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# Star of the Republic Museum

Government Publications  
Texas State Documents

## Notes

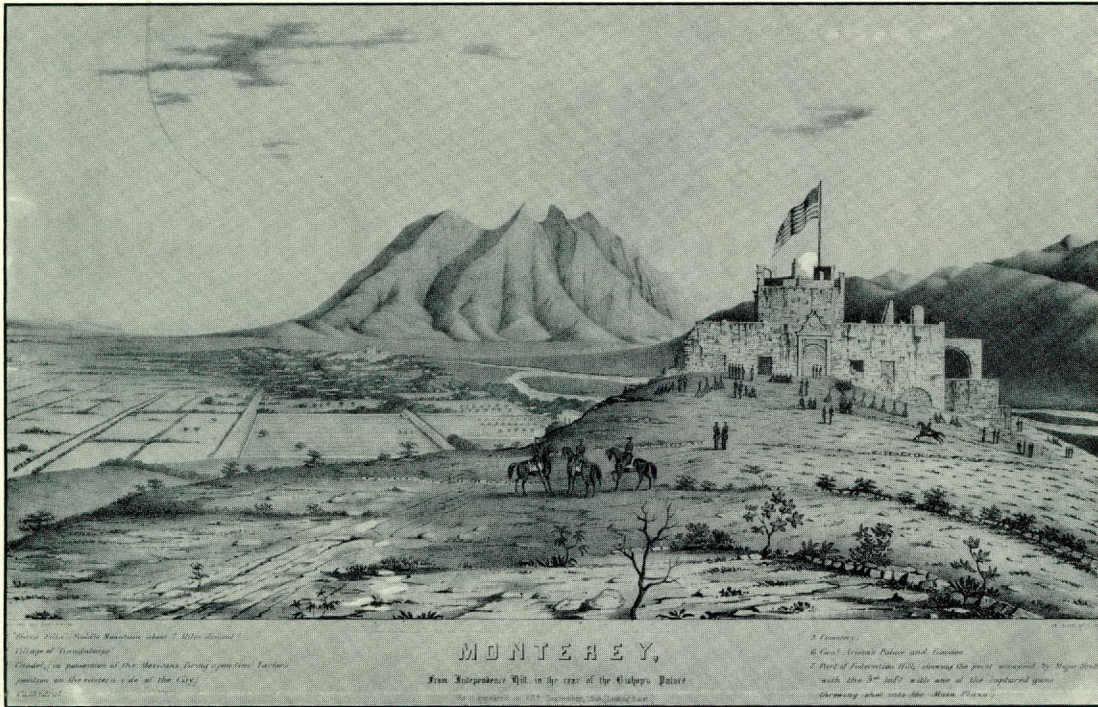
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## An "Unholy War" The Mexican War



Monterey, from Independence Hill  
Frederick Swinton after Daniel Powers Whiting, 1847

*From the moment when the supreme government shall know that the development of Texas has annexed to the American Union or that troops from the Union have invaded it, it shall declare the nation at war with the United States.*

The Government of Mexico, July 20, 1845

*The grievous wrongs perpetrated by Mexico upon our citizens for a long period of years remains unredressed; and solemn treaties have been disregarded...In the meantime we have tried every effort at reconciliation. The cup of forbearance had been exhausted, even before Mexico passed the boundary of the United States, invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon American soil.*

President James K. Polk, message to Congress,  
May 11, 1846

*Only Vietnam, for far less defensible or justifiable reasons, would exceed Mexico in public disapproval.*  
Historian Robert Leckie, 1993

When Texas finally became a Republic in 1836, President Andrew Jackson refused to recognize its independent status and even refused to recommend its annexation to the United States. Privately, however, he favored this action, but was reluctant to announce it officially because he felt that such a position could lead to war between the United States and Mexico. Ultimately, Jackson was right; when Texas was annexed, trouble began in earnest.

Mexico immediately broke off diplomatic relations with the United States, claiming that annexation was an act of hostility toward Mexico. Juan Almonte, Mexico's minister in Washington, called the legislation "an act of aggression, the most unjust which can be found in the annals of modern history." James K. Polk, whose party's platform favored what they called the "reannexation" of Texas, had won the 1844 presidential election contest against Henry Clay, who opposed the annexation of Texas. Polk sent the following message to Congress, who declared war on May 13, 1846: "Mexico has passed the boundary of the U.S., has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil. We are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country." Polk immediately sent General Zachary Taylor and a force of 4,000 men to defend an area close to the mouth of the Rio Grande River.

