

The Vital Contribution of Texas in the Winning of the American Revolution

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An Essay on a Forgotten Chapter in the Spanish Colonial History of Texas

PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD, THANKS TO HOLLYWOOD MOVIES AND TELEVISION, know about the great Texas longhorn cattle drives out of South Texas to the railheads in Kansas and elsewhere during the years following the Civil War. Very few people,

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however, are aware of the historical fact that Texas longhorns were trailed by Spanish Texans nearly one hundred years before the time usually ascribed to cattle drives. Although a few historians have known and written about the Texas cattle drives to Louisiana from 1779 to 1782, only in relatively recent years has their main purpose been discovered, which makes them doubly significant. The first formally authorized drives out of Texas went east, not north, and their purpose was to provide food for the Spanish forces of General Bernardo de Gálvez (after whom Galveston is named), who fought and defeated the British along the Mississippi River and along the Gulf Coast from Louisiana to Florida during the American Revolution.¹

When Americans think of the American Revolution, they think usually in terms of the events that occurred in the thirteen English colonies. Important as they were, they do not tell the whole story. An oft-neglected part of it concerns the vital role of Spain in the American Revolution.² A generally unknown sidebar to that story is the unique and interesting way that Texas—its soldiers, ranchers, and citizens—contributed to the winning of the war for independence.³ Overlooked by most historians much too long, the contribution of Spain, Texas included, was vital in the winning of American independence over two hundred years ago.

If the average Texan or American were asked what was going on in Texas during the American Revolution, the response would probably be varied. Some might answer that there was a big *fiesta*. Others might respond that there was a *siesta*. Most, however, would more likely say that *nothing* was happening. But Spanish archival records indicate that there was far more activity in Texas than is generally acknowledged among the public and in history textbooks.⁴

One of the most interesting and significant records, for example, is the muster roll for the company of cavalry stationed at Presidio San Antonio de B́exar on the Fourth of July 1776. While fifty-six Americans affixed their signatures to the Declaration of Independence at the old State House in Philadelphia, eighty-two Texans were listed on the muster roll for Presidio San Antonio de B́exar, on the site where the Spanish Governor's Palace and City Hall are today on the Plaza de Armas in downtown San Antonio. Included were El Barón de Ripperdá, who was both the governor of Texas and captain of the presidio; three lieutenants; two sergeants; six corporals; and seventy soldiers. Most interestingly, the muster roll tells what each soldier was doing on that significant day. Twenty were present for duty at the *presidio*, or fort; twenty-four were "*en la caballada*," or out guarding the presidial horseherd; fourteen were "*en reconocimiento de Indios*," or out reconnoitering Indians; twenty were detached to "*el fuerte del Zivolo*" (Fort of the Ćibolo), a small outpost of the Presidio de B́exar situated midway between San Antonio and La Bahía (now called Goliad); and four men were

dispatched to San Luís Potosí to carry the mail and bring back the military payroll. The document was signed and dated at Presidio San Antonio de Béxar by Texas Governor Barón de Ripperdá on "*4 de julio de 1776*." This document gives one a good idea of what was going on in Texas at this special time in history.⁵

It should be remembered that most of the Western Hemisphere, including Texas, belonged to Spain from 1492 until 1821, a span of time exceeding three centuries. In 1691, Texas received both its official designation as *la provincia de Texas ó las nuevas Filipinas* (the Province of Texas or the New Philippines) and its first governor, Domingo Terán de los Ríos, who among other achievements, is remembered for officially establishing the *Camino Real* (or King's Highway) in Texas.⁶

At the time of the American Revolution, Spain owned or claimed all the land of the North American continent west of the Mississippi River, including Alaska, where the names of two cities, Valdez and Cordova, still persist, plus the "Island of New Orleans," as it was then called. This vast territory, extending from Panama indefinitely northward, was called *Nueva España* (New Spain). The viceroyalty of New Spain was divided into *provincias*, or political provinces. Extending from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of México were the northernmost provinces of California, Sonora, Nueva Vizcaya, Nuevo México, Nueva Extremadura (or Coahuila), Nuevo León, Nuevo Santander, and Texas. A line of *presidios* (forts) to protect the northern frontier of New Spain stretched all the way from the Gulf of California to the Gulf of México.

