CREATING A MYTHISTORY: TEXAS HISTORIANS
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Laura Lyons McLemore, B.A., M.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1998

Many historians have acknowledged the temptation to portray people as they see themselves and wish to be seen, blending history and ideology. The result is "mythistory." Twentieth century Texas writers and historians, remarking upon the exceptional durability of the Texas mythistory that emerged from the nineteenth century, have questioned its resistance to revision throughout the twentieth century. By placing the writing of Texas history within the context of American and European intellectual climates and history writing generally, from the close of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, it is possible to identify a pattern that provides some insight into the popularity and persistence of Texas mythistory.

An overview of Texas history writing in the nineteenth century reveals that history was employed in the interest of personal and political agendas during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Civil War and especially Reconstruction had a profound effect on Texans' historical consciousness, while during the same period the Gilded Age had a profound effect on all American society and historical consciousness, impelling Americans to turn to
nostalgia. In Texas, professional historians and nostalgia buffs joined forces to create Texas’ mythistory, centered primarily on the Texas revolution. The one continuous mythical thread throughout Texas history, however, is that of Texas as a new world Eden, both as a place and a state of mind. With the promulgation of Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis,” Texas became America’s foremost representative of its frontier identity. The myths that evolved in the nineteenth century remain useful not only to Texans but to Americans and the world at large even in the late twentieth century. Not only do they continue to seem vital to Texans’ ability to see themselves as a people and confront the future, but they continue to be cherished representatives of the American self.
CREATING A MYTHISTORY: TEXAS HISTORIANS
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Laura Lyons McLemore, B.A., M.A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1998
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Numerous individuals have contributed both directly and indirectly to the completion of this project. First and foremost among them is Dr. Randolph B. Campbell, my major professor, who inspired, guided, challenged, championed, and, when necessary, pushed and prodded me from the conception of it to the conclusion. I have the greatest respect, admiration, and gratitude for members of my graduate committee, Drs. Donald E. Chipman, Donald Pickens, Ray Stephens, Ron Marcello, James Ward Lee, and Jim Laney, all of whom contributed valuable advice and insight. My colleagues at Austin College supported me in countless ways. In the course of researching and writing this dissertation, I received generous assistance in the form of fellowships from the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, the Texas State Historical Association, the University of Texas-Center for American History, and the Department of History at the University of North Texas, which made the time and travel necessarily devoted to the effort possible.

Finally, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to family and friends whose patience, sacrifice, and unswerving belief in me enabled me to pursue and achieve my goals.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. PROLOGUE: HISTORIANS OF SPANISH TEXAS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. HISTORY AS ROMANTIC ART</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. TEXAS HISTORIANS AND THE ROMANTIC REVOLUTION, THE 1830S</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. LONE STAR RISING, THE 1840S</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. PRIDE GOETH . . . BEFORE A FALL, THE WRITING OF
TENASX HISTORY 1850-1880 ........................................ 163

Changes in the climate of opinion and the rise of scientific history
Influences on the writing of Texas history
Antebellum historians : William Gouge, José Antonio Navarro, and Henderson Yoakum, Texas' national historian
The effects of Civil War and Reconstruction: DeWitt Clinton Baker, James Morphis, Homer Thrall, and Reuben Potter
History versus collective memory

6. EVERY TEXAN HIS OWN HISTORIAN ......................... 217

The emergence of professional historians and academic history, changes of style and audience
Hubert Howe Bancroft's "history factory"
Memorials, memoirs, and the retreat to nostalgia
A department of history at the University of Texas
Scientific history and nostalgia join forces to create a mythistory

7. TEXAS, THE ETERNAL FRONTIER ............................ 251

Overview of Texas history writing in the nineteenth century
The effect of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis on American historical consciousness
Texas, the living symbol of the American pioneer spirit.

WORKS CITED ......................................................... 262
INTRODUCTION

When historian Boyd C. Shafer told a friend he would be speaking before the Texas State Historical Association about the historian in America, his friend asked why he did not speak about the historians in Texas. Shafer replied, "I did not know much about the historians in Texas except that there were many of them and they were proud of Texas." Truer words were probably never spoken. T. R. Fehrenbach has boasted that the great difference between Texas and every other American state in the twentieth century is that Texas has a history. Indeed, pride in Texas history seems frequently to have elevated it to mythical proportions, so that the distinction between myth and history becomes difficult to draw. There are those who argue that this is not only a fact but is--to some extent at least--as it should be. Every society, including the United States and Texas, has some myths

associated with its history and identity. In Texas, however, myth seems particularly difficult to separate from history, prompting writer Larry McMurtry to question whether Texas has ever had an unsentimental historian.³

Shafer was also correct in observing that Texas had many historians. In the nineteenth century, for example, almost everyone in Texas was, in a sense, a historian. Texas attracted both the adventurous and the curious; the events unfolding there and the land itself were dramatic, evocative, and fraught with political implications; those who experienced it, and who were literate enough to do so, seemed compelled to write about it. Moreover, Texans apply the term “historian” freely. Even today one may hear the names Roy Bedichek, Walter Prescott Webb, and J. Frank Dobie referred to collectively as Texas historians. The defining characteristics of a Texas historian do not seem any clearer in the twentieth century than they did in the nineteenth. Indeed, according to McMurtry, something about Texas still turns even tough-minded intellectuals into sentimentalists. The chief requirement of a Texas historian, he argued in 1968, seems to be the ability to tell a Texas tale and get the facts straight.⁴

⁴ Ibid., 38-40.
With so many proud Texas historians in print, it is not difficult to conclude, as Boyd Shafer did, that little is actually known about most of them. Some of the giants of this century like Eugene C. Barker, Charles W. Ramsdell, Walter Prescott Webb, and Herbert E. Bolton have been the subjects of numerous studies. Texas historiography in the twentieth century has been assessed in various collections of bibliographic essays. Texas historical writing, in general, has provided the material for several ambitious bibliographies.⁵ No one has yet undertaken, however, a critical study of Texas history writing in the nineteenth century. Dramatic event and intellectual paradigm combined in that century to produce in Texas a myth, "composite yet exceptional enough to produce a definite identity that has been able to survive into the twentieth century and that gives every sign of continuing well beyond."⁶ Who were they, then, the many unsung historians in nineteenth century Texas? How did they look at the past, what historical


themes concerned them, and what was their contribution to Texas' mythistory?

Few generalizations can be made about the histories and historians of Texas in the nineteenth century. Not only did ideas about history and historians change between 1800 and 1900, but the cultural climate of the state and those who wrote about it changed as well. Nevertheless, one may assume some general characteristics that define the terms “history” and “historian.”

Perhaps the most general, and possibly the most accurate, definition of history is “the organized past.” A written history must deal with the past, whether ancient or recent, and relate it to the present of the writer. Hence, the historian is, by definition, an organizer of the past, who brings it to bear on contemporary concerns in the short run, and who promotes a society’s understanding of itself in cultural terms in the long view.\(^7\) One may also generalize that, although nineteenth century Texas historians were generally very well educated regardless of their cultural background, they wrote for various express purposes not necessarily, rarely even, having to do with

---

scholarly inquiry. And it may further be said that the historians of the
nineteenth century undertook to organize the past in such a way as to advance
these specific purposes, whatever they happened to be. From a geographic
standpoint, all of them, even the pre-revolutionary, identified Texas as a
region distinct from Mexico as a whole. Surely one of the most remarkable
characteristics of nineteenth-century historians of Texas was their multi-
nationalism. They came not only from America but from England, France,
and Germany as well. The Texas Revolution was an event whose time had
come. The imagination of the world was captured as it had been in 1776,
perhaps, because of romanticism, even more so. Finally, it should be noted
that, in general, the writers of Texas history in the nineteenth century seldom
produced more than one work, owing undoubtedly to the fact that history for
most of them, was not a profession nor did many of them have the
independent means to devote themselves wholly to history as in the case of a
William H. Prescott, George Bancroft, or Henry Adams. In 1893, historian
and philosopher William E. H. Lecky wrote that in judging the historian "we
must consider his nearness to the events he relates, his probable means of
information, honesty, and judgment" as well as the standard of proof and the
methods of historical writing prevailing at the time."8 The standard, then, for

---

Modern historians have repeatedly noted that each generation writes its own history. The real concern is not what history is but what it does and what is done with it. History (the past) that is not reduced to some tangible form is not useful to humans. That form, insofar as it is written, changes with each generation, so that while history (the past) is constant, the record of it changes in both style and content. Nineteenth-century generations saw the passage of more than one historical paradigm. In the first quarter of the century, while Enlightenment philosophy continued to hold sway in Europe and the United States, the historians of Texas came from the ranks of Spanish missionaries and Mexican soldiers. The second quarter of the century, which brought with it the advent of Anglo-American settlers and the cataclysmic events of the Alamo and San Jacinto, marked a major shift of perspective, and hence historical truth. Chapter one considers Texas history and historians prior to the earliest Anglo-American history of Texas, while chapters two, three, and four examine the work of contemporaries of Anglo-American colonization, revolution, and the Texas Republic during the flowering of the American romantic movement.

---

9 C. Vann Woodward, Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), Chap. 1, suggested that the “shelf life” of history is about twenty years, meaning that changing cultural environment, new methods, and new evidence will prompt new generations of historians to challenge the “truths” of the former generation. His observation may be applied to the nineteenth century as well as to the twentieth.
Mid-century witnessed new ideas exerting great influence on the intellectual climate of North America, and it found Texas a part of the United States and the slaveholding South. The theories of Charles Darwin inspired a "scientific school" of historians in America, but the greater facts exerting influence upon the state of historical writing in Texas were the Civil War and the perpetuation of democratic ideology. Chapter five covers the antebellum period in Texas history, as well as the Civil War and its aftermath.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the professionally trained historian and the establishment of a department of history at the University of Texas. Chapter six examines the work of Texas historians in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and what changes, if any, were wrought by the appearance of the "professional historian" and a new climate of opinion as realists, inspired by the theories of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and other scientists and mathematicians, began to react against romanticism. As Texans turned to history to provide them with a national identity in the years immediately following the transition from republic to statehood, they turned to an idealized or nostalgic past to help them cope with the unsettling changes thrust upon them during the Gilded Age. In concluding, chapter seven reflects upon the accomplishment and legacy of nineteenth century historians: what patterns of facts did they
establish? In what ways did they contribute to the historical “baggage”

Texans carried with them into the twentieth century?¹⁰

Modern historians have on occasion recognized the very thin line

between history and myth. C. Vann Woodward has spoken of the historian’s

craft in terms of “devotion to the analysis and understanding of human

behavior.” William H. McNeill has written of the historian’s task as putting

the facts of the past together in a pattern that is understandable, credible,

and useful to people. In the process, McNeill has observed, historians find

themselves perpetually tempted to portray people the way they wish to see

themselves and the way they wish to be seen, blending history and ideology.

The result is myth, which, in turn, helps shape that society’s economic,

political, and social behavior. The “mythistory” of Texas, created and

perpetuated in the nineteenth century, gives evidence that historical truth is

at best elusive. Walter L. Buenger and Robert A. Calvert, in their

introduction to Texas Through Time, Evolving Interpretations, charge that

Texas historians have had difficulty discarding old myths. The revision of

myths, they point out, is part of the practice of history but is a neglected part

of Texas history. They challenge scholars to subject the myths of Texas to

rigorous cyclical examination, to investigate the history of historical writings

and changing intellectual points of view. This study attempts to answer that

challenge by putting the writers of nineteenth-century Texas "mythistory" into some defining context as historians and by distinguishing the patterns that to them gave meaning and usefulness to Texas history.\textsuperscript{11}

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE: HISTORIANS OF SPANISH TEXAS

Texas did not begin to assume a geographic identity apart from the northern frontier of New Spain, or Florida, until late in the seventeenth century.¹ The first formal history of the province did not appear until almost a century later. Ideas about history during this time derived from the philosophy of the Enlightenment that affected both the style and content of historical writing in Europe and in America and would, ultimately, dramatically affect the climate of opinion in Spanish America. The rationalism of the Enlightenment would inevitably influence the writing of Texas history in the nineteenth century.

Rationalism marked a shift in form and substance that found the old arrangement of chronological annals unsuitable. In Italy, philosopher of history Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) argued that to make history meaningful historians had to break away from mere annals and describe the essence of a society. He called upon historians to cultivate a "scientific

method" for determining the truth about the past, which amounted to little more than a self-conscious effort at objectivity. History became a vehicle for comprehensive description rather than chronological narration, and historians preferred a direct and unpretentious style as opposed to the affected classical literary style of Humanism. Nevertheless, in the construction of their works, rationalist historians established history as a majestic literary expression commensurate with the new importance it assumed for humankind. They replaced the recital of political and ecclesiastical intrigues of city states, to some degree, with comprehensive accounts of the manners and customs of peoples and generally began their historical works with a description of the land and its inhabitants. Historians who had been merely collectors of descriptive information became speculative and encyclopedic.²

Influenced by the philosophy of Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and John Locke, European writers produced a rationalistic interpretation of natural and social phenomena that discredited superstition and the theological theories of historical causation and substituted natural causes; God still ordered the universe, but he worked through nature and through humans. The historical writers of the Enlightenment searched for cause and

effect relationships to explain everything in human history, seeking through
careful examination of human experience to prove the validity of their belief in
the laws of nature and the goodness of man. The Enlightenment historians,
however, made no attempt to lift history above the level of propaganda; on the
contrary, that aspect of it was intensified by the crusade in favor of reason. In
short, history became persuasive writing. The true historian put the past
to good use in service of the present.

In seeking to give meaning to the past, rationalist historians
developed a unifying theme for history, the concept of progress, which would
have a profound and lasting influence on western civilization and the way
historians interpreted it. No longer would social evolution be viewed as a
regression from a classic golden age but as orderly and continuing
development toward the perfection of humankind. Françoise Voltaire,
Guillame-Thomas Raynal, Charles Louis Montesquieu, and Arnold Heeren
produced some of the most important innovations of the Rationalists by
broadening the field of history to embrace society, commerce, industry, and
culture, and by introducing some embryonic sociological principles into
historical analysis. When they wrote political history, they adopted a truly
critical approach, employing history as an instrument of political criticism and agitation for reform.

The historians of the eighteenth century considered themselves scientific inasmuch as they had developed an inductive method for arriving at truth about the past, though as research scholars they generally confined their work to discriminating use of existing printed sources. Although they made a self-conscious effort to be objective, the basic moral of their story was predetermined, their conclusions complete in advance of their research, because they worked from a thesis about the essence of humanity before they asked history formally to provide the proof.

As modern scholars have pointed out, the Enlightenment was not a homogenous movement. Historian Daniel J. Boorstin has observed that the climate of opinion differed in different geographic areas. Moreover, the fact that people knew a certain complex of ideas existed did not necessarily mean they adopted those ideas. Schools of rationalist historians appeared in Italy, England, France, and Germany and exerted considerable influence in the British colonies in America, but Spain, at first, seemed to have been hardly

---


affected by this new school of thought. The Catholic Church, and the Jesuits in particular, used the surviving institution of the Inquisition in the eighteenth century to stamp out the threatening ideas of the Enlightenment.\(^7\)

With the advent of the Bourbon kings to the Spanish throne, however, Spain experienced a power struggle between the court and Rome. While Philip V jousted ineffectively with the Jesuits, a group emerged within the church of Spain that supported a strong royal policy and opposed the Jesuits. Called Jansenists because, like the followers of the seventeenth-century Flemish Catholic theologian Cornelius Jansen, they cited Augustine as their authority in their controversy with the Spanish Jesuits, this group contributed to the growing tension between the crown and the Company of Jesus that eventually led to the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish colonies in America.\(^8\) By mid-eighteenth century, the regalist policy of the Spanish Bourbons and the ascendance of men with Jansenist views to leading posts in the hierarchy were destroying the independence and authority of the Spanish church, the greatest obstacle standing between Spain and the Enlightenment. During

---


this period Enlightenment ideas, particularly those of the French

Enlightenment, found their way into Spain. The reform movement of the

Bourbons reached its height in the reign of Charles III (1759-1788), who

became known as Spain's "enlightened despot." In 1767, Charles ordered the

Jesuit Society banned from the New World. Along with this order came, for

the first time in colonial history, permission for the free entry of books from

overseas.  

Two centuries earlier Renaissance humanism had secretly entered New

Spain with its first bishop, Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Zumárraga, an avid

reader and collector of books, was probably the first to establish a usable

library in America in the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, which he helped

to found. At about the same time, in 1537, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas,
apologist for the American Indian, wrote a treatise based on the thesis that

the only way decreed by God for teaching men the true religion was "the one

which convinces the understanding in a rational manner and satisfies the

will," and this way was "common to all men of the world, regardless of errors,

sects, or vices." Thus the intellectual stage had long been set for the

---


transition from a medieval to a modern climate of opinion in New Spain.

Some historians in Mexico, notably Bernabé Navarro, have even credited the Jesuits for introducing modern currents of thought through some of their doctrines and "the actions of their disciples," including José Antonio Alzate, who represented "the culmination of the enlightened spirit," and Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, who started the independence movement in 1810.11 Another, Luis Monguió, has pointed out that contemporary literature in Mexico in 1788 and 1789 contained, within the boundaries of orthodox belief, "characteristically enlightened dicta."12 A third, Patrick Romanell, has noted that in the second half of the eighteenth century two priests, Andrés de Guevara and Juan Benito Díaz de Gamarra, attempted to revamp the prevailing Scholastic thought in Mexico along scientific lines and to temper Thomist dogmatism with Cartesian rationalism. By questioning authority and appealing to reason, they prepared the way for the infiltration of the Enlightenment spirit into New Spain, serving as ideological precursors of subsequent revolutions. In actuality, the preference for reason and experiment introduced by the Enlightenment was far more revolutionary than

the movement for political independence and provided a common thread for
the Enlightenment in Europe and Spanish America and in relations between
the two. Indeed, Latin American scholar John Tate Lanning, in a paper
entitled “The Reception of the Enlightenment in Latin America,” noted that
the Spanish colonies shared the eighteenth century climate of opinion that
sought truth in the “constant and universal principles of nature.” Diplomatic
historian Arthur Whitaker made a similar observation: the Spaniards were
“acutely conscious at this time of the sad decline of their country’s prestige
and power since the days of Philip II and were therefore receptive to new
ideas, even to ideas of political and religious reform, so long as these could be
carried out within the framework of the established order. They were
particularly responsive to the newer aspect of the Enlightenment--the zeal
with which it developed for the promotion of useful knowledge. The benefits of
this were sorely needed on both sides of the Atlantic . . .” Mexican historian
José Miranda observed that the Enlightenment spread rapidly in Mexico
between 1775 and 1800 when its main emphasis shifted from philosophy to

---

Interpretations,” *The Ibero-American Enlightenment*, 25; also see Arthur P. Whitaker, “The
Dual Role of Latin America in the Enlightenment,” *Latin America and the Enlightenment*, 5-6.
In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, then, ideas of the Enlightenment were present to affect, in one way or another, the climate of opinion in Spanish America, certainly that of its most learned inhabitants.

On the eve of the nineteenth century, an industrious, devoted, and learned Franciscan missionary, Fray Juan Agustín Morfi, wrote the first comprehensive history of the far northern province of New Spain known as Tejas, which he described as lying 360 leagues from the city of Mexico, bounded by the Gulf of Mexico and Nuevo Santander (Tamaulipas) on the south, Nuevo Reyno de León and the province of Coahuila on the west, by New Mexico on the north and northwest, and by the English colonies and Louisiana on the east. Morfi did not set out to become a historian, much less a Texas historian. In fact, he did not even set out to become a priest. Born in the Spanish province of Asturias, he probably came to America in 1755 or 1756. According to records in Mexico, he came as a layman and joined the Franciscan order in Mexico City on May 3, 1761. Thus, he appears to have come like so many others, in search of fame and fortune. Morfi taught

---


theology in the old college of Santa Cruz de Tlaltelolco under the direction of the Franciscans and wrote treatises on the subject. In a short time he made quite a reputation for himself as an orator and lecturer.

Morfí developed his deep interest in Texas and the work of missionaries there during a command performance as chaplain to Teodoro de Croix on his tour of inspection in 1777. Initially, he assumed the role of collector and compiler. He kept a careful diary that included information he was able to glean from local archives wherever the expedition stopped. After his return from that trip, he began actively to collect all the documents he could find on the provinces he had visited. Over the short space of five years, from 1778 to 1783, Morfí labored tirelessly to assemble the sources for the history of all northern Mexico—more than eight thousand pages on Texas alone—in order to complete the information in the Franciscan archives. He made the transition from collector to historian when his work took on a more specific purpose.

Morfí's impetus came from Antonio Bonillo's *Breve Compendio* (1772), which blamed the missionaries for the failure of the various attempts to colonize Texas. Deeply offended by this imputation, Morfí turned to the

---

17 Ibid., 19, 24-25.
writing of a history in defense of his brother laborers, who, his travels with
Teodoro de Croix had convinced him, were heroic and unselfish. He intended
to vindicate them by presenting the facts. He had already compiled his
sources and organized them roughly in his Memorias para la Historia de Texas
with the express purpose of proving how incompetent officials and flawed
government policy, not the missionaries, were to blame for Spain’s failures in
Texas.18 From his Memorias Morfi commenced to write his Historia de Texas.

Although he adhered generally to a strict chronological arrangement,
Morfi began his Historia with a detailed description of the province of Texas,
its location and boundaries, its rivers and creeks, settlements, and native
tribes, based on the most authoritative accounts known. Though this detail
might well have been reflective of the prevailing interest in natural history,
the land he described might easily have been imagined an earthly paradise by
his readers: neither too hot nor too cold, seldom a cloudy sky, enough rain but
not too much, mild winters, storms and earthquakes unheard of, healthy and
ageless inhabitants, abundant flora and fauna, fertile soil “exceeding all
exaggeration,” and incredible numbers of wild horses and cattle.19 Mythical?
Apparently not, based on the records of local archives and Morfi’s own
observations. This perception of the Texas province as a New World Eden,

---

however, would provide a link between the outlook of the Spanish explorers and conquistadores toward America and that of the eager inheritors of the Puritan mission into the wilderness who flocked to Texas in the nineteenth century.  

Morfi demonstrated further his determination to be matter-of-fact in his description of the native inhabitants. On the basis of the reports of missionaries and Spanish officials, he characterized the inhabitants of the province neither as noble savages nor inferior races, but simply as heathens in need of redemption, possessing both strengths and weaknesses. He freely admitted that many of these peoples either would not or could not adapt to mission life and teachings. He also noted, regretfully, that the character and the lives of some of them had been irreparably disrupted and altered through their arbitrary relocation by Spanish stratagems. It was evident in his writing that however difficult or unsuited some, or even a majority, of the natives might be for missionizing, Morfi had concluded that the missions offered Spain's best hope of maintaining control of Texas.

---


Morfi began his chronological account with Hernando De Soto's expedition in 1543 and ended abruptly with the death of Athanese De Mézières. Whenever he departed from strict chronology, he took pains to explain and justify the digression. He apparently considered his account of the French expeditions, René Robert Cavelier Sieur de La Salle's attempt to settle on Matagorda Bay and the appearance of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis at the presidio of San Juan Bautista, a long digression, because he explained the necessity of it by writing that the events of the history of Louisiana were so closely connected with those of Texas that he found it impossible to describe what took place in the latter without giving a summary of the former. In so doing, he acknowledged the connectedness of historical events, the acts of individuals, and the notion of cause and effect.

Throughout his manuscript, Morfi numbered the paragraphs and included marginal topical headings to guide the reader. He obviously attempted to give a cohesive narrative, but clearly his purpose was to prove, by presenting the facts, the injustice that had been done to the missionaries in Texas by Bonilla's report. Certainly, Morfi accumulated and presented a wealth of information from the most reliable sources available, but he also unmistakably interpreted them from his own bias as he paused to point out

---

22 As a result of Morfi's own death in October, 1783.
with bitter passion the weaknesses in the reforms of Rivera, the evils resulting from his policies, and the failure of the Texas missions because of changing policies of Spanish officials and the jealousy and ambition of presidial captains. Through it all, Morfi succeeded in presenting fairly and convincingly the evidence of the heroic efforts of the Franciscans to Christianize the natives. The success of his rational and objective achievement was measured both by his contemporaries and by later historians. Fray José Antonio Pichardo quotes from Morfi's Historia in discussing English traders in Texas, the activities of St. Denis in Texas, La Salle's expedition and settlement, Peñalosa in New Mexico and in the French court, Ibarbo's exploration of the Gulf coast, the death of LaSalle, French Indian traders, Blancpain's activities, and the history of New Mexico. Hubert Howe Bancroft later called it "the standard authority for Texas history" down to the date of Morfi's death.24

At the time of his death in 1783, Morfi's Historia was unfinished, but his legacy to future Texas historians was established. Not only was he thorough in his collection of sources, he was critical in his treatment of them and direct in his presentation. By setting out to prove a thesis through the

presentation and analysis of facts in a concise style, Morfi produced a thoroughly rational, secular history. Thus, the Historia provided the standard to which the next major Texas historian, and first of the nineteenth century, turned for authority.25

The first general work on the history of Texas written in the nineteenth century did not appear until nearly thirty years later, in 1812, which was unsurprising in that Spain exhibited little interest in Texas until the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. That event irrevocably linked Texas's history with the United States from the very beginning of the nineteenth century and provided the purpose for another history. Further, Thomas Jefferson's subsequent assertions that the boundary of the Louisiana Purchase extended to the Rio Grande, together with the intrusions of American filibusters like Philip Nolan, made the need for a history of the Spanish presence in Texas more urgent.26 This history, a treatise on the boundary between Louisiana and Texas, too, was the work of an enlightened ecclesiastic, Don José Antonio Pichardo of the archbishopric of Mexico. Pichardo was a “criollo” born in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1748 and educated at the very old college of San Juan

26 Pichardo, Pichardo's Treatise, Vol. 1, 4. Pichardo made it clear in his introduction that the entrance of the United States into the territorial matters concerning the region prompted the necessity for a concise history of the boundary question; also see Charles W. Hackett's comments in Pichardo's Treatise, Vol. 1, xiv.
de Letrán where he became a professor of Latin and philosophy. That he should be thoroughly versed in Enlightenment thought seems doubtless for several reasons. Through the work of Arthur P. Whitaker, John Tate Lanning, and other scholars, we know that modern philosophy and science were known and expounded in the eighteenth century schools and universities of the Spanish colonies in America. Pichardo enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most educated men in Mexico. He amassed a personal library of some 6,000 volumes and was purported to have read and used them all. In addition to Greek and Latin, he knew the principal modern languages as evidenced by frequent references in his works to French, Italian, English, and Dutch authorities. Further, his predecessor in the writing of the history of the boundary between Texas and Louisiana, Fray Melchor de Talamantes, was a brilliant scholar and political liberal removed from his assignment for his revolutionary leanings, a matter of which Pichardo must have been aware.

