a few brief years, Bagdad continued on in this manner until things started to slow down and it lapsed back into its original state of a settlement with reed huts occupied by Mexican fishermen and herdsmen.

Bagdad: A Crucial Civil War Port

Life trudged on slowly in this small habitation until, in 1861, the United States found itself embroiled in the ravaging Civil War. Crucial to the efforts of the Confederate army during the war was "Confederate White Gold," commonly known as cotton. This was traded for everything from guns to drugs with England and Europe. The Union army was well aware of this dependency and wasted no time in putting a naval blockade on the Gulf coast, virtually crippling the Confederacy.

However, the maintenance of a huge European textile industry depended on the cotton, so a neutral port was sought out where this trade could continue unimpeded. It did not take very long for entrepreneurs and agents from Europe to discover Matamoros. Here, there was a neutral port, one that could open the channels for commerce and evade the Union blockade so that there could be a continuance of the trading of cotton for the fabricated materials of war. This port of Matamoros was Bagdad.

Soon, this city became the back door of the Confederacy. This collection of reed huts soon bristled with life. There are some authorities who claim that half of the entire cotton trade was carried through Bagdad. Ships and steamboats were sailing under the Mexican flag which all but rendered them immune to the volleys of Union cannons. As an added precaution, English ships stood guard in the Gulf.

One example of Confederate trade is of special interest to the history of the Valley. On May 1, 1863, Charles Stillman, Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy set up a contract with Major Charles Russell, quartermaster of the Confederate army in Brownsville. These three men furnished food and other supplies for 2,000 troops in exchange for 500 bales of cotton per month. In 1863, this had a value of \$125,000. The meat delivered was from the King and Kenedy ranches. This trio put the cotton on their ships and steamboats and, sailing under the Mexican flag, landed in Mexico. This proved to be of prime importance in the handling of goods for the confederate war effort.

The Bagdad Boom

As a result, Bagdad grew at a phenomenal rate. Wooden shanties and warehouses were constructed overnight to accommodate the rapid increase in population. When buildings could not be constructed with sufficient speed, tarpaulins were stretched over poles and became open air restaurants by day and warehouse space by night. Confederate sea captain

Raphael Semmes reported in his memoirs:

"And Bagdad, on the Texas border, as full of them as an ant-hill is of ants; and the human ants were quite as busy as their insect prototypes. Numerous shanties had been constructed on the sands, out of unplanned boards. Some of these shanties were hotels, some billiard-saloons, and others grog-shops. The beach was piled with cotton bales going out, and the goods coming in. The stores were numerous, and crowded with wares. Teamsters cracked their whips in the streets, and horsemen, booted and spurred, galloped hither and thither. The whole panorama looked like some magic scene, which might have been improvised in a night. The population was as heterogeneous as the dwellings. Whites, blacks, mulattoes, and Indians were all mixed. But prominent above all stood the Yankee. He kept the hotels, marked the billiards, and sold the grog."

To understand the importance of Bagdad at that time, one has only to examine the financial status of cotton along the Rio Grande. At the beginning of the war, it was ten cents a pound in East Texas. By the time 1863 rolled around it had dropped to six cents and then plummeted even more than that. This was the result of the blockade, the sinking of Confederate currency and the gloom of war. In direct contrast, the prices paid for cotton in Matamoros explains why no obstacle could halt the shipment of this resource through the forbidding conditions of travel through the South and Texas. In August 1862, the going rate was sixteen cents per pound and this steadily increased until the year 1865 when the price had skyrocketed to \$1.25. This growth was reflected in the number of cargo ships. In September 1862 there were 20. Late in 1864 and early 1865 this grew to a staggering 200 to 300 ships.

It seemed that nothing could stop the wagon trains as they weaved their way through the deep South leaving behind a trail of snow in the form of cotton, remnants of the thousands of bales en route to Bagdad. Bagdad became so important that it had the first telegraph line in the area, before Matamoros, Brownsville, or Point Isabel (now Port Isabel)

A New Element in Bagdad

As if all of this activity weren't enough, there was yet another growth factor in the expansion of this city. With America locked in a bitter Civil War, Napoleon III decided to revive his dream of an overseas empire and in 1864 sent over the Austrian Archduke Maximilian to take over as the Emperor

of Mexico. This resulted in fighting between scattered bands of Mexican troops dedicated to the elected president of Mexico, Benito Juárez, and armies of French, Austrians and Belgians. One can easily imagine what this element added to the texture of Bagdad, for Bagdad was the major port of northern Mexico.

Don Paulino S. Preciado, the publisher of El Porvenir, one of the first newspapers in South Texas, reports on the state of Bagdad at this time: "Men (had come) from every country in the world with strange tongues and languages. The actual population of the town was approximately 25,000." (Most accounts that I came across while researching Bagdad pin the population at 15,000, but there are some that put it as high as 35,000). Preciado continues, "Streets were narrow and winding, and business buildings and warehouses, saloons and hotels, residences and a few schools were all of wood. No brick buildings were to be seen."

Bagdad was ridden with constant brawls, stage coach robberies, street fights, knifings and shootings. What else could be expected in a town crowded with such diverse nationalities as French, German, Italian, English, Yankee, Confederate, Austrian, Spanish, Irish, Belgian, Mexican, Hungarian and Indian? In addition to all of this, it must be remembered that the port was smack in the middle of the American Civil War on one side of the border and the Mexican Liberals fighting the European Imperialists on the other. Bagdad was a vital link to all involved in commerce and war.

The Reverend P. F. Parisot offers his opinion and experiences in Bagdad, "The cosmopolitan city of Bagdad was a veritable Babel, a Babylon, a whirlpool of business, pleasure and sin. A common laborer could easily gain from five to six dollars per day, while a man who owned a skiff or a lighter (a boat that could sail in shallow water) could make from twenty to forty dollars. The saloon and hotel keepers were reaping an abundant harvest. The Gulf, for three or four miles out, was literally a forest of masts. Ten stages were running daily from Matamoros to Bagdad." Parisot goes on to relate numerous times that he was held up by highwaymen in his stagecoach travels between Matamoros and Bagdad.

Clarksville: Across From Bagdad, War Through The Eyes of A

Child

Personal testimonies of the residents of Bagdad are difficult or even impossible to come by. However, there is an interesting and stirring account of life in this area written by Miss Grace Edman in 1966. This is a tale of the experiences of Theresa Clark Clearwater who grew up with her five sisters in Clarksville, directly across the river from Bagdad. Clarksville was named after her father William H. Clark who served in the United States Navy for six years. He was the superintendent of General Taylor's post at the mouth of the Rio Grande.

The Clark children had a serene life. Even the early years of the Civil War presented no real obstacle to their happiness. But by the year 1863, the village of Bagdad across the river started its staggering growth. Most of the residents are described by Mrs. Clearwater as "the scum of the earth." It was at this time that life became difficult for the Clark family, caught in the crossfire of two conflicts. There were times when Federal gunboats would appear off the coast and the entire family would have to evacuate to the sand dunes. Other times, French warships would fire at Bagdad only a few hundred feet away. Many shells hit on the Clarksville side causing much damage. All this despite the fact that Clarksville was neutral territory. Mrs. Clearwater reports that on other occasions, French and Austrian soldiers would come across the river to look around, and, although they did no harm, their very presence scared the Clark children "beyond measure."

The Confederates were in control of Brownsville, but the Union was in control of Brazos Santiago (near Boca Chica Beach). The Liberals were in control of Matamoros, but the Imperialists were in possession of Bagdad. "All this resulted in a cross-fire of bullets at almost any time." Add to these wartime incidents, the Negro raid on Bagdad (described later in this article), raids on their house by Mexican bandits and hurricanes, and there emerges a life filled with threat of danger at almost any moment.

The Final Days

The Civil War was over, and the last battle had been fought at White's Ranch, four miles up the Rio Grande from Bagdad. Due to a lack of communication this battle was fought almost a month after peace was declared. Now the once-thriving city lost its purpose. The trade disappeared, and the multitudes of people left. Maximillian was executed, and the Juaristas stood victorious over the Imperialists,

which meant that the Europeans were going home.

On the 5th of January 1866, Bagdad was raided by 200 negroes from the Union army. They went entirely out of control, possibly under the influence of mescal, and for three days they went wild. There was extensive looting, pillaging, raping and general pandemonium. They were finally stopped by a combined effort of the Mexicans, French and Austrians.

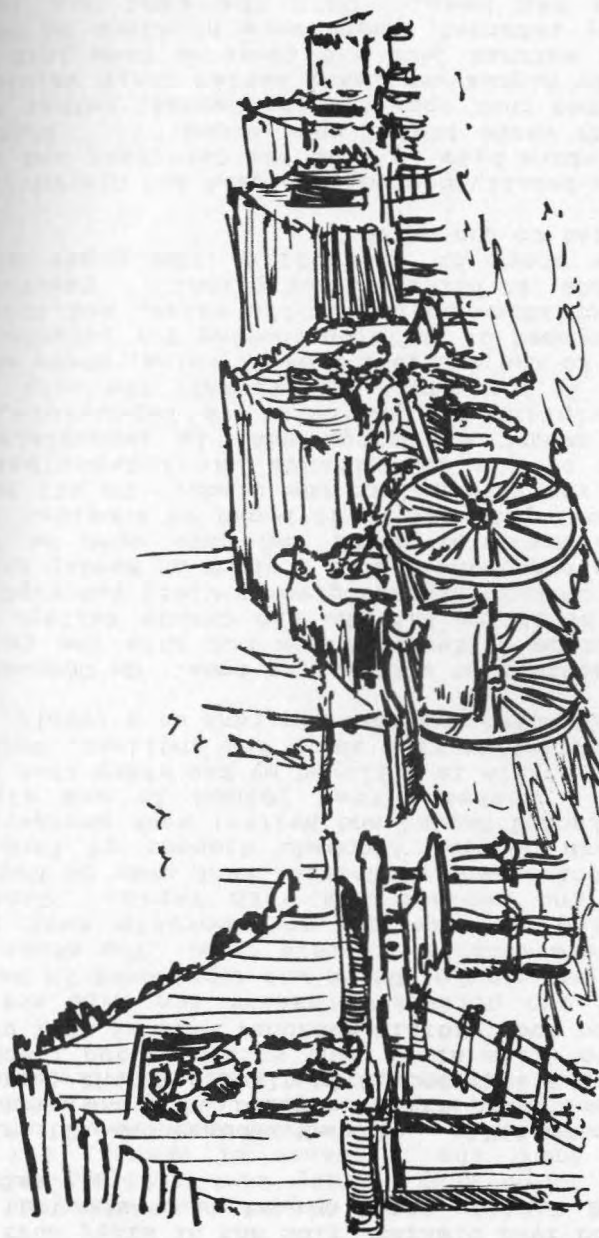
I encountered two different reasons for this action. One was that there was news of Union men imprisoned in Bagdad and these troops were sent to liberate them. The other was that Juárez decided to take the governorship away from Servando Canales and replace him with Tapia. Canales resisted, and the Union General Weitzel sent over 50 Negroes to help the Mexican General Escobedo dispose of Canales. They mistakenly attacked Bagdad and Weitzel sent another 150 men to stop them. Instead, they joined in and almost destroyed Bagdad. This is followed by the story that when Escobedo went to Weitzel to talk about the incident, Weitzel attempted to stab Escobedo and lost his rank as a result.

This was a precursor of what was to come. On October 8, 1867 (I've come across different dates but this one is the most prevalent) a hurricane hit the Rio Grande Valley. An account in the San Antonio Express gives a vivid description: "A terrible hurricane commenced at 9 o'clock on Monday night. It sounded like a knell of death and came upon us very suddenly. About half past twelve it began to subside. One third of the city was thrown into the winds. On all hands the consternation of the inhabitants was indescribable. To calculate the amount of damage done is impossible at present. A description of the ruins is impossible, so completely leveled is the city. At present, the only view which is presented to the eye is a mass of ruins, above which a weeping crowd composed of children looking for parents and parents bemoaning children buried in the ruins, and friends searching for friends; it baffles description. Describing the effect of the storm on Brownville, the paper said, "Brownsville is razed to the earth."

This hurricane totally destroyed Bagdad and Clarksville. In 1874, a second storm blew in from the Carribean and left nothing but a beach where Bagdad once stood. What is left? It is reported that upon fleeing Bagdad, rather than risk being robbed by highwaymen, many buried their valuables by putting them in earthen jars and lowering them into pit toilets. When they returned, there were no signs of where those pit toilets had been. Only the sand was left.

There are a few artifacts. Bits of furniture, horseshoes rusty from years in the Gulf, ceramic beer bottles, some gold coins that washed up to the beach after a few years and not much else.

Sr. Eliseo Paredes Manzano, a Matamoros historian told that there was a building on ninth street and Matamoros (in Matamoros) that was built with wood from a destroyed building in Bagdad; but he doubts that it is still standing. All we have left is some recorded history, but not much.



A two-wheeler
in Bagdad

24

ARE THERE TUNNELS UNDER BROWNSVILLE?

by

Alan Hollander

Growing up in Brownsville's historic Miller Hotel was impetus enough to keep a young girl's imagination active. There seemed to be so many places to explore within its 19th century walls. Think of it. Great men such as Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee reportedly slept there--and the hotel held a great many secrets, in keeping with Brownsville's rich history.

One of these secrets got a young girl, Rachel Perelman--now a respected realtor--into a great deal of trouble when she was eight or nine years old. "My father used to own the old Miller Hotel," she related from her desk in her Brownsville office. "I lived in it until I was in high school. "I was close to two of the hotel's residents. One was an old doctor--whose name eludes me although I loved him dearly--and the other was Judge Kinder. They told me stories about an old tunnel under the hotel and how there was a lot of activity down there. The stories were really neat."

Her eyes took on an introspective air as she reached back into her memory, pulling those long-past thoughts into the present. "They told me that Juan Cortina and his soldiers would come into Brownsville through the tunnel so they would not be seen." In the middle of the old hotel was a charming enclosed patio with staircases leading to the building's upper terraces, flower beds, and a boarded up area underneath one of the stairways. One day, Rachel and two of her girl friends gave in to a child's natural tendency to explore and began prying open those boards. What they found has haunted Mrs. Perelman throughout her adult life.

"There was a concrete staircase," she related without the slightest hesitation, becoming a young girl again as she recalled that day. "It was not very wide, I remember that we walked down quite a few steps. We found ourselves in a concrete tunnel. I distinctly remember that it was not brick because the walls were grayish. We had candles and handlamps and proceeded to walk. "We weren't pretty far into it. I recall that I could not see the opening when I looked back. There was no standing water but there were many cobwebs and I remember seeing Spanish writing on the walls. I can't think of what it said but there were quite a few initials."

The young girls looked back and saw Rachel's father

standing behind them. "He was scared," Mrs. Perelman said. He made them go back and made sure that his daughter never entered that place again. "I don't know what he said to me. Maybe that there were tarantulas or spiders there, I'm not sure, but it had an impact and I never went down again."

Mrs. Perelman told Horizon that she walked about 30 feet into the tunnel and that it continued on as far as she could see in the direction of the river. "The stories say that these tunnels went into Mexico. How could they be true?" Mrs. Perelman commented. "How could a tunnel be built under the river? However, great historical discoveries are made all the time and we wonder how these things were accomplished.

"Tales of these tunnels have been circulating for years. A lady told me that when the convent was closed down they found a tunnel there too. Recently, a man named Martinez Webb came into the office and told me that his great-grandfather built the hotel with Mr. Miller (Henry Miller began construction on the hotel in 1848. His partner was John Webb and the hotel was once called the Miller-Webb House.) He said to me, "Don't let anybody tell you that the tunnel doesn't exist, because it does." Mrs. Perelman looked slightly disconcerted and concluded, "I sit up at night thinking about the tunnel. I would do anything to find out where it led. There's got to be some way of finding out."

I left Mrs. Perelman's office, her concluding statement running through my mind. "There's got to be some way of finding out." The more people I called, the more tales came my way. Not only was there allegedly a tunnel under the Miller Hotel (which was razed in 1968), but there were reports of tunnels in other structures, some still standing and some destroyed, such as the Forto House, the Immaculate Conception Church, City Hall, the San Fernando Hotel, the old convent, the Roser Building, the Wortman House, the Monterrey Bar, the old Yturria Bank, Catedral Nuestra Señora del Refugio and Casa Mata in Matamoros, plus a number of other buildings.

The reports were so numerous, that I wondered why I hadn't read any documentation of the tunnels before. Totally sure of myself, I called on Robert Vezzetti, president of the Brownsville Historical Society. "It's most suspicious," he answered after listening to my verbal dissertation about the tunnels. "I doubt that they exist." He continued, "This area has a very high water table, making the possibility of constructing an underground tunnel quite

unlikely. In fact, during the Fort Brown bombardment of 1846, they called the Mexican cannon the "Swamp Angel". That would obviously indicate a swampy area, with a water table even higher than exists today."

Vezzetti continued his friendly swiping at my speculation with solid facts. "It really makes me wonder why these tunnels weren't discovered before with all the construction and digging that has gone on in Brownsville. You'd literally fall into them. When they recently dug up City Hall for the new bus depot, they dug pretty deep and didn't find any tunnels. "Brownsville is not a town to keep secrets. And if someone made such a major historical find such as a tunnel, there would be a great deal of hoopla about it."

I asked Vezzetti to comment on the reports I encountered about people entering tunnels. "Many alleged tunnels are simple cisterns. They are bricklined and well-built to hold water. A youngster may see one, tell his dad, and the father may have joked around saying, 'Oh yes, that's a tunnel that goes to Mexico' or whatever. "There are few buildings even with basements in Brownsville. In fact, when they dig a swimming pool here, they have to continually pump out the water. A water table such as the one found here makes a tunnel pretty impractical. The water constantly lowering and rising could make it collapse." He continued, "The Sanborn Company platted out this community for years with maps that date back to 1877, giving detailed descriptions of sections of Brownsville. These maps showed wells, outhouses and cisterns, but gave absolutely no indication of tunnels." Robert Vezzetti lit his pipe, blew a puff of blueish smoke into the air, and concluded, "If a tunnel were found, it would open up a whole new chapter in Brownsville's history. It would be a fascinating find: I'd love for someone to find one--but I don't think anyone will."

Bruce Aiken, another respected Brownsville historian, who is past-president of the Brownsville Historical Society and a past-chairman of the Cameron County Historical Commission, agrees with Vezzetti, "Chatfield (in "The Twin Cities of the Border" by W.H. Chatfield, 1893) indicates that there was an eight-foot water table, and it went higher than that at times. I know that when they dug the basement for the old Federal Building they had to pump like crazy. "Most of the old buildings here had underground cisterns. In order to keep their kids out of them, grandparents used to tell them mysterious stories. The tunnels make a romantic story. We'll always have them with us because grandma said that it's true."

George Samano, life-long Brownsville resident, owner of Quality Printing, and publisher of The Brownsville Times, had a printing company in the old Forto House, formerly located at 625 East Elizabeth across from the Sacred Heart Church. "Oh, yes, there was definitely a tunnel under there, I was in it myself," related Samano. "We were bringing in some equipment and knocked a hole in the floor. That's when we discovered it. There were about four layers of brick and the passage was big enough for a wagon to pass through.

"I went about 20 feet into it but didn't go much further as I was worried that it might collapse. It went deeper, much deeper. There was about eight inches of standing water. The walls were made of brick and the ceiling had supporting arches. "We found all kinds of things down there such as bottles, pottery, old silverware, plates--we had boxes and boxes of it. Someone once told me it went to the old convent."

Robert Vezzetti commented on this particular find. "Yes, I saw it. There was a brick-lined pit with arches--very well constructed. I did not go down into it but personally believe that it was a large cistern, because if it would have been a tunnel, the rest would have been discovered with all of the digging and construction that had gone on in that area. Possibly, the arch I saw could have separated two large cisterns." The Forto house was razed in the late 70's.

"About 10 years ago when we were digging up streets to build the Goodyear store on Levee street we found something," related Donald Ferguson, owner of Ferguson Construction. "We cut down along the alley and saw what might have been a tunnel running towards the old convent. It was made out of brick with a curved, vaulted top. At the most, it was four feet high. The width was about four or five feet. To go through it, you'd almost have to crawl. From what people have told me, I understand that there are many of those in the area." Ferguson continued, "No one investigated. I don't know if it was an old cistern or what. There was no water. We just saw the opening and sealed it up. Its ceiling was about three or four feet under the streets and its floor went to about seven or eight feet. "People say that they've run into that type of thing before, but that was the only one I'd seen with my own eyes." A cistern? Possibly. A continuation of the alleged tunnel running from the Forto House to the old convent? Unfortunately, it's too late to find out now.

The stories of Mexican bandits, bootleggers, and

citizens fleeing for safety through numerous tunnels under Brownsville and Matamoros crawled, uninvited, into my dreams and waking thoughts. Deciding to look for myself, I felt I would be able to either prove or disprove this theory--sworn to by many people, but looked upon with suspicion by knowledgeable historians. I picked up the telephone, and spoke--through underground cables--to Father DeGeorge of the Immaculate Conception Church in Brownsville. I related to him that I had come across stories of a monument in the church courtyard, on Jefferson Street, being an entrance to an underground tunnel. I added that there are other tales that tunnels run from the church basement to the old convent, numerous hotels and houses, and the river.

Father DeGeorge is not a man to mince words. "They don't exist here," he said. "Yes, in the monument in question, there are stairs leading down to a tomb. When the church was renovated, we removed the bodies and I know for a fact that the tomb was sealed and went no farther. "Concerning a basement, well, there is no basement. Regulo Rosales, a man who has worked in this church for 30 years, never saw any evidence of tunnels through all the many renovations. There are no holes in the ground."

Investigating a statement that a tunnel led from the old Yturria Bank on 1255 East Elizabeth, I spoke to Fausto Yturria, whose family still owns the building built in 1854. "There is an earthen cellar, but no tunnels," related Mr. Yturria. "I suppose people in the building used it to hide money from bandits or to protect themselves during hurricanes. But I've looked all around and there are no tunnels." He wished me good luck in my search and hung up the phone. "On to the next call," I thought to myself and forged on with another lead.

In order to find out if any evidence of possible tunnels was found in the recent Market Square renovation, I called Joe Rubio, construction superintendent for Ferguson Construction. "We went to seven feet in some places and found nothing that would connote there being a tunnel. We came across bricks, but if those came from a tunnel, I can't say. Most of these old buildings sit on a foundation of adobe brick. "You hear so much about tunnels all over town. Workers have told me that they saw a tunnel under the old convent but I never saw it. There's a trap door in the Monterrey Bar at 11th and Adams, but I have no idea where that leads. The bar is now closed."

He concluded, "A lot of the old-timers swear there's a

tunnel coming from under the San Fernando Hotel. We dug close to there but found nothing." I made contact with the owner of that building, who asked to remain unidentified, and he said, "You ask about tunnels under the San Fernando. I'll tell you one thing. There are definitely tunnels down in that basement. That's the truth. They were bricked up years ago, because people were using them to go from store to store. They were robbing and it was becoming a nuisance. They're blocked up, but they do exist!"

He granted me permission to look for myself. I called Larry Brown, director of Planning and Community Development for the City of Brownsville and Frank Bejarano, senior city planner. We grabbed some flashlights, a couple of screwdrivers, put on some old clothes, and crawled down into the depths of Brownsville under that building, reportedly constructed in 1877. The basement was dark, hot, and one had to bend over in order to walk around. The beams and brick were very old. What we found was quite frustrating. The area of the basement that we were in was apparently altered. Assuming that the ceiling was about five and one-half feet high, the inner walls where we stood only came up four and one-half feet. Peering into that one-foot open space at the top, we found ourselves looking at the original foundation walls of the old hotel, in some places, close to 20 feet away from us. The spaces between the new inner wall and the older outer wall were totally filled with earth. To investigate further would require ripping up the building's foundation signifying a dead end for us. The three of us crawled out, dirty and disappointed. Afterwards, we attempted to enter the Monterrey Bar across the street from the San Fernando, only to find it locked up.

Undaunted, we told ourselves that there were still other leads to be followed. Frank Bejarano and I drove to the Roser Building located at 400 East 13th Street. We were told that there was originally a tunnel leading from this building, one of the oldest in Brownsville--built in 1814 when this area was still Mexico--to a building across the street, now the Aldaña Travel Agency. This latter structure was once the Webb Pharmacy and a reliable source told me that there was evidence of a connecting tunnel.

Al Roser accompanied us down into his basement and guided us around the low ceilinged historic cellar. We examined the beautiful old brick work, and grills to the street. In fact, we found everything except evidence of a tunnel.

Trudging across the street, Frank and I coerced Juan

Kenigstein, president of Aldaña Travel Agency, to fulfill our unorthodox request and allow us to examine his basement. We literally had to slide down some boards to get there. After a thorough look, we said our goodbyes and left. Our curiosity satiated, our knowledge of Brownsville basement structure more complete, but our discovery of personal eyewitness evidence about the elusive tunnels under Brownsville still unsatisfied.

Speculating that if I could prove that tunnels existed in Matamoros, in a similar water table and land composition as Brownsville, then it would strengthen my determination to explore further on this side of the river, I went to Casa Mata, a fort constructed in 1845 to stop Zachary Taylor on his march into Mexico. I approached the caretaker, Ruben Moncada, and in barely communicative Spanish, told him of my quest. "Si, Si!" he said. His response had the effect of a shot of adrenalin into my veins. Moncada took me to the back of the fort, pointed through an arched doorway, and down about six or seven feet at the most perfectly preserved tunnel entrance I could ever imagine. To add some whipped cream to the dessert, he showed me a second, identical entrance.

He related that the now bricked-up tunnel entrances were used primarily by Juan Cortina and General Mejia (Maximillian's general). One entrance led to the Catedral Nuestra Señora del Refugio (the old church built in 1833 on the main plaza of Matamoros), and the other entrance went to the old bridge. He added that the entrances were bricked up in 1969 by Ing. Oscar Guerra Elisondo. I was elated; finally I had found two tunnel entrances. There was no doubt, they could not possibly have been anything else.

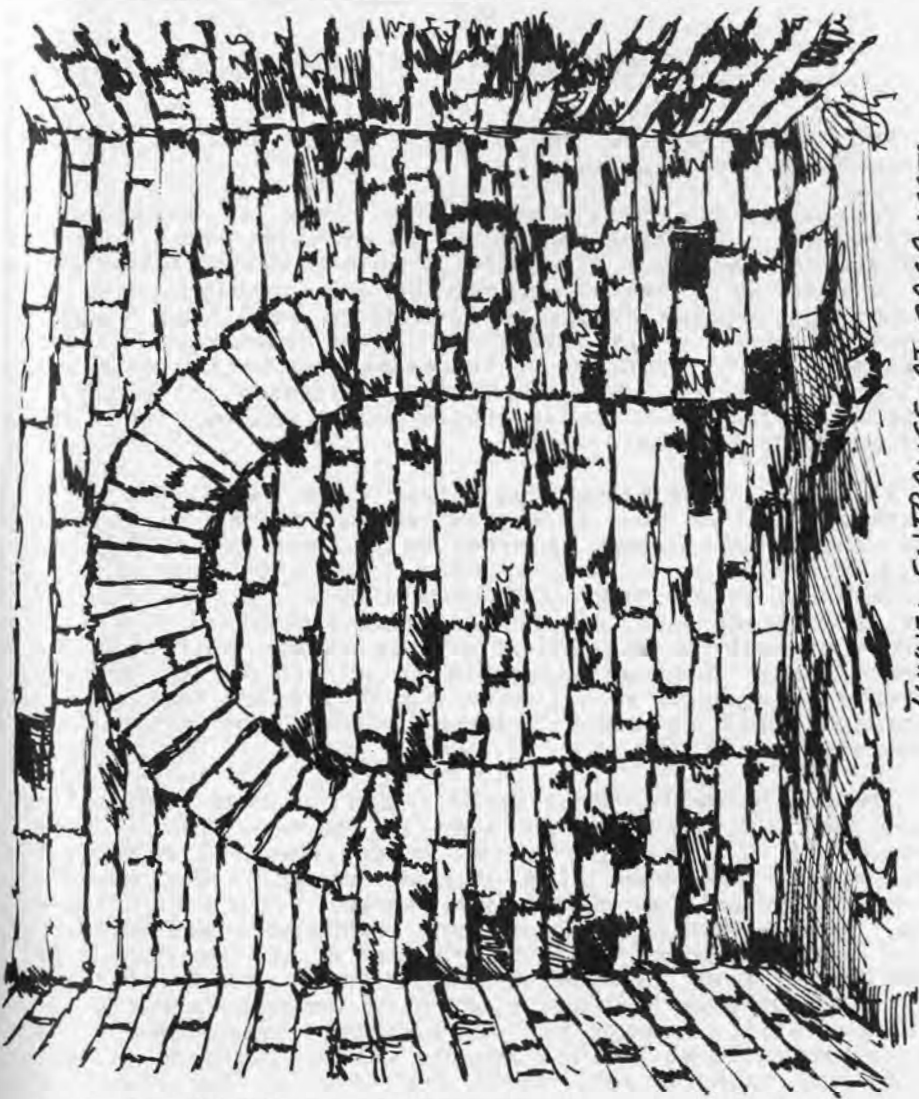
Upon returning to my office, I called Eliseo Paredes for verification. He is the foremost authority on Matamoros history and founder of the Casa Mata Museum. The elderly man greeted me cordially and patiently listened to my story in his Matamoros residence. "That's just a fable," he said, immediately deflating my historic balloon. "There is no evidence that those tunnels run to the church or to the bridge. If you look at an old map of Matamoros, you will see that trenches surrounded the city for defense reasons. That trench ran about 100 feet from the fort and that is where those tunnels led. "Casa Mata was built on a hill and because of that they were able to build those tunnels. If you go down a few feet, you hit water. You can't possible sink a tunnel there. "There is no scientific basis to what you are saying," he poignantly concluded.

Still, I had to go to the Matamoros church and find out

for myself. If there was a tunnel entrance there, maybe it could shed some new light on the situation. I called the Catedral Nuestra Señora del Refugio and asked the lady who answered the phone about permission to go into the basement and look for tunnels. "Of course," she answered. "There is a basement, and I believe there are tunnel entrances as well. Come on Friday."

I contacted Frank Bejarano and off we went with a flashlight, camera, notepad, and a lot of anticipation. We spoke to Martin Guerra, general vicar of the church who is a life-long resident of Matamoros and has worked at the church for 22 years. He politely listened to our request, then answered, "There is no basement in this church. There's too much water in the ground. They are doing some construction down the street and have gone down two or three meters and have hit water already. Sorry." Frank and I walked to some other offices in the church and spoke to Padre Jesús López, pastor of the church who has been there for 11 years. "I've heard about a tunnel from here to Casa Mata," he said, "But have never seen it. Besides, there's no basement in this church."

Feeling somewhat dejected, and thoroughly confused, from the stories we've heard and the evidence we could not find, we departed--still wondering, still speculating, still dreaming.



TUNNEL ENTRANCE AT CASA MATA
IN MATAMOROS WHICH USED TO LEAD
TO THE TRENCHES SURROUNDING THE CITY

El Belga
Leyenda Matamorense
por

Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda

Fué G.... uno de los belgas que vinieron con la expedición de Maximiliano.

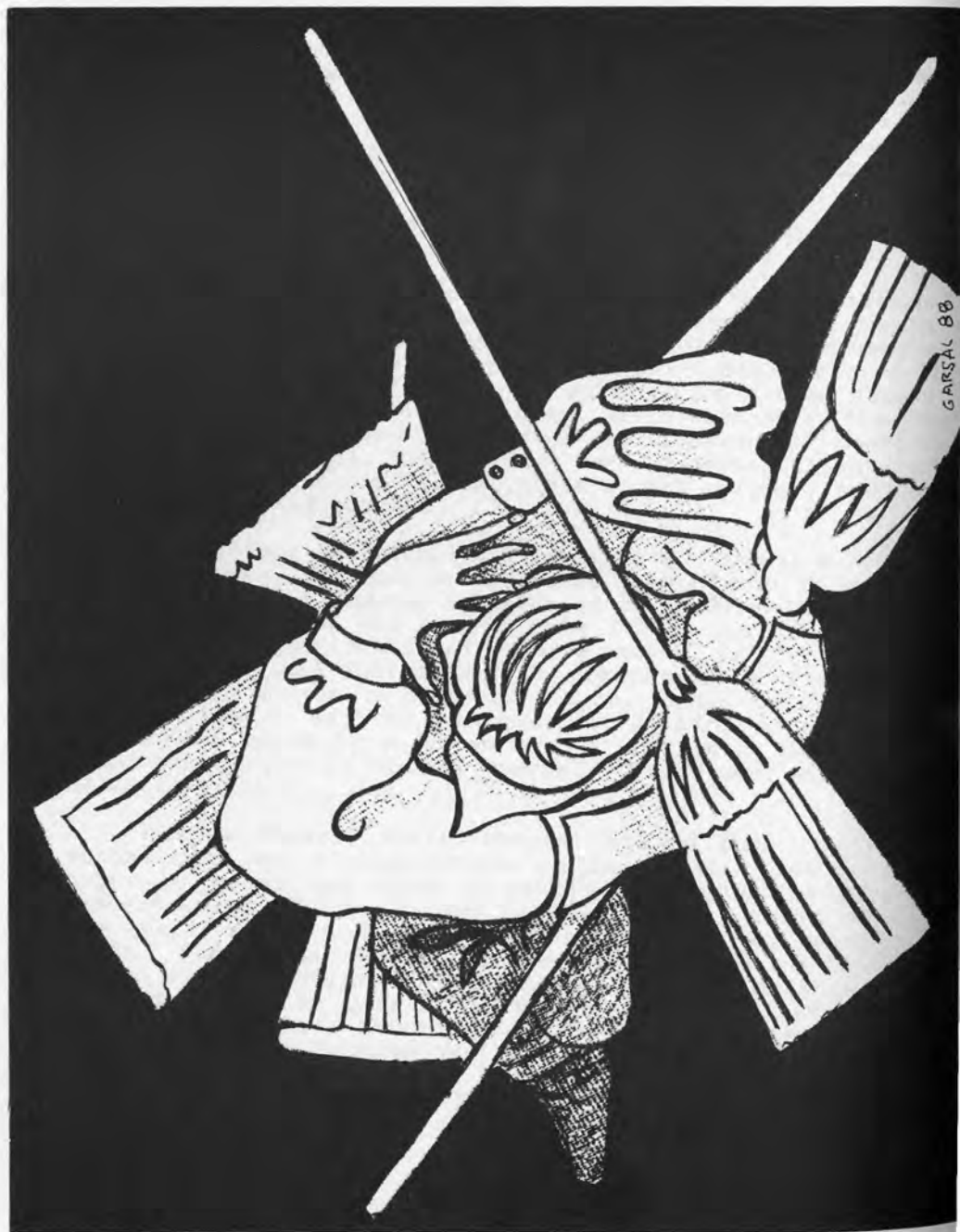
Terminada la guerra quedóse a vivir en Matamoros. Pacíficamente y sin mencionar nunca su aventura vivió y murió en Matamoros. Aprendió el español y lo hablaba pasablemente; sólo cuando se exitaba --raras veces-- hablábalo a lo gabacho: sin vocales finales y acentuando la última sílaba. Fabricaba escobas y las pregonaba callejeramente: "¡A las buenas escobas!" Pero si le regateaban mucho las comadres replicaba: "¡No cara. Buen scob!" Por lo demás, trabajador, apacible, honrado, sin vicios, tenía muchos amigos y era bien visto por todo el pueblo.

Sucedió por ese tiempo que falleció don Manuel N. Murió repentinamente, y, como de costumbre, expusieron su cadáver en la sala. Las puertas abiertas de la casa mortuoria, las negras colgaduras, el estrepitoso llanto de los deudos, anunciaban al pueblo todo el funébre suceso. G...., que por dicha calle transitaba, un hato de escobas sobre el siniestro hombro y una escoba en la diestra mano, entró contrito en la doliente casa. Dejó su mercancía en un rincón, se destocó reverente y se sentó en silencio. A su llegada cesaron los cuchicheos sobre la súbita muerte. Tras unos minutos de silencio habló G....:

"¡Pobre Manuel! ¡Murió Manuel! Era un buen ciudadano: votaba cada año y nunca estuvo en la cárcel. Fué un buen hijo: yo lo ví que cuidó a sus padres hasta los últimos instantes que vivieron. Fué un buen esposo; todos sabemos que quería mucho a su respetable esposa, hoy su respetable viuda. Fué un buen padre: dió buena educación a sus hijitos. Fué un buen vecino: nunca echó la basura en los solares de su alrededor. Fué un buen amigo: siempre hacía los favores que podía. Fué un buen cliente: siempre me compraba escobas..." al llegar allí, acosado por un recuerdo desagradable, se exitó y prosiguió su oración fúnebre de la siguiente manera: "¡Pero, ah, "disgraciad", tenía una "vac" y esa "vac" se comía toda mi "spig" y no me "dejab" ni para una "scob"..."

No terminó; los dolientes y presentes lo tomaron de los brazos y lo pusieron en medio del arroyo. Tras G.... salieron por el aire y certeramente le pegaron de los pies a la cabeza, las "scobs"...

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros



Late 19th Century





BROWNSVILLE CITY CEMETERY

by

Robert B. Vezzetti

The Brownsville City Cemetery, deeded June 5, 1868, contains the remains of some of the earliest Latin and Anglo settlers of the eastern end of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The inscriptions on tombstones, crypts, and masuoleums are mute testimony to the dangers and vigors of life in the Brownsville area in the Mid-nineteenth century. Bandit raids, gunfights, Mexican War, Civil War, yellow fever, cholera and a soldiers rebellion all took their toll.

The cemetery, enclosed by a five foot, double brick wall, is the most history-revealing of any of the many historic sites in the area. Its large number of above-ground crypts, massive ornate monuments and elaborately decorative iron work fences which marks off many old family plots, typify the Spanish-French influence in this border area in the mid-nineteenth century.

Once located at the edge of the original townsite, but now well within the city limits, the cemetery is bounded by Second Street, Madison Street, Fifth Street and an unnamed resaca (lagoon).

County records show that this was the second city cemetery. The first was established in 1848 when the townsite was first laid out.¹ This site was poorly kept and it soon became apparent that there was need for a new and larger location. As a result of this condition the City of Brownsville minutes, dated April 20, 1850, reflected concern by the City Fathers as "On motion of Alderman Nelson, seconded by Alderman Dougherty. It was resolved that a committee of three be appointed to take into consideration the condition and situation of the City Burial Place and that the Committee be instructed to report as early a day as possible such improvements as in their judgement may be deemed necessary to the protection of the same." The committee report, dated April 24, 1850, stated "Your Committee are of the opinion that it would not be expedient to enclose or grade the present square as its bounds are not sufficiently extensive to warrant the city in retaining it to its present use and also that its contiguity to the settled part of the city renders its further use as a burial ground incompatible with the generally received opinion in relation to public health.

"Your committee have visited what in their opinion seemed a suitable place to be occupied in future as a public cemetery (sic) and would recommend that the spot selected by them to the extent of two squares of ground be fenced in and dedicated to that use and that there be suitable measures taken to remove the remains of those who are interred (sic) in the present cemetery (sic) to the new Graveyard when it shall be enclosed."²

It is not presently clear when the first burials were made in this cemetery as research shows that earliest City Sexton's book in file dates back only as far as 1860. Other records indicate that the first cemetery was "abandoned in 1864." A map dated May 1864, "done by order of Major General F. J. Herron, Commanding, Army of the Frontier, Texas," shows the "road to Corpus Christi" crossing this burial site.³

Cameron County deed records show this land actually was deeded to the city years after the city council records show the use of the land as a cemetery. On June 5, 1868, Charles Stillman, founder of the original townsite, "Set apart, devoted, and dedicated for the purpose and object of a cemetery" this tract.⁴

For several years after the cemetery was established, the city could not generate funds with which to fence the area. In 1863 a cactus filled trench and a hedge of chapparal served as its boundary marker. A December 2, 1863, entry in a diary kept by a Fort Brown soldier named McIntyre read, "It is perhaps a half mile north of the city and is a beautiful place for the last resting place for the dead. It is hedged around by chapparal and cactus . . . the graves mostly covered by masonry. I noticed a couple of graves of (army) officers who had died at this place during the Mexican War."⁵

With no funding available from its own resources to fence the area, the city enlisted the aid of the Catholic Church, the Order of Odd Fellows, and the Freemasons to assist in the project. Cast iron fences and gates, with organizational names, still mark sections of the cemetery but use is no longer limited to these organizations.

The inscriptions on the crypts and headstones, written in English, Spanish, French and German, show an impressive cosmopolitan mixture of nationalities and the many locals within the then young United States from which people who died, in this then remote place, had come. Birthplaces recorded include Spain, Mexico, Norway, United States, France, Ireland, various German states, Austria and Scotland.

A section of the cemetery also contains a number of paupers' graves. However, lots in this section were apparently never designated as such. In 1893, W. H. Chatfield noted the considerable number of poor in Brownsville in proportion to the total population. His detailed account of city expenses from 1880 to 1889 revealed that nearly a thousand paupers had been buried during that nine-year period, "the coffins only being charged to the poor, and the services of the city sexton being put down under "Parks and Cemeteries."⁶

A partial list of those whose remains lie here, including the important and powerful, the "common folk" and ordinary citizen, reflect the typical makeup of a mid-19th Century Texas-Mexico border city and the roles they played in their lifetime include:

Rev. Hiram Chamberlain 1797 - 1825, father of
of famed rancher, Richard King

Santiago Brito 1851 - 1892, noted sheriff, a
legend in his own time, killed by an assassin

Joseph Webb 1851 1933, City Treasurer 1871-
1878, City Marshall 1888 - 1891, Cameron
County Clerk for 34 years

Henry Field 1842 - 1909, leading merchant

Dr. Charles Combe 1834 - 197 Doctor, community
leader

Celedonio Garza 1851 - 1911 Civic leader

Sarah Sherwood (England) 1813 - 1888

M. J. Gomila (Spain) 1836 - 1885

Israel Bigelow 1811 - 1869 First Mayor, first
Cameron County Court Judge

Robert Kingsbury 1816 - 1887 First Tax
Assessor

Victory Egly 1892 - 1912 Confederate Navy

William Neale 1833 - 1859 shot during the
Cortina raid, son of one of the earliest Anglo
settlers

Col. M. Dennett 1819 - 1867

John Vivier 1846 - 188

Baby Fernandez "She came and went on St. Valentine's Day - 1914"

Henry Maltby owner of the first city newspaper, mid 1850's

Dr. Charles Macmanas (Ireland) 1824, Assistant surgeon to Andrew Jackson, served under General Zachary Taylor 1846

Delia H. Kimball, 17 years, yellow fever September 19, 1858

Harriet N. Kimbah, 42 years, yellow fever September 21, 1858

Robert Lee Landrum 1863 - 1883

Mary Alice Sharkey, 4 years old, yellow fever

Henry G. Douglas 1864, 4 years old, yellow fever

Dr. Max Foster (Germany) 1863

Stephen Powers 1814 - 1882 Political and Civic Leader

Arnold Melou (France) died 1876, age 17 "un jour nous revera"

Little Dudley age 4 years, "went to join the angels"

San Ramon tomb (Spain) 1871 and 1890

Ben Kowalski, Brownsville mayor 1910 - 1912

Louis Kowalski, arrived in Brownsville 1861, served 40 years as Cameron County District Clerk

Other names, many of whose decedents still reside here, further trace the history of Brownsville: Cueto, Woodhouse, Cavazos, Celaya, Bouis, Dalzell, Browne, Fernandez, Longoria, Rentfro, Putegnat, Garcia, Yturria, Shodts, Hanson, Butler,

Ortiz, Pacheco, Treviño and many others.

