

"INDEPENDENCE, LIBERTY, AND JUSTICE": THE BIRTH,
LIFE, AND DEATH OF HADEN EDWARDS'
FREDONIAN REBELLION

by

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ABSTRACT

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To populate Texas, the government of Mexico encouraged foreign empresarios like Stephen F. Austin to bring families and settle. One of those men, Haden Edwards, hoped to turn a profit with his grant in the area around Nacogdoches. Local authorities opposed his efforts, he became involved in political and social squabbles, and the Mexican government felt compelled to revoke his grant. Seeing no alternative, Edwards engineered the Fredonian Rebellion, hoping to maintain his lands.

Characters including Edwards, Martin Parmer, and Samuel Norris turned a local dispute involving politics, money, and control, into what could have become a large scale revolution. Only the poor timing and lack of support from other Texas settlers caused the collapse of the "nation" of Fredonia in just two short months. Although brief, the Fredonian Rebellion was the first in a chain of events which would ultimately lead to the Texas Revolution in 1836.

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CHAPTER 1

EAST TEXAS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 The Significance of the Fredonian Rebellion

Today, the history of settlement in Texas occupies a place in many Texan's collective memory. While many people in the world can identify its distinct borders, remember such events as the Alamo and Battle of San Jacinto, few outside the state are aware of the regional differences which make up Texas. Even within the state, few people are aware of the nuances of the history of Texas, and how it emerged. Out of pride, most Texans assume that it has always occupied a place of importance in history. In reality, it was not until the eighteenth century that people began to see Texas as a territory even worth protecting, much less settling. From then until the nineteenth century, few people outside of Texas even cared about the region. The revolutionary zeal that had begun with the American Revolution gave way to a desire by Anglo Americans to expand, and it was then that Texas became a coveted territory.

First Spanish and then Mexican authorities had to deal with the issue of Texas. They had to determine whether or not the territory was important to them, if and how it should be protected, and who should be both allowed and encouraged to move there. Oddly enough, the policy each state held toward Texas was slow to change until the Fredonian Rebellion of 1826-1827. This single event became pivotal in Texas history. Suddenly, a group of Anglo-American colonists had challenged the Mexican government. Although cooler heads and calmer personalities may have prevented the uprising, once those events began to unfold, they significantly altered the course of history. The show of force offered by the Fredonians, although brief and futile, enlightened Mexico's leaders to the potential dangers of Anglo colonization in Texas. After the revolt, the Mexican government embarked on a more heavy-handed policy that, rather than prevent revolution, ultimately encouraged it. Some of the same

problems which led to the Fredonian Rebellion may have been experienced elsewhere in Texas, but Nacogdoches is where those problems were most acute and where the original armed insurrection against Mexican rule began. In fact, partly due to the failed rebellion, the Mexican government embarked on a course of action intended to restrict the freedom of settlement that many of the Anglos in Texas had experienced up to that point. Ultimately, had it not been for Haden Edwards and the Fredonians, events in the history of Texas, Mexico, and the United States may have taken a vastly different turn.

1.2 Spanish Control of East Texas

Texas had been claimed by the Spanish early in the Age of Exploration. Expeditions by Cabeza de Vaca, De Soto, and Coronado had each crossed into areas of the region and had helped to give Spain her claim to Texas. However, the Spanish government did not consider Texas to be an area of major concern until the late seventeenth century. Even then, the Spanish Crown did not truly show genuine interest in Texas until explorers and adventurers from France began penetrating the Texas frontier.¹ Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the European nations vied for control of the North American continent. Spain had the most territory, and therefore, the most to lose. By the end of the century, England had seized the Carolinas, both the British and the Dutch were attempting to expand in the West Indies, the French were moving down the Mississippi River Valley, and various privateers and pirates were raiding Spanish ships and settlements in the New World.² All of these encroachments had the Spanish concerned about their North American claims. Possibly the most serious threat to Spanish control of Texas though, came from the explorer René Robert Cavalier le Sieur de La Salle in 1685. Attempting to establish French control on the mouth of the Mississippi River by setting up a fort, La Salle sailed past the Mississippi and instead ended up in Texas. Spanish

¹ Félix D. Almaráz, Jr., "Spain's Cultural Legacy in Texas," in *The Texas Heritage, Third Edition*, ed. Ben Procter and Archie P. McDonald (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1998), 1.

² R. C. Donoho, *The History of Nacogdoches and Hayden Edwards Colony: A Study in the Spanish and Mexican Colonization in Texas* (Norman, OK: R.C. Donoho, 1929), 9.

authorities quickly dealt with this threat by destroying the outpost La Salle had erected, and then began making plans to establish permanent control of the Texas region. Although these were ambitious plans, their expense and a continued fluctuation of tensions between Spain and France resulted in Spanish policies toward Texas going through constant changes.³ By the end of the seventeenth century, Spanish authorities failed to push their settlements and explorations any further east than the banks of the Trinity River.⁴

Although it did not take place for another one hundred and twelve years, here begins the history of Nacogdoches and the Fredonian Rebellion. In 1714 the French began expanding in Louisiana and established a trading post near the Red River at the settlement of Natchitoches.⁵ In 1715 and 1716, the Spanish founded a series of missions in eastern Texas in an attempt to establish a physical presence to the Texas territory which they claimed. They founded a simple mission on the banks of the Arroyo Hondo, located in modern Louisiana, near the French settlement at Natchitoches.⁶ Another mission, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Nacogdoches, was also established at this time and formal settlement of the Nacogdoches area by the Spanish had begun.⁷ The threat of a French invasion in 1719 forced the residents of the outer settlements to retreat to San Antonio de Béxar.⁸ Again though, the Spanish returned to the area. In 1721, the viceroy commissioned San Miguel de Aguayo to travel to and reclaim the region in an effort to bolster the defenses of the area, and also to reestablish the missions which had been abandoned. On the banks of the Arroyo Hondo, Aguayo not only rebuilt the mission,

³ Almaráz, Jr., 6-7.

⁴ Joe E. Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story: An Informal History* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 2000), 3.

⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶ Joe E. Ericson and Carolyn R. Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier: Brief Narratives of Their Lives and Times* (Nacogdoches, TX: Ericson Books, 1998), 1.

⁷ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 5-6.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

but he also set up a presidio he named Pilar de Los Adaes.⁹ Quickly, this became the most important settlement in Spanish Texas, representing not only its furthest settlement, but also functioning as the capital for the region of Spanish East Texas.

Within thirty years, the settlements in Texas once again became unimportant to the Spanish Crown. By 1751, the Texas frontier was controlled through one presidio and mission at Los Adaes, a second mission in Nacogdoches, and a third nearby at Los Aís, known today as San Augustine.¹⁰ As hostilities between the Spanish and French dwindled, the need for the Spanish to demonstrate their control of Texas declined. By the mid eighteenth century, the French and Spanish agreed on territorial boundaries. Spanish officials were once again concerned with the costs associated with maintaining outposts along the frontier. In 1762, with the end of the French and Indian War at hand, France ceded Louisiana to Spain. In 1772, Marquis de Rubi, the Spanish Inspector of the Northern Frontier, recommended that the missions in East Texas be abandoned.¹¹ The resulting Royal Order of 1772 for the Regulation of the Presidios, therefore ordered the complete abandonment of the settlements at Nacogdoches, Los Aís, and Los Adaes, and the settlers in the surrounding areas were required to relocate to San Antonio.¹²

When the residents of Texas received the order in 1773, most of the established residents of these locations complied with the order to relocate, though a few did stay, particularly in the area around Nacogdoches.¹³ Almost immediately, some of the leading citizens of this relocated group began petitioning the government for permission to move back

⁹ Donoho, 13-14.

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹¹ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 4.

¹² Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 11.

¹³ Ibid., 11.

to their former homes. One of the leaders of this petition was Antonio Gil Y'Barbo, who had been born and raised in Los Adaes.¹⁴ In August 1774, the Spanish government permitted the displaced residents of East Texas, led by Y'Barbo, to return to Paso Tomas, a point on the east bank of the Trinity River, along the El Camino Real where it crossed the La Bahía Road.¹⁵ Slow to grow, a series of disasters struck the residents in early 1779, and between 300 and 350 of them, again led by Y'Barbo, made the decision to move further east, eventually arriving at the abandoned settlement of Nacogdoches.¹⁶ Some moved into outlying areas to farm. Others remained in the central settlement and began making preparations to expand the community. Y'Barbo functioned as the alcalde of Nacogdoches, but in reality had little legal authority to exercise the powers he now assumed. He began issuing land titles by means of simple verbal agreements with the settlers.¹⁷ Upon learning of this, the Spanish government ordered the settlers to petition the government for legal documentation of the lands they had been granted. While many of the residents did in fact petition the Crown for their land titles, owing to the legalistic bureaucracy of the Spanish Empire, few titles were actually granted.¹⁸ In 1792, an agent of the Spanish government came to Nacogdoches to investigate the situation. The shocked official learned that Y'Barbo was continued granting lands through verbal agreements with the intended landowners, in some cases granting eleven square leagues, almost 50,000 acres. Y'Barbo was censured by the government, removed from his position, and taken to San Antonio for trial, but the Spanish governors thereafter made little effort to clarify land titles held by the residents of Nacogdoches.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹⁹ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 9.

The settlement at Nacogdoches grew through the years. Just four years after being resettled by Y'Barbo, Nacogdoches had some 349 residents.²⁰ By the end of 1784, one year later, that number had increased to 399, and the pattern of growth continued.²¹ By 1800, Nacogdoches became the second largest town in Spanish Texas.²² This is not a tremendous feat. Nacogdoches proper held only 660 residents in 1800.²³ In fact, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the Spanish had established only three major towns in Texas: San Antonio, Nacogdoches, and La Bahía, today known as Goliad.²⁴ Despite its unsettled condition, Spanish authorities soon began turning their focus toward the Texas frontier.

1.3 Philip Nolan

It was into this sparsely settled region that Philip Nolan of the United States entered in the late 1700s. Nolan was something of an early American cowboy. He came to Texas to round up wild mustangs, either by capturing them himself or through trade with the Indians, and then transported them back to the United States for sale.²⁵ Census records from Nacogdoches as early as 1792 list Philip Nolan, age thirty, as a permanent resident of the town, though he undoubtedly split his time between Texas and the United States.²⁶ By 1794, he had secured official sanction from officials in Nacogdoches to carry out his mustang trade in Texas.²⁷ By 1796, the increasing number of Anglo Americans in Nacogdoches was beginning to concern some local officials. Spanish officials also worried about the illegal entry into Texas of a number

²⁰ University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, *Residents of Texas: 1782-1836, Volume I* (St. Louis: Ingmire Publications, 1984), 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²² Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 8.

²³ *Residents of Texas: 1782-1836, Volume I*, 33.

²⁴ Almaráz, Jr., 10.

²⁵ Archie P. McDonald, *Texas: All Hail the Mighty State* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1983), 40.

²⁶ *Residents of Texas: 1782-1836, Volume I*, 113.

²⁷ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 26.

of Anglo Americans who then made their way into the interior of the province.²⁸ Spanish officials became suspicious of many of the Anglo Americans, and came to believe that Philip Nolan might have had ulterior motives on his journeys through Texas.

In addition to being a mustanger, Nolan was also a former aid to General James Wilkinson of the United States.²⁹ Pedro de Nava, the General Commanding the Eastern Provinces, suspected that Nolan's true motives for entering Texas were to survey the land, reconnoiter Spanish positions, fortifications, and defensive capabilities, and then make plans to seize Texas. In a letter to the Governor of Texas, Juan Bautista de Elguizabul, de Nava ordered that Philip Nolan be arrested, and that he be interrogated regarding:

his native country, residence, occupation and religion; whether he is an American citizen, whether he has or has not been in commercial intercourse with citizens of the United States; whether he drove to that country the horses and mules which he bought in Texas or in Louisiana from our friendly Indians, and finally, whether he holds any commission from General Wilkinson.³⁰

The Spanish now began hunting for Philip Nolan. Joseph Vidal, the Spanish Commander of Frontier at Concordia, informed Governor Elguizabul that Nolan's capture was imperative because if Nolan were to succeed, "others would follow his example, and embark in similar expeditions; Americans would, by degrees, penetrate these precious possessions," and take them from Spain.³¹

Nolan did not alleviate Spanish fears when he told James Cook, a resident of Nacogdoches that he knew Spanish authorities would be looking for him, and that he planned on taking different routes to avoid them. Referring to Spanish officials and other business

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

²⁹ Owen P. White, *Texas: An Informal Biography* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1945), 13.

³⁰ The General Commanding the Eastern Provinces to the Governor of Texas, August 8, 1800, transcribed by Robert Bruce Blake in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 1-2, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas.

³¹ Commander of the Frontier at Concordia, LA, to the Governor of Texas, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 3-4.

contacts, Nolan told Cook that “they all think I am going to run mustangs,” suggesting that the Spanish may have been correct in their belief that he was up to something else.³² When this October 1800 letter fell into Spanish hands, the Governor of Texas ordered daily patrols out to look for Nolan, and to arrest James Cook.³³ Soon after, Spanish authorities apprehended Mordecai Richards, one of Nolan’s companions on this journey. After being questioned, Richards confirmed to the Spanish that the purpose of the journey was indeed to gain information about mines and other valuable lands and resources located in Texas. However, according to Richards, Nolan was not acting at the behest of the United States government. Instead, he planned on returning to seize Texas after “receive[ing] a commission from the British minister at Philadelphia...to take possession of those lands, or at least gather their wealth,” suggesting that in this case it was the British and not the United States that the Spanish should worry about.³⁴

Ultimately, Nolan’s expedition ended disastrously for him and his associates. James Cook, Antonio Leal, his wife Gertrudis de los Santos, and Pierre Longueville, all business acquaintances in some form with Nolan were arrested on suspicion of aiding this conspiracy to undermine Spanish control of Texas.³⁵ By the beginning of March 1801, 120 men had set out from Nacogdoches to seize Nolan’s party after receiving reliable information as to his whereabouts.³⁶ On March 21, a military unit from Nacogdoches caught up with Nolan and in the

³² Philip Nolan to James Cook, October 21, 1800, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume X, page 6.

³³ The Governor of Texas to the General Commanding the Eastern Provinces, November 12, 1800, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume X, page 9.

³⁴ The Commanding Officer at Concordia to the Commanding Officer at Nacogdoches, December 13, 1800, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume X, pages 12-16.

³⁵ The Governor of Texas to the General Commanding the Eastern Provinces, January 21, 1801, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume X, pages 19-20.

³⁶ The Governor of Texas to the General Commanding the Eastern Provinces, March 18, 1801, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume X, page 26.

brief battle that followed, Nolan was killed.³⁷ In all, twenty-four men were captured, fifteen of them Americans.³⁸ One of them, Peter Ellis Bean, eventually played a major role in helping to end the Fredonian Rebellion. Spain continued to view the United States with suspicion, but was in a difficult position when it came to securing eastern Texas. Commerce between the residents and foreign traders “date[d] from the very foundation of the village of Nacogdoches, owing to its remoteness from any home market.”³⁹ Despite the risks perceived by Spanish officials, interactions between their settlers and Anglo Americans continued.

1.4 Neutral Ground

Spanish suspicions toward Anglo Americans increased again after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The transfer of the Louisiana Territory to the United States occurred after Napoleon had demanded that Spain return it to France. He then sold the territory to the United States. There were major problems associated with this transfer. First, the exact border between Texas and Louisiana had never been formally established.⁴⁰ Secondly, Napoleon claimed that Texas lay within the territory of Louisiana.⁴¹ As tensions escalated, local commanders on both sides were forced to come up with a temporary solution. That became the Neutral Ground Agreement of 1806 between General Wilkinson of the United States and General Symon de Herrera and Governor Antonio Cordero y Bustamente of Spain. Wilkinson proposed that each country remove its troops from the disputed areas between the Arroyo

³⁷ The Governor of Texas to the General Commanding the Eastern Provinces, April 1801, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 27.

