

Texas Independence Movement

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The Columbia Committee of Safety and Correspondence

By 1835, independence fever was running high in the Texas Territory. The idea of a general consultation of all Texas had its origin in the jurisdiction of the municipality of Columbia. The people approved and recommended it in a meeting held there as early as the 23d of June, 1835. At another assembly, in the town of Columbia, on the 15th of August, a committee of fifteen persons was appointed, to be called " a committee of safety and correspondence for the jurisdiction of Columbia." It was " instructed to prepare an address to all the jurisdictions of Texas, requesting them to cooperate in the call for a consultation of all Texas." The committee published its address, and it was sent by express to every municipality in Texas. This was a genuine pronunciamiento; the consequent plan being that each jurisdiction or municipality should elect five individuals as representatives, the elections to be held on the 5th of October, and the consultation to convene at the town of Washington on the 15th of the same month.

Each member elect was to ascertain and bring with him the number of people in his jurisdiction ; and those jurisdictions that had not already appointed committees of correspondence and safety, were to do so.

This arrangement for a consultation was wise; it was intended to unite and direct the energies of the whole people in compliance with the wishes of the majority. There were in Texas, at that time, three parties, as follows : the war-party, who thought the country should fight at once ; a second party, that wished to consult and be united before adopting warlike measures ; and a third party, known as submissionists, who were opposed to war under any circumstances. A general consultation would heal these divisions, and enable Texas to present an undivided front to her enemy.

The Mexicans commenced their warlike movements at Goliad. Colonel Ugartachea had been too long in Texas, knew too much of the character of her people, and was entirely too humane in his disposition, to answer the ends of General Cos; besides, he had not been as active in arresting the persons proscribed as it was supposed he ought to have been, though his experience at Velasco had taught him the necessity of great prudence in his dealings with the colonists. He was accordingly made to give place in the Texan commandancy to Colonel Nicholas Candelle, a man of barbarous antecedents, and much prejudiced against the Texans. He commenced his career in Goliad by putting the alcalde in jail, and extorting from the administrador the sum of five thousand dollars, under the penalty of being sent on foot a prisoner to Bexar in ten hours. He also stripped the town of its arms, pressed

the people into the ranks as soldiers, and gave notice that the troops would be quartered upon the citizens—five to a family — and should be supported by them.

The movement for a general consultation met with a general and favorable response from the different municipalities ; and, after some correspondence with regard to the place of meeting, it was concluded, inasmuch as the principal political characters resided near San Felipe, and a printing-press was located there, that the meeting should occur at that place. Accordingly, the public mind was directed to the points to be settled by the consultation, and to suitable persons to carry out the will of the people.

Shortly after the capture of Captain Tenorio and his force at Anahuac by Travis, General Cos dispatched the schooner-of-war *Correo Mexicano*, commanded by Captain Thompson, to the scene of action, to give protection to Mexican commerce in that quarter. Thompson remained some time in Galveston bay, and was quite insolent to traders and citizens, threatening to burn down the town of Anahuac. While engaged in " protecting the revenues," he captured a small vessel engaged in the Texan trade. This conduct exasperated the public mind against him ; and a merchant-vessel, the *San Felipe*, was purchased and armed at New Orleans, placed under the command of Captain Hurd, and sent in pursuit of him. By the aid of the steamboat *Laura*, the *Correo* was captured (in September, 1835), and Captain Thompson sent to New Orleans to be tried for piracy.

Stephen F. Austin Returns to Texas

In the first days of September, 1835 Stephen F. Austin, after a detention so long and painful in Mexico, returned to Texas. The old pioneers who had come with him into the country, and been with him in days gone by, and who had witnessed and partaken of his toils and privations, gathered round and received him as one risen from the dead. Such demonstrations of regard were fully reciprocated by Austin. He was a genuine lover of his race, and especially of those for whose happiness he had devoted the best energies of his life. If there was any one desire nearer to his heart than all others, it was to see his colony prosper. He was greatly distressed to find Texas in her then unsettled condition. "I fully hoped," said he, "to have found Texas at peace and in tranquility, but regret to find it in commotion—all disorganized, all in anarchy, and threatened with immediate hostilities. This state of things is deeply to be lamented."

Austin's many friends invited him to a dinner at Brasoria, on the 8th of September. On that occasion he addressed them in some sensible remarks touching their affairs. He declared in favor of their constitutional rights, and the peace and security of Texas ; also for a general consultation of the people." The great popularity and personal influence of Austin sufficed to bring over to the side of a consultation nearly all its opponents. Wylie Martin, the acting political chief, who had been so strongly opposed to revolutionary measures, and who had, in fact, been at the head of the peace-party, surrendered his opposition, and joined the

friends of civil liberty. In his address, Austin stated that Santa Anna had "verbally and expressly authorized and requested him to say to the people of Texas that he was their friend, that he wished for their prosperity, and would do all he could to promote it; and that in the new constitution he would use his influence to give to the people of Texas a special organization suited to their education, habits, and situation."