Adjacent to the walls of the City Cemetery is a small walled section known as the Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery. On May 21, 1868, for the token sum of one dollar, Charles Stillman, Samuel Belden and William G. Hale deeded their tract of land to the Hebrew Benevolent Society of Brownsville and Matamoros for use "as a burial place and sepulture for those entitled." Representing the Society were S. M. Blun, B. Kowlaski, J. Alexander, B. Kunagel, George Meyers and Adolph Marks, all prominent in the Brownsville community at the period. Prior to this date members of the Jewish Community were buried in Matamoros, Mexico as there was no Hebrew Cemetery in Brownsville. Joseph Alexander, who participated in the transaction was one of the first to be buried there when he was killed by a bandit on August 11, 1872.

Both cemetery sites remain in use by the families of Brownsville.

The City of Brownsville maintains its section of the cemetery and the Hebrew Benevolent Society is responsible for the Hebrew section.

ENDNOTES

1 City of Brownsville, Texas Planning Dept., Historic Map file

2 City of Brownsville, Texas Original Minute Book 1, 1850 - 1858

3 Bay, Betty, Historic Brownsville: Original Townsite Guide BHA, Springman-King Brownsville, Tx 1980

4 Cameron County, Texas, Deed Records, supplement B, pp 333-335

5 Bay, op. cit. pg 199

6 Lieutenant W. H. Chatfield, Twin Cities of the Border and the County of the Lower Rio Grande, New Orleans: E. P. Brandas, reprinted by BHA, 1959 pg. 14



Dan Hatcher
1898

The PALM GROVE - RABB PLANTATION

by

Ruby Wooldridge

It was in 1519 when the first Spanish explorers first saw the grove of wild, native palms clustered along the banks of the Rio Grande some seven miles east of present day Brownsville. But exactly which Spaniard was the first to view the future site of the Rabb Plantation is a point of some debate.

What is known is that Hernando Cortez and Alonzo Piñeda were both commissioned to claim the land that is now Mexico for Spain. Through a series of political and military maneuvers Cortez drove Piñeda away from the area around Veracruz and its entrance to the riches of the Aztecs.

Forced northward, Piñeda sailed along the coast until he came to the mouth of a large river which was flanked by tall palms. He named the river "Rio de las Palmas." After spending a month at the river's mouth and exploring its westward course, Piñeda returned to Jamaica. Giving glowing reports of the area he convinced the governor of Jamaica to mount a second expedition, headed by Diego de Camargo, to the area. The attempt at a colony failed as Indian attacks soon drove the Spanish away.

Was the Rio de las Palmas the river we know today as the Rio Grande? Some evidence casts doubt on this claim. Some old charts reflecting the area from Pánuco to the Espíritu name no river mouths. No mention of a land mass (South Padre Island), an important item to both explorers and sailors, is made on the early maps. A 1554 map depicts the Rio Soto La Marina as the Rio de las Palmas and the Rio Grande as the Rio Bravo. Further research is necessary to clear this mystery.

What is known about the Palm Grove area is that the land was owned by Petra Vidal, who was married at an early age, to Col. Luis of the Mexican Army. She had five children of which four daughters survived. After her husband's death, Petra married Mifflin Kenedy. Their daughter, Maria Vicente, married Fred Starck, Sr. Starck was a Union officer during the Civil War. Their daughter Lillian, granddaughter of Petra Vidal, married Frank Rabb. Rabb was a professional baseball player from Corpus Christi. The plantation, consisting of 20,305 acres and extending along the river past Santa Maria, was developed between 1876 and the 1890s by Frank Rabb and his brother-in-law, Fred Starck, Jr. The

original plantation included some 200 acres of palm forest, much of which was left intact. The plantation produced cotton, grain, all types of vegetables, and sugar cane. The cane was milled at the Rio Grande Plantation which was built by George Brulay.

The house was constructed of bricks made from river mud with the large corner concrete bricks brought by boat to Point Isabel and then by mule train overland to the plantation construction site. It was a beautifully furnished home with a marble mantel over the fireplaces which occupied each room. The home was considered a social center for the area.

After the termination of his marriage to Lillian Starck, Rabb married Margaret (Peggy) McCormick. After Rabb's death, the land was sold, in 1957, to Ben Vaughn of Corpus Christi.

To his credit, Vaughn maintained both the house and the grove of rare native palms. With a challenge grant from Exxon Corporation, 172 acres of palms, adjacent to the Rio Grande, were acquired by the National Audubon Society (1971). The Society's Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary was established to preserve 32 acres of the grove and its wildlife.

However, life at the plantation and its adjacent areas was not always serious business. In 1930 a rather "off the top of the head" film entitled "Death Along the Delta" was shot at the Palm Grove. An amusing account of the production can be found in the "Rattling Yours - Snake King" by W.A. King, Jr.

Texas Southmost College

ENDNOTES

Interview Mrs. Annie Starck Heaner

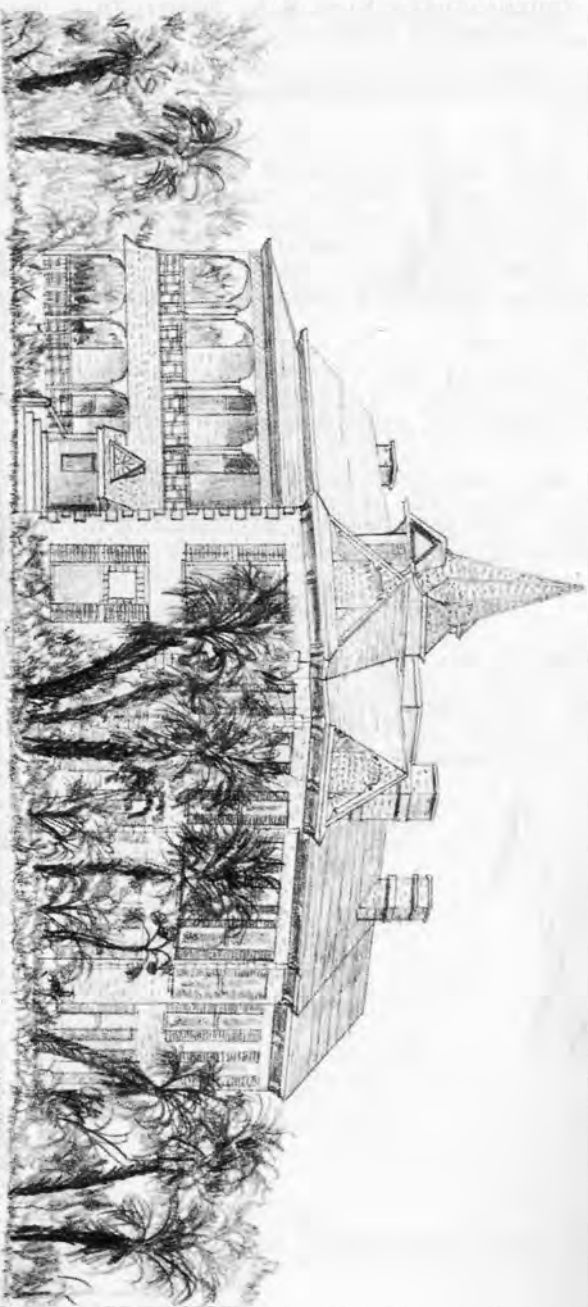
Interview A.A. Champion

Interview Ernest Ortiz

Subual Palm Grove Sanctuary, The Sand Dollar, No. 1, Vol. 1
Spring 1984

Rattling Yours--Snake King W.A. King, Jr., Springman-King
Lithograph Company, Brownsville, Texas, 1964

Papers Mrs. Harbert Davenport



FRANK RABB HOME CIRCA 1892
SABAL PALM GROVE SANCTUARY

The Ongoing Saga of The "Rio Bravo"

by

Alan Hollander

Just down river from the Gateway Bridge, hidden from the eyes of the traversing public by a characteristic bend in the river, is a pile of wooden refuse. It sits in the water, on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, shielded from pillage by overgrown vegetation, making human approach quite difficult.

Few, in the day-to-day rush of modern times, pay heed to this pile of wood and nails that juts out of the water like a submarine about to surface. However, this was not always the case. There was a time, following the War Between the States when this curiosity was not a discarded heap but a government vessel; one which was often at the center of controversy in the early days of the wild frontier town of Brownsville.

According to conclusions made from historical data, all indications point to this wooden protrusion being the Rio Bravo, an American gunship which still sits in the spot where it sank, over 100 years ago.

To properly understand the steamboat's reason for arriving on the river in the first place, it is necessary to backpeddle slightly. After Benito Juarez was reinstated as president of Mexico in 1867, thousands of Mexican troops were sent to the northern part of their country. These individuals, although in the service of Mexico, were left with little means to support themselves. The memories of the Mexican-American War were an unhealed scar on the minds of residents on both sides of the border. Feelings of the Mexicans to the Americans, and vice versa, were to say the least, strained. This situation led to a serious problem. Thieving raids, in which cattle were rustled to the Mexican side of the border, became commonplace. Add to this the racial tensions, and one can see how the foundation for turmoil became the undertone for life on this rugged frontier.

General E. O. C. Ord, commander of the Department of Texas, suggested that a naval vessel would "be better than a regiment of cavalry to stop the marauding." On June 9, 1875, President Grant gave the order that the Navy, "station one or two naval vessels at or near the mouth of the Rio Grande."

In a Southwestern Historical Quarterly article entitled, "Intrigue on the Rio Grande," by Michael G. Webster, a concise description of this boat is given:

"The vessel selected for this distinguished mission was the U.S.S. Rio Bravo, a 20-year-old Alabama steamboat formerly named the Planter, now renamed in honor of the river she would patrol. Although hardly a formidable battleship, the Rio Bravo had four howitzers and one 30 pound rifle gun - more than adequate armaments to handle any opposition on the Rio Grande. Her crew consisted of eight officers and 45 men."

A. A. Champion related, "The steamboat had to be accompanied down here because it was not designed for ocean sailing. One account says that it arrived on October 14, 1875, convoyed by the revenue cutter Dix." However, the Rio Bravo only made one trip up the river. A yeoman on the vessel, Frank Cushman Pierce, published a book in 1918 entitled A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. He related that on her first trip to Santa Maria, 25 miles from Brownsville, but 100 miles upstream by way of the crooked river, the Rio Bravo blew one of her boilers. She was unable to proceed and took advantage of the river's high water stage to float back and to moor near the Quartermaster's Building at Fort Brown.

According to Pierce, the Rio Bravo was later sunk approximately 400 yards south of that point, with the indentation of her hull acting as a breakwater. And that is where the Rio Bravo lies until this day. However, reader, don't pass this one-voyage boat off as a small slice of a rather dull and uneventful history. The Rio Bravo with her swarthy and often drunk Commander was to be part of some intrigues that threatened the lives and property of both Mexican and American Citizens.

The Rio Bravo Affair

In the year 1875, the Rio Bravo found itself moored in the middle of an affair where some United States citizens were attempting to provoke a war with Mexico. Two of the men spearheading this event were Captain L. H. McNelly of the Texas Rangers and his close friend, Commander Dewitt C. Kells of the gunboat, the U.S.S. Rio Bravo.

Some historians express that the reason for this action was to rid Texas of the Mexican border bandits and, secondly,

to extend the boundaries of Texas to the Sierra Madres. Others feel that the financial remuneration of selling arms to the governments involved was primary in the minds of the instigators.

Thomas Wilson, the United States Consul in Matamoros, got wind of the scheme and was, to say the least, appalled. The following is a partial transcript of a "Confidential Statement" (dispatch number 207) sent by Wilson to Hamilton Fish, Secretary of State in Washington D.C., on October 14, 1875:

"It has come to my knowledge that Commander Kells of the United States gunboat Rio Bravo which reached Brownsville, Texas has stated in a semi-confidential way to several persons that it would be arranged to have his vessel fired on by a party of Texans from the Mexican bank, in his first trip up the Rio Grande, in order that he might have an excuse to return the fire . . . ostensibly to arrange the insult of the United States flag, and thus precipitate an armed conflict with Mexico on this frontier. "I am convinced that such a project is actually contemplated and that it has the sanction, and perhaps will have the active support of a large number of persons in Texas, some of whom are men of means who expect to reap large profits in case a war with Mexico takes place by furnishing supplies to the United States Army, and employing steamboats which are now lying idle in the Texas coast . . . There are so many lawless and desperate persons in the Texas frontier who are ready to engage in any enterprise, especially likely to provoke a war with Mexico, and who would equally be ready to resort to any violence to prevent any interference with their projects, that I have to respectfully request you not permit any person to read this statement but yourself, or to let my name be known in connection with it. Otherwise I could not remain with any safety in this frontier."

Comparing the date of the Rio Bravo's arrival and the date this dispatch was sent, it is apparent that Kells wasted no time, upon his arrival in Brownsville, in scheming with "men of means" to precipitate a conflict with the neighbors to the south.

Following some advice given by Wilson in dispatch number 207, a telegram arrived from Washington instructing Kells to remain in Brownsville. Yet, Wilson discovered Kells and

McNelly aboard one of the steamboat's launches on November 7. They were delayed because the pilot failed to arrive, and it was apparent to Wilson that they were attempting to carry out their plans. When Wilson confronted Kells with the fact that he was disobeying orders, Kells sarcastically answered that the telegram read not to go upriver, and he was heading downriver.

The next morning, Kells and McNelly were once again ready to cast off, but the steamer became grounded. Before they could forge a third attempt, another telegram arrived from Washington ordering Kells to desist from further maneuvers on the river. On November 15, Commander George Remy arrived from Washington D.C. to investigate Wilson's accusations. He immediately assumed control of the Rio Bravo. Caution by the Mexican and American governments, and some keen observation from Thomas Wilson, may have prevented a second war with Mexico - one in which the Rio Bravo found itself unwittingly involved.

The Evacuation of Matamoros

Although by May 18, 1876, the Rio Bravo remained calmly moored near Fort Brown, unable to embark on any further trips up the river, it was yet to be part of another incident, this one involving the evacuation of Matamoros. There was great political upheaval after the presidency of Benito Juarez came to an end. General Porfirio Diaz, who would later become president of Mexico, was attempting to incite a revolution, plus other factions were at odds. It is in this climate that Thomas Wilson sent a dispatch to Secretary of State Hamilton Fish:

" . . . About daylight on the morning of the 18th . . . General González sent a communication to the German Consul and myself . . . stating that he confided the safety of the city (Matamoros) and its inhabitants to us until the arrival of government troops under General Escobedo which were supposed to be about 30 miles distant advancing the city. "As the civil authorities had been suspended for sometime, and there was no police force or other organization to maintain order, the action of General González left the city at the mercy of this lawless (element) of its population."

As it is noted in the following correspondence, also dated May 18, 1876, the Rio Bravo, now under the jurisdiction of Commander Johnson, was not yet through playing a part in the history of this area. Thomas Wilson wrote to General

Thomas C. Levine, commanding district of the Rio Grande, Fort Brown, Texas:

"General González has just informed the German Consul and myself that he is evacuating the city and confides its security to us. "I have in conjunction with the German Consul asked Commander Johnson of the Rio Bravo to land a force to protect lives and property of foreign residents, which he will do. "I have also to respectfully request you to take charge of the ferry between this city and Brownsville, and prevent the passage of persons likely to create disorder and to be in readiness to afford military aid in case of necessity."

Wilson signed this dispatch, "Yours in Haste."

After this event, there is no record available to local historians noting any further involvements of the Rio Bravo. However, the Brownsville census of 1880 lists the crew of this vessel, pointing to the fact that it was still afloat in that year. It was eventually sunk. and there it sits, only one of 113 steamboats that once called the Rio Grande home. Its hull is now exposed in another time, another age. As A. A. Champion jokingly related, "The Rio Bravo didn't do much good, but it left its ribs here."

REMAINS OF THE "RIO BRAVO"
A GUNBOAT SENT TO THE RIO GRANDE
BY PRESIDENT GRANT MORE THAN
ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.



HISTORY OF ESPERANZA RANCH: A SIGNIFICANT AGRICULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC SITE, BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS

by

Raymond W. Neck

INTRODUCTION

I first became acquainted with the Esperanza Ranch a number of years ago when I was conducting a literature survey on the insect fauna of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Every biological species, when first described in a scientific publication, has a designated specimen which is the type specimen for that particular species. If any doubt as to the identification of that species ever arises, that type specimen is the ultimate evidence as to what that species really entails. If a future scientist wants to collect additional specimens from the same population as the original specimen, the scientist can go to the locality where the type specimen was collected. This location is known as the type locality. One of the most important type localities of subtropical insects which occur in southern Texas and northern Mexico is the "Esperanza Ranch near Brownsville, Texas." As part of a literature review concerning the insects with the Esperanza Ranch as a type locality, I have encountered an interesting collage of historical vignettes in widely scattered references. Below I present an historical overview of the Esperanza Ranch and its most important resident, Celestin Jagou.

Location of Esperanza Ranch

The site of the Esperanza Ranch is located east of Brownsville along Resaca de la Palma. The historical significance of this site involves the first commercial agricultural efforts by Brownsville residents who were not descendants of grantees of the original eighteenth century Spanish land grants.

The name Esperanza originated with the Esperanza Agricultural Association. Whether the term refers to a feminine proper name or to the aspirations of the organizers of the association ("esperanza" means "hope" in Spanish) is unknown to this writer. The property has always been referred to as a ranch in the scientific literature. However, an advertisement for the property in 1893 referred to the "Esperanza Farm and Banana Plantation."¹

Land Use History

The land on the left bank of the Rio Grande centering on Brownsville and northward to the Arroyo Colorado comprised the Espiritu Santo Grant. This tract was granted in 1781 to José Salvador de la Garza and contained slightly over 59 square leagues. The grant was accepted by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which was the negotiated settlement between the United States and Mexico at the end of the Mexican War. The legislature of the State of Texas confirmed the Espiritu Santo Grant on February 1, 1852.²

The Esperanza Agricultural Association was established in September 1869 by several Brownsville citizens, each of whom contributed \$250 to purchase and develop the tract as farm land.³ The initial planning meeting had been held on August 2, 1868.⁴ Members of the association were Celestin Jagou, Captain William Kelly, Captain Dalzell, Jeremiah Galvan, J. L. Putegnat, and S. L. Brooks. This group purchased the property from another group of South Texans which included Mifflin Kenedy, Richard King, Robert Dalzell, Joseph Cooper, James G. Browne, Alexander Werbiski, and Franklin Cummings. The tract was one mile square (640 acres = 259 hectares) in share 23 of the Espiritu Santo Grant.⁵

The original attempt at farming was not a financial success, however, and the group sold the farm to Jeremiah Galvan (one of the original partners) on February 10, 1875. Following Galvan's death by drowning in the Mississippi River in 1879, Celestin Jagou purchased the property from the executors of Galvan's estate in that same year.⁶ However, legal disputes invalidated that transaction. Celestin Jagou renegotiated purchase of the Esperanza tract on May 27, 1889, with a final trial judgment on November 16, 1889.⁷

Celestin Jagou

Celestin Jagou was born in Lasscube, Department of Basses Pyrennes, in southern France. He attended a school of Christian Brotherhood until the age of 12. Later he learned the liquor distilling business. In 1859, he moved to the United States, living in New Orleans until 1862, when he moved to Bagdad, Tamaulipas. Subsequently, he moved to Matamoros where he was involved in the cotton processing business. At this time Matamoros was the most successful port on the Gulf Coast with a population of 100,000. The cotton economy declined precipitously when the American Civil War ended.⁸

Jagou opened a store in Brownsville where he sold fancy groceries and liquors. This establishment was a success although he suffered losses from raids by soldiers from Fort Brown in 1865 (losses were covered by the United States government) and the severe hurricane of 1867 which destroyed half of Brownsville and Fort Brown.⁹

Jagou married Adolphine Mailhe from New Orleans in 1869. Four children (Christine, Louis, Adolphe, Michael, and Albert) were born to this couple before Adolphine Jagou died in 1880. In 1881 Celestin Jagou married Agatha Bourdet of France. No children were produced by this marriage.¹⁰

Agricultural History

When Celestin Jagou purchased the Esperanza Tract, most of the land was still covered by native subtropical thorn woodlands which formed a "heavy tangle of brush jungle."¹¹ Jagou's cottage was located in a "rich tropical setting of ornamental shrubbery and beautiful trees such as the tall, peaceful palmetto."¹² The native brush was cleared by hand labor; Jagou initially planted the typical crops of the time -- Indian corn, cotton, and pinto beans. He used the first wire fence in the Valley, fastening the wire to stout mesquite posts with hand-wrought staples.¹³

Jagou had learned horticultural techniques required to raise grapes and subtropical fruits in the foothills of the Pyrennes in southern France.¹⁴ Soon Jagou experimented at the Esperanza Ranch in "fruit culture ;of; all the subtropical fruits, as well as those which are grown in California . . ."¹⁵ Jagou also had the "usual large diversified garden such as every French agriculturist has."¹⁶ He harvested 450 bunches of bananas from 11,000 banana trees in 1890,¹⁷ the same year that Jagou and Colonel J. G. Tucker planted the first long-staple Sea Island cotton in the Valley. Plantings produced one-half to three-fourths bale per acre and sold at thirty cents a pound in Liverpool.¹⁸ The cotton was shipped to Liverpool with seed, because gins capable of processing long-staple cotton did not exist in the Valley.¹⁹

In 1895, Jagou planted tobacco at the Esperanza Ranch, utilizing seed from Havana and the well-known Vuelta Abajo district of Cuba. Although the tobacco was susceptible to insect damage, the plantings grew well and samples sent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture officials were reported to be the best Vuelta Abajo tobacco grown in the United States. The tobacco was made into cigars by a Cuban who had a tobacco shop in Matamoros. Although the tobacco plant grew to a

larger size at the Esperanza Ranch than Cuba (over a meter in height and width),²⁰ and produced 4000 to 5000 cigars per acre, the plantings were soon discontinued because no reliable transportation existed to get the cigars to market.²¹

Jagou planted seven acres of oranges in 1891 -- probably the first commercial citrus planting in the Valley. These oranges were shipped from Orlando, Florida, via New Orleans.²² Limes and lemons were imported from Mexico and Italy, respectively. These citrus plantings were successful and well-established until the 1899 cold snap froze the trees below the bud line.²³ Although the trees resprouted the resulting fruit were the Spanish sour orange used as root stock. The 1899 freeze produced the coldest temperature ever recorded at Brownsville. Air temperature on February 13, 1899, was 12 degrees F.²⁴

Jagou brought cuttings of white, red, and blue varieties of grapes (Modoc, Chasselas, and Muscatel from southern France to the Esperanza Ranch where they were planted after being grafted on American rootstock. The vines grew well and produced enough grapes that Jagou was able to make a red claret and a white sauterne each season.²⁵ Jagou constructed wire baskets around the bunches in an attempt to deter feeding by birds, especially whitewing doves.²⁶

In an attempt to "detour the thieving birds," Jagou planted mulberry trees. The existence of the mulberry trees allowed Jagou to experiment with domesticated silkworms, the production of which he had observed in France. Silkworm eggs were introduced and caterpillars "would have thieved except for a small red ant which devoured them as fast as hatched."²⁷

Besides the various crops which Jagou was responsible for introducing to the Valley, he also introduced new or improved agricultural techniques. When Jagou purchased the Esperanza Tract, he reportedly believed "that with irrigation nearly all the tropical fruits can be profitably grown in the lower Rio Grande Valley."²⁸ He had a pioneer irrigation system that consisted of two large brick tanks which delivered water to underground pipes. A large windmill supplied water to the citrus grove. Although the Esperanza tract had been partially irrigated in 1893, the area was expected "to become still more famous for its prolific production of tropical fruits."²⁹

Celestin Jagou died in 1898,³⁰ after which time the Esperanza Ranch was operated by his son, Louis Adolphe Jagou,

Sr. In fact, Louis Jagou was the owner who hosted entomologists from the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in the first decade of the twentieth century. The other children of Celestin Jagou did not remain at the Esperanza Ranch. The sole daughter, Christine, emigrated to France and did not return to the United States. Michael moved to San Jose, California. Albert operated a branch Jagou store in Laredo.³¹

Louis Jagou's marriage to Melvina Schreiber produced four children (Melvin, 1907-1986; Louis Adolphe, Jr. 1904-1971; Joseph, who died of tularemia at age 21; Celestin, who died in infancy). Neither Melvin nor Louis, Jr. (who married Vida Bell Morris of Harlingen) had children. The last Jagou to live on the Esperanza Ranch is Vida Bell Jagou, widow of Louis, Jr., who resides at 201 Jagou Road.³²

Louis Jagou, Sr. saw the breakup of the original Esperanza tract (share 23 of the Espiritu Santo grant). In 1907, 500 acres were sold to J. P. Stephenson and F. N. Crane, followed by a 4.5 acre plot (15 foot strip on east side) which was sold to E. C. Shireman in 1908. In 1910 a 70-acre rectangle was mortgaged; this plot was later sold to E. K. Goodrich in 1913. On December 20, 1910, an easement (.2123 acre) was granted to the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway Company for a spur line to the old Piper Plantation in the Southmost area.³³

Current Conditions

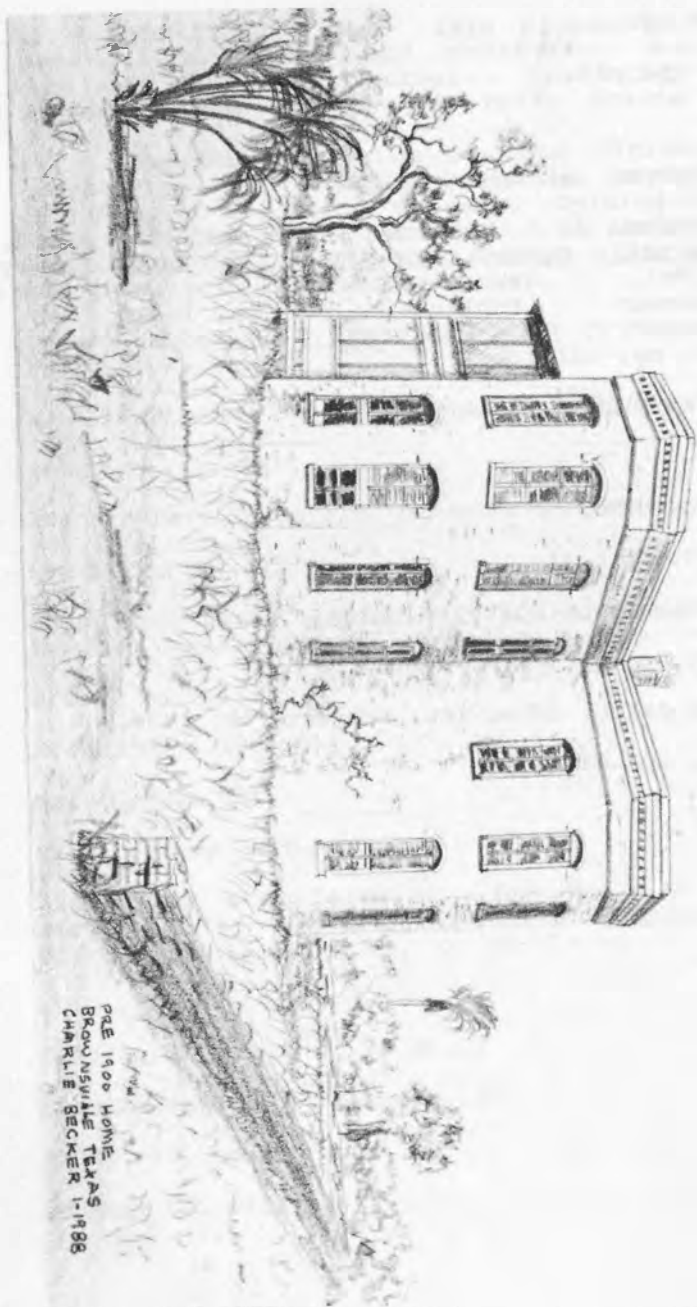
Presently, the Esperanza tract includes agricultural land (citrus groves, row cropland, and pastures), rural residences, new subdivision residences, irrigation water canals, roads (residential streets and farm-to-market highways), and very limited natural habitat still supporting growth of native subtropical thorn woodland. Future survival of the native brush tracts remaining in the Esperanza tract is threatened by continued residential development and a planned major roadway to a proposed new bridge crossing on the Rio Grande. The original natural resources which brought scientific fame to the Esperanza Ranch are almost totally destroyed. Que lastima!

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin

ENDNOTES

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Faith and Saints in Mexican-American Folk Religion

by

Mark Glazer

The Virgin Mary and the Saints continue to perform miracles in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. They do so because the Mexican-American community of South Texas has the faith which makes miracles possible. In this area as elsewhere, Catholic folk religion remains one of the major manifestations of Mexican-American culture.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is situated in the extreme southeastern corner of the state of Texas and includes Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy and Cameron counties. The area has a population of over half a million people and eighty percent of this population is Mexican-American. This paper is based on legends and personal experience narratives collected as part of a survey of the folklore of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and deposited at the Rio Grande Folklore Archive at Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas.

This Mexican-American community, as are all Chicanos, is rich in traditional lore and has a vibrant religious folklife which includes a folk saint who has no official standing in the Church. Two of the most important religious figures in the area are Our Lady of San Juan, resulting in a major marian cult, and a folk saint, Don Pedrito Jaramillo who was a "curandero" (healer) during his lifetime.

These two religious figures are viewed as having distinct personalities which condition their behavior towards humans. For miracles to occur, complete and unquestioned faith is demanded of the supplicants by both of these religious figures. Our Lady of San Juan demands exclusive faith in her powers while Don Pedrito Jaramillo demands unquestioning faith in him from the supplicant. If the supplicant does not have complete faith, his "manda" (request) from the saint may not come true or other and more severe consequences may ensue. This article will examine: A. Our Lady of San Juan, B. Don Pedrito Jamarillo, and C. the similarity in function and personality attributes characteristic of the two religious personages.

A. Our Lady of San Juan

Although in Mexican-American and Mexican communities Our Lady of Guadalupe is usually more important than other

personifications of the Virgin Mary¹, in parts of Mexico and the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas it is a diminutive representation of the Holy Virgin which is more commonly prayed to. Her statues are about two feet tall, and she wears blue and white colored garments. Her name in extreme South Texas and San Juan de Los Lagos in Mexico is "La Virgen de San Juan". The Texas personification is derived from the one in San Juan de Los Lagos in Mexico.

In the folk culture of South Texas, and in many other Catholic cultures, the fact that there is only one Virgin Mary is usually forgotten, and every one of her personifications is viewed as being a different person with her own distinct personality traits. The personality of Our Lady of San Juan is almost diametrically opposed to that of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is viewed as more forgiving. In spite of her diminutive size, it is Our Lady of San Juan who is highly demanding of her supplicants.

The two most important aspects of the relationships between a supplicant and Our Lady of San Juan are exclusiveness and the keeping of one's vows. If a person has a request ("manda"), to make from Our Lady of San Juan, that person must not pray to any other saint. If a person does pray to another religious personage, the request and miracle will not take place. If Our Lady of San Juan does perform a miracle she will hold the individual who made the request to his vow. If a person does not live up to his side of the bargain, the problem which led the person to make the request from the Virgin will reoccur; for example, the individual will become sick again and suffer from the same malady. There is also a belief which claims that if an individual does not pay his debt to the Virgin that he will become a ghost after his death.

Our Lady of San Juan may have learned how to heal as the result of an incident which took place during her childhood and which is told as an etiological narrative:

"One of my Grandmother's stories was the "Story of the Virgen de San Juan and the Chickens." My Grandmother use to tell us that long ago when the Virgen de San Juan was a little girl, she used to live with her grandmother. According to my grandmother, the Virgen de San Juan's grandmother had a lot of chickens. The Virgen de San Juan used to love to play with the chicks. Her favorite game was to remove the chicks' heads and watch them run around headless. One day while playing with the chicks and removing their heads, her grandmother

caught her. Her grandmother got after her for removing the chick's heads, so immediately she started placing their heads back without paying attention as to what head went with what body. According to my Grandmother that is the reason why some chickens have heads a different color from their bodies." (Informant: J.A., Female, Mexican-American, Student. Heard story years ago. Collected by J.A. in Edinburg, Texas, October 25, 1982).

It is hard to say if it is through this incident that Our Lady of San Juan learned how to heal sick people. It is, however, quite certain that this tale represents her as a person who has great power to put back together creatures which are in need of assistance. She does help people most especially by curing the sick, much as she healed the chicken when she was a child. The following is a personal experience narrative on her healing powers.

"When my mother was a little girl, she was taking care of her little brother. It was a cold day, and it so happened that the baby crawled outside. My mother was quite frantic. She prayed that the baby wouldn't get sick. Unfortunately he did get quite ill; he almost died. She then made a vow to the Virgen de San Juan, promising her that if he got well, she would take him to the altar on her knees. He did get well and many years later, she carried him on her knees to the altar". (Informant: Anonymous, female, forty years old. Mexican-American, housewife. Speaks only Spanish. Heard story from mother when she was a child. Collected by L.G. in Mission, Texas on November 20, 1982.)

This personal experience narrative is an example of the powers of the Virgin of Our Lady of San Juan, and an instance where everything is done properly when an individual makes a religious vow. The request is made, the miracle occurs, the promise is kept. The supplicant in this case has nothing to fear, and, certainly, no catastrophes are likely to occur. This may well be what happens most often. If a vow is not fulfilled during a person's lifetime or if an individual decides not to fulfill his promise, at the time of his death he will become a ghost. This is exemplified in the two stories below:

"In Mexico it is customary that when they are going to worship the Virgin to walk by night and rest by day. At night they say that a lot of men and women

come and join the group, and by day they disappear. They say that these people are the wandering souls that died before fulfilling their promise to the Virgin. While the people walk, they encounter numerous large rocks. These rocks are people who had change(d) their minds on their way to go worship the Virgin. They complain that it's too much walking and that they never get there. The Virgin changes them into rocks". (Informant: S.G., Female, Homemaker, Mexican, Speaks only Spanish. Heard tale from her mother around 1955, Mother told it as a personal experience narrative. Collected by: S.B. in Raymondville, Texas on October 27, 1980.)

The story above adds an extra punishment to the belief that a religious vow has to be paid if made to the Virgin of San Juan. People who have changed their minds about paying their debts are turned to stone. The severity of this personification of this Virgin in the folk mind is extreme in contrast to, for example, the Virgin of Guadalupe who will forgive the individual who, for some reason, fails to fulfill his vow. In the next story a supplicant who dies before fulfilling his vow returns as a ghost:

"Once there was a man who had a disease and he promised the Virgin of San Juan that he would go see her. He died before he could go see her. He went when he was dead to pay what he had promised the Virgin. His compadre, who didn't know that he was dead, saw him in church and they shook hands. His compadre asked for his comadre and to tell her hi. When he saw his comadre he told her that he had seen his compadre at church about a week ago. The comadre then answered, "No, it can't be because your compadre died six months ago". The point is to be careful with the Virgin with what you promise her because you either come dead or alive to pay what you promised her." (Informant: M.C. 79, Female, Housewife, Mexican-American, Speaks only Spanish. Heard story from an uncle about fifty years Collected by M.E.A. in Pharr, Texas on October 9, 1980.)

The two stories above exemplify the strictness of Our Lady of San Juan. Although she may be ready to help humankind, this can take place only within her terms. If an individual who has asked for a miracle deviates from what he promised Our Lady of San Juan, problems will ensue. The difficulties may or may not have anything to do with the

miracle for which the person petitioned. Generally this is punishment for not fulfilling one's vows. It is the fulfillment of the vow which Our Lady of San Juan is most particular about. An unfulfilled promise is completely unacceptable to her, and she will extract retribution if a vow is not fulfilled. On the other hand, for Don Pedrito Jaramillo it is complete faith that is crucial to the supplicant.

B. Don Pedrito Jaramillo

Although not a saint canonized by the Catholic Church, Don Pedrito remains one of the most commonly invoked religious figures in South Texas². Don Pedrito Jaramillo was a "curandero" with a reputation which went far beyond that of an ordinary faith healer. His grave site at Falfurrias has become a major shrine in South Texas. This site plays the same role as a church for individuals who have special needs and who require miracles to solve their difficulties. If they want Don Pedrito to assist them, many of them will visit his shrine. This is a folk shrine par excellence and has no official standing with the Church. It must, also, be said that what has made the church of Our Lady of San Juan in San Juan, Texas a major shrine is not the official dimension of the church, but the devotion of the Mexican-American community of South Texas and Northern Mexico to Our Lady of San Juan. With Don Pedrito Jaramillo we have the same situation taking place in a more extensive manner, as his shrine is completely independent of the Catholic Church.

The underlining characteristics for a successful vow to Don Pedrito is full and unquestioning faith in the folk healer on the part of the supplicant. This includes the thorough and step by step following of his instructions. Even accidental deviations from his directions may cause problems. The following is a personal experience narrative about Don Pedrito Jaramillo's death and the shrine at Falfurrias, Texas.

"...Just before he died, he told his son he would try to return back to his people. He told his son to uncover his grave after three days of being buried. Severo did not have the nerve to do it. This leaves many people in doubt. Some people really believe that Don Pedrito was very close to god. Many believe that if his son would have uncovered his grave, he would still be with us now.

Hundreds of people visit his grave today...As they did in his lifetime, pilgrims come from San Antonio, Laredo, Corpus Christi and Mexico to visit the grave. A follower from San Antonio put a small block house over the grave of Don Pedro a few years ago. Hundreds of people leave artificial flowers. Hanging from the ceiling over the grave, pinned to walls, placed on shelves or piled in boxes are literally hundreds of photographs of youngsters, old folks, newlyweds, soldiers and entire families. The photographs are placed there by loved ones or perhaps in hopes that Don Pedrito will recognize those in the photos and protect their good health and insure their safety. Also scattered around the building are a number of handwritten prayers to Don Pedrito. At several places are pins on which have been hung hundreds of miniature metal replicas of parts of the human body. The small metal arms, legs, heads and eyes were placed there by persons with illness or injuries in the same parts of their own bodies in hopes that Don Pedrito will see it to cure and repair. The belief in Don Pedrito apparently started with those who knew and had been treated by him and was passed on to children and friends.

This story was told to me by my grandfather. He said that his father had taken his oldest brother when he was sick, and that all his brother had to do was get a leaf from a plant and rub it on his skin, and he got well. His father told him most of this things and he read the rest." (Informant: P. C., Seventy years old, Mexican-American, rancher. Collected by M. C. in Encino, Texas on April 29, 1978.)

In this narrative, the powers of the "curandero" are viewed to have been so great that the only reason he is not with us today is his adopted son's fear to uncover his grave. His death does not, however, preclude him from helping people who need his help. This results in pilgrimages to his grave site which are similar to pilgrimages to churches, such as the Church of Our Lady of San Juan in San Juan, Texas, where promises are made and fulfilled by the Mexican Americans of South Texas. The next narrative emphasizes the importance of strict adherence to his instructions:

"He told me about his grandmother that one time she got very sick from her hands. My dad told me that she went to see Don Pedrito Jaramillo. He

prescribed her some sort of oil. The oil had to be rubbed on her hands every night before going to bed. Well, one time when she was rubbing oil, the little bottle fell and a couple of drops were spilled. She kept on night after night rubbing the oil. When she finished rubbing the oil and the little bottle was empty she notice that one of her fingers was crooked. Well she went back to Don Pedrito and he asked her, 'Did you spill some of the oil or did someone get some'. She answered, 'Yes one night while I was rubbing some on. I spill some'. He told her, 'That little drop that is missing is the one that you needed for that finger to get well!'" (Informant: J. R., Male, Hispanic, disabled, Speaks English and Spanish. Heard story from his father while working in the fields about fifty years ago. Collected by: M.R. in Mission, Texas, December 2, 1979.)

This is one of the better known legends about Don Pedrito Jaramillo. It stresses his insistence that the supplicant follow his instructions fully. The story makes it quite plain that unless directions are fully met that the sick person will not heal even if he is not at fault for not doing everything he was instructed to do. The following example stresses the importance of faith in following Don Pedrito's instructions.

"There was a girl who was very pretty who didn't believe that she was pretty because her complexion was too dark. The girl had heard much of the practices of Don Pedrito Jaramillo, but she didn't have much faith in him, but, with no other solution, she went to see him to see if he could do something for her. Don Pedrito told her that she had to put mud on her face and leave it on overnight. The girl not having much faith, decided to put mud on one side of her face only. In the morning, she anxiously took the mud off to see what the results were. The girl was surprised to see that the side where she had put the mud was much lighter than the side where she hadn't. And so the girl decided to put mud on the other side of her face so that she could fix it up. Well, it didn't work. So what she did was to go to Don Pedrito's again to complain and tell him what had happened. Don Pedrito then instructed her to put mud all over her face, so that it would even up. When the girl did this, her face was all even all right, it was all dark again." (Informant: O. M., Forty-seven

years old, Female, Mexican American, Housewife, Speaks Spanish and English. Heard the story from her mother during exchanging stories when she was in her teens. Collected by: H. M. in La Feria, Texas, December 1, 1979.)

The story above, with its emphasis on faith, is the most commonly told belief legend about the healer of Los Olmos. Its emphasis on the girl's doubt and her applying the mud to half her face and the result on this behavior is central to this story which emphasizes unconditional belief in Don Pedrito Jaramillo.