³⁸ The General Commanding the Eastern Provinces to the Governor of Texas, April 14, 1801, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 28-29.

³⁹ The Governor of Texas to the General Commanding the Eastern Provinces, September 13, 1801, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 38-39.

⁴⁰ Henderson H. Yoakum, “A History of Texas from its First Settlement under La Salle in 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1845,” in *A Comprehensive History of Texas: 1685 to 1897*, ed. Dudley G. Wooten (Dallas, TX: William G. Scarff, 1898), 59.

⁴¹ Stuart Reid, *The Secret War for Texas* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 10.

Hondo, claimed by the Spanish as the Eastern border of Texas, and Sabine River, which the United States claimed as the border.⁴² Although Bustamente and the Spanish agreed to this temporary solution, it soon presented a major problem for both sides. Spanish officials noted that the area was soon inhabited by citizens of the United States, including locations near Los Adaes.⁴³ The Governor of Texas, although stating that the defense of the province of Texas was significantly important, also declared that when it came to the Neutral Ground, the Spanish would have to “tolerate the intrusion of some foreigners into our territory.”⁴⁴ Occasionally, joint efforts by United States and Spanish forces attempted to clear the disputed territory of illegal residents, particularly undesirable elements.⁴⁵ Unfortunately for the Spanish, these efforts proved futile, as the Commandant at Natchitoches noted that by 1812, “the vagrants [were] returning; the same who were apprehended in our territory for settling themselves in it.”⁴⁶ While there were well-meaning people who moved into the area with innocent purposes, ultimately, the Neutral Ground became a safe haven for various individuals who had committed offenses within the United States, Spanish territory, or both.⁴⁷

1.5 Gutiérrez-Magee

The early nineteenth century saw residents of the United States supporting revolutionary movements throughout the Spanish colonies. John Hamilton Robinson was one

⁴² James Wilkinson to Governor Antonio Cordero y Bustamente, October 29, 1806, in *Documents of Texas History*, ed. Ernest Wallace and David M. Vigness (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1960), 37-38.

⁴³ General Bernardo Bonavia to the General Commanding the Eastern Internal Provinces, March 12, 1810, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 50-51.

⁴⁴ The Governor of Texas to the Commanding General of the Eastern Internal Provinces, January 23, 1810, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 47-49.

⁴⁵ The Governor of Texas to the Commanding Officer of the U.S. Forces Stationed at Fort Claiborne, July 17, 1810, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 55-56.

⁴⁶ Commandant at Natchitoches to Commandant at Nacogdoches, June 12, 1812, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 91-92.

⁴⁷ James T. De Shields, *Border Wars of Texas* (Austin, Texas: State House Press, 1993), 27.

of the original filibusters, Anglo Americans who armed themselves and entered foreign territory with the hopes of aiding revolutionaries, or claiming the land as their own.⁴⁸ A member of Zebulon Pike's expedition into New Mexico in 1806 and 1807, Robinson returned to the United States and helped promote the idea that the United States should help liberate the American colonies from their European colonizers.⁴⁹ By 1812, many Anglo Americans, particularly in the South, were not only listening to those ideas, but were prepared to do something about them.

The initial Mexican revolt against Spanish rule began on September 16, 1810, when Father Miguel Hidalgo issued the *Grito de Dolores*.⁵⁰ Although there was moderate support for Hidalgo's ideas of independence throughout northern Mexico among the lower classes, the upper classes were not sympathetic and remained loyal to the Spanish Crown. In Texas, however, the ideas of Hidalgo took hold, particularly in San Antonio, where the Spanish authority was overthrown for a brief period. Spanish authorities were forced to direct their attentions away from threats of foreign invasion and focus more on preventing or putting down internal revolt.⁵¹ The Spanish did not ignore rumors of foreign intervention or aid to the insurgents. Spanish officials along the frontier and government agents stationed in New Orleans continued to send reports of U. S. and even French aid to Mexican revolutionaries. Confronted with these rumors, some officials continued to urge an increased Spanish presence along the frontier, most notably within the province of Texas.⁵²

⁴⁸ David E. Narrett, "Liberation and Conquest: John Hamilton Robinson and U.S. Adventurism Toward Mexico, 1806-1819," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40 (Spring 2009), 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁰ Matthew Reynolds, ed., *Spanish and Mexican Land Laws: New Spain and Mexico* (St. Louis: Buxton and Skinner Stationery Co., 1895), 31.

⁵¹ Douglas W. Richmond, *The Mexican Nation: Historical Continuity and Modern Change* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 105-108.

⁵² Diego Murphy, Consul at New Orleans to His Excellency the Governor of Texas, February 27, 1812, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 78-79.

The Gutiérrez-Magee expedition of 1812-1813 exemplified the fears of Spanish authorities. José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara was a follower of Hidalgo's and one of the participants in the revolt which wrested control of San Antonio from Spain. With Hidalgo's revolution beginning to fail, Gutiérrez was sent by the revolutionary government which had taken control of San Antonio to the United States to gain financial and possibly military support.⁵³ During his mission, Hidalgo's revolution collapsed, yet Gutiérrez continued to seek U. S. aid. While in the United States, Gutiérrez met Augustus Magee, a United States Army officer. On his own initiative, Magee agreed to join with Gutiérrez in a military expedition to Texas with the goal of helping Mexico gain its independence.⁵⁴ Spanish frontier authorities attempted to alert officials in Texas and Mexico of Gutiérrez's plans, but to no avail.⁵⁵ The pair recruited volunteers in the United States and then proceeded into the Neutral Ground where they added additional supporters. Although the Mexican and U. S. volunteers were friendly toward one another, some of the Mexican volunteers were suspicious of the involvement of Anglo Americans. They reportedly feared that it might be part of an attempt by the United States to take part, if not the whole of Texas, as well as additional territory from Mexico.⁵⁶

Upon entering Texas, the Gutiérrez-Magee expedition headed immediately to Nacogdoches and easily captured the town in August of 1812. After wintering in East Texas, the expedition proceeded to La Bahía, where Augustus Magee died shortly after arrival due to an illness.⁵⁷ Almost immediately, the party headed to San Antonio, which fell to them in April of

⁵³ David E. Narrett, "José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara: Caudillo of the Mexican Republic in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 54: 2 (October 2002), 198-201.

⁵⁴ Archie P. McDonald, "Anglo-American Arrival in Texas," in *The Texas Heritage, Third Edition*, ed. Ben Procter and Archie P. McDonald (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1998), 19-20.

⁵⁵ Felix Trudeau to Don Bernardino Montero, May 3, 1812, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 80.

⁵⁶ Narrett, "Gutiérrez," 210.

⁵⁷ McDonald, "Anglo-American Arrival in Texas," 20.

1813.⁵⁸ Disagreements began to fragment the group. Several Anglo Americans began to head home after Magee's death. Others believed that the goal had been to liberate Texas, and that was accomplished with the capture of San Antonio. Gutiérrez himself removed from the leadership of the expedition on August 1, 1813.⁵⁹ Hoping to secure more territory and continue the revolution, the new leaders ordered the remaining participants of the expedition to depart San Antonio a few days later. On August 18, 1813, superior Spanish forces finally defeated the expedition at the Battle of Medina.⁶⁰ Joaquín de Arredondo, the Commandant General of the Eastern Interior Provinces, had marshaled some 2,000 soldiers to quell this rebellion. Not content to stop the active participants of the Gutiérrez-Magee expedition, Arredondo ordered Lieutenant Colonel Ygnacio Eliso to pursue the invaders back across the province and purge Texas of any and all Anglo Americans, along with Mexican supporters of independence. As the party approached Nacogdoches, the residents heard rumors of what was to come, and many fled into the Neutral Ground or into United States territory.⁶¹ Over the next few years, many of those who ran from East Texas returned to the Nacogdoches area, including some Anglo survivors of the expedition itself.

1.6 Adams-Onís and James Long

By 1816, Spanish authorities still considered Texas to be sparsely settled. After an inspection of the territory ordered by the Marqués de Rubí, a map of the Texas frontier was created. Texas had only four presidios: San Antonio, La Bahía, Vacoquizan (located at the mouth of the Trinity River), and Los Adaes. Additionally, there were only seven missions in all of Texas: three near San Antonio, two near La Bahía, one near Vacoquizan, and one at

⁵⁸ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 28.

⁵⁹ Narrett, "Gutiérrez," 225.

⁶⁰ Richmond, 119.

⁶¹ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 28-29.

Nacogdoches.⁶² There also remained the unsettled question of the Texas border. The Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819 resolved the lingering border question. After negotiations between Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and Spanish minister Luis de Onís, the two agreed that the Texas border would be marked by the Sabine River.⁶³ This inevitably angered many in the southern states, who viewed this as a surrender of territory to Spain. They continued to consider Texas as a part of the Louisiana Purchase and therefore rightful U. S. territory.⁶⁴

From Natchez, Dr. James Long organized another armed expedition to attempt to take control of Spanish Texas. In June 1819, Long led his men into Nacogdoches and proclaimed Texas independent. Although he was able to recruit some 200 additional volunteers from the surrounding area, lacking supplies and sufficient support, Long withdrew across the Sabine.⁶⁵ After learning of this invasion, the Governor of Texas Antonio Martínez sent Ignacio Pérez to drive the invaders out of Texas in October.⁶⁶ Frustrated by the situation he discovered in East Texas, Pérez asked the local United States Army commander in Louisiana for assistance in securing the border to prevent further interlopers from crossing into Texas.⁶⁷ Long attempted to invade Texas once more, arriving at Point Bolivar in April 1820. He marched on La Bahía where superior Spanish forces eventually captured him. Long was then taken to Mexico City and executed, while his remaining followers disbanded.⁶⁸ Long's supporters consisted of not

⁶² Mexico Tor Agorso, *Mapa do toda la Frontera de los dominios del Rey en la America sptentrional, construido y delineado por el Capitan de Ingenieros D. Nicolas de la Fora, y el Teniente de Infantería de Regimiento de America D. Jose de Vrantia sobre varios puntos tornados en el tiempo de la expedición que hicieron por dicha frontera a las ordenes del Marisal de campo el Señor Marques de Rubí.* (1816), Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington.

⁶³ McDonald, "Anglo-American Arrival in Texas," 22.

⁶⁴ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 30.

⁶⁵ McDonald, "Anglo-American Arrival in Texas," 22.

⁶⁶ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 30.

⁶⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Ignacio Pérez to the Commander of the U.S. Forces on the Sabine, October 31, 1819, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 197.

⁶⁸ McDonald, "Anglo-American Arrival in Texas," 22.

only Anglo Americans, but also Mexican revolutionaries. While a few remained in Texas, many once again fled across the border into Louisiana, fearing Spanish reprisal. Eventually though, many of Long's volunteers made their way back to Texas, settling as squatters in East Texas.⁶⁹

1.7 Mexican Independence From Spain

Father Hidalgo's brief revolution helped touch off a firestorm of revolt throughout Mexico. Inspired partly by the American Revolution, revolutionary movements had sprung up throughout New Spain. During the Gutiérrez-Magee expedition, Spanish authorities also had to contend with a revolutionary movement led by José María Morelos y Pavón. His revolutionary movement initially claimed success, but he was ultimately defeated, captured, and executed.⁷⁰ More revolutionary movements appeared, led by conservative members of the upper class, such as Guadalupe Victoria and Vicente Guerrero. These movements failed to overthrow the existing order in Mexico, although they did weaken Spanish power.⁷¹ Finally, in 1821, Agustín de Iturbide led the successful Mexican revolution against Spanish rule. His Plan of Iguala formally asserted Mexico's independence from Spain.⁷² Gaining the support of the majority of the population, Iturbide negotiated the Treaty of Córdoba with Spain, which formally recognized the independence of Mexico.⁷³

By 1821, Spain had still not fortified the border region of Texas sufficiently. There are three major reasons why. First, there was no immediate threat of a foreign power taking Texas from Spanish control. Although the French had sent a few small expeditions into the territory during the seventeenth century, they had each failed and Spanish control of Texas remained

⁶⁹ Donoho, 28.

⁷⁰ Richmond, 109-115.

⁷¹ McDonald, "Anglo-American Arrival in Texas," 23.

⁷² Reynolds, 31.

⁷³ Richmond, 124.

intact. When it came to the United States, there was no official United States policy aimed at gaining control of Texas. While the United States government might welcome an independence movement in Texas which would result in the region being joined to the U. S. no president could support such attempts. Second, as the Spanish began to realize the United States move to challenge it for control of Texas, as demonstrated by Magee and Long, a series of revolts broke out across Mexico, thus distracting Spanish attention from Texas. The Spanish Crown could not afford to divert its resources toward stopping a potential invasion while full-fledged revolts were breaking out across New Spain. While a large number of Anglo Americans had been involved in attempts to declare Texas independent, overall, their role became more one of supporting Mexican revolutionaries. Finally, despite having claimed the territory since its earliest explorations, Texas was still too remote from the main centers of power in New Spain. While local officials, and to a certain extent, regional officials had sounded alarms calling for the fortification of the area, Texas remained hundreds of miles away from the centers of political power, particularly Mexico City. It also remained sparsely populated, adding to problems of supplying any forces which would have to be stationed there. However, in 1821, Spain departed, and the problem of fortifying Texas now fell to the new government of Mexico.

CHAPTER 2

THE EMPRESARIO HADEN EDWARDS

2.1 Empresarios

Haden Edwards had been engaging in land speculation since 1799, when he began taking part in commercial land transactions in Louisiana.¹ As the American economy expanded through the early eighteenth hundreds, land speculation had become more widely practiced. In Texas, Edwards eventually saw a way to earn much more profit than he could in the United States. He first began to plan his settlement adventure in Texas while it remained under Spanish control. For the Spanish, one of the major problem with Texas had been its lack settlement. While there were more than a few Indians living in Texas, the Spanish had always felt that there were not enough “civilized” inhabitants. In the early 1820s, there were few major settlements in Texas to be concerned with. The two largest continued to be San Antonio, or Bexar, and Nacogdoches. Smaller settlements were few and scattered across the region.² Spanish authorities decided on a plan to increase settlement in Texas by using empresarios, contractors who would introduce families into the region to establish permanent settlements.

As far as the Spanish government, and later the Mexican government, was concerned, the goal of settlement was simple. They wanted loyal citizens who would make the land in Texas productive, either through farming, ranching, or some other pastoral activity. Obviously, the authorities hoped that Spanish empresarios would participate in the plan, but it was also opened to foreigners, including Americans. It was under this plan that an American named Moses Austin had sought to obtain a contract to settle families in a colony. Austin, like the other

¹ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 36.

² Stephen F. Austin, *Mapa Geografico de la Provincia de Texas*. (1822), Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas.

empresarios and settlers from the United States, was interested in profit, and hoped to benefit financially from a land grant in Texas. Authorities in San Antonio were alerted that on January 17, 1821, Austin's request to settle 300 families was granted by the Spanish authorities in Mexico City.³ Austin returned to Missouri to make plans for his new colony, but fell ill and died later in 1821. His son Stephen F. Austin journeyed to San Antonio to guarantee that possession of the venture had passed to him. Spanish authorities, still in control at that point, agreed and Austin planned his new colony.

