

Americas Archive Document Introductions

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C O N N E X I O N S

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the James Cramp letters

1.1 Introduction to 1835 James Cramp letters¹

The Tampico expedition of 1835 was an episode of the Texas Revolution whose success “would almost certainly have changed the course of the war” (Barker 169)². It came about following Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna’s rise to power in Mexico, and the resulting revolutions that arose to resist his dictatorship. In February of 1833 Santa Anna and Velentin Gomez Farías were elected president and vice-president of Mexico, respectively. Santa Anna, however, retired his position for most of the first year of his term, allowing Farías to govern in his place. On April 24th, 1834, Santa Anna reclaimed his executive position, and, within a month, had dissolved the national congress, made himself dictator, and established a centralized government. This, in turn, led to insurrections by federalists throughout Mexico, while the provinces of Zacatecas, Coahuila, and Texas refused to accept the new government. Santa Anna dealt with Zacatecas quickly and harshly, then turned his attention towards Texas (Barker 170).

The success of the Santa Anna’s centralist government at subduing the Zacatecas forced many liberals to seek refuge in New Orleans, where Texas’s insurrections against Santa Anna were finding ample support. George Fisher and José Antonio Mexia were two such refugees and they were “determined to organize and lead [...] an expedition in a final effort to restore the federal system” (Barker 170). Though the United States’ position of neutrality would not allow for direct intervention on behalf of Texas, Fisher was able to raise enough money to send two companies of soldiers to Texas and to fund the ill-fated Tampico expedition.

The city of Tampico was Mexico’s second most important port city (Vera Cruz being the most important) and provided a potential staging ground for military operations against Mexico (Coffey)³. Furthermore, Fisher and Mexia hoped an attack on Tampico would result in “stirring up in the eastern States an insurrection which would prevent Santa Anna from sending troops to Texas” (Barker 171). Mexia communicated with liberals in Tampico and the plan was for them to time an insurrection with the sudden arrival of Mexia and his one-hundred and fifty soldiers, which they believed would lead to an easy victory and the claiming of the port. He set off on November 6th in the schooner “Mary Jane,” planning to arrive on November 14th and take Tampico by surprise.

However, a sequence of unforeseen events doomed the expedition to failure. First, word of the insurrection leaked to authorities in Tampico, forcing a premature uprising on November 13th. The timing could not have been worse as a new company of the battalion of Tuxpan had recently arrived and the insurrection was promptly defeated. Meanwhile, Mexia’s ship ran aground and by the time his troops had waded ashore and dried out their weapons the element of surprise was lost. On November 15th, his one-hundred and fifty soldiers, as well as thirty-five to fifty Mexicans who had joined the troop, finally attacked Tampico, where

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m13822/1.8/>>.

²Barker, Eugene. “The Tampico Expedition.” *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 6, no. 3 (January 1903): 169-186.

³Coffey, David. “Tampico.” *The United States and Mexico at War*. Donald S. Frazier, ed. Simon & Schuster Macmillan: New York, 1998.

they were soundly defeated. Most of the company retreated and, on November 28th, fled to the mouth of Brazos (Barker).

Thirty-one of Mexia's soldiers, though, did not escape and were taken prisoner. Three of these died of battle wounds and the remaining twenty-eight were executed on December 14th, 1835 in an attempt to send a clear message that insurrections against the centralist government would not be tolerated.

There is, however, an element of controversy surrounding these prisoners. The prisoners claimed that most of the one-hundred and fifty soldiers aboard the "Mary Jane" were tricked into fighting in Tampico. They asserted that they were told that they were being taken to Texas and that their participation in the war once they arrived was optional. The expedition to Tampico, according to the prisoners, was a complete deception and they only participated in the attack because Mexia forced them to do so. In the letters featured here, James Cramp, who was one of the prisoners who was executed, outlines the prisoners' claims in a letter that all twenty-eight prisoners signed as well as in a personal letter to his brother. While the claims of these letters are probably highly exaggerated (as Barker points out, "the hundred hoodwinked and indignant men could have seized the ship and returned to New Orleans, or, at least, could have refused to fight after going ashore," and it is unlikely that Mexia would have allowed an important military operation to rest in the hands of a group of unprepared soldiers only fighting due to coercion), it is likely that there was some element of deceit that took place during the expedition (178). Thus, while we will probably never know exactly what transpired aboard the "Mary Jane," these documents provide an interesting insight into the events surrounding the ill-fated expedition at Tampico.

Chapter 2

Introduction to the Ayers Braach letter

2.1 Introduction to Ayers Braach letter¹

This letter, dated December 18th, 1861 discusses the failed business venture of a U.S. entrepreneur, Ayers Braach, who had attempted to establish a sewing machine business in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas. That such a venture would fail should come as no surprise, given the volatile social situation in Venezuela at the time of the venture, which began in “1859 or so.”