C. Our Lady of San Juan and Don Pedrito Jaramillo: A Comparison

Although one is male, the other female, one a representation of the Virgin Mary, the other a folk saint, the manner in which these two religious figures are perceived in Mexican-American folk religion is markedly similar. They are in many ways mirror images of each other. They both deal with similar human problems, mainly illness, and will accept petitions to heal a malady, and their powers are said to be great. However, neither one of them is easy to deal with or to make vows to as any faux pas will be viewed negatively and stop the requested miracle from occurring. It is also possible that the supplicant may be punished for not fulfilling a vow. These two religious personages share a severity in dealing with humankind which seems to be excessive. It is hard to say why either one of the two Saints' is so harsh, severe or so single-minded. There is nothing to suggest that Don Pedrito was a severe individual during his lifetime. There is even less evidence to explain why Our Lady of San Juan is as difficult as she is while Our Lady of Guadalupe is always kind. On the other hand it is also possible to contrast Don Pedrito Jaramillo with San Martin de Porres. Much as Don Pedrito is severe, San Martin de Porres is helpful, kind and very specially effective against evil. It is therefore difficult to explain why and how severity has been assigned to Our Lady of San Juan and Don Pedrito Jaramillo. The answer to this question may, however, be found in Mexican-American culture.

In attempting to understand these two "Saints" in terms of Mexican-American culture in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, it is important to take the following into consideration: The selection of strict, strong and powerful personages as the major saints of the area suggests that mediation between religious vows and miracles is dependent on the strength and power of the religious figures involved in

the process. The power of the "Saint" is thus expressed in terms of uncompromising strictness in dealing with supplicants. Given the harsh economic, historical and, until very recently, political realities of the Mexican-American community in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the projection of the austere and severe realities of life and behavior on Our Lady of San Juan and Don Pedrito Jaramillo seems to be a natural extension of daily life being projected, on the very "Saints" who are ready to help devoted supplicants.

Pan American University at Edinburg

EndNotes

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THE FORT BROWN GHOSTS

AND OTHER PHANTASMS

by

Alan Hollander

Like any self-respecting ghost story, ours starts at a most likely location - a cemetery. Why shouldn't it? For in this case, it is one of the most extraordinary cemetery stories ever passed down, and it may account for numerous ghosts and other apparitions seen in the Fort Brown area of Brownsville.

The Valley has had its share of military conflicts. The Mexican-American and Civil Wars have taken their toll on this area as far as human tragedy is concerned. The site where Texas Southmost College now stands was originally the site of a fort. In fact, many of the school's buildings go back more than a century, to when they had military purposes; among them, a morgue.

However, among old Fort Brown's numerous historical contributions, there is one that stands out distinctly to those attracted by the more morbid aspects of life. That is where the cemetery comes in - and the digging up of more than 3,500 bodies right here in our own back yard.

This cemetery, which was located at the present site of the Fort Brown Hotel, was started shortly after the Mexican-American War in 1846. The more than 1,000 American soldiers who died in the battles of Resaca de la Palma, Palo Alto and Cadeyreta, Mexico required a final resting place, and they found one in Brownsville. Most of these bodies remained unidentified due to the lack of records kept in those days, so they were buried with no other distinction than a number on their gravestones.

Fifteen years later, the United States became involved in a civil war. Again, many soldiers were killed in battles fought along the the border. Matamoros was a major shipping port in those days, and from there the Confederates traded cotton in exchange for incoming foreign arms. The Valley was a hotbed of conflict between Confederate and Union soldiers, and considerable contributions were made to the Fort Brown Cemetery.

Later, during the years 1885 and 1886, yellow fever took

the lives of hundreds of soldiers from Fort Brown and nearby Fort Ringgold. Under the rigid quarantine regulations of the period, the bodies could not be shipped to any other location, thus swelling the already large corpse population of the military cemetery.

Things went quietly until 1909. At that time there was a decision to abandon the fort as a result of a raid by blacks upon the city of Brownsville. It was no trouble to remove the live soldiers from the fort, but it was an entirely different situation with the 3,600 enlisted men and 183 officers resting six feet under in the fertile Valley earth.

A bid of \$18,700 secured the job for Brownsville contractor N. E. Rendall, who along with 75 other men began the unsavory task. As one can imagine, this assignment could not be completed without some obstacles. Mr. Rendall had quite a difficult job in getting laborers. It took two weeks for them to consult their local priests before beginning work. Finally the massive undertaking began.

Remains were dug up, placed in cloth containers and encased in 38 inch frame boxes. Bodies of officers were placed in full-length caskets. As the earth was dug - sometimes by the light of kerosene lamps - and the decomposed bodies were exhumed, workers found that large amounts of black snakes had made homes of the coffins along with the deceased.

The remains took up five freight cars, and the bodies were shipped to a graveyard in Alexandria, Louisiana. All told, the task took three months. Gravestones were sold to local stonecutters and presently make up the foundations of numerous Brownsville buildings. In fact, Nebraska Apartments, located in downtown Brownsville, proudly displays sections of the gravestones along the sides of the building and under the windows of the various apartments. If one looks closely, he can still see numbers and other markings on the old white marble slabs.

Contractor Rendall also dug deep underneath other sections of the city in the process of installing Brownsville's first sewer system, finding boats (from when the river flowed north of where it is now), old coins, swords and numerous skeletons . . . human skeletons.

The Cemetery May Be Gone, But Something May Have Remained

Apparitions appearing at the locations of former battles, cemeteries and other areas of death and trauma have been recorded throughout history and account for most ethereal sightings. One of the most famous haunted houses in New York City - Clinton Court, built in 1812 - was constructed on the site of a pauper's graveyard. Teddy Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis have either felt or seen the ghost of Abraham Lincoln agonizing in the White House - surely a place of stress for the great man, one where his assassinated body lay in state 1865.

The stories go on and on, but this article's initial concern is ghosts that are here in the Valley. I assure you the tales are numerous. But for now I shall concentrate on the area of Fort Brown . . . and the former resting place of 3,783 men killed by tragic wars or terrible disease, lonely and far from home.

The beautiful grounds of Texas Southmost College are historic indeed. Century-old buildings dot the area among the very modern structures. Supposedly the spirits of the dead have no architectural discrimination; they simple roam throughout the site of the old fort where death tapped them on the shoulder, beckoning them to the spirit world.

I spoke to Ms. Y, a very intelligent woman and an employee of the college. I asked her jokingly if she has seen any ghosts there. Her face became hard and serious as she looked into my eyes. "Yes," she replied, "I've seen many."

Reluctantly she told me some tales. "I'm often in the library at night, after it closes. On different occasions I'll be putting books back. Close to me, without any physical provocation, books will simply start falling from the shelves. Sometimes doors will swing open and shut. I'll look to see if anybody is there, but there never is. I also hear noises - people talking, groans, squeaks and other sounds."

Noticing that my previous joking mood turned somewhat more somber, she continued: "Janitors come to work in the evening and stay until seven in the morning. They clean and check the library and other buildings on the school grounds. Would you like to talk to one of them? They've got some tales that will make you think." I answered that I would.

Mr. M entered the room and began speaking in a matter-of-fact tone as if he were discussing the outcome of a high

school football game. "I have been in this library in the middle of the night and will hear people talking and other noises coming from inside a room. I'll open the locked door with a key and see nothing. The voices stop. As soon as I close the door, the sounds begin again. The janitors hear voices all the time throughout the grounds; it's almost a normal occurrence on the job."

He then proceeded to tell me some tales that made the small hairs on the back of my neck stand at attention like some Civil War soldier.

The Old Lady Always Visits

Many apparitions of the night cannot be dismissed as simple illusions, especially in a case where the same one appears again and again to different individuals at different times. Throughout the history of earthly manifestations from the spirit world, some have appeared so normal that they have been mistaken for living people - at least at first. This is applicable to the case I will call "The Old Lady of Fort Brown."

Mr. M continued with this story.

"In the middle of the night, a number of us used to get together for a break in the courtyard between the library and the cafeteria here at the school. This is a place no one can enter at night except for us because all surrounding gates and doors are locked. We were there eating. Suddenly an old lady approached us. She was dressed in a long black skirt with a white shirt, a shawl, and old-style shoes - although they looked new. We were all sitting here there looking at her and heard her ask, 'Have you seen my son?' We replied that we hadn't. She said, 'Thank you. I must go look for my son.' And she started walking away. To our surprise, she disappeared. We spent the rest of the night looking for her, but could not find anything. We wondered how she got through the locked gate. We haven't taken our break in that area since."

This same woman has appeared on two or three other occasions to different workers. Mr. M squinted his clear eyes in thought and told me of another appearance.

"A janitor was cleaning the grounds outside Tandy Hall and noticed an old lady approaching him. He described her dress exactly as I described the other old lady's dress to you. She walked up to him and asked, 'Where is the jailhouse

to the fort? I was told that my son was sick and that I should go see him. I need to find him. Please help me. The janitor answered that the complex of buildings where the fort was did not exist any more. The lady said, 'Thank you, but I need to find my son.' She walked into a doorway and disappeared. The janitor followed her but found nothing."

The Old Lady of Fort Brown has manifested herself on other occasions, always saying the same thing and wearing the same clothes. Perhaps she should be looking in the graveyard in Alexandria, Louisiana!

As eerie as these stories are, we have not even mentioned the most frightening' one - an occurrence that resulted in a man becoming ill and quitting his job.

An Entire Troop of Ghosts!

I asked Ms. Y if there were any more experiences. By this time I was intrigued and quickly acquiring an appetite for more. She slowly rubbed her chin, saying, "There is one story, but I promised the man I would not tell anyone." I begged her to tell me the tale, promising that I would disguise the man's identity. She thought for a long minute and finally agreed. My stomach reacted with waves of spasmodic chills as Ms. Y spoke. If I had not known this woman for years, I would have doubted the credibility of this discourse. My respect for her makes disbelief an impossibility. She began:

"A little more than a year ago I came into work at my regular time, ten in the morning. This man approached me. I was very surprised to see him because he normally finished work at seven. He looked terrible, like something quite traumatic had happened to him. Looking at me with pallid skin and great fear in his eyes, he said, 'I waited all morning for you to come to work. Others would just laugh at me if I told them what I'm about to tell you, but I thought you might understand.'"

I looked out the window, thankful for the reality of bright sunlight as Ms. Y continued the eerie tale. "The man was visibly shaken as he spoke. He told me, 'It was raining last night. Just before the sun came up, it stopped. I was in the library and heard bugles and people marching. I thought it was the people across the river in Matamoros and felt they were inconsiderate making so much noise early in the morning.

"I went outside and realized the sounds were not coming from across the river but from in front of Gorgas Hall. I assumed it was an organization like the American Legion carrying out some maneuver. Walking to the end of the sidewalk to see what was going on, I could not believe my eyes. There were men mounted on horses, dressed in very old-looking military uniforms, saluting the flag on the pole which stands in front of the school. There were also many soldiers marching in the area. I realized what I was seeing could not be, and I began running for all I was worth back to the library. The door was locked. I fumbled for the key and finally got in. I saw another janitor there, and he glanced at me, commenting that I looked all white, as if I'd just seen a ghost."

Ms. Y told me that the man got sick from the occurrence and refused to continue working at the school. Then she related something that really put the finishing touches on this strange tale. "Before the man left that morning, he walked back to the site in full daylight to see if there was any sign of horses or men having been there. Of course there was nothing. But he happened to look down, something catching his eye. He bent down and picked up an object. It was an old military button; perhaps it was left behind as a sign that they really were there."

This man, who still lives in the area, retains possession of that button to this day!

More Chilling Tales

A prominent Brownsville citizen, Mr. B, told me this unusual story.

"My wife and I were walking at the back end of the old fort, by the art league building, as we often do. We looked down and noticed horse prints. The weird thing was that they simply started in the middle of the road. They came from nowhere, continued on for two or three blocks, then ended as abruptly as they began. I nervously joked to my wife that they were prints from a patrol looking for Colonel Cross, who was killed in 1846. I must say, it was quite eerie seeing prints that really didn't come from anywhere!"

There are more tales, many more, and they don't come from the lips of generally superstitious people, either. I could go on for pages, even volumes, about the strange stories of ethereal beings appearing in the Valley. But to save the reader some time - and some sleep - I will only

relate one more. So hold onto your hats.

This one also has to do with a cemetery, but not the one that was dug up 75 years ago. This is a burial ground that still exists; it's the old city cemetery in Brownsville.

Ms. Y told me this story towards the end of our conversation. It is one that has occupied my thoughts for weeks. She started, "A cab driver was cruising past the old cemetery late one night and noticed a man standing in front of the gates. The man waved down the taxi and gave him an address. The taxi driver flipped on the meter and proceeded to drive towards the destination. When he arrived, he turned around and noticed the passenger was not in the cab. This was quite puzzling to him because it would have been virtually impossible for the man to get out of the cab without the driver noticing.

"Later that evening, the same driver was waiting for passengers at the bus station. My father was coming in from Laredo and got in the cab. On the way to my father's home, the driver related the story of the man from the cemetery, and my father was intrigued. He asked the driver the address the man wanted to be taken to and a description of his face, which the driver supplied. My father was taken aback with horror. 'That is the description and address of my cousin, Mr. C,' he exclaimed. 'He recently passed away and was buried in that cemetery!'"

This happened almost 20 years ago, and many cab drivers will still not go past that cemetery at night.

So, my friends, laugh or don't laugh: believe or don't believe. It really does not matter. If these events are fabrications, then many individuals are under similar illusions. If they are true, it may provoke some thought. I, for one, am a reporter, recalling the tales of others.



Start of the 20th Century



Lawlessness in Cameron County and the City of Brownsville: 1900 to 1912

by

William V. Wilkinson

Banditry along the Texas-Mexico border was a common phenomenon from 1836 until 1920.¹ However, banditry in the Lower Rio Grande Valley reached a peak in the years 1912 to 1920--the Bandit War years.² Historians have attributed the Bandit War era to the Mexican Revolution, World War I, and national prohibition.³ Professor Rocha has proposed a fourth causal factor in the rise of banditry--lawlessness that existed in the Valley from the turn of the century until the beginning of the Bandit War in 1912.⁴ Not only was the administration of justice ineffective, but the primary agents of social control, the Texas Rangers, were themselves contributors to this lawless era.

This paper is primarily a synthesis of Professor Rocha's Background to Banditry in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas: 1900 to 1912. The purpose of this paper is to examine this lawless thesis as it pertains specifically to Cameron County and the city of Brownsville.

The Lawless Era in Cameron County

At the turn of the century, the Rio Grande River was less a line of demarcation than a semi-porous membrane that "contrabanistas" readily transversed. In his discussion of the border between 1865 and 1900, Zaveleta points out that the "duty free zone created along the border by Porfirio Diaz heightened commerce in the area, but it also encouraged the blatant cattle rustling and smuggling activities that flourished from Brownsville to Laredo."⁵

From 1900 to 1912, 103 cases of horse and/or cattle theft were processed by the Cameron County District Court. Sixty-nine of the cases ended in dismissals, 17 ended in acquittals, and 17 defendants were found guilty.⁶ These cases represent only those that officially came to the attention of the criminal justice system. As can be seen from an analysis of assaults and criminal homicides, law was often ignored in favor of more direct action.

Between 1900 and 1912 there were 80 complaints of assault with intent to commit murder filed with the Cameron County District Court. Fifty-nine of these cases resulted in

dismissals, 10 ended in acquittals, and 11 persons were found guilty.⁷ Rocha succinctly points out that "obedience to the law could not be counted on in light of the easy going judicial system in the Lower Rio Grande Valley."⁸ He further concludes that if "one was arrested for the crime of assault with intent to murder during the first decade of the 20th century, the chances were about 87 percent that he would be freed."⁹ An analysis of the year of 1912 (the beginning of the Bandit War era) is enlightening. The charge of assault with intent to commit murder was filed against 22 persons in 1912; charges against all of the 22 defendants were eventually dismissed.¹⁰

Newspaper accounts during this period repeatedly reveal the lawless nature of the Valley border area. Many of the incidents reported in the Brownsville Herald never appear in the official records. Rocha explains this contradiction.

For some reason some of the crimes reported in the newspapers do not appear in the court records. A reason for that could have been the failure of the authorities to secure the necessary evidence against those alleged to have committed a crime. When the grand jury met, the state did not present the case, and, thus, no indictments were ever returned.¹¹

This lack of judicial effectiveness is further substantiated by an analysis of 55 murder indictments that were handed down in Cameron County from 1900 to 1912. Only seven convictions resulted. "Seven convictions out of 55 is a vivid illustration of the laxity of the American judicial system in Cameron County prior to the bandit problem."¹² Considering the serious nature of this offense, this conviction ratio indicates a complete breakdown in the Cameron County justice system.

In order to obtain an accurate picture of the judicial system during this era, one must include law enforcement officials, and the most visible group was the Texas Rangers or "los rinches." Accounts of atrocities against Mexicans and Mexican Americans by the Texas Rangers have been well documented.¹³ And there is little doubt that "the Ranger atrocities in the Valley, plus the contemptuous attitude toward the local law enforcement officials to law and order, a negative attitude toward all law enforcement officers developed in the Valley during the first thirteen years of the 20th century."¹⁴ Paredes states that "killing of innocent Mexicans as 'accomplices' became standard procedure--especially with the Texas Rangers--whenever a

Border Mexican shot an American."¹⁵ Rather than bringing law, order, and justice, the Rangers often merely brought chaos. They were often asked to leave the communities they were to patrol and were often "considered more dangerous than the men whom they were supposed to hunt down."¹⁶

Rocha concludes that "lawlessness was encouraged by the laxness and incompetence of the administrators of justice who were almost always Anglo-Saxon-Americans or Gringos, as the local Mexicans referred to them...;and...added to the laxness and incompetence of the administrators was the unwarranted disregard for constitutional law and human rights by the Texas Rangers, deputy sheriffs, and local law officials of the Valley in their handling of Mexicans suspected of violating the law."¹⁷ During the 1900 to 1912 period, two incidents occurred in Brownsville that highlight and support the preceding analyses--incidents involving the Cerda brothers and Jacinto Treviño.

The Cerda Brothers

The Cerda incident probably began on January 1, 1901 with the arrest of two brothers, Ramón and Alfredo Cerda, for cattle theft.¹⁸ Although no official charges were ever filed, this arrest on the El Sauz Ranch by Ranger A.Y. Baker (with two other Rangers) was probably the starting point in an incident that clearly portrays the lawlessness that existed during this period.

Ramón and Alfredo Cerda owned El Rancho de Francisco de Assis. However, their ranch was surrounded by the El Sauz Ranch, owned by the family of a noted local land and cattle baron, Richard King. This was a time of continued expansion for the King empire, and there were claims of cattle theft by both ranches.¹⁹ The difference was that the King family enlisted the support of the Texas Rangers to patrol the El Sauz Ranch while the Cerdas could depend upon no one but themselves.

On May 15, 1902, Baker and two other Rangers were riding the fences of the El Sauz Ranch. They came upon a Mexican vaquero whom they suspected of being a cattle thief, but they could not be sure that he was not a King vaquero. In this state of indecision, they left him tied to a tree, and his fate is still unknown.²⁰ Considering the subsequent events, he may have been lucky. Rocha chronicles those events.

The following day Ranger Baker came across another Mexican ;Ramón Cerda; in the process of branding a

calf. Baker suspected that this man, being a Mexican, was probably a cattle thief. According to Baker, the Mexican, upon seeing Baker, shot at him. Baker alleged that his 'horse shied and threw up his head and the bullet hit the horse and killed it and, as the horse was falling, I shot at Cerda and hit him over the right eye and he fell dead.' After the body of Ramón had been buried, it was decided to disinter it for a second inquest in which evidence was produced showing that Cerda had been dragged and otherwise maltreated.²¹

Unlike the previous day's indecisiveness, there is no doubt that Baker knew Ramón and Ramón knew Baker.

Baker's killing of Ramón Cerda created a state of overt tension between the Mexican and Mexican American citizens of Brownsville and the Rangers. This was seen as another episode where the Anglo land barons used the law to inflict pain and suffering on Mexican and Mexican American landowners, forcing them to give up their land to enhance the holdings of the Anglo ranchers. But this event had not yet ended.

On September 9, 1902, Baker and two Rangers were ambushed outside of Brownsville. One Ranger was killed and Baker was wounded. As Baker was involved, the general assumption was that Alfredo Cerda was involved, even though the assailants could not be identified.²²

Alfredo and five other men were arrested and charged with murder and assault with intent to murder, but none of the accused was ever convicted. Since the killing of Ramon, "Alfredo had been threatening to kill Baker and had offered a reward of \$1000.00 to who ever would kill Baker."²³ But after Alfredo's arrest and charge, he crossed into Mexico, believing that the Rangers would eventually kill him. Although his premonition was subsequently proved sound, Alfredo returned to Brownsville on October 3, 1902 and went to the store of Don Tomás Fernández.²⁴ Paredes describes the results of this visit.

Mr. Marcelo Garza of Brownsville, who was a clerk at the Fernandez store on Elizabeth street in 1902, was an eye-witness to the shooting of the youngest Cerda. A Ranger whom Mr. Garza identifies as 'Bekar' shot Alfredo, Mr. Garza relates, as Cerda sat by the door of the Fernandez store talking to Don Tomas Fernandez, the owner. The Ranger used a rifle and shot Cerda in the back from across the

street, 'stalking him like a wild animal.' After the shooting the Ranger ran into a nearby saloon, where other Rangers awaited him, and the group went out the back way and sought refuge with the federal troops in Fort Brown, to escape a mob of indignant citizens.²⁵

Baker was charged with murder, but he was acquitted for the murder of Ramón Cerda on February 23, 1903 and acquitted for the murder of Alfredo Cerda on September 29, 1903. Baker's bond was handled by the King family, and his defense attorney was Judge James B. Wells.²⁶

The angry reaction of the Mexican and Mexican American citizens of Brownsville after this killing provides an illustration of the growing displeasure with the legal system early in the 20th Century. This episode also serves to point out the symbiotic relationship between the law and the Anglo land barons that developed during this decade, further spreading distrust of "gringo" justice. This discontent had become endemic by the end of the decade and can be illustrated by the Jacinto Treviño saga.

Jacinto Treviño

Rocha states that "probably the best example of local Mexican's attitudes toward Texas justice that was administered in the Valley occurred in 1910...;with...the adventures of Jacinto Treviño."²⁷ Treviño killed Jim Darwin, an engineer for the San Benito Canal Company. Darwin had beat Treviño's younger brother to death following an argument over whether the younger Treviño, who worked for Darwin, could take off for an afternoon.²⁸

After the killing of Darwin, Jacinto fled to Mexico. Sam Robertson, chief engineer for the canal company, forced Jacinto's cousin, Hilario Treviño, to confess that he had witnessed the killing of Darwin by Jacinto. Upon hearing about the assault on his cousin, Jacinto made plans to kill Robertson. Apparently, another cousin, Pablo Treviño, told the authorities of Jacinto's plans, and a posse of ten men set out on the night of July 31, 1910 to intercept Treviño and his men. The posse separated into four groups, but instead of ambushing Jacinto, 3 posse members were ambushed by Treviño and his men, and Ranger S.B. Carnes and Deputy Sheriff Lawrence were killed. Jacinto returned to Mexico while local authorities petitioned the Mexican government to arrest and extradite Jacinto.²⁹ This did not happen and Jacinto remained free.

This was a time of mixed emotions for the Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Brownsville area. Rocha states that the "Mexicanos along the river viewed the entire affair with both fear and pride--fear because the Anglo American system of restoring law and order could be deadly; pride because one of their own kind had defended himself against the Anglo oppressor."³⁰

Unfortunately, the Jacinto Treviño affair triggered a volley of retaliatory acts as law enforcement officers converged in the Brownsville area, beating and killing suspected Treviño gang members (meaning Mexicanos). However, due to the respect he held within the Mexican community, Jacinto Treviño continued to receive support from both sides of the border.³¹

For the next two years, violence escalated. Mexicans and Mexican Americans were tortured and murdered by vigilantes, ranchers, and law enforcement officers, lead by the Texas Rangers. Anti-American sentiment was strong in Mexico due to the reports of atrocities committed in the Borderlands, and Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Cameron County and the City of Brownsville were becoming increasingly distanced from the political and judicial process. A recent study by Binder supports the lack of community involvement from this period through (and past) the Bandit War years, and he concludes:

Mexican Americans were major participants in the political process in the early period under consideration (1876-1910). They both ran for political office and won substantial numbers of races. They were most successful in winning election to the least important political offices. They had little or no success in races for offices of judges, countywide offices and the commissioners court during that period of time. From 1910 to the late 1940s, Mexican Americans' success rate ranged from low to non-existent in all the categories of political offices.³²

During this period, no Mexican American held the position of District Judge or District Attorney, positions that impact heavily upon the criminal justice system.

It is clear that from 1910 to 1912, the Mexican-American community had either been excluded systematically from political and judicial policy making, or had voluntarily withdrawn. By the time of the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, "the Mexicans of the Valley, though

unaware of it, were planting the seeds of banditry in their experiences with the ineffective justice which they encountered.³³

Conclusions

The Bandit War that savaged the Lower Rio Grande Valley from 1912 to 1920 has generally attracted the interest of historians from a causal perspective. Historians have focused on three causes of this tumultuous period; the Mexican Revolution, World War I, and prohibition. Professor Rocha has proposed a forth cause--lawlessness, and he makes the following analysis:

Cameron County had most of the population of the Valley from 1900 to 1920... As a result, lawlessness was most prevalent in that county. The crime of cattle and horse theft, assault with intent to commit murder, and murder committed during the first thirteen years of the 20th century lead one to conclude that the administrators of justice were ineffective in dealing with all three crimes... The laxness and incompetency of the administrators of justice made it easier for the Mexican-American to gain vital experience for the Bandit War and be better prepared as he joined the hordes of bandits. The Mexican American had no respect for the law and order system that the Anglo-American produced in the Valley. For one thing, they were excluded from it as the Anglo-American population increased in the Valley. Although Mexican-Americans made up the vast majority of the population in the Valley and a great number of them were qualified to serve on juries, they were systematically denied that right.³⁴

If the Mexican-American citizen of Cameron county had little respect for the law, he had even less respect for those sworn to uphold it. The Texas Rangers were less a force for "law and order" than an order maintenance force for the rich land barons. The Rangers were responsible for untold deaths during the Bandit Wars, but these atrocities had a logical beginning during the lawless era. Local law enforcement officers took their lead from the Rangers, and by the Bandit War period, they were also following the "shoot first" philosophy, especially if those to be questioned were Mexicans or Mexican Americans.

This lawless era is well exemplified by the actions of, and reactions to, the Cerda brothers at the beginning of this decade. All of the elements are included--lawlessness, land barons, Ranger "justice," and community upheaval. At the end of this decade, the saga of Jacinto Treviño portrays this same lawlessness--but with different results. Here the Mexicano won. But the violence that was created brought great harm to the Mexican and Mexican American citizens of Brownsville, and ushered in an even more violent era. Rocha concludes with the following:

In conclusion, the lawlessness in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas prior to 1912 was as important a cause of the Bandit War as was the Mexican-Revolution, World War I, and prohibition. The Mexicans of the Valley were encouraged to steal cattle or horses from their neighbors by the laxness of the administrators of justice in the Valley. They were heartened to take the law into their hands when confronted in a dispute with their neighbor. They settled the dispute by assaulting, or at times killing, their adversaries. The Mexicans realized that if they were captured by the local authorities, they would probably be exonerated of the charge as a result of the incompetence or laxity of the administrators of justice. Still another factor that incited the Mexican into lawlessness was the methodology used by the Texas Rangers, deputy sheriffs, and other law officials in their handling of Mexicans accused of a crime. The law officials denied the Mexicans their constitutional rights, even their human rights, and acted as judge, prosecutor, and executioner on a Mexican suspected of having committed a crime. The end result was that as the winds of revolution sweeping Mexico blew past the Valley, the Mexicans initiated their own little rebellion against the administrators of justice and the lawless officials in the Valley. This turbulent period became known as the Bandit War years.³⁵

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Rodolfo Rocha, Background to Banditry in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas: 1900 to 1912, M.A. Thesis, Pan American University, 1974; The Influence of the Mexican Revolution on the Mexican-Texas Border, 1910-1916, Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1981.
- ² Walter Prescott Webb, The Texas Rangers: A Century of Fronter Defense, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1935; reprint ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965.
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- ⁴ Ibid., p. 6.
- ⁵ Antonio N. Zavaleta, "'The Twin Cities': A Historical Synthesis of the Socio-Economic Interdependence of the Brownsville-Matamoros Border Community," in Studies in Brownsville History, Milo Kerney, Ed., Brownsville, TX: Pan American University at Brownsville, 1986, p. 143.
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- ⁷ Ibid., pp. 15-16.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 17.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 18.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 19.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 25.
- ¹³ Americo Paredes, El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez, A Ballad of Border Conflict, Ph. D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1956; Robert J. Rosenbaum, Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- ¹⁴ Rocha, 1974, p. 72.
- ¹⁵ Paredes, p. 25.
- ¹⁶ Rocha, 1974, p. 100.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

- 18 Ibid., p. 85.
- 19 Ibid., p. 84.
- 20 Ibid., p. 85.
- 21 Ibid., p. 85.
- 22 Ibid., p. 86.
- 23 Ibid., p. 87.
- 24 Ibid., p. 87.
- 25 Paredes, p. 41.
- 26 Rocha, 1974, p. 87.
- 27 Ibid., p. 37.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
- 29 Rocha, 1981, p. 41.
- 30 Ibid., p. 41.
- 31 Ibid., p. 41.
- 32 Norman J. Binder, "Changes in Mexican American Political Behavior in Cameron County: 1876-1988," a paper presented to the Western Social Science Association, Denver, April, 1988, p. 12.
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- 35 Ibid., p. 113.



Las Playas Washington y Boca Chica

por

Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda

Causa curiosidad, a veces mezclada de extrañeza, a muchos visitantes de nuestra región, enterarse de los nombres con los que designamos a nuestras playas: "Boca Chica", la correspondiente a Brownsville, Texas, E.U.A., y "Washington" a la relativa a Matamoros, Tamaulipas, en México. Sonríen ante la aparente paradoja, o piensan en diplomática reciprocidad. Ni lo uno ni lo otro. Ambos nombres tienen su lógica explicación.

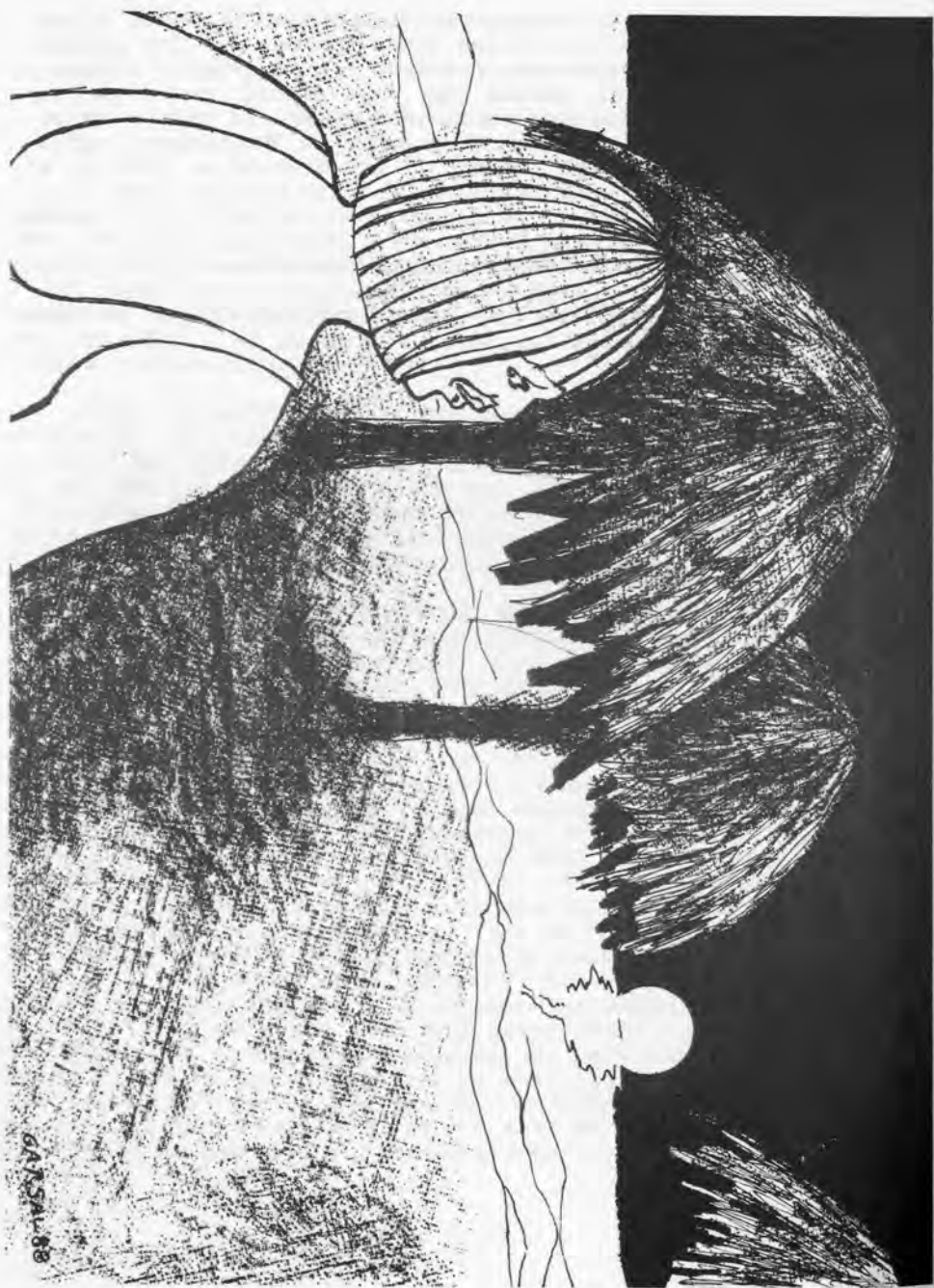
"Boca Chica", del lado texano, debe su denominación a un accidente físico-geográfico; las marejadas en ese lugar abrían un paso estrecho que formaba una laguneta; como un poco más al sur está la desembocadura del río Bravo, se designó el sitio con el nombre de "Boca Chica". Por tradición el nombre se ha conservado, a pesar del cambio oficial del idioma y de que a la fecha canal y laguneta han desaparecido.

En cuanto a "Washington", en el lado tamaulipeco, se trata de otro fenómeno. Originalmente también producto de la naturaleza, aunque en su furia: a principios de este siglo--los más viejos ribereños a quienes he consultado no me han podido precisar el año--como resultado de un naufragio, apareció en médano ubicado a varios kilómetros al sur de la desembocadura del río Bravo, un barco de madera y de no muy grandes dimensiones, una de cuyas bandas se leía: "City of Washington"; por tal motivo los matamorenses que visitaban nuestra playa en ese lugar empezaron a usar expresiones como ésta: "Vamos al médano del City of Washington". Con el afán de apocopar, pronto se dijo: "Vamos al médano del Washington"; tras de suprimir el posesivo inglés se suprimió el posesivo en español, y se dijo: "El médano del Washington", con lo que se olvidó el naufragio, el barco y se adjudicó al médano el nombre del primer presidente norteamericano; después y finalmente se suprimió el médano y sólo se dijo y se dice: "Vamos a Washington"; si se acortó la denominación, en cambio se agrandó en longitud el sitio, pues se convirtió en una extensión de varios kilómetros--desde la "boca del río" hasta la playa de "El Barril"--lo que se ahora se conoce con el nombre de "Playa de Washington", y muy pronto, gracias a la flamante carretera soñada, en "el balneario Washington".

Parece que hay la tendencia de llamar a esta playa matamorenses "Bagdad" o no sé qué otro nombre; no nos parece histórica ni geográficamente acertado el propuesto nombre, pues Bagdad existió al margen del río Bravo, cerca de su desembocadura, y el sitio donde termina ahora la carretera no es precisamente allí. Dejar el nombre de Washington sería conservar una tradición local. No deshonra honrar a Washington.

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros

Note: Washington Beach has now been renamed Playa General Lauro Villar.



GOLDEN YEARS OF THE RAIL

by

ALAN HOLLANDER

I quietly sat in my air-conditioned car waiting for the train to pass. The music from my radio did nothing to alleviate impatience as the iron snake slowly and deliberately chugged its way north to destination unknown by me. Car after car carrying cotton, vegetables and products from various aspects of industry moved across the road that I wished to traverse. The thing about that situation is that no matter how much a rush you're in, you have no recourse but to wait.

With not much else to do, my mind started to wander. Railroads being foremost in my thoughts at the time, I focused on the miles of tracks that link the Valley to thousands of points on the continent, somehow weaving through this country and its neighbors, creating one interacting unit. Recalling some historical studies I remembered how the railroads were primarily responsible for building this country and I wondered about the Valley. How did it begin? What was it like before the railroads came? Who was responsible? What are some of the stories and who are the people involved?

A horn blaring from the car behind me snapped me out of my thoughts to inform me that the train had passed me and I could proceed. The five minute wait changed my plans and I headed to the Fort Brown area in order to look at the old locomotive innocently standing there and not holding up anyone. In its days, there was no one to block, only roads to build.

First Tracks Are Laid

The Civil War was over and the country was unified. However, there was still some suspicion as to the stability of the State of Texas. The French occupying Mexico were also looked upon with a careful eye. Therefore, Union troops were stationed in this area and General Sheridan wired Ulysses S. Grant. "At first our troops up the Rio Grande were supplied by small steamers which we had sent up the river; but the difficulties of entrance at the mouth of the Rio Grande made this line very dangerous and precarious as sometimes a transport could not cross the bar at the mouth of the river for nine or ten days. I therefore ordered the building of a

railroad from Brazos to White's Ranch on the Rio Grande River, a distance of eleven miles."

This telegram began an era that transformed this Valley from a Barren and deserted wilderness to what it has become in modern times. General Sheridan got his railroad but it did not last long. The hurricane of 1867 totally destroyed it, and it was never rebuilt. However, it led to the building of the Rio Grande Railroad a few years later on higher ground.

In the year 1870, Brownsville had no telegraphic connections to the north, and only one mail delivery service every week. Steamboats stopped in Point Isabel only every other week, and it would take a month to get a letter answered from Washington. At this time, the citizens of Brownsville decided to invest one quarter of a million dollars in a railroad from Point Isabel to Brownsville, a distance of twenty- three miles. The train that quietly stands in the Fort Brown section of Brownsville is all that is left of that historic line, except for a few ties lying scattered here and there along the way.

In those early years, not everybody welcomed the new train. A Brownsville merchant named H.D. Woodhouse did what he could with his ox carts to compete against the Rio Grande Railroad for some time after the line was open.

The history of this railroad was a tempestuous one, being the victim of floods and storms which left it in financial straits. In its early years, the Rio Grande Line was approached by the Mexican National Railway, prompting it to build a connecting link in order to help import materials for its Monterrey extension. This was called the Brownsville and Gulf Railway. I have serious reservations about calling this small extension a railroad. Its equipment consisted of four flat cars and one box car for rainy weather. The locomotives were not made of iron, rather, there were two tired mules, as well as a third in case of mud. This line functioned until 1889. The Rio Grande Railway Company was largely responsible for the growth of the Laguna Madre area and transported people and goods until the mid-nineteen twenties.

The Great Expansion

As the book of centuries turned pages into its twentieth chapter, the Rio Grande Valley and a good part of the Texas Gulf Coast were still unchartered wilderness. The area from Brownsville to Sinton, 160 miles north, did not have one village, only miles after miles of empty, unfenced

wilderness. What is now Hidalgo County was referred to as the "Wild Horse Desert."

An early account of those days describes Brownsville:

"Visualize Brownsville, if you please, without city water supply, street gutters its only sewers, all streets innocent of pavement save Elizabeth street with chuck holes and deep puddles of other days, dark at night. The only telegraph was handled over a military line extending from Fort McIntosh at Laredo to Fort Brown at Brownsville. Here is the Brownsville of that period, its safe streets untainted by gasoline smells, the unhurried donkey carried an incredible load of firewood on its back. It was the custom of merchants in those days to close at about eleven o'clock in the morning and to open again at five, while in strict accord with American methods, business should have been going on strong. Much of the surrounding land was desolate and cactus grown, on which grazed innumerable herds of goats."

The only means of transportation to the nearest northern city, Corpus Christi, was by stage coach which required thirty-four hours of back breaking travel. There was a relay of horses every ten miles, gates marking boundaries of ranches had to be opened and closed by one of the passengers and there were practically no bridges. When Los Olmos creek overflowed, stages and other means of transporting goods such as burros and ox teams were held up for days.

There were attempts to expand the railroad to the Valley. The Texas landscape was dominated by the rails of the mighty Southern -Pacific line but they were biding their time before coming to the Rio Grande. However, the great promise here turned many eyes to this area. A certain Colonel E. H. Ropes spent the years 1888 - 1895 digging a projected railroad to South America. He got as far as twenty-five miles south of Corpus Christi and was stopped by financial onslaught, especially the panic of 1893.

Fortunately not all attempts failed. The development and expansion of the Rio Grande Valley go hand in hand with the mention of a man named Uriah Lott. For reasons unknown he is left out of many history books written about this area. However, he is possibly the most prominent historical name concerning the growth of the Rio Grande Territory.

In 1899, Lott singlehandedly started a campaign for

means to build a railroad to Brownsville. He convinced financier B.F. Yoakum to help out. With the donation of land from local ranchers he was on the way, despite great protests from the Southern Pacific lines.

On January 12, 1903, a charter was issued to the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad Company and in mid-November, 1903, the first tracks were laid in Robstown by Railroad Builder Sam A. Robertson. The new Railroad was commonly referred to as the Lott Railroad or the Brownsville Line.

Driving in the Spikes

The vast wilderness stretching from Corpus Christi to Brownsville was forbidding, and the hardships and hazards of constructing the Lott Railroad were many. J.L. Allhands is one who worked on that early railroad. Following are some of his accounts of life on the rails. "Creeping tarantulas, scorpions and centipedes were as plentiful as fiddlers are said to be in Hades. With power in its coil and poison in its fangs, there seemed to be a rattlesnake to the acre. It was not uncommon for the steel and tie gangs to kill from six to a dozen of those enormous rattlers daily. The water for camp use, often brackish, had to be hauled long distances and would reach camp in an ill-smelling condition."

Workers often took along their families to live with them in the camps and carried "their homes on their backs," Allhands describes some of those conditions; "There were no musical instruments, newspapers, radio, church or even school. The faithful wife, doctoring the squalling kids' measles, whooping cough, mumps, etc. would cast her eyes out of the window of her dreams, the tent door, and hope and yearn for an education and golden times for her offspring. She even lost track of dates and sometimes the names of days."