Mexican independence forced Austin to travel to Mexico City to meet with the new leaders of the government and ensure the legal standing of his claim.⁴ Having learned of the Spanish empresario plan, other Anglo Americans were also in Mexico City hoping that Iturbide's new government would continue the policy and grant them colonial land grants as well. One of those men was Haden Edwards.⁵ Edwards was also joined by Robert Leftwich, whom he had loaned a sum of at least 5,000 dollars. He also loaned Austin somewhere between five and six hundred dollars.⁶ Others also sought grants by writing to various governmental authorities across Texas and Mexico. Already residing in Nacogdoches, probably illegally, James Gaines requested the Governor of Texas in 1821 for permission to bring in 250 families to grow wheat, cotton, and other suitable cash crops.⁷ Bombarded with these requests, along with the continued reports of Anglo-Americans illegally crossing the frontier, some within the new government were becoming suspicious. Even Iturbide may have had his doubts. According to

³ Ambrosio Maria de Aldasora to the Ayuntamiento of Bexar, January 17, 1821, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, pages 216-217.

⁴ McDonald, "Anglo-American Arrival in Texas," 24-25.

⁵ John Henry Brown, *History of Texas* (St. Louis: L.E. Danielle, 1892), 119.

⁶ Malcolm D. McLean, ed., *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas*, vol. 2 (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1975), 41.

⁷ James Gaines to the Governor of Texas, June 5, 1821, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 237.

the Mexican Secretary of State, in mid-1822, Iturbide was pursuing a two-fold policy toward Texas settlement. While hoping to promote legal colonization, Iturbide was also determined to send a military force into Texas to “clear it of the adventurers that infest it.”⁸ Austin argued that his father had received the grant legally, and that the contract should have passed to him upon his father’s death. Iturbide determined that the new Mexican government would respect the contract as it was. Elected Emperor of Mexico in May 1822, Iturbide signed into law the “Colonization Law of Iturbide” on January 4, 1823. This law allowed two types of land grants: the first for empresarios who would contract directly with the Mexican government, and the second for individuals who would contract with the town councils, or ayuntamientos.⁹ The law required empresarios to bring in a minimum of 200 families to their particular grant. Meant to encourage the settlement of regions which were at that time sparsely populated, and recognizing that it might be difficult to get established Mexican citizens to relocate on their own, the law made specific provisions for foreign immigration. It did, however, state that “natives of the country shall have a preference in the distribution of land.”¹⁰

Ultimately, Austin was the only Anglo-American granted permission to settle families in Texas under this particular law. Iturbide was forced to abdicate just a few months later, and the Congress of Mexico suspended the colonization law he had issued in January 1823. Finally, on August 18, 1824, the government passed a new colonization law which authorized it to carry out the colonization of the territories within Mexico’s jurisdiction.¹¹ The National Colonization Law again aimed at attracting settlers to various points throughout the country which remained sparsely settled, though Texas remained a top priority. Although open to foreign empresarios,

⁸ The Secretary of State of Mexico to Don Juan Bautista Avispo and Don Refugio de la Garza, Representatives of Texas, June 28, 1822, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 262.

⁹ Reynolds, 32.

¹⁰ “The Imperial Colonization Law,” January 4, 1823, in *Documents of Texas History*, 47-48.

¹¹ Reynolds, 32-33.

the law still contained provisions whereby Mexican citizens were given preferential treatment. It also required the states to each “form colonization laws, or regulations” to govern distribution of lands within their own borders.¹² Thus, technically, the national government would not issue contracts, but the individual state governments, including the state of Coahuila y Texas, would.

2.2 Haden Edwards’ Contract

Those seeking to gain contracts to settle families in Texas, including Edwards, Leftwich, and Benjamin Milam, now traveled to Saltillo to petition the state government, which passed its own colonization law on March 24, 1825.¹³ Edwards received his land grant on April 15, 1825.¹⁴ The boundaries of the grant included: south to within ten leagues of the Gulf of Mexico, east to twenty leagues west of the Sabine River, fifteen leagues north of Nacogdoches, and west to the Navasota River.¹⁵ This particular location was ideal for attracting settlers, but not necessarily good for establishing an empresario’s land grant. North of Edwards’ colony were Cherokee Indians, who had been driven out of the United States by that time. To the east was the old neutral ground, still populated with displaced persons from both the United States and Mexico. Along the southwest border was Austin’s colony.¹⁶

The contract for the Edwards grant also outlined certain expectations and responsibilities that Edwards had to meet. First, Edwards had to organize a local militia. Second, after personally settling 100 families, Edwards would then request the government for a land commission to distribute land titles.¹⁷ Most importantly though, Edwards was to respect

¹² “The National Colonization Law,” August 18, 1824, in *Documents of Texas History*, 48.

¹³ McLean, *Papers Concerning Robertson’s Colony*, vol. 2, 52.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 39.

¹⁶ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

“All the property held under lawful titles by the residents of Nacogdoches and its vicinity.”¹⁸ This also guaranteed that the traditional town governmental structures would be maintained. Each town or district would continue to elect an alcalde who would have jurisdiction over that district. Larger towns, such as Nacogdoches would also continue to have an ayuntamiento.¹⁹ It was this particular expectation that would cause Haden Edwards so much trouble, and ultimately precipitate the Fredonian Rebellion.

Article twelve of the state colonization law specified that an empresario could receive additional premiums should they introduce 800 families.²⁰ If he had introduced 800 families, Edwards would have received 184,320 acres of land, valued at around five dollars per acre. He would also have received approximately \$440,000 in administrative fees.²¹ This would have resulted in him earning a gross profit of over 1.3 million dollars. Although it is highly unlikely that Edwards would have been able to actually realize these levels of profit, on paper, these figures were, at the very least, probable. At the very least, in 1826, even realizing a third of these potential profits, approximately \$450,000, would have been substantial and made the adventure in Texas more than worthwhile. Edwards would be somewhat pressed for time though, as the law also stipulated that he had six years to bring in the eight hundred families. If he could not complete settlement in that time frame, he would be subject to losing some of the privileges that the state’s colonization law would allow.²²

Edwards was on a tight schedule. In order to obtain the additional privileges he could claim under the colonization laws, he had to introduce all 800 families into his land grant within

¹⁸ Haden Edwards Colonization Contract, April 15, 1825, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 23-25.

¹⁹ Joe E. Ericson and Carolyn R. Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight: John S. Roberts and Early Nacogdoches* (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1989), 61.

²⁰ “The Coahuila-Texas Colonization Law,” March 24, 1825, in *Documents of Texas History*, 49.

²¹ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 46.

²² Haden Edwards Colonization Contract, April 15, 1825, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 23-25.

six years. First, he had to arrange the families, and then he had to find land for them to settle on. By December of 1825, Edwards had made plans with James Gaines, a Nacogdoches resident and a key player in events leading up to the revolt, to help him survey the lands within his grant. Hoping to make the establish of permanent settlements easier, Edwards told Gaines that he wanted the country “laid out in square ligue[s] in township ranges and sections.”²³ Unfortunately for Edwards, events during 1826 would destroy his attempt to plant a colony in and gain any wealth from Texas.

2.3 Minor Problems

From the beginning, problems regarding his grant beset Edwards. One became the issue of authority. The town of Nacogdoches, contained within his grant, already had a functioning local government, and also served as the center of provincial government from the Trinity River to the Sabine and from the Red River to the Gulf Coast.²⁴ Outlying settlements throughout East Texas would appeal to the alcalde of Nacogdoches for help, governmental rulings, and ask him to forward their requests to the state government in Saltillo.²⁵ Edwards was subject to the jurisdiction of the alcalde of Nacogdoches. Further complicating matters was Austin’s position over the governmental structure covering the land grants. Since his contract had been issued by the Mexican government, it was not subject to the restrictions placed on other empresarios by the State of Coahuila y Texas. In fact, Austin’s contract made him a type of judge to whom appeals from any alcalde’s jurisdiction could be made.²⁶ Therefore, Edwards

²³ Haden Edwards to Captain James Gaines, December 23, 1825, manuscript in the *Haden Edwards Papers*, Box 5, Folder 9, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas.

²⁴ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 33.

²⁵ Pauline Shirley Murrie, *Early Records of Nacogdoches County, Texas* (Waco, Texas: Pauline Shirley Murrie, 1965), vii.

²⁶ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 39.

was not only under the jurisdiction of a local alcalde, he was also under Austin's. He also had almost none of the civil powers that had been granted to Austin.²⁷

2.4 Land Confusion

By far, the largest problem Edwards faced was the question of land ownership within the borders of his grant. Claims by some of the Mexican inhabitants dated back to the 1770s and many legal titles had been lost over the previous decades.²⁸ Living within the area were also former residents of the Neutral Ground who had continued to move west, Spanish and French Creoles, and various groups of Indians, some which had settled in Texas before the Spanish arrived, and some, like the Cherokees, who had entered Texas after being pushed out of the United States.²⁹ There were reported to be a large number of squatters in the area as early as 1823, when the Baron de Bastrop had been sent to investigate the number of illegal settlers rumored to have been in Texas already. The Baron estimated that just between San Jacinto and the Sabine, there were 200 families, and that at Pecan Point along the Red River in Northeast Texas, there were fifty more.³⁰ Also within the area were many Anglo-Americans, some of whom had accompanied Philip Nolan, Augustus Magee, or James Long on their filibustering expeditions and had eventually settled in Texas.³¹ Recognizing that there were a large number of non-Mexican citizens living within the territory, Juan Seguín, acting as alcalde in 1824, offered them the opportunity to become citizens of Mexico. His proclamation had stated that any one living in the district of Nacogdoches who wished to "reside in the Mexican province and become quiet and peaceable citizens of the same" could come before him on

²⁷ Donoho, 35.

²⁸ Archie P. McDonald, *The Old Stone Fort* (Austin, Texas: Texas State Historical Association, 1981), 19.

²⁹ Donoho, 28.

³⁰ The Baron de Bastrop to the Political Chief and Governor of Texas, December 2, 1823, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 321.

³¹ McDonald, *The Old Stone Fort*, 19.

June 6, 1824 to swear allegiance to the new Mexican Constitution.³² This, however, still did not solve the problem of land ownership.

Many of those problems had originated with Antonio Gil Y'Barbo and his method of assigning lands to people when he functioned as alcalde. According to his contract, Edwards was to respect the land holdings of the previous residents of the area bounded by his grant. However, the 1809 census of Nacogdoches reveals just how hard it was for some to prove the legality of their land holdings. An unknown farmer, age fifty, had received his property from José Sanches "by informal sale."³³ Crivostomo Yucante held property "for which land he has no judicial document and possessed it with verbal permission."³⁴ Andres de Acosta, a sixty-five year old resident, had a piece of property that he had received "from the citizen Manuel de Acosta, contracted informally to said party, which was granted to him verbally by Captain Don Antonio Gil Ibarvo."³⁵ Samuel Davenport acquired half of his property through formal purchase, and "the other half by verbal purchase."³⁶ Juan Seguin purchased some of his property through "extrajudicial sale from Damaceno Barrera."³⁷ Even more confusing are the cases of Gerónimo Equis and Baltasar de la Garza. Equis' land "was verbally conveyed by his grandmother, Juana Bautista Acosta who acquired it by informal sale from citizen Juan de Acosta and his in same manner had it from Mariano Sanches to whom it was given by his father Juan Jose Sanches to whom don Antonio Gil Ibarvo gave it as a settler without judicial document."³⁸ This piece of

³² Proclamation of Juan Seguin to Those Wishing to Become Citizens, May 21, 1824, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 350.

³³ University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, *Residents of Texas: 1782-1836, Volume II* (St. Louis: Ingmire Publications, 1984), 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

property had changed hands five different times, and at no time had there been official, legal documentation. Garza obtained his property "from Juan Esparza by informal sale...who had it by informal sale from Dimas Moya, who before that possessed it as a settler and asked permission of it of Capt. Dn. Juan Cortes and it was not given to him, and instead to the said Garza."³⁹ During the Gutiérrez-Magee Expedition, Bernardo Gutiérrez had also issued land titles to people living in the Nacogdoches area. In 1824, the Mexican government ruled that since Gutiérrez had possessed no authority to issue land titles, "said titles [were] worthless to those who hold them."⁴⁰

The problem with Anglo-Americans was just as bad. Many of the Anglos living in the area were squatters, living on the land without any form of sale to them whatsoever. Some were survivors of the filibustering expeditions, but others were Anglo Americans who had been forced out of Louisiana due to floods. Some even claimed that they had been headed for Austin's colony, but had heard rumors of drought and famine in that colony. Deciding that East Texas was suitable enough for their needs, they stopped their journey and settled where they could find open land.⁴¹ Others held presumably valid land titles granted by the Baron de Bastrop. These people, and apparently Bastrop, assumed that their lands were actually in Austin's colony.⁴²

2.5 Elections of Alcalde and Militia Leader

Haden Edwards, already faced with the huge problem of sorting out land ownership, then became involved in another problem of his own making. The issue at hand was the election of local officials. The alcalde of Nacogdoches, Luis Procela, and the town sindico, or

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ The Political Chief of Texas to John A. Williams, April 3, 1824, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 341.

⁴¹ Donoho, 34.

⁴² Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 40.

clerk, José Antonio Sepulveda, had been trying to validate old Spanish and Mexican land titles after learning Edwards had received his grant.⁴³ Believing that they were in reality forging land titles so as to deprive him of opportunities, Edwards ordered that elections be held for the purpose of selecting militia officers for Nacogdoches. Rather than take some of the pressure off of Edwards, the election resulted in Sepulveda being elected Captain of the Nacogdoches militia. Frustrated by the election results, Edwards then ordered elections for a new alcalde, something which his empresario contract did not give him the right to do.⁴⁴ Typically, local officials were to be elected annually, however, elections for alcalde in Nacogdoches were held at irregular intervals. Since Mexico had won her independence, elections had been more frequent. James Dill served as alcalde from 1821 to 1823, that year Juan Seguín was elected. Followed by Patricio de Tores in 1824, then Pedro Proceta, and Luis Proceta, who became alcalde in 1825.⁴⁵

The candidates in the alcalde election were two non-Mexican settlers in the area. The first candidate, Samuel Norris, was born in 1783 in Maryland, and first moved with his parents to the area around the Attoyac River in 1803.⁴⁶ By 1805, the family moved back across the Sabine River, into the Neutral Ground.⁴⁷ Samuel Norris returned to Texas in 1820 and settled in Nacogdoches.⁴⁸ The other candidate was Chichester Chaplin, an Irish immigrant, who was married to Tabitha Beall Edwards, Haden Edwards' daughter.⁴⁹ Norris won support from the original inhabitants of the Nacogdoches area, which included the legal residents, those who had

⁴³ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 38-39.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁶ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 34.

⁴⁷ *Residents of Texas: 1782-1836, Volume I*, 423.

⁴⁸ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 34.

⁴⁹ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 36.

undocumented claims, and squatters, both Anglo American and Mexican. Chaplin, was obviously supported by his father-in-law Edwards, his financial backers, and the recent arrivals to Edwards' colony who had been recruited to come and encountered difficulty in gaining clear possession of lands they desired. The result was a disputed election which both men claimed to have won. Having received the majority of the vote, Chaplin immediately took possession of the office of alcalde, along with the town archives.⁵⁰

Chaplin's election caused a major dispute in the region. Accusations were made that Chaplin had won the office because a number of the voters in the election were ineligible because they were Anglo-Americans who had recently moved into the area and had not yet become citizens of Mexico.⁵¹ Such an accusation may not have been unfounded, nor was it uncommon. In the election for the alcalde of the Ayish Bayou region immediately east of Nacogdoches in February of 1825, Bailey Anderson won. Accusations raged there as well, including allegations that the election officials would not let "a freeman vote Because [sic] he was dark complected [sic] and admitted two men to vote that lived in the U. States."⁵² In fact, in that election, only one of the voters had a Hispanic name, E. Ruiz, though he is also listed as Henry Reug. The remaining fifty recorded voters possessed Anglo surnames, such as Thomas, Sherman, McNeal, Anderson, Chamber, Williams, Shannon, Wooten, Barnes, and Wright.⁵³ Through the early months of 1826, appeals were made by and on behalf of Norris to José Antonio Saucedo, the Political Chief of Texas in Bexar. Ultimately, he overturned the results of

⁵⁰ Archie P. McDonald, "The Fredonia Rebellion," in *Nacogdoches: Wilderness Outpost to Modern City*, ed. Archie P. McDonald (Burnett, Texas: Eakin Press, 1980), 39.