Pichardo undertook the research and writing of this monumental project in 1808. From the outset, his work shared a number of characteristics

---


with that of Morfi, whose *Memorias* and *Historia* he cited as sources. Both authors used a format of numbered paragraphs, though Pichardo, in addition, divided his work into an introduction and four parts. Like Morfi, Pichardo based his work on a thesis. Unlike Morfi, however, Pichardo did not attempt a strict narrative history; his method was wholly argumentative, his authorities and sources carefully selected to prove his points. In keeping with the scientific tenor of the age, he did not stint on scientific measurements and mathematical proof with regard to his geographical assertions. He plainly intended to be thoroughly scientific in the belief that this method would insure his objectivity and render his conclusions unquestionable. "I have endeavored always to give proofs of what I am saying," he wrote, "and... I refer to what I have already proven, or what I must prove in due time, or I cite near the writing the texts of the authors or documents upon which I have based my assertion. My work has been long drawn out, but I have preferred to lay myself liable to this offense to that of making myself obscure because of brevity, and unworthy of credit because of the weakness of my sources."

---

31 For this reason Carlos E. Castañeda asserted that Pichardo's *Treatise* was not in fact a history but an argumentative brief with definite limitations as a history of Spanish Texas, *Morfi's History of Texas*, Vol. 1, 42, n. 58.

Pichardo quoted extensively from his sources. His own comments seem to have been inserted mainly to state his argument, to introduce a quotation, and to point out how it proved his thesis. He included virtually no important event connected with his subject without referring to basic primary sources relating to it, and he made use of secondary printed works, more than 100 books, pamphlets, and maps written or printed prior to 1811. Unlike those Enlightenment historians who achieved fame by literary style, epigram, and wit, Pichardo was not concerned with literary device but with clarity. He believed that, properly stated, the facts would speak for themselves.

For all his meticulous and painstaking efforts at objectivity, Pichardo could not escape the subjectivity inherent not only in advocacy but in any act of interpretation. Considering the circumstances which prompted his writing of the boundary history; i.e. royal orders of the viceroy of Mexico, he could hardly have been otherwise. He made many honest concessions to practical realities such as the admission that, “despite the injustice with which the French appropriated for themselves all the land of Louisiana,” La Salle’s claim, however ignorant or erroneous it may have been on his part, justified the belief of the French at Natchitoches in 1735 that their territory extended to Arroyo Hondo. However, Pichardo never conceded that the French had a legitimate right to any of the Louisiana territory. Instead, he maintained, the

33 Ibid., xix.
Spanish monarch simply allowed them this delusion out of the goodness of his heart and nobility of spirit in order to "avoid wars and the effusion of human blood." He admitted that the boundary question had not been disputed when France ceded her claim to Spain in 1762, because neither party really cared much about Texas, absent any third-party interest. With sharp foresight Pichardo recognized that the acute interest of the United States in the region prompted "the necessity for a concise history of the boundary question." However, he hastened to portray Spain's intentions as purely noble and fiscally responsible: "She is so upright and so faithful in the performance of duty that, once made the compact of the retrocession, she does not wish to retain any of that which she received and has ceded. But she is at the same time so frugal that she does not wish to squander that which she has not included in her compacts."

In furtherance of his historical argument, Pichardo began with the discovery of America and the papal grant. He discussed the French expeditions of Giovanni da Verranzano and Jacques Cartier to the Atlantic coast and recognized the first presence of the French in the Louisiana territory in the persons of Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet in 1673. He dated the history of Texas as a distinct province from the settlement of El Paso in 1693.


In the opinion of later historian Charles W. Hackett, editor and translator of the *Treatise*, Pichardo's greatest contribution in the way of historical data was the detail of significant and little-known events that occurred in the Spanish province of Texas during the last three-quarters of the eighteenth century. But Pichardo reached perhaps his most intriguing conclusion with his physical description of Texas in which he developed the thesis that the province of Quivira, which Francisco Vásquez de Coronado visited, was on the plains of Cibola and was actually the province of Texas. However faulty this conclusion, the good Father based it upon thorough and accurate study of the available sources, his own profound knowledge of the Indian tribes of the plains of Cibola, geography of the region, comparison of Indian names given by early writers, the application of mathematics, and other critical methods of comparison and research. In doing so, he demonstrated his susceptibility to the tendency of both his Spanish predecessors and his American successors to perpetuate a mythistory of Texas--part mission, part destiny, part redemptive bounty of a New World Garden.

So began the writing of Texas history in the nineteenth century, with two highly educated, enlightened ecclesiastics devoted to a scientific method of arriving at the truths they knew and strongly influenced by their purposes.

---

36 Ibid., xx, 390.
for turning to history for proof. Morfi, though writing in the late eighteenth
century, set a precedent for the writing of Texas history that set it apart from
earlier histories of the New World. The writing of both these men reflected
the intellectual and political climate of their times. As members of the
ordered Catholic clergy and Spanish subjects, their viewpoints were
somewhat limited by loyalty to their mission brethren (in Morfi’s case) or
loyalty to the Spanish crown (in Pichardo’s case). Nevertheless, their work
exhibited a self-conscious effort at objectivity, a search for cause and effect
relationships in the actions of humans and the evidence of physical science
rather than in miracles and the capriciousness of a willful God, an inductive
method, and a critical, direct style. They gave meaning to the history of
Texas, as none before them had done, by putting it to contemporary use. Yet,
while their style and content may have made them trailblazers in Texas
historical writing, it did not prevent them from perpetuating or attempting to
corroborate certain aspects of New World mythology that extended to the
frontier of Texas. It remained there to be shared with future generations of
Texans and Texas historians. Professor Frederico Onís, writing in the mid-
twentieth century, emphasized the important role played by the United
States in the spiritual transformation of Hispanic America in the eighteenth
century. “The intellectual relations between the Americas are not an
invention of our day, as many believe,” he wrote. As both Morfi and Pichardo acknowledged, the American presence was a factor in writing about Texas. It would only become stronger. The next one with a use for Texas history would be an American.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORY AS ROMANTIC ART

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the United States and its republican ideas exerted significant influence on the climate of opinion in Spanish America. But while North American science and democracy effected one sort of stimulus upon the Spanish American mind, the Louisiana Purchase and the attendant interest in and curiosity about New Spain's far northern frontier effected a different one. These stimuli produced a combination of events that brought about dramatic changes in Spanish North America, particularly in the province of Texas. Soon Anglo-Americans would tread upon Texas soil and also write its history.

The opening of the nineteenth century brought changes in the intellectual climates of Europe and the United States as well. Early in the nineteenth century, a new set of attitudes toward the past gradually matured in America. These attitudes developed in part from the Enlightenment, in part from the influence of European Romantic currents, and in large part from

---

developments in America itself. While history in the eighteenth century had been “philosophy teaching by example,” in the early nineteenth century history reached its zenith as romantic art. An understanding of the intellectual origins of these romantic attitudes is crucial to the study of Texas historiography in the second quarter of the nineteenth century because of their powerful and enduring influence on the writing of Texas history.

Eighteenth-century philosophers and historians had introduced the concept of progress, formulated a scholarly method, and established history as a meaningful form of knowledge and a majestic literary expression. Vico’s theory of history as the objective description of the essence of society found its way abroad in the works of Charles Louis Montesquieu and Françoise Voltaire, both widely read in America. Voltaire subordinated details to the significant essence of the whole culture, and, along with American writers like Thomas Hutchinson and David Ramsay, established an ideal for the nineteenth century.²

Despite its great contribution to historical thinking, essence history had its limitations. Essence history assumed the changelessness of human nature and thus rejected the particular as being irrelevant. It tended to dismiss dramatic conflict and biography, intensified the eighteenth century

assumption that history had always been the struggle of reason against superstition, and, most important, it contributed to a de-emphasis on study of the distant past, the assumption being that since all history was essentially alike, and since contemporary civilization represented the pinnacle of human progress, anything beyond the present or recent past could hardly matter.

The rationalist idea of progress, too, had its limitations. Historians like Voltaire, David Hume, and Edward Gibbon tended to think of progress mechanically, as correction instead of maturation. They judged the past by what they assumed were superior modern standards, exposing the errors of other ages and cultures. J. A. N. Condorcet, an enlightened liberal French philosopher, appealed more to Americans, probably because he appealed to their conceptions about themselves. He spoke of the unlimited progress of human nature as a natural law and viewed the United States as the extension of the progress of the Old World, thus lending intellectual credence to Americans' view of themselves as exemplars, carrying out their redemptive mission in the wilderness of the New World. An American edition of his

---

Outline of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind appeared in Philadelphia in 1796, and a second American edition appeared in Baltimore in 1802. English theorists William Godwin and Joseph Priestley, who viewed the American Revolution as a step in the emancipation and progress of humanity, also enjoyed a sanguine reception in the United States. Enlightenment historians, however, never successfully established a further purpose for history beyond its value as literature. The great historians of the eighteenth century achieved their fame not as scholars but as men of literature. History was popular because it was instructive and entertaining; it was, in a word, "doctrinaire."^5

While Enlightenment history influenced historical thinking, its limitations, its materialism, and its anti-historical attitude stimulated a new movement in reaction to it. Surely, many argued, there was more to the world than reason and logic alone could explain: passions, feelings, mysteries. The reaction began in the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau and his disciples, which formed the transition from rationalism to romanticism. Where Voltaire had been purely intellectual, critical, and unsentimental, Rousseau was emotional, sympathetic, and exceedingly sentimental. Where Voltaire

---

had been realistic and practical, Rousseau was idealistic and utopian.

Where Voltaire had praised enlightened despotism and had little faith in the political ability of the illiterate masses, Rousseau championed the release of the masses from despotism.⁸

Romanticism, as a historical premise, was based on the doctrine of the gradual and unconscious nature of cultural evolution in any nation. Its ideal was decidedly more democratic than that of the rationalists, envisioning the struggle of the middle class to free itself from feudal and monarchial restrictions. Romanticists viewed past ages sympathetically, going so far as to assert, at one point, that primitive savagery was superior to civilized life. Though they shortly rejected this particular notion, the romantic school continued to look back to primitive times as representing a form of society with a value of its own which the development of civilization had lost. This nostalgia for the past, particularly a fascination with the Middle Ages, was tempered somewhat by the persistent conception of history as progress.⁷

The romanticists also exhibited a decidedly mystical strain in their thinking. They maintained that unconscious creative forces operated mysteriously in defiance of direct intellectual analysis and that these

---

mysterious psychic influences were responsible for the development of unique cultural and national identity, later referred to by Leopold von Ranke as the Zeitgeist. At the same time, the writing of the romanticists exhibited a tendency toward universalism since their interest in culture and historical philosophy had a worldwide sweep. The romanticist point of view in literature and aesthetics achieved notable expression in the works of François René Auguste de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), also a European historian much admired in America.⁸

Another great European influence on nineteenth century historians in America was English literature, especially the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). While historians Thomas Babington Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle insisted upon a vital, dynamic history, Scott’s fine storytelling succeeded in re-creating the past for the public, a feat considered highly desirable by many contemporary critics. He was, by far, the best-selling author in the United States until the Civil War.⁹ Scott heightened the effect of history with the high adventure and emotional warmth of fiction. His readers came to expect as much from their historians as from a novelist. "It

---

⁸ Barnes, History of Historical Writing, 178, 181-86.
may be laid down as a general rule, though subject to considerable qualifications and exceptions, that history begins in Novel and ends in Essay," wrote a reviewer in 1828. As one historiographer pointed out, this tendency was really anti-historical, in that it aimed primarily to portray past events with the vividness and intimacy of contemporary events. Its main contribution to better historical writing lay in that it awakened public interest in history on an unprecedented scale. American historians who most successfully captured the attention and interest of their countrymen in historical subjects—Washington Irving, William Prescott, George Bancroft, Charles Gayarré, and Francis Parkman—all acknowledged a debt to Scott.

Along with the eloquent literary history being written in France and England between 1820 and 1860, philosophical ideas developing in Germany from 1775 to 1830 contributed to the shaping of a uniquely American concept of history. The central figure in this period of German historical thought was Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), the father of historicism. Historicism posited the belief that anything in the present must be understood primarily in terms of its historical development, that the past shapes and constitutes

---

the primary means of understanding the present. The historian ought to explain how a distinct history created a distinct people. German historians became especially concerned with manners, arts, myths, and culture. While Americans did not think of themselves as "historicists" in the early nineteenth century, they began to feel the importance of their unique historical experience as the force that made them what they were.\textsuperscript{12}

Herder assumed that ultimate reality lay in the spiritual rather than the physical world, in continuous change rather than in eighteenth century universal principles. He believed that one came to understand reality not through a study of philosophy or science, but of history. Therefore, Herder called upon historians to immerse themselves in history, whereupon the ultimate test of evidence became "identifying with the subject" and "feeling the truth of the fact."\textsuperscript{13} Unlike Voltaire, he emphasized the uniqueness of every event and every individual in history, and since each individual could alter the course of events, he believed the historian should emphasize biography, an approach enthusiastically embraced by American historians in


the early nineteenth century. The greatest appeal of the past lay in enabling the reader vicariously to become a historical hero, asserted Ralph Waldo Emerson. The historian "describes to each reader his own ideal, describes his unattained but attainable self." This notion of Emerson's stemmed mainly from his theory of the Over-Soul, by virtue of which every man was a part of all history and all heroes. Emphasis on the importance of everyman in history reflected the tenor of an age in a nation experiencing a remarkable leveling of society as the result of market revolution and the extension of suffrage to propertyless classes. The "self-made man" rapidly became the romantic ideal of this society, and the frontiersman became the epitome of this romantic ideal.\(^{14}\)

Americans knew about the German philosophers. Herder's *Philosophy of History* was available in an English edition in 1800. The American clergy began to appreciate the study of German for the purposes of biblical research, and German influence spread through Joseph Green Cogswell, Frederick Henry Hedge, George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and George Bancroft, who

studied in Germany and returned to write hundreds of articles in American magazines before 1846. But distinctly American attitudes toward nationalism, God, and time probably provided the most important source for American historical thinking in the early nineteenth century. Of George Bancroft, America’s first historian laureate, J. Franklin Jameson wrote that however much he learned from Arnold Heeren, Friedrich Karl Von Savigny, or Friedrich Christoph Schlosser “his ideas were derived . . . mainly, in truth, from the soil from which they sprang.”

A number of stimuli contributed to American historical thinking in the early nineteenth century, the most obvious of which was the nationalism inspired by the American Revolution and War of 1812. Another, deeper stimulus that undoubtedly helped to shape the character and intensity of American nationalism in the post-Revolutionary era was the Puritan sense of mission and exceptionalism. American experience had been one of individual achievement and worth, and, as one historiographer put it, “from individual worth it was only a short step into romantic cults of heroism, chivalry, diversity, originality, imagination, intuition, subjectivism, and supernaturalism.”

---

15 Callcott, History in the United States, 9-10; Henry A. Pochmann, German Culture in America, Philosophical and Literary Influences, 1600-1900 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1957), 61-68; Callcott, History in the United States, 13.
American individualism differed from European individualism in a number of ways. It was rooted in the past instead of the future; it was traditional instead of iconoclastic, and instead of subordinating biography to national essence, it enabled American writers to find national essence in biography, the universal in the particular. American nationalism intensified and gave new meaning to the eighteenth century concept of progress. The real experience of the developing nation changing wilderness into civilization, a seemingly limitless frontier stretched out before them, and the Puritan belief in a divine plan fostered in Americans a conviction that their future could only get brighter. All this optimistic nationalism gave rise to the desire for a national literature as independent from Europe as America was herself; moreover, it should be reflective of America's particular culture of individualism. In 1833, Massachusetts lawyer Rufus Choate declared in an oration entitled "The Importance of Illustrating New England History by a Series of Romances Like the Waverly Novels," that the documentary history of the origins of the United States and its Revolution had been "amply written" and called for a new history in "a form in which it would speak directly to the heart and affections and imagination of the whole people." What America needed was its own Walter Scott to project "a series of romantic compositions . . . the scenes of which should be laid in North
America, somewhere in the time before the Revolution, and the incidents and characters of which should be selected from the records and traditions of that, our heroic age.” In other words, America needed a mythistory.

Tangential to distinct romantic attitudes about national identity and culture, Americans in the early nineteenth century had a distinct concept of time. Certainly they believed theirs was an unprecedented history, and they developed a fervid antiquarian absorption with all things historical. Historian Daniel Boorstin has observed that their sense of freedom from the errors of history allowed Americans to glorify their ancestors, remold them in their own image, and celebrate a simple happy past, an observation borne out by early nineteenth century writers like Thomas W. Gilmer, who proclaimed in an 1837 address: “If our country has no antiquity, we are also exempt from those painful traits of history, which only serve to remind us of the crimes or the follies of our ancestors . . . The American colonies sprang at once, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter, into vigorous maturity, armed and adorned by the virtues, unshackled by the vices of the parent country. . . . The high and noble impulses under which the early settlers of this country acted, were

---


infused into their descendants.\textsuperscript{20} Interestingly, this past, so conceived, portrayed the innocence sought after in the Second Eden and New World Garden myths. Noted scholar Fred Somkin has suggested that this sense of unprecedentedness resulted in Americans' fascination with the past, partly in an effort to find and expropriate whatever they wished as models and partly in an effort to identify traits which they believed characterized themselves in the present and for the future. A historian of American political rhetoric, Major L. Wilson, concluded that, whatever their political persuasion, men in the nineteenth century argued in terms that revealed a nostalgia for the past and hope for the future.\textsuperscript{21} The observations of all these scholars suggest the conscious fashioning of an American collective memory. In any event, the American concept of time in the early nineteenth century was oriented toward its usefulness to the American self.

The other major force behind American historical thinking and America's view of the past was religion. Americans never completely relinquished their Puritan past nor completely embraced Enlightenment skepticism. Instead of breaking ties with the Church, as Voltaire, Hume, and


Gibbon had done, religious dissenters in America found an outlet in pious Unitarianism or Universalism. Many of the best known American historians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries began their careers as Unitarian clergymen, including Abiel Holmes, Jeremy Belknap, John Palfrey, Jared Sparks, George Bancroft, and Richard Hildreth. At American universities men like John Witherspoon, Timothy Dwight, and David Tappan taught Scottish "common-sense" philosophy that spoke of "self-evident principles" and the inner senses that provided the knowledge of God, beauty, good and evil, knowledge essential to the discerning of truth. Jonathan Edwards, a Congregationalist minister from Northampton, Massachusetts, did more than anyone to bring seventeenth-century Puritanism into nineteenth-century historical thought and, in the process, into the essence of the American romantic movement. Edwards, one of America's most profound philosophers and theologians, believed that God was the driving force of progress and the essence of the national spirit. Furthermore he insisted on the importance of every detail, every individual, every event. For Edwards, the study of history glorified God. Writing history demonstrated truth and thus was an act of worship. Several years before America's first mass movement, the Great Awakening, swept the colonies in the 1730s, Edwards developed a mystical religious strain that recognized "God's

22 Ibid., 16-17; Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 184-85.
"excellency" in everything, "in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind." In his belief in the divinity of the physical universe, Edwards provided a bridge from covenant theology to American romanticism in its most intense expression.²³ By the turn of the century, religious reaction to Enlightenment secularism had reached its apex. A revival of piety swept the western world during the early 1800s. After the Second Awakening, Americans took readily to the romanticists' emphasis on individual liberty, democracy, and the beauties of Nature.

The divinity of Nature was a major facet of the most intense expression of romantic thought in America, the Transcendentalist movement, which emphasized that realm of thought that transcended reason. Transcendentalism had originally been inspired by European philosophers and writers like Immanuel Kant and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, but in its American manifestation owed its roots to New England Puritanism. Originating in America in the Boston and Concord vicinities, the movement blended romantic ideas about the divinity of Nature, Unitarian ideas about the relaxation of formal restrictions on religion, and the Quaker doctrine of the inner light into a philosophical idealism closely allied with romanticism.²⁴

²³ Callcott, History in the United States, 16; Miller, Errand into the Wilderness, 185-86.
²⁴ Ibid., 198-99; Clark, Transitions in American Literary History, 226.
The high priest of American Transcendentalism was Ralph Waldo Emerson, a disaffected Unitarian minister, but the movement drew other clergymen, philosophical writers, and educators, among them historian George Bancroft. Through its emphasis on nature, moralism, intuition, and inner light as the chief means of discerning truth, Transcendentalism exercised considerable influence over many historians’ and critics’ attitudes toward the relevance of facts in the writing of history, the proper subject matter and method of writing history, and the proper uses of history; in short, the definition of history in the first half of the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic.

American romanticism, however, for all its spiritualism and idealism, contained contradictions that reflected the developing conflict in American society and in the American psyche between idealism and materialism, fueled by the market revolution. Even as romanticism reached its height during the Jacksonian era, principles were relegated to rhetoric, and expediency became the arbiter of actions. The same romantic fervor that revered nature and the land also glorified American Progress in the conquest of the wilderness and industrialization. Americans found in romanticism a rationale for the “machine in the Garden.” Thus while Thoreau fumed over the intrusion of the locomotive into his pastoral world, John Quincy Adams proclaimed that “a
progressive improvement in the condition of man is apparently the purpose of a superintending Providence."

Perhaps typical of the confusion of the times, the romantic definition of history in America was neither singular nor consistent. Critics and reviewers did not agree on what history should be: popular or philosophical, narrative or scientific. Most seemed to favor some combination of passion and reason. They listed "pictorial exhibition, matter-of-fact exactness, and causal connexion and sequence" as the elemental historic qualities. "History is not a business of paste and scissors—but of high art, exact science, and deep philosophy," wrote one critic. In 1828, a critic for the Edinburgh Review repeated Henry St. John Bolingbroke's assertion that facts were the mere dross of history. "It is from the abstract truth which interpenetrates them... that the mass derives its whole value." According to this writer, the perfect history would, like art, represent reality, not in all its minute detail but in the perception of the artist: "those are the best pictures and the best histories which exhibit such part of the truth as most nearly produce the effect of the whole." The experience, intuition, and imagination of the historian, like the

perception of the painter or poet, would enable him or her, "by judicious selection, rejection, and arrangement" to give to truth "those attractions which have been usurped by fiction."27 "History may be defined to be the science of human nature, as shown in a full, correct, and philosophical account of the experiments which have been tried upon humanity ever since its first existence," declared the North American Review. To speak of the study of history in the same light as poetry, as if their values were comparable, was a great error. Another reviewer insisted that the writer of classical history must "embrace his whole subject with an enthusiastic love," and that "his passions must instruct his reason."28 "The most perfect history, when separated from its philosophical accompaniment, is, in reality, but a sequence of anecdotes, more or less developed, and arranged in a methodical and chronological order," and if there were any chance of finding truth in history, "it must be in a collection of anecdotes" claimed one article in the Southern Literary Messenger, while another contributor declared that history was associated with philosophy, "which scans with microscopic severity the deep current of public events; which traces out moral effects to their causes and their consequences; which analyzes the mysterious and complex fabric of society; which investigates and establishes truth; which discriminates justly

between the transient prejudice of an hour and the enduring sentiment of ages.”29 “A perfect History is the revival of the past in its events, its spirit, its causes and results, and its character,” wrote a critic in the Christian Examiner in 1838, holding out the works of George Bancroft (History of the United States) and William H. Prescott (History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella) as the “perfect Ideals.” In 1841, Emerson articulated his definition of history in an essay of that title. Originally delivered before the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1836, it was the starting point for his Transcendental philosophy. History was the record of the works of a universal mind. All history, Emerson insisted, existed in the minds of all men. “All history becomes subjective,” he wrote, “in other words, there is properly no history; only biography.” “Let it suffice that in the light of these two facts, namely, that the mind is One, and that nature is its correlative, history is to be read and written.”30

Plainly, the definition of history depended on the audience. In 1847, the editors at Princeton told their readers that history might be written simply to detail the facts in a given case in an entertaining manner; or it might be written so as to exhibit the evidence on which the facts of history are

---

based, the designs of the actors in the drama of human life, and the relations of the events recorded. “The former may be termed popular, the latter philosophical history...” An essay in the Southern Literary Messenger in 1837 carried a similar observation. “Two classes of persons read history; those who read superficially and those who reflect.” The essayist characterized superficial readers as those who skipped over the reasonings to arrive at the facts and were impervious to the philosophical labor of the historian. Those who reflected required philosophical history. Another essayist observed that the large audience attracted to history were divided into two classes, those who sought to be entertained by “varied incident and thrilling narrative” and those who were attracted to history as a field for enlarged speculation. The ideal history might provide a combination of art and science, but either was accepted as history. “To belong to either class is to inform the mind and, to a well-disciplined taste, to enable us to lap in an intellectual Elysium.” The reviewer of a history of Kentucky allowed that, though it did not lay claim to the title of history “in the highest and most philosophical sense of the term,” it nevertheless illustrated some of the most important points in the science of human nature as “a simple record of the

32 “Thoughts on the Manner of Writing History,” 156-57.
adventures, perils, and hardships of the settlers of Kentucky, and of its progress from a collection of log cabins to populous cities—from an untaught community, to a people of schools and colleges—and from a handful of men, in danger of destruction from the exasperated neighbors, to a power state.\textsuperscript{34}

Not only were there different kinds of history for different audiences but also for different historical perspectives. The writer who would produce a classical history must "narrate the fact, as to make [readers] the witnesses of the occurrence; so to describe the spot, as to spread out its map before the imagination; so to picture the acting spirits, as to make them rise up, living and sentient, and repeat their ancient exploits in your presence." "The history of the present times," assured the same reviewer, "is best written by the severe and ample accumulation of facts."\textsuperscript{35}

Along with a romantic definition of history, American Romanticism produced various opinions about historians as well. One essayist explained that the historian had to possess the qualities of feeling, imagination, and judgment. Feeling was "that nice sensibility which catches even the slightest impression, and in which there subsists a due proportion between the emotion and the cause of its excitement." Imagination enabled the historian to "seize the circumstances most characteristic of each object" and "give existence to

\textsuperscript{34} Review of A History of the Commonwealth of Kentucky by Mann Butler in American Quarterly Review 17 (June 1835): 525.
animated description." True judgment enabled the historian to be impartial and objective.\textsuperscript{88} Other critics emphasized one quality over another. "The perfect historian," wrote one, "must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make the narrative affecting and picturesque." Though he agreed it must be controlled, "the best historians of later times have been seduced from truth, not by their imagination but by their reason." Another essayist enumerated no less than three kinds of historian. A historian might be a narrator of past occurrences or of those of his or her own time, while individuals who chronicled their own exploits or those in which they had participated made up a third species of historian.\textsuperscript{97} Most authorities seemed to agree that the perfect historian exhibited the "character and spirit of an age."\textsuperscript{98}

In 1809 Washington Irving sketched a caricature of the contemporary historian as a rather pompous, good-natured bookworm, too in love with his work ever to complete it and so immersed in the romance of the past as to be oblivious to the reality of the present. "After all, gentle reader," he intoned, "cities of themselves, and, in fact, empires of themselves, are nothing without an

historian." Irving's personna, Diederich Knickerbocker, in truth cut a fairly accurate figure of the American historian of the early nineteenth century. Most of those individuals engaged in writing history in pre-Civil War America did so as an avocation, most were quite well educated, usually in the classics, and most possessed an income that permitted them to devote themselves to their passion for the past. They have been dubbed the "patricians" by American historiographers. A statistical study of nineteenth-century American historians revealed that most wrote and published in the leisure of middle-age. Those who were not independently wealthy came from the ranks of clergymen, statesmen, physicians, educators, farmers, printers, editors, librarians, journalists, and, not at all surprisingly, novelists. "We require of the historian that he be learned," wrote a contributor to the Westminster Review, "deeply, variously learned; learned not as a pedant and antiquary, but as a philosopher and a man; saturated with the learning illustrative of the age and nation whose story he has to tell; imbued with its poetry and its politics, its legends and its statistics; its very localities must all be familiar to him, as the streams and hills of his native village, or the streets and squares of his native town."