"Their work might call for setting up camp in the slime of a moss-hung mosquito swamp of our great bottom lands. When it rained, the camps were about the wettest places one could imagine, with clinging mud everywhere inside and out. In unscreened rag houses, minus the comforts and conveniences of civilization, voracious red bugs, ticks, ants, mosquitos at their peppiest, and grievous swarms of buzzing flies left peace neither day or night. And a doctor or dentist, well none was near. A pair of plyers was brought into play when the sharp grind of pain became too great and no 'go easy, doctor' was heard."

Despite the hardships, the trackers finally reached Brownsville. More than five thousand people gathered to watch the last day of work as the men drove their spikes into the ground. They came on horse, burro, oxcarts and on foot to watch the long bands of steel become one with the ground.

By early July, 1904, the Lott line was ready for its opening. An account of that memorable day reads, "When the first train screeched to a stop at 7:20 p.m., there was bedlamic cheering and shouting by the crowd of about 600. Fireworks boomed out a welcome and a brass band blared for it in a Fourth of July packed with extra meaning for Brownsville. It was an hour of real glory for Uriah Lott, too, as he, grinning and waving a big brown hand, alighted from the first train into town." In honor of this occasion, Brownsville actually changed their time system from Sun to Standard, twenty years after the rest of the country.

It is worth note, that the track builder, Sam A. Robertson went on to settle San Benito, built a spur railroad system, became sheriff, built a road to South Padre Island, fought in World War I at the age of fifty-one and became one of the most memorable men in Valley history before his death in 1938.

The railroad had a tremendous impact on the Valley. Every city presently located from Corpus Christi to Brownsville got started because of it. Raymondville, Harlingen, Kingsville and the rest. Now it was time for expansion to the west.

Hidalgo Branch

The Hidalgo Branch or (Sam Fordyce Branch) was the next step for the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway. There was a plan to carve through the dense wilderness and to link rails from "The very puny desolate looking Junction point known as Harlingen and at times dubbed as Rattlesnake Junction. One of the great number of snakes killed there was fully ten inches in girth at the thickest part of its body." The ultimate destination of this line was Rio Grande City. However, this destination wasn't reached until the nineteen twenties. By August, 1904, the twin steel ribbons reached what was then referred to as 'Section Forty.' In the year 1908 this desolate area became Mission.

As the construction headed west, growth and progress spread with each tie laid into place. La Feria, Mercedes, Weslaco, Pharr and that isolated depot that John McAllen called Santa Anita Ranch. After the railroad workers laid

the tracks, McAllen got the urge to have a town bear his name and that area of Hidalgo County holds it to this day. Uriah Lott promised him a depot and one was soon built there. Allhands tells us that, "The depot remained agentless for more than a year but even then there wasn't anything to do. The townsite there in the bush just stood so still that for a long time the agent could bang away with his rifle from his stand on the station platform and get a deer."

The line finally was completed in December 1904 at a townsite past Mission named after Sam Forsyth. The great opening day for this line was on December 19, 1904, when daily service was inaugurated. There was little celebration, because other than the construction force and a few pioneers, nobody was there to celebrate.

One memorable character is a woman that Donna was named for, Donna Hooks Fletcher. A pioneer with bold ideas and determination, she made great strides to build that area. She was the first postmaster and Notary Public. She opened Donna's first boarding house, created the first frame office building, hatched her own fields out of the wilderness and cultivated them, gave the Valley its first herd of Jersey cows and opened and operated Donna's first department store.

Most relevant here is the fact that she was the first woman passenger ever to ride a passenger train out of Brownsville. A few weeks before the Line opened into Brownsville, she was called to the bedside of an ill relative in Beaumont, Texas. Fletcher found the trackbuilder, Sam Robertson, and persuaded him to let her ride on the line even though it did not yet have any accommodations for passengers. Robertson thought that it would be extremely dangerous for a lone woman to ride that construction train to Corpus Christi with all the hoboes and roughnecks who bummed rides on this new line.

Falling victim to her persuasive powers, Robertson finally put her in a railcar with "a few sandwiches, a bucket of water and a wire cot." The doors were shut and locked for protection and the train took off at nine. The next morning, the train arrived at Robstown and Donna Fletcher crawled out in "a grimy and disheveled condition," made it to Corpus Christi and from there to Beaumont on the Southern Pacific Lines.

Bringing In The People

The great railroads were vastly responsible for populating the Southwest. In the act of doing so, the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Line took a financial beating in the first years of its operation. Because they literally built into unknown and undeveloped country, they had to take on the task of creating their own traffic and commerce. People had to be brought in to live and work in the wilderness and newly built townsites.

One ploy was to make the rates as low as possible. For a time they even supplied free passage from Corpus Christi. They succeeded in bringing people from as far away as Chicago. J.L. Allhands remembers some of the tactics used. "Old timers will remember how, when those home-seekers excursions got going, they rolled in every two weeks, on the first and third Thursday. Consisting of from seven to ten cars, they usually ran in several sections. An agent would be found in charge of five or more prospective buyers, and those, 'snow-diggers' from the North would listen as if hypnotized to the spiel of that land salesman as he warmed up to the subject."

The Lott Railroad went as far as starting its own publication called "Gulf Coast Magazine" which came out in 1905, and was published quarterly in Corpus Christi. It told of the merits of this area. Finally, this area started teeming with investors of every type. In the first eight months of 1908, the Lott Railroad handled "251 cars of emigres from the North hankering for a piece of land. Those immigrant cars were usually loaded with everything they owned and everything they loved: a cow, a horse or two, a dog, chickens, household goods and a few farming implements."

Allhands tells of the state of Brownsville due to that influx, "All the people who came to find homes in that new land made Brownsville their objective, and that city overflowing with such an ingathering of them that all rooms were jam-packed, in some instances as many as six persons to a room."

It is worth note that in 1907, the state imposed its first regulations on motor vehicles. The speed limit was eighteen miles an hour on a state highway and eight miles per hour within an incorporated town. Drivers were requested to brake their machines for a horse team to let the animal pass and they had to have a bell to ring when approaching intersections.

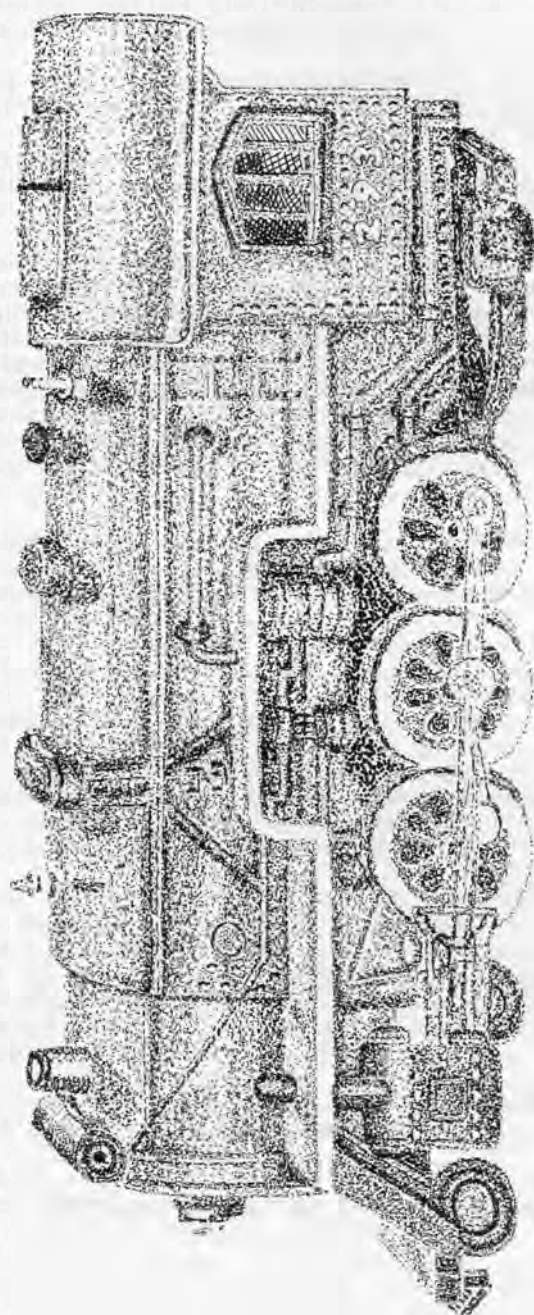
The Big Boys Take Over

In 1926, a permit was granted for the powerful Southern Pacific Railroad to extend their line from Falfurios to Edinburg, McAllen and finally Harlingen. In January, 1927, the tracklayers reached Edinburg amidst much pomp and ceremony. That same year, the railroad pushed down into Brownsville.

By the time the year 1925 rolled around, the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway hauled 35,562 cars out of the Valley in that year alone. The old Brownsville Line (or Lott Line if you prefer) was sold and taken into the fold of the Missouri-Pacific Line. The vast improvement made on the railroad from this time on are staggering. Diesel-powered locomotives pulling more than 125 cars appeared with sturdier rails and more development.

The vast role of the railroads cannot be stressed enough. We have hardly touched on the people, anecdotes and experiences of those golden years of the rail. There were bandit raids, train robberies, great men who came in and built the Valley up from the desert of mesquite and cactus. We did not talk about Lon C. Hill beginning a town in the wild and calling it Harlingen after a town in Holland. Space prevented us from touching on the popular presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, falling in love with the Valley and building a house in Mission in 1909.

I don't know if I'll feel any different when a huge train causes me to be late for an appointment, but I can tell you that I will certainly view it with considerably more awe between my protestations.



The Murder of Joe Crixell

by

Ralph Schmeling

On August 9, 1912, Joe L. Crixell, Chief of Police, was killed on Elizabeth St., between 12th and 13th streets, about a quarter of ten, by Paul McAllister.

From witnesses the story is that Crixell had just ridden in from his usual rounds of the town, and dismounted in front of T. Crixell's Saloon. He walked towards the Saloon and when he was about five feet from it, he was shot. Six shots were fired and each one of them struck Crixell. He died instantly. There were few people on the street when the shooting occurred as a crowd of about 200 people were gathered and listening to a band which was playing on the roof of the Miller Hotel. When they heard the shots, they all ran in the opposite direction.

Phil P. Barbour and Dr. W. N. Spohn reached Crixell first and with Deputy Marshal J. M. Dwyer, they took Crixell's pistol from the holster and saw that it had not been fired.

Captain Fox testified that he was sitting in a chair in front of the Bank Saloon and had spoken to Crixell when he rode by. He did see Crixell standing on the sidewalk talking to a man on horseback. McAllister was sitting in a chair in the gutter in front of the Club Bar. Then he heard shots, four in succession, then a pause, and two more shots. He rushed across the street and found Crixell dead, so he arrested McAllister. Fourteen wounds were found on Crixell's body.

J. H. Krafts during the trial testified that he was leaving the saloon and saw a man in a chair in the street at the edge of the sidewalk. He said he heard the man call "Joe"--then saw Crixell walk toward the man--when he was about five or six feet from the man in the chair--he saw him fire two shots and Crixell fall. Then the man got out of his chair and fired more shots into Crixell. Then two men from across the street came out and caught the man and took him across the street to the Bank Saloon. Others testified the same.

It was believed that politics was the cause of the killing.

There were two parties. One was the Democratic Party, Jim Well's party, called the "Blues." R. B. Creager headed the Independent Party, known as the "Reds."

In these elections, people elected a Mayor, Treasurer, Secretary, Attorney General and Councilmen from each of the four wards.

The killing is believed to have started at a ballgame in 1909 or 1910. George Cleveland was at the gate taking up tickets when the people in the bleachers started to complain about Briseño, who worked for the Missouri Pacific Railroad and who was sitting on a rail watching the game, blocking the view of those behind him in the bleachers. George went up and asked him to move so the people could see, but he refused. This argument ended in a fight with both men evenly matched. The crowd got excited and Pat Combe, evidently losing his head, got up and with his pistol in his hand, started cussing out the Mexicans. This incident made the Mexicans so mad that they turned against Fred Combe in the next election. (1910)

The Mexicans as a result of the fight at the ball park had cast their votes for Crixell, and this enabled him to win over Fred Combe. It was in this election that Crixell, member of the Red Independent Party, was elected City Marshal. It was the first time the Independent Party had defeated the Democratic Party.

It was also the Mexicans who burned down the ball park before the 1910 election was held.

Jim Browne was the only Democrat to win. He was from the 4th Ward. He refused to take position, Cain and Dennett ran for the office and Cain won.

In the election of 1912, the Red Independent Party won again. T. A. Kinder was the only Blue Democrat elected and Joe Crixell was elected City Marshal again.

This made the Democrats mad and they believed that Joe was the strong man of the Independent Party when actually it was his brother who was the strong man.

It is believed it was the Democrats who hired McAllister, an ex-Ranger and known gun man, to kill Crixell.

McAllister was acquitted in his trial on the plea of self defense. The case was transferred to Halettsville in

Lavaca County, after several postponements. McAllister testified that Crixell had approached him and attempted to shoot him and as Crixell made a motion for his pistol, that he (McAllister) beat him to the draw.

Several years later, McAllister was killed in a gun duel in Corpus Christi, Texas.



JOE CRIXELL

THE PLAN OF SAN DIEGO
AND
THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

BY

Jake Watts

Introduction

The United States border with Mexico is like no other border in the world. It is the only border where the haves come face to face with the have-nots, or as the economists say, the developed versus the less developed. Because of this stark contrast, it has been a most difficult border to control. The smuggling of goods and people is and has been endemic. Where else in the world could an estimated 6 to 12 million illegal aliens cross from one country to another and remain basically untouched? This paper concerns itself with a short and intense period in the history of the border, when fear and hatred spread across the Rio Grande River.

During the Mexican Revolution, the border was an instrumental factor in the history of that period. Some argue that the Mexican Revolution was not the triumph of the masses and the overthrow of tyranny but rather the emergence of the North as dominant in Mexico. This influential Northern dynamism did not stop at the Rio Grande; it drew much of its lifeblood from the American side.

The northern side of the river offered protection for the first revolutionaries, though it was subject to the vagaries of American politics, as the Flores Magón brothers tragically were to discover. Villa received his arms and technical assistance from the North. But it was also a two-way street and could work against the revolutionaries. Wilson's recognition of Carranza and cutting off of Villa's armament supply caused the eclipse of the once bright star of the "León del Norte."

The Mexican Revolution spilled over all along the border. This paper will discuss the revolutionary document, the Plan of San Diego, and its implications for the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas during 1915. The Plan of San Diego made its first appearance to the general public of the Valley on February 4, 1915. The headline of the Brownsville Herald

read: "Atrocious Plot Unearthed," and proceeded to give some of the more alarming details contained in the Plan.¹ A copy of the Plan was found on Basilio Ramos, a native of Nuevo Laredo, when he was arrested in Hidalgo County while attempting to solicit recruits to join the revolution. Ramos remained in jail until May 13, 1915, at which time he was indicted by the federal grand jury in Brownsville. Basically, the Plan was a call for the takeover of the Southwest by the Mexican-Americans, with the help of other exploited races--the Native American, the Black and most interestingly, the Japanese. By May, the hysteria produced by the Plan had been so forgotten that Ramos' bail was reduced from \$5,000 to \$100.² As a result, Ramos promptly jumped bail and fled to the safety of the Mexican side of the river.

Interest in the Plan was revived when raids began under the banner of the Plan in July and lasted through October. New leadership emerged in the person of Luis de la Rosa and Aniceto Pizaña, both natives of the Valley. The Lower Valley found itself in a state of guerrilla war from July second on. This activity did not cease until late October, after the United States government recognized Carranza.

The Plan was reactivated by Carranza during the period of General Pershing's occupation of Mexico in 1916. This threat brought the Army to the border, as the raids in 1915 had shown how vulnerable the area was. Yet this period saw little action compared to that of the July to October, 1915 period. Only one raid of significance took place in the Valley on June 14 when Abel Sandoval crossed the river with twenty men intent on wrecking trains and attacking army patrols. Two days later two raiders were captured and the rest fled across the river.³ Carranza had assembled other troops in the Laredo area but called off any attempted invasion when relations with the United States improved in late July. This saw the end of the Plan of San Diego.

Charles Cumberland's "Border Raids in the Lower Rio Grande Valley-1915," was the first major work dealing with the events surrounding the Plan of San Diego. As indicated by the title, Cumberland concentrated on the disturbances themselves, touching only lightly on the Plan of San Diego.

One of the major sources used by Cumberland were the weekly reports by the Commanding General, Southern Department, to the Adjutant General of the Army in the National Archives. These reports are especially useful in documenting the conflict between the Texas State government, in the person of Governor Ferguson, and the Federal

government, represented by Secretary of War Garrison and General Funston, over the responsibilities for maintaining order along the Mexican border.⁴ Cumberland follows the events which eventually brought the United States Army into direct action on the border after their acceptance of Mexican responsibility for the raids. Initially, their policy had been that the raids were carried out by locals and the product of political squabbles between people on the American side of the river and thus fell under the responsibility of the state authorities.⁵

Cumberland's main contribution is the treatment of the fighting along the border; the various raids and their consequences. Also, he details the Anglo panic in the Valley. Yet it is interesting that Cumberland relies exclusively on the Corpus Christi Caller and the San Antonio Express newspapers for a great deal of the coverage. Neither Corpus Christi nor San Antonio are in the Valley and they did not suffer the effects of these border raids, being respectively 160 and 320 miles north of Brownsville, the center of the hostilities. Local papers in the Valley, as well as Mexican border papers, covered these events. This point will be expanded in the next chapter.

The Plan of San Diego is briefly described as an irredentist plan developed in northern Mexico and drafted by a group of Huerta supporters while they were in a Monterrey prison. Ostensibly it was written in San Diego, Texas; hence its name. But no further discussion is made of the obvious inconsistency presented by a plan drawn up in a Monterrey prison by Huertistas and named after a small ranch town in South Texas which was not even in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Aniceto Pizaño, which should read Pizaña, and Luis de la Rosa are pointed out as leaders of the plan. Little is mentioned about them other than that they are Americans of Mexican extraction and "had been relatively successful economically in the Valley."⁶

Further mention of the Plan is made in discussing the capture of Mexican raiders carrying documents indicating Mexico as the source of the raids and the plan as the motive.⁷ This is credited with changing General Funston's attitude concerning responsibility for the raids.

Though attributing the Plan to Huertistas initially, Cumberland later points out the advantages the unrecognized Carranza government received from the border situation in dealing with President Wilson. The question is left open as to whether Carranza encouraged the raids or merely ignored the problem. But Cumberland does not hesitate to say that

Carranza was responsible for the termination of the raids and used them as an instrument of policy in seeking recognition for his government.⁸

In regard to the Plan of San Diego specifically, Cumberland does little more than mention its supposed origins and briefly states its influence upon General Funston. Great detail is given to the military involvement along the border and the reaction of the populace. It is a basic article that is important for its treatment of the American side of the border problems.

Following Cumberland's extensive work, William Hager's article is less thorough. Focus is placed on the sensational aspects of the Plan of San Diego, rather than on an analysis of the events. It is difficult to believe that Hager even read the Plan itself. In his first paragraph, Hager writes: "Those responsible for formulating the Plan envisioned a division of the conquered territory into two new republics, one a buffer state between Mexico and the United States, and the other to revert to Mexico as part of the domain lost in 1848."⁹ Examination of the Plan shows that clause 10 states that the new republic shall be annexed to Mexico only if it be thought expedient. Also, no mention of a buffer state is made.¹⁰

In the same paragraph, Hager states that: "as much of the episode centered on the border town of San Diego, Texas, the conspiracy quickly was labelled "The Plan of San Diego."¹¹ First of all, the center of activity for the episode was in the Lower Valley, over 150 miles south of San Diego. Secondly, it would be difficult to characterize San Diego as a border town, since it is over 80 miles from the Mexican border.

Later in the article, Hager mentions that there is some evidence that certain American interests were involved in the plot.¹² But this evidence is not forthcoming in the article. Brief mention is made of the Falls Committee and its bias, exemplified by the Texas Ranger Hansen who was a member of the investigating committee and stood to gain from American intervention in Mexico. But this is hardly "evidence of American involvement" in the Plan of San Diego. There is no doubt that many Americans who owned land in Mexico and had had it taken away as a result of the Revolution lobbied for American military occupation of Mexico, hoping this might facilitate the return of their land. But there is no evidence that they were involved in the Plan of San Diego. Walter Prescott Webb, in his book on the Texas Rangers, mentions that the authorship of the Plan

has never been revealed and offers that "others say a prominent border character who later held a responsible position in Texas designed it (the Plan) in order to overturn Carranza and regain a ranch that the revolutionists had taken from him."¹³ Webb does not indicate the source of these "others."

The origins of the plan present a difficult problem. Michael Meyer, in "The Mexican-German Conspiracy, 1915," treats the Plan of San Diego as a second diversionary movement on the part of the Huertistas exiles. Also stated is the belief that the Plan of San Diego was the inspiration for the Zimmermann telegram.¹⁴ In this, Meyer falls short of claiming outright German involvement, other than financial. The Russians, Alperovich and Rudenko, on the other hand state positively that Germany was responsible for the plan: "El Plan de San Diego constituía otra tentativa más del imperialismo alemán para arrastrar a Mexico a la guerra con los Estados Unidos, jugando para ello con las aspiraciones del pueblo mexicano de recuperar el territorio arrebatado a Mexico a mediados del siglo XIX por los usurpadores yanquis. Uno de sus inspiradores era el consul alemán en Monterrey, Buchard."¹⁵ It is unusual that there is not a reference given for this information, in an otherwise well documented book.

Further treatment of German involvement in the Plan is seen in Gerlach's "Conditions Along the Border-1915, The Plan of San Diego." Gerlach makes use of state department records, "Report of Conditions Along the Border," 23 Jan. 1915, to point out that the American Consulate in Monterrey was aware that conservative Mexicans there believed the Germans were involved in the south Texas problems. Also a Colonel Crane of the United States Army had been informed in Mexico City of a connection between Germany and the disturbances in Texas.¹⁶

Gerlach adds that the Plan "was merely another phase of the larger Huerta-Orozco scheme." He confirms this by stating that the characteristics of the Plan, Huertista composition and German involvement, parallel the well documented Huerta-Orozco invasion attempt.¹⁷ In neither case does Gerlach definitively prove his point. The German involvement is based on second hand hearsay evidence found in the state department files, which Gerlach himself states, when referring to Crane's statement, was exceedingly vague and included no details.¹⁸ This is hardly conclusive proof of either German or Huertista involvement in the Plan.

A second point in Gerlach's article is his insistence

that Carranza had no connection with the Plan. Gerlach suggests that Carranza's desire to end disorder along the border proves his lack of relationship with the Plan.¹⁹ Gerlach does not take into account that Carranza became interested in ending the disorder only after he received recognition from the United States government. As will be pointed out in discussion of the most recent literature on the Plan, Carranza had a great deal to do with the Plan in various stages of its development.

Gerlach's major contribution is his use of the state department records concerning the internal affairs of Mexico. There is a weakness, however, in relying too much on the state department correspondence. Rather than examine the original local sources personally, Gerlach accepts the interpretation of the state department member. This is especially true in discussing conditions reported by state department people as they interpreted them from local newspapers.

After having covered the literature that purports to show that the Plan's origins were Huertista, German/Huertista, American or Carranzan; Juan Gómez suggests that the Plan was none other than what it said it was: an authentic attempt by the Mexican-Americans to take over the Southwest. Gómez bases his theory on the fact that the Plan called for the creation of an independent country and not immediate annexation to Mexico. Also he feels the inclusion of other minorities, which have a common bond in discrimination, points to Mexican-American authorship.²⁰ Gómez offers no substantive proof for this theory. There is no doubt that Mexican-Americans in south Texas were in some cases sympathetic to and even took an active part in the Plan. But this does not substantiate their authorship of the Plan.

A comparison of the two most recent, as well as the most comprehensive, articles on the Plan of San Diego offers an example of the dangers involved in the use of speculative evidence and the advantages of discovering as yet untapped material.

Sandos reiterates what Gerlach previously had attempted to prove about German involvement in the Plan. The American Vice Consul Robertson in Monterrey is quoted as stating that the Austrian and German consuls in Monterrey had provided financial backing for the Plan.²¹ This is use of the same correspondence cited by Gerlach; although Gerlach quotes Robertson on August 12 instead of Sandos' December 8. In the earlier correspondence Robertson stated that local Mexican

conservatives felt the Plan had German backing.²² Neither of these quotes offers conclusive proof and are based on hearsay cultivated by the American Vice consul.

Additional proof of German involvement is presented by the reports of Special Agent J.B. Rogers, who was sent into Mexico to investigate German activity. Sandos states that Rogers was "extremely able at collecting intelligence in hostile areas."²³ Rogers was so efficient that in his correspondence he was unable to correctly spell the name of one of the leading characters in the Plan: Pizaña appears as Pizaño. Nonetheless, Rogers was able to determine from the Spanish and Italian Consuls that the German Consul, John Bouchard, had been funding the operation.²⁴ Again there is no hard evidence to support this claim of German involvement. The whole case rests on Vice Consul Robertson's speculation about German support in Monterrey for the Plan. In Robertson's correspondence, in which he outlined the Plan of San Diego, he is quoted in Sandos as saying de la Rosa and Pizaña were originators of the Plan.²⁵ De la Rosa and Pizaña were from Brownsville and were recruited into the Plan well after it was drawn up.²⁶ Robertson does not appear to be a reliable source in matters concerning the Plan.

Harris and Sadler, on the other hand, come to the conclusion that there is no hard evidence of German involvement in the Plan. They point out that the documentation concerning Witzke, the German saboteur, is invalid because he did not arrive in the United States until the summer of 1916 and not until the spring of 1917 did he operate from Mexico. Also German messages intercepted by British naval intelligence between 1914 and 1918 contain nothing relating to the Plan of San Diego. In regard to financial backing, the adherents to the Plan were poorly financed and had little equipment. And most conclusively, when the Americans asked for hard proof in Mexico City, the state department was unable to confirm German involvement in the Plan.²⁷

While Harris and Sadler have weakened the argument for German involvement in the Plan, they have strengthened the Carranza connection. The key position of Carranza's benign neglect of the border, thereby creating a refuge for the raiders, and his use of the Plan as a diplomatic bargaining tool in search of United States recognition run through most of the literature. But what had been in doubt was Carranza's direct involvement in the Plan. Through the use of the Pablo Gonzalez Archive in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, Harris and Sadler are able to show that Carranza Generals Gonzalez, Fierros and Zuazua took leading roles in

the Plan. Financial backing was also provided through Gonzalez during the Fierros period of involvement in the Plan.²⁸ It is speculated that Carranza was using the Germans, rather than vice versa.

The treatment of some particular events surrounding the Plan of San Diego suffers from inconsistency in both articles. Sandos states that, "In May, when Basilio Ramos was brought to trial in McAllen, the judge stated that the defendant 'ought to be tried for lunacy, not for conspiracy against the United States.'" ²⁹ First of all, Ramos was not brought to trial in May, he was merely indicted and it took place in Brownsville, not McAllen. Ramos was placed under \$100.00 bond and promptly jumped bail and fled to Matamoros.³⁰

Sandos describes de la Rosa, a prime mover in the Plan, as a butcher in Laredo.³¹ Various other sources state that he was from Brownsville, economically well off and a one time Deputy Sheriff for Cameron County.³²

Harris and Sadler claim that Ramos was arrested by pro-Villista officials in McAllen.³³ In fact, Ramos was arrested by Deputy Sheriff Tom Mayfield. The confusion comes from the fact that Ramos was turned in by Villa supporters while attempting to gain recruits for the Plan.³⁴

The origins of the Plan of San Diego offer a difficult problem. It is doubtful if the identity of the authors of the Plan will ever be definitely uncovered. Yet it is surprising that so much of the early literature accepted the idea that the Plan was formulated by Huertistas. Harris and Sadler have pointed out that this supposition rests on two points: one is that Basilio Ramos said he was a Huertista and secondly, that the Plan emerged during the period of Huerta's attempted comeback.

Harris and Sadler show by examination of court records that Ramos stated that he was assisted by the Carrancista General Nafarrate prior to his arrival in Texas.³⁵ This information was available from the first appearance of Ramos' activities in the Brownsville Herald newspaper. The press reported that Ramos admitted receiving help from Nafarrate.³⁶ This, coupled with his reported lavish reception in Matamoros after jumping bail cast considerable doubt on his supposed Huertista affiliation. The neglect of local sources on the part of the early researchers has led to a simple acceptance of less than conclusive evidence.

One area which has not been discussed is how could

Huerta have benefited from the Plan of San Diego and the nature of its philosophy? A close study of the Plan does not reveal a Huerta point of view. In truth, the Plan itself, and especially the revised version, indicates a Flores Magón anarcho-syndicalist point of view.

With Huerta's political center for his attempted counterrevolution in El Paso, it is difficult to see what advantages could be obtained by stirring up the Mexican-American population of the Lower Valley.³⁷ If anything, one would think that Huerta would do all he could not to antagonize the United States, as this was the temporary home of many of his supporters and the necessary launching site for his plot. The Plan could only succeed with the active cooperation of the Carranza border forces; a group less than enthusiastic about the return of Huerta to power.

The wording of the Plan itself presents a complicated picture. Time and again the Plan has been called an irredentist movement.³⁸ In the strict sense of the word: an adherent to a party which advocates the recovery and union to the mother country of native districts now subject to other countries;³⁹ the Plan was not an outright irredentist movement. Clause 10 of the Plan states that annexation to Mexico would be requested only if it be thought expedient. As a matter of fact, great care was taken in drawing up the Plan to distance it from Mexico. The last clause of the Plan states that the adherents on no account shall accept aid, either moral or pecuniary, from the Mexican government. This indifference to Mexico extended itself to politics as well. If annexation should occur, it would be "without concerning ourselves at that time about the form of government which may control the destinies of the common mother country."⁴⁰

Great influence has been placed on the spectacular nature of the Plan, especially the section dealing with the killing of all Anglo males over sixteen and the formation of an independent country along the border. No mention has been made of the clauses that created an independent image of the Plan, separate from either Carranza, German or Huerta influence. Obviously, the authors of the Plan attempted to present an unrelated movement, detached from Mexico. Whether this was just a ploy on the part of a Mexican faction to gain Mexican-American support is not known. Carranza certainly exploited the effects of the Plan and financed it during its final stage, but this is far from proving his definite responsibility for it.

If the original Plan contained some elements foreign to

Carranza, Huerta and German philosophy; the revised Plan was of an even more radical bent. The word proletariat was introduced, all rural property was to be held in common and the principles of "universal love" were to be taught in the schools.⁴¹ This has all the flavor of the Flores Mogóns' Regeneración. Interestingly enough, radical political meetings composed of Mexican-Americans were reported to have been going on in San Benito for two years prior to the proclamation of the Plan of San Diego.⁴² Further anarcho-syndicalism influence is seen in a letter written to the Brownsville paper El Porvenir demanding jobs for the poor on the threat of death to the rich.⁴³ Rudolf Herler, a mysterious "Mexican emisary," was arrested in Pueblo, Colorado while attempting to incite Mexican-American mine workers to join the Plan and become part of the South Texas Revolution.⁴⁴ A political speech made in San Antonio at the time by an adherent to the Plan of San Diego left no doubt as to his inclinations when he closed with "long live anarchy," which cost him several months in jail.⁴⁵

If there is no proof of either Carranza or Huerta/German authorship, there is also little speculative evidence. Harris and Sadler have shown Carranza involvement through the Gonzalez papers, but at a time towards the end of the Plan's influence. If the Plan was written in San Diego, as some local people believe, no want of ill feelings directed at Mexican-Americans would be found in that South Texas town.⁴⁶ At the time of the Plan's supposed writing, Duval County, of which San Diego is the county seat, was in the middle of one of its typical political imbroglios. The Parr family, which has left a political patron dynasty to this day, was attempting to have the county seat moved to Benavides, where the Anglo-patron faction could exercise more power.⁴⁷

As further evidence of the San Diego origin, two of the original signers, Augustine Garza and Basilio Ramos, had worked in San Diego. Garza was a former school teacher and Ramos worked in a San Diego brewery.⁴⁸

In looking at what evidence there is concerning the authorship of the Plan of San Diego, I think that the best educated guess is that it was authored by people familiar with the problems of the South Texas area and quite possibly did take place in San Diego. However, one is hard pressed to explain the enigmatic inclusion of the Japanese "race" along side the Latin and Negro in clause 12. It has been argued that this is a clear indication of the international influence, most pointedly German/Japanese, in the Plan.

In terms of its stated goals, the Plan of San Diego was

nothing less than an abysmal failure. No independent republic was established, no races were liberated, nor were the general living conditions of the Mexican-Americans in the Valley improved. On the contrary, the Mexican-Americans found themselves the objects of hatred and fear. The vast majority of the Mexican-American population was subjected to a state of affairs little short of war.

This was all occurring while Carranza was enjoying diplomatic success with the help of the problems on the border, as Harris and Sadler have pointed out. But what needs to be examined, is at what cost? While the raiders could flee across the river to safety, the local Mexican-American population had to suffer the consequences created by the warlike conditions on the border. However, over one thousand people were able to cross the river to Matamoros during the most difficult times.⁴⁹ But these were the fortunate ones who lived near the border and had family or connections in Matamoros to support them. The rest were not so lucky.

The problems on the border coincided with arrival of two diverse groups. From the interior of the United States, especially the Midwest, families came to occupy the land made available by the new irrigation projects. A steady flow of Mexicans streamed towards the border, escaping the chaos wrought by the Mexican Revolution. The developers from the North took advantage of the Mexican migration. This unemployed mass of humanity was offered as an enticement to get people to settle in the Valley as the following quote by one of the developers suggests:

Cheap labor was needed to develop this new country and it was there in abundance. The supply was composed of swarthy poverty-stricken and half-starved Mexican peons, not one of whom could read, write, or speak a single word of English. They dressed in tight cotton breeches, and the cheapest shirts of the same material. They wore sandals, if they did not go bare-foot, and the inevitable peaked straw hats with raveling gaudy blankets around them, that showed much service, completed their costumes. They were plentiful and willing to work at sixty-two and one-half cents Mexican per day, while the frowsy female hands or señoras were paid the small pittance of thirty-seven cents.⁵⁰

Newspaper articles throughout the period quote local Anglos as saying, "my Mexicans" are uneasy and are acting surly. The Plan of San Diego could not have created the

problems it did without the help of the local Mexican-American population. And this in turn was fostered by poor relations between the newly arrived anglos and the local people. In colloquial speech the term "Mexican" defined a race rather than a nationality. In the Valley there were many "Mexicans" whose fathers, grandfathers and even great-grandfathers were born within what is now the territory of the United States.

Early on in the disturbances, local law enforcement officers stated that the marauders were often aided by persons living on the American side throughout the brush country, who acted as lookouts and refused to give any information to the officers.⁵¹ But not only were they giving aid, they were also taking an active role in the fighting. Less than a month after the initial fighting, officers captured three raiders and obtained a list of twenty-one names, all of whom resided in Cameron County.⁵² This fact established conclusively that the gangs, in a large part, were residents of Cameron County and not all came from Mexico as previously had been assumed. By early September local papers reported that the leaders of the fighting in the Valley were Aniceto Pizafia and Luis de la Rosa.⁵³ Both were natives of Cameron County.

What had started out as a supposed Mexican invasion of Texas, now was a revolt led by local men and apparently made up mostly of Valley Mexican-Americans. What were the conditions in the Valley which prompted such behavior? Shortly after the first exposure of the Plan of San Diego in local papers under the headline: "Atrocious Plan Unearthed," a "Mexican" was killed near Lyford because he had the audacity to take a drink of water using an Anglo farmer's cup.⁵⁴

There had been a long history of abuse of Mexican-Americans on the border by Texas Rangers from the time of the Cortina raids from Mexico in the previous century. The following succinct statement gives one an idea of border justice during the period of the Plan of San Diego:

"We met two Mexicans. They tried to escape. We stopped them. We could not identify them, so we left them there." The newspaper reporter added a note of clarification, as if it were needed, to the quote: "These Mexicans were killed."⁵⁵

When firing across the river in September intensified, General Nafarrate requested that the Texas Rangers stay away from the border and added that he would not shoot Army personnel but reserved the right to shoot Rangers and

civilians.⁵⁶ He had no bone to pick with the Army, as they were not familiar with the South Texas style of dealing with "Mexicans." The soldiers were new arrivals to the Valley and had not developed the prejudices of the area and were also under much stricter discipline.

At a hearing in 1919 investigating the conduct of the Texas Rangers, R.B. Creager of Brownsville, National Republican Committeeman from Texas, testified that approximately 200 Mexicans had been killed by Rangers, local peace officers or citizens during the preceding three years. He estimated that 90% of these were innocent of any wrongdoing. During the same time not over 20 Americans were killed.⁵⁷

In one rare case where an alleged raider was brought to trial, his conviction was overturned on appeal. Ramón Pizaña, brother of Plan leader Aniceto Pizaña, was convicted of the murder of McGuire, an Army trooper, which occurred during a raid at the family ranch, los Tulitos, on August 3, 1915. This conviction was overturned by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.⁵⁸ It is ironic that the defense counsel for Pizaña was the Brownsville law firm of Dancy and Canales. Canales was a prominent Mexican-American who had formed a group of secret scouts to fight the raiders.⁵⁹ That his firm would take the case of and successfully defend Pizaña is interesting indeed. One of the main points made by counsel in presenting its request for appeal was that no one at the ranch had ever been convicted of a criminal offense. In examining the court records of Aniceto Pizaña, who was present at the ranch during the raid, I found that he had been convicted in District Court of stealing two mules in 1906.⁶⁰ Thus the motion for appeal was based on incorrect information.

The success of the raiders rested on three basic points: first was the support offered by the local Mexican-American population, secondly the sanctuary provided by the Carranza controlled border and lastly the use of small highly mobile bands operating in the dense chaparral, making apprehension extremely difficult. If the raiders had ever attempted, as Harris and Sadler suggest, a formal military invasion during the last stages of the Plan, the results would have been disastrous.⁶¹ It would have been suicidal and utter folly and I do not think that Carranza ever really entertained the idea. Increasing the number of troops on the border is one thing, but an invasion is something else again. First of all, the Mexicans could not have counted on the local Mexican-Americans to offer much help, regardless of how much they might have wanted to contribute. Their guns had been

taken from them earlier in the troubles.

The Fierros Brigade was to be the main force behind the invasion and contained only 570 men. This would have been no match against the 100,000 to 125,000 National Guardsmen and 30,000 regular troops on the border.⁶² The retaliation against a greatly weakened Mexico could have been worse than that experienced after the previous war when Mexico lost half her territory. The United States was the source of most of Mexico's armaments and the rest which came by sea from Europe could easily have been cut off.

The Plan of San Diego was viable as a diplomatic tool only as long as Carranza used it in a way that was merely annoying and not directly threatening to the United States. The guerrilla activity of August to October saw the greatest success for Carranza when he was able to win diplomatic recognition from the United States. An all out war with the United States would have won him nothing and cost him a great deal. One author has suggested that the raids in the Lower Valley set the precedent for the raiders of 1916 and 1917, especially Villa.⁶³ This may be true. But it is important to see that the two events are quite different. The second stage of border troubles centered around the Big Bend area of Texas and the isolated town of Columbus, New Mexico.

The Big Bend of Texas was and is a sparsely populated area. The Mexican side of the border was even less populated. Raids carried out by Mexican irregulars, such as the May 5, 1916 raid on Glen Springs, were lightning incursions on small isolated settlements. They took place in a hostile area and found little support, if any, from the local people.

Villa's raid on Columbus was the result of ill feelings against the United States. Recognition of Carranza, the cutting off of armaments and the use of American railway to transport Carrancista units to Agua Prieta, Sonora to fight Villa troops; all of these things embittered Villa. Villa's Manifesto to the Nation proclaimed Americans to be "our eternal enemies... and ... the barbarians of the North."⁶⁴ The Columbus raid was the natural result of the United States policy. Where was Villa to turn?

The raids in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in 1915 fit neither of these schemes. They were not isolated incursions, nor were they desperate retaliations against United States diplomatic policy. What existed on the border during this short intense period set the precedent not for Villa and the Big Bend raids, but for such contemporary raiders as the IRA

and ETA. Local leaders Pizaña and de la Rosa had the sanctuary of the Mexican side of the border and the support of many local people. As the IRA use the Irish Republic and ETA use France, so did the raiders use Mexico. The raids in the Valley could have gone on indefinitely. Only the action of the Carranza forces on the Mexican side put a stop to them. Once the sanctuary was taken away the raids stopped. During the height of the raids over half the total mobile forces of the United States Army were involved in attempting to end the raids.⁶⁵ However, these forces did nothing to lessen the number of raids.

Historically, the raids in the Lower Rio Grande Valley showed that a small force of guerrillas could keep a large modern military unit at bay by the use of the unique circumstances present along the Mexican-United States border during the Mexican Revolution.

Pan American University at Brownsville

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Translation Copy

Provisional Directorate of the Plan of San Diego, Texas

Plan of San Diego, Texas January 6th, 1915

We who in turn sign our names, assembled in the REVOLUTIONARY PLOT OF SAN DIEGO, TEXAS, solemnly promise each other, on our word of honor, that we will fulfill, and cause to be fulfilled and complied with, all the clauses and provisions stipulated in this document, and execute the orders and the wishes emanating from the PROVISIONAL DIRECTORATE of this movement, and recognize as military Chief of the same, Mr. Augustin S. Garza, guaranteeing with our lives the faithful accomplishment of what is here agreed upon.

1. On the 20th day of February 1915, at two o'clock in the morning, we will arise in arms against the Government and country of the United States of North America, ONE AS ALL AND ALL AS ONE, proclaiming the liberty of the individuals of the black race and its independence of Yankee tyranny which has held us in iniquitous slavery since remote times; and at the same time and the same manner we will proclaim the independence and segregation of the States bordering upon the Mexican Nation, which are: TEXAS, NEW MEXICO, ARIZONA, COLORADO, AND UPPER CALIFORNIA OF WHICH States the Republic of Mexico was robbed in a most perfidious manner by North American imperialism.

2. In order to render the foregoing clause effective, the necessary army corps will be formed, under the immediated command of military leaders named by the SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY CONGRESS OF SAN DIEGO, TEXAS which shall have full power to designate a SUPREME CHIEF, who shall be at the head of said army. The banner which shall guide us in this enterprise shall be red, with a white diagonal fringe, and bearing the following inscription: "EQUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE" and none of the subordinate leaders or sub-alterns shall use any other flag (except only the white flag for signals). The aforesaid army shall be known by the name of: "LIBERATING ARMY FOR RACES AND PEOPLE."