This year's Texas Independence Day occurs on the 150th year of Texas statehood. In a curious way, the Mexican War was a partial result of the event we are commemorating, Texas' annexation to the union in 1846. A long chain of events, beginning with the settlement of Texas by the Spanish, and including the Texas Revolution, gave rise to this war with Mexico, which still claimed Texas. It ended with the U.S. (called by some "the Colossus of the North") giving Mexico \$15 million in return for the U.S. annexation of a huge chunk of land. Primarily fought in Mexico, it left behind devastation and death on both sides, and, some say, a conflict which endures to this day. The Star of the Republic Museum will present a thought-provoking exhibit of the results of Texas annexation, opening March 2, 1996. It is called "The Mexican War," and contains prints, commemorative objects such as Texian Campaign china, rare textiles, and even a tattered Mexican flag. Visitors will be able to decide for themselves whether or not such a war was justified or if it was, indeed, "unholy."

Mexican historians of 1848 claimed that the war was begun by the "insatiable ambition of the United States," and that the Americans "desired from the beginning to extend their dominion in such a manner as to become the absolute owners of almost all of this continent." They maintained that the greed of the United States was illustrated by its absorption of territories owned by other countries and that "nothing has restrained it when treating of territorial acquisition. Louisiana, the Floridas, Oregon and Texas have fallen successively into its power."

This was not simply a Texas war. It encompassed

much more than that. The Mexican War was perhaps as controversial in the 19th century as Vietnam was in modern memory. "The Texas Question" had been among the "most controversial in American politics," with the issue of slavery dividing the northern and southern states, since Texas would be annexed as a slave-holding state. The war itself was called "Polk's War," the "Unholy War," and "a dirty little War." It is because of the devastation of war that the lessons of history should remain with us. "The shouts of victory hide the blood, ruin and desolation with which it is bought," Jane McManus Storms, the first female war correspondent, wrote of the battles in Mexico.

Living conditions for the U.S. volunteers were so bad that unofficial names of their camps included those such as "Camp Graveyard," "Camp Confusion," "Camp Starvation," or "Camp Maggot." One soldier wrote his brother at home that there were "millions of mosquitoes to annoy, harass and vex us; they are very troublesome, and the largest I have ever seen." Daily provisions included bread or hardtack, beans or rice, coffee, and sugar. Wild cattle were shot to provide beef, said to be as "tough as wagon tire." One recruit claimed that if he ever had to sign up to fight again, he would have a small grinder inserted into his stomach. Drinking water was "brackish as well as scarce," and sometimes deadly. Camargo became known as a "Yawning Grave Yard" due to the merciless sun and heat reflected off the broiling rocks. One officer wrote, "The Dead March was played so often on the Rio Grande that the very birds knew it."

Mexican citizens also suffered, however. Predicting that Veracruz inhabitants would resist American invasion, Jane McManus Storms wrote: "The citizens will prove themselves better soldiers than the regular army...for they are animated by a proud, inflexible Spanish resentment against their invaders." She observed many "sorrowful and destitute families" fleeing the invaders and "upbraiding the Americans as the cause of their ruin." "Vera Cruz presents a woeful aspect. Houses beaten in, with cannon shot, many disemboweled with the exploding bomb shells which fell through the roofs...and in many cases setting fire to the buildings." European accounts of it "will not flinch to tell you that there were more women and children killed in the taking of the city than soldiers, which unhappily is true—but they will not impute it to the hard necessity of war, which is equally true."

Ending the war with Mexico on February 2, 1848, with the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States gained vast territories. This land included Texas, much of today's Colorado, and all of Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, and California, adding a total of 1,193,061 square miles to U.S. borders. In return, Mexico received \$15 million. The Spanish West was now the American West.

For the United States, the cost of war with Mexico was about \$100 million. In lives it was 13,780 dead and "thousands more wounded beyond recovery." Other historians claim that more than 25,000 Mexicans died in combat as compared to 5,000 Americans. Disease and

accidents accounted for seven out of every eight American deaths.

The Mexican War left a mixed legacy of assimilation and conflict. Phrases in the language which some think came out of the Mexican War include the term, "dough-boys." Marching south to fight, the U.S. infantrymen became coated with white powdery dust from the trail; the cavalymen who rode above them began calling them "adobies" for the white Mexican houses. "Adobies" became "dobies," and finally, "dough-boys." After the fall of the Citadel in Mexico City, a Marine Lieutenant A.S. Nicholson "cut down the Mexican flag and ran up the Stars and Stripes, unwittingly giving to his famous corps the first line of its stirring battle hymn," "From the Halls of Montezuma."

The Mexican War was probably the first war to be quickly illustrated for mass distribution in the form of lithographs in Harper's Weekly and other publications. Prints such as these were important as documentation, and were the best method of presenting the "news" before the advent of photography. The Mexican War prints, sometimes with the artist's additions or omissions, were fairly accurate depictions of actual events. Often the sketches were done in the field, sent to Harper's magazine or other publishers, and redrawn by staff artists for publication.