---

40 Craus and Joyce, Writing of American History, 136; Callcott, History in the United States, 69-72.
In general, most historians of the early nineteenth century were motivated by their love of the past often prompted by family heritage and intensified by European travel. Some, like William Hickling Prescott, had the luxury of devoting themselves entirely to history writing to give direction and purpose to their lives. For those not so financially well off, history provided a diversion from the cares of their everyday existence. Many cited their love of their subjects as their reason for writing. Others simply found gratification by dwelling in the past. Few wrote for profit, and many confessed to barely breaking even or worse. At least one historiographer has classified the American historians of this period into distinct types: the gentlemen of leisure whose works combined art and scholarship; the lawyers, doctors, and clergymen whose works were generally compilations of facts, scholarly but lacking artistry or philosophy; the professional writers and printers whose works met the public demand for simple, exciting narrative; and professional archivists, editors, and collectors, devoted antiquarians who regarded their work as a labor of love and service.42

If American historians in the romantic era were supremely sensitive to audience, they took their choice of subject seriously as well. Modern

historiographers have observed that whatever the historians' indebtedness to
the theories of Montesquieu and Herder, "they were happiest when they could
emulate Scott and [James Fenimore] Cooper by staging a battle on a sublime
natural scene." Further, if the action revealed awe-inspiring character or
produced results of biblical proportions, the historian had his perfect
subject.\textsuperscript{43}

Very often the choice of subject matter related most closely to the
individual's personal interest or purpose for writing history, but certain
themes seemed particularly popular. Since most people agreed on basic
principles of morality, progress, patriotism, and the existence of God, these
assumptions provided unifying themes and a way of finding meaning in
history.\textsuperscript{44} After the Civil War contradictions began to appear. In the first half
of the nineteenth century, however, those who came to Texas and wrote its
history brought these basic assumptions with them and encountered no
difficulty at all finding in Texas history illustrations of the truths they
posited.

Assumptions stemming from the American attitude toward
nationalism, God, and time, which began even before the American Revolution

\textsuperscript{43} Levin, History as Romantic Art, 17-18; F. W. P. [Greenwood], Review of History of the
Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic, by William H. Prescott, Christian Examiner 24
\textsuperscript{44} Callcott, History in the United States, 151-52.
and matured during and afterward, provided “probably the most important source for American historical thinking in the early 19th century.”

In the first half of the nineteenth century, especially after 1815, among the most compelling themes for American historians were nationalism and patriotism. Americans viewed the uniqueness of their national character in terms of liberty, democracy, individualism and republicanism, values rooted in American experience and central to Romantic thinking. The American cult of individualism evolved from a history of individual worth into Romantic cults of heroism, chivalry, diversity, originality, imagination, intuition, subjectivism, and supernaturalism. In the South, particularly, popular histories seemed to embrace these themes. “There is a certain grandeur about everything American, which the genius of the historian seizes and stamps upon his page. It is an element of the national character and no historian, who feels his subject can fail of impressing it upon his pages.”

Along with nationalism early nineteenth-century American histories vigorously sought to engender patriotism. Histories inspired by state pride and written by participants in the events surrounding the American Revolution and the War of 1812 characterized the period. They emphasized

---

cultural and institutional factors for the purpose of promoting patriotism.

"Perhaps the most abundant source of history is the love of country, the desire of those who look beyond their own narrow sphere, to make known to other nations and to preserve to coming generations, the lives and deeds of their countrymen." Many authors exalted the American Revolution as a revolt against intolerable tyranny, words echoed in the writings of Texas historians in the nineteenth century. Just as the United States cast off the yoke of British oppression, Anglo-Americans in Texas triumphed in righteous revolt against overwhelming Mexican odds, and, later, tragic heroes of classical proportions rose to similarly righteous battle in the Lost Cause. Perhaps because in these respects, the Texan experience paralleled the American experience, Texans developed a strong sense of particular nationalism and patriotism for the Lone Star that far outlasted the Republic and appeared in Texas historical writings and school histories through the nineteenth century. Writing of Texas during the Civil War, Victor M. Rose wrote in 1881, "To us, Texas was the 'Nation,' to her alone we owed allegiance. We were allied with the other Southern States, not indissolubly joined." Early nineteenth century Texas historians, however, most of whom were not "Texans," concerned themselves with "vindicating the Texans' right to the land," a concern, some

---

argue, that stemmed more from the racial principle of Anglo-American expansion than from the principle of regional independence.\textsuperscript{48}

In addition to nationalism and patriotism, a second profound influence on the nineteenth century view of the past was the sense of God. The great American historians of the early nineteenth century tended to measure history in terms of moral character. "The best philosophy is inseparable from a pure morality," and "a writer is in the strictest sense manly, when he is true to virtue." George Bancroft found the reason for America's achievement of nationhood in a benevolent overruling Providence.\textsuperscript{49} The romantic idea that truth could be discerned through intuition stemmed from the notion that intuition was the voice of God speaking through nature. Their common sense philosophy gave historians a "sense of the reality of God and the importance of moral standards in history" which often became more important than the facts. "We believe it the Historian's province honestly to give the relation of the deeds and characters he reviews to the eternal law of Rectitude."\textsuperscript{50} From the time of Saint Augustine, a fundamental assumption had held that all


that happened in history was the will of God. The emphasis shifted to morality during the romantic period, i.e. change was inevitably for the better when men acted morally. Editors of the *American Quarterly Review* cautioned against relying too heavily on Providence to explain causation: “Men are apt to lend to an overruling Providence their own schemes of a satisfactory government of the universe.” They pointed out that Providence gifted humans with free will; the good and evil they did was of their own making after that.

The romantic movement in America, for all its insistence upon freedom from restraint, revived and intensified the Puritanical virtues. Religious feeling characterized American romanticism and marked the histories of the era; Texas histories offered some prime examples, and in Texas, as elsewhere in America, many chroniclers of local history were clergymen.  

The particular virtues manifested themselves in the stereotypic romantic hero: strong character and will, self-reliance, integrity, piety, plain living, industry, practicality, temperance, courage, and patriotism. The opposing virtues, equally plain in the romantic villain, consisted of pride, pomp, deceit, luxury, materialism, atheism, slothfulness, sensuousness, dissipation, and effeminacy. The emphasis on morality, with its absolutes of right and wrong, set history up as a kind of tribunal. The moral character of

---

events became the only standard by which the events of history could be judged. When the historians of the Texas Revolution defended the principle of Anglo-American expansion, their historical justification had a distinct moral tone, the triumph of 'moral organization' over 'the puppets of ignorant and intolerant misrule.'

Another basic assumption of the early nineteenth century was progress, which entailed ideas about "the state of nature, the evolution from savagery to civilization, the guiding hand of God, free will, the nature of evil residing in corrupt institutions, and the greatness of the United States as the capstone of human history." Assumptions about progress, together with assumptions about God and morality, gave rise to corresponding assumptions about immorality, decay, and evil in national institutions, and became wrapped up in the "us (good) against them (evil)" theme that developed in American romantic history. In the view of early nineteenth-century historians, simple, democratic people like the American pioneers embodied progress by regenerating the decaying society around them with their renewed sense of

---

52 Ibid., 157; quote, William Kennedy, Texas: The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas, 2d ed. (1841; reprint, Ft. Worth: Molyneaux Craftsmen, Inc., 1925), 518; David Levin observes that when discussing evil characters, the historian concentrated on moral judgment and instruction and on the operation of natural law. If virtue was instructive, the consequences of evil were even more so, History as Romantic Art, 31; also see Gilmer, "An Address," 97-98.

morality, innocence, and vigor. The evil these romantic heroes stood against might be characterized by the Spanish Hapsburgs, the Roman priesthood, the French Bourbons, the English monarchy, and even the Indian nations of the Americas. Progress in America became identified with a concept eventually hailed as “manifest destiny.” This idea of progress involved a common assumption among historians that history revealed a progressive advance toward liberty and “that people of Anglo-Saxon origin had a special destiny to bring democracy to the rest of the world. To many Texas historians of the early nineteenth century, the “contest of civilizations” in Texas represented the inevitable fulfillment of a divine plan.\(^5\)

The assumption of progress prompted historians to seek roots for national institutions which would explain and confirm national character. The pre-eminent of these institutions, the concept of liberty, seemed to have rooted in Germany, evolved through English law, and culminated in America. In the search for the origins of tolerance, democracy, and the various traits of republicanism, race became increasingly basic. George Bancroft promised to

\(^5\) Payne, “Texas Historiography in the Twentieth Century,” 17; Progress and morality defined each other since progress was inevitable and right was eventually triumphant (Callcott, History in the United States, 162); see for example, Henry S. Foote, “… it is that sublime collision of moral influences for the first time now met in dread encounter which has gathered, as it were, the generous minded of all nations…” Texas and the Texans; or Advance of the Anglo-Americans to the South-West; Including a History of Leading Events in Mexico, From the Conquest by Fernando [sic] Cortes to the Termination of the Texan Revolution, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1841), Vol. 1, 14.
trace liberty from “that Germanic race most famed for love of personal
independence.” Thus assumptions about national character evolved into
assumptions about racial superiority, which played a significant role in the
interpretation of events unfolding in Texas in the nineteenth century. Henry
L. Pinckney, in an address to students at the University of North Carolina in
1836, spoke of “a gallant band in a neighboring territory who, with the true
nobleness of the Anglo-Saxon blood, have firmly resolved to achieve their
independence, or to perish in the effort.” Historian Mark E. Nackman has
noted that common language, religion, ethnicity and political heritage led
Americans and Europeans in Texas to form a coherent group that wanted to
convince others that they were entitled to a nation state.

In addition to choosing the right subject, romantic historians conducted
scrupulous scholarship to lend credibility to a work, developed a literary
style, which was “essential to transform facts into a flowing story,” and used
personal emotion to elevate scholarship and style into art. All these
techniques were really means of being interesting to readers, an aim of

---


paramount importance to early nineteenth century historians. “Interest, interest, interest,” William Prescott exhorted himself as he worked, “the great requirement... interest!”

For history to be true or interesting, the historian had to impart his or her personal passion, subjective insight, and individual genius. This was the essentially “romantic” element in early nineteenth century historical writing. Early nineteenth-century history writing in America required the element of feeling even more than scholarship or style, and critics saw no contradiction between objective historical truth and passionate, intuitive conviction.

“[The historian’s] descriptions must be tender, as being founded on those circumstances that escape an ordinary eye... the correctness of his feeling leads him to such only as are just.” Good history, critics observed, was necessarily “an attribute of the heart,” while “fairness and impartiality” are too often “exaggerated into faults” and become “indifferency.” Critics praised Emerson, Bancroft, and Prescott for their “intuitive insights” into the past. Intuition was the voice of God speaking to man, and the romantics believed that ultimate truths inaccessible to reason were accessible through

---

58 Callcott, History in the United States, 147.
inspiration. “The instinct of the mind, the purpose of nature, betrays itself in the use we make of the signal narrations of history,” wrote Emerson. “History shall no longer be a dull book. You shall not tell me by languages and titles a catalogue of the volumes you have read. You shall make me feel what periods you have lived. Historians have “not merely the senses opening to us the eternal,” said George Bancroft, “but an internal sense, which places us in connection with the world of intelligence and the decrees of God.”

Part of the critical acceptance of this “intuitive” interpretation stemmed from the fact that in the early nineteenth century “right principles” seemed beyond dispute and based on natural law and intuition. Patriotism, liberty, morality, or progress were established more certainly than historical facts, and these principles, in turn, determined the significance of historical facts. “In history the facts are given to find the principles,” wrote one reviewer. A historical “fact” that coincided with deeply held principles was more significant that a “fact” that did not. “We understand better than our fathers, what may be called the symbolism of the facts,” explained another

---

Ever since the rationalists' application of inductive reasoning to the writing of history, historians dedicated to right principles did not seek truth so much as illustrate it. Therefore, historians might even sacrifice factual accuracy for the sake of accuracy of impression. "A cold narrative that is literally true, would often be a false picture," asserted more than one authority. Historians might even alter direct quotations if they believed such alteration came closer to the speaker's true intention. As long as these principles remained generally accepted, the historian's impression could be more interesting and vivid, more real and true, than literal details.\textsuperscript{64}

The interpretation of facts to illustrate the truth of accepted principles did not mean that the romantic historians eschewed accurate, factual scholarship. On the contrary, they prided themselves on the new idea that history could be based on research rather than philosophy. "The new historical reform has begun--where all reforms should begin--at the beginning, with the more thorough and earnest study of facts... a microscopic research and exactness are among the cardinal virtues of the modern historian. Thus historians conducted painstaking research that they might have the most authentic, thorough, and accurate array of facts possible to present. They


considered honesty the “highest and noblest qualification of an historian.”\textsuperscript{65}

They valued accuracy as the “prime virtue of an historian,” that which imparted the impression of reality to the historical narrative. They regarded this as the historian’s great advantage over the novelist. The romantic historians achieved the height of artistry when they recounted the absolute truth, through “judicious selection, rejection, and arrangement” of facts. Authenticity of historical facts not only made truth more compelling than fiction; it was more instructional in the meaning of life and the sources of virtue.\textsuperscript{66} Historians insured that they possessed sufficient details to paint a faithfully realistic picture by leaving no stone unturned in the collection of them. The scholarly virtues of the romantic historians prompted them to place a premium on original sources. As a result, Washington Irving spent years in Europe scouring both public and private libraries for original documents for the writing of his \textit{Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus}, and William Prescott spent thousands of dollars of his own money to purchase original, or copies of original, sources for his histories of the conquests of Mexico and Peru. The painstaking effort to re-create a historical


scene through accurate details produced a keen interest in geography, “the geographico-climatic and the human in their mutual action and reaction.”

The American historians of the early nineteenth century consulted a wide range of primary sources including private papers, government documents, and contemporary literature, much of it eagerly amassed by historical and antiquarian societies. They particularly liked the intimate flavor of personal interviews. “It is coming now to be very generally understood that history is not all in books; that history is to be sought and found elsewhere than in books; and that the unwritten sources . . . are more trustworthy, when interpreted [sic] than the written.” Having accumulated the sources of information, the historian had to weigh it all critically and impartially, to judge the character of his witnesses, and use the data discreetly. This was the historian’s art. Moreover, romantic historians documented the sources of their data. Irving, Prescott, Bancroft, Palfrey, and Ticknor all devoted sizeable portions of each page to footnote references. Sir Walter Scott, who did not, was criticized for his omission. “History is

---

progress toward... true unity and universality... not in the neglect of details but in the more perfect verification, the more careful mastery.⁷⁰

Despite reliance on intuition and selective use of facts, conscientious research and documentation enabled romantic historians to claim impartiality. This they did not consider contradictory or inconsistent. During the romantic period, subjectivity was not seen as opposed to objectivity but rather as a means of achieving it. Critics and reviewers acknowledged the importance of objectivity and its elusiveness. "We know how difficult it is to escape all bias. . . . and no Historian has . . . risen above all that is personal and local," wrote the editors of the Christian Examiner. "Positive impartiality is not given to man. To obtain from an individual the truth, the true truth, you must take from him all the passions, both good and evil of human nature; it is necessary, in a word, that he should not be a man." While recognizing personal accounts as a legitimate type of history, one writer noted: "The difficulty is much increased in the case of the writer, who gives us an account of transactions with which he has himself been connected. He will give us a more detailed account, but it will be tinctured with personal feeling . . . Thus, do we find reason to receive every history with caution from its peculiar character; there are, moreover, difficulties common to all, which of course

result from the various temperaments of writers." For this reason, some critics argued that ancient history was more instructive because it could be written without passion. One essayist, after struggling with the need to balance passion and reason in writing history, concluded that objective truth could not be found in ancient history because it was too distant nor in modern history because it was too near.\footnote{First quote, Review, \textit{Christian Examiner} 24 (July, 1838): 358; second quote, "Thoughts on the Manner of Writing History," 156; third quote, "The Philosophy of History," 44; "Thoughts on the Manner of Writing History," 156-57.}

Having collected and critically digested the facts, historians of the early nineteenth century had to adopt a suitable literary style. In the elements of style, they were more consistent than in any other aspect of history writing. Although critics did not unanimously agree on the most felicitous style, both critics and historians seemed to agree that excellence of style was essential not only to make history readable but to provide a means of approaching truth. The historian was a man of letters and, like the poet, sought to convey a more profound reality than lay in facts alone. At least partly to compete with the historical fiction of Scott and Cooper, good historians strove to immerse their readers in the past, involve them in the historical experience and the spirit of the age. They thought of themselves as painters, filling their pages with vivid color, action and mood, bringing the past to life by appealing
to the senses of the reader. Literary artistry, in fact, received more attention from historians and critics than any other aspect of history writing. Reviewers wrote that while historians were “not allowed to fabricate,” they were “required to embellish.” “[Embellishment] leads to no error; it supplies in the narrative the want of life in the personages and reality in the events. It gives animation and glow to the silent page, and brings it somewhat nearer, in its effect upon the mind and heart, to the actual thing described.”

Critics and reviewers praised “flowing and spirited” style. Literary mastery defined the scholarly historian. The distinguished narrative of the great literary historian, William Prescott, endowed his *History of Ferdinand and Isabella* with “all the graces of modern scholarship.” Another reviewer of the work spoke of the “felicity of concurrent circumstances” that attended this “scholar-like production” in the combining of great subject with great writer, and described Prescott’s style as “clear, easy, flowing.” Many critics favorably compared romantic history with the grandiose style of the Enlightenment historians. They berated Bancroft for his oratorical tendencies, but they delighted in the dramatic devices employed by the best known romantic historians to stimulate interest in their stories.

---

One of the most popular stylistic devices of the literary historians was the use of historical characters around whom a story could be constructed and with whom the reader could identify. The romantic public searched for their own identities in fictional and historical characters, fueling the popularity of the novel and historical biography. Literary scholar David Levin, in emphasizing the importance of the stock historical hero in the works of Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman, observed that each of these historians presented at least one hero who "perfectly represented his people." And the representative man represented even more. He represented the progressive principle in the struggle against antiprogress. He stood for great moral principles and represented ideal virtues. He possessed many essential romantic characteristics suited to the contemporary conquest of their wild native country. His prime characteristic was naturalness. For historians like Bancroft, influenced by Transcendentalism, the hero epitomized the idea of right arising from the depths of man's consciousness, while nature represented the evil that comes from without. Moreover, the romantic historians accepted the literary convention of the Byronic hero. "In the romantic vocabulary," explained Levin, "the extreme suffering of a majestic man were, like the terrible violence of a thunderstorm or a wild, overpowering natural scene, 'sublime'; in the vocabulary of an aggressive society bent on
progress, expansion, and production, perseverance was an exalted virtue.\textsuperscript{74} This natural, isolated, melancholy, sometimes tragic hero figure, mis understood, suffering and lonely, but nobly enduring despite the odds, easily represented the Anglo-Americans who ventured into the vast Texas wilderness in the early nineteenth century, and with no difficulty whatever evolved into the quintessential western hero, the Texas cowboy. The romantic villain was no less a stock character: haughty, pompous, wealthy, selfish, and effete. The description fitted the arrogant and ruthless Spaniards perfectly in romantic literature, an image enhanced by the Black Legend, perpetuated in Europe since the sixteenth century and, in America, in the writing of Bartolomé de las Casas. Scenes of turbulent action, dramatic crisis, battle, and violence were the fitting setting for such characters. The public is "hungering and thirsting after food for admiration and abhorrence," wrote one critic. "The plurality . . . expect, as a matter of right . . . to be gratified with admiration and horror, with suffering saints and triumphing monsters."\textsuperscript{75} On the Texas plains in the early nineteenth century, all these ingredients of style-character, setting, and action--could be found.

\textsuperscript{74} Levin, \textit{Historic as Romantic Art}, 50-51; 71.
\textsuperscript{75} The Black Legend, as historians from Spain came to call it, was a whole complex of perjoratives that had its roots in sixteenth-century Protestant northern Europe. "History," 89.
If romanticism was an essential characteristic of the historian's choice of subject and method of writing history, the most essential characteristic of the idea of history in the early nineteenth century was its clear projection toward definite ends. Americans, however influenced by the German Romantic philosophers, were much less concerned with the meaning and patterns of history than with its utility. One of the main sources of history's popularity in the early nineteenth century was its usefulness. Purpose determined virtually all elements of the American concept of history: importance of the past, subject matter, interpretation, and methods. "To undertake the acquisition of any science without some idea of its utility and importance, we hold to be the act of no sane mind," wrote one essayist. Another critic, noting the differences between popular and philosophical history, opined that little practical wisdom was derived from the knowledge of facts. "On the contrary, history becomes useful chiefly when its facts are considered in their relations." In early nineteenth century America, history's primary use was social, and it assumed increasingly important moral purposes. History's purpose was to strengthen society's basic principles concerning morality, religion, and nationalism.

---

76 Callcott, History in the United States, 175.
The social use of history traced its origins to the Enlightenment. Bolingbroke's statement that history was "philosophy teaching by examples," still quoted frequently in the nineteenth century, came to mean that philosophy furnished true principles and history proved them. Thus, history's object was to instruct society on these principles. "The only useful purpose to which history . . . has been susceptible of application, has been simply as a code of morals teaching by example."78 History "must exist as an object lesson"; it must "always teach a valuable lesson"; "the object is to instruct."79 Because it aimed to serve such lofty ends, a very carefully positive view of the past emerged. Failures, iniquity, errors of judgment, character flaws, bloody cruelties, and obscene missteps were assiduously avoided in favor of heroic actions and noble ideas because these were more instructive examples of desirable behavior. Facts that did not illustrate some moral or political truth were useless, for right principles were known and agreed upon while all the facts about the past could never be known or verified.80

In America this meant supporting the principles of progress, of personal morality, the existence of God, and the greatness of America. "The
principles of history are certain, distinct and applicable, as well as those of other sciences," explained one historian. The principles of the science of history might be rendered less extensive by the mutability of humans in their relations to each other, but they were nevertheless momentous. "Those [principles] of history, which by common consent [were] firmly established" amounted to nothing less than Progress and unmistakably reflected the political and social mind of the Jacksonian age:

that we are improving beings, the noblest truth that science ever taught . . . that there is a necessity of positive regulations . . . called laws, which especially regard the well being of society, -- that the mutual wants of society produce commerce, which reacts most beneficially in producing liberality of sentiment, correcting prejudices, and creating wealth and . . . that luxury unrestrained is a curse to any nation, but considered as the grand stimulant to industry, and consequently modified thereby, becomes of great advantage . . . that the virtues of hospitality belong rather to an agricultural than a commercial people . . .

Teachers and clergymen used history to promote morality with missionary zeal. As a biographer of Mason Locke Weems pointed out, Weems turned from the ministry to writing the cherry tree fables convinced that he was "still doing God's work, having merely transferred his activities from the pulpit to a wider mission field." History provided abundant evidence that virtue is rewarded and evil punished. "The great lesson which history teaches

is that public virtue is the first, chief cause of national happiness and glory. To the American romantic, virtue meant personal rectitude, honesty, earnestness, simplicity, industry, and piety—rural as opposed to urban virtues, again, a curious blend of Puritan ethic, Jeffersonian republicanism, and Jacksonian idealization of the common man.

Related to the use of history for social instruction in early nineteenth century America was the memorialization of worthies, who were by definition people of virtue, religion, and patriotism. Certainly, the acts and deeds of these individuals provided examples of noble behavior for Americans to emulate. This use of history, however, lent itself frequently to abuse, for some historians, in their anxiety to inspire virtue, exaggerated the qualities of their subjects and took great liberty with facts in order to emphasize that which was worthy.83

The use of history to support social values lasted as long as the consensus about what those values were. Critics dealt harshly with historians who ventured beyond consensus values. They recognized and enforced a distinction between proving principles and proving arguments. When confined to accepted philosophical examples, history not only served

83 Callcott, History in the United States, 190.
society but provided historians with the opportunity and personal satisfaction of doing so.  

Another popular, though less lofty, use of history was amusement and personal pleasure. Historians and critics acknowledged that an immediate purpose of writing history was to create pleasure. “The mass of people read history mainly to be amused, and they are carried along with the narrative,” wrote one reviewer. They justified entertainment as an aim of history by pointing to its superiority over other forms of amusement. After all, history provided intellectual stimulation and served the cause of democracy by making knowledge entertaining. Reviewers and critics elevated the use of history for amusement further by attempting to define pleasure in lofty terms of human needs—the need for vicarious experience, for truth, art, ideas, and emotional enrichment. In this way, they offered something for those uncomfortable with the idea of history as purely amusement. Both historians and their readers found pleasure in the mysterious and in learning something that had never been known before, all the more fascinating because it was not only unique but true. Historians chose their subjects primarily for their newness and appeal to public curiosity. Nowhere was this better demonstrated than in the proliferation of histories of Texas in the 1830s and

---

1840s. "The history of the present century offers no subject of inquiry more curious and interesting, than that series of convulsions and revolutions, which have agitated and still continue to agitate the former dominions of Spain and Portugal on this continent," proclaimed the *North American Review*.