3. Each one of the chiefs shall do his utmost by whatever means possible to get possession of the arms and funds of the cities which he has beforehand been designated to capture, in order that our cause may be provided with resources to continue to fight with proper success. The said leaders each being required to render account of everything to his superiors, in order that the latter may dispose of it in the

proper manner.

4. The leader who may take a city must immediately name and appoint municipal authorities, in order that they may preserve order and assist in every way possible the revolutionary movement. In case the Capital of any State which we are endeavoring to liberate be captured, there will be named in the same manner superior municipal authorities, for the same purpose.

5. It is strictly forbidden to hold prisoners, either special prisoners (civilians) or soldiers; and the only time that should be spent in dealing with them is that which is absolutely necessary to demand funds (loans) of them; whether these demands be successful or not, they shall be shot immediately without any pretext.

6. Every stranger who shall be found armed and cannot prove his right to carry arms, shall be summarily executed, regardless of his race or nationality.

7. Every North American over the age of sixteen shall be put to death; and only the aged men, the women, and the children shall be respected; and on no account shall traitors to our race be spared or respected.

8. THE APACHES of Arizona, as well as the INDIANS (RED SKINS) of the Territory, shall be given every guarantee; and their lands which have been taken from them shall be returned to them to the end that they may assist us in the cause which we defend.

9. All appointments and grades in our army which are exercised by subordinate officers (subalterns) shall be examined (recognized) by the superior officers. There shall likewise be recognized the grades of leaders of other plots which may not be connected with this, and who may wish to cooperate with us; also those who may affiliate with us later.

10. The movement having gathered force, and once having possessed ourselves of the United States above alluded to, we shall proclaim them an INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC, later requesting (if it be thought expedient) annexation to Mexico. without concerning ourselves at that time about the form of Government which may control the destinies of the common mother country.

11. When we shall have obtained independence for the negroes,

we shall grant them a banner, which they themselves be permitted to select, and we shall aid them in obtaining six States of the American Union, which States border upon those already mentioned, and they may form from these six States a Republic that they may, therefore, be independent.

12. None of the leaders shall have power to make terms with the enemy, without first communicating with the superior officers of the army, bearing in mind that this is a war without quarter; nor shall any leader enroll in his ranks any stranger, unless said stranger belong to the Latin, the negro or the Japanese race.

13. It is understood that none of the members of this COMLOT (or any one who may come in later), shall, upon the definite triumph of the cause which we defend, fail to recognize their superiors, nor shall they aid others who, with bastard designs, may endeavor to destroy what has been accomplished by such great work.

14. As soon as possible, each local society (junta) shall nominate delegates who shall meet at a time and place beforehand designated, for the purpose of nominating a PERMANENT DIRECTORATE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT. At this meeting shall be determined and worked out in detail the powers and duties of the PERMANENT DIRECTORATE, and this REVOLUTIONARY PLAN may be revised or amended.

15. It is understood among those who may follow this movement that we will carry as a singing voice the independence of the negros, placing obligations upon both races; and that, on no account will we accept aid, either moral or pecuniary, from the Government of Mexico, and it need not consider itself under any obligations in this, our movement.

"EQUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE"

San Diego, Texas, Jan, 6, 1915

(signed) L. Perrigo, President A. Gonzales, Secretary A.A. Saenz E. Cisneros Porfirio Santos A.S. Garza Manuel Flores B. Ramos, Jr. A.G. Almaraz.

(1) Investigation of Mexican Affairs, Report and Hearing before a Subcommittee on Foreign Relations, Sen. Doc. 285, 66 Cong., (Washington, 1919-1920) vol. I pp. 1205-1207.

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POINT ISABEL EXLEY 1903
 SKETCH FROM A PHOTO
 COURTESY OF MANUEL GRAVITO
 BY CHARLIE BECKER 1-1988



The Olmito Train and the Universal Struggle

by

Mimosa Stephenson and Olive Rathjen

During the recent holiday season, one of the writers attended a New Year's Eve party where she happened to meet a cultured woman from Mexico City, who, in the conversation that ensued, revealed a love of Mexican-American literature, her favorite story being "El Jamon y Los Frijoles." The short story that this woman particularly loved and remembered is Americo Paredes' story that takes place in Brownsville about the time of the border bandit troubles. This story, "The Hammon and the Beans," uses a young boy to tell of the life and death of a little girl named Chonita. Although Paredes bases his narrative on a particular historical Brownsville event, "The Hammon and the Beans" has wide universal appeal.

At 10:15 p.m. on October 18, 1915, a party of about 25 Mexican bandits, headed by Luis de la Rosa, alleged cohort of outlaw Aniceto Pizaña, wrecked and robbed the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico passenger train. The train, number 101, was held up near Olmito, about six and one half miles from Brownsville, according to the front page of the October 19, 1915 issue of The Brownsville Herald.¹ Americo Paredes, Brownsville folklorist and professor at the University of Texas at Austin, whom University of Texas anthropologist Jose Limon calls "one of the country's most distinguished folklorists" and "the dean of Mexican American scholars,"² uses this historical occurrence as a basis for his short story, "The Hammon and the Beans." The narrator relates the life and death story of his childhood friend, Chonita, whose father was killed in the reprisals after the wreck. The story is also the narrator's struggle to learn who he is in an area where two distinct cultures and races share streets, landmarks, and events.

Paredes sets his story in fictitious Jonesville-on-the-Grande, a border town dominated by Fort Jones, a military post reactivated by border troubles of the teens. The town "told off our days by the routine on the post. At six sharp the flag was raised on the parade grounds to the cackling of the bugles, and a field piece thundered out a salute. The sound of the shot bounced away through the morning mist until its echoes worked their way into every corner of town. Jonesville-on-the-Grande woke to the cannon's roar, as if to battle, and the day began."³

The story is narrated by a man looking back to his childhood. He begins his narrative as if beginning a fairy tale, "Once we lived in one of my grandfather's houses near Fort Jones," focusing on pictures of war, death, and destruction but finding ultimately an acceptance of life. The story has taken place sometime before its telling because "At this time Jonesville-on the-Grande was not the thriving little city that it is today." The narrator who tells the story of Chonita, a girl living in poverty who dies of "Pneumonia, flu, malnutrition, worms, the evil eye," says, "In later years I thought of her a lot." As an adult he looks back--"to this day I do not know"--to a time when his innocence and ignorance had been dispelled. Now he understands what he did not understand then. The man remembers how he, as a child recovering from chills and fever, had sat in the kitchen hearing his father and Dr. Zapata discuss the death of Chonita. As he, who has watched her brave struggle in the neighborhood, hears how she lost her final battle, he grieves not only for her but for himself as he too must attend the war. The man looks back on the experience realizing it has been vital to his initiation.

The controlling images of the story are of the military. The first sentence sets the story near Fort Jones. The bugle is heard throughout the story. In the story are parade ground, post, fieldpiece, shot, salute, cannon, cavalry, soldier, flag, khaki uniform, and mess hall, all terms of war. The narrator remembers studying of George Washington and reciting "'The Song of Marion's Men' about Marion the Fox and the British cavalry that chased him down the broad Santee" in school and hearing "about Aniceto Pizana and the 'border troubles'" in the evenings. The night Chonita dies the boy lies in bed unable to sleep, seeing behind his closed eyelids images: "Emiliano Zapata's cavalry charged down to the broad Santee, where there were grave men with hoary hairs." The Mexican-American boy grows up instructed in war from both sides of his culture. In school, he has memorized pieces of William Cullen Bryant's Revolutionary War poem "The Song of Marion's Men" that deals with freedom and patriotism:

Grave men there are by broad Santee
Grave men with hoary hairs;
Their hearts are all with Marion,
And lovely ladies greet our band
With kindest welcoming
With smiles like those of summer,
And tears like those of spring.
For them we wear these trusty arms,
And lay them down no more

Till we have driven the Briton
Forever from our shore.

He confuses and mingles the two histories but learns the nature of life.

Chonita, the girl the narrator remembers, dies of poverty and malnutrition. According to the boy's father, she has come to such a sorry pass as a result of the border troubles between the United States and Mexico, a casualty of war, though at the time of the story, presumably around 1924 or 1925, those troubles are past. Her father had "died before the girl was born--shot and hanged from a mesquite limb. He was working too close to the tracks the day the Olmito train was derailed." According to The Brownsville Herald "two men believed to have been implicated in the train wreck were summarily executed." The newspaper the next day reporting the incident states the fact in one sentence. Paredes in his story deals with the far-reaching consequences of conflict for innocent victims. Chonita's pregnant mother, left alone when her husband, an innocent bystander, is hanged, remarries; but Chonita comes into the world without a natural father to see to her support. Her mother, who takes in the washing of the narrator's family, clearly tries to hold the family (and soon there are other children) together. The stepfather, not vitally concerned with the welfare of Chonita, drinks up most of the six dollars a week he earns as a laborer. Chonita herself, at about nine years of age, goes to the mess hall at the fort each night trying to provide left over "luxuries" to feed the family. She lives in a one-room shack patched with tin and apparently is unable to go to school as she does not know English. The narrator, in contrast, benefits from American schooling and good nutrition (which help him win his battle with the flu that kills Chonita). War has killed her father and left her poorly equipped to face the battle of life.

The story refers specifically to revolutionary Mexico and border troubles between the United States and Mexico. According to The Brownsville Herald, the train derailment near Olmito was part of the "border troubles" of Paredes' story. John W. Sword of Pikesville, Kentucky, "a discharged United States soldier" who ran from the train to give the alarm, said the bandits shouted "Viva, Pizaña, Viva, Carranza". A Mr. M. Finkelstein from Houston was forced to shout "Viva Carranza." The bandits apparently had been recruited among General Lopez's men in Matamoros, for some had no shoes. General Lopez had many Husachito Indians among his men. These men generally wore sandals tied with leather thongs. Local officials and soldiers thoroughly searched

Villanueva, a Mexican village five miles from Brownsville and across the river from Las Rucias where the bandits were believed to have crossed. The emergency called out several companies of United States infantry and cavalry from Fort Brown at two in the morning. The newspaper account reveals the summary assumption that the local population of Mexican descent must be on the Mexican side in the issue and must have been involved in the incident. Hence, Mexican-Americans, however innocent, were brought into the conflict.

Paredes alludes to both American and Mexican military heroes to illustrate the two cultures claiming the narrator and to support his battle theme. The American heroes are George Washington and Marion the Fox from the Revolutionary War. The Swamp Fox, Francis Marion, was a guerilla leader in South Carolina. The three Mexican heroes are Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Aniceto Pizaña, also revolutionaries, these from the early years of the twentieth century in Mexico. Zapata, from southern Mexico's state of Morelos, joined Villa, northern revolutionary from the state of Chihuahua, to take Mexico City, which they held for a few months in the name of economic reform. Pancho Villa is the Robin Hood of Mexico, perhaps a counterpart to Marion the Fox who is remembered in "The Song of Marion's men." Aniceto Pizaña is a local bandit based in Matamoros but a Mexican folk hero. These fighting figures symbolize the battle for survival the narrator watches as a child.

Paredes makes sure the reader understands that his story of the struggle for survival in a war-torn world is not only about Brownsville, Texas or Jonesville-on-the-Grande but is about man's life in all times and all places by having the Dr. Zapata in the story compare the outcome of the border troubles to the outcome of the Trojan War three thousand years ago. Chonita has been left (after the "war" is supposedly over) to survive with inadequate means. The doctor says: "In classical times they did things better. Take Troy, for instance. After they stormed the city, they grabbed the babies by the heels and dashed them against the wall. That was more humane."

Another way Paredes universalizes his story is through the narrator's thinking of Chonita later in the thirties during his own youth. He thinks: "those years would have been just made for her. Many's the time I have seen her in my mind's eyes, in the picket lines demanding not bread, not cake, but the hammon and the beans." The narrator is saying that Chonita is not unreasonable; she does not ask for luxury (the "cake" of life) but pleads for the basics that were routinely distributed to the Fort Jones soldiers. By this

time he is older and knows that the battle of life is everlasting.

The boy witnessing the struggle of Chonita is initiated by the experience. His initiation leads him toward manhood and his own involvement in the struggle of life. After initiation a man finds himself one of the group of fallen men yet a separate individual, apart from all others. As a boy knowing and losing Chonita, the narrator has felt his aloneness in the universe. Literature commonly uses fences and walls (as in Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener") as symbols of alienation. Every evening the children watch the flag being lowered "through the high wire fence that divided the post from the town." The boy says, "And so we lived, we and the post, side by side with the wire fence in between." The boy hears the bugle on the post at eleven at night "when everything was dark and still, and it made me feel that I was alone in the world."

Paredes ends his story of Brownsville and the aftermath of its border troubles on a note of acceptance. In the midst of the discussion between the boy's father and Dr. Zapata of the horror of war, the doctor cracks a joke providing comic relief in the middle of a discussion which has grown too tragic to handle. The father chuckles and later throws back his head and laughs. In acknowledging and laughing at the grotesqueness of life, the father is pushing life away, rejecting it for its absurdity. The boy, who has cared about Chonita, lies awake thinking of her in heaven (where his mother tells him she is). In his mind's eye he sees "her in her torn and dirty dress, with a pair of bright wings attached, flying round and round like a butterfly, shouting, 'Give me the hammon and the beans!'" After he has imagined Chonita in heaven, the boy is able to release his emotion: "Then I cried. And whether it was the bugle, or whether it was Chonita or what, to this day I do not know. But cry I did, and I felt much better after that." This crying shows not only the realization that life is a tragic battle which ultimately no combatant survives, but it shows an acceptance of that reality. It does not laugh at odds to the absurdity, but it cries along with it. The laughter and sneering bring scorn and more alienation; the tears bring one into the stream of humanity, at one with others.

Paredes has pictured life as a battle, and, of course, it is a war no one ever wins, but his attitude toward life is still positive. At one point in the story the boy has gone frightened to sleep. He wakes in the morning: "But next morning the sun shone and life began all over again, with its whistles and cannon shots and bugles blowing." Life may be a

battle, but there is much to be lived under the morning sun (a symbol of beginning) according to the narrator, who has learned about life from knowing Chonita. She may not have survived the battle, but while she lived, she stood proudly on top of the fence, "her bare dirty feet clinging to the fence almost like hands." She spoke "Give me the hammon and the beans," the English she knew, "with a grand, distant air." Chonita, made fun of by the other children except for her younger brothers and sisters who look "up at her with proud serious faces," makes life better for herself and her family. She courageously fights even though she ultimately dies.

That courage in the strife helps the narrator to find his own identity. The boy the narrator remembers being was learning who he was as he learned about the battle of life and grew to be a man. At school he learned to be an American as he heard of George Washington and Marion the Fox and learned English. At home he spoke Spanish and learned of Aniceto Pizaña, Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, and the border troubles. Both the United States and Mexico were part of his identity. As a child he tried to figure out which he was, American or Mexican, and, of course, eventually found that he was both. The problem of identity is underlined throughout the story. The soldiers in the fort ignore the children outside, going "about their motions without noticing us at all." At night hearing the bugle blow, the boy may "even doubt that I was me." His relationship with Chonita helps him to find out who he is and accept life with all its struggles. He must have a sense of his own worth, a sense that he as an individual matters, a positive identity, if he is to fight ably in the war.

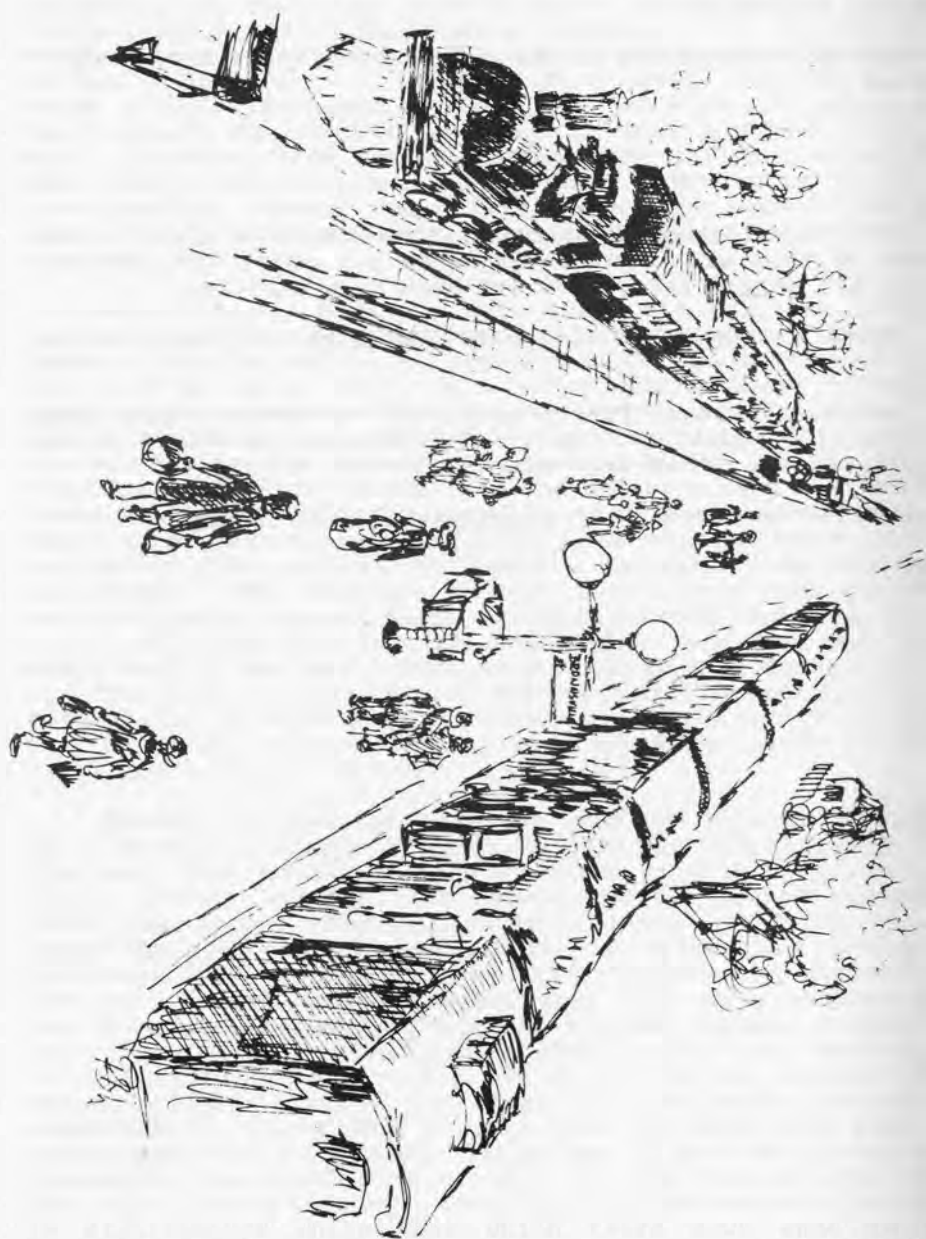
Paredes is not the first to picture life as a battle (See Stephen Crane's Maggie, a Girl of the Streets for instance), but he handles the symbol very skillfully using a local setting. Though "The Hammon and the Beans" discusses man's search for identity, especially when confused by two competing cultures, it exemplifies the universal growth in knowledge as the child must confront the pain and sorrow that make up life and death, and pictures life as a battleground for all men in all times and all places, Paredes gives his "airy nothing/A local habitation and a name"⁴ by setting it in Jonesville-on-the-Grande, his pseudonym for Brownsville, Texas. The story, set locally but with universal significance, faces the tragedy that is life and ends in acceptance, not rejection. Ultimately a work of literature, presenting the experience of life in the form of art, must deal with life's meaning. That which helps man carry on ends in significance while that which tears down ends in the

garbage heap. Paredes' story is a valuable addition to American literature.

Pan American University at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

Endnotes

1. "Train Wrecked, Passengers Robbed and Killed." The report of this wreck is contained on p.1 cols. 1-3, and p.3 col.1. All Herald references are from this article.
2. "With a Corrido in His Heart," Nuestro, 3 (Fall, 1979), 41.
3. Americo Paredes, "The Hammon and the Beans," The Texas Observer, 55 (April 18, 1963), 11. Because the story covers only pp. 11-12, other page numbers are not cited.
4. William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, V,i,16-7.



Saludo Presidencial

Leyenda Matamorenses

por

Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda

Durante los últimos años del siglo pasado y los primeros del actual, en un pueblecito de la frontera norte de México-- y es de suponerse de toda la República--, el primero de enero amanecían los pacíficos vecinos preguntando: --Quién "salió de Presidente?

Referíanse, por supuesto, al Alcalde del pueblo.

La designación del cabeza de la Comuna, solía hacerla el Jefe Político, el Gobernador del Estado, o ambos de acuerdo, cuando eran compadres, lo que ocurría a menudo.

Eso sí, se cumplían los formulismos, y año por año, la última quincena de diciembre, el C. Srío. del muy H. y R. A. trabajaba día y noche, y para la fecha de la renovación de funcionarios, ya estaban completos los expedientes de una elección popular; solían aparecer como votantes ciudadanos que estaban ausentes del lugar desde ya más de un lustro y otros que, aunque yacían en el mismo poblado, ya ni respiraban ni se movían desde dos lustros o más. Fuerza de la rutina.

Generalmente se turnaba en el puesto a los miembros del Ayuntamiento que fué "nombrado", cuando pasó por allí D. Porfirio, y la "elección" salía acertada o ...

Un año le tocó a D. Rogerio. Este dejó su rancho para venir a ocupar la Presidencia. Ocho días antes, un enviado matando caballos, le comunicó la noticia. Vino al pueblo y preguntó a Don Felipe, el Presidente saliente:

-- ¿Qué voy a hacer, compadre?

--Pues no más haga lo que yo, compadre.

Satisfizole la respuesta y dióse a copiar a Don Felipe. Usaba éste sombrero de copa, fenomenal puro de "a real" y grueso bastón apizaqueño.

Y héte aquí el primero de enero a Don Rogerio con la recia cabezota en continuo movimiento a fin de mantener en equilibrio el sombrero de seda; mordiendo el grueso puro para que no se le escapara de la boca y cambiando sin cesar de mano el bastón, pues no se acordaba si su compadre lo usaba en la de la rienda o en la del fute.

En la puerta del "Palacio", esperábanlo los principales vecinos. El compadre Felipe se apresura a saludarlo, darle la bienvenida, felicitarlo. Se acerca destocándose y tendiéndole la diestra...

Aquí fué el apuro de don Rogerio: no podía hablar y le faltaba una mano: una ni para que contarla, estaba ocupada con el apizaqueño; si se quitaba el puro de la boca para contestar, no podía quitarse el sombrero, correspondiendo al saludo...

El embarazo fué momentáneo: para eso tenemos mollera; dejó el bastón en el suelo, se destocó con la recién desocupada mano, con la otra se quitó el puro de la boca y contestó rápido:

--Gracias, querido compadre y señores.

Y siguiendo rapido, para estrechar las manos que se le tendían, tomó el sombrero de copa entre los dientes y estrechó la diestra de todos los de la comitiva.

Terminada "la recibida", como escribía Nacho, el "periodiquero" del pueblo, el Jefe Político se dirigió en telegrama cifrado al Gobernador: "Compadre, creo que estuvimos acertados en el de este año..."

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros



The Encounter

by

Peter Gawenda

It must have been about ten years after the railroad had come to the Valley that Viejito had his accident. Only some of Viejito's friends knew that he had been a railroad engineer, way back then when wood and coal were still used to drive the engines. And I think, except for Felipe and maybe one or two friends, nobody knew that Viejito had driven his locomotive into a small herd of cattle at high speed, or at least what was considered a high speed at that time. Nobody knew how long ago he had quit the railroad, where his money came from, and why he had started drinking. According to Felipe his friend Viejito had been drinking as long as he had known him, and that was at least forty years. Nobody knew why he eventually started to lose his mind.

Viejito rarely spoke. And if he spoke it was in a strange dialect, maybe Irish. He understood Spanish very well, but I never heard him use it, except when asking for: "... otra Blanquita, por favor!" All beer was Carta Blanca for him.

When I first met him, he would proudly show me his old watch that probably helped him keep his schedule. And several times he insisted that he had never been late. Neither water, nor storm, nor cattle could have made him late, not even the revolution. And he would add: "But then came the accident", and he would start staring into the distance, his grey eyes would suddenly get empty, and he would forget everything around him. When I asked Felipe, the barber, whether he knew what had happened, he slowly shook his head: "I think he ran into a herd of cattle someplace between Brownsville and where later San Benito was built. "At that time there was only mesquite country and cactus and coyotes, ...and you better watched los bandidos de Mexico!" Felipe added.

When I saw Viejito the next time he didn't remember, why he had the old watch with the locomotive on the dial. He just sat there and stared. Felipe believed that Viejito whose real name was actually Tom was at least eighty, maybe even older, because not only had he known Cortina, but he had also driven one of the first trains. Viejito didn't have his own family and had been taken in by a Mexican family which had come across during the twenties. For "his" family's kids he was Papa Gran. I saw Tom several times when I went to Felipe's Barbershop back in sixty, and I saw him again on Christmas

Eve of sixty-two, and that was the time when he told me about his accident.

"I knew my tracks like the palms of my hands," he said, "yes Sir, I knew every mile of them. I knew all the bumps and the road crossings, and I knew when to blow the whistle. ... I don't like the nights. Right after Tito's farm that's where it happened, ...three times, I tell you, ...three times." He sat back and was breathing heavily, "three times he warned me, but how could I know?" His eyes became watery and his voice turned kind of hoarse. "Three times, ...three times". It was dead silent in the barbershop, Felipe had stopped shaving Mr. Garcia, and Louie stopped cutting little David's hair. Everyone just stared at Viejito.

"The first time, it was before midnight, I saw the man waving. He ran beside the tracks and started waving, as if he wanted to stop me. Then he ran onto the tracks, and I just pulled the brakes, I even threw the engine in reverse. The man was running in front of the engine waving like mad. I got the train to stop, and the man was gone. I jumped off the engine, but I couldn't see nothing. Like a ghost the man was gone. I tell you, I hit my head and my knee, but I got the train to stop. You should've seen Joe. Boy was he mad. He didn't see the man. He screamed and yelled, 'cause he didn't see him. I got back on and we just kept the train going to Brownsville."

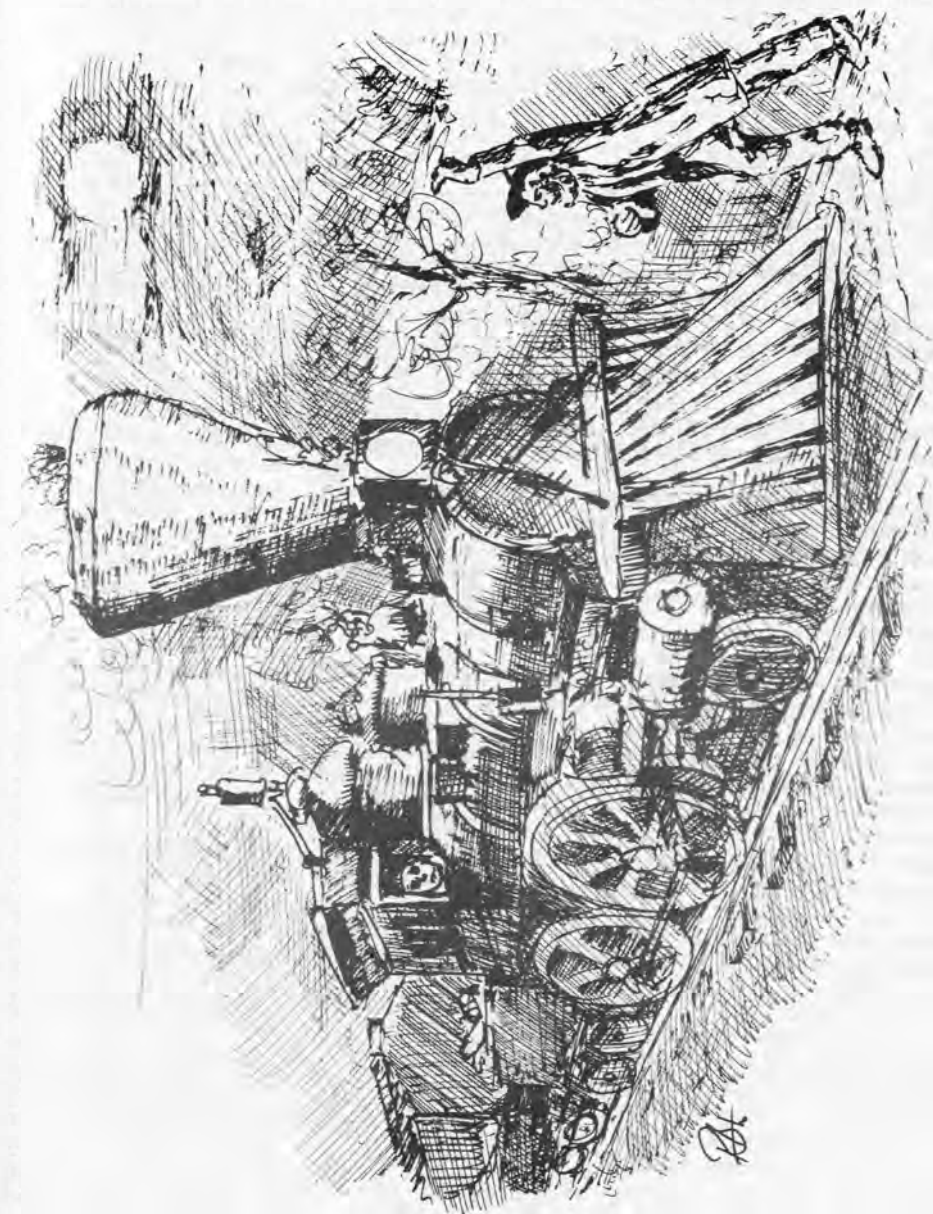
He stared out the door and continued: And the next time the same thing...again at Tito's ranch. The same man running along the tracks, waving like mad, and then running onto the tracks. I pull the brakes and the train screeches ... and the crazy man runs on the tracks, and waves his arms ... and Joe cusses and yells, but I stopped the train. I grab the rifle, jump down, run to the front, ... and nothing ... gone, the man is gone. This time Joe wants to report me, because he thinks I am crazy, and dangerous. But I saw the man, I saw his face, I saw the cut over his eyes.

Nobody had ever heard Viejito speak that much. Everyone was sitting now, just listening. Viejito kept on talking with a very low voice, almost whispering: "The next time again the same thing, and again at Tito's ranch ... the man runs along the tracks, he waves his arms, he even screams, he runs onto the tracks, ... and I just pull the brakes. But the man is gone again. "Viejito breathes very heavily and tears run down his cheeks. "On my last ride, when I saw the man, I didn't stop. Joe pulled the brakes, he yelled and screamed, and he cried. Sure I saw the man, ... sure I saw the man. He tried to chase the cattle off the track. We put the man on

the flatbed. He had a cut over his eyes. I should've stopped

Everyone cried with Viejito. The kids had come to take him home and wondered why he was crying. I saw Tom only two more times in sixty-three. He didn't remember why he had the old watch with the locomotive on the dial.

Pan American University at Brownsville



Los Dados

by

Peter Gawenda

"You can't go into the **salón**. It belongs to the four **soldados**, those of the revolution. They have lived there, ... and they come back whenever they want" ... "But you told me, that there is only one old chair in the room! Don't the soldiers sleep on beds or something?" ... "No, they only come here **a jugar dados, ellos no duermen!**" ... "Is that your house?" ... "**No, es la casa de mi tia.**" This short conversation raised my interest and I started to listen in. And that was in December 1983.

The house must be like many others in Matamoros. It was probably built in the mid-eighteen hundreds and has seen good and bad times during its life-time. It's a smaller house, well kept, with a kitchen and dining area, two bedrooms, and a family secret, **un salón**. The **salón** which used to have an open chimney is toward the back of the house. Its windows are boarded up, and a little shack in the garden hides it from outsiders. The **salón** has not been used for several generations.

During the last days of the Mexican revolution several houses were requisitioned by the army, and five to ten soldiers were assigned to each household. This house had initially five or six soldiers who were treated like family by the house owners. They were fed, their uniforms were washed and ironed, and the young soldiers attracted the attention of several of the daughters in the neighborhood. In the evenings, after the family had gone to bed, the soldiers would drink wine and roll dice until after midnight.

When the time came to leave, two of the soldiers packed their bags, grabbed their rifles and joined their unit while three or four of them decided rather to wait for the end of hostilities in hiding, while gambling, eating and sleeping. At that time they might have boarded up the **salón** so that nobody could see them inside the room. It is not known how long they remained in hiding, but some time later they were detected. They were dragged out of the house by a group of rough-looking men with big sombreros, and taken to the prison or maybe a camp outside the city limits. One of the family members, the old aunt, tried to follow the prisoners, but she was held back. That evening she heard a few shots, but then there was lots of shooting going on at that time.

That same night all the family members stayed up until midnight listening again and again to the story of the aunt. They prayed a lot and cried a lot, and finally retired to bed. Shortly after midnight the aunt heard the soldiers laugh and throw dice in the **salon**. At times they would argue, and then roll the dice again and the aunt's dog would growl. She went back to sleep, happy that her soldiers had returned. Next morning she fixed breakfast as usual and went to the **salon** to wake up the soldiers, but they must have already left because the room was empty. Nothing seemed to have been touched and she wondered whether she had been dreaming. She didn't say anything to her family but kept watching the front door all day. The soldiers didn't return that day.

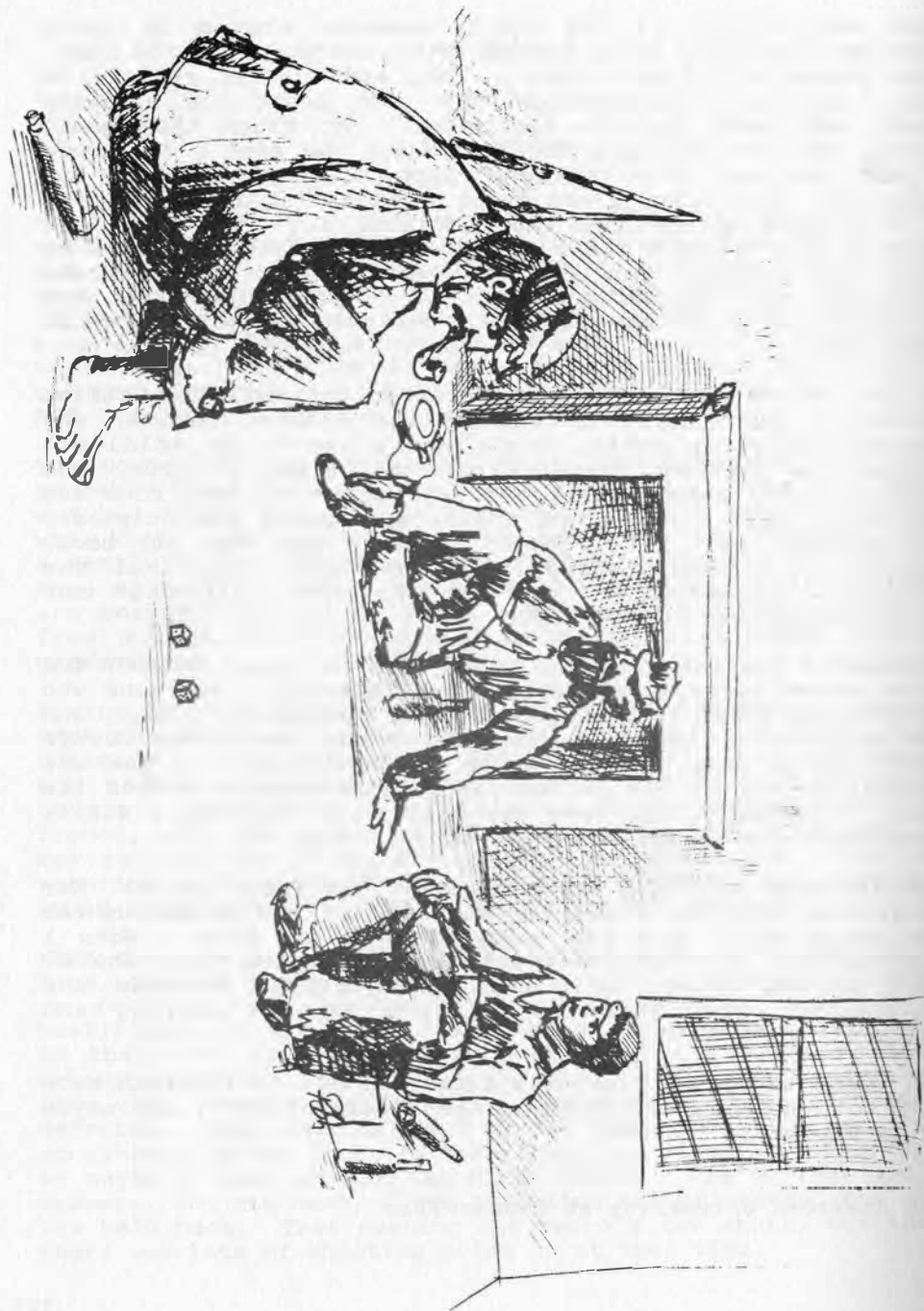
Shortly after midnight, the old aunt who had just fallen asleep at the table, on one of the kitchen chairs, she suddenly woke up again. She clearly heard the soldier's voices, and she heard the dice roll on the wooden floor. She rushed to the **salon** and opened the door. But the room was dark and empty. She stood there, dumfounded and helpless, and suddenly felt a cold draft. Chills ran down her back, and her dog started growling. She knew then that the soldiers had returned, ... but she also felt that her soldiers were no longer alive.

Eventually the furniture was moved from the room, because the room seemed to be always cold and unfriendly. Everyone who entered the **salon** felt the presence of something strange, and the daughter of the niece remembered that she would always start crying when she was taken to that room, ... she was deathly afraid of it. A few years later someone locked the door. The key to the room was eventually lost and a vanity chest was moved in front of the door.

The old aunt has been dead for more than forty years. Her niece has told the story to her daughter and granddaughter who could still hear the soldiers roll the dice. When I listened in, it might have been the only time that one of them talked about their nightly visitors, because she insinuated later that the soldiers behaved angrily and furiously that night.

The house was put up for sale back in 1984, ...it might have been torn down and replaced by new construction, ...or maybe it is a parking lot now.

Pan American University at Brownsville



Since World War I



A TRIBUTE TO SAM PERL

1897-1980

by

Harriett Denise Joseph

Originally from Austria, the Perl family by the late 1800's lived in Galveston, Texas, where sons Sam and Leon were born. As a young man, Leon served in the U.S. armed forces during World War I. While working for his uncle in Beaumont in the mid-1920's, Leon decided to use the money acquired from his military service to go into business for himself. Sam, a travelling salesman for a flour company, was also interested in making a change. In 1926 the two brothers came to South Texas aboard a special excursion train from Houston. Most impressed by the developing Brownsville area, they purchased a store from José Joachim and became the proud owners of the newly renamed "Perl Bros. Fashion Store for Men."¹

Sam and Leon Perl proved to be successful businessmen. Wearing the merchandise available at their store, they became noted as "dapper" dressers and were their own best advertisements. Offering quality name brands like Arrow, Stetson, and Florsheim at reasonable prices, Perl Brothers with its downtown location attracted a significant clientele from both sides of the border. Even though it was a men's store, women liked to shop there too, because Sam and Leon knew everyone in town and could be relied upon to help find just the right gift for a father or brother. Possibly another attraction was that Sam "kissed every lady, girl, girl child, old lady . . . every single time"² that they came into the store. Whatever their secrets of success, Sam and Leon established a business that endured even after Leon's death in 1969.³ By the time that Perl Brothers passed out of the family's hands in the mid-1970's, the store had been a respected, thriving part of the Brownsville business community for about fifty years.

For many years of Perl Brothers' existence, the store sponsored a five minute radio show featuring Sam Perl. In the days before television, this program attracted a large audience. Recognized as a commentator "devoted to promoting the interests of his community,"⁴ Sam would provide news of local events, recognize prominent Brownsvillians for their community service, and offer folksy gossip. Sam always

signed off by saying, "Remember we do love everybody."⁵

A garrulous individual, Sam meant it when he said that he loved everybody, and in return he was one of the best liked men in Brownsville. Sam would join other downtown businessmen in the mornings before the stores opened for a cup of coffee and a chat. They would meet again in the afternoons for a coffee break. At these gatherings Sam, who liked to tell jokes, would entertain his friends with humorous stories. One of his favorites was about the time that his daughter got married and went to New Orleans on her honeymoon. She wired her father that New Orleans was so great that she and her new husband wanted to stay another week. Sam wired back, "It's great everywhere. Come home!"

Sam and Leon enjoyed weekly poker games with their cronies, but Sam did not like to lose. According to local lore, he would have his wife call him at around 11:00 p.m. on poker nights. If he was losing, he would tell his friends that he had to leave because he was needed at home. If Sam was winning, he would say that the call wasn't important and play longer.

The people that Sam Perl loved most, of course, were his family members. He took great pride in his wife and children. He met Stella Cohn at a High Holy Days Service in Houston in 1921, and they were married for over half a century. Sam and Stella had two children, a son and a daughter. When his children were young, Sam took them to school in the mornings and un-self-consciously kissed them both on the mouth as he told them good-bye. Sam was never embarrassed to display affection for his family.

Sam Perl, an incredibly energetic individual, found time not only for his family, his friends, and his business, but also for numerous civic activities. He could talk knowledgeably on his radio show about major local events because he was involved in much that was happening in Brownsville at any given time. In the 1930's Sam was one of the main figures behind the founding of Charro Days, a bicultural border event still celebrated on an annual basis today. He was Director of Charro Days, Director of the Mr. Amigo Association, and Chief Justice of the Charro Days Brush Court. A leading force in the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce, Sam was President, served on the Board, and participated on numerous committees. He helped to organize Chamber jaunts into Mexico to encourage Mexican tourism into Brownsville. Accompanied by other local businessmen, he travelled thousands of miles on these goodwill trips to towns like Monterrey, Tampico, and Veracruz. Perl was also

instrumental in formulating the plans and soliciting the funds to construct the building that presently houses the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce. The idea for a high-rise living facility for the elderly was initiated while Perl was Chairman of the Brownsville Housing Authority. The resultant Villa del Sol was (and is) a major contribution to public housing for senior citizens in Brownsville. For his many accomplishments as a civic leader, the community honored Sam Perl in the 1970's at a large dinner held at the Jacob Brown Auditorium. On this occasion, Sam was presented with a plaque designating him as "Mr. Brownsville," an appropriate title for a man who had made significant contributions to his community for five decades.