The province of Texas extended generally from the Nueces River on the south and west to the Red River on the north and east, and from the Gulf of México on the south to the "Arctic snows" on the north—quite a large chunk of territory that would theoretically include much of the western United States and Canada. Practically speaking, however, the Plains Indians imposed limits that were unequivocal, and settlements were unable to expand north of the *Camino Real* between San Antonio and Nacogdoches. From 1721 to 1773, the capital of the province of Texas was at Los Adaes near present Robeline, Louisiana. From 1773 until 1821, the end of the Spanish colonial period, the capital was at San Antonio de Béxar.⁸ The *Casas Reales* (Royal Houses), situated on the east side of the *Plaza de las Islas* (commonly known as Main Plaza), served as the seat of government and the residence of the governor of the province of Texas.⁹ [What is called the Spanish Governor's Palace today was actually the *comandancia*, or headquarters, of the Presidio de Béxar.]

In the province of Texas during the American Revolution period were the *presidios* at San Antonio de Béxar, at La Bahía (now Goliad), and a little fort between them called El Fuerte del Cibolo. There were but three civil settlements in Texas during this period: the Villa de San Fernando de Béxar (now San Antonio), established by the

Canary Islanders in 1731; the settlement that developed around Presidio La Bahía; and the temporary settlement for displaced Adaesanos called the Villa de Bucareli (1774-1779), near present Antioch in Madison County, which was moved in 1779 to become the Villa de Nacogdoches.¹⁰

A composite picture of Texas in 1779, therefore, would look something like this: About three thousand Spanish citizens lived in and around the settlements at Béxar, La Bahía, and Nacogdoches. There were five active missions near Béxar and two at La Bahía. About eighty soldiers were on active duty at Presidio San Antonio de Béxar, and about sixty were stationed at Presidio La Bahía. Between these two presidios was the small outpost of El Fuerte del Cíbolo, where twenty soldiers from Béxar were detached to guard the many Spanish ranches in the area. The San Antonio River Valley was filled out with ranches belonging to the missions of Béxar and La Bahía and to private individuals who had received them by royal land grant. On these ranches grazed great numbers of cattle—progenitors of the Texas longhorn—that provided the connection between Texas and the American Revolution.¹¹

A more unique and interesting sidelight to the history of the American Revolution could happen “Nowhere Else But Texas,” where truth is often stranger—and much more interesting—than fiction, explained as follows.

After the Battle of Saratoga, which school history books describe as “the turning point of the American Revolution,” France, Spain, and Holland joined the American colonists in their fight against Great Britain. After Spain decided to declare war against Great Britain on May 8, 1779, King Carlos III commissioned Louisiana Governor Bernardo de Gálvez to raise and lead Spanish forces in a campaign against the British along the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi River. Accordingly, Gálvez proceeded to raise an army of fourteen hundred men, which by 1781 had swelled to more than seven thousand.¹² Then, as now, the military axiom that “an army travels on its stomach” held true.

But Gálvez knew where the food supply was; better yet, he knew where there was a veritable “traveling commissary” for his troops. Ten years earlier, as a young lieutenant, Gálvez had been stationed in Chihuahua, where he led Spanish troops in several campaigns against Apaches, once going as far as the Pecos River near present Horsehead Crossing. While in Chihuahua, which was the military headquarters for all northern New Spain, Gálvez first learned of the existence of great herds of cattle that roamed the numerous ranches between Béxar and La Bahía in the province of Texas. In 1778, after a visit to Texas, frontier diplomat Athanase de Mézières reported to Governor Gálvez about the great abundance of cattle on the Béxar-La Bahía ranches. At that time,

however, Texas cattle were prohibited from export to the neighboring provinces and were worth only three to four pesos a head, valued mainly for their hides, tallow, or local consumption, which could not make a dent in their great numbers, estimated to be in the tens or possibly hundreds of thousands.¹³

In order to feed his troops, Gálvez sent an emissary, Francisco García, with a letter to the new Texas Governor Domingo Cabello, both requesting and formally authorizing the first official cattle drive out of Texas. García arrived in San Antonio de Béxar on June 20, 1779, and by August, two thousand head of Texas cattle, gathered from the mission and private ranches in the Béxar-La Bahía region, were on their way to Gálvez's forces in Louisiana. Instrumental in the effort to secure large numbers of Texas cattle was Fray Pedro Ramírez de Arellano of Mission San José, the *Padre Presidente* (Father President) of all the Texas missions, who gave his permission and blessing for missions to provide most of the beef, the largest supplier being Mission Espíritu Santo of La Bahía.¹⁴