Historians who provided such intellectual stimulation most effectively did so through the art with which they told their stories, through structure, style, language, and unity of composition. They and their critics realized that the popularity of history depended on artful presentation. In this way, historians of the era aimed to make their contribution to society by making history accessible and valuable to the widest possible audience.  

Some historians and critics believed that the most important use of history was to predict the future. "No past event has any intrinsic importance. The knowledge of it is valuable only as it leads us to form just calculations with respect to the future. History which does not serve this purpose, though it may be filled with battles, treaties, and commotions," is useless. "With history,—the experience of ages past,—[man] has become a seer

---

who can penetrate the dark future. . . . If we regard philosophy as that wisdom
which opens to us the future . . . then, it must be admitted that history makes
the true philosopher, the one whose knowledge is most practically useful."

The use of history to predict the future suited well the themes of Providence
and progress and in many instances provided would-be historians not only
with philosophical examples but with warnings of the consequences of
immorality and evidence of the rewards of virtue, all of which might be
utilized positively or negatively, as the case might be, to predict for avid
audiences of the 1830s and 1840s the future prospects of Texas.

In early nineteenth-century America, influenced by European idealism,
the writings of Johann Herder, and the discourses of Kant and Hegel, history's
highest use or purpose came to be understood as a means of perceiving
ultimate reality. Perhaps the most comprehensive expression of history as
ultimate reality, however, came from the philosophy of American essayist
Ralph Waldo Emerson. To Emerson, "History rather than nature"—even more
than science or art—provided "the best expositor of the divine mind." Many
reviewers and critics of the time expressed the opinion that history provided
insight into the workings of Providence. "The classical historian, in composing
the history of his own country . . . is the instrument of Providence," intoned a

---

of History," 37, 47.
reviewer of George Bancroft's *History of the United States*. Thus, Americans could turn to their historians for proof that God was on their side. Others preferred to think of ultimate reality in terms of life rather than God, to think of historians as artists who depicted nature rather than revelation. The historian distilled human experience into his creation as did the artist. "The perfect historian is he in whose work the character and spirit of an age is exhibited in miniature. In his narrative... some transactions are prominent, others retire. But the scale on which he represents them is increased or diminished, not according to the dignity of the persons concerned in them, but according to the degree in which they elucidate the condition of society and the nature of man."97

Romantic history, then, was defined in several different, sometimes contradictory ways. Some saw its definition in terms of theme and interpretation, others in terms of style and method, still others saw history as ultimate reality, but, above all, Americans of the romantic era defined history in terms of its utility. American Romanticism, like so much else American, was a mixture of the old and the new, of Old World philosophy and New World practicality, of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the emotionalism of the New Light, of reason and imagination and, perhaps most

significantly, New England intellectualism and frontier anti-
intellectualism. Americans, like Spaniards, had, from the beginning, many
romantic elements in their view of the New World. For Americans, this view
remained intensely romantic, fed by nationalism and the romantic movement
of the early nineteenth century. The nineteenth century became the age of
history. By the time they arrived in Texas, Americans were ready to write
its history and eager to read it.

---

88 Ibid., 367.
CHAPTER 3

TEXAS HISTORIANS AND THE ROMANTIC REVOLUTION

THE 1830S

Nowhere more than in Texas was history appreciated for its utility. In many respects, in fact, the American romantic climate of opinion manifested itself--indeed, found its perfect subject--in the writing of Texas history in the first half of the nineteenth century. As surely as it presented new frontiers to settlers, Texas produced new frontiers in history writing and, to some extent, a new breed of romantic historian, one who approached neither the philosophical achievement of Hegel nor the literary prowess of Prescott but who reflected both the romanticism and the increasing materialism of the times.

The sheer number of Texas histories that appeared between 1819 and 1849 distinguished Texas history writing from that of other parts of the North American frontier. During this period more than thirty monographs were published on Texas, a dozen of which either claimed to be or for all intents and purposes were histories in the sense that they organized the past from a particular perspective and brought past events to bear on their contemporary
accounts. Half of these were written by Americans, half by Europeans. None of them became permanent residents of Texas. Such prolific publication about a single frontier state during this period of westward expansion appears to have been unprecedented, with the possible exception of California. The bibliographies of early imprints related to Texas attest to the tremendous volume of publication during this period.\(^1\) While the popularity of history and the spirit of nationalism following the War of 1812 produced numerous histories of the United States between 1816 and 1849, individual state histories were much less common. This resulted, in large part, from the fact that so many frontier states had been carved from larger territories. Thanks to the diligence of Spanish historians, Morfi and Pichardo, Texas, unlike the states of the Old Northwest, the Floridas, the Pacific Northwest, or the Louisiana Purchase, existed as a distinct place with definite, albeit disputed, boundaries long before the first American and European histories of it appeared.

The writers of these early nineteenth century histories of Texas in many ways conformed to the profile of romantic historians in their

---

backgrounds and occupations, as well as in their themes and writing styles.

In other respects they distinguished themselves from their contemporaries.

Texas, in the early nineteenth century, was a political "hot potato," and history, because it commanded a wide readership, became a favored medium for those deeply interested in the controversy, for one reason or another, who wished to appeal to public sentiment. Thus, though Texas historians might philosophize to some extent, they wrote primarily for more practical purposes. Unlike William Prescott, who created vividly accurate descriptions from his sources without ever visiting either Mexico or Peru, none wrote about Texas without having experienced it first-hand, however brief the encounter. Almost without exception they had specific, pragmatic reasons for writing which rarely involved such lofty aims as teaching moral lessons, providing models for society, or demonstrating ultimate reality, the typical uses for romantic history. As a consequence, form followed function. They produced history as emigrant guide, polemic, legal brief, or stirring narrative as suited their specific purposes. Few wrote about Texas purely out of curiosity. Europeans had been interested in the area off and on for centuries. Perhaps even more compelling for European observers was the American revolutionary experience and America's peculiar brand of liberty. American writers seemed, in this as

University Press, 1948-1977), contains hundreds of imprints relating specifically to Texas among its nearly 400,000 entries.
in virtually every other field of American endeavor, compelled by a desire for gain of one sort or another. 

The extra-legal adventures of American filibusters in Texas in the late eighteenth century attracted the attention only, it seems, of Spanish writers for several reasons. Texas was a Spanish province, and the activities of these freebooters concerned the Spanish audience on a practical level. Americans, meanwhile, found themselves absorbed in the securing of their own republic. American and European interest in Texas increased considerably with the Louisiana Purchase, however, and intensified with the struggles for Mexican and South American Independence. Serious American interest in Texas began with Zebulon Pike’s narrative, first published in 1810. Even as early as Pike’s account, American nativist attitudes appeared in print and were incorporated into perceptions of Texas. That interest increased further with the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819, an event that, combined with American fervor for the cause of liberty, prompted geographer and journalist William Darby to visit the vicinity and publish a short history of the ill-fated Gutiérrez-Magee expedition to Texas in 1813.

---


relations with Spain; the revolutionary state of the Spanish colonies in both
the Americas: the part which many of our citizens have taken in that struggle;
and finally, the policy which our government has and may continue to pursue,
all tend to render interesting every subject connected with the Spanish
colonies, particularly those in North America,” he wrote.⁵

Darby, who had grown up in the Ohio country, became a deputy United
States surveyor after a fire destroyed his cotton plantation near Natchez,
Mississippi, in 1804. Philadelphia publisher, John Melish, used his
Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana... Being an Accompaniment
to the Map of Louisiana (1816; 2nd edition, 1817), as the basis for the
boundary delineation in the treaty of 1819 between the United States and
Spain. Unlike many subsequent nineteenth century Texas historians, Darby
wrote several books between 1817 and 1829 on the geography and history of
the United States and North America that distinguished him professionally.⁶

Darby wrote his account of the province of Texas shortly after the battle
for San Antonio but did not seek to publish it until “recent movements in
Texas [gave] this sketch some interest.” Darby’s assessment was
dispassionate, informed, and matter-of-fact, based on his personal

⁵ William Darby, “Province of Texas,” from the New York Columbian (Aug. 3, 1819),
observations as both a scientist and a journalist. His historic interpretation of the episode placed it in the context of world events and universal history. "It is not unworthy of remark," he wrote, "that this petty war has been rendered memorable by the greatest extremes our nature is capable of." Darby condemned not only what he saw as the selfish and ignoble motives responsible for this episode but the unwillingness of Americans to educate themselves as to the culture and perspective of the Spanish-Mexican population with whom they shared the continent. "If to engender confidence, friendship, and reciprocal forbearance, be an indispensable duty, in those who regulate the conduct, or who form the morals of private persons, how much more incumbent is the obligation on the rulers of nations, to preserve and foster a spirit of amity, probity, and urbanity, between contiguous states. The unlicensed plunderer, or marauder, that roams, at this moment, from the United States into Texas, prevents or retards the peaceable approach towards a general intercourse."

When an American, Stephen F. Austin, established a colony in Texas and began to solicit immigrants from the United States, the historian's and history reading public's fascination with the mysterious and new focused more fully on the province. This fascination, combined with a number of other, more mundane factors, produced what has generally been regarded as the first

---

7 Darby, "Province of Texas," first quote, 42; second quote, 44; third quote, 45.
Anglo-American history of Texas and Texas' first historian, Mary Austin Holley. Following her lead, during the 1830s histories of Texas concentrated on the Anglo-European settlement of this vast region and its forcible separation from Mexico.

Holley, a cousin of the empresario, Stephen F. Austin, not only exemplified many of the characteristics of the American romantic historian of the early nineteenth century, she also set the example for early histories of Texas to follow in the years of the Texas Revolution and Republic. Like many of the patrician historians, Holley, nee Austin, was born of a well-to-do New England family, moved in upper social circles, and received a fine education. Her father, Elijah Austin, was the older brother of Moses Austin. She married a Yale graduate, Horace Holley, a young clergyman who converted to Unitarianism and eventually became president of Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. During her marriage she moved in circles that included the Adamses, historian William Hickling Prescott, orator Edward Everett, and Henry Clay. Nevertheless, she turned to writing more out of financial necessity, prompted by the death of her husband in 1827, than out of

---

Her second motive for writing about Texas was also financial, for she had been persuaded by her brother and cousins to become a land speculator and hence acquired a vested interest in promoting Texas. Mary Austin Holley never settled permanently in Texas, but her brief visit in the fall of 1831 to claim her league of Texas land produced two enduring works of Texas literature. Her first book, *Texas: Observations Historical, Geographical and Descriptive*, a collection of letters published in 1833, made no pretense of being anything other than promotional, and her second, *Texas*, published in 1836, started out that way. It was to have been based largely on the first volume, topically organized with chapters on geography, rivers, soil and climate, trade, society and manners, money, banks, and mail, "strictly a matter of fact volume." But even as she wrote, the events in Texas turned toward Revolution and prompted her to change her emphasis. Texas needed more than vigorous immigration; it needed political support, and Holley determined to use her writing and extensive connections to further the Texas cause in the United States. As a result of her efforts to include each historic

---

*Horace Holley's death left his wife in difficult circumstances with an incompetent child. The loss prompted Mary Austin Holley's first book, A Discourse on the Genius and Character of the Rev. Horace Holley, LL.D., a defense of her husband's record at Transylvania University that was surprisingly well received and established for her something of a literary reputation.


event as it occurred, she produced a hastily assembled account of the Texas Revolution and birth of the new republic, entitled simply *Texas*. Ironically, the first book brought her the greatest critical acclaim and was influential enough that it was plagiarized by David B. Edward and other historians of the era.\(^\text{12}\) Clearly, however, Mary Holley herself considered the second book to be the more important of the two and to be the basis of her claim to the designation "historian."\(^\text{13}\)

In fact, though it began as a travelogue and emigrant guide, Holley's *Texas* bore many of the characteristics of the romantic history being written in America at the time. The description of geography, climate, soil, streams, and native races with which the volume opened, in addition to providing general information to the prospective immigrant, satisfied the contemporary requirement that modern history, as a science, endeavor to understand "the real geography of a country, its organic structure; the form of its skeleton, that is, of its hills; the magnitude and course of its veins and arteries, that is, of its streams and rivers; to conceive of it as of a whole, made up of connected parts . . . exhibiting these two elements—the geographico-climatic and the human—in their mutual action and reaction."\(^\text{14}\) Nor did she neglect the historian's

\(^\text{12}\) reprinted in its entirety in *Letters of an Early American Traveller: Mary Austin Holley, Her Life and Her Works*, ed. Mattie Austin Hatcher (Dallas: Southwest Press, 1933), 63.

\(^\text{13}\) Holley, *Texas*, 309.

duty to identify cause and effect in the unfolding of events. Holley's style, replete with classical references and nature metaphors, reflected the demand that history be picturesque as well as accurate. The pages of her history abounded in the obligatory romantic heroes and villains, elevated the common man, and idealized frontier agrarianism: "The blood-hounds of Mexico" tore up "every vestage [sic] of civilization." Texas "had her Leonidas, and many a Curtius," and every man would "become a Cincinnatus."15

As easily identifiable as elements of romantic style were the prevalent themes of American romantic history in Holley's Texas: morality, progress, patriotism, and God, and their attendant virtues of liberty, democracy, individualism, republicanism, and, of course, American expansionism. "The righteous cause," wrote Holley, "the cause of LIBERTY, PHILANTHROPY, and RELIGION--shall prosper. Such is the cause of Texas." Mexicans, on the other hand, she described as "very indolent, of loose morals, and if not infidels, of which there are many, involved in the grossest superstition."

"Mexico can never conquer Texas! The justice and benevolence of Providence will forbid that delightful and now civilized region should again become a howling wilderness," Holley proclaimed. "The Anglo-Saxon American race are destined to be forever the proprietors of this land of promise and fulfillment. Their laws will govern it, their learning will enlighten it, their enterprise will

15 Holley, Texas, 3; v, 182; quotes, v-vi.
improve it, their flocks alone will range its boundless pastures, for them alone its fertile lands will yield their luxuriant harvests.” Texans were protected by “the genius of liberty and sanctified by the spirit of a beneficent religion,” and all this was inevitable because “the wilderness of Texas” had been “redeemed by American blood and enterprise.”

In her righteous and patriotic fervor, Holley did not neglect the historian’s duty to the facts. In her trip to Texas in 1831, she had witnessed firsthand the physical features of the country and had interviewed fellow travelers and prominent residents. Being fluent in both Spanish and French, she had read the writings of Lorenzo de Zavala and European travelers to Mexico. Her most valuable source of information, of course, was Stephen F. Austin himself. When events in late 1835 and 1836 prompted her to mold her erstwhile emigrant guide into what she hoped was an inspiring history, her distance from the scene of the action created some difficulty in collecting accurate data. Nevertheless, with the help of her brother, Henry, and Stephen F. Austin, she acquired many of the official documents relative to Texas and its revolution which she appended to her manuscript for authority.  

---

16 Ibid., first quote, 180; second quote, 128; 298-99.  
17 Holley’s Texas represented the first book printing of a number of key documents of the revolution including the Texas Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the Republic of Texas, and Travis’ famous victory or death letter from the Alamo, as well as the Mexican Constitution of 1824 and her translation of the colonization laws.
Without question or pretense to the contrary, the element of Holley's history most characteristic of its time was its utility, a fact she readily admitted. When she spoke of utility directly, she referred to its usefulness to the prospective immigrant. However, Mary Austin Holley never lost sight of the book's usefulness to herself and her family. She knew that Texas, being "terra incognita," was a subject that would capture the attention of the reading public, and she exploited that interest to attract emigrants to Texas and to lionize Stephen F. Austin. No doubt because of her own vested interest in Texas as well as out of regard for her cousin, Holley determined to help Texas secure recognition by the United States, and perhaps later annexation, the advantages of which, she believed, far outweighed the dangers of the extension of slavery. The book, which appeared in July 1836, sold even better than her first volume. In fact, she exerted an influence not only in Kentucky, but also in Texas and in Europe.

Hence, the first history of Texas written in English aimed at limited goals. It did not seek primarily to instruct its audience on proper social values, provide lofty intellectual amusement, or explain a culture to itself although Holley did presume to predict the future of Texas as the workings of Providence. It was not written to promote human understanding but to

---

18 Holley, Texas, 9.
19 Hatcher, Letters of an Early American Traveller, 97.
promote individual interests—her interests and those of her family members. If in the process her history memorialized fallen worthies and reinforced basic assumptions about the conduct of life, it did so merely as a reflection of the climate of opinion, the contradictory romantic idealism and materialism of America in the mid-1830s.

One, whose interest in writing Texas history Mary Austin Holley obviously influenced, was David Barnett Edward, the self-described “preceptor” of Gonzales Seminary, one of Texas’s earliest schools. Edward was “a Scotch Laird” and obviously proud of all that his birthright implied. “I was born . . . in Scotland,” he wrote, “that classic land of science and renown, where a Wallace fought, a Knox preached, and a Scott wrote.” Edward possessed a restless spirit prompted, he claimed, by his curiosity about freedom and democracy in the new world. He lived in the West Indies and South America before settling in Louisiana in 1819, where he became principal of the academy in Alexandria. Edward moved to Texas in 1830 where he lived until 1833. He applied for a copyright in 1834 for a manuscript entitled Observations on Texas, Embracing the Past, the Present, and the Future, which was to have been published in Alexandria, Louisiana, but apparently

---

never made it into print. According to Edward, he wrote his *History of Texas* (1836) after living there on the frontier for three years, plus a six-month visit in 1835 during which he updated his previous work.²¹

What precise event inspired Edward to write a history of Texas was not immediately apparent, but two things were evident from the title: Edward's sense that history must have a practical use (hence an emigrant's guide) and his acceptance of the historicist's assumption that for people to be interested in a place, knowledge of its history would be of primary importance. By his own account, he claimed to be writing for the purpose of setting the record straight, "believing that no country or people, so nearly allied with the republicans of the North, have ever been less impartially considered; or when spoken of, more unwarrantably exposed to the extremes of calumny and panegyric: each in its turn creating no little excitement in the breasts of those who are anxious to know of things just as they are, before a movement should be made which might bring disappointment, if not ruin, in its train."

Whatever his motivations, Edward reassured his readers of his objectivity and made it clear from the outset that he was not motivated by self-interest, at the same time acknowledging that perfect objectivity might not ingratiate him in some circles. "I have covenanted--let the consequence be what it may--to steer a neutral course, between the extravagant representations of the

monopolizing land speculator, and the unwarrantable scurrility of the viciously prejudiced ... And to insure the convincement of my reader—I have no lands in Texas to sell.” Far from profiting by this book, Edward assured his readers, telling the truth had cost him money as well as physical hardships. Nor did he write to advance a political agenda, he contended further, “therefore, may my readers rest assured, that I write with a pen untrammeled by the influence of a party,” although the assertion in his Preface that he had taken “no interest whatsoever in the political contests of that country” might well have been, and was, heatedly contested by some of his contemporaries. His sole reason for writing, Edward insisted, was his own amusement and the satisfaction of his friends.22

However amused and satisfied he and his friends may have been by Edward’s rendering of Texas history, his Anglo-American contemporaries in Texas found his work neither morally uplifting nor amusing, and far from satisfying. According to Texas bibliographer John H. Jenkins, he came under severe attack for what were considered his pro-Mexican leanings. The outrage was so intense that Stephen F. Austin narrowly escaped a duel in July of 1836 for accusing John T. Mason of writing it. Mason, a land agent whose business was almost wiped out when the revolutionary government of Texas canceled some large land grants, was highly insulted. He set Austin straight

22 quotes, Edward, History of Texas, viii.
on the authorship and called the book "a slander on the people of Texas".

E. M. Pease is said to have written to his father after the book appeared: "Be cautious of using Edward's *History of Texas*. There is little in his work that can be relied on except what is stolen from Mrs. Holley." Edward found it necessary to leave Texas for good. He moved to Ohio (where his *History of Texas* was published) and died there in 1870.²³

The source of all the commotion was what later critics have referred to as Edward's pro-Mexican politics and "clearly anti-Texan" bias.²⁴ In point of fact, Edward wrote that he had "every reason to believe and say that the hearts of the actual... landholders and farmers, [were] filled with love and gratitude towards their benefactors... Always directed by the motto of their political faith,---*Never ending fidelity to the government of that constitution under which they became privileged citizens*---they voluntarily assume[d] the guardianship of Liberty." Liberty, he asserted, however, was a word that covered many ambiguities and concealed "many of the darkest and most malignant deeds, that have ever debased the character of man," and that had been "wrested by political adventurers and political fanatics to the destruction of thousands; leading them to believe that anarchy was order and

party spirit that of patriotism.²⁵ In short, Edward contended that Texans were not bad, but out of ignorance, weakness, or naiveté had been duped by self-serving adventurers into a foolish and faithless revolution.

To explain the turbulent political conditions in Mexico and the behavior of its leaders, Edward resorted to the popular use of classical references and compared the Mexican national character to that of Rome after the expulsion of the Tarquins. Like them, he explained, Mexico’s leading characters, “having been bred and reared in the lap of war, feel a reluctance to lay down their military power, and its flattering consequences.” With searing logic, Edward defended the Mexican character against Anglo-American presumptions of its inferiority with oblique yet unmistakable reference to United States history, particularly the events of the instant decade. One thing was certain, he asserted: Mexico would never submit to rule by a crowned head again or even for long by an aristocracy, because, however they might disagree, “no nation or people will be allowed to interfere; nor any State of the present confederation be suffered to withdraw itself entirely by violent means, to a state of independence; or by its own negotiation alone, place itself under the protection of any other government.” With this rather sweeping prediction, Edward departed the realm of historical interpretation and revealed the emotional bias of which his Texan detractors had accused him. In his Preface, he had

²⁵ Edward, *History of Texas*, xii.
made reference to his discouragement over “man's inhumanity to man.”

Edward alluded to America's own struggle for independence (and possibly to South Carolina's recent threat of secession in 1832-33) as he pointed out bluntly that under the Mexican Republic every man became a voter at the age of eighteen without discrimination as to property, taxation, or color, “a great improvement upon the federal constitution of America, which acknowledges all men as free and equal, yet allows of negro slavery and Indian oppression.”

Thus, despite his claims to perfect impartiality, Edward clearly used his *History* as a forum for personal moral and political opinions.

It was most certainly, though, Edward's characterization of the people of Texas that provoked the outrage that accompanied publication of his *History of Texas*. He characterized them in general as composed of a class who had been “unfortunate in life,” some simply poor and others n'er-do-wells or lazy opportunists. Another group Edward termed “innovators,” unprincipled speculators who sought to receive property of one government while determined, if possible, to belong to another. At the feet of this class of Texas immigrant Edward laid primary responsibility for the problems between the citizens of Texas and the Mexican government. If one felt compelled to justify their schemes at the expense of their “Republican

---

26 Ibid., quotes, 115; ix; 116.
27 Ibid., 177-79.
Mexican benefactors," Edward suggested two possible scenarios: first, the
discovery that the true line of demarcation between the United States and
Mexico might be laid west of the supposed and acknowledged boundary of
1819, or second, the knowledge that the Mexican government, desirous of
unloading its wayward and unruly province, intended to give it to England in
payment of that nation's pecuniary claims against Mexico. Were this indeed
the case, Edward conceded with deliberate irony, then Mexico would be
responsible for provoking war and bloodshed, because the United States
would have to interfere for self-preservation and to avoid being surrounded by
that "ambitious, over-reaching, and avaricious nation!" Nevertheless,
Edward insisted, these avaricious land speculators manipulated both the
Texas yeomanry and Stephen F. Austin (of whom Edward actually thought
highly) to the detriment of all involved.²⁸

As further indication of his intention to make out of Texas history a
moral lesson, Edward took a distinctly sympathetic view of the "savages."
Under the influence of early nineteenth century romanticism, one might view
the American Indian as either "a noble savage" or an uncivilized beast that
must be purged from the land in the interest of divinely ordained progress.
Edward leaned toward the former attitude while observing fairly that the
depredations of the Indians were an understandable and predictable response

²⁸Ibid., 181; 182-254.
to the invasion of their domain by white settlers and that the settlers' fear
and aversion toward the Indians were predictable and understandable
responses to the presence of these unknown people.29 As the works of Morfi
and Pichardo earlier had suggested, Edward noted that in Texas most Indian
groups were really remnants of broken tribes, generally disunited among
themselves, and, when compared with a Texas full of white settlers, were
"utterly contemptible and harmless." With only a few words, he pointed out
that Indians were attracted to Texas for essentially the same reason as white
settlers, noting that the United States' own Indian removal policy accounted
for much of what white settlers in Texas perceived as a problem. Because the
land left for Indians was generally worthless, Edward observed, it was
understandable that they might be attracted to what Texas had to offer in
abundance.30

Edward, concluding his history prior to the end of Texas's war for
independence, performed what many of his contemporaries regarded as the
duty of a modern historian and speculated on the probable outcome of the
Texian war. He speculated that the most probable and desirable result would
be for the State Rights party of Mexico to overturn the present government
and re-establish the Federal Constitution of 1824. This, wrote Edward,

29 The word "Indian" is used here to refer to indigenous peoples because it is the term
Edward (and his contemporaries) used.
would prevent Antonio López de Santa Anna’s personal involvement in the affairs of Texas, which would, in turn, spare trouble and bloodshed; “for he is a ‘Jackson’ of a fellow, and that speaks volumes to an American.” Such a comparison probably did not speak the same volumes to all Americans, but no doubt the audience at whom his remarks were directed would immediately take his meaning, and Edward obviously knew it. A second possible outcome, Edward predicted, might be the laying aside of all other political considerations by Mexico until they completely subdued the Texian Americans and either placed them under military rule or expelled them from the Mexican Republic altogether, in which case Texas would surely revert to wilderness. The third, and least desirable, possibility would be that the government of the United States become involved, with the result a general war between the two Republics, an event that Edward clearly believed would corrupt both Texas and Mexico. In his words is much to remind later readers of transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, expounding a decade later upon the immorality of the Mexican War.31

Having dealt with the themes of morality, progress, and patriotism, Edward turned in his concluding chapter to comments on religion, remarking that “a true historian should be faithful to the trust reposed in him by all who

31 Ibid., 92-93, 95, 97.
come within the sphere of his observations." In this as in other aspects of his account of Texas, Edward endeavored to represent both Texan and Mexican and generalized about both by admonishing against hypocrisy and the abuse of religion for self-aggrandizement or political ends, "The work of the Lord’ being their watch word, but ‘worldly ease’ their rallying point!” he accused. He critically examined the virtues of liberty and republicanism with an equally balanced presentation of the pros and cons.