While Sam Perl contributed significantly to Brownsville in general, he was of particular importance to the Jewish community in the area. When he came to Brownsville in 1926, the Jewish population was small and relatively un-organized without a temple or a Rabbi. Raised in an orthodox home environment and nurtured in his religion by Rabbi Cohen of Galveston, Sam was concerned about this situation. While ordained Rabbis had to undergo extensive training, Judaism did not require ordination as a prerequisite for administering most ministerial functions, so Sam took the initiative in organizing his co-religionists. Working with a "polyglot of orthodox, conservative, and reformed; backgrounds,"⁶ he unified his fellow Jews into a congregation. Serving as lay Rabbi, he became the motivating force in and cement of the Brownville Jewish community for about fifty years.

With no Jewish synagogue available, Sam Perl at first officiated at religious services held in places like the Masonic Lodge. In 1930 he worked with the newly chartered Temple Beth-El Sisterhood in a movement to build a house of worship in Brownsville. Constructed in 1931 as a direct result of these efforts, Beth-El was the first Jewish temple in the lower Rio Grande Valley, and it still serves as the center of Jewish life in Brownsville.

Assisted from time to time by other congregants like Ruben Edelstein, Sam Perl conducted Sabbath and High Holy Days services at Beth-El for decades. His Sabbath services on Friday nights were "short and sweet" with an informal atmosphere. On "Rosh Hashanah" (New Year) and "Yom Kippur" (Day of Atonement), however, he was appropriately reverent, formal, and ritualistic.

Sam recognized that he was serving a diverse community with different approaches to practicing Judaism. He tried to

meet the needs of the congregation at any given time. Originally, his services were conducted in a very reformed or liberal manner, because that was what the congregants wanted. As years passed and some people of a more orthodox orientation came to Brownsville and to Temple Beth-El, Perl made concessions, such as wearing a "yarmulke" (skull cap) and "tallis" (prayer shawl) during services. Committed to holding the Jewish community together and to giving everyone a feeling of belonging, "Rabbi" Perl did his best to conduct services acceptable to all.

Conducting services was only one aspect of Sam's role as spiritual leader of Temple Beth-El. He also presided over weddings. Although originally assisted during marriage ceremonies by a Justice of the Peace, Perl was eventually recognized as lawful representative of the Jewish religion by the Cameron County Commissioners' Court which empowered him to perform legal civil marriages. Interestingly, many of the couples for whom he performed this service were not Brownsville natives but came there from Mexico or other parts of the Rio Grande Valley to be married in a Jewish ceremony. When necessary, Sam would go to Matamoros to marry Jewish couples who could not obtain visas to come to the U.S. During his many years as lay Rabbi, Sam Perl estimated that he performed about thirty weddings, including co-officiating at that of his daughter.

Besides weddings, there are several other observances that are an important part of Jewish life. Major among these are "Bris,"⁸ "Bar Mitzvah,"⁹ and confirmation ceremonies.¹⁰ Sam Perl was available to preside over any or all of these events.¹¹ He also officiated at the funerals of his co-religionists. In short, Sam tried to meet the needs of the Beth-El congregation from birth to the grave and did virtually everything that an ordained Rabbi would have done.

As lay Rabbi, Perl received no official stipend except for remittance of his annual Temple dues. Any gratuities that he received for performing ministerial functions he donated to Beth-El. Sam used to joke that he was the only Rabbi who paid his congregation instead of the other way around.

Sam did not limit his activities in the religious sphere to administering ministerial functions. He was a member of the Beth-El Board of Directors, helped manage Temple finances, and handled correspondence relating to that institution. He played a key role in any Jewish fund raising activities not only in Brownsville but also in other areas of the lower Rio Grande Valley. He was active locally and

statewide in B'nai Brith, the Jewish men's organization. Sam was "President of Texas B'nai Brith and was a member of the Grand Lodge of B'nai Brith and the Kallah of Texas Rabbis."¹²

In addition to the above, Sam Perl was the principal and recognized representative of the Jewish community in Brownsville. Living in a border town that was overwhelmingly hispanic and Christian, he was open about being a Jew. He answered questions about his religion, participated in ecumenical undertakings, and provided many people in the area with their major exposure to a Jew and/or Judaism.

During Perl's many years as lay Rabbi, Brownsville experienced significant growth, and the Jewish population also increased noticeably. By the 1970's the Beth-El congregation was finally large enough and affluent enough to hire an ordained Rabbi. By this time, however, "Rabbi" Perl was an institution. Out of respect, the congregants did not want to replace him until he was ready to step down. As a compromise, the Temple advertised for a Director of Education with Rabbinic credentials and hired Harry Lawrence for that post in 1973. As Perl's health deteriorated rapidly, Lawrence increasingly assumed ministerial responsibilities for Beth-El. Sam Perl was not able to continue as spiritual head of the Temple and leader within the Jewish community.¹³

When Sam and his wife subsequently moved to San Antonio for medical and familial reasons, the Beth-El congregation created a secret fund to purchase a "Torah" (holy scroll) that had survived the holocaust. In a moving ceremony at the Brownsville Temple this "Torah" was presented to Sam, who in turn donated it to his beloved congregation.

During his lifetime Sam Perl was a successful businessman, a popular individual, a devoted family man, an energetic civic leader, and a dedicated lay Rabbi. One might wonder how one man could be so multi-faceted and accomplish so much. It was partly by force of his personality and partly because he had a strong support system. Admiring Sam's vitality and out-going nature, brother Leon devoted himself to the business, which freed Sam to join numerous organizations and undertake significant projects. Stella Perl, of a more retiring nature than her husband, maintained a comfortable home for him and cared for their children while Sam was so active outside of the home.

Sam Perl liked the limelight and thrived on being the Center of attention. If he belonged to an organization, he wanted to be in a position of leadership. He would initiate projects but at times leave it to others to complete the

tedious tasks necessary to bring those projects to fruition. Whether in the Charro Days organization, the Chamber of Commerce, the Brownsville Housing Authority, Temple Beth-El, or elsewhere, Sam had the cooperation of others without whom he could not have achieved so much.

Even though Sam Perl's accomplishments were due at least in part to the support and cooperation of others, he was a remarkable man. When people reminisce about him, they speak with admiration and assert that he deserved the recognition he received during his lifetime. Beginning as a Jewish youth with limited formal education and coming from a family of modest means, he became "Mr. Brownsville" and "Mr. Temple Beth-El." Sam Perl earned a place of honor in the history of Brownville.

Texas Southmost College

Endnotes

1. A combination of written and oral sources was used to research this article. Like his predecessors, Rabbi Arthur Rutberg was helpful in providing access to the Temple Beth-El archives and other forms of assistance. The Temple archives, which contain varied materials such as minutes of Board and congregational meetings, newspaper clippings, legal documents, financial records, and photographs, proved especially valuable in casting light on Sam Perl's activities within the Jewish community. The author also conducted oral interviews with carefully selected individuals who had close contact with Sam Perl either personally or professionally. Former Brownsville mayor Ruben Edelstein, who served as assistant lay Rabbi at Beth-El from the 1950's to the 1970's, supplied information both in written and oral form. Corrine Perl, Sam's sister-in-law, worked with him in the family business and was an active member of the Temple. Olive Rathjen, a Brownsville native, often played the piano for religious functions at Beth-El. Banker Walther Rathjen in his youth worked part-time at Perl Brothers. In formal interviews these people generously shared their time and memories of Sam Perl with the author. Others, such as Fred Klug, Guta Klug, and Anna Neuman, in informal conversations provided insights into Sam Perl's role in the Jewish community.

²Interview with Olive Rathjen, 18 March 1988.

³Leon's wife, Corrine Perl, was actively involved in the store for decades. After Leon's death, she and Sam ran the business for about another seven years until Sam's health failed.

⁴Interview with Ruben Edelstein, 11 April 1988.

⁵Without exception, everyone interviewed for this article mentioned Sam Perl's radio show and his famous sign-off phrase.

⁶"Self-Made Itinerant Rabbi 'Perl' of the Rio Grande," San Antonio Express, no date (probably March of 1979 or 1980).

⁷Interview with Corrine Perl, 18 April 1988.

⁸"Bris" is a "circumcision ceremony occurring on the eighth day after the birth of a Jewish boy." This and subsequent definitions of Jewish terms are taken from Lydia Kukoff, Choosing Judaism, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1981.

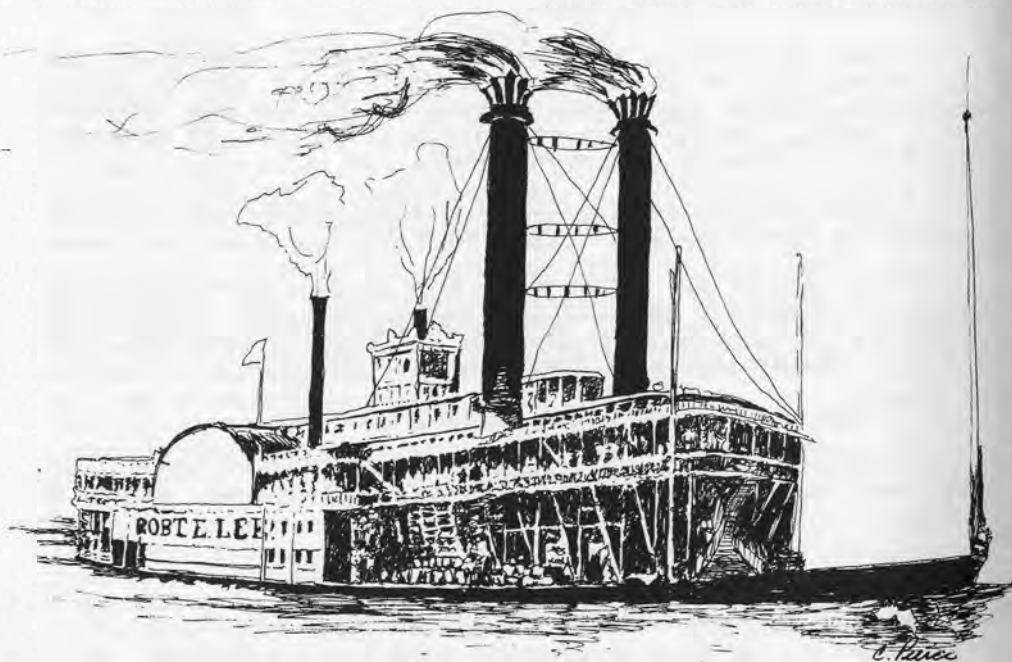
⁹"Bar Mitzvah" is the "public ceremony, usually at age 13, recognizing a child's attainment of an age at which meaningful Jewish observance is possible." (In his capacity as lay Rabbi, Sam Perl was especially proud that he presided over the Bar Mitzvah of his own son).

¹⁰Confirmation is the "public reaffirmation of a Jewish teenager's determination to live as a Jew."

¹¹It should be noted that Brownsville Jews sometimes chose to "import" an ordained Rabbi from San Antonio or elsewhere to preside over certain religious ceremonies, but Sam Perl was available if they wished to use him.

¹²"Itinerant Rabbi," San Antonio Express.

¹³Since Sam Perl retired as lay Rabbi, Temple Beth-El has been served by a succession of professional ordained Rabbis.



"El Chubasco del '33'

by

Manuel Medrano

Chubasco is the Spanish term for storm and is also symbolic of one of the most lethal of all storms, the hurricane. Located on the southern tip of Texas, less than twenty-five miles from the Gulf of Mexico, Brownsville has been both a potential and actual landfall for many hurricanes. One of the most destructive occurred in September, 1933.

On September 3, all weather bureaus along the Texas coast received an advisory from the Washington bureau indicating that the storm that had left over a hundred people dead in Cuba was headed for the Texas coast. At this time no indication was given as to where or when landfall would occur, but persons living along the Texas xcoast were warned to stay away from areas that could be made inaccessible by rising tides and high winds.¹

By the next day Texas coastal cities and towns were fearfully awaiting the arrival of an intense hurricane with winds in excess of 100 miles per hour. At 9:30 A.M. the national weather bureau reported the center of the storm to be 160 miles east of Corpus Christi moving west northwest at approximately thirteen miles per hour. Predicted landfall was near or north of Corpus Christi. Gale warnings were issued for the coastal areas between Port Arthur and Brownsville. W.J. Schnurbusch, chief of the Brownsville Bureau, issued a supplemental advisory for the Brownsville area indicating that winds of fifty miles per hour with probable rains could be expected during the afternoon and evening. Brownsville residents made preparations hoping for the best, but because of the unpredictability of such storms, expecting the worst. Windows were boarded and nonperishable foods and water were stored.²

People on Padre Island who were not associated with the Coast Guard were warned to leave. Most left, but those few who remained would later regret it. Captain McCauley of the Coast Guard reported winds of about 35 miles per hour at about 10:00 A.M.

Ultimately, landfall occurred not at Corpus Christi, but at the South Padre Island/Brownsville area. A sixty mile wide

area including the northern Mexican coastline was affected. High winds and heavy rains battered the area for nearly 10 hours on the night of September 4 and during the early morning of September 5.

Henry Krausse, a prominent long-time Brownsville resident, recalls that he and his family spent the night of the hurricane at the federal building in downtown Brownsville. Many other families also took refuge there that night to weather the storm. The morning after the hurricane, Krausse remembers "scenes of devastation" in the area. Power had been cut off; broken windows were everywhere; many structures were heavily damaged. Later that afternoon the Krausse family drove through the area and viewed the damage. One building that suffered extensive damage was the Garza Wholesale (refer to sketch). The roof had blown away, and the high winds had littered the area with packaged goods.³

Ramon Garcia, another Brownsville resident, who lived in rural north Brownsville near present-day Port Brownsville, experienced the hurricane in an entirely different setting. He recalls that his father had gone to town on horseback and returned with the news of the approaching "chubasco". The family stayed in their small wooden home until it became evident that it might not withstand the high winds. They then left the home and remained in the shrubs of a nearby "corral" (pasture) until the eye of the storm had passed. When the wind shifted, the family moved to some other shrubs on higher ground and remained there until the storm was over. About ten o'clock the next morning they returned to their home which had sustained damage but was still erect. The home had a dirt floor that was now a mud floor with a substantial amount of standing water. Mr. Garcia remembers that an older brother, Jorge, killed several black snakes that had gone inside the dwelling during the storm. He also recalls the tremendous amount of standing water in the area (refer to sketch).⁴

One of the most interesting of the hurricane episodes was told by Sam Robertson of Del Mar, near present-day Port Isabel, of two oyster fishermen who remained on the south end of Padre Island during the storm. They attempted to weather the storm in a shack. The shack was destroyed by the high winds, and they stayed on a high sand dune until the water was so high that they sought refuge in some mesquite trees. They clung to some branches for five hours, "most of the time at a horizontal position, with water rushing about them".⁵

The storm also produced a hero named Victor Delgado. Delgado, a veteran sailor, singlehandedly saved the only boat

to remain in commission in Valley waters during the storm. He guided the 38 foot cruiser, "Alice", through the channel for Port Isabel and six miles out into the Gulf through 15 foot waves. Early Tuesday morning Delgado returned to Port Isabel and then to the Coast Guard station. All of the boats there had been severely damaged or destroyed by the winds. The cruiser was then employed in rescuing those few that had remained on Brazos Island during the storm.⁶

Early predictions of human casualties were estimated "at least 100".⁷ However, no one was actually killed in Brownsville. In the area around Brownsville, including Matamoros, Mexico, 22 people were killed and approximately 1,500 suffered injuries.⁸

According to one report approximately 800 Brownsville residents of a population of about 30,000 lost their homes. The citrus crop in the area, valued at approximately \$12,000,000 was virtually destroyed.⁹

Property damage to the Brownsville area was extensive. In addition to the many private homes that were damaged or destroyed, many school, church and government buildings were also affected. According to the reports of the office of county school superintendent Mrs. W.R. Jones, school buildings at Palm Grove and Villanueva schools were entirely destroyed and almost every other common school in Cameron county was badly damaged.¹⁰ The Cameron County Courthouse was also damaged by the hurricane. The basement and the top floor were damaged by the winds and heavy rainfall. The dome, which was undergoing repair due to a previous storm, was blown off the roof.¹¹ After reviewing the damage to Fort Brown, Major Edwin B. Winans of San Antonio approximated the damage to be \$100,000. The wooden structures in the old post incurred the most damage losing windows, roofs, and sleeping porches. Even the 220 ft. steel radio tower was toppled by the high winds.¹² Damage to the Sacred Heart Church was estimated at \$5,000. The roof of the church collapsed on the pipe organ. Additionally, half of the rectory was unroofed, and several stained glass windows were broken.¹³

The first direct communication with the outside world after the hurricane was established over an amateur radio transmitter, W5CKS, owned by Frank Matejka. First contact was established with W5PJ in Dallas. The Dallas amateur relayed the information about the hurricane damage to WFAA, and it was then broadcast over the large station. Matejka and several other amateurs then handled over 150 distress messages from local residents to many other locations in the United States usually informing relatives of their safety.¹⁴

Relief efforts for the storm-ravaged area were swiftly mobilized. Harry Hopkins, Federal relief director, authorized the purchase of groceries for the destitute, and these were transported by the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Governor Miriam A. Ferguson announced from Austin that arrangements were made to send medical personnel and supplies to the area. The Southwestern division of the Red Cross was assembled in Houston and moved to the area as soon as conditions permitted.¹⁵ Within a week of the storm, over 5,300 persons in the Brownsville area had received inoculations against typhoid at the free clinic operated by local, state and federal officials.¹⁶

Many stories and rumors circulated after the hurricane. One of the more interesting ones was that the lions and snakes from "Snakesville", a zoo owned by W.A. (Snake) King, had escaped and were roaming the city. King assured Brownsville residents that no animals and snakes were loose. He did state, however, that during the early part of the hurricane, a lion had escaped and killed one horse and several dogs. The King family prevented the lion from entering their house by using chairs, sticks, and other objects. The animal was finally killed with a shotgun. The other seven lions that had temporarily escaped were captured and secured, and no snakes had escaped.¹⁷

The "chubasco" of 1933 was probably the most powerful hurricane experienced by Brownsville residents during this century. In its wake, it left physical destruction, displaced people, and a keen respect for the sheer power of one of nature's most interesting phenomenoms. It also left, however, an historical imprint upon a community that managed to weather both the Hurricane of 1933 and the harsh economic realities of the Great Depression.

Texas Southmost College

Endnotes

¹"Hurricane Moves into Gulf After Taking 16 Lives," The Brownsville Herald, September 3, 1933, p.1.

²"Brownsville Area to Get Winds of 50 - Mile Velocity," The Brownsville Herald, September 4, 1933, p.1.

³Interview with Henry Krausse, February 6, 1988.

⁴Interview with Ramon Garcia, January 23, 1988.

5"Men Hang to Tree as Storm Rages," The Brownsville Herald, September 8, 1933, p.10.

6"Delegado Saves Alice," The Brownsville Herald, September 8, 1933, p.1.

7"Hurricane Sweeps Wide Texas Area," The New York Times, September 6, 1933, p.1.

8"Gulf Storm Toll is Reduced to 22," The New York Times, September 7, 1933, p.4."Gulf Toll is Reduced to 22," The New York Times, September 7, 1933, p.4.

10"Schools Over Cameron Get Heavy Damage," The Brownsville Herald, September 10, 1933, p.4.

11"Courthouse Is Damaged," "The Brownsville Herald," The Brownsville Herald, September 8, 1933,p.3.

12"Post Damage Said \$100,000," The Brownsville Herald, September 8, 1933, p.1.

13"Missions Are Said Ruined," The Brownsville Herald, September 10, p.6.

14"Brownsville 'Hams' Get First Direct Word Out to U.S.," The Brownsville Herald, September 10, 1933, p.2.

15"Hurricane Sweeps Wide Texas Area," The New York Times, September 6, 1933, p.18.

16"5,000 Persons Are Innoculated," The Brownsville Herald, September 12, 1933, p.1.

17"Snake King Kills Rumor," The Brownsville Herald, September 10, 1933, p.1.



CHARLIE BECKER
1-1988

BROWNSVILLE TEXAS
HIS MEXICAN

Cameron County's Public Schools in 1935

by

Peter B. Gawenda

The State of Texas has made several attempts to raise the standards of public education since its independence from Mexico trying to fulfill a promise that was given by the founding fathers to the citizens of Texas 150 years ago. The absence of an organized and state-supported education system had been used as one of the justifications for the separation from Mexico in 1863. Until 1930, the attempts to raise the quality and increase the number of schools seemed to fail because of insufficient funds and the very low priority of education in Texas. Population groups who had the power and responsibility to initiate necessary changes sent their children to private and parochial schools thus never experiencing the need for or a lack of quality public education.

By 1934 the State Board of Education recognized serious inequalities in existing school organizations because of (a) varying abilities of school districts to financially support education programs and (b) extreme variations in local efforts. Both had resulted in detrimental differences in (1) school plant facilities, (2) cost of instructional services, (3) length of school terms (ranging from three to nine months), and (4) ability to adjust curricular offerings to needs of the students and expectations of society. These differences led the State to conduct a "Texas School Adequacy Survey" which was to prove that educational opportunities were not provided in a satisfactory manner by existing school organizations. The survey was conducted as Official Project No. 65-66-7752 under the sponsorship of the State Board of Education by the Works Progress Administration, and described the status of education in Cameron County in 1934-35. The statistical analysis in the report were intended to serve as justification for a complete reorganization of the public school system eventually eliminating the Common School Districts, the high percentages of small schools (partially caused by a strictly enforced segregation), and the high percentage (69%) of schools with short school terms between 80 and 159 days of classes.

Although Cameron County was situated in the southernmost part of Southwest Texas, the alluvial prairie with its rich soils and subtropical climate proved attractive. The fast

growing county led the State in truck farming, main production being citrus, corn and cotton. The city of Brownsville was county seat and commercial center of the Valley due to its numerous industries, a large trade with Mexico, and the deep water port on the Gulf of Mexico. Harlingen provided some competition to Brownsville as an important retail and shipping point which already dominated fruit and vegetable canning.

In 1934, Cameron County still had the following Common School Districts or schools: Anacuitas, Las Vescas, San Jose, Landrum, Escomtado, La Paloma, Hardin, Briggs Coleman, Palm Grove, Nogales, Buenavista, and Villanueva. The Independent School Districts included: Brownsville, El Jardin, Highland, La Feria, Los Fresnos, Los Indios, Olmito, Point Isabel, Rangerville, Rio Hondo, San Benito, Santa Maria, Santa Rosa, Stuart, and Wilson.

Between 1900 and 1930 the population of Cameron County had grown 4.82 times from 16,095 to 77,572. The county's population growth is demonstrated with seven of the County's cities:

POPULATION AS OF

CITIES	1900	1910	1920	1930
Brownsville	6,305	10,517	11,791	21,944
Harlingen	-----	600	1,784	9,486
La Feria	-----	-----	-----	1,594
Los Fresnos	-----	-----	-----	150
Point Isabel	-----	-----	-----	1,177
Rio Hondo	-----	-----	510	710
San Benito	-----	925	5,070	10,789
Remainder of the County	9,790	15,116	17,507	31,722
Cameron County, Total:	16,095	27,158	36,662	77,572

The scholastic population did not grow at the same rate as the population. It had increased only 2.6 times from 7,275 (school year 1910-11) to 18,767 (school year 1930-31). Growth rates for select cities were:

CITIES/ DISTRICTS	WHITE STUDENTS			
	1910-11	1920-21	1930-31	1934-35
C.S.D.	3,937	2,387	1,833	1,792
Brownsville	2,519	4,282	4,865	5,545
Harlingen	246	1,104	3,109	3,376
La Feria	-----	-----	1,138	1,288
Los Fresnos	-----	-----	730	781
Point Isabel	-----	-----	379	515
Rio Hondo	-----	378	885	1,015
San Benito	555	2,048	2,819	2,786
Remainder	-----	722	3,009	3,243
of the County				
Total White:				
Cameron County	7,275	10,921	18,767	20,341
=====				

BLACK STUDENTS				

C.S.D.	-----	2,161	-----	-----
Brownsville	4	22	-----	10
Harlingen	-----	1	64	58
La Feria	-----	-----	40	21
Rio Hondo	-----	-----	-----	2
San Benito	1	8	32	28
Remainder	-----	-----	42	7
of the County				
Total Black:				
Cameron County	5	2,192	144	126
Total White and Black:				
Cameron County	7,280	13,113	18,911	20,467
=====				

School attendance was somewhat of a problem in 1934-35. Of the 1,792 scholastic (6 to 17 years of age) of the Common School Districts only 1,187 (or 66.2%) were enrolled, and the average daily attendance or A.D.A. ranged around 684 (or 38.2%). The problem was similar at Brownsville. Although the City had 5,559 youths of schools age (white and black) only 4,664 (or 83.9%) were enrolled in 1934-35, and the average daily attendance ranged around 3,515 (or 63.2%).

When looking at the totals of Cameron County, only 16,570 (or 82.3%) of the 20,131 white school age children were enrolled, while average attendance ranged around 12,252 (or 60.9%), and all 11 black pupils were enrolled but the average attendance was 3 (or 27.3%).

The cost of education varied in different school districts of Cameron County substantiating the State Commissioner's contentions that the State and the communities were neglecting their financial responsibilities toward education. The following table provides an impression of the assessed valuation, the tax rate, and the cost for several of the County's cities:

CITIES DISTRICTS	ASSESSED VALUATION	TAX RATES	ANNUAL COST	
			TOTAL	PER PUPIL A.D.A.
C.S.D.	\$ 1,785,333	\$.25-.75	\$34,547	\$23.04-107.01
Brownsville				
whites (3,512)	\$14,000,000	\$1.00	\$161,523	\$45.99
blacks (3)			\$975	\$325.00
El Jardin	\$1,735,259	\$1.00	\$17,954	\$81.98
Harlingen				
whites (2,382)	\$10,762,790	\$1.00	\$115,166	\$48.35
blacks (58)			\$1,840	\$31.72
La Feria				
whites (766)	\$2,760,000	\$1.00	\$36,242	\$47.31
blacks (17)			\$845	\$49.70
Los Fresnos	\$1,853,380	\$.95	\$19,696	\$62.33
Point Isabel	\$1,518,000	\$.60	\$19,317	\$62.31
Rio Hondo	\$1,975,000	\$1.00	\$ 29,534	\$43.24
San Benito				
whites (1,935)	\$6,000,000	\$1.00	\$75,531	\$39.03
blacks (17)			\$922	\$54.23
Remainder of the County	\$8,034,948	\$.75-1.00	\$81,915	\$51.09-67.98
Total:				
Cameron County	\$50,724,710		\$596,007	\$48.23

In 1934-35 Cameron County had 27 schools for whites and 4 schools for blacks. The schools were served by 392 white teachers and 5 black teachers. When comparing education and experience of the teachers of Cameron County with those of the State then the following summary can be made:

	CAMERON COUNTY WHITES	BLACKS	STATE WHITES	BLACKS
Teachers with College Degrees	47.6%	40.0%	44.4%	32.1%
Teachers with Experience of Five Years or More	68.4%	100.0%	69.4%	73.4%
Teachers with Tenure of Five Years or More	43.1%	60.0%	40.3%	48.7%
Average Annual Salary	\$857	\$534	\$899	\$553

The State's drive during the mid-thirties to centralize schools, and provide equal educational opportunities is more understandable when reviewing the existing (1934) grade distribution of pupils by number and percentages arranged by schools:

GRADE	ONE	TWO	3 TO 5	6 TO 9	10 AND MORE	ALL
TEACHER	TEACHER	TEACHER	TEACHER	TEACHER	TEACHER	SCHOOLS
SCHOOLS	SCHOOLS	SCHOOLS	SCHOOLS	SCHOOLS	SCHOOLS	
No. %	No. %	No. %	No. %	No. %	No. %	No. %

I n d e p e n d e n t W h i t e						

1	-- --	-- --	258 48.6	70 23.9	3,075 23.9	3,403 24.9
2	-- --	-- --	77 14.5	34 11.6	2,013 15.7	2,124 15.5
3	-- --	-- --	63 11.9	33 11.3	1,615 12.6	1,711 12.5
4	-- --	-- --	47 8.8	29 9.9	1,285 10.0	1,361 10.0
5	-- --	-- --	45 8.5	26 8.9	1,025 8.0	1,096 8.0
6	-- --	-- --	27 5.1	20 6.8	959 7.4	1,006 7.4
7	-- --	-- --	14 2.6	22 7.5	805 6.3	841 6.2
Total						
Elem.			531 100	234 79.9	10,777 83.9	11,542 84.5

8	-- --	-- --	-- --	21 7.1	686 5.4	707 5.2
9	-- --	-- --	-- --	17 5.8	516 4.0	533 3.9
10	-- --	-- --	-- --	14 4.8	416 3.2	430 3.1
11	-- --	-- --	-- --	7 2.4	443 3.5	450 3.3
Total						
H.S.				59 20.1	2,061 16.1	2,120 15.5
Grand						
Total			531 100	293 100%	12,838 100%	13,662 100%

Common White

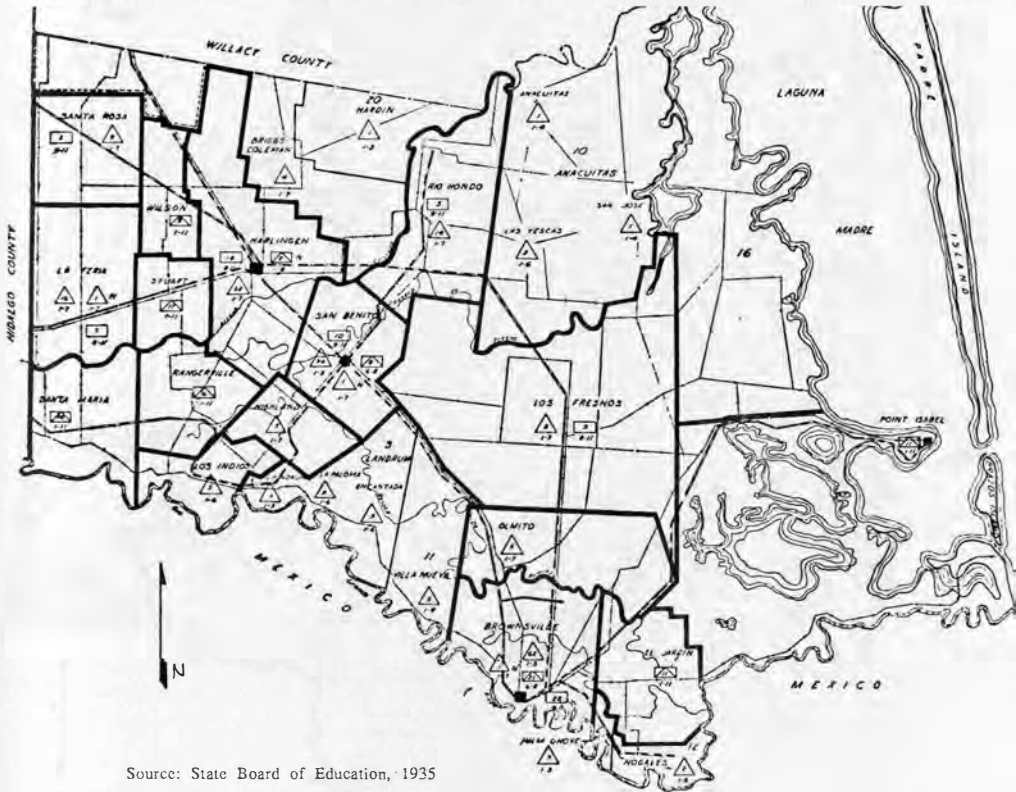
1	107	50.5	125	42.9	381	51.5	--	--	--	--	--	--
2	70	33.0	54	18.8	159	21.5	--	--	--	--	--	--
3	13	6.1	37	12.7	87	11.7	--	--	--	--	--	--
4	18	8.5	37	12.7	38	5.1	--	--	--	--	--	--
5	4	1.9	25	8.6	39	5.3	--	--	--	--	--	--
6	--	--	13	4.5	25	3.4	--	--	--	--	--	--
7	--	--	--	--	6611	1.5	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total												
Elem.												
212 100% 291 100% 740 100% 1,243 100%												
No H.S.												
-- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- --												

Independent Black

1	13	31.7	13	20.6	--	--	--	--	26	25.0
2	6	14.6	6	9.5	--	--	--	--	12	11.5
3	5	12.2	5	8.9	--	--	--	--	10	9.6
4	5	12.2	9	14.3	--	--	--	--	14	13.5
5	3	7.3	7	11.1	--	--	--	--	10	9.6
6	2	4.9	10	15.9	--	--	--	--	12	11.5
7	7	17.1	7	11.1	--	--	--	--	14	13.5
Total										
Elem.										
41 100% 57 90.5 -- -- -- -- 98 94.2										
8	--	--	6	9.5	--	--	--	--	6	5.8
Total										
H.S.										
-- -- 6 9.5 -- -- -- -- 6 5.8										
Grand										
Total										
41 100% 63 100% -- -- -- -- 104 100%										

Pan American University at Brownsville

SCHOOL DISTRICT MAP CAMERON COUNTY (SCHOOL YEAR 1934-1935)



Source: State Board of Education, 1935

Symbols:

- Paved or All-weather Roads
- - - All other Roads
- - - County Boundary
- == Railroads
- Independent School District
- Common School District

- △ Buildings, Elementary only
- Buildings, High School only
- ▢ Buildings, all Grades

Figure in Symbol: Number of Teachers
Figure below Symbol: Number of
Grades taught







"N" to right of Symbol: Black School

SCHOOL DISTRICT MAP CAMERON COUNTY (Proposed Reorganization)



Source: State Board of Education, 1935

Symbols:

-  Paved or All-weather Roads
-  All other Roads
-  County Boundary
-  Railroads
-  Proposed Attendance Areas
-  Proposed Administration Unit




-  Buildings, Elementary only
-  Buildings, High School only
-  Buildings, all Grades

Figure in Symbol: Number of Teachers
Figure below Symbol: Number of Grades taught
"N" to right of Symbol: Black School



BROWNVILLE TEXAS 1933
HURRICAN

CHARLIE BECKER
1-1988

The Founding of CHARRO DAYS

by

Ruby A. Wooldridge and Robert B. Vezzetti

When the founders of Charro Days, the Valley's oldest, largest, and most noted celebration, conceived of the idea, little did they know that the concept had deep historical roots. Among the purposes of the event was the promotion and introduction of the area to "outsiders" and to strengthen ties with our sister city Matamoros. The same thoughts were in the minds of the citizens of Matamoros in 1832 when the residents of this commercial center of some 70,000 persons launched their project. Hearing of communities being settled in Texas by citizens of the United States, some 75 to 100 Matamoros merchants loaded with varied merchandise to trade or sell, and wearing their finest costumes traveled to the Nueces River. Located here was a settlement of North Americans under the leadership of two Irishmen, McMullen and McGloin. The settlers honored the merchants with a gala fiesta that lasted nearly a full week. While the occasion was hailed as a step forward in international trade and goodwill, it was short lived as a short time later the Texas Revolution broke out.

Some 84 years later the concept of introducing the area and developing better international relations was reborn. It was 1937, Brownsville was yet feeling the pains of the depression; business was slow and businessmen were worried. The sad state of affairs was the talk of the town; even at a Pan American Round Table party at the home of Mrs. G. W. Johnson. The women were in full costume. the men in a group talking, and music in the background; it was in this atmosphere that Kenneth Faxon, a Brownsville businessman, had an idea. "Here are two nations represented by Brownsville and Matamoros; a mingling of two cultures. Let's have a fiesta and tell others what we have to offer."

There was a great deal of discussion over the idea but with the backing of the citizens of Brownsville and the Chamber of Commerce, a fiesta was born. J. M. Stein, editor of the Brownsville Herald, named the event Charro Days, and later created the slogan "A Charro Never Sleeps."

Community spirits were high, most people managed to have a costume, men grew beards, sideburns or mustaches. There were horse drawn, hand-made floats in that first parade. Charros and Chinas on horseback, store window decorations,

fireworks, carnival, a restaurant offering different foods of Mexico (which developed into the merienda given each year by the Pan American Round Table I), Brownsville Art League exhibit, the Triple L dance at the country club, costumed street dance, a Teen Age Grand Ball and of course the costumed Grand Ball. The army post band from Fort Brown rode horseback in the parade and later gave a concert in the old band stand located on the post. School children made posters and participated in a children's parade. Musicians from Mexico flooded the downtown area and would burst into song as they wandered down the streets in groups of five or ten. A. A. (Daddy) Hargrove initiated a long standing family tradition of presenting the first "grito" of the celebration.

In 1938 the Grand Brush Court was founded in the spirit of fun and promoted the growing of mustaches, side-burns, and beards. It operated at unexpected times and places and with no warning would "arrest" any clean shaven man.

The deputies of the court would take offenders to the court's jail or chain him to the nearest light-post. Fines collected were given to charity.

At the end of Charro Days, the Brush Court would give awards for the "uncultivated" growth, the "best growth" and for the younger set, the "peach fuzz" growth. The first Chief Injustice of the Court was Sam Pearl, who was assisted by John H. Hunter. Other fun loving organizations soon were created including the "Los Derrotados," in their peon costumes, to provide fun and distinctiveness to the Charro Days events. Wiley Truss was the first leader of this group.

Charro Days has been the subject of documentaries, newsreels, magazines and newspaper articles and a radio program aired by the Voice of America. Its events have been seen throughout Mexico and Latin America. Many dignitaries have been guests at the celebration and many well-known national bands have played at the Grand Ball.

After 50 years the basic concepts continue; let us tell people what we have and let us continue to be good neighbors.

Sources: Interviews

Mrs. Kenneth Faxon

Mrs. Bascom Cox

Mrs. John Hunter

Papers of Mrs. Wiley Truss

Charro Days Minute Books

Texas Southmost College



Snake King Of The Rio Grande

by

Alan Hollander

Traveling south down the tree-lined thoroughfare of Palm Boulevard in Brownsville is a pleasant albeit common occurrence. But, as anything in life, there is more there than meets the eye. Before you cross the railroad tracks, you will see a small shopping center on your left. Take a long look at it. In your mind's eye imagine what was there before the stores, before the people, before Palm Boulevard itself. No need to regress too far. The turn of the century will be fine.

You'll find yourself standing in the middle of a tropical wilderness consisting of mesquite, cactus and a sign which reads, "Snakeville-population 17,209." This figure is a true one, although slightly deceiving, for the vast majority of the inhabitants of this compound were a certain species of reptile, affectionately referred to as diamondback rattlesnakes.

One other species sharing this common space was one near and dear to our hearts, human beings. Although outnumbered by the serpents, they were vastly responsible for putting the Rio Grande Valley on the map. Especially one individual, in particular, named William Abraham King Sr., otherwise known as Snake King, undoubtedly one of the most colorful and resourceful individuals ever to inhabit this region.

The Early Years

One of the greatest drawbacks in the snake show business is that these reptiles die prematurely from being handled at night, a time when they naturally rest. This situation leaves the operator of such exhibits with a problem, one that presented an individual named William Lieberman with a potential goldmine.

In 1907 he found himself in a place where this much sought-after commodity was available in abundance simply by opening your front door. That place was Brownsville, Texas. With the realization that the railroad would be here soon, he collected rattlesnakes, invented a permanent defanging method, took a new name, raised a family and built an empire. Circuses, carnivals and pet shops from all over the country subscribed to his mail-order business. He was well known to

these people because of his involvement in these circles for years. But a man such as Snake King was not content to keep things as they were. In no time at all, expansion was on the horizon.

Nothing could hold back Snake King from expressing the full extent of his innovative personality. Every potential problem would be turned to an advantage and no publicity stunt would be considered too far-fetched. One of the earliest of these was an attempt to promote a Rattlesnake Catching Contest held in 1914 at Brownsville's Sixth Annual Mid-Winter Fair. To ensure maximum press coverage for this event he branded an invitation on a tanned bobcat skin, wrapped it in a large rattlesnake skin and topped it off with a bowtie. The recipient of the unique invitation was the governor of Texas, O.B. Colquitt. It was personally delivered by Snake King. He rode a burro from Brownsville, right up the capital building's steps in Austin.

For the record, the governor did, in fact, show up for the event. Considering what Snake King had in mind for the future, this event was merely the tip of the rattles.

Snakeville Grows

Although rattlesnakes were still abundant in Snakeville, there were profits to be made and excitement to be had with other species. Brownsville became hosts to lions, apes, giant lizards, javelinas, wild parrots and many others. When Palm Boulevard started growing and the population increased, it was time to move farther out into the wilds. He purchased some land east of Snakeville and moved his animal kingdom there. Incidentally, this new location is currently called "four corners" but back then there were no International or Boca Chica Boulevards.

Snake King prided himself on practical jokes, and quick humor. He had one of the first phones installed in Brownsville and it seems that his phone number was constantly confused with that of the ice man. He would pick up the phone and hear "Will you please send me fifty pounds of ice right away?" After getting fed up with this, he developed a quick answer, "Sorry, lady, we can't send you the ice, but we'd be glad to send you fifty pounds of rattlesnake." No takers were ever found.

At another time he made national news by fabricating a story that a dinosaur was loose in Texas. He reported footprints five feet in length and a span of over thirty feet between hindquarters and forefeet. Snake King even cooked up

a name. Ramaferinkus. Week after week, he would leak reports to the press until Ramaferinkus met his end in a sulphur pit.

Bill King, a current resident, and printing entrepreneur in Brownsville grew up in Snakeville. As the eldest son of W. A. Snake King, he has a wealth of anecdotes about his father. So many, in fact, that he wrote a book entitled Rattling Yours ...Snake King, a book written with such warmth and humor that this writer actually read it cover to cover three times. He told, "Dad was so involved with his business that he never had time for such things as sports or other activities. Once he was with Will Rogers and Rogers was talking about the then very famous Babe Ruth. Dad looked at him with a blank expression and Will Rogers said 'Don't you know who Babe Ruth is?' Dad replied, 'Does he sell snakes?'"

Stories and Anecdotes

Snake King's outgoing and infectious personality attracted many characters and involved him in many situations. Snakeville became a well-known tourist attraction and in its 30 year history, literally hundreds of thousands of people toured the facilities. There were many different tour guides, including Snake King and his immediate family, plus some hired for the purpose. There was one such person, Doc Barnard, who actually was able to train a rattlesnake.

On the guided tour, someone would inevitably ask about the rattlesnakes, "Do they bite?" To which Doc would reply, "Of course they do. How the hell do you suppose they manage to eat?" As the tour continued, he would drop hints about his prized possession. Eventually, he would have to show the folks the large snake. After they "fed the kitty," he would go into his act. Doc would ask the snake, "Do you like your mother-in-law?" The snake would register no response. Then he would ask "Do you love girls?" and the reptile would rattle its tail off.