⁵¹ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 65.

⁵² Thomas W. Spencer to Louis Procel, May 1, 1825, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume XI, page 38.

⁵³ Election Returns for Alcalde in Ayish Bayou District, Showing election of Bailey Anderson Sr., for 1825, February 26, 1825, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume XI, pages 13-15.

the election on the basis that illegal votes had been cast for Chaplin. Norris was therefore installed as the alcalde of Nacogdoches.⁵⁴

Chaplin and his supporters originally refused to acknowledge that the election had been overturned. Norris called out the militia under the command of Sepulveda. This show of force compelled Chaplin to turn over the official papers and office of alcalde to Norris.⁵⁵ However, this controversy heightened the tensions between the two groups of residents, those who had been living on the land for years, and those coming to take advantage of Edwards' grant. As the year progressed, Norris would exceed his authority as alcalde in an attempt to prevent Edwards from taking advantage of the local, long established residents, at least as Norris saw it. Edwards and his supporters believed Norris was acting as a dictator, attempting to defraud and harass the new arrivals.⁵⁶ On March 3, 1826, Edwards attempted to once again intervene in the politics of the local government and the command of the Nacogdoches militia. Attempting to overturn at least the election of Sepulveda as the leader of the militia, Edwards hoped that he could have another person, more to his liking elected. The notice he placed concerning this new election stated:

The citizens of this District have elected a man as their Captain who has since violated the laws in refusing to obey the order of the civil authority and selling the property of a deceased [*sic*] person which belongs exclusively to that authority, as well as many other charges unfavorable to his character and consequently I cannot agreeably with my duty and obligation to the public commission him to act as such. Therefore I require said citizens to meet again at Mr. Davis on the fifteenth day of the present month to elect some other person of unexceptionable character.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 65.

⁵⁵ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, March 22, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 123-124.

⁵⁶ De Shields, 28.

⁵⁷ Notice by Haden Edwards, March 3, 1826, manuscript in the *Haden Edwards Papers*, Box 5, Folder 9.

On March 20, after the disputed election was settled, there was a disturbance in the town during which Edwards, Chaplin, and five others were attacked by supporters of Norris and Sepulveda in response to their assault upon a member of the Nacogdoches militia.⁵⁸ Norris felt that the area had been “thrown into a state of confusion by the conduct of Chaplin and the Empresario Haden Edwards,” and had therefore dissolved the existing ayuntamiento and formed another, presumably with members who had supported him.⁵⁹ Norris also had other people supporting him, including James Gaines.

2.6 Regulators and Other Issues

James Gaines was well known to Haden Edwards. Edwards had planned on hiring him to assist in the surveying of certain areas of his grant.⁶⁰ Gaines was also well known to the Mexican government. Although he had been a part of the Gutiérrez-Magee Expedition, Gaines had remained in East Texas, become a Mexican citizen, and served as alcalde of the Sabine District from 1824-1825.⁶¹ Gaines had formed a group of “Regulators” whose job it was to maintain law and order among the ruffians who had inhabited the old Neutral Ground and the area around Nacogdoches. His “Regulators” were part of the old, established residents of the area, and as a result of their actions, the government of Mexico had commended them and Gaines.⁶² But Gaines was also married to Susanah Norris, making him the brother-in-law of Samuel Norris. Edwards’ faction accused Gaines and his “Regulators” of assaulting their supporters, attempting to seize their property, and in general harassing them.⁶³

⁵⁸ The Commanding Officer of the Militia of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, March 23, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 125-127.

⁵⁹ Samuel Norris, Alcalde of Nacogdoches to Political Chief of Texas, May 2, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 166.

⁶⁰ Haden Edwards to Captain James Gaines, December 23, 1825, manuscript in the *Haden Edwards Papers*, Box 5, Folder 9.

⁶¹ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 30.

⁶² Donoho, 33.

⁶³ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 67.

As the area became more and more violent, John A. Williams in the Ayish Bayou area complained to Stephen F. Austin that he believed the authorities in Nacogdoches had been abusing their positions of power. He stated that “James Gaines [was] believed to be the prime mover of all these questionable measures.”⁶⁴ In July, Haden Edwards’ brother Benjamin also wrote Austin to criticize James Gaines. Benjamin Edwards stated that while Gaines’ company of men may have originally been founded for good reason, “he now makes use of this auxiliary aid to oppress and bear down every man who is obnoxious to him, or who does not approve of his policy of throwing the whole country into commotion.”⁶⁵ Benjamin Edwards continued that Sepulveda was aiding Gaines in his actions, and that Gaines held influence over the alcalde, Norris, who Edwards described as being “very ignorant himself.”⁶⁶

James Gaines not only defended himself against these rumors and accusations, but also made allegations of his own. On April 1, James Gaines rode into Nacogdoches with news that Chaplin had approached him and others with the idea of staging a revolution and forming an independent republic between the Attoyac and Sabine rivers. Norris, ever more suspicious of Haden Edwards’ intentions, forwarded this information on to the authorities at Béxar, along with his additional concerns.⁶⁷ Norris wrote to his superiors again on May 2 to inform them that he had called out two companies of militia from the surrounding areas to defend Nacogdoches, and to request that “a detachment of regular troops” be sent immediately to the town in an effort to stop revolutionaries in the area.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ John A. Williams to Stephen F. Austin, July 19, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, Eugene C. Barker, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 1379.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Edwards to Stephen F. Austin, July 21, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1383.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1384.

⁶⁷ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, April 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 145.

⁶⁸ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, May 2, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 167.

In September of 1826, James Gaines wrote to Saucedo claiming that any disorganization in the Nacogdoches area was due to land speculators and ruffians who were disappointed in their attempts at personal gain. He also accused two local men, James Dill and a Mr. Durst, which could have included any one of the brothers John, Joseph, or Jacob, of also being a part of some type of conspiracy by Edwards and his supporters to throw the region into chaos.⁶⁹ On the same day, Samuel Norris wrote to Austin that Gaines had done nothing out of the ordinary, and that Norris had been aware of everything that Gaines and the Regulators had been doing in their attempt to maintain law and order.⁷⁰

This back-and-forth series of accusations continued throughout 1826. In January, as he was continuing to plan for his surveys, Haden Edwards wrote to James Gaines that he had already encountered problems with “the Spaniards” in Nacogdoches, although he provided no specific examples.⁷¹ Edwards also felt that he was the target of attempts to smear his reputation. Although the rumors he addressed specifically dealt with land prices and charges, he also defended his general conduct to Austin, hoping to gain his sympathy and support.⁷² Indians in the area also caused more problems, as Norris began to suspect that Edwards was attempting to incite them. On August 12, 1826 Richard Fields, a chief of the Cherokee Indians living in the lands north of Nacogdoches, informed Norris that a man named John Williams was attempting to gain Cherokee support in a local revolt.⁷³ Whether or not this was exactly the case, Norris continued to send warnings on to Bexar.

⁶⁹ James Gaines to José Antonio Saucedo, September 5, 1826, found in *The Austin Papers*, Volume I, 1446-1447.

⁷⁰ Samuel Norris to Stephen F. Austin, September 5, 1826, found in *The Austin Papers*, Volume I, 1448-1449.

⁷¹ Haden Edwards to Captain James Gaines, January 4, 1826, manuscript in the *Haden Edwards Papers*, Box 5, Folder 9.

⁷² Haden Edwards to Stephen F. Austin, February 28, 1826, in *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas*, vol. 2, 520-522.

⁷³ Letter from Richard Fields, August 12, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume XI, page 186.

2.7 Property Disputes

The Nacogdoches area was proving itself to be a poor location for Edwards' grant. Living within the area were squatters, people who frequently moved around, and ruffians from the old neutral ground, both Mexican and American.⁷⁴ The residents had been in a state of flux for at least the past fifteen years, not to mention their removal from East Texas in the 1770s. In 1820, a U. S. visitor estimated that fewer than 100 people lived there. In 1821, while passing through on his way to Mexico City, Stephen F. Austin noted that only thirty-five people attended a public meeting in the town.⁷⁵ This was a pitiful decline for a town that in 1812 was estimated to have had close to 1000 residents. However, by 1823 the number of residents in Nacogdoches had to increase once again.⁷⁶

These residents were the most immediate problem Edwards faced once he received his grant. Upon his arrival in Nacogdoches on September 25, 1825, Edwards gave notice that anyone who claimed to have legal title to land holdings within the boundaries of his grant must bring evidence of their claim for him to verify.⁷⁷ Another notice, posted in October, stated simply:

...that every individual or family resident, within the limits of the specified territory and all those who claim to have a right to any part or parts of the land or lands of said territory shall immediately present themselves to me and show me their titles or documents, if any they possess, so that they may be received or rejected, according to the laws; and if they do not do this, the said lands will be sold without distinction...⁷⁸

This obviously angered the residents who knew they did not have legal title to their land holdings, but it also angered residents who considered themselves to be the actual, legal

⁷⁴ Richard W. Haltom, *The History of Nacogdoches County, Texas* (Austin, Texas: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1972), 7.

⁷⁵ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 30.

⁷⁶ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 3.

⁷⁷ McDonald, "The Fredonia Rebellion," 38.

owners of the lands they occupied. Claims by some of these inhabitants dated back to the 1770s and many legal titles had been lost over the previous decades of settlement, abandonment, resettlement, and continued abandonment during the filibustering expeditions of the early 1800s.⁷⁹

Therefore, a large number of people could not reliably validate their land holdings. This included those who had received their titles from Spanish authorities prior to 1821 and those whose titles had not properly been documented. In addition, squatters who had been living on the land for two or more generations believed that they had been given legal title to occupy those lands at some point. Some of the residents had even received their titles from the Baron de Bastrop as part of Austin's colony, but either they or Bastrop, or both, believed their lands were part of Austin's colony.⁸⁰ Edwards wanted to move quickly in removing from his grant those people who he considered to be squatters and replace them with wealthier, Old South planters, like himself, who could easily afford to purchase large tracts of land from him.⁸¹ Edwards was mistaken in believing that he had total control over the lands and the legal process concerning the lands within his grant.⁸²

In fact, the residents of Nacogdoches had a legal process they could use to contest Edwards' attempts to evict them from their lands. In 1825, the alcalde, Procella, and the sindico, Sepulveda, took advantage of this process and began trying to validate many of the old land claims. Some within the Mexican government, including the Political Chief of Texas, José Antonio Saucedo, believed that these earlier claims were already questionable.⁸³ The election

⁷⁸ Donoho, 40.

⁷⁹ McDonald, *The Old Stone Fort*, 19.

⁸⁰ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 64.

⁸¹ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 38.

⁸² Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 63.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 63.

of Norris proved just as problematic. As the original inhabitants of the area began to come forward with their land claims, Edwards, of course, wanted them to be held to a strict standard in order for them to prove ownership. During the appeals, however, Norris consistently ruled in favor of those claiming to have original land titles, or at least claimed the right to possess the land by virtue of their previously having lived on it.⁸⁴ As Norris and the old residents thwarted Edwards' attempts to remove them, they were not merely undermining his authority, they were also threatening the potential profits Edwards hoped to receive from his investment.

Edwards made another mistake regarding the lands in his grant. In assuming he had absolute authority over the territory, Edwards also believed he could make the financial rules regarding the sale and possession of those lands. Some who might have been more willing to work with Edwards, especially later on, were put off by his attempts to collect land title fees from people who were already living in the vicinity before his contract was awarded.⁸⁵

2.8 Benjamin Edwards Arrives and Haden Edwards Leaves

Haden Edwards convinced his brother Benjamin to come to Texas to assist him in managing the grant. Those who knew him described Benjamin as modest, and he was known for his skill at public speaking.⁸⁶ After visiting Austin at his colony, Benjamin returned to Nacogdoches early in 1826. In May, Haden Edwards left his brother in charge of the affairs in Nacogdoches while he returned to the United States to attempt to recruit more settlers.⁸⁷ Unfortunately for the Edwards brothers, it was during these summer months that tensions escalated in the region between the old and new settlers. Facing these mounting hostilities and angry rumors directed toward himself and his brother, Benjamin Edwards sought advice from Stephen F. Austin. He began by recounting his version of events over the past few months,

⁸⁴ Brown, 133.

⁸⁵ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 40.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁷ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 68.

stating that the entire region was in a state of disorder due to the ineffective administration of government in Nacogdoches. He recounted the problems of clearing land titles and told Austin that he had “strong reasons to believe that there have been some forgeries of papers here.” He mentioned how mail addressed to Haden Edwards had arrived “broken open” and “order after order has been transmitted here, containing censure of Haden Edwards, without any inquiry into the truth or falsehood of the accusations.”⁸⁸

One of Benjamin Edwards’ main concerns was the distribution and clearing of land titles to current and hopeful residents around Nacogdoches. Immediately prior to writing Austin, Edwards had received news regarding those lands and titles. He wrote Austin:

Haden Edwards was not entitled to charge any thing for lands...all contracts already made may stand; but that none hereafter made will be good...Edwards shall refund whatever he may have recd for lands...the Junta alone and not the Empresario shall dispose of said lands within *said district*...The last order...directs the Alclada to inform H. Edwards that unless he changes his conduct (without informing him what it is complained of) that his grant will be *taken from him*...⁸⁹

This major threat to the continued control of the land grant of course worried Benjamin Edwards, and he asked Austin for his advice. Austin responded by advising that Benjamin address his concerns to Victor Blanco, governor of the State of Coahuila y Texas.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Benjamin W. Edwards to Stephen F. Austin, July 21, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1380-1383.

⁸⁹ Benjamin W. Edwards to Stephen F. Austin, July 21, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1382.

⁹⁰ De Shields, 28.

CHAPTER 3
THE FREDONIAN REBELLION BEGINS

3.1 Edwards' Contract is Revoked

Throughout the summer months, tensions continued to mount. Land disputes were more and more often being filed in favor of the old settlers by alcalde Samuel Norris. New arrivals continued to feel as though they were being unduly harassed by the "Regulators." Seeking to preserve his brother's grant, and counter the accusations against him, Benjamin Edwards wrote Governor Blanco in the late summer of 1826.¹ Although he may have been considered eloquent by some of his acquaintances, Benjamin Edwards' letters to officials in San Antonio and Saltillo were argumentative and insolent. Casting insults upon Norris and the local government in Nacogdoches, implying that the entire structure of both the Texas and Mexican political systems were arranged against the Edwards brothers, and accusing those in power, both in Nacogdoches and Mexico City of corruption, Benjamin Edwards succeeded only in insulting and angering Governor Blanco.²

While Benjamin Edwards was pushing his case with Blanco, Norris was making allegation against the Edwards' brothers in his own letters to Blanco. On September 5, 1826, Norris made a series of reports to the Political Chief of Texas, regarding the situation in and around Nacogdoches. In one he disclosed a statement made by Richard Fields, a Cherokee Chief in the area, who claimed that Edwards had attempted to gain his support in a revolution against Mexico and that he believed Edwards would incite a rebellion upon his return from the

¹ Haltom, 9.

² Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 40.

United States.³ In a second report, Norris claimed that the civil unrest in the area, which he blamed on the Edwards brothers and their supporters, was severely curtailing the ability of the government in Nacogdoches to function.⁴ In a third letter, Norris made a formal request of the government that regular troops be sent to Nacogdoches in an effort to restore the authority of the local government.⁵ With the perceived insults made by Benjamin Edwards, and the information questioning Haden Edwards' loyalty to the government of Mexico, by the end of September the decision to revoke his contract was made.