During the remainder of the American Revolution (1779-1782), some ten to fifteen thousand head of Texas cattle were rounded up on the ranches between Béxar and La Bahía, taken to La Bahía, and assembled into trail herds of about one thousand each. From La Bahía, Texas beef were trailed northeastward to Nacogdoches, Natchitoches, and thence to Opelousas for distribution to the Spanish forces under Gálvez.¹⁵

Spanish Texas *rancheros* and their *vaqueros*, many of whom were mission Indians, trailed these cattle. *Soldados* (Soldiers) from Presidio San Antonio de Béxar, El Fuerte del Cíbolo, and Presidio La Bahía escorted the herds. Several hundred head of horses were also sent along for cavalry and artillery purposes. Extant records even indicate that a few soldiers from Texas were recruited to fight with Gálvez's army.¹⁶

The upshot of the story is this: Fueled in part by Texas beef—Texas longhorns, no less—Spanish troops took to the field and waterways in the late summer of 1779 and defeated the British in battles at Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez.¹⁷ (This sounds like the Civil War, but it isn't. It's the American Revolution!)

Early the next year, after a month-long siege by land and sea, Gálvez, with more than two thousand men under his command, captured the British stronghold of Fort Charlotte at Mobile on March 14, 1780.¹⁸

(map reference on map.pdf page)

The climax to the Gulf Coast campaign occurred the following year when Gálvez directed a two-pronged land and sea attack on Pensacola, the British capital of West Florida. More than seven thousand men, including a part of the French fleet, were involved in the two-month siege of Fort George before its capture on May 10, 1781.¹⁹

Although the war for independence was practically over for the Americans when Lord Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, the war was not over for the Spaniards. After the victory at Pensacola, Gálvez organized another expedition, which on May 8, 1782, captured the British naval base at New Providence in the Bahamas. He was preparing for a grand campaign against Jamaica when peace negotiations resulting in the Treaty of Paris of 1783 ended the war.²⁰

By creating a third front and defeating the British along the Gulf Coast, Gálvez and his Spanish forces made it much easier for George Washington and his Continental Army to fight and finally defeat the British along the eastern seaboard. Additionally, Gálvez controlled New Orleans and held open the Mississippi River, which served as a veritable lifeline for men, money, arms, ammunition, military equipment, and medical supplies to reach the embattled soldiers under Washington and George Rogers Clark.²¹

While all this was going on, public prayers, as requested by the King of Spain in the official Declaration of War issued on June 21, 1779, were being offered by Texas citizens for success in the war. Moreover, on August 17, 1780, King Carlos III issued a decree requesting voluntary donations from all Spanish citizens in the Americas for the war effort. Spaniards were to pay two *pesos*, and *mestizos* and Indians were to pay one *peso*.²² Accordingly, soldiers, citizens, and mission Indians in the province of Texas donated 1659 *pesos* to defray the costs of the worldwide war that Spain waged against Great Britain, detailed as follows:

The five missions of San Antonio.....	217 <i>Pesos</i>
The inhabitants of Presidio	
La Bahía	198 <i>Pesos</i>
Mission Espíritu Santo	67 <i>Pesos</i>
Pueblo de Nuestra Señora del	
Pilar de Nacogdoches.....	181 <i>Pesos</i>
Inhabitants of Presidio de Béxar	
and the Villa de San Fernando.....	312 <i>Pesos</i>
Individuals of the Company of	
Cavalry of the Presidio de Béxar.....	452 <i>Pesos</i>
Individuals of the Company of Cavalry	
of the Presidio de la Bahía.....	232 <i>Pesos</i>

Total..... 1659 *Pesos*²³

Although it cannot yet be ascertained, it appears that the voluntary tax money raised throughout New Spain was included in the 500,000 *pesos* delivered from México (the seat of government for New Spain) to Francisco de Saavedra, Spanish special envoy and military strategist in Havana and Guarico, who advanced the money to Admiral de Grasse to pay his French sailors and re-provision his fleet. Saavedra forwarded another one million *pesos* from México to De Grasse for delivery to the French army under General Rochambeau shortly before the Battle of Yorktown. A little later, Saavedra arranged for some nine and one-half million *pesos* from México to finance Gálvez's proposed invasion of Jamaica and attack on St. Augustine,²⁴ which never came to pass.