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Venezuela’s political situation, which had lacked stability for several decades following its declaration of independence from Spain in 1811, reached a level of turmoil that was exceptional even for the country’s chaotic history. Following a brief period of relative stability under the leadership of José Antonio Páez, the country spent the last few years of the 1840s and most of the 1850s under the self-serving and iron fisted Presidency of José Tadeo Monagas. In 1857 Monagas, having already forcibly replaced the Conservative Congress with Liberals, rewrote the Venezuelan Constitution so that he could serve consecutive terms as president, thus consolidating his power. This move backfired, however, as the Liberals and Conservatives united to oppose Monagas’ power grab, ousting the President and replacing him with Julián Castro as provisional president and, in so doing sparking a new wave of political and social instability.²

The credibility of the Conservative/Liberal coalition was undermined by the fact that “[t]he only thing the Liberals and Conservatives had in common was their opposition to Monagas” (Marsland 193). Also, Monagas himself had fled to the French Embassy in Caracas where, despite intense pressure to turn the former president over to Venezuelan authorities, the French ambassador continued to provide sanctuary. This led to a national incident as the French declared that “an attack against Monagas would be considered an affront to most of the civilized world,” eventually leading to French and British ships blockading Venezuelan ports to assure that their declaration was being upheld (Marsland 193).

With the government’s credibility quickly deteriorating, several groups of revolutionaries saw an opportunity for power. Eventually two generals emerged, Ezequiel Zamora and Juan Falcón, to lead the revolutionaries (Federalists) against the current regime (Centralists). While contending with this external pressure, the Centralists also had to deal with internal tensions, beginning with the imprisonment of Castro for his own Federalist leanings. Vice-President Manuel Felipe de Tovar replaced Castro, but he refused to act as a dictator, which many believed was what was called for under the circumstances. In the face of this pressure Tovar resigned from the presidency, which eventually led to Páez, whom Monagas had exiled but who had now returned to Venezuela, taking over as dictator on August 29, 1861. Finally, in 1863, the conflict ended and Falcón, the leader of the Federalists, became the new president while Páez agreed to leave the country.

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m13823/1.5/>>.

²Marsland, William D. and Amy L. Marsland. *Venezuela Through Its History*. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York: 1954.

Braach's letter, then, was written just a few months after Páez had claimed the dictatorship. Whether it was this event that finally convinced Braach to abandon his business venture or not is difficult to determine, but it is clear that his belief that, "the people of this country are not sensible enough" as well as his failure to successfully start a sewing business in Caracas both probably stemmed from the intense turmoil that had engulfed the Venezuelan capital.

Chapter 3

Introduction to the Independence of Texas document

3.1 Introduction to the Independence of Texas¹

This document represents one of the earliest in a progression of events that would eventually lead to the Mexican American War. The Louisiana Purchase had raised the question of whether the United States or Mexico could claim Texas. The Adams-Onís treaty of 1819 settled this dispute by granting control of the Floridas to the United States and control of Texas to Mexico. However, as early as 1825 the United States began to make attempts to purchase Texas from the Mexican government and these attempts would continue until Texas declared its independence in 1836 (Tutorow 17) ².

This declaration came about as a result of the Mexican Congress making substantial changes to its constitution in January of 1835. These changes consolidated power in the central government and weakened the state governments of Mexico. Texas debated what course of action to take: whether they would push for political change or declare their independence from the Mexican government. When Mexican troops marched into Texas in January of 1836, the local Texas government saw no choice but to declare independence from Mexico (Tutorow 18).

Since the United States had been making efforts to acquire Texas for more than a decade, it is no surprise that Texas's separation from Mexico would lead to a new push within the U.S. to acquire it. The document presented here is one of the first signs of that push, as it calls for the U.S. House of Representatives to create a salary for a minister to Texas, a move that was followed just three days later by the Senate declaring official recognition of Texas as an independent nation. This, in turn, led to a decade long debate within the United States regarding the possible annexation of Texas – a debate that hinged largely on the concerns of many in the northern U.S. who feared that annexation would lead to the further spread of slavery (Price 25) ³.

As much as this debate raised tensions between northerners and southerners in the United States, it created an even more tense political situation between the United States and Mexico. While Mexico “made no serious effort to reconquer Texas, she stubbornly refused to acknowledge the independence of the territory” (Price 24). The United States' recognition of Texas and the subsequent debate over its annexation, then, did not sit well with Mexican leaders. The document presented here represents the first step in that recognition, and thus also represent a key first step in the developing tensions between the U.S. and Mexico – tensions that would, ten years later, result in open war.

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m13824/1.4/>>.

²Tutorow, Norman E. Texas Annexation and the Mexican War. Chadwick House Publishers, LTD: Palo Alto, 1978.

³Price, Glenn W. Origins of the War with Mexico: The Polk-Stockton Intrigue. University of Texas Press: Austin, 1967.

Chapter 4

Introduction to the Venezuelan Declaration of Independence

4.1 Introduction to the Venezuelan Declaration of Independence¹

The Venezuelan Declaration of Independence was the product of both a complicate network of local politics and revolutionary forces encompassing at least three continents. Though patriotic forces in Venezuela had been opposing Spanish rule for decades, these early uprising were primarily civil wars (Marsland 99). It was not until revolutions broke out in North America and Europe that the political environment in Venezuela would allow for the Declaration of Independence.