Haden Edwards received word of the annulment of his grant personally. He returned to Nacogdoches in late September, 1826. On October 2, Governor Blanco informed him stating that his contract had been cancelled, and that he and his brother Benjamin had been ordered out of the country.⁶ According to Blanco, Edwards was guilty of wrongly setting himself up as a military commander, forcing settlers to provide valid land titles or face eviction, storing a large supply of weapons in his house, illegally attempting to sell his colony for \$120,000 in the United States, and recruiting men to participate in a revolution against the sovereign government.⁷ Angered, Haden Edwards reportedly promised he would resist the attempt to rescind his contract.⁸ Therefore, Haden Edwards continued operating business as usual. Frost Thorn, another son-in-law of Haden Edwards requested permission to select two parcels of land along

³ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas (regarding Richard Fields' statements), September 5, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 223.

⁴ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas (regarding the unsettled state of affairs), September 5, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 225.

⁵ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas (regarding the alarming situation in Nacogdoches), September 5, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 226.

⁶ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 70.

⁷ Ed Kilman, "Haden Edwards, Fredonian Rebel," *Houston Post*, 12 January 1936, page 9. Found in the Haden Edwards Papers, Box 5, Folder 8.

⁸ De Shields, 28.

the Trinity River.⁹ Edwards believed his resistance to these orders was justified. He apparently felt that he had been given assurances regarding his authority over the lands and area covered by his grant, and that the Mexican government could not live up to its responsibilities as expected by Edwards. Therefore, he saw no legitimate reason to appeal to any court which may have been open to him, since it was his belief that he could not receive a fair hearing on any matter he presented.¹⁰

3.2 Last Days of Peace

As early as the end of March 1826, the tension between Edwards' supporters and those loyal to Norris was obvious. Some believed that armed conflict between the two sides was inevitable. Sensing that the situation might result in bloodshed, Richard Fields of the Cherokee nation, made a point of telling the Mexican authorities that should hostilities with either the United States or the Anglo-American settlers in Texas commence, the Cherokee would support Mexico.¹¹ Fields' motives were two fold though. The Cherokee were seeking their own land grant in the area, and Fields hoped to ingratiate himself to the Mexican authorities and thus gain their favor, hoping a land grant would be his reward. However, Fields would keep his options open, and kept friendly relations with some of Edwards' supporters in East Texas. As tensions continued to mount, Samuel Norris began to doubt the loyalty of Fields and the other Cherokee toward Mexico. Even after Fields' warning about the attempts of John Williams to incite the Indians on August 12, only ten days later Norris received information that Fields' own son had

⁹ Frost Thorn to Haden Edwards, October 14, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 259.

¹⁰ Haltom, 9.

¹¹ The Cherokee Chief, Richard Fields, to the Commanding Officer of Texas, April 22, 1825, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 29-30.

told a local resident that “a great deal of blood would be spilt” as the Cherokee were indeed considering participation in a revolt, on the side of the revolutionaries.¹²

It was not the Cherokee that were the immediate threat to Norris though, it was the Edwards brothers and their supporters. One of those supporters was Martin Parmer, who had come to Texas from Missouri in 1825, and quickly joined Haden Edwards.¹³ Described as being very bold, aggressive and fearless, Parmer had already made a name for himself in Missouri battling local Indians.¹⁴ In Nacogdoches he was continuing to live up to his reputation as a brawler. After moving to the Nacogdoches region, Parmer became involved in a dispute with a man named Moton Askins. In early October 1826, an incident occurred during which Moton Askins was mortally wounded after being shot, allegedly by Parmer.¹⁵ After Askins’ brother Otho filed the complaint, Samuel Norris issued a warrant for the arrest of Martin Parmer.¹⁶

Events, disputes, and tensions came to a head in Nacogdoches. Upon returning from the United States, Haden Edwards announced that he had arranged for the settlement of some 700 men in the region by the next winter.¹⁷ While Edwards faced the prospect of losing the estimated \$50,000 he had already invested in the operation, the situation in Nacogdoches continued to deteriorate.¹⁸ On September 4, Theodore Dorsett resigned as the Captain of the militia after the members of the militia began to leave. He accused John A. Williams of causing

¹² The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, August 22, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 192.

¹³ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60-62.

¹⁵ Complaint filed by Otho Askins against Martin Parmer for the shooting of Moton Askins, October 15, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 205.

¹⁶ Warrant of arrest of Martin Parmer for murder of Moton Askins, October 15, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 206.

¹⁷ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, October 17, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 265.

¹⁸ Brown, 134.

these defections, since Williams had complained that there was no proper authority in the area. Dorsett also accused Benjamin Edwards, John A. Williams, and Burrell Thompson of trying to “completely effect the revolution.”¹⁹ On November 13, militia Captain José Antonio Sepulveda described to his superiors the problems he and Norris were facing. He reported rumors he strongly believed were true that a group of Anglo Americans were planning on seizing the municipal government by force. He also complained that a request he had made in April for more troops had gone unanswered, wondering if it was “possible that the Supreme Government can be so regardless of the security of these innocent people.”²⁰ For the better part of a year, Norris and Sepulveda had sent warnings and complaints to government officials, often requesting that more regular troops be dispatched and stationed in Nacogdoches permanently. The Guadalupe Victoria government of Mexico seems to have determined that little threat of a rebellion existed in East Texas, or that any rebellion there would be small and easily subdued by the local militias, even with the presence of so many Anglo-Americans in the vicinity.

3.3 The Trial and Removal of Norris and Sepulveda

On November 22, 1826, a group of thirty-six armed men from the Ayish Bayou region rode into Nacogdoches and began making arrests. Their main targets were Samuel Norris and José Antonio Sepulveda, both of whom were readily taken into custody. They also searched for James Gaines, who remained at large.²¹ A man named Lewis Nugent, another Anglo-American, was also reportedly arrested by this group. However, in the process of bringing him to Nacogdoches, he reportedly tried to escape and was killed in the process.²² The group also

¹⁹ Resignation of Captain T. Dorsett of the Militia, September 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 220-221.

²⁰ The Commanding Officer of the Militia of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, November, 13, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 283.

²¹ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 41.

²² Joseph Durst to the Political Chief of Texas, November 29, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 294-295

arrested Haden and Benjamin Edwards.²³ The leaders of this armed band were Martin Parmer, still accused of the murder of Moton Askins, John S. Roberts, and Burrell J. Thompson.²⁴ It is possible that some of the men in the company believed that they were there for noble purposes: the removal of unjust authorities in the persons of Norris and Sepulveda, and the restoration of law and order by determining which group of leaders were truly in the right, Norris or Edwards.²⁵

The group next formed a court martial to judge the accused. They formed a Committee of Arrangements which spelled out the charges against the accused. The members of this committee were Will B. Ligon, John W. Frith, and Herman B. Mayo. Haden Edwards was brought before the court and the crowd which had gathered to witness the proceedings were asked if anyone of them had accusations to make against him. Though the crowd included Norris, Sepulveda, and former alcalde Luis Procella, no one stepped forward to offer accusations, and the court released Edwards.²⁶ It is entirely probable that the arrest of Edwards was merely a ruse to give the action an appearance of neutrality. Edwards had already promised revenge against the authorities he felt had attempted to deprive him of his grant throughout the previous year.²⁷ Seizing control of the area by force would have been in Edwards' mind the only possible recourse. With any luck, these extralegal proceedings against Norris and Sepulveda, if enough evidence against them was presented, might cause the Victoria government to side with Edwards and restore his grant. The proceedings would be heavily biased against the two in any case. Haden Edwards was well acquainted with Martin Parmer, John S. Roberts, and Herman and John Mayo.

²³ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 44.

²⁴ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 41.

²⁵ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 71.

²⁶ Impeachment Proceedings against Samuel Norris and José Antonio Sepulveda, November 24-26, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1515-1516.

²⁷ De Shields, 28.

The court martial consisted of Martin Parmer, president or presiding judge, Burrell J. Thompson, John S. Roberts, J. W. Mayo, and William Jones.²⁸ Charges against Samuel Norris included: oppression and corruption, extortion, treachery, inciting murder, refusing to allow worship, and exceeding his authority. Some of the more specific “crimes” the court accused Norris of included: banishing John Williams from the country for questioning the authority of the captain of the Ayish Bayou Militia and the Alcalde of the Ayish Bayou District, seizing the property of the office of Alcalde from John Sprowl, Alcalde of the Ayish Bayou District, continually requesting troops to put down a rebellion which did not in fact exist, and giving a militia guard transporting a prisoner back across the Sabine River permission to kill the prisoner if they wished.²⁹ José Antonio Sepulveda faced charges of forgery, treachery, theft, swindling, and “possessing a character of notorious infamy.”³⁰

As evidence in the trial of the two men, statements made by several individuals in September were introduced. These statements were all made on September 4, prior to the notification in Nacogdoches that Haden Edwards’ grant had been rescinded. George Pollitt stated that he had overheard Norris and Sepulveda plotting to force the Edwards’ and their family out of their house and property.³¹ Samuel Isaacks corroborated this statement and reported that Norris had estimated that three companies of troops would be required to take Edwards.³² The administration of justice by Norris also was questioned. Radford Berry had stated in the presence of Joseph Durst that an armed guard had been posted at the door of the

²⁸ Impeachment Proceedings against Samuel Norris and José Antonio Sepulveda, November 24-26, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1515.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1511-1513.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1513-1514.

³¹ Statement by George Pollitt, September 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 215.

³² Statement of Samuel Isaacks (regarding Edwards’ house), September 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 216.

courthouse during the trial of an Italian man, and no one was allowed inside.³³ Joshua Robeson confirmed that Norris utilized this procedure.³⁴ Samuel Isaacks also confirmed this accusation, stating that on three separate occasions, Norris had ordered armed guards to deny the admittance of spectators who wished to observe legal the proceedings of certain trials.³⁵ A separate statement was also made regarding Norris' orders involving Haden Edwards. According to Robertson, he had acted as a translator between Luis Procela and Frost Thorn. Procela had told Thorn that the Alcalde of Nacogdoches had been give orders "not to interfere with the concerns of Col. Haden Edwards but to let him alone [and] observe his conduct."³⁶

The end of the trial came on Saturday, November 26. The court found Norris and Sepulveda guilty and "worthy of death," but decided to commute that sentence to denying each man the ability to ever serve in public office again.³⁷ Part of the reason for their decision to commute the sentences may have been reports they heard regarding don Manuel Santos who had supposedly recruited a group of approximately twenty-four locals and Indians to help put down the rebellion.³⁸ The court then appointed Joseph Durst to fill the office of alcalde until a proper election could be held.³⁹ Possibly due to the rumors of Santos and his men, they also

³³ Statement by Radford Berry, September 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 215.

³⁴ Statement by Joshua Robeson, September 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 219.

³⁵ Statement of Samuel Isaacks (regarding courthouse and armed guard), September 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 216.

³⁶ Statement of Joshua Robertson, September 4, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 217.

³⁷ Impeachment Proceedings against Samuel Norris and José Antonio Sepulveda, November 24-26, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1521-1522.

³⁸ The Post Master of Nacogdoches to the Post Master of Bexar, November 28, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 288.

³⁹ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 74.

began strengthening the Stone House and adding additional fortifications nearby.⁴⁰ The group then left town, promising to return again on December 15.⁴¹ The Fredonian Rebellion had begun.

3.4 Edwards' Men

Friends and relatives of Haden Edwards comprised a large number of the leaders of the rebellion. Reports concerning the identity of the principal leaders are varied, but a few names occur in every report. Martin Parmer, John S. Roberts and Burrell Thompson were identified by Samuel Norris as being the principal leaders of the initial action on November 22, 1826.⁴² John S. Roberts had been a land speculator in Louisiana prior to coming to Texas in 1826 to work with Haden Edwards in East Texas land speculation.⁴³

Other men involved in the insurrection included the brothers Herman B. and John W. Mayo. Herman Mayo acted as a member of the Committee of Arraignments in the trial of Norris and Sepulveda, in addition to serving as the trial clerk. John Mayo was one of the presiding officers of the trial itself.⁴⁴ In addition, Herman Mayo was married to Elizabeth Turner Edwards, daughter of none other than Haden Edwards.⁴⁵ United States consuls became aware of the disturbance in East Texas, and filed reports regarding what they had learned. According to

⁴⁰ The Post Master of Nacogdoches to the Post Master of Bexar, November 28, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 288.

⁴¹ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, November 28, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 291-292.

⁴² The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, November 28, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 291-292.

⁴³ Murrie, 128.

⁴⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 72.

⁴⁵ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 36.

David Dickson, the United States Consul Texas, the leaders not only included the Edwards brothers and Parmer, but also William B. Legon.⁴⁶

Joseph Durst and Francis Adams were not directly named as members of the rebellion, though they did accept positions as alcalde and constable in Nacogdoches from the rebels.⁴⁷ Durst did his best to explain the situation to José Antonio Saucedo, the Political Chief of Texas, on November 29. Durst informed Saucedo of the events that had transpired over the past week, and claimed that he was “decline[ing] to act as a judicial officer,” although he was maintaining control of the documents and archives of alcalde to ensure their protection.⁴⁸

There were conflicting opinions about the feelings and intentions of the general population among those who supported of the rebellion. Reports in the United States circulated that the cancellation of the Edwards grant was what had excited the population in Nacogdoches to revolt, and that several hundred men had assembled in Nacogdoches in order to march on San Antonio.⁴⁹ Those in Texas, such as Stephen F. Austin, continued to believe that this was not a true revolution against the government of Mexico, or against Mexican officials. Austin believed the action was caused by “the hatred of those people towards Gaines and Norris, and not any ill feeling against the Government.”⁵⁰ It was therefore, in his opinion, merely an attempt to remove corrupt or ineffectual leaders and replace them with stronger men who were still loyal to Mexico. In fact, among most of the participants, there was not be a strong desire to separate from Mexico. For most, their participation was really half-hearted. They sought mainly to

⁴⁶ David Dickson to Henry Clay, January 23, 1827, found in *Dispatches from US Consuls in Texas 1825-1844* (Washington, D.C.: The National Archives, 1958), 7.

⁴⁷ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, November 28, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 291-292.

⁴⁸ Joseph Durst to the Political Chief of Texas, November 29, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 294-295.

⁴⁹ David Dickson to Henry Clay, January 3, 1827, found in *Dispatches from US Consuls in Texas 1825-1844*, 6.

⁵⁰ Stephen F. Austin to José Antonio Saucedo, December 4, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1528.

protect the lands they had secured from possible confiscation by Mexican authorities after Edwards' grant had been cancelled.⁵¹

3.5 Cherokee

As Mexican authorities in San Antonio received word of the November confrontation, they became increasingly alarmed. The prospect of fighting an estimated forty armed civilians was not the largest concern; it was the loyalty of the local Indians. By December, Sepulveda had received promises from the Nadacos, Nacogdochitos, Tejas, Cashattas and other tribes in the area that they would fight alongside the Mexicans in suppressing the rebellion.⁵² Natives of the East Texas region, these tribes no doubt wished to expel those from the area who would, or had already, tried to dispossess them of their traditional tribal lands, including the Cherokee who were being relocated out of the United States and beginning to settle in Texas.

The Cherokee living in Texas had fled the United States hoping to secure land for themselves that would not be taken away by either settlers or the government. They had learned of the Spanish, and then Mexican empresario plan, and sent two representatives, Richard Fields and later John Dunn Hunter to Mexico City to attempt to secure lands for themselves.⁵³ While in Mexico City, the two met Haden Edwards.⁵⁴ Attempting to give Mexico cause to trust that the Cherokee would be faithful subjects, Fields induced the Cherokee to meet in his village on August 20, 1824 to sign a treaty that would recognize the authority of the Mexican government over them.⁵⁵ In Mexico City, John Dunn Hunter continued to apply for a land grant on behalf of the Cherokee. By 1826 there had been no resolution of the Cherokee's

⁵¹ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 42.