The Mexican War was no different from any other

war, in that it provoked argument and dissension. Although it was not fought on U.S. soil, nor in this century, it did provide a training ground for that horrible war which was fought between North and South. Civil War Generals Robert E. Lee, U.S. Grant, W.T. Sherman, J.B. Magruder, Jefferson Davis, P.G.T. Beauregard, G. Pillow, G.B. McClellan, and others learned their lessons well in Mexico.

### Epilogue

*The Mexican War cast a pall over the relations between the United States and Mexico, a pall that lasts to this day because the Mexicans have never become reconciled to it. [Since 1848, their history] has not been happy...Throughout their tribulations the Mexicans have found it convenient to blame the Colossus of the North for their misfortunes....But even though U.S. actions during the last few decades have been generally honorable, resentment continues to smolder, and the war that raged between 1846 and 1848 is often cited as a major cause of Mexican woes: "Alas, poor Mexico! So far from God and so close to the United States."*

John S. D. Eisenhower, in So Far From God, 1989

## Texas Independence Day Celebration

On Saturday and Sunday, March 2 and 3, 1996, Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park will celebrate the 160th anniversary of the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence in 1836. Come join us to remember the work of 59 men who met in an unfinished building on a cold March day to decide the fate of a nation. In commemoration of this turning point in Texas history, the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park Association, the Star of the Republic Museum, and the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park will sponsor a variety of activities. On Sunday, March 3, **U. S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison**, a descendant of Declaration signer Charles S. Taylor, is scheduled to speak during the commemoration ceremony. She will participate in ground-breaking ceremonies for the new Park development that will conclude with the cutting and sharing of a "Texas size" birthday cake.

Travel back in time to Independence Hall one year into the life of the new Republic and reminisce with one of the residents about life in the village of Washington and the events that dramatically changed the lives of Republic citizens. Visit Dr. Anson Jones in his home, "Barrington," where he will greet visitors and discuss the ups and downs of Texas politics. After visiting with President Jones, experience a day of Republic family fun and folkways, presented through music, games, demonstrations, and crafts. Join the Texas Army and other historical groups for demonstrations of military skills and equipment. Meet notable figures of the day, brought to life by the Texana Living History Association. Join in period games suitable for the young and young at heart. Listen to music of the period while artisans demonstrate traditional crafts, and be on the look out for a bargain too, as many of the handmade craft items will be available for sale. Food and drinks will also be available for purchase to complement your day.

Highlighting the Texas Independence Day Celebration will be the opening of a new exhibit at the Star of the Republic Museum pertaining to the Mexican War. Visitors will see artifacts, documents, maps, and prints of the battles, and will learn about this conflict fought mostly in Mexican territory. Among featured items in the exhibit are pieces of Texian campaign china produced in England to commemorate the war with Mexico. Ending the war with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the United States gained the undisputed control of Texas, much of present-day Colorado and Arizona, and all of Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, and California. This added a total of 1,193,061 square miles to its borders and consequently led to national conflicts over the newly acquired lands.

P. O. Box 317 Washington, Texas 77880

Notes

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Star of the Republic Museum

April Folk Weekends

During every weekend in April, the Star of the Republic Museum will hold its annual "April Folk Weekends," with demonstrations of traditional folk art and crafts. The Museum will be open every Saturday and Sunday in April from 10:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. and will offer visitors a chance to observe and participate in folk demonstrations representing various aspects of everyday life during the Texas Republic period, and perhaps take home a handcrafted item. In addition to activities at the Museum, the park staff will conduct living history programs at the historic sites and wildflower walks. Special guest speakers in the fields of nature science and art will be featured—Barron Rector, Extension Range Specialist from Texas A&M University, representatives from the Brazos Valley Art League, and more.

April Folk Weekends Schedule

Saturday, April 6	Larry Newbern, blacksmithing
Sunday, April 7	Easter
Saturday, April 13	Sacred Harp Singers
Sunday, April 14	North Harris Co. Dulcimer Soc.
Saturday, April 20	Bill & Joe Ann Phillips, woodcarving & quilting
Sunday, April 21	Don Henthorne & Lou Rose, chair caning and rushing
Saturday, April 27	Bertie Edwards, spinning & weaving
Sunday, April 28	Don Hann, handmade musical instruments

Park Holds Annual Fishing Derby

Join us for a day of fishing fun at the "Children's Fishing Derby," on Saturday, May 11 and 18. Children ages 4-12 are encouraged to attend and participate. Prizes will be awarded. Reservations may be made by calling the Park staff at 409-878-2214.



EXHIBIT SCHEDULE

*The Mexican War*

Opening March 2, 1996

MUSEUM SCHEDULE

Open Daily

10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

409-878-2461 (fax) 409-878-2462

Administered by Blinn College, Brenham, Texas

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