There is one very important link, though, between the early days of insurrection against Spanish rule and the eventual signing of the formal Declaration of Independence: Francisco de Miranda. After receiving part of his education in Spain, Miranda began his career as a captain fighting for the Spanish military, eventually transferring to America where he helped the Spanish to harass the English during the United States Revolution. Eventually, though, he was found guilty of smuggling and, frustrated with his treatment at the hands of the Spanish military, left for the United States where he first began to consider the possibility of Venezuelan independence. During this time his “diary of acquaintances reads like a Who’s Who of post-Revolutionary America: Baron von Steuben, Anthon Wayne, Gouverneur Morris, astronomer David Rittenhouse, George Washington, Thomas Paine, Samuel Adams, and Lafayette” (Marsland 103). He followed this visit with a tour through Europe, where he found ample support for his plan for Venezuelan liberation from Spain, especially upon his arrival in England in 1790 where the Prime Minister believed that Venezuelan independence would “weaken Spain and open profitable markets for English goods” (Marsland 104). England and Spain settled their differences peacefully, however, and Miranda’s plans would have to wait.

Unfortunately for Miranda, in the years that followed, the turmoil of the French Revolution and the resulting war that was spreading throughout Europe further interfered with his plans for the liberation of Venezuela. Frustrated by five years of fruitless attempts to get English support he returned to the United States in 1805 where he once again met with lukewarm enthusiasm for his plan and no official or material support. Determined to go through with his plans, however, Miranda put together a small band of soldiers and, in 1806, led an attack on Venezuela, intending to free it of Spanish rule. This attempt failed – as did a second attack that benefited from modest British support – in large part because the people of Venezuela were not behind his cause. In fact, rather than celebrating his few victorious moments, many Venezuelans contributed to the Spanish forces that eventually drove him out. Miranda returned to England and Venezuela remained firmly under Spanish rule (Marsland).

At this point, however, the war in Europe, which had previously limited Miranda’s plans, now aided them. Charles IV of Spain was “an incompetent fool,” and the Spanish people eventually called for his

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m13825/1.5/>>.

brother, Ferdinand, to replace him in 1808 (Marsland 110). Napoleon Bonaparte convinced Charles IV to come to his camp at Bayonne. After the French took Madrid, Napoleon forced Ferdinand to return the crown to his father, who then turned the crown over to Napoleon, who in turn gave it to his own brother, Joseph. When news of these events reached Venezuela it created a dilemma for the captain general, Don Juan de las Casas: should he support Joseph or refuse to acknowledge the new king and continue to support Ferdinand? Meanwhile, the Spanish people fought against French rule and established a central executive, the Junta General, to act as their leader. When news of this turn of events reached Venezuela the question of allegiance grew still more clouded. Las Casas's indecisiveness led to his being replaced by Vicente Emparán, who represented the people's will to remain loyal to Ferdinand. However, when France overran Spain in 1810, those who supported Venezuelan independence argued that there no longer existed any Spanish authority to whom to show loyalty and eventually ousted Emparán and created a Junta of their own. Hoping to protect itself from possible Spanish retaliation, this Venezuelan Junta sent Colonel Simón Bolívar and Luis López Méndez to London in the hopes of gaining protection from the English. While England's alliance with Spain in opposition to France would not allow them to support the Junta, this diplomatic mission did have one very important result: Bolívar made contact with Miranda, who still resided in England, and convinced him to return to Venezuela (Marsland).

Miranda's return was a triumphant one and, together with Bolívar he was able to rally a great deal of support for independence among the people of Venezuela. The Junta, meanwhile, began to collapse under both exterior pressure from France and Spain and interior pressure from royalists and republicans. In March of 1811 the Junta dissolved and the first Venezuelan Congress, which was intended to be a more representative governing body, convened. One of the first issues that it considered was that of independence and, under the passionate leadership of Miranda and Bolívar, the independence movement eventually triumphed. Falling a day short of their goal to achieve independence on July 4th (to coincide with U.S. independence), on July 5th, 1811 Venezuela declared its independence from Spain.

Index of Keywords and Terms

Keywords are listed by the section with that keyword (page numbers are in parentheses). Keywords do not necessarily appear in the text of the page. They are merely associated with that section. *Ex.* apples, § 1.1 (1) **Terms** are referenced by the page they appear on. *Ex.* apples, 1

- | | |
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| B Borders, § 1.1(1), § 3.1(5) | Liberalism, § 1.1(1), § 2.1(3), § 4.1(7) |
| C Conquest, § 1.1(1), § 3.1(5)
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| | W War, § 1.1(1), § 2.1(3), § 3.1(5), § 4.1(7) |

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Americas Archive Document Introductions

This course contains modules offering substantial scholarly introductions to some of the documents in the Americas Archive (the James Cramp letters, the Ayers Braach letter, the Independence of Texas document, and the Venezuelan Declaration of Independence). It will provide viewers interested in these elements the archive more information than is available in the document abstracts.

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