As Americans continue to commemorate the American Revolution and enjoy the freedom and opportunity gained from it, they should also remember the important role of Bernardo de Gálvez and his forces, with whom many people around the world may identify. Gálvez, for example, had under his command men from Spain, Mallorca, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, and Ireland. From Louisiana he had Frenchmen, Acadians, Germans, Canary Islanders, Indians, and Blacks, both slave and free. A number of Americans, including a contingent of First Continental Marines, a part of the South Carolina Navy, and even a few *Tejanos* were in his forces. He also had troops and ships from México. One of his top officers was Major General Gerónimo Girón, a direct descendant of Montezuma. His aide-de-camp was Francisco Miranda, the precursor of Venezuelan independence. Gálvez also commanded a part of the French fleet, which he dismissed and re-provisioned with money and supplies after the battle of Pensacola. The fleet then set sail up the East Coast and arrived at Yorktown just in the nick of time to help George Washington and his Continental Army defeat Lord Cornwallis and his British forces in the Battle of Yorktown.²⁵

During the course of the war for independence, Gálvez was in direct correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, General Charles Henry Lee, Captain George Gibson, and Oliver Pollock.²⁶ Gálvez was cited by the American Congress for his aid during the conflict and helped draft some of the terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1783, which ended the war.²⁷

In 1785 he was appointed viceroy of New Spain to succeed his father, Matías de Gálvez, who had died. Bernardo de Gálvez, his Louisiana-born wife, the former María Felicianita de St. Maxent, and their three infant children moved to México City, which was then in the throes of famine and disease. He endeared himself to the people of México by opening up not only the resources of the government but also his personal fortune to help the populace of the city through tough times. Two of his main achievements were the start of the re-building of the Castle of Chapultepec (memorialized in the "Marine's Hymn" as the "Halls of Montezuma") and the

completion of the Cathedral of México in México City, the largest church in the Western Hemisphere.²⁸

Gálvez, however, was stricken during the epidemic and died prematurely on November 30, 1786. His body was interred in a crypt beside that of his father in the Church of San Fernando in México City, from whence came many a Franciscan missionary to the far-off province of Texas, and his heart was interred in an urn in the Cathedral of México, which was completed while he was Viceroy of New Spain. On November 30, 1986, forty members of the order of Granaderos and Damas de Gálvez from Texas, including my wife, Victoria, and me, with the help of Architect Ernesto Aguilar Coronado, founder of the Sociedad Mexicana de Amigos de España, erected and dedicated a bronze plaque on Gálvez's crypt in the Church of San Fernando to honor the life and deeds of this great man. On February 20, 2000, fifty members of the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, with the help of Sr. José Ignacio Vasconcelos, Sra. Oliva Fernández-Lana Álvarez, and Padre Josaphat Muñoz Muñoz, Prior of La Iglesia de San Fernando, placed another commemorative plaque on the crypt of Bernardo de Gálvez.²⁹

As we Americans continue to honor great men and women of the American Revolution—George Washington, George Rogers Clark, John Paul Jones, Betsy Ross, and Molly Pitcher, to mention just a few of our own country; foreigners such as Lafayette, Rochambeau, and De Grasse of France; Von Steuben and De Kalb of Prussia (Germany); and Kosciuszko and Pulaski of Poland—we should include, also, Bernardo de Gálvez of Spain. All of these great men and women are worthy of special remembrance. We Texans should not forget, either, the *Tejano* soldiers, ranchers, and cowboys, who supplied beef for Gálvez's Spanish forces, and the *Tejano* citizens who made voluntary donations and offered public prayers for the war effort.

SOURCES

- ¹ For a detailed portrayal of the vital role that Texas played in the winning of the American Revolution, cf. Robert H. Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1981); and Robert H. Thonhoff, *El Fuerte del Cibolo: Sentinel of the Béxar-La Bahía Ranches* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1992).
- ² Spain engaged Great Britain not only on the North American continent during the American Revolution but also in such far-flung places as the Philippines, Galápagos, Juan Fernández Islands, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Minorca, and Gibraltar. For a comprehensive overview of Spain's worldwide war, cf. Eric Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos* (Madrid, Spain: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992), and Thomas E. Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).
- ³ Cf. Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*.
- ⁴ The Béxar Archives records in the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, cited hereafter as CAH, provide a wealth of information on life and times in Spanish colonial Texas.
- ⁵ *Compañía de San Antonio de Béxar, 4 de julio de 1776*, Béxar Archives, CAH.