Edward wrote with little of the drama and color he might have admired in the writing of Sir Walter Scott, apparently determined to bolster his objectivity by eschewing excess either in words or emotion. Nevertheless, in describing that portion of Texas lying between the Sabine and Trinity rivers, Edward waxed as eloquent as any romantic writer or Texas historian before him. "Few spectacles surpass it in beauty and magnificence," he wrote. "Nature invites the cultures of art with the most alluring smiles." He subsequently compared his first glimpse of the valley of the Guadalupe to that of Moses beholding the land of Canaan, and at last compared the reality of Texas to "those fabled dreams of the Elysian fields."  

32 Edward, History of Texas, first quote, 295; second quote, 299.  
33 Ibid., History of Texas, 37-39, 41.
For authority Edward relied heavily on his own first-hand observations. Such observations he considered sufficient qualification for writing a history since “throughout thirty years experience in the busy world” he had been “brought to such a measure of thought as to judge cautiously, charitably, and in some degree philanthropically of the actions of men.” In addition to his reliance on his own judgment and despite his unfortunate plagiarism of some secondary sources, Edward did not neglect the collection and study of primary sources. He quoted full texts of or important extracts from Mexican laws and regulations regarding colonization policy, judicial system, and trade, many of which were never included elsewhere. He provided the full text of the proposed Constitution of 1833, and many other official documents of both sides between 1832 and 1835. An appendix contained census statistics for North America, Mexico, and South America, and an English translation of the Mexican Constitution of 1824. As a result, Edward’s History of Texas has been described by twentieth century bibliographers as “one of the best accounts of Texas on the eve of the revolution” and “one of the few choice early histories of Texas.”

---

34 Ibid., vii.
35 Certain of his Texas critics accused Edward, with some justification, of plagiarizing Mary Austin Holley’s work. He copied entire sentences verbatim from Mary Austin Holley’s 1833 book, and according to John H. Jenkins, often used available sources without giving credit. Jenkins, Basic Texas Books, 139; C. W. Raines, Bibliography of Texas, 74, quoted in Jenkins.
Actually, despite his eloquent explanation of his purpose and his claims of impartiality, Edward did, indeed, have a personal agenda. According to a family memorial, written in part by Edward himself, he attributed a “family” loss of $20,000 to “the slaveholding unjust Texian war of 1836.” He undertook his sojourns in the Indies and South America, it seems, in pursuit of his brother, James, who had lost a $20,000 family inheritance in the New York Stock Exchange. Having lost his farm in Virginia to debt as a result, David Edward eventually went to Mexico and located 640 acres of land under Mexican laws, which he lost, in turn, when Texas won its independence.38 Thus, David Barnett Edward became Texas’ first revisionist historian but with a purpose no less personal than those of promoters like the Austins or Mary Holley. The intensity with which his contemporaries in Texas rejected his work spoke of the times, when ideals and principles, though frequently voiced, had, in reality, been given a backseat to a frontier “go-ahead” mentality and the exigencies of a market revolution.

Even as Edward’s book ended, the apparent success of the Texan Revolution merely increased popular interest in the subject and prompted a virtual frenzy of writing and publication. One of the earliest books purporting to be a history was the History of the Revolution in Texas, Particularly of the

38 Family Memorial, Edward Family Papers, 1838-1936, Center for American History, University of Texas.
War of 1835 & 1836; Together with the Latest Geographical, Topographical, and Statistical Accounts of the Country, from the Most Authentic Sources by Chester Newell, Massachusetts native, Episcopal minister, and Yale graduate, who came to Texas for his health in the spring of 1837. According to the editors of The Writings of Sam Houston, he hoped to defray his expenses by writing a history. He resided in Texas for a year, three months of which he spent in the capital of the Republic acquiring the information and material necessary to write his history.

As sources, Newell cited documents in the War Department and “others to which he had access,” and interviews with several distinguished participants in the war, including Sam Houston and Mirabeau Lamar. Newell described his method as “studied conciseness and perspicuity, more than elegance,” as he sought to be “useful” rather than original, assuring his public that he had chiefly endeavored to “exhibit the truth” in all that he had written. He began with a year by year recitation of the history of Mexico from 1821 to 1835, beginning with the revolt of Colonel Agustín de Iturbide and ending with the centralization and consolidation of the government under

---


Santa Anna in June, 1835, drawn from the accounts of witnesses and from previously published Mexican accounts with virtually no editorial comment whatsoever.  

To be purely objective throughout, however, Newell would have had to resist interpretation, and that clearly was not his purpose. In the dedication of his book to the Honorable W. C. Preston of South Carolina, Newell portrayed the people of Texas as "oppressed and calumniated." He obviously made it his purpose to vindicate their character and their cause. The Texan Revolution, Newell wanted the American public to know, was a victory for the romantic principles of morality, God, and progress, and the virtues of liberty, individualism, and expansion of the Anglo-American race. With rapturous references to classical Italy, destiny, the redemption of the uncivilized wilderness, and Anglo-American superiority, Newell portrayed Texas as every bit the second Eden his predecessors had. He dutifully described the geography, topography, statistics, and towns of the Republic, and he analyzed the people and projected the future of the region. 

Newell claimed that his principal object in writing was "faithfully and impartially to exhibit the causes and narrate the interesting events of the

39 Ibid., 3-11.  
41 Ibid., 13.
Revolution.” Having purchased a league of land there himself, however, he had something of a personal interest in writing a history to promote the interests of Texas as an independent nation.” In any event, Newell presented a patently pro-Texan version of the “truth” that emphasized repeatedly Spain’s and, subsequently, Mexico’s use, abuse, and oppression of foreign emigrants to compensate for their own respective ineptitude and inability to protect and develop the province. In the first two chapters alone, Newell managed to make at least one reference on every page to the rights of the colonists and Mexican violations of same. Newell, like Holley before him, described the conflict between Mexico and its Texas colonists as the inevitable result of utterly incompatible and unresolvable cultural differences. Comparing the “licentious character” of the soldiers of Mexico with the character of North Americans, “obedient to law, and universally jealous of their rights,” Newell concluded, “it must be perfectly evident that Mexican soldiers and North American citizens could not live together without collision.” Newell viewed the colonists themselves, not as the indigents, criminals, and opportunists Edward had painted them but as people “tired and disgusted . . . with the noise and rancor of party strife in the United States” who had emigrated to Texas in search of peace and quiet, better soil,
and a milder climate. If some of them had been “carried to some extremes in manner and in measures,” it was only because the determined spirit of their race had been justifiably aroused in defense of Liberty. He seemed, as much as anything, determined to redeem the reputation of the Texans by the writing of their history. “There is existing in the minds of the people in many places, if not generally, at the North, a strong and bitter prejudice against Texas,” he wrote. The majority of Texans could not possibly be of such a poor character, he argued, otherwise, “how could they have achieved their Independence and established a regular and efficient government?” And even if a large part of them were miscreants and n’er-do-wells, he asked the reader, “should the entire population and country be then reviled?” Moreover, Newell never missed an opportunity to emphasize the chivalry of Texan leaders, such as Fannin, and the “chivalrous and generous spirit” of the companies of volunteers in the cause of Texas.

Newell did not disappoint those who believed it the duty of historians to immerse the reader in the scene and make history dramatic and picturesque. He described with relish “the shrill sound of the fife, the soul-stiffening beat of the drum, and flash of the bright sun on the rifles.” He faithfully portrayed the Texans as heroes in a sublime battle for God, liberty,

---

44 Ibid., 35; 189-90; 75.
and the American way. In vivid simile, he recounted James Fannin's loss at Goliad, assuring his readers that the Independence of Texas was secured by these hapless men, whose blood "like dragon's teeth, sown upon the earth" caused others to rise and rush into battle.46

In background, occupation, style, theme, method, and even motivation, Newell fitted the mold of American romantic historians. Like many of them, he realized little or no monetary gain directly from the sale of his book. On the contrary, he incurred the cost of publishing it himself.46 Like others who wrote about Texas, he had personal, practical reasons for promoting the newly formed republic. Reviewers, particularly those whose interest in the Texas republic conflicted with his, labeled his work propaganda and harshly criticized Newell for his partisanship despite his claim to truth and impartiality.47

As demonstrated by their immediate reaction to publications such as Newell's, Europeans had as lively a curiosity about the affairs of Texas as Americans, particularly once it had separated itself from Mexico. Part of this fascination may have stemmed from the romantic impulses of the age, but part of it undoubtedly had more to do with European economic interests of one

46 Newell to Williams, 19 September 1838, Alex Dienst Papers.
kind or another. By all accounts, the Frenchman, Frédéric LeClerc, was
inspired by the former; however, considering the number of Europeans visiting
and writing about America in the early nineteenth century, it seems likely
that LeClerc's intellectual curiosity had been piqued, like that of Alexis De
Tocqueville, Harriet Martineau, and Frances Trollope, by the United States'
peculiar revolution and democratic experiment and by the Anglo-Americans'
aggressive definition of liberty in comparison with the French experience.46
LeClerc, in his opening remarks, admitted that the recurrence of this
revolutionary phenomenon in Texas and the potential impact that an
independent country of such tremendous resources would have on the world
prompted European interest in the new republic.49

Frédéric LeClerc, a French physician, came to Texas in 1838. His short
history of the Texas Revolution was originally published in La Revue des Deux-
Mondes in two installments (March 1 and April 15, 1840), but an English
translation soon appeared before American readers in the Southern Literary
Messenger. LeClerc had been educated at the University of Paris and belonged

46 James L. Shepherd, III, “Translator's Preface,” in Frédéric LeClerc, Texas and its
first publication in book form was Frédéric LeClerc, Le Texas et Sa Revolution (Paris: H.
Fournier et Co, 1840); Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 2 vols. (1835, 1840);
Harriet Martineau, Society in America, 2d ed., 2 vols. (New York: Saunders & Otley, 1837);
Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London: Whitaker,
Treacher & Co., 1832). There were a host of others published prior to LeClerc's visit; these
were among the most influential.
49 LeClerc, Texas and its Revolution, 17.
to a number of learned societies, including the Society of Natural History and Entomological Society of France.\textsuperscript{80}

Following the typical pattern, LeClerc opened his history with a description of the rivers, soil, and people of Texas in order to lend scientific credibility to the work and to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the historical events about to be related. He dismissed the question of Texas’ discovery by Europeans as difficult to determine precisely and “not really very important to know” but made it clear that he had researched his subject, referring to the journey of Cabeza de Vaca “towards 1536” and a manuscript history of the new kingdom of Galicia written in 1742. Like Morfi and Pichardo, he acknowledged that, had LaSalle’s colony not perished, Texas might very well have been French. He was not the first, nor would he be the last, but LeClerc was among those critical historians of the nineteenth century who argued the inevitability of the Texas revolution given Spain’s neglect of the province’s obvious attributes and the proximity of the United States and the Anglo-American race. “Indeed, the consequences of their proximity were not long in developing,” wrote LeClerc, “and the European political picture, always a great factor in the destiny of the New World, was to

\textsuperscript{80} Frederick [sic] LeClerc, “Texas and its Revolution,” \textit{Southern Literary Messenger} 7 (May-June, 1841), 398-421. The translator of this edition was identified by the journal’s editor only as “a Gentleman of Philadelphia.” Tyler, et al, \textit{The New Handbook of Texas}, vol. 4, 136.
accelerate the trend towards revolution." Further, this French observer made it clear how well he understood the implications of the advance of the Anglo-Americans into Texas:

The natural resources of the land, the good climate, the possibility of instituting steam navigation on its rivers, were facts well known throughout the Union and especially in the new Western and Southern states. . . . Texas . . . offered an almost limitless field to slave-labor, one practically boundless both in area and in types of agriculture which might prove profitable, on its rich virgin plains. By extending its frontier to the Rio-Grande, the United States would have drawn considerably nearer to the great mining regions; and to several Mexican provinces whose population, already well-established, rather wealthy, and devoid of industries, would have constituted a valuable market for its commerce. Finally, one step more would have been taken, and a very important step, towards the Sea of California and the Pacific Ocean, so laboriously reached much farther north, by means of the difficult Rocky Mountain passes, and the sandy deserts to their west.

Thus, LeClerc realized fully all the material, practical reasons why the United States would be aggressive toward Texas and at the same time acknowledged the age-old mythology of westward migration: the search for a route to the East, pulling western Europeans like a magnet over the centuries. Neither did he fail to appreciate the effect of Andrew Jackson’s personality on the climate of opinion. “Jackson seemed destined to extend into what was formerly Spanish territory the empire of that aggressive race whose passions

52 Ibid., 67-77.
and indomitable instincts he shares," wrote LeClerc. After concluding his introductory chapters by commenting on the speed with which the Anglo-American race had obtained first the mouth of the Mississippi and then Texas, LeClerc proceeded to the main subject of his writing, the history of the Texas Revolution itself.

LeClerc proffered several causes for the trouble between Mexico and its Texas colonists, but the two he emphasized were the diplomatic pressures of the United States and England. He noted that some in the Mexican Republic believed the United States had aided Spain in the Barbados expedition, the last Spanish threat to Mexican independence, and were further convinced of the American threat by American diplomat Joel Poinsett's overtures to acquire Texas while he served as the first United States minister to Mexico from 1825 to 1829. LeClerc attributed much disquiet on the part of the United States to the abolition of slavery in Mexico by President Vicente Guerrero in 1829 because of the sensation it might produce among slaves of the southern United States, especially when Poinsett learned that Guerrero was contemplating the fostering of a slave revolt in Cuba. And LeClerc noted that English influence probably had something to do with Mexican hostility toward the United States. In addition, he pointed out, proclaiming the immediate abolition of slavery in all parts of Mexico was undeniably a breach

53 Ibid., 68.
of faith toward the Texas colonists and would have ruined the settlers of
Texas had provincial governor Viesca not insisted on its repeal where Texas
was concerned. LeClerc surmised that attacks on the Mexican character in
American newspapers in the latter part of 1829 probably did not help
matters. Then there was the ambition of Stephen F. Austin, whom LeClerc
portrayed as a conniver bent upon obtaining commercial control of the
northern province of the Mexican Federation, including Chihuahua and
ultimately Santa Fe. Ambition aside, LeClerc concluded that Americans
were simply in a revolutionary mood. He cited a Louisiana newspaper
announcement that Sam Houston was going to Texas towards the close of
1829 or in 1830 in order to “revolutionize” the land. “Let it be noted in
passing,” wrote LeClerc, “the proof which this offers of the strong
revolutionary element contributing so heavily to the settling of Texas, proof of
the inevitability of the explosion.” Beyond American aggressiveness, LeClerc
conceded that the turmoil of the Mexican government contributed in no small
measure to the trouble in Texas. He cited constant civil wars, lack of
discipline among government troops stationed in Texas, and the chronic
distrust of the Mexican government as factors that, combined with the Anglo-
American instinct towards self-government, forced the Texans to their
decision “irresistibly.”

54 Ibid., 72-80; quote, 108; 86-87.
LeClerc maintained his attitude of detached observer throughout his account and analysis of the war for Texas independence itself and the subsequent development of the Texas Republic. Although he drew largely from previously published works such as Barbe-Marbois' *History of Louisiana* and Newell's *History of the Revolution in Texas*, he relied, fortunately, on astute personal observation and his own remarkable political insight, going so far as to point out inconsistencies between Newell's account and the evidence of original documents. LeClerc made concise analyses of both events and personalities, presenting the leading figures with an even hand. He obviously respected Austin for his good sense and disrespected Houston for his "unsoldierly deportment" and "undignified manners." In fairness, however, he wrote, "One is wrong to blame General Houston for not facing the enemy any sooner. On the Colorado and even on the Brazos he did not have a single cannon. In proportion as he withdrew, he concentrated to better advantage all the forces at his command, whereas Santa Anna continually left some of his troops along the way; and there is reason to believe that by drawing nearer the United States border he was counting on some help, at least indirect, from General Gaines ..."55 LeClerc refrained from treating the Texans as larger than life, appearing neither particularly sympathetic nor antipathetic to their cause. Of Texans and the Anglo-American race in

55 Ibid., 96; quote, 121.
general he seemed simply awed--by their ambition, by their determination, by their rather foolish bravado, and, in spite of it all, by their accomplishments.

Frédéric LeClerc demonstrated that romantic history could be and sometimes was analytical and objective. While drawn to his subject at least partly because of its obvious interest and appeal to the reading public, he did not seek to expound any great themes or teach any great moral lessons but merely to shed the light of insight on events which had attracted the world's attention. Furthermore, he did so with apparent conciseness and without the hyperbole that frequently characterized his era. He returned to France after his visit to Texas and continued his career as a distinguished physician. LeClerc did return to the United States to live in 1872 but not to Texas. He died in Bloomfield, New Mexico, in 1891.56

As the decade of the 1830s drew to a close on the newly formed and highly controversial Republic of Texas, one other history cum emigrant guide founds its way into print in America. Its author, Edward Stiff, a Virginian by birth, had occupied himself as a hatter in Baltimore, Maryland, before making a visit to Texas in 1839. He claimed to be motivated by "combined causes," the precise nature of which he failed to elaborate, but primarily for the purpose of preparing an emigrant guide for the common man at whom, in

his opinion, no previous such works had been directed. He also asserted, as had virtually all of his predecessors, that his work was needed since no works on Texas had yet been written "with that independence of thought, and strict impartiality, which should ever be the aim and end of the Historian who aspires to an enduring and honourable fame." This allusion to himself as "historian," in addition to the statement that he had included "other and dissimilar information" as well as that necessary to guide emigrants, distinguished Stiff's work from other contemporary travel books and guides. Despite his claim to perfect impartiality, Stiff clearly had strong opinions about Texas and believed that his interpretation of the Texas situation would interest and benefit the many Americans who, he perceived, had an avid interest in it, possibly as much from a political standpoint as from an emigrant's: "[The Author] frankly acknowledges that he is and has been determined to express his own opinions; to wear all the honours and bear all the obloquy which this volume may call forth," Stiff warned in his Preface.

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., iv.
The reason for such a caveat became evident in the course of Stiff's writing. Although his work has been praised as one of the most objective contemporary accounts, it was heavily slanted toward the Mexican government and against the "war party" in Texas, in which Stiff included everyone who supported independence from Mexico. Further, Stiff's interpretation might have been influenced by his own political troubles during his stay in Texas. His book contained a number of unflattering references to Houston's mayor and editor of the *Telegraph and Texas Register*, Francis Moore, Jr., who appointed Stiff Deputy Constable in Houston only to discharge him twice from the office for drunkenness.66

Actually, Stiff's admitted interest in national politics, despite local hard feelings, might, ultimately, have prompted his attention to all sides of the Texas question in his writing, thus earning him credit among later historians and bibliographers for his objectivity.

“There has [sic] always been those among us who have viewed [Texas] with a wishful eye, a feeling in which the government have [sic] at times participated . . . Again, there is, and has long been many of our citizens who view a further extension of territory as dangerous to the integrity of the Union, and have constantly manifested a determined opposition to measures of such tendency; and while our party have invariably asserted that in fixing the Sabine as the south western boundary of the United States, the American Secretary was outwitted by Don Ennis de Onís, the Spanish Minister. Others, with perhaps equal

---

information, have ascribed to the Hon. John Q. Adams, motives wholly unworthy of an American Statesman . . . .

Since Edward Stiff apparently remained in Texas for only about sixty days, much of his information was of necessity gleaned from secondary sources though he insisted his work was itself original: "if the Author has studied, it has been to produce an original and correct picture. He has selected no model . . . if, under such circumstances, it were impossible to avoid colours which may have been used before, it is not the result of a mind affected with the spirit of plagiarism, but the natural offspring of desultory reading, and intercourse with the world, and that sort of instinct which has at all times imperceptibly drawn him away from fixed fashions and rules."

If by "fashions and rules" Stiff referred to flowery romantic literary style, he spoke truthfully. While he sometimes wrote with exaggerated formality, he rarely engaged in the hyperbole often associated with romantic literature. Nor did he become carried away with heroes and villains. Stiff waxed poetic, however, in describing the land itself and the amazing outcome of the battle at San Jacinto. "No traveler can cast his eyes over this plain without calling to mind the prodigious results that sometimes flow from comparative small causes, and certainly no American can pass the spot

---

62 Ibid., iv.
without feeling a flow of manly pride at the remembrance of the deeds of
valour performed by the Spartan band of San Jacinto,” he wrote. With frank
acknowledgement of the differences of opinion over the Texas Revolution, Stiff
noted that whether the Americans who fought there had been misinformed or
not, the prompting motive was a noble one and should have earned them the
respect of those who had claimed to espouse the cause of freedom in the
world. Like Frédéric LeClerc and others, Stiff was impressed by the fact
that these people could not only face but overcome such tremendous odds, and
he willingly assumed that such a feat could only stem from noble intentions.

Though Stiff’s sanguinity toward the Texan army might not have been
shared by all his contemporaries, his attitude toward the land itself
expressed the abiding myth of the New World Garden that seemed to appear
in all writing about Texas. “Even here,” he reflected, “far removed from
civilization, the hand of a beneficent, [sic] Being could be easily traced and his
promises to the fatherless and widow realised.” In this, Stiff did not
measurably differ from the Spanish clerics, Morfi and Pichardo, or from the
Puritans who sought to redeem the faith of the Old World in the New, or from
the myths and legends that grew out of the rumored settlement of Portuguese
priests in the Antilles before the voyages of Columbus, or, for that matter,
from the beginning of the Judeo-Christian tradition. American tradition,

65 Ibid., 103.
especially, had attached moral and cultural significance to the land. The changes wrought by the market revolution were also evident in Stiff’s writing as in that of the New England Brahmins: “it is evident that nature has been bountiful, and when all her resources are developed by the ingenuity and industry of man, and these solitudes inhabited by a moral and intelligent community, Texas will indeed be a delightful country.”

That Edward Stiff regarded his work as a history as well as a guide to emigrants became even clearer when he republished it virtually unchanged, except for the addition of documents related to the Mexican War, as A New History of Texas; From the First European Settlement in 1692, Down to the Present Time..., in 1848. A number of other works by Americans and Europeans appeared in the years between the War of 1812 and 1840 that sought to take advantage of the great public interest in Texas and its revolution. Nearly all included some comments on Texas’s history. Emigrant guides such as those published by Detlef Dunt in 1834, and travelogues such as Amos Andrew Parker’s A Trip to the West and Texas (1835), and the anonymously published A Visit to Texas (1834), provided much useful information, insights, and often vivid contemporary accounts of Texas as the writers found it, but they emphasized what Texas was, its present and future

---

64 Ibid., first quote, 12; second quote, 13.
prospects, not how it had come to be.\textsuperscript{65} Other books written during the same period offered personal accounts of specific events, such as Frenchmen Hartmann and Millard's diary accounts of Napoleonic refugees in Texas, or Robert M. Coleman's diatribe against Sam Houston's handling of the San Jacinto campaign.\textsuperscript{66} Though their purposes for writing might have been similar to those of other writers of Texas history, their primary (and often singular) source of information was their own experience and observation rather than accumulated written and oral documentation.

All diarists, travel writers, promoters, speculators, and self-professed historians of Texas in the early years of the nineteenth century had in common practical motivations for writing about Texas. They took advantage of the avid public interest in that territory to generate a bit of income for themselves, to promote a political agenda, even to avenge themselves of some real or imagined loss or injustice. Few wrote solely for a higher purpose such as the dissemination of truth, moral instruction, the demonstration of an


\textsuperscript{66} L. Hartmann and \textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{__}} Millard, Le Texas, Ou Notice Historique Sur Le Champ D'Asile, Compranent Tout Ce Qui S'est Passe Depuis La Formation Jusqu'à La Dissolution De Cette Colonie, Les Causes Qui L'Ont Amenee, Et La Liste De Tous Les Colons Francais, Avec Des Renseignemens Utiles A Leurs Familles, Et Le Plan Du Camp (Paris: Chez Beguin, editeur, 1819); Robert M. Coleman, Houston Displayed; Or, Who Won the Battle of San Jacinto? By a Farmer in the Army (Velasco. 1837).
ultimate reality, or even purely for entertainment. Those who claimed for their work the distinction of "history" were no more consistent in their approaches to that genre than historians and critics elsewhere in America during the romantic era. Their works represented a combination of passion and reason. All the ingredients for romantic history abounded in Texas: turbulent action, scenes of dramatic crisis, battle, and violence, "food for admiration and abhorrence." Yet, of the histories of Texas written up to 1840, only one resorted to blood, thunder, and flowery rhetoric as the primary means of creating interest, while all of them spoke of the landscape in "painterly" terms. With rare exception, they conscientiously sought and relied on primary sources, both written and oral, as well as personal observation, and most were methodical and critical in their presentations of them, only one being essentially narrative. They all ardently proclaimed their impartiality and objectivity, but none achieved it completely. Taken as a whole, however, perhaps they did provide a fairly balanced analysis of Texas history through the war of independence from Mexico. For every history that expressed an Anglo-Texan bias, another exhibited a sharply pro-Mexican stance. Some made heroes of Sam Houston and the Alamo defenders, while others cast aspersions on the character of Texans in general and the revolutionists in particular. They perpetuated only one myth with uniformity, that being the

enduring perception of the untamed wilderness as humanity's second chance at Eden.

The most prominent writers of Texas history during this period largely fit the profile of the patrician historian, but, as a group, they reflected more accurately the spirit of the Jacksonian age. They were journalists, teachers, ministers, physicians, of genteel background and classical education, yet at least one was a shopkeeper, a common man, writing for “the common man.” They visited Texas out of curiosity and the hope of financial gain; none of them maintained permanent residence there. They exhibited typically romantic themes in their writing, most notably morality, progress, Providence, and the virtues of liberty, democracy, patriotism, and individualism. Nevertheless, the illustration of these themes was secondary to the promotion of personal or political interests. These self-styled historians wrote to sway a contemporary audience not for the benefit of a future one.
CHAPTER 4

LONE STAR RISING

THE 1840s

While attention focused on colonization and revolution in Texas during the 1830s, it turned to the political and diplomatic fortunes of the new republic in the 1840s. Controversy, far from quieting after Texas claimed its independence, increased after the revolution. Mexico's loss of such a large piece of real estate with its attendant resources had a devastating effect on that country's investors, many of whom were English. When initial efforts to annex Texas to the United States failed in 1837 and 1838, the contest for the republic, both at home and abroad, escalated rapidly. The volume of publication on Texas increased proportionately, all of it aimed at persuasion of one kind or another. Much of it, as in the previous decade, donned the respectable and popular cloak of history.