⁵² The Commanding Officer of the Militia of Nacogdoches to the political Chief of Texas, December 15, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 305-306.

⁵³ De Shields, 28.

⁵⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 45.

⁵⁵ Richard Fields to Juan Seguin, August 12, 1824, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume X*, page 376.

attempts to obtain land, and Fields felt that he and his tribe had been insulted by the Mexican government.⁵⁶ Norris had suspected the loyalty of the Cherokee already, especially after hearing reports that some of the troublemakers in the area had been trying to incite the local Indians to violence against the Mexican officials.⁵⁷ Two of those men may have been Joshua Robertson and Asa B. Edwards, another brother of Haden Edwards, who were planning a trip to meet with the Indians living around Nacogdoches on November 11, 1826.⁵⁸

3.6 Anglophobia Rears its Head

While in Mexico City, John Dunn Hunter met the British minister to Mexico, Henry Ward. Since 1823, Mexico and Britain had discussed British recognition of Mexican independence.⁵⁹ The British were also interested in blocking the expansion of the United States. Ward had personally gone to President Victoria in November of 1825, detailing locations of Anglo American settlement in Texas and alleging that agents of the United States in Mexico, including United States envoy Joel R. Poinsett, were attempting to influence the government of Mexico to relinquish territory, either directly or inadvertently.⁶⁰ Realizing the vulnerability of Texas, British agents had been working to prevent a complete Anglo-American takeover of the region. Arthur Goodall Wavell, an Englishman who had served under Iturbide in the Mexican Revolution, applied for and received a land grant in Northeast Texas.⁶¹ The Cherokee applied for land in

⁵⁶ Recount of a speech delivered by Fields in Austin's Colony, found in Stephen F. Austin to the political Chief of Texas, December 31, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 310-312.

⁵⁷ Letter from Richard Fields, August 12, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 186.

⁵⁸ Contract between Asa B. Edwards and Joshua Robertson and Moriano Sanchez, November 11, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 282.

⁵⁹ Reid, 8.

⁶⁰ J. Fred Rippy, "Britain's Role in the Early Relations of the United States and Mexico," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (February 1927): 13.

⁶¹ Reid, 18.

northern Texas along the Red River. Were that to be approved, Wavell's grant and the Cherokee would control the lands guarding the northern frontier of Texas, and could potentially block United States expansion southward.⁶²

Early in 1826, Henry Ward met with Hunter and advised him on how to be more successful in obtaining a land grant. Ward wrote out for Hunter a petition which he hoped would help convince the Mexican government to grant the Cherokee request. Ward then had Hunter copy the petition in his own handwriting, to make it seem as though Hunter had written it on his own.⁶³ On March 19, 1826, Ward outlined to George Canning, the British Foreign Minister, concerning a plan he had to secure the borders of Texas and prevent American expansion.⁶⁴ In the summer of 1826, after visiting British Minister Charles Vaughan, Wavell returned to Texas, stopping in Nacogdoches along the way.⁶⁵ At the end of April 1826, Norris had taken the statement of a Cherokee Indian that elements of several tribes were preparing for war against the local authorities. The Cherokee had also stated that "an Englishman" had visited with them and encouraged their participation in a revolt later that year, when he and his fellow insurgents would have sufficient supplies to carry out a prolonged revolt.⁶⁶ While the British government was no doubt not involved in the planning of the revolt, it is possible that some of the English settlers in the area may have seen an opportunity to protect their own investments, or ingratiate themselves to Edwards.

Ward had no plans to aid in any revolt, much less the Fredonian Rebellion. In fact, news of Edwards' actions unnerved him to the point that he accused United States envoy

⁶² Rippey, 15.

⁶³ Reid, 19.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁶ Declaration of a Cherokee Indian made on the 26 of April, 1826 relative to the revolutionary movements of certain Indian tribes and the instigation of an Englishman, April 26, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 168.

Poinsett of having something to do with the planning of the rebellion.⁶⁷ True, Ward helped Wavell and Hunter in their attempts to gain land grants. His hope had been to prevent further Anglo American expansion. Having a Cherokee grant along the Red River, next to the grant of an Englishman would prevent Anglo Americans from crossing into northern Texas. A successful revolution by the Edwards brothers would threaten that goal. In fact, Ward believed that the rebellion itself was the first step in a well planned strategy to incorporate Texas into the territory of the United States.⁶⁸ Should the rebellion have been successful, Ward's only chance to maintain his goal would be to ensure the new nation's independence, a task made all the more difficult by the involvement of so many Anglo Americans already.

3.7 Treaty of December 16, 1826

Technically, there had been no actual revolution in Nacogdoches, at least not a revolution with the intent of forming an independent nation. This would change on December 16, when Benjamin Edwards rode into Nacogdoches with around thirty armed men, raised a white and red flag proclaiming "Independence, Liberty, and Justice," and declared that the Fredonian Rebellion had officially begun.⁶⁹ Rather than trust that the Mexican government would restore Edwards' land grant, the Edwards brothers apparently decided that their best chance for saving their investment was in effecting a complete break from Mexico. Haden Edwards declared himself commander-in-chief of the new Republic of Fredonia, and Martin Parmer was appointed to command Fredonian military forces.⁷⁰ Other principal leaders were Burrell Thompson, John S. Roberts, Francis Adams, Joseph Durst, Chichester Chaplin, and Adolphus Sterne. According to these and other leaders, some 200 men eventually joined the

⁶⁷ Rippey, 16.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 74.

⁷⁰ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 67.

rebellion that day, although many may have only been trying to protect their own property from being confiscated by Edwards' men.⁷¹

On December 21, Parmer negotiated a treaty with the Cherokee which bound the two parties to support each other.⁷² The groundwork for this treaty had already been established in earlier discussions between the Cherokee and Edwards' supporters. For the Cherokee, Richard Fields and John Dunn Hunter signed, after being promised that they would receive land to settle on.⁷³ Brought back to the Fredonian camp, Haden Edwards and Herman B. Mayo also signed.⁷⁴ This alliance, if it held, could field a formidable force against any military units dispatched to quell the rebellion. After learning of the alliance between the Cherokee and the Fredonians, Stephen F. Austin exclaimed that he found it unbelievable that Edwards' followers would "league with barbarians and join a band of savages in a war of murder, massacre and desolution [*sic*]."⁷⁵

The formal Declaration of Independence came on December 25.⁷⁶ In this declaration, the rebels accused the Mexican government of "repeated insults, outrages, and oppressions" aimed specifically at "white and red immigrants from the United States." The group claimed not just the Edwards grant, but land all the way to the Rio Grande and ultimately the Rocky Mountains. A line running east to west was to be drawn across the territory, just north of Nacogdoches. The Cherokee would be able to freely settle above this line, while the Anglos would control the territory below. In addition, the declaration contained a statement about the

⁷¹ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 75.

⁷² Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 67.

⁷³ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 76.

⁷⁴ De Shields, 28-29.

⁷⁵ Stephen F. Austin to Burrell J. Thompson, December 24, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1539.

⁷⁶ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 42.

possibility of moving into and taking additional territory from Mexico.⁷⁷ The Committee of Independence which ratified the declaration consisted of Parmer, Haden and Benjamin Edwards, William Legon, John Sprowl, Burrell P. Thompson, Joseph A. Huber, Herman B. Mayo, Richard Fields, John Bags, Ne-Ko-Lake, Cuk-To-Keh, and John Dunn Hunter.⁷⁸ This alliance between Anglos and Indians was surprising, and at the same time, revolutionary. Many in both the United States and Mexico believed that all Indians were “savages” and uncivilized. The Edwards’ either did not hold this attitude themselves, or they saw the Cherokee as timely allies. In any event, the use of the flag, the top half white and the lower half red, had been yet another overture to the Cherokee. Edwards and his supporters hoped that the symbolism of the flag would help strengthen the alliance.

⁷⁷ “The Fredonian Declaration of Independence,” December 21, 1826, in *Documents of Texas History*, 59-60.

⁷⁸ Malcolm D. McLean, ed., *Papers Concerning Robertson’s Colony in Texas*, vol. 3, 38.

CHAPTER 4

THE FREDONIAN REBELLION COLLAPSES

4.1 Mexican Response

After the November 22 action, Mexico faced limited options. Negotiating would take a significant amount of time, and the rebels, who were at that point only rumored to be plotting full-scale rebellion, could strengthen their positions. Military action had to be taken. The now former militia commander, José Antonio Sepulveda headed to San Antonio shortly after his release to gather reinforcements. He became convinced that with fifty men he could return to Nacogdoches and pacify the rebels. Sepulveda's plan called for the use of brute force and planned to make an example of the perpetrators of this incident once he returned by leaving some of them "hanging on the trees."¹ After learning of the initial incident, Lieutenant Colonel Mateo Ahumada in San Antonio, the Military Commander in Texas, prepared a much larger force consisting of fifty dragoons and 110 infantry to march on Nacogdoches.² Learning that reinforcements were already heading out from San Antonio, Sepulveda decided to wait for the troops to arrive at San Felipe de Austin. He personally knew that there were several Indian tribes in the Nacogdoches area that were friendly to the Mexican nation and willing to assist in putting down the rebellion.³ Although it would take some time to march to Nacogdoches, the Mexican government wasted no time in organizing troops and dispatching them. In fact, to ensure success, the government was prepared to send more troops. The Political Chief of

¹ The Commander of the Militia of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, December 3, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 261-297.

² The Commanding Officer of Texas to Don Antonio Elosua, December 10, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 300-301.

³ The Commanding Officer of the Militia of Nacogdoches to the Political Chief of Texas, December 15, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 261-297.

Texas, José Antonio Saucedo even suggested that additional troops be brought in by way of Galveston to aid in suppressing the insurrection.⁴

4.2 Stephen F. Austin Responds

Stephen F. Austin responded quickly and shrewdly. One of his biggest fears was that the rebellion would cause the Mexican government to begin questioning the loyalty of every Anglo moving to Texas, and as a consequence, they might suspend the empresario program, or revoke the remaining land grants altogether. After learning about the removal of Norris and Sepulveda, Austin cautioned John A. Williams and Burrell Thompson of this, and stated that they were doing nothing but “building up the credit of their enemies.”⁵ He again tried to play the role of peacemaker on December 24, when he again wrote to Thompson suggesting two things that he could do to alleviate the anger of the Victoria government: disband the militia that had taken over Nacogdoches, and swear his personal loyalty to the government of Mexico.⁶

Austin also acted as an intermediary between those living in the Nacogdoches area who did not support the rebellion and the Mexican officials. Elisha Roberts wrote to Austin that the great majority of the people of Nacogdoches wished to help put down the rebellion. He estimated to Austin that there were really only thirty or so Anglo Americans actually siding with the Fredonians, but that “the Indians [were] formidable in numbers – Shawnees, Delawares, Socks [sic], Guipos and Cherokee.”⁷ Austin also attempted to send out a peace delegation to meet with the principal leaders of the rebellion. Austin hoped to entice them to lay down their arms and once again become loyal subjects of Mexico. The delegation included Abner

⁴ The Political Chief of Texas to the Military Commander of Texas, January 4, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 318.

⁵ Stephen F. Austin to John A. Williams and Burrell J. Thompson, December 14, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1532.

⁶ Stephen F. Austin to Burrell J. Thompson, December 24, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1539-1540.

⁷ Forwarded letter of Elisha Roberts to Stephen F. Austin, found in Stephen F. Austin to the political Chief of Texas, December 31, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 310-312.

Kuykendall, Richard Ellis, Francis W. Johnson and James Cummings. They were also joined by James Kerr, who had come from Green DeWitt's colony for the same purpose.⁸ Once the delegation arrived in Nacogdoches, they met with Haden and Benjamin Edwards, John Dunn Hunter, and another Cherokee, referred to only as Bassett. Edwards told the group "that the laws of war had been declared" and that they viewed the Mexican government as "*Corrupt Base, futile and faithless.*"⁹

Austin could not afford to wait long before deciding on a definite course of action for himself and his colony. If he waited too long before declaring his intention to support the Mexican government, he risked suspicion falling upon himself. On January 1, 1827, he again tried to reason with the conspirators, warning Thompson that his only hope was to back down as Mexican troops were heading out to put down the rebellion.¹⁰ On the same day, Austin also wrote to residents living in the Victoria vicinity, asking them to send volunteers to assist in retaking Nacogdoches from the Fredonians.¹¹ On January 4, Austin tried to appeal to John Dunn Hunter, informing him that the Cherokee had one last chance to avoid a war with Mexico, and it would require them to immediately break their alliance with the Fredonian rebels.¹² On January 22, 1827, Austin issued a proclamation in his colony stating that the rebels were inciting the Indians in the area and attempting to bring ruin to the surrounding lands and

⁸ De Shields, 31.

⁹ Richard Ellis, James Cummins, and James Kerr to Stephen F. Austin, January 22, 1827, in *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas*, vol. 3, 209-210.

¹⁰ Stephen F. Austin to Burrell J. Thompson, January 1, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1556-1557.

¹¹ Stephen F. Austin to Citizens of Victoria, January 1, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1558-1559.

¹² Stephen F. Austin to John Dunn Hunter, January 4, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1565.

colonies. He then ordered the militia be called up and prepare to march from San Felipe on January 26 to aid in suppressing the rebellion.¹³

4.3 Appeals for Outside Aid

Edwards and the Fredonians knew that a revolution against Mexico would be countered by military force. They immediately began seeking support from people outside the Nacogdoches region, hoping to entice enough supporters to effectively defend themselves against Mexico. Hoping to gain support from other empresarios already in Texas, the Fredonian Declaration of Independence promised to respect the grants already awarded by Mexican authorities, provided that the colonists and empresarios of those grants did not oppose their independence or withdraw “their aid and support to its accomplishment.”¹⁴

Benjamin Edwards began a one-man letter writing campaign, asking people he knew in the area to support the cause of Fredonian independence. He and Herman B. Mayo wrote an open letter to the residents at Pecan Point in far northeastern Texas, explaining why they forcibly entered Nacogdoches, removed Norris and Sepulveda, and initiated the independence movement. Using language which harkened back to the American Revolution, Edwards and Mayo made their case for revolution. They then appealed to the residents of Pecan Point to rally to their cause.¹⁵ He wrote to several specific individuals, particularly in Austin’s colony, each time attempting to explain why the Fredonians were justified in rebelling against the government, and attempting to persuade the individuals to offer aid and support. In virtually every letter, he declared that the rights and liberties of the citizens of Texas were at stake. He implied that this cause was as just as the American Revolution against Britain had been. To

¹³ White, 58.

¹⁴ “The Fredonian Declaration of Independence,” December 21, 1826, in *Documents of Texas History*, 59-60.

¹⁵ Benjamin W. Edwards and Herman B. Mayo to Inhabitants of Pecan Point, December 25, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1542-1545.