Rattlesnakes were not the only species of reptile to inhabit Snakeville. There also were a great many reticulated pythons. These creatures came from India and it is not uncommon for them to reach a length of 30 feet. These pythons were usually mean when they arrived because they had been cramped in a box and hadn't been fed for weeks. Bill King wrote about a surprising experience that he encountered with one of these monsters. "Once, in the process of unpacking, someone got ahead of himself and prematurely removed a lock. As I passed by, the python

struck out at me. I remember the lid flying open suddenly as the huge head zeroed in on me in a blur. Fortunately, it was unable to clamp down on me for the jaws were parallel to my leg. The top fangs ripped my belt while the lowers gashed me below the knee cap. This will give you some idea of the distance their jaws can span."

There is also a story about the time a giant python actually got a grip on one of Snakeville's employees, who was barely saved by the quick and expert actions of his fellow workers. This is described in detail in Bill King's book. A photograph of this giant beast appears on these pages.

Snake King's flair for publicity and his mischievous streak never faded. Bill King told, "Dad was considered good copy by the press wherever he went. Once, at a Shriners' convention in San Antonio, he decided to play a little trick. So he let a bunch of rattlesnakes loose on the floor. Great pandemonium resulted. Of course, the snakes were defanged and their mouths were sewn shut."

Feathered Friends

Occasionally, Snake King's humor and the resourcefulness that went hand-in-hand with it backfired on him. A large part of Snakeville's business was the importation of thousands of Yellowhead and Redhead Parrots from Mexico. Bill King relates in his book that you had to be real careful about what you said around these birds because sometimes they would start giving you some of your own medicine. "One over-abundant season we made the sad mistake of housing surplus parrots in a building adjoining the carpenter shop. Within one week hundreds of baby parrots were chugging away noisily in perfect imitation of a gasoline engine, complete with occasional backfires. It was perfectly horrible."

As time went on, it was discovered there were fewer of these birds arriving from Mexico than paid for. Snake King did some investigating and found that some of these birds were being stolen. Never to be held back by any circumstance, he came up with the idea of attaching tags to the crates warning that the parrots were contaminated with a fever and cautioning against handling the birds until they had been vaccinated. This worked like a charm until the U.S. government got involved and decided that this would be something to watch for. There was a federal investigation launched and a so-called parrot fever was born by the name of psittacosis. This was escalated to the point that it became a great threat to the national welfare. Snake King challenged the U.S. Public Health Bureau through the press to

prove that such a fever actually existed but to no avail. Psittacosis was here to stay. It became virtually a household word with strict regulations and quarantines. This resulted in greatly escalated costs and the death of countless perfectly harmless birds. When parrot fever never struck, the scare wore off, but the quarantine period endured.

Parrots were not the only birds that Snake King dealt with. He stocked game preserves with Bobwhite quail from Mexico and dealt in numerous other species. It is of note to mention that he invented techniques to catch quail in great multitudes.

Circuses and Hollywood

W.A. Snake King's flair for adventure spurred on many projects. Snakeville was being built up to house many species of animals in such a way that the animals would be free to roam in their own areas, instead of being caged. This was an early precursor of today's Gladys Porter Zoo and many other zoos around the country. Many other projects gave vent to his creative juices.

For one thing, he got involved with a number of circuses in Mexico and the United States. This brought to the Valley not only a wide variety of characters who travel in these circles, but also elephants, giraffes, zebras, camels and other creatures came to the lush delta known as Brownsville. Some of these circuses proved to be lucrative while others were nothing but fiascos.

Snake King's personality and business sense acted as a magnet for a number of Hollywood producers who used Snakeville, its resources and people in their films. One such film was called "Death Along The Delta." This was filmed in the Palm Jungle down Southmost Road, as well as in Snakeville itself. The film featured Snake King, his son Bill and a host of others. There were more films and more circuses. This opens up what may, in fact, be the most colorful and interesting aspect of Snake King, his family and business.

The World's Youngest Wild Animal Trainer

A young lion cub wandered away from its mother and ended up in a drainage ditch. The young animal was cared for by Snake King's wife and became the beloved pet of his seven-year-old son Manuel. At the same time, ten other cubs were

born. Manuel could not keep away from them. He would pet them through the cage and eventually wander into the cage to play with his friends. The cubs in return, vied for his affection. He went into the cage when no one was around, fearing he would be forbidden to do so if anyone knew about it.

Manuel King relates the story: "In the middle of one of these sessions, Dad caught up with me and I thought sure this time it was curtains. But, instead, he called me out of the cage and asked me if I wanted to become famous and make a world of money, enough to retire when I was 21. All I had to do was go in the cage, run the cats around a few times, come out and take a bow. It all sounded so simple, I took Dad's proposition up right on the spot."

So was born "The World's Youngest Wild Animal Trainer." Circus periodicals of the 1930's were searched for the right teachers for Manuel and a one-armed lion trainer (his right arm was lost in the ring) named John (Chubby) Guilfoyle was found. The career that followed lasted for six years and saw Manuel King in the big cage over four thousand times without an injury. Snake King was a master of promotion and he enjoyed the contacts, traveling and meeting top people in the entertainment field.

Throughout these years, Manuel King became famous. He played to huge crowds all over the United States and Mexico, got top press coverage from many magazines and newspapers throughout the country, did a couple of featurettes for "Strange Occupations," filmed by Universal Studios, made an adventure serial and co-starred in a movie entitled "Darkest Africa," with Clyde Beatty.

A good example of Snake King's quick humor was in Fort Worth where Manuel was headlining the 1936 "Flirting With Death Arena" consisting of 10 or 15 daredevil acts. He sent his son Bill to get some tools to repair the lion's cage and became infuriated when the man in charge wouldn't let Bill have any tools because he didn't have a union card. Snake King went to the man, took him to the cage and said, "Get in there and fix that cage before it's too late." The repairman said "You nuts or something, mister? Those damned lions would tear me to pieces before I'd get to lift a hammer." Snake King replied, "Don't worry about a thing, if they give you any static, just flash your union card!" There ended any further difficulties in obtaining tools.

Another humorous incident occurred during Manuel King's lengthy tour of Mexico. It seems that the ringside seats

were reserved for rich and important people. Some times these people would sit with their noses up in the air at the entire affair. At such times, Snake King would give his sons the high sign which communicated to them that they should neglect to have the elephants empty their bowels before their performance. When the elephants started whirling around, the haughty spectators would get showered with "elephantine footballs" and would flee or get down on the floor to protect themselves from the overwhelming bombardment.

Manuel's colorful career was exciting and lucrative. He is now living in Houston and is involved in the snake business. Manuel says: "...despite all the hard work, the close calls and inevitable gripes that I put up with in those years, I truly enjoyed every moment I spent in the arena. Given the opportunity, I'd do it all over again. The thrill of big audiences in far-away places, and the enthusiastic applauses I drew, to this day still bring out the 'kinker' in me...I just can't help it."

The Scourge of Nature

September 5, 1933 was Manuel's tenth birthday. An after-school party was planned. But after the clock struck noon, clouds began forming and the Valley became dark and foreboding. It was apparent to the King family and others in Snakeville that a huge storm was approaching. Cages containing the big cats were boarded up, grass-eating animals were herded into contained areas, poisonous snakes and lizards were dumped into concrete pits and battened down with extra-heavy lids.

The family barricaded themselves in a concrete office building which proved stable, although the windows were quickly shattered by the winds. Over the howling winds, macaws, parrots, monkeys, baboons, lions, hyenas and others could be heard protesting nature's show of force. Then, suddenly, a lion was seen running past the window. Bill King writes about the incident:

"Instantly, Dad posted an armed guard at each window. As best we could, we blocked all windows with steel file cabinets and chairs, anything that would form a barrier of some sort to plug the gaping windows. Moments later, a large African lion stood just outside one of the windows gazing at the occupants. In its bone-crushing jaws, the jungle king held the remains of a mule head. Soon, another lion appeared to challenge the first one and almost at once a savage fight broke out. While

the two battled, a skulking hyena stole off with the mule head. On the north side of the office, Chubby reported a battle in progress between a Royal Bengal tiger and a pair of African lions. As the big cats rolled out of sight, a leopard streaked by chasing a javalena. A series of frantic squeals ending in muffled sounds marked the end of this chase."

And so it was throughout the night enduring 120 mile per hour winds. When day broke and the storm subsided, most of the animals were herded and subdued. One lion became indignant and had to be killed and five large pythons escaped. The tremendous property damage leveled Snakeville and ended the life of this animal preserve forever.

Snakeville did continue in other ways however. The previously described tour of Mexico got underway, Snake King got in and out of the long bird business, World War II began and Bill and Manuel went off to work. Snake King moved to Mexico and became involved in manufacturing military insignia and then in the cigarette lighter business. From there it was roof lights and meters on Mexican taxi cabs. The only thing that could stop Snake King occurred on Armistice Day in November 1955 when the inventive brilliance of W.A. Snake King was laid to rest.

Snakeville lived on for a couple of years under the guidance of Manuel King but the absence of its originator left it without its spark and Snakeville's illustrious career came to an end.

Bill King, Today & Tomorrow

Much of the innovation and intelligence of Snake King is reflected in his son Bill. Bill King linked up with Paul Springman after the war and started the very successful and note-worthy printing business, Springman King Lithographers. The unusual circumstances of his life are reflected in his thinking process; growing up with a strong personality like Snake King, among lions, tigers and other creatures of the wild has given him unique perspective.

He has written not only Rattling Yours..Snake King (I highly recommend this book) but has other works to his credit- Lion On A String, The Reptile Reporter, and Now It's Government OFF The People. His opinions touch many areas- from war to medicine, from eating to writing.

When he first wrote Rattling Yours...Snake King, he

resolved to send out 50 books, one to each governor. But there was a twist. He wanted to cover each book in rattlesnake skin. So, for the first time in twenty years he went out and gently caught a large specimen. As he was returning to Brownsville, he felt a twinge about taking the life of such a magnificent creature merely to cover a book, so he turned around, released the snake and wound up embossing leather to make it look like snakeskin. He inscribed the book "covered with 100% pure artificial rattlesnake skin."

Bill King told "I can't hunt to this day. Live and let live. It's one thing for a man who lives on a ranch to eat the animals and use the skins, but quite another thing to kill for the sake of killing. No animal does this except man. Lions can be resting with antelopes right there but they will not kill unless they're hungry."

This way of thinking makes King feel that man is treading on dangerous ground by delving into areas where he does not belong. "Man has a restless urge to pry and pry. We have learned the language of dolphins. That's between dolphins. They don't need us; they have no problems." On a more serious subject, he says, "Man has gone overboard in technology, man is fooling around with fission and atomic cobalt bombs. This is something that can easily get out of control. There has been warfare since the beginning of time, but if we keep following this road we are on, we would destroy each other before war would begin. I would call it chemical dissolution of mankind."

He believes in the draft and in arming the United States "to the teeth," but feels that we should quell our imperialistic attitudes and concentrate on building our own country.

On other matters, he feels that life has become too complicated, "There are too many lawyers. It takes an act of Congress to buy furniture." He also observes "Did you ever see an animal eat too much? If you're hungry, don't eat. No one was ever born obese; they stuff themselves to be that way. Take care of your body and it will take care of you."

He has other thoughts concerning man stumbling on the same rock two or three times when a horse won't. He said to me with a sly smile, "Did you ever see a horse bet on a human race?"

This article is mainly about Snake King, but to find out more about Bill King's philosophy, we may soon be treated to

a new book tentatively titled Back To The Apes...If They'll Have Us. It's just going to take a little encouragement to get him to write it.

How about the time he gave Dean Porter the idea for the Gladys Porter Zoo while they were waiting in line at the San Antonio Airport? Well, that's going to have to be another story.



SNAKE KING

The Populist Revolt of M. M. Vicars

by

Anthony K. Knopp

It all began in the 20-30 Club, a pre-Rotary organization for men in their twenties. Margal M. Vicars, a young (29) Brownsville laundry operator, was unhappy with the long-time city administration headed by Mayor Herbert L. Stokely, and voiced his dissatisfaction to fellow club members. The underlying factor in Vicar's unhappiness was his belief that the Stokely administration had used deception to turn city park land into the "silk-stocking" residential area known as Rio Viejo.¹ Club members urged Vicars to challenge Stokely in the next mayoral election and promised to work in the campaign. Vicars would also have the support of photographer Robert Runyon, a former Brownsville city manager and (briefly) mayor.² Runyon became Vicars' close friend and political mentor.

Runyon may have been seeking revenge against the man and political machine which replaced him as mayor. By 1955 H.L. Stokely had been mayor for ten years, continuing a tradition of long-term mayors dating back to the overthrow of South Texas political "boss" Jim Wells by an alliance of Republicans and independents. This coalition, which constituted the economic and educational elite of Brownsville, had controlled the city for almost forty years, excepting the Runyon administration.³

The Stokely years had involved progress for Brownsville in terms of business and population growth. The crown jewel of the Stokely administration was the Fort Brown Memorial Center (auditorium and civic center). Unchallenged since his first election, Stokely had no reason to doubt his reelection. In announcing Vicars' candidacy the Brownsville Herald noted that "around the coffee counters it was ;strong odds; that the opposition had little chance...."⁴

Mayor Stokely campaigned on his record on new paving, improved public services, and unchanged tax and utility rates. But the discontent over city governance extended beyond Vicars and his friends. Even the Herald recognized from the start that Vicars "would pick up protest votes cast by citizens who are unhappy with current conditions at city hall," and soon charged the administration with failure to keep up city property.⁵

The Vicars attack on Stokely, however, had a different focus. The challenger accused the incumbent of charging exorbitant rates for electricity from the city-owned utility and claimed that tax rates were excessive. "The people are being bled to death," Vicars asserted. "It's time to stop carefree, wasteful spending" due to "big shots" in the government.⁶

Apparently most political pundits did not take the Vicars challenge seriously. Stokely received favorable publicity when the annual convention of the League of Texas Municipalities met in Brownsville on October 24--with Stokely as president. The campaign remained quiet on the surface until the last week of October, with little mention in the Herald. Vicars did have press support from the Spanish-language El Puerto, run by Gilbert Cerda. On October 31 a campaign ad for Stokely, signed by many of Brownsville's socio-political elite, appeared in the Herald. The election on November 1, 1955, resulted in an apparent twenty two vote victory for Vicars out of 4700 vote total. The Herald recorded "a sort of numb shock" among Stokely supporters who feared "that an enormous tragedy had overtaken Brownsville, the sort of political calamity one would assert, if, say, Liberace had been elected President." But the Herald also called attention to the limited extent of the opposition victory: the Stokely forces would retain a three-member city commission majority. Among those defeated for commission was Robert Runyon, eminence grise of the Vicars forces. The "simple truth", according to the Herald: "Herbert Stokely was beaten, but so was the man who represented the acme of the opposition, Robert Runyon."⁸

Although Mayor Stokely initially indicated that he would not contest the outcome of that exceedingly close election, new developments and the insistence of his supporters changed his mind. In the first place the city election ballot was defective due to lack of printed instructions on how to cast a vote. Secondly, the city commission's canvass of returns narrowed Vicars' margin of victory to eleven votes and produced an extended debate over disputed ballots. Stokely began what eventually became a seventeen-month law suit in which he was successful at each judicial level, ultimately including the state supreme court. In the meantime Vicars had served as mayor under a \$5000 appeals bond.⁹

Operating under the cloud of a legal challenge to his election as well as suffering the crippling effect of being in the commission minority, Mayor Vicars found little opportunity to implement his plans during his seventeen months in office. Indeed, Vicars was warned by several

sources, including Commissioner Mike Cortinas and law enforcement officers, that there was "a contract out" on him and urged him to take steps to protect himself. Vicars was primarily concerned for the safety of his family, but he also decided to "pack a six-gun" in his waist band and wore it under a suit coat to commission meetings.¹⁰

Forced from office by the courts, Vicars immediately announced that he would again seek the office of mayor in the upcoming election. While Mayor Stokely declared that he felt "no resentment or bitterness toward anyone" and was "hopeful that politics would be given a vacation for a while," Vicars expressed his hope that Stokely's return to office would "not mean a return to 'persecution and harassment' of Brownsville tax and utility payers."¹¹

Mayor Stokely did not choose to run in 1957, but an elite-supported slate of candidates headed by Paul Springman filed under the banner of the Independent Citizens Party. Vicars headed the team endorsed by the Good Government Party. Now that it was evident that Vicars was a force to be reckoned with, the political charges came fast and furious.

The public focus for the campaign was a series of political forums conducted by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and the League of Women Voters. The major issue involved the charge by Vicar's people that the Independent Citizens and Springman were 'under the thumb' of Mayor Stokely, a "smear campaign" in the words of commission candidate Tony Carnesi. The Independent Citizens candidates disavowed Stokely and accused Vicars of planning to fire the police chief, which Vicars denied. Vicars continued to challenge the tax and utility rates and promised to take action on drainage and flood control problems.¹²

The Brownsville Herald took editorial note of the Stokely issue in the campaign. "You get the feeling that they are disavowing a leper colony. While we have seriously disputed many of the things the present administration has done, and has left undone, they are not pariahs to be despised by all aspiring politicians as an evil influence," exclaimed the Herald.¹³

Despite the disclaimer, the Herald was regarded by many, including M. M. Vicars, as an occasionally critical supporter of the Stokely regime.¹⁴ Certainly the Herald showed little enthusiasm for Vicars' candidacy, although the paper eschewed editorial opposition. Opportunity for indirect criticism presented itself in the form of "Don Pedro says," a brief, daily, front-page vehicle for humor or sarcasm. In

1957 "Don Pedro" was a city commission candidate with a Vicars-like platform. "I intend to reduce the electric rates 50 per cent, the taxes 60 per cent, the price of water 70 per cent, and in addition there will be free raspas for the niños at all times," Don Pedro announced. Newsroom skeptics asked where he would get the money to pay for it all, to which Don Pedro replied, "Do not worry me with details....Perhaps I will sell a few deficits to make up the difference. I am not one to quibble and piddle."¹⁵

The heightened awareness of the campaign and its issues was evident on election day. A remarkable seventy-five percent of the 9,700 registered voters turned out to provide Vicars a narrow 84 vote victory. Three other members of Vicars' team also achieved narrow wins, with Tony Carnesi the sole victor for the Independent Citizens. Class distinctions appeared in the precinct totals, with Vicars carrying middle and lower class areas such as the Canales School Precinct (by four to one) while losing the Rio Viejo area (by five to two).¹⁶

Despite the slim margin of victory, Mayor Vicars reentered office in a much strengthened position based on a four-to-one council majority. Vicars found city services in disarray. Prolonged neglect of the city power plant necessitated costly repairs to cope with flood problems. According to Vicars, city workers were equipped only with shovels and machetes. New personnel were hired for city departments and funds spent on new projects such as Riverview Golf Course--a public course for the common man who had no access to elite country club courses.¹⁷

The heavy expenditures soon took their toll on city coffers. At one point the city government was over \$800,000 in the red. In June 1959 the city's auditors, Pope and Spillers of San Antonio, warned the commission of the need to reduce expenditures and recommended "drastic steps to cut personnel costs." By October the city payroll was reduced by 100 employees.¹⁸ The administration suffered yet another blow in early July when the superintendent of the city power plant, W. L. Spikes, announced his resignation due to the inadequate condition and funding of city utilities.¹⁹

The city's financial difficulties were accompanied by political squabbling on the commission. Mayor Vicars saw his majority crumbling as Commissioner Carnesi exploited divisions among the majority. When it was necessary to select a new commissioner after a resignation, the mayor could obtain no support for his candidate.²⁰ Seeking vindication, the mayor organized a new ticket for the Good

Government Party in the November city elections. Vicars blamed the city's problems on neglect of public services by the prior administration and wasteful commission spending over the mayor's opposition.²¹

Opposing Vicars was a new slate of candidates known as the Better Brownsville Ticket and headed by Dr. J. C. George. Naturally the George team promised to restore unity and balance the budget by ending excessive spending. Vicars was accused of breaking promise after promise. The greatest damage to the Vicars campaign however, was done by Pope and Spillers in their June audit. The George team hit this issue hard.²²

By election day Vicars defeat would have been predictable, but the extent of that defeat was staggering. In a record-breaking vote of 7,370 the Better Brownsville Ticket was swept into office by almost a three-to-one majority. Vicars' team failed to carry a single precinct.²³ Both the Herald and Vicars recognized that much of the success of the George team was due to its superb (and well-funded) organization.²⁴ The Brownsville elite establishment was taking no chances on another race to the wire, culminating in a Vicars victory.

Thus ended the crusade, or populist revolt, of M.M. Vicars. The former mayor went on to a successful career of business and public service, and is presently employed as manager of the Cameron County Fresh Water District No. 1. The Brownsville elite establishment had regained control of the city government and would retain power for another twenty years. Never again, however, would the elite feel completely assured of control.

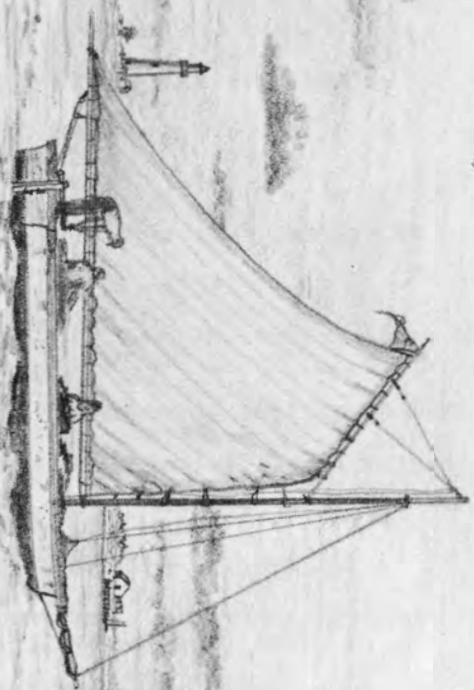
Texas Southmost College

ENDNOTES

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12. Brownsville Herald, October 28, 1957, p. 1; October 30, 1957, pp. 1, 10
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20. M. M. Vicars, personal interview, January 18, 1988;
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and later a four term mayor of Brownsville); Brownsville
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TYPICAL FISHING BOAT
LAGUNA MADE OFF
POINT ISABEL EARLY 1900'S



SKETCH FROM PHOTO
OF MANUEL GAVITO
BY CHARLIE BECKER 1-1988

Las Ferias en Matamoros en 1962

por

Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda

ANTAÑO.-Desde el linde de lo memorable --principios de este siglo-- recuerdo las ferias que se celebraban en la H. Matamoros Tamps.

NUMERO.-Eran dos, la primera llamada "la jamaica", y la segunda o "la feria grande" o "de septiembre."

TIEMPO.-Verificábase la jamaica en mayo, empezando durante la primera semana del mes, y la "feria grande" daba principio en la segunda semana del patrio mes.

DURACIÓN.-Por acuerdo de los ayuntamientos, sancionado por el Gobierno del Estado, la jamaica debería durar quince días, y la feria grande un mes; pero era costumbre prolongar la primera por todo el mes, y la segunda por mes y medio, y, a veces, hasta por un par de meses.

UBICACIÓN.-El lugar de instalación de ambas ferias era la Plaza de Allende. Esta plaza encuéntrase entre las calles Morelos al Norte y Guerrero al Sur, y entre las calles números Diez y Once al Oriente y al Poniente. --En aquel entonces dicha plaza estaba casi en el límite sur de la población, ya que el pueblo por ese tiempo terminaba a dos o tres cuadras al mediodía, en la calle Canales. --A la plaza de Allende, popularmente se le dominaba "Plaza de la Capilla", por existir en su costado oriental una capillita en ruina, ruinas obra de un ciclón. La plaza de la Capilla, se aseguraba, había sido planeada especialmente para instalar ferias. Tal parecía: en el centro se elevaba un quiosco de madera para ser ocupado por las bandas de música; rodeaba al quiosco un embanquetado circular, como de seis metros de anchura pavimentado de ladrillo; a este embanquetado interior seguían espacios de tierra libre, sin árboles ni césped; luego otro embanquetado, también de ladrillo, menos ancho que el anterior, de forma cuadrangular, siguiendo paralelamente los lados de la plaza; seguía a este segundo embanquetado nuevos espacios libres, hasta las calles, en cuyos límites sólo existía un cordón de la anchura de un ladrillo a lo largo; en cada ángulo de la plaza y a cada media cuadra, sendas banquetas unían ambos embanquetados y daban entrada a ellos. No había aceras exteriores y como los espacios libres se ocupaban con los puestos de las ferias, por eso se

afirmaba que la plaza de la Capilla fuera planeada para tales festividades.

LA RAYADA.-En las últimas semanas de abril y de agosto se anunciaba en los periódicos locales --"El Puerto de Matamoros" de "Don Pepe Arrese, "El Sol de Mayo" de Doña Eutimia, y "El Matamorense" de Don Pedrito-- que se iban a subastar los locales para la próxima feria. El día fijado se llamaba "de la rayada" y era toda una ceremonia. A la hora predicha se apersonaban en la plaza una comisión del R. Ayuntamiento, los solicitantes de los locales y no escaso público. De acuerdo y sin que por lo general hubiera discrepancias, escogían los solicitantes sus respectivas ubicaciones. Se respetaba la tradición y ocupaban los lugares que en anteriores ocasiones hubieran tenido. Ya de acuerdo, un peón limitaba con líneas de cal pulverizada los lugares escogidos. Era la "rayada".

LA CALENTURA.-Oficialmente las ferias comenzaban el primer domingo de mayo y el segundo de septiembre, pero por costumbre se inauguraban los sábados anteriores a esos domingos y se llamaba a esos sábados "la calentura". Durante "la calentura" en las cantinas se obsequiaba una cerveza, en los restaurantes no se cobraba el café, los dulceros y fruteros daban a probar su mercancía y, en general, en los demás puestos se hacían pequeños obsequios o se cobraba la mitad de los objetos.

LA BANDA.-La banda municipal, primero bajo la dirección del Maestro Cenobio Carrillo, y luego bajo la batuta del Maestro José María Barrientos, noche a noche, y los domingos --y algunos sábados-- también en la tarde, amenizaba y era una de las principales atracciones de la feria. Se tocaban principalmente marchas: "el 23 de infantería", la incomparable "Zacatecas", "Los Cazadores" con uno o dos emocionantes y esperados disparos de fusil...valeses, el también incomparable "Sobre las Olas", "Alejandra", "Recuerdo"...y se atrevían con trozos clásicos "la marcha de Aída", la "Caballería rusticana"...y se llegaron a estrenar obras de compositores locales: "De Matamoros al Paraíso" del propio Maestro Cenobio Carrillo, así como otras, danzas y mazurcas, del mismo Maestro; varias y diversas obras --valeses, danzas, marchas-- del Maestro José María Barrientos, y la marcial y armoniosa marcha "Gral. Lauro Villar" de la inspirada compositora matamorense María Hinojosa.

LA CONCURRENCIA.-En el embanquetado al rededor del quiosco, durante las audiciones --y aun horas antes-- las señoritas matamorenses en parejas o en grupos de tres --raras veces de cuatro--daban vueltas y vueltas --como en las

"retretas" o "serenatas" de la Plaza Hidalgo-- en sentido contrario a las manecillas de un reloj; las respectivas madres sentadas en bancos a prudente distancia, vigilaban o simulaban--; los jóvenes --y uno que otro viejo verde-- también en parejas o tríos --rara vez solitarios-- giraban en sentido contrario. Y a la vuelta y vuelta se intercambiaban miradas, suspiros, sonrisas; y furtivamente, papelitos con perfumadas declaraciones amorosas, o flores que ya confirmaban la aceptación. Así nacieron muchos idilios y no pocas indigestiones con "calabazas".

LOS "CABALLITOS".-Un "tren de caballitos" instalaba mi padre ---luego mi paternal hermano-- en la feria. Eran pequeños caballos de madera --una docena--, todos iguales, pintados de diferentes colores, y que pendían de sendas barras de metal. Se hacían girar por un cigüeñal movido por mano humana. Bastaba para la tracción un sólo hombre. Había además dos cochecitos --"las cunitas" las llamaba la chiquillería-- para acomodar a los más pequeñuelos y a las niñas, aunque muchas de estas --sufragistas ahora-- preferían a los caballitos, y montaban a ahorcajadas. Un cilindro musical, accionado también a mano, acompañaba con viejos vales desentonados el circular de los caballitos. El "Cigueñista" y el "cilindrero" tenían también la misión de vigilar que los chicuelos no se atravesaran al voltear de caballitos y cunitas. Recuerdo que una tarde, a pesar de la vigilancia, un chiquillo se atravesó y fué derribado. Inmediatamente se detuvo el tren y se atendió a la víctima. Por fortuna los golpes no fueron de consideración y al preguntarle, para consolarlo, qué quería, respondió que "dar vueltas montado en un caballito."

Algunas ocasiones venía un "carrousel" en toda forma, con caballos y otros animales grandes, accionados por motor, con órgano musical mecánico--, pero la chiquillería matamorenses de aquel entonces prefería la de los "caballitos chiquitos" y aun los padres compartían la misma opinión, los consideraban "menos peligrosos."

LOS PUESTOS.-Al día siguiente de "la rayada" y con febril actividad se procedía a la erección de los puestos. Se fabricaban con madera y se techaban con un zacate especial o con hojas de palmera. Se oía el martillo en todo Matamoras. Eran más o menos grandes, según la categoría del negocio al que estaban destinados.

CANTINAS.-Se instalaban dos o cuando más tres, eran las que ocupaban más espacio y las contruían cerradas por los cuatro lados, con cancel en la puerta que impedía ver el interior. Además de expendir bebidas alcohólicas, eran

también garitos, con ruletas, "carcamanes" y juegos de baraja y dados. Tanto los borrachines como los tahures obraban con discreción y no hubo escándalos notables ni mucho menos hechos de sangre.

RESTAURANTES.-Los había grandes, medianos y "fritangas". Los puestos de los restaurantes seguían en importancia a los de las cantinas, pero los hacían abiertos en tres direcciones; sólo al sur --viento reinante-- no tenían protección, para que el viento avivara mucho la lumbre de leña o carbón. Se comía, pues, casi al aire libre. Eran platillos principales los regionales: cabrito en sangre o al pastor, predominando de la primera manera, menudo, carne asada, enchiladas... Muchas familias gustaban cenar en la feria y, cuando no podían ir, se hacían llevar "órdenes" a sus domicilios.

Las fritangas no tenían puestos, instalaban en cualquier sitio no estorbante el brasero y las ollas de atole y tamales.

LAS LOTERIAS.-Atracción popular eran las loterías. Había cuando menos dos. Se premiaba con vasijas de barro, de vidrio, con abanicos, anillos y otras baratijas. Era curioso oír a los gritones". Una de las loterías la regenteaba un conocido matrimonio de la clase media. Cuando ya estaban vendidos los "cartones", decía solemnemente la señora: "Ya mi rey!" --Contestaba el señor: "Ya mi reina!"-- Y "el rey" empezaba a vocear, con las metáforas acostumbradas, las figuras que iban saliendo: "'El que le cantó a San Pedro" --el gallo--; "La cobija de los pobres" --el sol--; "Don Cucafate en la paseada --el borrachín--; "Para arrear el ganado" --el peine---... Otra lotería la voceaba un entonces jovencito, muy circunspecto y posesionado de su papel que, a voz en cuello que se escuchaba en todo el Matamoros de entonces, anunciaba: "El Búfalo del Ohio!", pero no pronunciando "ojaio", sino castellanamente "oio", en lo que nosotros entonces --y todavía-- aprendices de inglés, nos reíamos, sin misericordia, pero también sin discreción.

EL FONÓGRAFO.-Reciente el descubrimiento de Edison, se explotaba en la feria un fonógrafo de los primeros que hubo. Los sonidos estaban grabados en cilindro y se escuchaban individualmente por medio de audífonos personales. Explotaba el invento un señor Carbajal que había grabado un cilindro con una producción de su cosecha y que ponía a petición del público: una oración fúnebre! Pero causaba admiración que, entre los chirridos y rispideces, se reconocía la voz del señor Carbajal elogiando a un muerto.

PELEAS DE GALLOS.- Se alzaba un palenque, a veces dentro de la misma plaza, pero en la mayoría de las ocasiones dentro de un solar baldío de los que rodeaban entonces la plaza, a menudo en el sitio que ahora ocupa el Cine Alameda. A los muchachos de entonces nos llamaba mucho la atención la forma circular u octagonal del templete, pero nunca pudimos ver el interior, pues se cumplía estrictamente la orden de no admitir menores de edad.

CORRIDA DE TOROS.-La plaza de toros estaba a dos cuadras de la Plaza de Allende, por el rumbo sur. Sólo funcionaba cuando las ferias y nada más con una o dos corridas. Eran éxito de taquilla el "Reverte mexicano", la cuadrilla de "las señoritas toreras, que capitaneaba la "Charrita mexicana", más jinete que torera, y, en las últimas ferias "la cuadrilla juvenil mexicana" con los niños Arruza entre otros. Detalle recordable: mi compañero de escuela primaria el niño Alberto Benevendo --de rancia familia matamorenses y que sabía tocar la corneta, era el que daba las clarinadas que regulaban la bárbara fiesta, de la que decía en el final de uno de sus sonetos mi Maestro Don Pepe Arrese:

el picador...y el público ilustrado"

...sólo veía dos bestias en la plaza.

DULCERIAS.-No faltaban los puestos de dulces, dulces de fabricación local, entre los que descollaban los sabrosos y nutritivos "jamoncillos" --dulces de leche quemada--, los no menos deliciosos calabazates y las incomparables charamuscas correosas rellenas de nuez.

FRUTERIAS.-En ellas se expendía fruta de la estación, sobresaliendo las sandías gigantescas de fresca y dulce pulpa de acitante rojo, que dieron fama nacional a Matamoras; caña de azúcar, entonces cultivada, aunque en poca escala y de sabor algo salado, en la región, y cacahuete de "El Paso", traído de Galeana, Nuevo León.

OTROS PUESTOS.-Entre otros puestos, solía haber los de cerámica, popular y artística --cazuelas y floreros-- legítimos de Tlaquepaque.

FINIS.-Un año, un buen Ayuntamiento ("bueno" en el sentido irónico y peyorativo) permitió por apatía o por venalidad-- averiguelo Vargas-- que los puestos de las cantinas no fueron derribados, como se hacía inmediatamente después de las ferias; persistieron, pues, las cantinas, al poco tiempo se añadieron otras y no tardó la Plaza de Allende en convertirse en inmundo zoco. Así persistió por varios

años hasta que otro Ayuntamiento (ahora sí "bueno" en su pristina acepción) se impuso a los "intereses creados", derribó los puestos del zoco y transformó la Plaza de la Capilla en el hermoso jardín actual. Pero la Plaza de Allende dejó de ser sede de las ferias matamorenenses.

En puridad, desde el linde de mis recuerdos --principios del siglo actual-- las llamadas ferias de Matamoros, no lo fueron, sino festividades con disfraz popular y, en realidad, culto a Birján, constitucionalmente prohibido, pero oficialmente permitido.

HOGANO.-El almodrote de la Academia asienta que feria es: ..."3. Mercado de mayor importancia que el común, en paraje público y días señalados, y también las fiestas que se celebran con tal ocasión. Paraje público en que están expuestos los animales, géneros o cosas para este mercado"...

Este año --1961-- y gracias al entusiasmo del actual Gobernador de Tamaulipas, Dr. Norberto Treviño Zapata---matamorenses nato-- habrá en Matamoros una verdadera feria que concuerde con la definición académica.

NUMERO.- Se han verificado previamente, en los dos años anteriores, "exposiciones" agrícolas, comerciales y ganaderas; este año se verificará la tercera de esas exposiciones y primera feria algodонера.

DURACION.-Durará diez días, los comprendidos entre el once y el veinte de agosto. Lapso adecuado, pues coincide con la cosecha del algodón.

UBICACION.-Cuéntase con lugar especial --"paraje público!-- localizado al sur de la carretera pavimentada a la que llaman "el Sendero Nacional", al poniente de la ciudad, distante dos kilómetros de ésta. El tramo carretero sirve como paseo y se recorre en breve tiempo y con comodidad.

EXTENSION.-Comprende trece y media hectáreas --diez veces mayor que la Plaza de Allende--y hay probabilidades de ampliarla.

ADAPTACION.-Se ha planeado para su objeto. De la carretera se entra por amplia avenida forestada. Frente a la entrada hay, a ambos lados, dos secciones para estacionamiento de automóviles, con capacidad para mil quinientos vehículos.

PLAZA PRINCIPAL.-Ocupa la parte central y es de basta extensión la "Plaza principal" de la feria. Está pavimentada

y adórnala en su centro una fuente monumental. En su costado sur se irguen tres altos mástiles, donde, al inaugurarse las fiestas, se izan tres pabellones; en el más alto y central de los mástiles, la Bandera Nacional, en el de la derecha, el lábaro de Tamaulipas, y en el de la izquierda el gonfalon de la feria. Esta ceremonia la efectúan un representante especial del Presidente Municipal, respectivamente, a los sones de los himnos Nacional y de Tamaulipas y con los aplausos respetuosos y entusiastas de la concurrencia.

BANDAS.-Tres bandas dan sus armonías, la banda municipal de Matamoros, la banda del Gobierno del Estado de Tamaulipas, que viene especialmente de C. Victoria y, un día dedicado a internacional, la banda estudiantil de una escuela estadounidense. Además, algunas de las negociaciones expositoras ofrecen grupos de mariachis.

EL "GRUPO REGIONAL TAMAULIPECO".-Obra del Gobierno del Estado de Tamaulipas. Músicos y bailarines. Tocaban y bailaban sones regionales, especialmente huapangos y polkas. Su maestría los hizo vencedores en concurso nacional. Su fama es internacional. Han hecho giras triunfales a diversas ciudades de Europa, Estados Unidos del Norte--incluyendo Hawai--y Centro y Sudamérica. Este Grupo regional tamaulipeco es admirado y aplaudido en la feria de Matamoros.

PUESTOS.-Se han construido seis grandes pabellones de diez por cuarenta metros, subdivididos cada uno en veinte departamentos (nos resistimos a llamarlos "stands"). Existen además otros puestos individuales, de menor, igual y mayor tamaño que son ocupados por diversos expositores. Entre la Plaza principal, los pabellones, los puestos y demás estructuras, hay amplios espacios abiertos, algunos con banquetas y arbolados. Se piensa seguir forestando.

RESTAURANTES.-Hay uno principal, con edificio especial, y otros que se instalan en los puestos o terrenos de la feria. El restaurante principal está situado al sur y además del edificio cubierto, consta de amplia terraza, con mesas donde se come al aire libre. Momentos hay en que ambos lugares, el cerrado y la terraza, son insuficientes. Buen servicio y buenas comidas regionales.

JUEGOS MECÁNICOS.-Al oriente de los terrenos de la feria se instalan amplia y comodamente los ahora llamados "juegos mecánicos" --"carrousel, montaña rusa, autos chocadores, sillas voladoras, etc., etc.,--de aceptación popular y donde añoramos el "tren de caballitos"...

LA REINA.-Luego de la ceremonia de la inauguración, prosigue la de la coronación de la reina de la feria, a la que impone corona y cetro el Gobernador del Estado. La reina es previamente elegida por votación popular. Este año hay candidatas del agro y ciudadinas. La coronación es vistosa y colorida; previamente desfilan bellamente ataviadas bellas damitas con rango de embajadoras; todos los clubes sociales y de servicio envían sus embajadoras, además de las principales poblaciones del Estado, del Valle bajo de Texas y de Monterrey.

BAILES.-En seguida de la coronación, inicia el baile la reina, danzando con su chambelán; hacen lo mismo la princesa, todas las damas de la corte y las embajadoras. Después el baile se generaliza y se entregan al placer de Terpsícore cuantas parejas lo desean.

LOS EXHIBIDORES.-Múltiples son y diversos. Se presentan con sus mejores ejemplares lo pecuario y lo agrícola, la industria y el comercio. Grupos de ganado, donde descuellan magníficos individuos, muestran lo mejor de vacunos, equinos, ovinos, porcinos y caprinos. Eminentes ejemplares avícolas, y sus productos. Se premia a los mejores y se hacen transacciones. Los agricultores exhiben sus productos escogidos; plantas enteras de algodón con numerosos y grandes capullos albeantes; enormes mazorcas de maíz con grandes y succulentos granos; diversas variedades de frijol y muchos otros productos del agro que nos es grato ver y nos enorgullese saber que en la región se producen. La industria muestra varias de sus ramas; la petrolera enseña con maquetas y gráficas el proceso de la extracción y beneficio del petróleo; la industria eléctrica muestra lo suyo; los algodoneros enseñan el proceso de industrialización del algodón, habiendo mostrado en funcionamiento el primer y primitivo despepitador que funcionó en la región; otras industrias, la de la cordelería, la de las conservas alimenticias, etc., muestran los procesos de sus elaboraciones.

CIVISMO.-El Gobierno del Estado, en un pabellón especial "Tamaulipas construye" muestra con productos, gráficas y maquetas, la labor constructiva que el actual gobierno hace para beneficio del Estado. Se exhiben películas alusivas.

Las Secretarías de Agricultura y Salubridad muestran lo suyo.

LIENZO DEL CHARRO.-Preocupadas las autoridades dirigentes por la conservación y desarrollo del deporte hípico, en su mexicanísima rama de la charrería, han

construido en los terrenos de la feria un "Lienzo del Charro". Tiene todo lo necesario, graderías con capacidad para mil espectadores y caballerizas para docenas de caballos.

PISTA DE CARRERAS.-Así mismo para el desarrollo de los hípicas deportes, se cuenta con una pista para carreras de caballos. Está al sur de los terrenos y posee las dimensiones requeridas.

LOS PREMIOS.-Calificados por un jurado experto, se galardona al final a los mejores productos o animales exhibidos. Es otra ceremonia especial, otorgando los premios el Sr. Gobernador del Estado.

ARTESANIAS.-Se informa que en la feria correspondiente al presente año se empezará a dar importancia e impulso a las artesanías populares. Habrá de ellas exhibiciones especiales y especiales premios.

PRONÓSTICO.-Las ferias en Matamoros --ahora si verdaderas ferias en la acepción académica-- son ya una institución y tienden a hacer tradición. La harán. Benefician a Matamoros; a Matamoros se conoce y, conocerlo, es admirarlo y amarlo. Si en Matamoros se construye el proyectado puerto --que sí se construirá-- en no pocos años las ferias matamorenses serán un acontecimiento de trascendencia mundial.