One Texan convinced of the utility of history for promoting his vision for Texas, and his political agenda for achieving it, was Mirabeau B. Lamar, president of the Republic of Texas from 1838 through 1841. Lamar had, from his youth, mingled literature and politics. Moreover, possessing the heart and
soul of a poet, he approached both with genuine romantic passion. He had been a politician and newspaper editor in Georgia prior to coming to Texas in 1835 with the idea, among other things, of writing a history of the region, and to that end he amassed a wealth of documentary material. Though circumstances prevented his carrying out the writing himself, when he determined to secure Texas’s sovereignty and economic independence, he promptly sought to procure the writing of a history that would bolster his efforts to obtain diplomatic recognition for the Republic. In this endeavor he had two likely prospects, William Kennedy, an English diplomat, and Henry Stuart Foote, a writer and politician from Mississippi.

Kennedy became interested in Texas in 1836 after reading newspaper accounts of the province’s revolt against Mexico. As in the case of Frédéric LeClerc and others, Kennedy was intrigued by the fact that this Anglo-American band, so insignificant in number compared with the population of Mexico, had been successful in establishing their independence by force of arms. "I could not clearly understand," he wrote, "how the settlers of Texas were enabled to repel the armies of Mexico and to found a Republic of their own." As an Englishman, perhaps his interest had been piqued by the fact

---

that these Americans had been able to repeat this feat no less than three
times in fifty years, not only against the larger force of Mexico but twice
against England, the mightiest nation on earth.

In fact, William Kennedy's interest in writing and in America pre-dated
the Texas Revolution by several years. At the age of twenty-five he had
published a volume of prose narrative, and during 1828-1829 he had
collaborated in the publication of *The Paisley Magazine*, a short-lived
periodical. As private secretary of the Earl of Durham, he had accompanied
that British political leader to North America to investigate the cause of the
Canadian Rebellion. Having been thus intrigued, Kennedy welcomed the
opportunity to satisfy his curiosity about Texas first hand when in 1838 the
Earl of Durham proposed that he visit North America to head a commission
for improving municipal institutions in Lower Canada.

After completing his report at the end of 1838, Kennedy set out to
satisfy his curiosity about the United States and Texas. He made his way to
Texas in April of 1839 and remained until June, during which time he was
warmly received. He was also very favorably impressed with the sanguine

---

3 According to Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, editors of *The Writings of Sam
Houston*, Vol. 2 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1939), 451, Kennedy first came to North
America in 1831 with the Earl of Durham. This information is not confirmed in other
published biographical accounts. Kennedy himself, in the “Personal Narrative” with which
he prefaced his book on Texas, refers only to the 1838 trip to North America that brought
him to Texas, and he states that he first saw the Earl of Durham in 1833. *Texas*, xx, xxiii.
attitude of the Texans toward his own country, especially in comparison to
the animosity he had encountered toward England in the northern United
States. At that point, evidently, Kennedy's interest in writing about Texas
became a resolve to promote the Republic and its history in England. He
immediately commenced collecting documentation, readily assisted by Lamar
and his cabinet members. Suitably impressed with Kennedy, Lamar provided
access to the collection of historical material he had amassed for the writing
of a history. On the eve of his departure, Kennedy met with Lamar and
accepted a message from him to the rulers of Great Britain as well as a letter
of introduction to General James Hamilton, who was already on his way to
Europe as financial agent for the Republic of Texas. 4 Kennedy returned to
England where he continued his correspondence with Mirabeau Lamar. In
September of 1839 he reassured Lamar that he would exert himself
strenuously to bring out his intended work on Texas before the meeting of
Parliament in February. "The work of itself will form a defence of Ministers," he wrote, "if they should have the courage and foresight to establish friendly
relations with a people whose interests must always be coincident with our
own." He promised Lamar copies of the book as soon as it was published. 5

---

4 Ibid., xxxix; xli.
Whatever his motives or biases, within two years' time, William Kennedy produced the most thorough, comprehensive account of Texas history of its time, and one that set a standard for years to come. Its contemporary influence was profound. It succeeded in its purpose, for it proved a key element in determining England's ultimate recognition of Texas independence. American critics wrote that "a fuller and more satisfactory answer" to the question of the recognition of Texas as an independent republic "is given by Mr. Kennedy, in the work whose title we have just cited, than in any one which has come to our knowledge. The high character of this gentleman, and the fact that he has no personal interests to advance by what he writes, add great weight to his testimony. We hope to see Mr. Kennedy's book reprinted here immediately, feeling confident it will do more to correct the erroneous impressions in regard to Texas, which are prevailing amongst us, than could be done by any other means." In the late nineteenth century, Homer S. Thrall, author of Texas history school books, remarked upon Kennedy's amazing knowledge of the country and its institutions. "His style is clear; his facts well arranged; his descriptions of the country just and striking." Frank Brown, in the *Annals of Travis County and of the City of Austin (From the Earliest Times to the Close of 1875)*, called Kennedy's work

---

“one of the best of the many histories of Texas that have been published from
time to time during the past seventy years.” More than three quarters of a
century after Kennedy’s book appeared, twentieth century Texas historian
Eugene C. Barker acknowledged that Kennedy “wrote with real historical
spirit, and in some respects, his book has not been superceded.”

Kennedy, like other writers of Texas history in the first half of the
nineteenth century, after prefatory remarks, began his work by introducing
the reader to the geography, natural history, climate, and topography of
Texas. And like his predecessors, he effused in terms of the age-old myth of
the Garden along with the more recent emendations to it of the racial
principles of Anglo-American expansion: “Nature has lavished her bounties
with the munificence of an indulgent parent; it only remains for man to show
himself worthy of her favours, by the due application of his energies, mental
and corporeal, and the temperate use of the means of enjoyment placed at his
disposal. For a sensual, indolent, uninquiring race, the bowers of a second
Eden would bloom in vain.” As he dealt with the Spanish and Mexican claim,
he similarly dismissed the native Indian tribes as having no fixed habitation
in Texas, nor possessing “that real interest in the land which is derived from

---

7 Thrall and Barker quoted in John H. Jenkins, Basic Texas Books, rev. ed. (Austin: Texas
State Historical Association, 1988), 311; Frank Brown, undated typescript, “Annals of
Travis County, and of the City of Austin: From the Earliest Times to the Close of 1875,”
Chapt. 2: 22, Texas State Library, Archives Division.
labour expended in its cultivation."

Kennedy turned to history to explain the events that had brought Texas to its present state. He reviewed the history of the Spanish claim as well as the French, carefully documenting his sources in footnotes. He concurred with those who explained the Texas revolution in terms of an inevitable conflict of cultures, and, perhaps more importantly, of moral principles. In addition to differences of character and social position, he attributed much of the trouble between the Mexicans and their colonists to differences in political background and experience. "It were equally futile to expect the practical development of an enlightened polity from a long oppressed, demoralized, and uninstructed people, as to hope for a judicious household economy under the domestic rule of a neglected nursling."

Although Kennedy's sympathy toward the participants in the Gutiérrez and Magee expedition might appear illustrative of a romantic predisposition for adventure, he was probably making a perceptive, realistic observation when he characterized the Americans who joined the expedition as "brave and ardent spirits, to whom the excitement of military adventure was irresistibly attractive." Most of the invading force, he noted, were "in the season of youthful daring," motivated by thrills not principles. He was equally

---

8 First quote, Kennedy, Texas, 196; second quote, 200.
9 Ibid., 258.
pragmatic in his sanguine judgment of Stephen F. Austin, noting that his sole recompense depended on the successful discharge of the responsibilities he had undertaken both to the colonists and to the Mexican government. On every page, he referred to copious sources, both primary and secondary, making it clear that he had read the work of other historians on the subject, was aware of varying interpretations, and even corrected inconsistencies. In his account of the surrender of General Martín Perfecto de Cos, he noted that he had seen the losses estimated at 200 killed and 390 wounded, but that this seemed to be an exaggeration. Further, he observed that Chester Newell claimed twice the number of men in James Fannin's detachment under Captain Amon B. King at Refugio as General José Urrea reported in his diary, and that he could find no account of any escaping.¹⁰

Like other historians of the romantic period, Kennedy's work exhibited a distinctly moral tone and typically romantic themes, particularly the themes of liberty and the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. "With the degenerate races of the South" he wrote, "liberty was but a poetical abstraction . . . with the Anglo-Americans it was a substantial inheritance--dear to them as the memory of their ancestors--essential to their social progress as the air of heaven to their physical existence." His thorough study of the materials of Texas history did nothing to dissuade him from his

¹⁰ Ibid., quote, 267; 320; 515; 565.
original fascination and awe with the unique “go-ahead” character of Americans. “It is the facility with which the Anglo-Americans mould themselves to circumstances, whatever they may be, added to their habits of reflection and self-reliance, that accounts for their pre-eminence in colonization,” he concluded.¹¹

Though not generally inclined to flowery prose, Kennedy’s account of the battle for the Alamo was worthy of romantic drama, and he waxed especially poetic in his description of David Crockett. In doing so, however, Kennedy might well have made a very salient point. The notions of the Alamo defenders themselves were even more romantic than romantic historians or journalists painted them. Crockett, William Travis, Jim Bowie, and others, suggested Kennedy, were so carried away by the romantic idea of dying for a cause that they threw themselves into a ridiculously lopsided battle and actually died for glory.¹²

Although his writing was certainly influenced by romantic style and themes, William Kennedy exhibited a methodology and honesty of perception undeserving of late twentieth century accusations that his was an adventure story in the guise of history. While critics point to his vividly drawn description of a storm at night on the Gulf of Mexico as evidence of this

¹¹ Ibid., first quote, 517; second quote, 526-27.
¹² Ibid., 557.
adventurous perspective, Kennedy’s description probably owed more to the very real experience of the terrifying force of nature and his own helplessness in the face of it than to any particular sense of romantic adventure, and he included it not because of its bearing on Texas history but because it made a vivid impression on him. Kennedy’s history was consistent with the best of national writing at the time. Though primarily narrative, he interspersed it liberally with excerpts of original documents and commentary on discrepancies he found in sources and earlier interpretations. He emphasized the abstract principles behind major actions and the importance of national character, race, and great men. With as much historical evidence at his disposal as had ever been amassed on Texas history, he interpreted it as proof that right principles triumph, and those who were wise and practical would ally themselves with proven winners.

At about the same time he entertained William Kennedy, Lamar entered into communications with Henry Stuart Foote, a member of the Mississippi House of Representatives. Originally from Virginia, Foote had been educated at Georgetown College and Washington University, had studied law, and had been admitted to the bar. Prior to his election to the Mississippi legislature, he had occupied himself as a lawyer and newspaper

---

editor in Alabama and Mississippi. Although it is unclear who first approached Foote, there is no doubt that he was solicited to write a history of Texas. In remarks prefatory to his first volume, he wrote, “I chanced to visit the Republic of Texas, upon a jaunt of recreation and curiosity; and was invited, whilst there, to undertake a History of the War of Texan Independence, by more than twenty of the most conspicuous actors in that war.” John H. Jenkins speculated that Ashbel Smith may have given Foote the idea for the book as early as March 1839, but he was by no means the only member of Lamar’s circle pressing for a written history to strengthen the administration’s political position. In August, Thomas J. Green of Bexar County wrote that it must be perfectly plain that the time had arrived when Lamar and his administration required vindication “by responsible names... I know the history of our young country full well and know too these acts only want telling by the proper persons and in the proper way. Upon this matter let me refer you more particularly to our friend General Foote with

---

whom we have talked freely.”15 Indeed, Lamar apparently was himself already acquainted and in correspondence with Foote. Between March 30 and April 27, 1839, Foote had addressed at least three letters of introduction to Lamar. Some sort of arrangement seems to have been made shortly thereafter, for in early June, Memucan Hunt, Texas representative on the joint United States-Texas boundary commission, made reference to meeting with Foote in Mississippi “previous to [Foote’s] departure for Texas to compile its history.”16 By fall, Foote and Lamar had established regular correspondence concerning the progress of Foote’s history. Lamar’s influence was evident throughout, as manifested in Foote’s attitude toward Sam Houston as well as Houston’s attitude toward Foote. Foote portrayed William Travis, Branch T. Archer, and Ben Milam as heroes of epic proportions, while slyly criticizing Houston “in a spirit of impartiality... by stating the views entertained on either side in Texas” and by noting what the commander-in-chief of the Texans, had he been a truly great leader like Frederic of Prussia or Napoleon or Jackson, might have done. Houston

---

16 Ibid., Vol. 2, 509, 542, 547; M. Hunt to M. B. Lamar, 5 June 1839, Mirabeau Lamar Papers.
referred to Foote's book in November, 1841, as "the Foot history" because it would be "more footed than eyed."\(^{17}\)

Foote made it clear from the outset that he viewed history as a tale of morality, Texas history being a prime example. He attributed the cause of the conflict between Mexico and Texas not to cultural differences but entirely to moral ones. According to Foote, it was the moral nature of the conflict that aroused so much interest and made Texas history so worthy a subject for study. "It is that sublime collision of moral influences, for the first time, now met in dread encounter, which has gathered, as it were, the generous-minded of all nations, around the outspread arena of conflict."\(^{18}\)

Foote launched his narrative with remarks on the condition of Europe and Spain at the time of the Mexican conquest (1519-21) and moved rapidly to conclusions completely in keeping with prevailing romantic notions of heroes and villains. With bemusing irony, he described one portion of the territory "opened by the genius of Columbus to the enterprise of civilized colonists of the Old World," as the abode of Science and the Arts, "where, beneath the majestic banner of civil and religious freedom, the mind of man, disburdened of the shackles of prejudice, and redeemed from the paralyzing


\(^{18}\) Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, vol. 1, 13-14.
sway of bigotry, dares to assert its own *absolute independence*, acknowledging no authority save that of cultivated reason, and yielding no obedience save to the lessons of *truth,*” while charging that in another portion of that territory, “more ample in extent of territorial surface, and greatly more favoured by the bounty of Providence,” human dignity had been “utterly prostrated, and the true ends of human exertion almost wholly disregarded; whilst *ignorance* and *vice,* and anarchical despotism have been permitted to wield the sceptre of a vile and debasing dominion over the most sacred rights and most precious privileges of humanity.” This irony was heightened by the fact that Foote not only blithely overlooked the great moral stain of slavery while waving the “majestic banner of civil and religious freedom” but ten years later had to resign the governorship of Mississippi and flee to California because of his Unionist sympathies.  

The entire two-volume history lived up to the grandiosity of its introduction both in style and in its flagrant distortions of facts, which included justifications for the actions Aaron Burr, James Wilkinson, and Haden Edwards, and condescending excuses for the implied cowardice of General Houston. “Those who commanded at Goliad and Bexar,” Foote loftily asserted, “are not censurable for *anything*.” According to his version of the history of the war in Texas, *all* Texans were unblemished heroes and *all*  

---

Mexicans were "vulgar tyrants" (Domingo de Ugartachea) and "demoniacal" agents (Martín Perfecto de Cos), and their cohorts "unprincipled renegades" (Juan Davis Bradburn). Though in discussing the conquest of Mexico, Foote alluded to the respected works of Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Bernal Díaz, and Abbé D. Francesco Saverio Clavigero, as well as manuscript papers of Burr and Edwards, he obtained most of his information concerning the Texan revolution and the history of the Republic from personal interviews with participants.  

Henry Foote, like most of his predecessors, claimed that he had engaged to write an impartial history of the war in Texas and repeatedly referred to his spirit of impartiality (emphasis Foote's) particularly preceding some of his most biased representations. In fact, though the first Texas historian in the nineteenth century to claim that his whole inspiration and purpose was moral edification, Foote was the first to be hired to write a history of Texas expressly for promoting the partisan views of a political administration. He was also the first to attempt deliberately to cover his real motives for writing. Editors of the New York Review, in comparing the works of Kennedy and Foote had little to say regarding the latter, giving it a single,
tactfully understated sentence. "We have not particularly adverted to the work of Mr. Foote, in the foregoing paper, as it is, in great measure, occupied with earlier historical details than have engaged our attention, and as, also, we wished, rather to present our readers with the impressions [of a traveler from abroad] than those which had been made... upon one of our own citizens, who might, perhaps, be supposed to have a stronger personal interest in speaking favorably of it."²²

Certainly, Foote's history contained all the requisite elements of romantic history. The themes of liberty, progress, and Providence were ever prominent. In moral tone and descriptive narrative he rivaled even the effusive Reverend Newell. Foote, however, went beyond either history or literature to produce a parody of both in form and substance. In so doing, he became the first intentionally to treat the whole subject of Texas history, and particularly modern history, as heroic myth.

A third book on Texas to appear in 1841 boasted considerably fewer pretensions than its contemporaries. Many of the differences between *Texas in 1840* and the works of Kennedy and Foote probably owed to the fact that it was written by a Calvinist preacher rather than by politicians. The Reverend A. B. Lawrence, a Presbyterian minister and editor of the *New Orleans Presbyterian*, visited Texas in 1839-1840 and while there wrote a volume

primarily intended as an emigrant guide but later published as *A History of Texas.*

Lawrence, like Foote, found in Texas history a great moral lesson but with considerably more sincerity. Where for Foote the moral aspect had been merely a front for his real purpose of deliberate political propaganda, for Lawrence the purpose of history was to provide fodder for a sermon, and he determined to make the most of Texas history. Lawrence’s work illustrated the prevalent idea that for people to fully understand or appreciate a description of a place, they must have a knowledge of its history, and, conversely, in order to understand or appreciate the history of a place, readers must possess information about its geography and culture. In his preface, Lawrence professed a desire to furnish useful information to the thousands “flocking towards the new and rising star of the west,” and to aid that country in “gaining to herself an industrious, intelligent, and virtuous population.” In the process, Lawrence, either consciously or unconsciously, constructed a case for the annexation of Texas by the United States.

By all accounts, including his own, Lawrence intended his first

---


24 Lawrence, *A History of Texas,* xiv.
publication, *Texas in 1840, Or the Emigrant's Guide to the New Republic; Being the Result of Observation, Enquiry and Travel in that Beautiful Country, By An Emigrant, Late of the United States*, to be just that. He devoted two hundred of the book’s 275 pages to chapters on agriculture, geology, flora and fauna, ornithology and entomology, cities and towns, society and manners. In addition, he included his diary of his tour from Galveston to Austin. It is also clear from his introduction to the book that he considered it an opportunity to point out the instructiveness of history. What the history of Texas taught, Lawrence maintained, was the triumph of right principles over wrong. Like Chester Newell and Henry S. Foote, Lawrence adopted an unqualified pro-Texas stance. The causes of the Texan Revolution, he asserted, differed “essentially from the causes of all other similar events, with the single exception of that which produced the independence of the United States. . . . High principles of religious and political freedom, ardent patriotism, generous devotedness to the cause of regulated liberty and lofty heroism marked the character of the leaders in the great struggle of Texian independence.” As Lawrence warmed to his subject, he broadened the implications of the war in

---

Texas to embrace the history of the Protestant Reformation and freeing the
world from the tyranny of the Catholic church, which he equated with the
empire of Satan. Thus, he eagerly furthered the maturing romantic American
westering myth that had Providence proclaiming manifest destiny: “Mexico
herself will in the event appear to be but a suburb of the extended territory to
be pervaded by the conquering power of the gospel of Jesus. Guatemala and
all South America will feel the bland influence of the light of the Sun of
Righteousness rising.” In this missionary context, Lawrence viewed the
history and relations of Texas as nothing less than the “beginning of the
downfall of Antichrist.”

Despite his professed intention to emigrate permanently to Texas,
Reverend Lawrence never actually did so. His original publication, Texas in
1840, was reprinted in 1842 with the year updated and in 1844 and 1845
with the title changed to A History of Texas. Referred to by bibliographer
John H. Jenkins as “scissors and paste” history, his work well illustrated the
haziness that surrounded the definition and purpose of written history in
America during the first half of the nineteenth century, and it illuminated the
growing tendency to transform romantic themes into efficacious myths.

America was growing. If right principles were to triumph, they must remain

26 Lawrence, A History of Texas, first quote, xvi; second quote, xviii.
consistent with that growth. As discrepancies began to appear between those
traditional principles and the realities of a growing nation, the need for myths
to correct them increased apace.

An antidote to the promotional histories of the Lamar administration,
specifically to William Kennedy's work, appeared almost reflexively in 1842
with *The History of the Republic of Texas, From the Discovery of the Country to
the Present Time; and the Cause of Her Separation From the Republic of Mexico*,
by Nicholas Doran P. Maillard, a bitterly frustrated British holder of Mexican
bonds. Actually, this book had more in common with Foote's blatant
propaganda than with Kennedy's. In contrast to Kennedy's book, which,
though undeniably pro-Texan, was impeccably researched and faithfully
written, Maillard's work graphically demonstrated the ruthlessness with
which "history" might be used to selfish and material ends. John H. Jenkins
called it "the most vitriolic denunciation of the Republic of Texas, written
with absolutely no regard for the truth."\(^{28}\)

Maillard arrived in Texas in early 1840, representing to local residents
of Richmond, Fort Bend County, where he took up residence, that he had been
lured to Texas by its genial climate and glorious history, that he had been a
barrister in London and a literary man, and that he intended to buy a

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 363.
In the introduction to his book, Maillard claimed that, in delicate health, he had been seduced into coming to Texas by “exaggerated accounts then, as well as now, promulgated respecting Texas and the Texans.” He did gain admission to the Texas bar in April of 1840, became co-editor of the Richmond Telescope, and gained a local reputation as a master bartender. According to county historian Clarence R. Wharton’s sources, he also burned a great deal of midnight oil writing a novel or taking notes on the law, depending on whom one asked. Also according to local accounts, Maillard spent a great deal of time in the company of one James Riddell, a gunsmith and cutler in Richmond, leading to speculation that the two had known each other elsewhere. Maillard’s subsequent admission to being a Mexican bondholder increased suspicion that Riddell had been a spy for the same bondholders committee.

While living in Richmond, Maillard made several trips to Houston and one to Austin. He returned to London in late summer or early fall of 1840.

---

29 Clarence R. Wharton, Wharton’s History of Fort Bend County (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1939), 108.
31 The significance of this relationship is likely to remain purely speculative since the 1840 Texas census includes the name of Doran Maillard in Fort Bend County but no reference at all to Riddell.
Clarence Wharton suggested that Maillard's original plan had been to gather material and write a series of articles for publication that would turn public opinion in England against Texas at least sufficiently to cause the Palmerston ministry to require Texas to accept land warrants issued by Mexico in 1839 to English bondholders in lieu of payment on Mexican bonds. Once back in England, Maillard decided to write a legal brief instead, which could be used in a discussion of the Mexican bond question in Parliament and later expanded it into a history.32 His book appeared in early 1842. Despite the expressions of disgust and outrage from both contemporary and modern critics over Maillard's gross misrepresentations and defamation of Texas, he claimed to be objective and impartial. He began by informing his readers that his object was "to present to the public an unvarnished account of what Texas and the Texans really [were]." Yet, in the same breath is issued far-from-objective judgments: "... of the true origin and history of their rebellion against Mexico, their lawful sovereign; of their inhuman treatment of the Negro and Indian races; of their aggressive policy systematically pursued toward Mexico." He admitted further that his purpose was to prevent

---

32 Wharton, History of Fort Bend County, 105-106. According to Wharton, in April 1837 the Mexican Congress proposed the issue of a new series of bonds, payable in 1866 and secured by land warrants in the departments of Texas, New Mexico, and California. This proposal was presented to bond-holders by the Mexican agent in London (identified only as de Yturbi). After two years the deal was closed and the new bonds and land warrants were issued.
England or Englishmen from entering into a treaty with Texas. Maillard insisted that Mexico would have been a more lucrative trading partner, that the dividends of such a relationship with Mexico would have been remitted on the English debt, and that a large part of that debt could have been canceled by the lands in Texas pledged by Mexico to the bondholders. He conveniently failed to acknowledge that the lands were pledged by Mexico in 1837, after San Jacinto, and therefore of disputable title from the outset.  

Ironically, in view of what was known or suspected about his activities in Texas, Maillard’s criticism of Kennedy provided a classic example of the “pot calling the kettle black.” Admitting Kennedy’s work was “obviously got up with great care” and of “considerable merit” in language and composition, he went on: “the historian should be more careful of his facts than of his language; these are to be collected by careful observation, and not imbibed while sipping champagne and inhaling the crafty inspiration of astute young Yankee lawyers congregated in Texas, first, to seize the country; secondly, to turn its resources to their own profit; and thirdly, to justify the act.” (This from a bartending lawyer who spent his waking hours with a suspected diplomatic spy writing an argument on behalf of his own economic interests, which he attempted to disguise by calling it History.) In fact, Maillard’s

---

33 Maillard, History of the Republic of Texas, quotes iv; xii.
34 Ibid., xii.
History was filled with errors, large and small, such as dating the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1829, which he attempted to excuse as owing to "distressing illness in [his] family, and other pressing incidents." His presentation of the information he accumulated in his visit to Texas more nearly resembled the novel he was rumored to be writing than non-fiction. By contemporary standards, it succeeded as neither. Although he included excerpts or full texts from many historical documents, Maillard could never have been mistaken for "objective and impartial" by even the most sympathetic critic. "Maillard's History of Texas," wrote one English reviewer, "is as wholly anti-Texan as it is possible for any man, even for Mr. Kennedy, to be thoroughly on the opposing side. But the one-sidedness of the author before us may be more easily accounted for, according to his own showing, than the partiality evinced by the other writer." As "history," his work offered no moral instruction or even entertainment. It had no literary qualities that might distinguish it as art. Easily verifiable mistakes were so numerous as to render its execution sloppy and its "truths" or insights suspect, even when there was some truth to them. Unfortunately for him, in his palpable "hatred of the land of promise," Maillard was hoist with his own petard. His History succeeded neither as history nor as propaganda, since it apparently had no appreciable effect on

British recognition of Texas independence, which was accomplished in June of 1842.