James Ross, Edwards went so far as to say “We call upon you and every American, as our brothers in a foreign land, to aid us in the holy cause.”¹⁶

The purpose of this language would not have been lost on Anglo Americans in this time period. The year 1826 was the jubilee year in the United States, and all over, celebrations had linked nostalgia for the revolutionary movement of 1776 with the new spirit of industrialization and expansion in the country. Author William Wirt had linked the movement of literary romanticism with the Revolution.¹⁷ Within the United States, the continued expansion of democracy to the lower classes fueled ideas of liberty in 1826, as the ordinary citizens began to see their own ability to be included in the growing economic and political opportunities.¹⁸

Use of the term “American,” as well as the references to the American Revolution and its spirit, confirmed the fears of Mexican officials who had grown suspicious of the number of Anglo-Americans that were living in Texas. Those fears were validated when the Fredonians began sending appeals for aid directly to the United States. In their requests for help, Haden Edwards and his supporters characterized the entire Mexican government as brutal, unjust and oppressive. Fifty years after the signing of the American Declaration of Independence, they were no doubt attempting to enlist aid from the citizens, if not the government, of the United States by playing on their patriotic sympathies. As word of the rebellion spread, United States newspapers began publishing stories that were somewhat pro-Fredonia in nature. The *Missouri Republican* published a letter from Benjamin F. Foster, claiming that the Fredonians were well organized. Foster went on to state that Martin Parmer was traveling to the United States in order to gather supplies for the rebels, and that John Dunn Hunter was actively organizing

¹⁶ Benjamin Edwards to James Ross, December 26, 1826, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1545-1546.

¹⁷ Andrew Burstein, *America's Jubilee* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

friendly Indians to support the cause.¹⁹ Hunter may also have been hoping for additional foreign aid. According to John Kerr, who notified Austin in late January 1827, Hunter was expecting a detachment of around 500 British volunteers to support the rebellion. Although Kerr thought such an occurrence seemed unlikely, he did warn Austin that he suspected the involvement of Englishmen and Frenchmen with organizing the rebellion.²⁰

Frustrated by the lackluster support he was actually receiving, Edwards next succeeded in angering the very people he was hoping to attract as allies. He appealed to the people of Ayish Bayou region and those living around the Attoyac River to volunteer and aid his cause. No one in either region apparently enlisted, causing Edwards to threaten to seize their property and expel them from the territory claimed by Fredonia.²¹ In early January 1827, he even dispatched two companies of armed men to begin confiscating the property of those who would not help the rebellion.²²

4.4 Responses from the Colonies

The response Haden Edwards and the Fredonian revolutionaries received from the residents of the Nacogdoches area was disappointing at best. For the vast majority of people, much more would be lost than gained by supporting a revolution against Mexico.²³ In fact, the two main reasons that few volunteered to aid Edwards included their fear of Mexican reprisal, and distrust of the Cherokee and other Indians, who might turn on them or raid their settlements

¹⁹ Benjamin F. Foster letter to the *Missouri Republican*, December 12, 1826, in *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas*, vol. 3, 184.

²⁰ Reid, 23.

²¹ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 78.

²² Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 45.

²³ David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 166.

while the militia was away.²⁴ Threatening to seize the property of those in the Ayish Bayou region had also caused some of the residents to take up arms against the rebellion.²⁵

The support that the Edwards brothers hoped for from across Texas never materialized. In Austin's colony, the citizens there rallied in support of the Mexican government and declared themselves ready to oppose the revolution by force as it was their duty to unite in opposition to "the mad conduct of ...desperate men."²⁶ Resolutions adopted by the Mina District in Austin's Colony declared their "firm resolution to support the Mexican Constitution and the state of Coahuila and Texas" against the men whom they considered to be "infamous characters."²⁷ Colonists in DeWitt's Colony also drafted statements denouncing the rebellion and affirming their loyalty to the Mexican government.²⁸

Settlers in the area around Victoria went even further in their declaration against the Fredonians. Like the other citizens of Austin's colony they stood ready to help suppress the rebellion, but also stated their belief that the act of declaring independence by Edwards and his followers was "an act of treason." They warned that such actions not only detracted from the name American, but also would cast suspicion over all other Anglo-American settlers in Texas.²⁹ Settlers, such as Jared E. Groce, attempting to prove their loyalty to their adopted country, offered their services in supplying and transporting the soldiers who were journeying

²⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 77.

²⁵ Kilman, 9.

²⁶ Resolutions of a Meeting Held in Austin's Colony Relative to the Revolutionary Movements at Nacogdoches, January 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 320.

²⁷ Declaration of Citizens of Austin's Colony of the District of Mina, January 4, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1568-1569.

²⁸ Resolution of Loyalty: Labaca Station in DeWitt's Colony, January 27, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1594-1595.

²⁹ Resolutions of a meeting Held in the District of Victoria Relative to the Revolutionary Movements of Nacogdoches, January 9, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 321-324.

eastward to stop the rebellion.³⁰ Others also suggested to Stephen F. Austin that in a campaign against the Fredonians, he should march out with the militia. These men hoped that Austin's presence and counsel might help bring about a peaceful resolution to the situation, without the need to resort to violence.³¹

4.5 Military Maneuvers Around Nacogdoches

In mid-December, Lieutenant Colonel Ahumada left San Antonio with 110 infantrymen to restore order in Nacogdoches. Arriving at San Felipe, he was joined by Austin and around 250 militiamen from Austin's colony.³² Without knowing exactly how many armed men awaited them, Austin, Ahumada, and José Antonio Saucedo, who was also traveling with the party, attempted to end the situation peacefully. Saucedo hoped to end the rebellion outright and offered amnesty to the Edwards brothers and their followers if they would lay down their arms. The Fredonians, or at least the Edwards brothers and other principal leaders, rejected the offer.³³ Ahumada and Saucedo each also attempted to convince the Cherokee chief, Richard Fields, to break the treaty with the Fredonians and thus significantly reduce their fighting strength. Saucedo wrote to Fields that all hope for obtaining a land grant was not yet lost for the Cherokee, but they must first swear their loyalty to Mexico and denounce Edwards and his supporters. Saucedo even offered Fields the benefit of the doubt regarding his position with the rebels, referring to word that the Cherokee had signed a treaty with the Fredonians as "rumors."³⁴

³⁰ Jared E. Groce to the Military Commander of Texas, January 22, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 333.

³¹ Randal Jones to Stephen F. Austin, January 3, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1561.

³² Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 41.

³³ White, 58.

³⁴ José Antonio Saucedo to Richard Fields, January 4, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1563-1564.

In Nacogdoches, Samuel Norris was attempting to drive the Fredonians out. He had learned from his brother Nathaniel that there were only ten or twelve rebels remaining in Nacogdoches at the fortified Stone House. He became convinced that a small number of men could easily retake the town and arrest the principal leaders of the rebellion, including Edwards.³⁵ On January 4, 1827, Samuel Norris raised a group of men and marched into Nacogdoches with the intention of turning out the few remaining Fredonians stationed there. Norris had with him around sixty men and estimated that the Fredonians numbered only around twenty. Though Norris' forces caught the men in the Stone House by surprise, Parmer and Hunter, the two Fredonian leaders in Nacogdoches at the time, counterattacked and forced Norris' men to retreat.³⁶

Around Nacogdoches, elements of the Mexican military and local militia units were also moving to stop the rebels. One of the leaders of those forces was Colonel Peter Ellis Bean, who had been a survivor of Philip Nolan's expedition into Texas in 1800. After his release, he had become an agent of the Spanish and then the Mexican military.³⁷ In addition to being loyal to the Mexican government, he also had a personal grudge against one of the leaders of the Fredonians, Martin Parmer. In August 1826, Parmer's wife Sarah had died. Shortly thereafter, he "married by bond" Candace Midkiff Bean, since there was no judge or priest available to formally marry the two. Candace Midkiff Bean was the "widow" of Peter Ellis Bean, who was rumored to have died in Mexico. Shortly after this relationship began it ended when word arrived that Peter Ellis Bean was indeed alive and on his way home.³⁸

³⁵ The Alcalde of Nacogdoches to the Military Commander of Texas, January 2, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 313.

³⁶ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 67.

³⁷ McDonald, *Texas: All Hail the Mighty State*, 42.

³⁸ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 64.

While Norris encountered little success in Nacogdoches, Bean concentrated on the Cherokee. He began by writing to Fields, suggesting that it was indeed possible that the Cherokee could still obtain a land grant of their own without the prospect of bloodshed.³⁹ Unable to drive a wedge between Edwards and his Cherokee ally, he next began to undermine Fields and Hunter's leadership. Bean met with two of the principal war chiefs, Big Mush and Bowles, and convinced them to lead the Cherokee in breaking their alliance with the Fredonians.⁴⁰ He may have been helped in his mission by Austin, who was also attempting to influence the Cherokee to change their allegiance. After writing to Hunter and receiving no reply, Austin wrote to the other Cherokee chiefs that Hunter had deceived them, stating that the Anglo settlers in Texas were "all united to a man in favor of the Mexican Government and [would] fight to defend it."⁴¹ By January 25, Bean had also reached an agreement with chiefs of the Delaware, Kikapoo, and Tabano by convincing them that they had been deceived by Fields and Hunter into accepting the alliance, and that they would be better off in remaining loyal to the Mexican government.⁴²

Residents of the Ayish Bayou region had begun joining the anti-Fredonian forces after the rebels had threatened to confiscate their property. Stephen Prather assembled a force of around sixty Indian and Anglo residents in early January 1827.⁴³ After learning of Fredonian forces sent into the region, and fearing that they were there to begin turning the inhabitants out of their homes, Prather and his men attacked the rebels. They quickly defeated them, taking

³⁹ Colonel Peter Ellis Bean to Richard Fields, January 4, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 314-315.

⁴⁰ Kilman, 9.

⁴¹ Stephen F. Austin to Cherokee Chiefs, January 24, 1827, in *The Austin Papers, Volume I*, 1592.

⁴² Colonel Peter Ellis Bean to the Military Commander of Texas, February 7, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, page 339.

⁴³ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 67-68.

around 100 prisoners in the process.⁴⁴ Realizing that the settlers of Texas were against them, that the Cherokee alliance had been broken, and that aid from the United States would not be forthcoming, on January 28, Haden Edwards and the remaining Fredonians abandoned Nacogdoches and headed toward Louisiana. Although Norris and others considered John A. Williams a problem, Williams raised forces to aid in dispersing and capturing the remaining rebels in the area. He sent out a party to cut off Edwards' escape, but succeeded in taking only one prisoner, Thomas Whitehead. Within a week the forces under Williams, Bean, and another local militia leader, Richard Kenny had joined forces, and they marched to Nacogdoches.⁴⁵

On February 1, loyalist citizens once again took control of Nacogdoches.⁴⁶ Ahumada, Saucedo, and Austin's forces numbering around 360 men, arrived in Nacogdoches a week later on February 8, where an additional 150 Anglo volunteers from the Ayish Bayou region joined them.⁴⁷ The prisoners taken at the end of the rebellion would likely have received death sentences had it not been for Austin. Recalling Saucedo's earlier amnesty offer, Austin convinced the Political Chief of Texas to pardon many rebel supporters, thus sparing their lives.⁴⁸ The only exceptions to the declaration of amnesty were Haden and Benjamin Edwards, Martin Parmer, and Adolphus Sterne, who had been accused of procuring supplies for the Fredonians.⁴⁹ To fully restore order and to assert the authority of the Mexican nation over any

⁴⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Spoiling For a Fight*, 79.

⁴⁵ John A. Williams to the Military Commander of Texas, February 12, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 343-345.

⁴⁶ Edmund Morris Parsons, "The Fredonian Rebellion," *Texana* 5: 1 (1967): 35.

⁴⁷ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 41.

⁴⁸ De Shields, 32.

⁴⁹ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 43.

residents who still had doubts, Ahumada and Saucedo remained in Nacogdoches through March 1827.⁵⁰

4.6 Aftermath in Nacogdoches

After the rebels were driven off and order was restored to the area, several residents had to account for their actions during the rebellion. Joseph Durst had been appointed Alcalde of Nacogdoches by the rebellion. Almost immediately after the November removal of Samuel Norris, he had written to Saucedo explaining what had happened and why he had taken the office, stating that no one else had offered to claim it. He claimed that he had reluctantly accepted the position and had done so hoping to prove himself “a good citizen” of Mexico.⁵¹ Frost Thorn wrote to the Mexican authorities that, although he was in Nacogdoches in December when the rebels returned, he personally took no part in the actual rebellion. He went on to dispute rumors that he had joined the rebellion and gone to New Orleans to secure supplies were false, and that he had merely been in New Orleans to obtain supplies for the store he ran in town. It was his familial relationship with Edwards that he feared would cause the Mexican government to believe those rumors and he had therefore sent for his family to join him in Louisiana until they could return to Texas.⁵²

Some residents of the area claimed that they had been forced to serve with the rebels or to supply them. They feared that their unwilling participation in the rebellion would result in their being branded as traitors and that they would be accused of helping to plan and organize the rebellion. Thomas Hastings declared officially that his service in the Fredonia militia had been forced, that his name had been added to the revolt without his consent. Fearing what

⁵⁰ David Dickson to Henry Clay, April 25, 1827, found in *Dispatches from US Consuls in Texas 1825-1844*, 9.

⁵¹ Joseph Durst to the Political Chief of Texas, November 29, 1826, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 294-295.

⁵² Frost Thorn to the Political Chief of Texas, February 18, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 348-349.

Edwards might have done while he was in control of Nacogdoches, Hastings served in the militia hoping only to protect his property from being confiscated by the Fredonians.⁵³ Others claimed that their purpose was merely to remove unscrupulous local officials. For some it may have been true, but Martin Parmer also made this claim.⁵⁴ Given his leadership in the brief Republic of Fredonia, it is doubtful.

Civil authority returned to Nacogdoches, yet it remained precarious. Samuel Norris was restored to the position of alcalde by Saucedo, but on July 15 the Ayuntamiento of Nacogdoches removed him. At the same time, the Ayuntamiento issued a proclamation intended to keep peace in the city. After lights out was sounded, individuals were prohibited from riding through town. Citizens and travelers arriving in town after lights out were to dismount and walk their horses through the streets. Citizens were required to inform the authorities if they were lodging any visitors to Nacogdoches. An assembly of more than three persons in the streets after sundown was forbidden, and it became illegal to walk the streets armed, regardless of the time of day.⁵⁵ Although the authorities took these actions to forestall another rebellion, some of these measures seemed harsh, and no doubt angered some of the residents, particularly those who had not participated in the Fredonian Rebellion.

⁵³ Thomas Hastings to the Colonel Commanding Nacogdoches, February 5, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 337-338.

⁵⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 67.

⁵⁵ Proclamation in Nacogdoches, July 15, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 394-395.

CHAPTER 5

CONSEQUENCES OF THE REBELLION

5.1 Measures in Texas

While Spanish responses to perceived threats against Texas had usually been shortsighted, the Mexican response to the Fredonian Rebellion had been much more aggressive. To suppress the rebellion, Mexican authorities prepared to use a significant number of regular troops. They also prepared to use local militia volunteers. These militia units had been in a better position to respond, being closer to the actual rebellion, were also well armed, and ultimately they drove the Fredonians out of Nacogdoches. Anastasio Bustamente, the general commanding the Eastern Internal Provinces, commended those he called “our worthy, fellow citizens” specifically naming Bean, Austin, and Williams, for their great service to the country of Mexico.¹ However, Mexican trust of the Anglos in Texas had been severely damaged. Rather than bring in the families and productive citizens that the Mexican government had intended, Edwards was merely interested in land speculation, as were most of his ardent supporters. That they had resorted to armed revolt in an effort to secure their profits was bad enough. Although the rebellion had collapsed, an organized, well armed force might have been much harder to defeat. Realizing this, Bustamente informed Lieutenant Colonel Mateo Ahumada that the military would be sending more troops, artillery, and cavalry units to Texas after the Fredonian Rebellion.²

¹ The General Commanding the Eastern Internal Provinces to the Military Commander of Texas (regarding the Pacification of the Frontier), March 9, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume XI, page 355.

² The General Commanding the Eastern Internal States to the Military Commander of Texas (regarding additional troops ordered to Texas), March 9, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume XI, pages 353-354.