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros



Winning Political Office in Cameron County, 1876-1988:

The Mexican-American Case

by

Norman E. Binder and Frank J. Garcia

INTRODUCTION

Minorities, like other citizens, believe that participation in politics is essential to a democratic society. Political participation represents the mechanism whereby citizens select representatives, identify problems, articulate solutions, formalize public policy and allow for implementation of those policies. Registering to vote, voting, becoming a candidate, donating time and money to candidates, joining a political party, displaying political signs and expressing to elected officials and the news media individual and community interests are typical means of political participation. These types of participation have not been viewed favorably by minorities in America. On the one hand formal and informal restrictions or obstacles limited minority's ability to vote. Non-recognition of citizenship, white primaries, poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, registration and residency requirements, threats of violence, violence, and economic sanctions limited the most widely used form of political participation in America for minorities. Minorities were unable to exercise adequate political pressures to elect non-minority candidates which would be responsive to the specialized needs of minorities. On the other hand, the principle of majority rule, which influences all other rules of the political game, made it virtually impossible for minorities to select minority candidates to represent them in the decision-making processes of government. Except in isolated situations, white majorities have not supported minority candidates at the ballot box. Without that support minority candidates found it almost impossible to become officeholders. Only in those geographic locations where minorities are a numerical majority does the principle of majority rule work in favor of minorities.

Cameron County, Texas represents one of those geographic locations where Mexican Americans make up a majority of the population. Since 1848, when Texas became a part of the United States, Mexican Americans have been in a majority which ranged from 70 to 85 percent of the population. Because of this large majority one would expect that Mexican

Americans would be active participants in all phases of the political process including holding political office. In fact, if majority rule operates to exclude minorities from political office where non-minorities are the majority one might expect the same principle to work in favor of minority candidates where minorities represent a numerical majority.

This article attempts to determine the extent to which Mexican Americans sought and successfully acquired political office in Cameron County during the period 1876-1988. It is descriptive in nature and makes no attempt to explain variations in Mexican-American success rates. Implicit in the discussion, however, is the widespread notion that minority representatives may be more sensitive to the needs of the Mexican-American population than non-minority representatives. This is especially true given the widespread conflict between Mexican Americans and Anglos at various time periods in the history of Cameron County.

METHODOLOGY

A list of all offices for Cameron County was developed through examination of voting records maintained by Cameron County for the time period 1876-1988. The list of offices included some that are selected countywide (County Judge), some that are regarded as county offices but represent smaller areas of the county (Constables or County Commissioneres) and some that actually extend beyond Cameron County (State Senator and District Judges). Inclusion of the latter group of offices is warranted because in most cases Cameron County represented the major voting area for the office, or the ethnic composition of those areas not in Cameron County are comparable to Cameron County. For example, Mexican-Americans made up the major voting constituency for the office of Senator in Hidalgo County and for District Judges in Willacy County.

The time period of the study was determined by the availability of data. Except for two election years (1886 and 1888) systematic voting records were available in the office of the administrator of Elections and Voter Registration at the Cameron County Courthouse for the time period 1876 through 1986. Although some data for the time periods 1848-1874 and 1886-1888 were available from other sources, they were neither systematic nor comparable and therefore were not included in the study.

Not all offices in the study were in existence for the entire period 1876-1988. For example, the office of County

Superintendent of Public instruction was in existence for the period 1884 through 1978. In some cases two offices were combined at some point in time. The offices of County Tax Collector and County Tax Assessor were combined in 1934. Table 1 lists those offices for which data were collected, and the time periods for which the offices were in existence and for which data were available. In addition, it also lists the number of years and percent of total office time the offices were held by Mexican Americans.

After identifying all offices, voting records for each office were examined for each election year between 1876 and 1986. Data on both primary and general elections were gathered. Except for the elections of 1886 and 1888 data were available for almost all offices for every general election. Primary election data were available from 1950 through 1986. From the voting records, data were gathered for each election year for each office. First, all contested elections where a Mexican American candidate ran against a non-Mexican American (Anglo) candidate were identified. The name and vote total for each candidate were noted. Second, in cases where contested elections were between Mexican American candidates or between Anglo candidates only the name of the winning candidate was noted.

Generally, determinations of candidates' ethnicity were based on surnames. Spanish surnamed candidates were identified as Mexican-American and non-Spanish surnamed candidates were identified as Anglo. Special efforts were made to categorize candidates with known ethnicity into the proper group even though the surname appeared to indicate otherwise.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The analysis of data involved several steps, First, for each office a percentage of occupancy by Mexican-Americans was calculated across time. (See Table 1) The time period used was 1876 through 1988. Offices filled in the 1986 election year are not open for re-election until 1988. These data were then grouped into six categories of offices for further analysis.

TABLE 1

OFFICES, TIME PERIOD OF OFFICE, NUMBER OF YEARS OF OFFICE,
NUMBER OF YEARS OCCUPIED BY MEXICAN AMERICANS, PERCENT OF
YEAR HELD BY MEXICAN AMERICANS

OFFICE	TIME PERIOD OFFICE IN EXISTENCE	NO YEARS OFFICE EXISTED	NO. YRS MEXICAN AMERICAN	% YEARS MEXICAN AMERICAN
District Judge	1878-1928	50	0	0
103rd Dist Judge	1926-1988	62	10	16
107th Dist Judge	1946-1988	42	14	33
138th Dist Judge	1956-1988	32	24	75
197th Dist Judge	1970-1988	18	0	0
357th Dist Judge	1986-1988	2	2	100
Court of Law # 1	1928-1988	60	22	36
Court of Law # 2	1982-1988	6	2	33
District Attorney	1882-1947	62	0	0
State Senator	1876-1988	108	16	15
State Rep. 1	1876-1988	108	44	41
State Rep. 2	1960-1988	28	10	36
State Rep. 3	1982-1988	6	6	100
County Judge	1876-1988	108	22	17
County Attorney	1876-1988	108	22	20
District Clerk	1876-1988	108	10	9
County Clerk	1876-1988	108	10	9
County Sheriff	1876-1988	108	26	24
Co Tax Collector	1876-1934	54	14	26
Co tax Assessor	1876-1988	104	12	12
Co Treasurer	1876-1988	104	22	21
Supt of Pub Instn	1884-1978	92	12	13
Hide & Animal Inspector	1876-1946	66	42	64
County Surveyor	1876-1946	56	0	0
Public Weigher	1912-1914	8	0	0
Co Comm Pct 1	1876-1988	108	46	43
Co Comm Pct 2	1876-1988	108	46	43
Co Comm Pct 3	1876-1988	108	36	33
Co Comm Pct 4	1876-1988	108	20	17
JP 1	1876-1988	106	6	6
JP 2 Place 1	1876-1988	104	44	42
JP 2 Place 2	1922-1988	66	50	76
JP 3 Place 1	1876-1988	106	42	40
JP 3 Place 2	1932-1988	56	34	61
JP 4	1876-1988	108	22	20
JP 5	1876-1988	108	82	76
JP 6 Place 1	1876-1988	102	46	45
JP 6 Place 2	1930-1988	56	2	03
JP 7	1876-1988	96	18	18

JP 8		1914-1988	66	10	15
Constable 1		1876-1988	102	56	54
Constable 2		1876-1988	106	78	73
Constable 3		1876-1988	108	68	62
Constable 4		1876-1988	104	70	67
Constable 5		1876-1988	108	102	94
Constable 6		1876-1988	100	50	50
Constable 7		1876-1988	96	44	45
Contable 8		1914-1988	66	10	15

Second, a percentage of occupancy by Mexican-Americans of all offices was calculated for each election year from 1876 through 1986. Graph 1 displays this data graphically. These data were also divided into six broad categories of offices for additional analysis. (See Graphs 2 through 6) Third, contested elections between Mexican Americans and Anglos for each office across time and for all offices for each election year for primary and general elections were analyzed to calculate rates of success and discern patterns of success by Mexican-Americans. Success rates for Mexican-Americans for all elections for the entire period for all contested elections were also calculated.

FINDINGS

Mexican-American success in acquiring political office in Cameron County varies across offices and over time. Table 2 shows the success rates of Mexican Americans in six different groups of offices.

TABLE 2
PERCENT OF TIME POLITICAL OFFICE WAS HELD
BY MEXICAN AMERICANS

Constables	.61
Justices of the Peace	.37
Commissioners Court	.32
Judicial Offices	.27
Other County Offices	.18
All Offices	.34

Mexican Americans were most successful in their bid for the office of Constable. For all offices of Constable they occupied this set of offices sixty-one percent of the time. In one particular constable position (position number 5) Mexican-Americans were in power 102 of the 108 years for which data were available. This represents the one office in which Mexican-Americans were most successful. While occupancy in this office represents considerable success, it

should be noted that this group of offices is least important in the development of public policy. Constables are primarily responsible for the implementation of public policies, not the formulation of those policies.

Mexican Americans were less successful in gaining offices for Justices of the Peace. Although they made up the majority of the population base they only occupied the office thirty-seven percent of the time. The legal and political powers of the office of Justice of Peace are important. In addition to their non-political functions Justices of the Peace make decisions in minor civil and criminal cases as well as set bonds for individuals in major criminal cases.

Although the members of the County Commissioners Court are constrained in their political decision-making power by the State of Texas, they represent a critical decision-making group in the County. Because of their power to tax and spend and their responsibility in implementing state laws, county commissioners have considerable power in deciding who gets what, when and where in the County. Mexican Americans have only filled the county commissioners court about one-third of the time during the period 1876-1988. The position of County Judge was included in this group because he is a member of the Commissioners Court. In addition he represents the chief administrative position and primary political official of the County. Available data indicate that Mexican Americans occupied this office only 22 of a total of 108 years.

Within the judicial branch of government in Cameron County where state and county civil and criminal legal justice is dispensed, Mexican-American control was only twenty-seven percent.

The least success by Mexican Americans was in the group of political offices grouped into the "other" category. They won only eighteen percent of the time. Yet, within this group of offices are some of the county's most important political positions.

The office of County Sheriff was occupied by Mexican-Americans only 26 of 108 years; the office of County Tax Assessor only 12 of 104 years; the office of County Superintendent of Public Instruction only 12 of 92 years; the offices of County Clerk and District Clerk each only 10 of 108 years; and the office of County Attorney only 22 of 108 years. In several offices no Mexican Americans were ever elected. They included the office of District Judge which was in existence from 1878 through 1928, the office of District Attorney which was in existence from 1882 through

1947, and County Surveyor which was in existence from 1876 through 1946. Only in one case where an office was in existence more than 25 years did a Mexican American occupy that office a majority of the time. That office was the office of Hide and Animal Inspector which Mexican Americans controlled for 42 of 66 years (64 percent). The office of State Representative was occupied by Mexican Americans 44 of 108 years.

For all political offices during the entire period of time, Mexican Americans were in the decision-making positions a total of thirty-four percent of the time.

To summarize briefly, Mexican Americans have not been as successful in acquiring offices in Cameron County during the period 1876 through 1986 as would be expected. Where they have been most effective is in the lesser offices and they have been least effective in the most important political offices.

A second means of analyzing the data is to calculate the percentage of offices that Mexican Americans occupied within the six different groups for each election year between 1876 and 1986. The findings are extremely interesting because they clearly indicate sharp differences in Mexican-American success rates across time. Graph No. 1 displays the percentage of Mexican-American officeholders for each year from 1876 through 1986. Mexican-Americans controlled forty-eight percent of the offices in 1876 and maintained close to that amount of political offices (did not gain or lose more than 10 percent of that total) for the next 32 years. Thereafter, Mexican-American successes dropped dramatically to a low of five percent in 1930 and 1932, experienced a minor resurgence, reached a high of 19 percent in 1948, and dropped again to an all time low of two percent in 1950. Beginning in 1952 Mexican-American success rates gradually rose and gained a majority of the offices by 1968 and continued to climb until Mexican Americans held an overwhelming majority of seventy eight percent of the offices in 1986. By 1986 Mexican-Americans officeholders in Cameron County began to approximate their majority in the population in Cameron County. Mexican Americans were very successful in acquiring offices of Constable between 1876 and 1916 where they clearly held a majority of the offices (ranging from 63 to 100 percent). Beginning in 1918 they lost their majority and gradually lost more and more offices until they reached a low of 13 percent in 1928 where they remained, with the exception of one election, until 1944. Thereafter they gradually increased their numbers in office until they again gained a majority in 1960. Steady increases continued until

1980 when they captured, and continue to hold, all of the offices of Constable in Cameron County. (Graph 2)

Mexican-American successes for the office of Justice of Peace are somewhat similar. Early majorities gave way in 1890, then vascillated between 1892 and 1916 at which time the number of Mexican-American officeholders for the position of Justice of the Peace dropped to thirteen percent and remained at that level for the next eighteen years. Gradual increases occurred until Mexican Americans again gained a majority of offices in 1966. Steady increases occurred thereafter until they reached an all time high of ninety percent in 1986. (Graph 3)

The success rate for Mexican Americans in the Cameron County Commissioners Court has been very limited. Between 1876 and 1912 Mexican Americans enjoyed a majority only three terms. From 1912 until 1958 no Mexican Americans sat in the Commissioners Court. Not until 1970 did Mexican-Americans again regain majority control of the Commissioners Court. They have maintained that majority since 1970. Between 1978 and 1986 Mexican Americans controlled 100 percent of the offices in the commissioners court. (Graph 4)

No Mexican American occupied the offices of District Judge or County Court at Law for the first eighty-six years. Of the 112 years covered in this study, Mexican Americans have been in the majority only 10 years and six of those years have been since 1982. Mexican Americans currently occupy 5 of the 6 judicial positions. That number represents an all time high. (Graph 5)

For the remaining offices in Cameron County, Mexican-Americans' lack of success is quite apparent. Mexican-Americans occupied about one-third of the other offices between 1876 and 1908. They reached a high of 41 percent in 1890. From 1914 to 1970 Mexican Americans never held more than twelve percent of the offices and during many of those years they held no offices (1922-1934 and 1948-1968). Not until 1972 did they occupy fifty percent of the offices and not until 1974 did they achieve majority status. Only in the last two elections have Mexican Americans controlled a solid majority of sixty and seventy percent of the offices. (Graph 6)

A final means of analysis is to examine the frequency of contested elections where one candidate is Mexican American and the other candidate is an Anglo and calculate success rates for Mexican-American candidates. Prior to 1900 about twenty percent of all elections pitted Anglos against

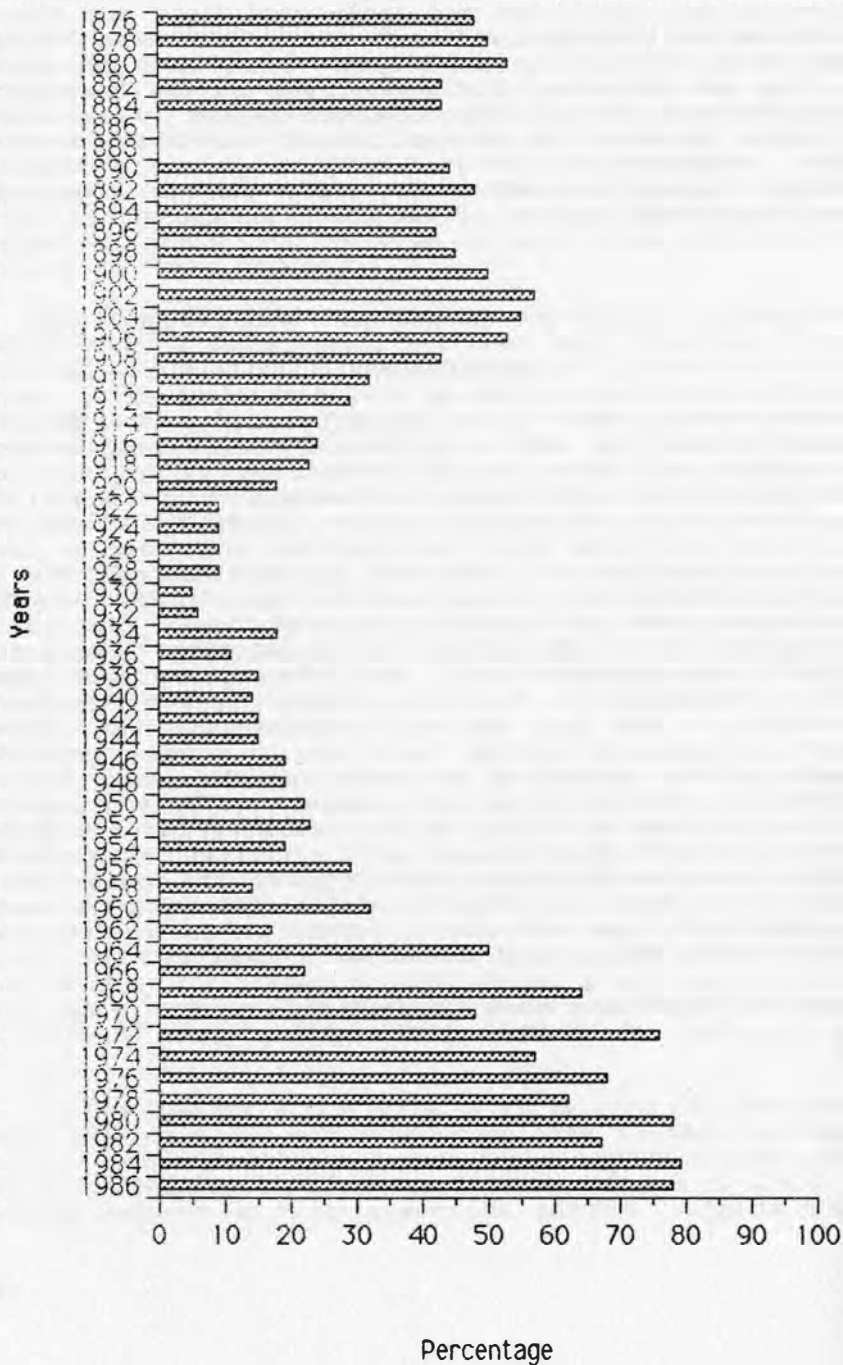
Mexican Americans. The remaining races were between candidates of the same ethnicity. The success rates of Mexican-American candidates and Anglo candidates are almost equal across all political offices. After 1910, few Mexican-American candidates are on the ballots. Not until the early 1950s does one encounter contested races in the Democratic Primaries between Mexican Americans and Anglos. Again, they first appear in races for the position of constable and then Justices of the Peace and gradually reach all political offices by the early to mid-1960s. But, here too, they make up less than twenty percent of the total elections.

CONCLUSIONS

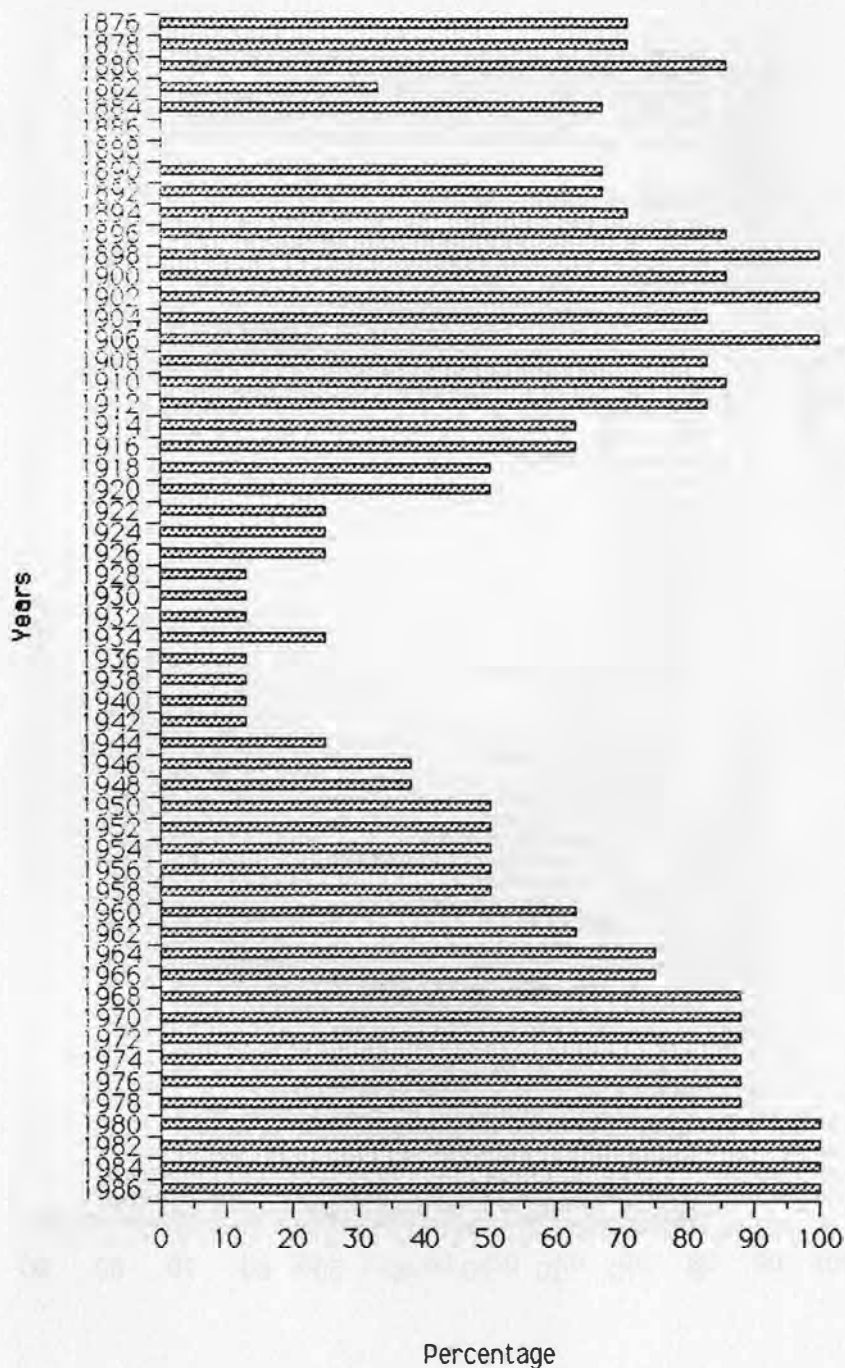
Mexican Americans were major participants in the political process in the early period under consideration (1876-1910). They both ran for political office and won substantial numbers of races. They were most successful in winning election to the least important political offices and in political positions where the election was based on less than a countywide basis. They had little or no success in races for offices of judges, countywide offices and the commissioners court during that period of time. From 1910 until the late 1940s, Mexican-American's success rate ranged from low to non-existent in all the categories of political offices. Beginning in the late 1940s, Mexican Americans again began to run for and win elections in the lesser offices and gradually worked their way to almost complete dominance of the political structure by the early 1980s. The principle of majority rule now appears to be working for minorities in Cameron County in the same way that it works for whites in most other regions of the United States. Only a handful of Anglos have been able to resist the dominance of the Mexican American political majority at the ballot box and these might be unique situations. There is no evidence to suggest that the future will be markedly different.

Pan American University at Brownsville

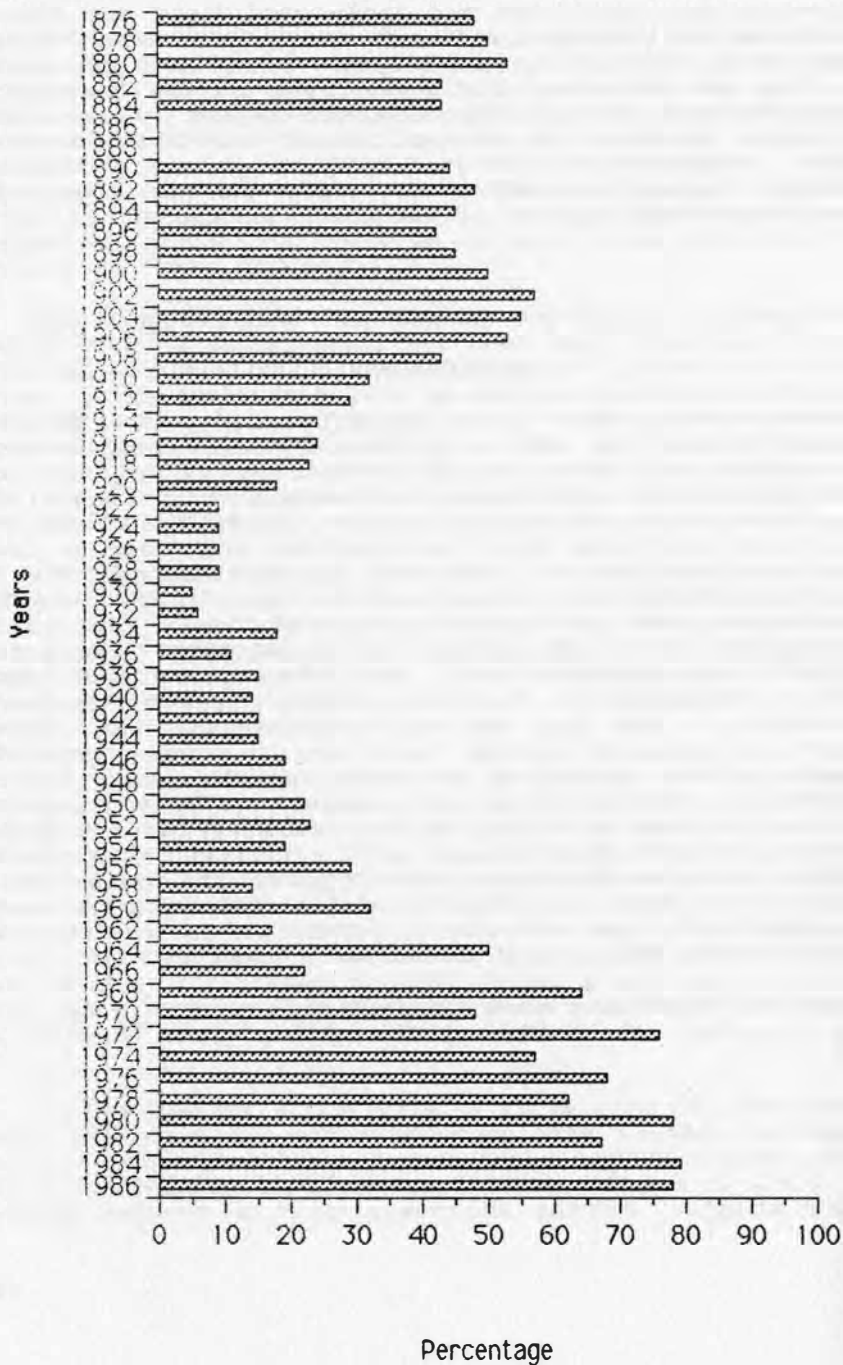
Graph 1
Percent of Mexican-American Officeholders
in Cameron County: 1876-1986



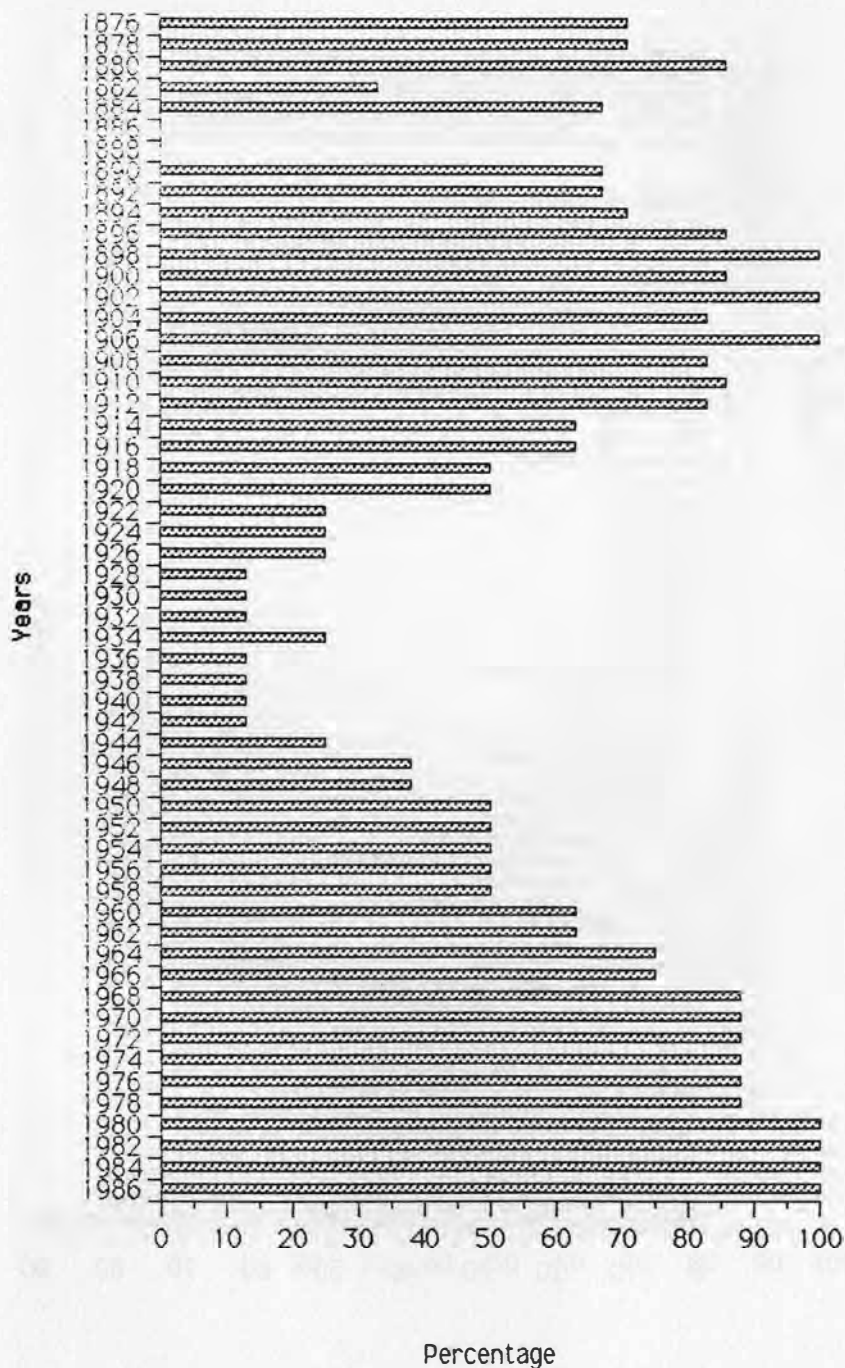
Graph 2
Percent of Mexican-American Constables
in Cameron County: 1876-1986



Graph 1
Percent of Mexican-American Officeholders
in Cameron County: 1876-1986

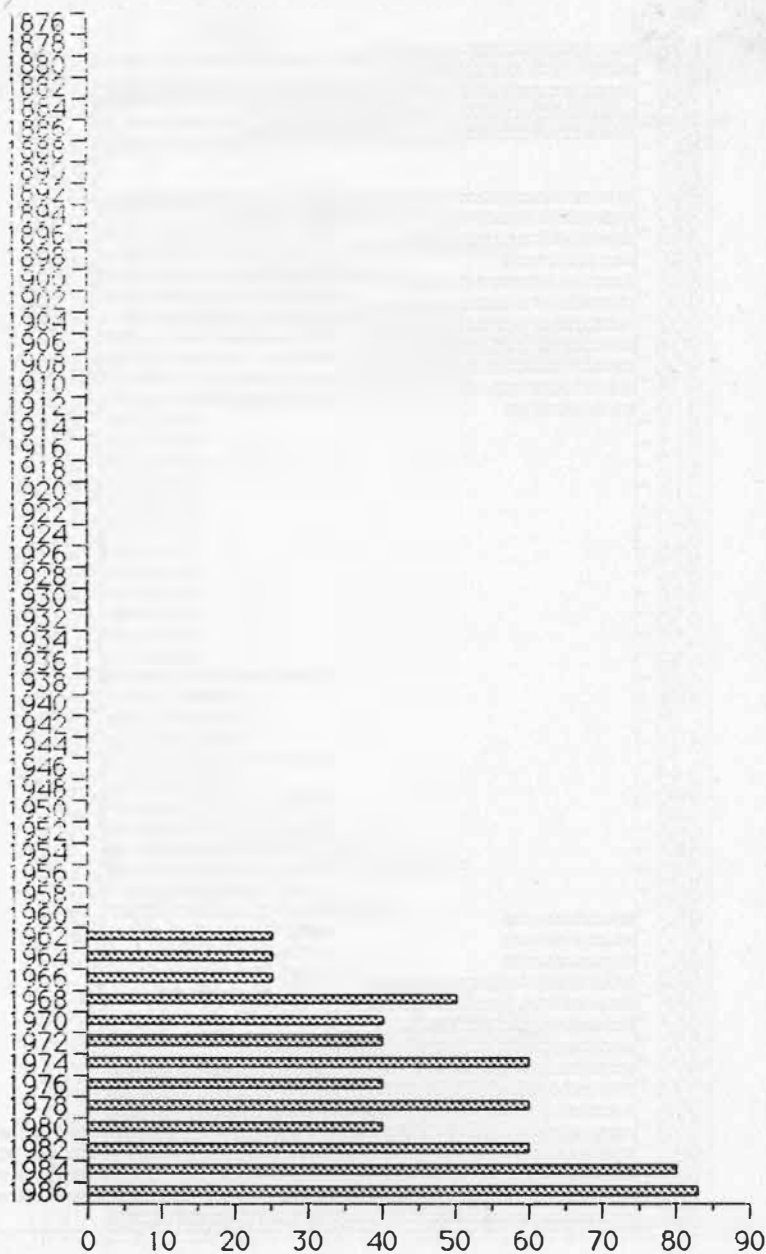


Graph 2
Percent of Mexican-American Constables
in Cameron County: 1876-1986



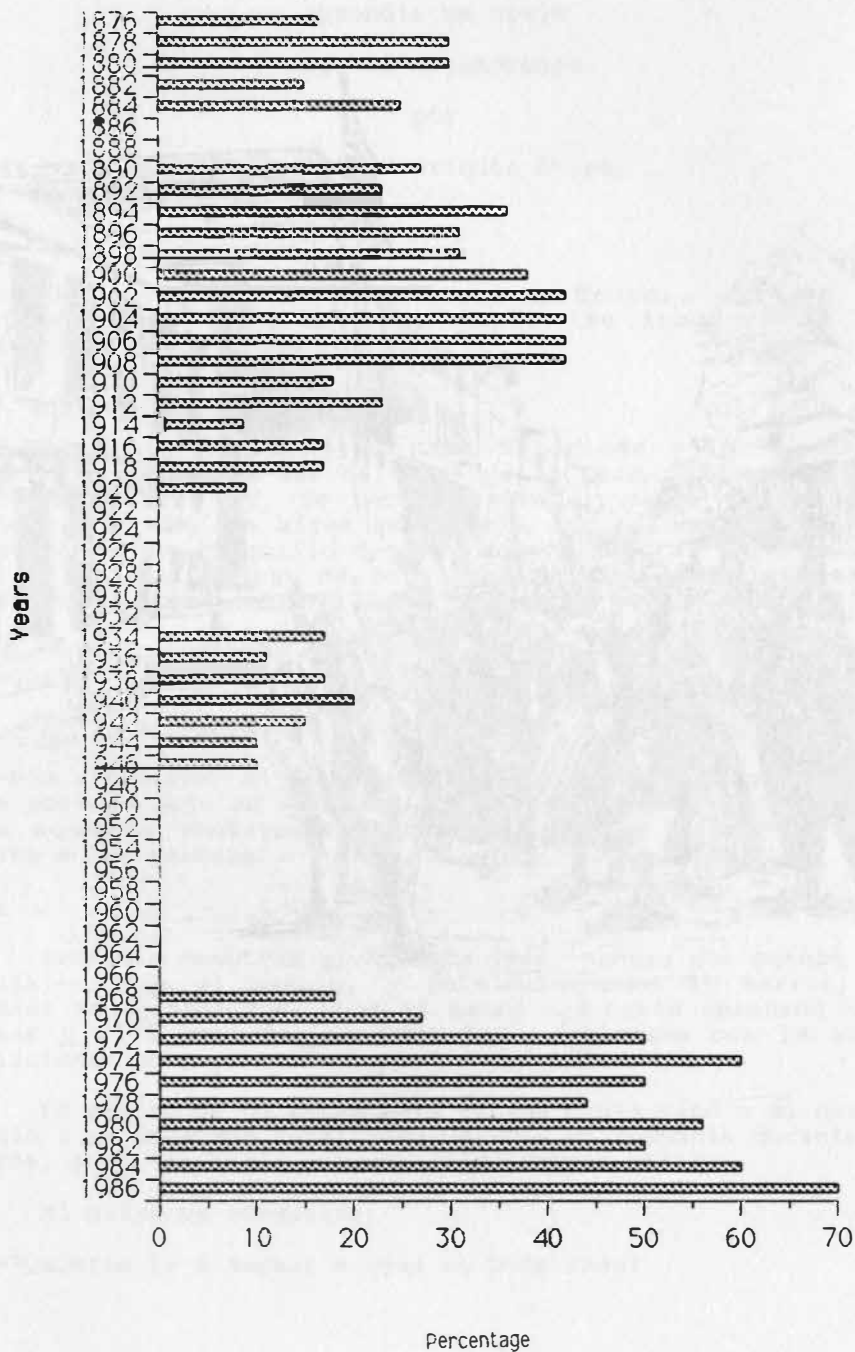
Graph 5
Percent of Mexican-American Judges
in Cameron County: 1876-1986

Years



Percentage

Graph 6
Percent of Mexican-American "Other"
Officeholders in Cameron County: 1876-1986





Aprendiz de Brujo

Leyenda Matamorenses

por

Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda

I

Ignoro si en la H. Matamoros, Tamps., existen aún brujas, o si desaparecieron cuando se inauguró la luz eléctrica, pero de que las hubo...

II

Desde el patio de mi casa solariega --ancha casona baja-- se divisaban los balcones de la casa de dos pisos de Doña Gregorita. Y, de tarde en tarde, solía ver a dicha señora y a sus dos hijas asomadas a los balcones. Para mi imaginación de chiquillo de ocho años, las tres mujeres eran los seres más felices de la tierra: podían - ver el pueblo desde una altura...!y verlo cuantas veces se les antojara!

Un día miró unos hombres en la azotea de la casa de Doña Gregorita. Mi pasmo no se contuvo:

---!Mamá, mamacita, mira!--grité.

---Son albañiles, hijito, andan componiendo la azotea. Desde ese momento deje de envidiar a Doña Gregorita y a sus hijas: los supremos venturosos eran los albañiles...!podías subir hasta a las azoteas!

III

Frente a nosotros vivía Doña Inés, señora que pasaba por bruja. Todo el pueblo, y particularmente el barrio, le temía; menos nosotros, pues mi madre nos había enseñado a no temer y sí a respetar, a Doña Inés. Llevaba con la bruja relaciones poco estrechas, pero no hostiles.

La mañana de un sábado, la vecina bruja vino a mi casa y pidió a mi mamá que permitiera hacerle yo compañía durante la noche, pues "le había entrado miedo dormir sola"

Mi madre me consultó:

---?Quieres ir a dormir a casa de Doña Inés?

--Si, señora.

--Allá se lo mando al oscurecer, Doña Inés.

--Gracias, no sabe cuánto se lo agradezco.

Esa tarde conté a mis camaradas el suceso. Comentaron:

--!Te va a comer!

--!Te va a sacar los ojos!

--!Te va a chupar la sangre!

--Te va a volver tecolotito!

Regresé a mi casa algo impresionado y alcancé a oír el final

--de una conversación entre mi madre y una vecina:

--Usted sabe lo que hace, señora.

--Nada le pasará, y si algo le sucede...!una madre puede más que -todas las brujas de la tierra!

IV

Doña Inés dormía en un catre de lona y tendió otro para mí. Hacia calor y brillaba la luna llena. Por la ventana abierta llegaban los ruidos nocturnos. Me mandó que me acostara, obedecí, me cubrió con una sábana, apagó la vela y la oí acostarse. Las palabras escuchadas a mi madre me daban valor y los pronósticos de los chicos una curiosidad máxima.. Recordé que las brujerías se hacen a la media noche y me propuse no dormirme sino hasta después de las doce. Oí las diez en el reloj del parían cuando empezaba a adormilarme. Para ahuyentar el sueño traté de resolver los problemas de aritmética que tenía que presentar el lunes...pero sentí más sueño; pasé a la geografía y quise reconstruir mentalmente los contornos del mapa de México: resultó la Baja California más ancha que Yucatán. Oí las once, Pasé revista a los sucesos de la semana:

los pantalones rotos al brincar la cerca; una carrera ganada a Alonso, el más veloz de mi pandilla; mi canica grande de cristal de colores; colores que trajeron por asociación la imagen de la vecinita de la otra calle, morenita, gordita, vestida de chillante rojo, con grandes moños en la cabeza y en...!lasdoce!...Doña Inés, desde su catre me llama quedo:

--M...e...m...e...

--!Meme!

Permanezco silencioso. Más fuerte:

--!!Meme!!

Coninuo callado. La oigo que se levanta y enciende la vela. Tengo un ojo completamente cerrado y con el otro apenas entreabierto, por entre las pestañas, atisbo. La veo ir a un mueble, sacar un pote, untarse del contenido en todas las

coyunturas, ir a un rincón por una escoba, situarse en medio del cuarto, cabalgar en la escoba y decir clara y distintamente siete misteriosas palabras, a las que puse mucha atención y se quedaron inmediatamente grabadas en mi memoria.

No bien había acabado de pronunciar la última de las siete palabras la vi salir volando por la abierta ventana, hacia la luna. En pocos instantes era solo una silueta negra que disminuía de tamaño hasta verse como el de un cuervo, luego como una araña, después, nada.

Me levanté, busqué el pote, me unté de su contenido en todas las coyunturas, busqué en vano una escoba a la que reemplacé por un bastón, cabalgando en él me situé en medio del cuarto y dije las misteriosas palabras. Entonces las recordé perfectamente, ahora, como han pasado tantos años, ya las he olvidado.

V

Sin saber cómo me encontré en la azotea de la casa de Doña Gregorita. A la luz de la luna en plenitud realicé uno de mis sueños: ver el pueblo desde una altura. Pero como hasta el placer cansa, me quedé dormido.

--!Meme, Meme!

Me despertaron, en la madrugada, cautelosos, los llamados de la bruja.

--Aquí estoy, Doña Inés.

Desde abajo, donde se encontraba, me hizo señales de que callara. Trajo una escalera y bajé.

Camino de mi casa, venció mi curiosidad y le pregunté:

--Dígame, Doña Inés, ¿por qué no fui yo volando hasta la luna?

--Porque montaste en un bastón en lugar de haberlo hecho en una escoba.

Escuela Normal Lic. Guadalupe Mainero, Matamoros





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