Promotion of Texan interests in the 1840s came from more than one camp. While Lamar, Burnet, and their supporters sought to strengthen Texas' position as an independent nation, others, both in Texas and the United States, continued to pursue annexation. Those who wished to advance or deter such interests also turned to history as a vehicle for promoting their respective views. One who had long entertained an interest in Spanish America and its relationship to the United States was John M. Niles of Connecticut. Niles published *A View of South America and Mexico* in 1825. As a United States senator from 1835 to 1839, he gained a reputation for being disturbingly non-partisan, refusing to vote immediately for the recognition of Texas much to the chagrin of fellow Democrats. During his second term, 1843-49, he was even less partisan. He turned distinctly protectionist and expressed little support for the Mexican War.\(^{37}\) In 1844, as the debate over Texas raged, he republished his book on South America and Mexico as a history, this time including a short history of Texas. "Lying, as Texas does, upon our borders ... it cannot fail to be an object of intense interest," he wrote, making it irresistible by describing it, as had others, as the "garden of

\(^{37}\) *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Niles, John M.".
the earth." The author of this history, Niles assured his North American readers, derived his principal facts from one who had been on the spot.\textsuperscript{38}

The author of this historical view of Texas, Lorrain Thompson Pease, did indeed have information from someone on the spot. Also from Connecticut and connected by marriage to Niles, Pease was the father of Elisha Marshall Pease, future governor of Texas, who had settled there in 1835 and was presumably his father's chief source of information. Whether L. T. Pease ever actually visited Texas himself is unclear. His brief history comprised 126 pages of Niles's first volume and contained little that was "fresh" despite the editor's claim. His themes—liberty, patriotism, progress of the Anglo-American race—reflected typically romantic assumptions of his day as did his style, though even that lacked the vividness of imagery considered by many to be essential in writing history. In the first chapter, Pease set the scene for his historical narrative by describing the boundaries, geography, soil, climate, waterways, transportation, towns, and inhabitants, touting the region as the realization of "dreams of a paradise on earth." He dismissed Texas history prior to the establishment of Austin's colony as "little more than the history of the wandering tribes of savages" who had roamed the wilderness for

\textsuperscript{38} John M. Niles, \textit{History of South America and Mexico; Comprising Their Discovery, Geography, Politics, Commerce and Revolutions. To Which is Annexed, A Geographical and Historical View of Texas, With A Detailed Account of the Texian Revolution and War. by Hon. L. T. Pease,} 2 vols., (Hartford: H. Huntington, 1844), Vol. 1, iv.
"countless ages." Indeed, according to Pease, the early history of the country was so unimportant as to be unknown prior to the signing of the Onis Treaty in 1819. To the early "adventurous spirits" from the United States he attributed the influence that enabled the natives to "throw off the Spanish yoke." In other words, Pease asserted, Texas had no history prior to Anglo-American influence, and thus, by implication, its history was part and parcel of United States history. He presented the Texans as brave and self-sacrificing buffers between the forces of good and evil.39

Pease's account continued through the victory of San Jacinto, which he portrayed as a victory of global significance. He uncovered no new sources and made slight use of traditional ones such as Austin's 1836 Louisville address, military records, government documents, and personal accounts of participants, "men of unquestioned veracity." In none of these sources did Pease find cause for closer scrutiny because analysis was not his goal. The truth he already knew. His history was not intended to judge it but merely to prove it, a fact that became evident with his concluding plea for Texas annexation to the United States, the only prudent thing for both sides.40

Other publications in the early 1840s, such as that of Arthur Ikin, an Englishman with an interest in Texas lands who was appointed Texan Consul

40 Ibid., 364-65.
to Great Britain in 1841, and Mathilda Houstoun, wife of a British army
officer who visited Texas in late 1842, portrayed Texas and Texans in an
equally favorable light.\textsuperscript{41} Ikin's work, intended to encourage immigration, was
purely promotional literature. Houstoun, already well-known in British
literary circles, wrote a witty and insightful account of her observations of
Texas and Texans as she encountered them while visiting with her husband,
undoubtedly for her own amusement and to satisfy the curiosity of her
countrymen. An equally candid but less sanguine guidebook by the founder of
New Braunfels appeared in 1846.\textsuperscript{42} All were primarily concerned with Texas
and Texans as they were and any references to their history was incidental to
that aim.

In addition to these, a number of personal narratives appeared
recounting the adventures of their authors in various Texas scrapes. The
earliest to appear were the memoirs of Hermann Ehrenberg, a German
immigrant and member of the New Orleans Greys who fought in the Texas
Revolution. Ehrenberg's memoirs consisted of a colorful review of his

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] Arthur Ikin, \textit{Texas: Its History, Topography, Agriculture, Commerce, and General Statistics. To Which is Added, A Copy of the Treaty of Commerce Entered Into By the Republic of Texas and Great Britain. Designed for the Use of the British Merchant, and As A Guide To Emigrants} (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1841) and Mathilda Charlotte (Jesse) Fraser Houstoun, \textit{Texas and the Gulf of Mexico; Or, Yachting in the New World} (London: John Murray, 1844).
\item[42] Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, \textit{Texas; Geschildert in Beziehung Auf Seine Geographischen, Socialsen, Und Ubrigen, Verhaltnisse, Mit Besonderer Ruecksicht Auf Die Deutsche Colonisation Ein Handbuch Fuer Auswanderer Nach Texas} (Frankfurt am Main: Johann David Sauerlander's Verlag, 1846).
\end{footnotes}
adventures as a soldier. This effort was followed in annual succession by accounts of participants in the Santa Fe and Mier expeditions. While they made great reading, they were first and foremost frontier adventure stories.43

The fate of the Texas Republic produced a flurry of publications in the first half of the decade that faded markedly with the final passage of Texas statehood in 1845-46, and still a Mexican history of the Texan Revolution had yet to be written. However, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo making the loss of Texas forever a reality, the first history of Texas and its revolution by a Mexican appeared. Its author, General Vicente Filisola, Santa Anna's second in command, had published a defense of the Texas campaign as early as 1836.44 More than simply a defense of conduct or the personal memoirs of an event, Filisola's Memorias para la Historia de la Guerra de Tejas, published in September 1848, brought the entire history of Texas colonization to bear on the Texan Revolution and its outcome. Its composition reflected not only personal observations but references to earlier histories and important


44 Vicente Filisola, Representacion Dirigida Al Supremo Gobierno... En Defensa De Su Honor Y Aclaracion De Sus Operaciones Como General En Gefe Del Ejercito Sobre Tejas (Mexico: Impreso por Ignacio Cumplido), 1836.
original documents written in Texas.

Vicente Filisola, a native of Italy, wrote from the perspective of a professional soldier who had served both for and against the Mexican army. He had joined the Spanish Army at an early age and had participated in the Napoleonic Wars before being sent to Mexico where he continued to serve the Royalist army until 1821, when he became an officer of the Mexican army under Iturbide. He had himself received a colonization grant in Texas in 1831 and from 1833 had been charged with stemming the flow of American immigration into Texas. According to his editors, he had been working on his memoirs for a number of years, but since the publication of Maillard's history in 1842, he had been particularly pressured by the desire to "confront it with another history from the pen of a Mexican."\(^5\)

The editors of this work assured their readers that they would find in it "the truth of the matter set straight and made manifest" by "the most important and impartial information." Their only goal, they insisted, was the objective truth. They were convinced that knowing the history of Texas would enable present and future generations to benefit from the faults and errors that led to the loss of Texas and the potential compromise of Mexico's independence and national existence. At the same time both Filisola and his

editors recognized the difficulty in writing objective contemporary history.\textsuperscript{45}

Filisola began his history with a brief review of the claim that Spain and later Mexico had upon Texas in order to conclude that the United States had no legitimate claim to Texas based upon the Louisiana Purchase. He maintained, as had some earlier Texas historians, that from 1803 onward the United States had, nevertheless, cast an avaricious eye in that direction and that those North Americans who ventured into Texas, whatever their pretext, were motivated solely by greed. That they were able to do so Filisola attributed to the abandonment of the mission/presidio system. Thus, with considerable honesty, he pointed out the errors and shortcomings of both Spain and the United States. He credited Spain, however, with making a well-intentioned effort to correct its mistakes by undertaking a project to build the population of Texas, an effort that failed because it was interrupted by the break between Great Britain and Spain and by the abortive revolution led by Hidalgo.\textsuperscript{47}

Filisola exhibited an ability to assess events of Texas history honestly on various occasions. In his accounts of military engagements he excelled, being able to give a particularly balanced evaluation no doubt because, as a professional soldier, he understood them thoroughly. He astutely placed

\textsuperscript{45} Vicente Filisola, \textit{Memorias Para La Historia de La Guerra de Tejas}, xxv, xxxi.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 8; 13; 11; 16.
blame for the murder of Manuel de Salcedo and Simón de Herrera on Bernardo Gutiérrez, taking note of the resistance of the North Americans and other foreigners serving with Gutiérrez’s troops to the proceedings. He asserted that Moses Austin, being down on his luck, was out to grab the main chance with his plan to become a colonizer of Texas under the conditions of the Spanish government, but he credited Stephen F. Austin for his fortitude in facing the trials of maintaining the colony against nature and marauding Indians.\textsuperscript{48}

In fact, in his assessment of Austin, Filisola revealed the differences in world view that separated the Mexican understanding of Texas history from that of North Americans and Europeans. In his view, Austin occupied the catbird seat, poised to become the most powerful citizen not only in Texas but in the whole Mexican Republic. Filisola confessed his utter mystification that Austin would then sacrifice all “the fruits of his anxieties and sufferings” to an adherence to “theories of independence and exaggerated liberty for himself and his people.” In a flash of insight, Filisola noted that Austin’s dreams were “in truth snatched from him later by the new wave of adventurers and criminals who came in ... and these people took over his lands.”\textsuperscript{49} Though, like other historians of the romantic era, he interpreted the hand of

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 21; 44-45.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 52.
Providence in the course of events, Filisola made it plain that his basic assumptions about morality and history were not the same as those of American romantics. For Filisola, duty and obedience (values important to a soldier) rather than liberty were paramount. He could not understand why the Texas colonists did not just obey the law whatever it was. That, as he saw it, was the duty of a citizen. Anglo-Americans believed if they opposed the government, they should revolt. That, as they saw it, was their right as citizens.

Ultimately, Filisola concluded that, whatever the immorality or culpability of the North Americans, the loss of Texas was the result of Mexico's own mistakes and inexperience. "Our blindness has been such that we have given away the lands of a paradise, we have granted them without stipend or any sort of advantage to our enemies. . . . right now we are receiving the punishment that our lack of foresight has deserved." The purpose of his history was to help Mexico learn from her mistakes, to profit by the lessons of history, and, as far as Filisola was concerned, they were not moral lessons, they were practical ones.50

The Mexican War and its aftermath produced a spate of war memoirs, travel accounts, emigrant guides, and a natural history. The first personal

50 Ibid., quote 210; xci-xcii.
account of the Mexican War appeared in 1846. Another followed in 1847. These anecdotal volumes provided valuable eyewitness accounts but did not dwell on the history of the conflict. One of the best immigration guides yet issued appeared as the decade drew to a close. Its author, Viktor Bracht, came to Texas as an emissary of the German government for the purpose of assisting in colonization activities. His book, *Texas Im Jahre 1848, Nach Mehrjährigen Beobachtungen Dargestellt*, provided a thorough critical study of the country, its flora, fauna, and people. Bracht was forthright in both praise and criticism. Nevertheless, he wrote purely to provide useful, up-to-date information specifically for the German immigrant and did not dwell on the past, either distant or recent. In the 1840s, the volume of publications on Texas increased along with its population. As the issues of boundary, Anglo-American settlement, and independence produced intense interest in Texas during the 1830s, foreign and domestic issues related to American expansion, as well as the availability of so much free land for immigrants, produced even greater interest during the 1840s. Another half dozen histories appeared, mostly as utilitarian as those of the 1830s had been with a few subtle

---

differences. While the historians of the 1830s had written for personal gain of one kind or another, historians of Texas in the 1840s were, for the most part, motivated less by self-interest than by promotion of some larger cause. Only one, Maillard, wrote primarily to further personal interests. Although they all professed impartiality, on the whole they produced a decidedly more pro-Texan view of Texas history than their predecessors had done a decade earlier as well as a more distinctly racial and moralistic one. They obviously viewed the relationship of past to present as one of cause and effect whose chief value was to teach moral lessons, the most important being that right principles triumphed.

The Texas historians of the 1840s referred frequently to romantic themes of morality, patriotism, progress, and Providence and emphasized them vigorously with respect to the general topic of Anglo-American expansion. As previous writers had done, they perpetuated the westering myth of the frontier Eden, but they also expanded upon it, incorporating, more emphatically than ever before, the right of those who cultivated the land to possess it, an addition necessary to the moral acceptability of aggressive territorial expansion, America's manifest destiny. These writers had access to more documentation than had ever been available before. Although some of them used sources lightly with little evaluation and few footnotes, others
documented thoughtfully and thoroughly, resulting in some of the best and worst scholarship on Texas to date. Like other writers of the period, their accounts of battles and other emotionally charged events tended toward the dramatic, though only Foote engaged in much embellishment and romantic ornamentation.

In background and occupation, writers of Texas history during the 1840s fitted the profile of the romantic historian. All were well-educated professionals: writers, editors, preachers, lawyers, politicians, diplomats, and soldiers. Few, if any, wrote with the expectation of deriving much gain directly from book sales. They differed, however, from the greatly admired and imitated patrician models of romantic history, Prescott, Motley, Bancroft, or Parkman, in that none of them set out to write a definitive history. They all had some primary agenda and used history not as an end in itself but as a means of achieving particular ends. At the middle of the nineteenth century Texas had become a state and the center of raging controversy. Texas history had become more romantic because romance enhanced its utility.
The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo not only ended the dispute with Mexico over the boundary of Texas but institutionalized Anglo-American hegemony to the Pacific coast of North America. The addition of so much territory provided fuel for the already hot fires of sectionalism in the United States. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, national turmoil and divided loyalties would leave the new state of Texas grappling for its sense of identity. At the same time, the events of that turbulent quarter century inevitably brought changes in the climate of opinion and in the basic assumptions that had shaped it for more than fifty years. These changes were reflected in American history writing and would ultimately affect the writing of Texas history.

For the first half of the nineteenth century, historians shared with their audience basic assumptions about essence, morality, progress, and national character. When people began to disagree on these points, a different approach to historical scholarship and a different kind of history began to
develop. By 1850, romantic nationalism had reached its zenith. In Washington Irving, George Bancroft, William Prescott, and Francis Parkman, America finally had its own national historians, the equals of their European counterparts. Even as they gathered public acclaim, however, the reaction to the limitations of romantic history was gathering momentum. Between 1850 and 1880, several factors contributed to the shift in the climate of opinion, among them the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, a devastating civil war, and the rapid expansion of population in the American West. American historical writing did not transform itself overnight. By the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, however, changes had taken place not only in the subject, style, and methods of writing history but in the uses of history and in the ranks of historians and their audiences as well.

In the 1850s, reviewers and critics for the most part still praised the artistry of the romantic historians, but even before Darwin published his theories, the Frenchman, Auguste Comte, founder of sociology, had begun to influence American opinion by applying the methods of natural science to history. Some scholars reacted by incorporating new methods and themes into old ones. “The path to all true art lies through nature and science,” wrote editors of the *Princeton Review*. “Nature furnishes the material. Science

---

observes, classifies, and ascertains its laws. And Art, by following those laws, reconstructs for the expression of human thought. Historical science is one thing, history, as written, is another; and the vast and varied subject, of which they treat, extends far beyond them both. While some critics still demanded universal history and the lives of great men, others called more and more often for history of "the very life of the people . . . the knowledge of which can alone furnish a true picture of the age and the actual condition of society."

Many acknowledged the increasing lack of consensus. "He who reads much will find there almost as many philosophies of history as there are writers of it," wrote a contributor to the *Universalist Quarterly and General Review* in 1850. "He must follow no one as an unerring guide; but, diligently using all helps, he must finally judge for himself what is the true philosophy of history." Another essayist wrote, "History, of all the productions of the intellect, is that which presents the most varied forms. Independently of the philosophies of history, whose object is to lead the reader to some arbitrary conclusion, we have chronicles, memoirs, narratives of battles, and the lives of kins, in which the personality of the narrator is more or less apparent."

Others continued to insist that tracing the connection between cause and

---

effect, developing the consequences of actions, and pointing out the bearings of events upon each other, was "the true idea of the philosophy of history," thus exemplifying "the great laws of political economy and morality" in history and justifying the ways of God with man. "Picturesque narrative, exaggerated description, startling contrasts, and epigrammatic style" reduced history to the level of fiction, wrote a reviewer for North American Review. Such history "ceases to instruct, and labors only to astonish or amuse. . . . By thus gradually losing a strict regard for truth it ceases to be trustworthy." Little more than a year later writers for the same journal roundly criticized Richard Hildreth for presenting "a naked record of facts" without making "any attempt to generalize them or to deduce from them the broader lessons of experience." "History written on such a plan needs must be imperfect and untrustworthy," charged the reviewer.³

Although some writers, like Richard Hildreth, made attempts to write more factual, unembellished history, in the 1850s there still appeared a strong preference for literary history. History writing continued to be considered an art by some, a science by others, and both an art and a science by a third faction. Historians were praised for "pure English style" that

would "reanimate the past" and bring the reader "into the presence of its hero as a living being." "We have given the first place to narrative power, because we cannot conceive of a good history without it," wrote the editors of the North American Review. "It is the art of telling a story in such a way as to make the incidents their own interpreters. Description holds the next place, and by bringing particular objects closer to the eye and investing them with their natural attributes, gives greater definiteness and vivacity to the conception."

"History consists of the two fundamental elements of description and narrative," asserted The Princeton Review. At the same time, astute critics realized that ornament could hide a lack of substance. While most reviewers continued to call for "English style, pure, animated, and flowing," they criticized Macaulay's work, which, for all its "brilliancy and richness of illustration," was often "superficial and deficient in earnestness."

Hence, one barometer of a gradually changing climate of opinion, a trend actually advanced by the great romantic historians, Irving, Bancroft, Prescott, and Parkman, was the increased demand for thorough research and use of original materials and the scrupulous citation of sources. "The importance of minute and diligent research of a laborious examination of

---

every page of the original authorities, as a necessary preparation for writing
the history even of comparatively recent periods, has been, perhaps,
somewhat exaggerated of late years; so that too many histories have
appeared which are crammed with a painful collection of insignificant facts,
loosely strung together, that teach no valuable lesson . . . but research and
references are not to be abandoned altogether.” “As history has developed
itself as a science, it has taught us the extreme value of close, critical, truthful
investigation.” Just as important as careful collection and use of sources was
the insertion of “full and precise references to authorities at the foot of each
page,” which, the reviewer insisted, “may now be regarded as indispensable to
every well-constructed historical work.”

Coupled with this insistence on painstaking research and
documentation, was an awakening debate over the efficacy of the inductive
method. “It is impossible to write history without seeking, either avowedly, or
stealthily, or unawares, to verify some hypothesis, or establish some theory,
which furnishes a reason and guide for the selection and arrangement of
materials,” wrote one reviewer. In criticizing such methods, a critic for the
Westminster Review observed, “In all cases, the theory precedes the study of

---
5 First quote, Review, North American Review 73 (Oct. 1851): 443; second quote, Review of
third quote, 486.
the facts out of which it professes to be derived. . . . Mr. Alison, it is said, wrote his eighteen volumes to prove that Providence was on the side of the Tories; but Mr. Alison formed his premises out of his conclusion, and he saw only so many of the facts as countenanced it."

Whether they condoned or criticized the inductive method, whether they espoused romantic or "scientific" history, reviewers and critics in the 1850s seemed to agree that the historian must measure his facts against a moral ruler. "In the classification of facts we shall often need the application of a strict criticism of their moral character; for that is not unfrequently misrepresented by even the best historians," the Princeton Review warned.

Related to this conviction were the lingering theme of Providence and the assumption that history demonstrated the principle that right always triumphed, a principle which, in the 1850s, was widely held without regard to geographic or economic sections. The nationalism embodied in Bancroft's History of the United States provided evidence of such conviction, however ironic. "It had been the belief of nearly all the learned men of antiquity, that far to the westward, across the wide expanse of the Atlantic, lay in primeval beauty a new world. But North America was reserved by the hand of Providence for the possession of a race with nobler motives than the conquest

---

of Indian empires, and the plunder of Indian treasures. It was destined to receive the best part of the European population; men with bold hearts and strong arms, whose resolute spirits swelled big against oppression, and who scorned to live anywhere except among their equals."

Two features of the American climate of opinion at mid-nineteenth century manifested themselves in the writing of Texas history. First, while Irving, Bancroft, and Parkman received public acclaim as national historians, a younger generation of local historians began to appear in the late 1840s. They turned their attention to the study of the history of their own localities, taking a closer look at oft-repeated stories and burrowing into accumulated documents to verify and correct older histories. Critics pointed out that the study of such particulars could, "in the aggregate," provide insight into the "grand characteristics of our people." Secondly, nationalism in American historiography had centered around the romantic period of colonization and the struggle for American independence. The American Revolution provided a theme with which Texans could identify themselves. Following annexation, Texas had mounted an energetic campaign to attract immigrants but found itself hard put to escape its reputation as a haven for fugitives and the

---

prevailing assumption that its inhabitants were unmannered, illiterate, semi-savages. As one historian has pointed out, "Texans were sensitized to the subject of 'national character,' and for good reason." Texans, resentful of their rough reputation in the eyes of the world, rushed to create a usable past for themselves, culminating in a fierce nationalism that reached its zenith in the 1850s. Just as the United States cast off the yoke of British oppression, Anglo-Americans in Texas triumphed in righteous revolt against overwhelming odds. Texans could call upon their own revolutionary tradition followed by a period of almost uninterrupted progress to unite their diverse population and create a sense of national identity. The United States had its national historians and Texas needed its own.⁹

A third influence on the writing of Texas history in the third quarter of the nineteenth century also involved the evolution of the Texan character. At the very time when Texas was at pains to dispel its rough hewn image, Indian wars and the Mexican War drew many more adventurers and delinquents. In addition, with its liberal land and immigration laws, Texas became the place of last resort to many who had failed to succeed elsewhere.¹⁰ "What," asked

---


¹⁰ The personal papers of such individuals, found in public and private archives around the state, confirm that they saw Texas as their opportunity to be somebody. See for example, Laura Lyons McLemore, "John Patterson Osterhout, Annals of a Texas Immigrant," Texas Studies Annual 2 (1995): 87-88.
one student of the Texian character, "must be the feelings of men who could think of a howling wilderness as their last stop in life?" The answer, historian Mark Nackman concluded, was humor in the form of the Texas tall tale. As he pointed out, men such as Strap Buckner, Deaf Smith, Old Paint Caldwell, and Bigfoot Wallace "allowed considerable play to the imagination" at a time when many still argued that imagination was an essential ingredient in writing history. "It was everyone's wish to be somebody in the general company," wrote Gustav Dresel, a German visitor in 1854, "and therefore, everyone threw a veil of oblivion over past deeds." In their search for a usable past, Texans were more than willing to incorporate such colorful real life characters into a history uniquely their own.¹¹

Perhaps the first indication of the shift in interest from general to particular in Texas history appeared in William Gouge's *Fiscal History of Texas* in 1852. Instead of the comprehensive treatment attempted by earlier writers, Gouge limited his topic to the financial history of the Texas Revolution and of the Republic of Texas. Gouge, a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, had a reputation for his opposition to banks, corporations, and paper money. Nevertheless, he spent his life engaged in banking and finance. He had been editor of the Philadelphia *Gazette* and *The Journal of Banking*.

and had authored several books on finance from a historical perspective before turning his attention to Texas. Following a visit to Texas in 1852, he became a special agent of the United States Treasury Department in 1854, served as accountant for the State Bank of Arkansas, 1857-1858, and wrote the Report of the Accountants of the State Bank of Arkansas in 1858. Although Gouge's bias against national banks was evident, and he was severely criticized by Texans like Sam Houston, who accused him of writing specifically for the purpose of sabotaging Texas' credit reputation, he had to be considered knowledgeable of his subject. Biographical sources have suggested that his biased attitude had mellowed by the time he arrived in Texas.\(^\text{12}\)

Gouge readily admitted a specific purpose for writing a financial history of the Texas Republic that extended beyond the desire to give a simple objective account of what happened. Over the course of his life he had arrived at conclusions about the American system of public credit and the dangers of paper currency that he believed had to be demonstrated to the American

people. As to why he chose to write such a particular history, he explained, "history is of importance only as it illustrates principles; and principles may be as strikingly illustrated in the small communities of Rhode Island, Delaware, or Texas, as in the larger ones of New York, Massachusetts, or Virginia." He chose to write about Texas for much the same reasons as earlier historians. "In the short period of seven months," he observed, "[the Texans] achieved the independence of a country larger than Great Britain and Ireland, and for ten years, without direct aid from any foreign government, they sustained this independence, in defiance of all the attempts which a nation of ten millions made to reduce them to subjection. The history of such a people cannot be without interest." Furthermore, Gouge allowed as how, if the proper history should be of classical proportions, Texas qualified as well as any subject. "As we proceed," he assured readers, "it will be found that all the fiscal faults which the great nations of Europe and America have committed on a large scale, the Texans have committed on a small."\(^{13}\)

Gouge also clearly intended that his history, though narrative, be scientific with regard to the accumulation and use of sources: "The extracts . . . are given in distinct type. This gives the volume all the

advantages of a documentary history.” Likewise, he made it plain that his
was not to be a picturesque, imaginative history designed to captivate a wide
audience. “If the book is not as amusing as the last new novel, the writer
cannot help it. . . . He does not write for boarding-school misses . . . Some of
the details may be interesting to few but citizens of Texas, and creditors of
Texas; but the principles involved are highly important, not only to those
whose political position requires them to study finance as a science, but to all
who are in any way interested in the preservation of the public faith when
pledged for the payment of public debts.” Thus, admitted Gouge, history
provided him means to an end, a view expressed earlier the same year by the
North American Review in arguing that historical investigation might be
immediately useful even if the broader implications of the knowledge
gathered might not be discernible for generations: “The means are nominally
considered inferior in dignity and importance to the end which they are made
to subserve; but the end may be a distant, even an unattainable one, while the
use of the means is immediately and constantly productive of good.”