In a few days, Austin was placed on the committee of vigilance and safety at San Felipe, and gave a fresh impulse to the revolutionary correspondence of the committees. On the 12th of September, the committee at San Felipe sent out a circular, noticing, among other things, the rights of the Indians. It is true they qualified it by speaking only of their just and legal rights. This was a point of vast importance to eastern Texas, and, in fact, to the whole country, for there were more than a thousand warriors among the different tribes that had emigrated from the United States, and almost surrounded the frontier of eastern Texas. Colonel Bean, who had been for a long time Mexican agent for these Indians, possessed great influence over them ; and they had only to turn their savage arms upon Texas to decide the contest in favor of Mexico. It was generally admitted that they had some rights, though they had never been distinctly defined by the Mexican government. The committees of San Augustine and Nacogdoches had jointly sent a deputation, which included the names of Houston and Rusk, to conciliate them. They declared to the Indians that "they had ordered all their surveyors to keep away from their lands, and not to make any marks on them ; that they did not intend that any white man should interrupt them on their lands." These promises, to which others were afterward added, as we shall see, served to keep the Indians quiet. Besides, Bean was probably at heart in favor of the Texan cause ; but he had grown old, was very poor, and was receiving a colonel's pay in the Mexican service; therefore he did not wish to compromise either his office or his countrymen.

The desire of the colonies to perfect the titles to their lands was not suspended by the approach of war; and many, who had bought up headright claims, were still more anxious to have the titles extended. On the 3d of September, Colonel Ugartachea addressed an order to the political chief at Nacogdoches to suspend all persons, so engaged, from giving titles, till the further commands of the supreme government should be received. This order was referred to the committee of safety, who resolved that, under the laws, the settlers were entitled to their lands, and that, under the constitution, Colonel Ugartachea had no right to control the civil authority; and that therefore they would resist such an assumption of power, and would sustain the land-commissioner in extending titles. This was all manly and patriotic in the committee, though it would have been better if they had restrained the commissioner; for, during the contest which followed, and while the worthy of the land were in the army, monstrous frauds were perpetrated by the commissioner, and hundreds of leagues perhaps were passed away in the names of fictitious persons, and of such as had fled the country, never to return!

Mexican Troops Fill Texas

In the beginning of September, very few doubted that war was inevitable. The commission of Messrs. Barrett and Gritton will be remembered. Gritton had been sent from Bexar to San Felipe for instructions. He returned without them, but with a letter from Wylie Martin, stating that no further instructions were necessary. Barrett himself then returned to San Felipe, leaving Gritton at Bexar. It was shortly afterward discovered that Gritton was a spy ; at least, the facts looked strongly that way. His intimacy with the Mexican officers ; his desire to have the proscribed persons surrendered; his holding out the olive-branch to Texas until the enemy had almost filled the country with troops—these, and other facts, rendered him justly suspected. Barrett was advised, by a letter from Gonzales, of the suspicious conduct of his colleague, and, for a while at least, did not write to him.

The Mexican officers, though they had seen, in the proceedings of the great meeting at Columbia, of the 15th of August, a resolution declaring that the proscribed persons would not be surrendered, still renewed and revised the list, and sent it to the different political chiefs. Even as late as the 3d of September, a new list was sent off. With this list, they informed the Texans, through Edward Gritton, that they would certainly march into the colonies; and, among other things, when they came, they would remove intruders from the public lands.

At length, a dispatch was received from the secretary of state of the supreme government, declaring that "the colonists, in adopting Texas for their country, subjected themselves to the laws which a majority of the nation might establish." If the colonists had been allowed a voice in making those laws, even then there would be a limit to their obedience—which limit would depend upon the character of the laws, and the prospect of a successful resistance ; but, having absolutely no voice in making the laws, the proposition was wholly inadmissible, and incompatible with civil liberty.

To add to the war-feeling among the Texans, positive intelligence arrived that General Cos, with an additional force, was on his march to Bexar, to overrun and disarm the country, to drive out all Americans who had come into Texas since 1830, and to punish those who had trampled upon Mexican authority. On the receipt of this news, the committee of safety at San Felipe, of which Stephen F. Austin was chairman, warned the people that "war was their only resource," and advised that volunteer companies be immediately formed. [Next: See The Battle of Gonzales]

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