Mexican troops were placed in Nacogdoches on a permanent basis. Ahumada had brought with him to Nacogdoches the Twelfth Permanent Battalion and they remained in Nacogdoches under the command of José de las Piedras.³ The intent was for these troops to be used to secure the border and maintain law and order in the area. However, falling into the same patterns as the Spanish, the Mexican government once again began to ignore Texas, and as a result, disregarded the needs of the soldiers in Nacogdoches. Supplies were not sent at regular intervals, leaving the soldiers to have to fend for themselves. These troops soon began confiscating materials and supplies from the local stores in Nacogdoches, once again angering local residents.⁴

The Fredonian Rebellion elicited excited responses from across Mexico. One Mexican official believed that threats across Mexico's northern territories, New Mexico and California especially, were identical to the threat that had just been faced in Texas.⁵ Others within the Mexican national government looked beyond the borders of Texas toward the United States with suspicion. Around the same time as the rebellion, the United States had sent Joel Poinsett to Mexico with an offer to purchase portions of Texas for the United States.⁶ Although the original mission had merely been a political ploy by the John Quincy Adams' administration to try and gain favor among voters interested in Anglo American expansion, Poinsett took his mission seriously and persisted in his attempts. When President Andrew Jackson increased the offer of the United States from one million to five million dollars, Mexican suspicion increased as well.⁷ Legislators in one Mexican state almost immediately proposed that the national

³ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 43.

⁴ Weber, 110.

⁵ Ibid., 181.

⁶ Archie P. McDonald, "Texas Independence," in *The Texas Heritage, Third Edition*, ed. Ben Procter and Archie P. McDonald (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1998), 32.

⁷ McDonald, *Texas: All Hail the Mighty State*, 63.

government begin relocating loyal citizens into a band fifty leagues wide along the border with the United States to protect the sovereignty of Mexican territory.⁸

5.2 Terán Expedition

The Fredonian Rebellion increased calls for the Mexican government to send an official to study the situation in Texas, observe any problems which existed, and then offer suggestions on what could be done to correct them.⁹ In order to determine what exactly was going on in Texas, the government appointed General Manuel de Mier y Terán to head the Boundary Commission in assessing the Mexican frontier, determining how to provide for its security, and how as well as where additional garrisons should be placed.¹⁰

During the Terán expedition, the team carefully observed the people of Texas, both Anglo-American and Mexican. After arriving at San Felipe in 1828, one member of the expedition remarked that the beginnings of a war which would result in Mexico's loss of Texas would begin there.¹¹ Terán himself focused a great deal of his attention on the Anglos who were pouring into Texas from the United States. He entered Texas with preconceptions that the territory was in danger of revolting entirely from Mexico. What he saw confirmed his suspicions and troubled officials in Mexico City. Across Texas, Terán found scores of Anglo-American settlers both indigent and prosperous.¹²

Writing from Nacogdoches during the summer of 1828, Terán stated that "as one travels from Béjar to this town, Mexican influence diminishes, so much so that it becomes clear that in this town that influence is almost nonexistent."¹³ In Nacogdoches itself, he found that the

⁸ Weber, 181.

⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁰ Jack Jackson, Introduction to *Texas by Terán*, Jack Jackson, ed. trans. John Wheat (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000), 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ Manuel de Mier y Terán to the President of Mexico, June 30, 1828, in *Texas by Terán*, 97.

local government was still incapable of performing its responsibilities. "Foreigners from every nation have this frontier of our federation open to them to enter," he wrote, also noting that foreigners "settle where it suits them, and they take over whatever land they desire without the alcalde's approval and in defiance of the laws of colonization and of the rights of prior ownership."¹⁴ On one leg of his journey, Terán even ran across a settlement near the Trinity River which held fifty eight families and had been established "without the authorities' knowledge."¹⁵

By the end of his mission, Terán determined that San Antonio, La Bahía, and Nacogdoches, after decades of Spanish and Mexican rule, remained the only centers of concentration of Mexican citizens in Texas. The other settlements and towns which had sprung up were overwhelmingly populated by Anglo-Americans and even within these three communities, the Anglo influence was too great in Terán's opinion. According to his estimates, only around 4,000 Mexican citizens actually lived in Texas, and with the large numbers of Anglos moving in, he believed that Mexico must consider Texas as having virtually no Mexican settlement within it whatsoever.¹⁶ In fact, by 1835 there would be an estimated 30,000 colonists from the United States living in Texas, compared with just 7,800 from Mexico.¹⁷

After returning to Mexico City, Terán submitted his recommendations for strengthening Mexican control of Texas and securing the border with the United States. He divided his recommendations into political and military measures. Three of his political recommendations involved immigration: transporting convicts to Texas to serve out their sentences and then settle there, encouraging more Mexican families to move into Texas, and encouraging Swiss

¹⁴ Manuel de Mier y Terán to the Secretary of Foreign Relations, July 7, 1828, in *Texas by Terán*, 104.

¹⁵ Diary entry of Manuel de Mier y Terán, December 14, 1828, in *Texas by Terán*, 13.

¹⁶ Jackson, Introduction to *Texas by Terán*, 34-35.

¹⁷ Richmond, 151.

and German immigration to Texas, since they had a different language and customs than the Anglo settlers. The fourth political measure was to encourage more trade between Texans and the rest of Mexico in order to strengthen economic bonds.¹⁸ Military measures included reinforcing the existing garrisons, moving troops from their encampments along the Rio Grande to the Nueces River, setting up a garrison between Nacogdoches and San Antonio, occupying a point north of Galveston, and forming a mobile force that could rapidly be moved to any troubled spot.¹⁹ Others joined Terán in suggesting that the government suspend colonization contracts to citizens of the United States and that those colonies already operated by Anglo empresarios be closely watched.²⁰

5.3 Law of April 6, 1830

The Fredonian Rebellion directly caused Terán's expedition. Most of that expedition's recommendations were adopted by Anastasio Bustamante's government in the Law of April 6, 1830. It attempted to establish firm control over the territory in order to fully protect it from outside pressures. Several articles within the law troubled the Texas colonists. Among them were increased oversight which would determine to what extent each empresario had complied with his contract, provisions which would allow Mexico to increase Mexican settlement in the region by transporting "convict-soldiers" to the area, and the end of the importation of slaves into Texas. The law also prohibited settlers from adjoining countries into the provinces bordering those countries.²¹ Although no specific country was mentioned, it was clear to everyone, and it had been the goal of the Mexican government, to prevent any more Anglo Americans from entering Texas.

¹⁸ Donoho, 90-91.

¹⁹ Ibid., 89-90.

²⁰ Jack Jackson, Epilogue to *Texas by Terán*, 180-181.

²¹ "The Law of April 6, 1830," April 6, 1830, in *Documents of Texas History*, 66-67.

Further efforts to restrict Anglo settlement to Texas resulted in a survey of the requirements of the empresarios and their grants, and their success up to that point. After a careful evaluation of each colony, all of the empresario grants were declared by a government commission to be incomplete and therefore suspended under the law, with the only exceptions being the colonies of Austin and Green DeWitt.²² This law began angering the Texans, both Anglo and Mexican. They had immigrated to the territory with specific goals in their own minds. Anglo Americans, especially the empresarios themselves, had been caught up in the practice of speculation, buying land at cheap prices, hoping to sell it at a profit. Restricting further immigration from the United States thwarted these goals. The settlers in Texas also perceived their rights and liberties were violated, and would later accuse the soldiers and government officials of overstepping their bounds and unduly harassing law abiding citizens. Ultimately, the severity of the law and its unpopular provisions, problems with its administration, as well as inconsistent rulings and orders related to the law heightened the distrust and anger of the Texas colonists toward Mexico.²³

5.4 What Ever Happened To...

The Edwards brothers fled Nacogdoches for Louisiana at the end of the rebellion. Benjamin Edwards never returned to Texas after that. Instead, he moved to Mississippi where in 1836 he helped raise funds to support the Texas Revolution. In 1837, Benjamin Edwards ran for the governor of Mississippi, but died during the campaign at age fifty-seven.²⁴ In 1827 Haden Edwards defamed the character of both Stephen F. Austin and the Baron de Bastrop, who he believed had been responsible for the failure of his enterprise. It had been Austin who had suggested that Texas separate from Mexico and join the United States. Yet Edwards believed that when he had been forced to fight the Mexican government, Austin had abandoned

²² Jackson, Epilogue to *Texas by Terán*, 181.

²³ Ibid., 184.

²⁴ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 46.

him.²⁵ Eventually, he returned to Texas. In 1835, land commissioner James Bowie granted him eleven leagues of land in northeast Texas within John T. Mason's empresario grant.²⁶ He continued speculating in lands, and in 1839 offered for sale 400 shares of five lots each in the town of Fredonia, and also in the town of Cotton Plant at \$100 each.²⁷ Haden Edwards died on August 14, 1849 in Nacogdoches.²⁸

Cherokee chiefs Richard Fields and John Dunn Hunter met more gruesome fates. For their part in the rebellion, Richard Fields and John Dunn Hunter were killed by their fellow Cherokee who felt they had been deliberately misled by the pair.²⁹ No record exists showing whether or not Martin Parmer ever stood trial for the murder of Moton Askins.³⁰ After the collapse of the Fredonian Rebellion, Parmer fled first to the town of Gonzales and then to Louisiana. He too eventually returned to Texas, receiving a land grant in 1835 after being pardoned by Mexican authorities. In 1836, he was selected as a delegate to the Congress convening at Washington on the Brazos, and was one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence.³¹

Henry Ward, the British diplomat who had schemed to thwart United States expansion and had been an acquaintance of John Dunn Hunter, likely had nothing to do with the planning or execution of the Fredonian Rebellion. Ward was recalled to London in early 1827. In

²⁵ Haden Edwards to _____, November 22, 1827, in *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas*, vol. 3, 306-312.

²⁶ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 46.

²⁷ Notice of Terms of Sale for the Towns of Fredonia and Cotton Plant, November 14, 1839, manuscript in the *Haden Edwards Papers*, Box 5, Folder 9.

²⁸ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 47.

²⁹ The General Commanding the Eastern Internal States to the Military Commander (ad interim) of Texas, March 20, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection*, Volume XI, page 363.

³⁰ Ericson and Ericson, *Personalities on the East Texas Frontier*, 65.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

leaving, he failed to realize his goals of blocking Anglo expansion.³² Only nine Anglo-Americans were ever arrested for having supported the rebellion. They were: John W. Mayo, William Wilson, Horatio Seymour, R. D. Piaty, Thomas Whitehead, David Onstet, C. H. Harrison, J. P. Smith, and Adolphus Sterne. Only Whitehead, Onstet, Harrison, Smith, and Sterne had actually been captured during their retreat, the rest were merely suspected of aiding the rebels.³³ Even among these nine, only Sterne was sent to trial, found guilty of aiding the rebellion, and sentenced to death. However, in another moment of generosity, the Mexican government offered to parole Sterne, with his pledge that he would never again take up arms against Mexico.³⁴

5.5 Nacogdoches, Opening Shot in the Texas Revolution

Nacogdoches, as well as the rest of Texas, continued to experience a heavy influx of Anglo American immigrants after the Fredonian Rebellion.³⁵ Events in Mexico soon worsened the situation in Texas. A series of revolts and power sharing agreements weakened the ability of the national government to exert full control over Texas.³⁶ When Santa Anna initiated his overthrow of the Mexican government in 1832, the citizens of Nacogdoches demanded that Colonel José de las Piedras declare for Santa Anna, but he refused. After appealing for aid, the settlers in the region defeated Piedras in the Battle of Nacogdoches, which effectively cleared East Texas of any substantial Mexican military forces.³⁷

The Texas Revolution owes much to the history of Spanish and Mexican Texas. What was important to the Spanish was the presumed ownership of the land, not actual control over

³² Reid, 25.

³³ Samuel Richard Kenny to the Military Commander of Texas, February 9, 1827, in the *Robert Bruce Blake Research Collection, Volume XI*, pages 340-341.

³⁴ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 43.

³⁵ Ibid., 45.

³⁶ Richmond, 141-144.

³⁷ Ericson, *The Nacogdoches Story*, 45.

it. Had actual control been a concern, as it should have been, Spain would have vigorously pursued development of frontier outposts in towns such as Nacogdoches early on, which would have resulted in proper government oversight, including the complete issuance of land titles. Although the actions of Anglo filibusters garnered the attention of the Spanish, these expeditions into Texas did not present a threat great enough to force the Spanish to fortify the region. While the Spanish no doubt wished to establish control over their colonial borders, they were either unable or unwilling to divert their limited resources to accomplish this task in Texas. Even with the increasing participation of Anglo Americans, controlling the local population remained the major concern. The Spanish could even consider the Gutiérrez-Magee expedition as an internal revolt, rather than outside forces attempting to take Texas.

Mexican independence changed the way its national government perceived Texas. Although still sparsely populated, Mexico formulated plans to increase the population of Texas. Even though there was still an insufficient number of troops and government authorities in Texas, the Fredonian Rebellion demonstrated the change in attitude that had occurred in Mexico City. This revolt, clearly engineered by Anglo Americans, had virtually no aid, inducement, or willing support from established citizens of Mexico. It emerged from the empresario system which was supposed to have been a more efficient means of promoting Texas settlement. The Mexican government believed that the empresarios would introduce families who were willing to become law abiding Mexican citizens. The Mexican government believed immigrants from other countries would easily assimilate the local language, religion, and customs.

What happened instead was a clash of economic and social ideas. The empresarios who came were not interested in promoting social development in Texas. Their plans were to act as land speculators and intermediaries between the Mexican government and the new settlers. By doing so, they hoped to make a large profit in a short amount of time. Some of the settlers these empresarios brought in were speculators themselves, hoping to turn around and

sell the land to more newcomers. Tensions between these two forces finally boiled over in Nacogdoches. Haden Edwards and his supporters were all motivated by the threat of losing their investment, which was substantial, and losing the potential profit they could earn from the colony. Had the rebellion truly been about the ideas of "Independence, Liberty, and Justice," the initial actions in November would have immediately resulted in a declaration of independence. Instead, the revolutionaries waited until December, as they saw their opportunity to salvage their investments slip away. Mexican authorities promptly moved to quell what at first was an insurrection against the local authorities in Nacogdoches but quickly turned into an outright revolution intended to separate the whole of Texas from Mexico.

In the end, no military action against the rebels became necessary. The rebellion collapsed quickly, as some of its initial supporters, most notably the Cherokee Indians, deserted. Anticipated support from other colonists, who were already well established in neighboring colonies, never materialized. But the impact of the Fredonian Rebellion changed the course of events in Texas dramatically. As a result of the actions taken by the Edwards' brothers and their supporters, Mexican authorities determined that the Texas frontier must be more closely guarded. The Terán expedition confirmed fears within Mexico City that the Anglo Americans could soon be in a position to revolt en masse and sever Texas from the nation. Had it not been for the Fredonian Rebellion, Mexico may not have passed the Law of April 6, 1830, which, rather than resolve the Texas problem in Mexico's favor, instead fanned the flames of distrust among the Anglo settlers and ultimately became a major factor in the causes of the Texas Revolution. Without any doubt, the Fredonian Rebellion, limited in scale and completely unsuccessful during the winter of 1826-1827, altered the histories of Texas, Mexico, and even the United States.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

After graduating from Ennis High School in 1997, John Wesley Strunc attended Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Double majoring in History and Political Science, Strunc earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in December of 2001. He began teaching at Springtown High School in January of 2002. In August of 2002, he began teaching United States History at Duncanville High School. As of 2009, Strunc remains at Duncanville High School, teaching both Advanced Placement US History and Honors US History. He began working on his Master of Arts degree in the spring of 2007. His major areas of research during that time include: the Munich Conference, Paul Robeson's role in the Civil Rights Movement, and the Fredonian Rebellion. Having not only a love of history, but also a love of telling others about history, Strunc plans to continue teaching on the high school level.