- ⁶ Cf. Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*, 1-18, for the historical setting of Texas during Spanish times.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-3.
- ⁹ For a concise history of the *Casas Reales*, see Frank W. Jennings, "Thoughts of San Antonio: Historic Texas Site," *The Senior Sentinel*, Senior Citizens Council of Bexar County, San Antonio, Texas, June 2002.
- ¹⁰ Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*, 5-6.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8-18. For a general description of the ranching activity in Texas during the American Revolution period, cf. Robert S. Weddle and Robert H. Thonhoff, *Drama & Conflict: The Texas Saga of 1776* (Austin, Texas: Madrona Press, 1976), 143-171. For a comprehensive, detailed description of ranching in Texas during the Spanish colonial period, cf. Jack Jackson, *Los Mesteños: Spanish Ranching in Texas, 1721-1821* (College Station; Texas A&M University Press, 1986).
- ¹² John Walton Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana, 1776-1783* (1934; reprint, Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Co., 1972), 149-214; Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos*, 43-170.
- ¹³ Thonhoff, *El Fuerte del Cibolo*, 73; Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540-1795* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 506.
- ¹⁴ Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*, 49-50; Thonhoff, *El Fuerte del Cibolo*, 73-74; Jackson, *Los Mesteños*, 197f.
- ¹⁵ Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*, 75-76, as compiled from Béxar Archives records; Weddle and Thonhoff, *Drama & Conflict*, 170-171; Jackson, *Los Mesteños*, 620-621.
- ¹⁶ Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*, 46; Thonhoff, *El Fuerte del Cibolo*, 74; *Texas and the American Revolution* (San Antonio, Texas: University of Texas at San Antonio Institute of Texan Cultures, 1975), 17.
- ¹⁷ Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana*, 149-170; Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos*, 43-67.
- ¹⁸ Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana*, 171-186; Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos*, 115-122.
- ¹⁹ Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana*, 187-214; Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos*, 123-170.
- ²⁰ Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana*, 244-247; Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos*, 173-183.
- ²¹ Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*, 73-74.
- ²² Granville W. Hough and N. C. Hough, *Spain's Texas Patriots in its 1779-1783 War with England during the American Revolution* (Midway City, California: SHHAR Press, Society of Hispanic Historical and Ancestral Research, Eight Parts, 1998-2000), Part Five, SPANISH BORDERLAND STUDIES, 9-10.
- ²³ Letter of appreciation for individual and military contributions by Texas citizens, Béxar Archives, 9 March 1784, CAH.
- ²⁴ Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos*, 187-200; Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift*, 200-204; Robert H. Thonhoff, *The Vital Contribution of Spain in the Winning of the American Revolution: An Essay on a Forgotten Chapter in the History of the American Revolution* (Privately published in Karnes City, Texas, 2000), 4-5. Currently, scholars are diligently searching for information concerning the collection and disbursement of these voluntary funds. One of the best treatments of this issue can be found throughout Granville W. Hough and N. C. Hough's SPANISH BORDERLAND STUDIES (Midway City, California: SHHAR Press, Society of Hispanic Historical and Ancestral Research, Eight Parts, 1998-2000); e.g., Hough and Hough, *Spain's Texas Patriots in its 1779-1783 War with England during the American Revolution, Part Five*, 9-10, 23-24; 174-175.
- ²⁵ Thonhoff, *El Fuerte del Cibolo*, 75; Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783*, 102-134; and Beerman, *España y la Independencia de Estados Unidos*, 173-185.
- ²⁶ Thonhoff, *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*, 25-27.

²⁷ James Alton James, *Oliver Pollock: The Life and Times of an Unknown Patriot* (1937; reprint, Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 270-271; 308-326.

²⁸ Thonhoff, *El Fuerte del Cibolo*, 75-76.

²⁹ *Ibid.* For a good biography of Bernardo de Gálvez, cf. Lorenzo G. LaFarelle, *Bernardo de Gálvez: Hero of the American Revolution* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1992).

THE DRAWING ON THE TITLE PAGE was done by Jack Jackson [JAXON], artist-historian of Austin, Texas, who conceptually portrays Spanish Texas *rancheros*, *vaqueros*, and *soldados* trailing Texas longhorn cattle along the *Camino Real de los Tejas* from the San Antonio River Valley in Texas to Louisiana to provide beef for the Spanish forces of General Bernardo de Gálvez during the American Revolution.