Although Gouge did not write to amuse or entertain and freely
admitted the dryness of his materials, he did not lack for a sense of humor,
albeit as dry as his subject. As a result, he undoubtedly amused himself and
his more perspicacious readers with his frequently tongue-in-cheek style.

\[14\] Ibid., iv; Review, North American Review 75 (July 1852): 265.
Nowhere is this better illustrated than in his analysis of the failure of General James Hamilton's negotiation of a loan for the Republic in 1841 and its application to the principle, by then gaining in popularity, that the smallest detail of human relations might have the profoundest effect on society. Gouge recounted how, threatened with another invasion by Mexico and without funds to provide for Texas's defense, President Lamar struck upon the idea of negotiating a loan for the Republic with the Bank of Messrs. J. Lafitte & Co., to be guaranteed by the French government. The negotiations appeared to be proceeding nicely, Gouge told his readers, until difficulties arose between the French minister to Texas and an Austin tavern-keeper by the name of Bullock whose pigs had trespassed on the property of M. de Saligny, whereupon they were killed by the servant of the French minister. Mr. Bullock, in turn, whipped the servant, thereby enraged Saligny, who sought justice by influencing his brother-in-law, as luck would have it, the French minister of finance at Paris. Consequently, Hamilton's loan was defeated. With all seriousness, Gouge explained the providential implications of this controversy:

All Texas stood by Mr. Bullock and his pigs. Houstonites and Anti-Houstonites were of one accord. Nor will it be too much to say that, as Rome was saved by the cackling of geese, so Texas was saved by the squeaking of pigs. If the loan had been obtained, it would have been used in establishing a national bank, by which every dollar would have been made to look like
ten. The result would have been that the debt of Texas, instead of being twelve millions, would have been twenty-five, thirty, perhaps forty millions. The most intelligent Texans agree in opinion that this would have been the result. All honor, then, to Mr. Bullock and his pigs; and this heretofore much despised animal must be regarded hereafter as possessed of classic interest. If his figure, carved in marble, should be placed over the entrance of the treasury of Texas, it would serve as a memento to future ages of his having been the salvation of the Republic, and teach Mr. Branch Tanner Archer's 'thousands and millions, born and unborn,' that the humblest of agents may be instrumental in producing consequences of the utmost importance.  

Texans reacted defensively to Gouge's book when it appeared and were bitterly critical of what they considered his bizarre fiscal views long afterwards. Half a century later, historian George P. Garrison condemned it for its "tone of rasping criticism." Outside Texas, however, critics received the work more charitably and dispassionately. "The historian has not only presented all the facts bearing on the debts of Texas in the order of their occurrence in a very clear and striking manner," wrote a reviewer for DeBow's, "but has made his narrative a vehicle for enforcing sound doctrines on subjects of the highest importance to the public at all times--such as the nature of state securities, the obligation imposed by public debt, together with numerous questions concerning currency and finance, which are far more clearly and forcibly illustrated by the progress and result of the measure explained in the history, than could be done by any didactic statements."

---

15 Gouge, Fiscal History of Texas, 106-11, quote, 111.
Moreover, these critics recognized in Gouge’s work the operation of general
laws: “The book is, in fact, a book of political philosophy, in which the conduct
of Texas is taken as the theme, and the true principles of currency and finance
thereby illustrated, for the most part, by ‘the rule of opposites’.”

Gouge’s book was, if nothing else, representative of its time:
transitional. A blend of anecdotal, narrative, and documentary history, it
focused on one aspect of human activity in microcosm rather than attempting
a full sweep. It was considered unacceptably biased by those with opposing
biases, i.e., Texans, sensitive to any criticism of their national character, and
supporters of Nicholas Biddle and national banks. Yet, as John H. Jenkins
has pointed out, it was no more biased than other early nineteenth-century
Texas history, and it brought to light an aspect of Texas history not previously
examined in any depth. It was not written for the general reader but for a
limited audience, who might, if willing, heed the warning that the historian
interpreted as the operation of general laws evidenced in history.

In the year after the publication of Gouge’s *Fiscal History of Texas*
another author with a limited focus began to publish his commentaries on a
previously neglected aspect of the history of Texas. José Antonio Navarro, a
signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and one of the Republic’s

---

16 Quoted in Jenkins, *Basic Texas Books*, 202; Review of *The Fiscal History of Texas*, by
most influential founding fathers, began publishing a series of historical commentaries designed primarily to write the ignored and diminished historical contributions of Tejanos into the history of their state. Although Navarro had long been a Tejano advocate, he acted specifically in response to Anglo-American renderings of their history in the early 1850s, such as Francis Baylies’s *A Campaign in Mexico, in the Years 1846, 1847 & 1848*, and articles in local newspapers, the *San Antonio Western Texan*, October 14, 1852, and the *San Antonio Ledger*, September 15, 1853, all of which portrayed the Tejano population as morally and intellectually impoverished and dependent on the Anglo-American influence for redemption of their heritage. Through a series of commentaries or historical chronicles published in English in the local press between 1853 and 1857, Navarro intended to set the record straight as to the history of the people who developed San Antonio and sacrificed their lives for it. He also had a more immediate and political purpose, that of discouraging Americans, “who with base and aggressive pretexts” wanted to displace legitimate citizens who were descendants of these people. He attempted to do so by drawing parallels between Anglo-Texans and the revolutionary struggles of the Tejanos of San Antonio, who were “guided only by an instinct for their liberty, against enemies so superior that they may be placed alongside the most free and fortunate nations of all

mankind—such as the nation with the flag of stars.” Like Gouge, Navarro did not write for a wide audience but for a specific one. Initially, he translated his comments into English for publication because he wrote for an Anglo-American audience, and he appealed specifically to a smaller segment of that readership. “I do not write for the heartless nor for the egoists— to whom the glories and misfortunes of men of another origin and language matter little or not at all. I write for the humanitarian and cultured who understand how to respect and empathize with the tribulations of a valiant people.”

Navarro’s chief authority as to the facts was his own eyewitness account, but he referred to manuscript sources, such as Bernardo Gutiérrez’s written account of the infamous executions of Governors Manuel de Salcedo, Simón de Herrera, and company, in order to support his recollections and his rendering of events that he did not witness firsthand. His comments centered mainly on the struggle for Mexican independence, commencing with Miguel Hidalgo Y Costilla, and were limited to the defense of San Antonio de Bexar. “This is an imperfect but truthful history of the events of that period,” he wrote. “You will not discover vainglory, nor the inordinate desire for excellence of style,” he warned, “but rather a concise narrative of bloody and

---

revolutionary times.” Navarro readily admitted that he had no aspirations as a literary historian: “I write this booklet as an inveterate devotee to historical materials, without literary pretensions, against all mercenary purposes, and feeling myself free and above those who do such for profit.” If his style, method, biases, and use of history did not particularly distinguish him, Navarro was distinctive as a Texas historian in the nineteenth century in other respects. He was the first to write a series of historical articles as opposed to a monograph. Not only were his commentaries the first Tejano publication on Texas history, Navarro himself was the first aspiring Texas historian born on Texas soil and a lifelong citizen of that country. As such he was Texas’s first genuinely patriotic historian.

Texas did not have long to wait for its first patriotic history. In the efforts of Henderson King Yoakum of Shepherd’s Valley, near Huntsville, Texans would at last have their own national history. In the Preface to his Fiscal History of Texas in 1852, William Gouge had bemoaned the want of “a good general history of Texas . . . that by Kennedy extending no further than to 1839-1840.” By the time Yoakum published his History of Texas in 1855, the clamor in Texas for a general history of the state had reached a crescendo, and in his work Texas history reached the pinnacle of romantic nationalism. Once

---

19 McDonald and Matovina, eds., Defending Mexican Valor, first quote 58, second quote, 44, third quote, 62.
it was published, Texans had the past they had waited for, and Yoakum, though he had never published a word before his *History of Texas* and never published another word after, became the historian of Texas, first and, in the minds of many, last. Upon his death in 1857, he was memorialized in the Huntsville, Texas, *Bar and Bench* as "the father of Texas History. He did lay in the wilderness the foundation for a vigorous quest for truth." During his lifetime, Yoakum had been a soldier, a politician, a lawyer, an advisor, an amateur scientist, and a dedicated promoter of higher education, but when the Texas Centennial Committee erected a marker before his home in 1936, it was for his *History of Texas* that he was memorialized.20

Henderson Yoakum, as far as anyone knows, did not write his *History* for profit. Nevertheless, William Gouge was not the only one of the opinion that Texas needed a comprehensive history, and leading Texans, among them Yoakum's friend, Judge P. W. Gray, to whom he ultimately dedicated his *History*, had expressed their desire to see one published. Although Yoakum

---

may have determined on his own initiative to write a history of his adopted state, he would have known such a work was impatiently awaited.

Yoakum's History, from the time of its publication, was one of the most highly regarded of all the state histories written during the antebellum era, and it has endured much longer than most, if not all, of them. It was also very much a product of its times: laboriously researched and documented, and thoroughly romantic. Touted for its objectivity, it was as biased as any of its predecessors. In what is probably the most exhaustive study of Yoakum, Herbert H. Lang attributed his success as a historian to the fact that he had "the zeal of a convert to a new cause for his subject." Others, however, have pointed out that it was not the zeal of a convert to a new cause but the zeal of an ideologue for an old one that inspired the pen of Henderson Yoakum.21

The key to Yoakum's approach to his History of Texas can be traced to his political career in his native state of Tennessee. Yoakum was an ardent admirer of Thomas Jefferson and a staunch supporter of Andrew Jackson, ideologically dedicated to agrarian republicanism and imperial expansion of the Union. He had been active in local Democratic politics during the 1830s. In 1836 he served as captain of the Murfreesboro Sentinels, a cavalry unit

---

organized to aid the Texans in their war for independence, though the victory at San Jacinto precluded the need for the Tennesseans's help. Yoakum then enlisted for service on the Sabine frontier under General Edmund P. Gaines, and in 1838 he enlisted in the Tennessee Infantry during an outbreak of hostilities between the army and the Cherokees. These military excursions reflected Yoakum's political philosophy. Along with endorsement of Indian removal, he supported Democratic economic policies of "hard" money and an independent treasury. In a letter to Martin Van Buren in 1845, he asserted that the western land belonged to the American agrarian because God planned for democrats like himself to displace the "savage" and enrich the land.  

Yoakum found both his ideology and his career threatened in the late 1830s and early 1840s by economic depression, which left his middle-Tennessee constituency more amenable to Whig ideas of industrialization and centralization. Like many other Jacksonians, Yoakum feared the changes that modern institutions were bringing. With his political career in shambles, he began casting about for a place to reconstruct his dream of an ideal republic, and the annexation of Texas provided just such an opportunity, a new republic in need of securing. In June of 1845, he wrote Martin Van

---

Buren that Texas was, "the Italy of our continent," a place where "they hail the approach of that period when they can claim the eagle as their own." He told Van Buren that he believed Americans should pursue an aggressive policy in the West, replacing the "savages" and despotic Mexicans with "enterprising, industrious, thrifty" democrats because that was the only way Americans could "accomplish the great ends" of God. In this frame of mind, Yoakum began his life in Texas as an attorney whose most prominent client and neighbor was another Jacksonian, Sam Houston.

Yoakum brought his democratic ideology to the writing of his *History of Texas*. If he wished to be thorough, accurate, and comprehensive in the collection and interpretation of the facts, he also wished to instruct the principles of virtue, patriotism, and morality. Yoakum, like other European and American writers, regarded the period prior to Anglo-American settlement as the dark ages of Texas history, when "ignorance and despotism . . . hung like a dark cloud over [Texas'] noble forests and luxuriant pastures." The spirit of liberty, loosed by the American Revolution, he argued, dispelled the dark cloud. According to Yoakum, the struggle between the forces of freedom and despotism, personified by Texas and Mexico, resulted in overwhelming victory for the forces of freedom at San Jacinto that was

---

“physically and morally complete,” for even “Providence seemed in every way
to favor the result.”

Yoakum's style, though unquestionably romantic, evinced tasteful
restraint. He avoided excessive ornamentation and exaggerated language,
and he used anecdotes and figures of speech with discretion. Nevertheless, he
succumbed to many of the habits of the romantic historians, such as
improving upon the accuracy of impression of direct quotes when he believed
his alterations came closer to the speaker's true intention. He defended his
editorial attempt to improve upon the manuscript copy of Ellis P. Bean's
memoirs by arguing that Bean "was but poorly educated, and his long
residence in Mexico had caused him almost to forget his own language. Hence,
it has become necessary to correct his manuscript and to rewrite it." On the
other hand, much of Yoakum's enduring credibility derived from the apparent
accuracy of his summaries and his faithfulness to the accounts he
summarized.

In choice and treatment of his subject, Henderson Yoakum also
demonstrated himself to be a thoroughgoing romantic. He devoted nine pages
to a colorful, detailed account of a minor skirmish between James Bowie and

---

24 Quote, Henderson King Yoakum, History of Texas From Its First Settlement in 1865 to Its
Annexation to the United States in 1846, 2 vols., (New York: Redfield, 1855; reprint, Austin:
a roving band of Indians but only nine chapters to all of Texas history prior to
the beginning of the Anglo-American period. Herbert Lang described this
imbalance as Yoakum’s "lack of a proper sense of proportion."\(^{26}\) In fairness to
Yoakum, events in Texas prior to Philip Nolan’s excursions had been largely
glossed over by everyone except Morfi and Pichardo, not only from lack of
interest but because sources from that period were not as easily accessible. If
Yoakum indulged in the dramatic appeal of hand-to-hand combat, he revealed
his ideological leanings even more clearly in his heroes. Although he has often
been criticized for his favoritism to Houston (most frequently by Houston’s
foes), his real hero was Stephen F. Austin, the pioneer and builder who
overcame the wilderness in order to establish an empire on revolutionary
principles of freedom and independence. “If he who, by conquest, wins an
empire, and receives the world’s applause, how much more is due to those
who, by unceasing toil, lay in the wilderness the foundation for an infant
colony, and build thereon a vigorous and happy state!” he rhetorically asked.\(^{27}\)

Yoakum’s real achievement and the key to his *History’s* resounding
success lay in his masterful use of documentary sources. He began his
research as early as 1850, some even speculate 1849. In a letter to Thomas J.
Rusk in 1853, he wrote that he had been “two or three years engaged in


collecting materials, and preparing a history of Texas.” In January 1854, he wrote Houston: “I am constantly employed in my history. I find it much more troublesome and laborious than I expected, having often to consult a dozen works on a page. . . . I want to have everything correct.” Moreover, Yoakum recognized the relative quality of various sources. He used numerous personal accounts, but observed that they had their drawbacks: “The accounts [of the San Jacinto battle] vary considerable, from the fact that no one of the eye-witnesses, however impartial, could himself see the tenth part of what occurred during the 20th and 21st.”

This devotion to scrupulous research and annotated documentation benefited Yoakum’s reputation in several ways. It set him apart among his contemporaries as being on the cutting edge, scientific and objective in his methods. It delighted fellow ideologues because Yoakum’s work offered them a meticulously documented and well-constructed justification of the ideology of westward expansion and empire, and its professional quality led later historians not to look too closely at his ideological biases. Consequently, Yoakum’s *History* incorporated the elements of his democratic ideology—the
189

racism, the republicanism, and the expansionism—into the presumably
objective record.

Perhaps in testimony to the thoroughness with which admiration of
Yoakum's method obscured recognition of his biases, the modern reaction to
Yoakum's History of Texas was more sanguine than that of his
contemporaries. Initial reaction demonstrated vividly the influence of
politics on Texans' expectations as well as an increasing lack of consensus,
generally, about what properly constituted good history writing. Immediately
after the release of the first edition in 1855, the Dallas Herald criticized
Yoakum's inability to escape his "biases and sympathies" for "his bosom
friend" Sam Houston "so as to give an impartial and unprejudiced narrative."
If Yoakum's account of San Jacinto was a sample of his work, the public would
have to "look to some future historian beyond the influence of living actors" to
present "a faithful and unbiased account of them." The Texas Almanac, in
1856, conceded that "Yoakum's late valuable work gives us some satisfactory
account of the first discovery and settlement of Texas." Later articles in 1859,
1860, and 1861 accused him writing to Sam Houston's tune.30 Contentions
that the Almanac's publisher, Willard Richardson, or David G. Burnet

authored the accusations seemed to be borne out when the attacks ceased after Houston’s resignation as governor in 1861. Ashbel Smith lent credence to the idea that the Almanac’s attacks were essentially political when, bitter over a series of articles in the Galveston News criticizing Anson Jones, he called Yoakum’s History “concocted—Hasty prejudice, ignorant,” and without regard to the available sources. Smith claimed that it was incorrect, incomplete, and false on the important events in history, “a burlesque of history, hardly accurate enough for the columns of a daily newspaper.” Peter W. Gray, to whom the work was dedicated, was not overly generous in his praise either, saying it was “faithful and just as far as it goes” while conceding that it would be a standard in the future. He criticized Yoakum for errors of expression and grammar and thought his style “too unpretentious” for his subject. Outside Texas, reviews were more favorable. One of the earliest reviews, appearing in DeBow’s Review in 1857, praised Yoakum for his collation of existing material as well as much new material. A review in Harper’s the same year described the work as having been “prepared with painstaking diligence, and though without pretensions to grace or vivacity of style,” and as “an important contribution to American History.” A reviewer for Putnam’s believed the books could have been written in “a more graphic and spirited” style and that the events of San Jacinto deserved “a somewhat
less calm and summary enumeration” but agreed with other critics in praise of Yoakum’s “diligence” and “perspicuous narrative.” Yoakum’s writing, wrote this critic, could not be called “classic,” and displayed “no keen dissection of human motive” nor rose “to any stately and philosophic progression” but was “simple and clear, going direct and business-like to the point, and rarely confusing the facts it handles.”

Later historians were generally more effusive. Hubert Howe Bancroft thought Yoakum’s history “one of the best, if not the best, history of Texas.” Bancroft cited its completeness, dismissed the charges of Houston’s influence, and considered minor errors unimportant to the work’s value. In 1898, Seth Shepard and A. T. McKinney, two contributors to Wooten’s *Comprehensive History of Texas*, excused defects in Yoakum’s *History* as due to lack of necessary materials at the time and praised his “literary skill, painstaking accuracy, and the impartiality with which he reproduced the leading facts of [Texas’] growth and development.” Wooten himself, while attempting to correct some of Yoakum’s inaccuracies, reprinted his *History* in its entirety, stating that he could not improve upon it substantially enough to supersede

---

it. In 1898, C. W. Raines, like others, noted the deficiencies of Yoakum's coverage of the colonial era but concluded that with whatever defects it may have had, it was "the accepted standard of authority" for that time. Z. T. Fulmore, in 1935, wrote that Yoakum's *History* was "known and consulted by writers of history the world over, and regarded as the standard of the period which it covers." In 1945, Herbert Gambrell asserted that "[Yoakum] achieved a degree of objectivity unusual for the amateur historian, and literary style not often equaled by the professional," and Eugene C. Barker considered Yoakum's *History* the first "to meet the standards of professional historians."³²

The writing of Henderson King Yoakum, like that of Gouge and Navarro, exhibited the signs of a changing climate of opinion. Careful consideration of his work suggests that, in fact, it was the audience and not the historian who was changing. In many ways, Yoakum was typical of romantic historians in America in the nineteenth century. He was a classically educated lawyer who undertook the writing of history in "days and

nights stolen from other pursuits. His philosophy of history and politics reflected the democratic ideals of Jefferson and Jackson. His themes reflected the basic assumptions that had guided the nation since the late eighteenth century, assumptions about patriotism, God, morality, and Anglo-American progress. He chose for his project a comprehensive history of his subject, one filled with bloody battles and heroic deeds. His style, though subdued, was unquestionably romantic. Much was made by contemporaries of Yoakum's attention to sources and footnotes. Yoakum was not the first to use primary sources or footnotes; he was not, as some have claimed, the first to recognize that Texas had a history prior to the French intrusion in 1685; and he was as biased as his predecessors. He received acclaim and approbation denied them because his audience perceived him in different ways than it had earlier Texas historians.

Much was made of Yoakum's scholarship because people paid attention to it. This was due, in part, to increased interest in research and documentation of historical works in the 1850s, making them seem more scientific. It may also have been due, in Yoakum's case, to the fact that, unlike his predecessors, Yoakum was a resident of Texas, not a visitor. He had moved there in 1845, a few years before he began writing his history, and was well established. Yoakum's two volumes might be considered as

---

promotional as earlier histories but in a different way. They were not written to promote personal interests, as were the histories of the 1830s, nor to promote political interests, as were the histories of the 1840s. Instead, Yoakum provided Texans with a documented and competently argued justification for their identity. Because it was born of ideology rather than expediency, for all its scholarship Yoakum's was the first genuinely romantic history. Although the fibers of a Texas mythology existed, like fringe on the single historical thread of the new Eden idea, they did not begin to form a whole cloth until Yoakum organized and canonized them with his authoritative history. Not only did he articulate them, he supported them with his "scholarly approach." He attempted to bring the Texas Revolution within the canon of American Revolutionary myth, and he perpetuated the notion that right principles always triumph. The success of the Texas Revolution proved the virtue of the Texas Republic compared to the "ignorance and despotism" of the Spanish and Mexicans. The success of energetic, noble-minded individuals, like Austin and Houston, proved that commitment to liberty and independence would bring prosperity to the western wilderness. The growth of Texas proved that American principles of government were superior to others. Providence sanctioned this success because "enterprising, industrious, thrifty" American farmers had replaced the "savages" and, by
developing the wilderness of Texas, were achieving the "great ends" of God. However romantic assumptions about God and right principles were, Yoakum made them seem irrefutable. His history was a turning point. It marked the beginning of the institutionalization of Texas's mythistory.

In the decade following the publication of Yoakum's *History*, two major events occurred that affected the writing of Texas history: the Civil War and the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. In the United States, the Civil War stimulated interest in the whole field of American history, especially the study of the early national period and the foundations of the Union that the war presumably was fought to preserve. Though the struggle seemed "to banish for a season the study of the past," wrote the editor of the *Historical Magazine* in 1862, yet "our past history, now more than ever, claims, and is receiving, the attention of thinking men." Another contributor wrote soon after the war, "It is really only now that we are beginning to know for certain what were the undoubted facts in our revolutionary history of 1776."

Certainly in Texas, the Civil War banished "for a season" the study of the past. No significant studies of state history appeared during the 1860s.

---

Following the war a southerner had predicted that the history of the conflict would be written by northerners. In Texas the Civil War produced accounts of military campaigns and personal experiences but no critical studies of Texas's involvement in it. Published works between 1860 and 1875 included Rev. Nicholas A. Davis, *The Campaign from Texas to Maryland* (1863); Augustine Joseph Hickey Duganne, *Camps and Prisons: Twenty Months in the Department of the Gulf* (1865); Theophilus Noel, *A Campaign from Santa Fe to the Mississippi* (1865); William Williston Heartsill, *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army* (1874-76); and Joseph Palmer Blessington, *The Campaigns of Walker's Texas Brigade* (1875).

When Texas histories did begin to appear again, they reflected the effects of both the outcome of the war and American society's newly elevated interest in science. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* appeared in print in 1859, affecting the whole range of human knowledge. Charles Francis Adams declared that "a new epoch in the study of history" dated from its publication. Historians sought to successfully apply Darwin's methods to human history. Earlier Auguste Comte, who died in 1857, had already taken steps in that direction and had identified evolutionary stages in social development as well as in intellectual growth. Between 1857 and 1861 Englishman Henry

---

37 Ibid., 145.
Thomas Buckle, a follower of Comte, had published his *History of Civilization in England*, in which he attempted to turn history into a science by discovering laws of history as inescapable and incontrovertible as the laws of physics. Although its immediate reception in the United States was at least cool, it eventually had a significant impact on the climate of opinion. “With considerable merits of literary execution, it is characterized in a remarkable degree by arrogant pretensions, a dogmatic spirit, coarseness of expression, and a contemptuous disregard of the feelings and opinions which a vast majority of the author’s countrymen hold sacred,” wrote a contributor to the *North American Review* in 1861. The idea of scientific history had been around for more than a century, but Buckle’s idea of history received harsh criticism for its perceived threat to dearly held assumptions about freedom and morality: “There is no man who would not recoil from rendering up his free personality and all it enfolds to become a mere link in a chain of causation.” “It is essential to the existence of a scientific law that there should be uniformity of phenomena,” wrote another critic. “But in human affairs uniformity is impossible.” There being then no historic laws, this thinker reasoned, there could be no “Science of History,” “for science cannot
exist without laws." However, by 1866 cracks began to appear in the
resistance to the idea of a science of history. "The very first result of the
science in its most imperfect stage was a power of foresight, and this was
possible before any one true astronomical law had been discovered," wrote a
critic. "We should not therefore question the possibility of a science of history,
because the explanations of its phenomena were rudimentary or imperfect."

By 1873, American critics had grown much more accepting and philosophical
about Buckle's work. "Rightly or wrongly it was universally felt that human
actions must be at last made the subject of general rules, principles or laws.
To this conviction Mr. Buckle gave the boldest and most decisive expression."

Historians Michael Kraus and David Joyce assert that the influence of Buckle
was particularly great and that Americans, reflecting on their own national
experience, were attracted to Buckle's thesis of the relationship between
environment and the development of humanity, a theme becoming popular
particularly with regional historians like Lyman Draper of Wisconsin, whose
mission was to rescue western pioneers from oblivion by basing the

quote, Goldwin Smith, quoted by [James Fitzsimmons Stephen], "The Study of History," *The
Cornhill Magazine* 3 (June 1861): 666; third quote, William T. Thornton, "History and its
reputations of his heroes firmly on fact so that their claim to fame could not be disputed.  

Still suffering the humiliation of being allied with a losing enterprise and the perception that they had been deprived of their self-determination by Reconstruction, Texans embraced the idea of rescuing their own heroes from oblivion and experienced a burst of renewed Texas nationalism. Following the Civil War, the upsurge of nationalism in American historiography naturally centered mainly on the romantic period of colonization and the struggle for American independence. The same could be said of Texas history. Among the first products of this renewed Texas nationalism and memorialization of national heroes were the works of DeWitt Clinton Baker and James Morphis.

James M. Morphis had come to Texas in 1846 from North Carolina and opened a law office in Paris by the end of that year. He became active in politics and ran for United States Senate unsuccessfully against Louis T. Wigfall in 1859. When war came, Morphis served in the Confederate army at the rank of colonel. Following the Civil War, he turned editor and traveling correspondent for the Galveston Civilian and the Telegraph and Texas

---


Register, and by 1871 had settled down in Austin to write occasional sketches for the Austin Daily Democratic Statesman."

When Morphis decided to gather his historical sketches into a book is unclear. In June 1874, the Dallas Daily Herald, announcing the forthcoming publication, reported that he had been for some time collecting facts and material for a complete history of Texas. The editors asserted that Morphis’s twenty-five year residence in Texas gave him “peculiar advantages” for the work of writing a history of the state. For his part, Morphis clearly seemed motivated by the spirit of nationalism, both Texan and American, and a desire to dilute, if not completely dissolve, the inglorious memory of the Civil War by reviving the glorious memory of the Texas Revolution. His aim clearly was to give Texas, in the wake of the disheartening Lost Cause, a history of which Texans could be proud, and which would remind the United States how fortunate it was to have Texas a part of it. “In a history of Texas,” he wrote, “it is impossible to omit the four long weary years of war.” But Morphis chose not to dwell on them or describe any battles, he explained to his readers, in the hope “that they may be remembered alone to prevent their recurrence.”

Further, he wrote, “the author’s intention has been to show plainly and clearly to the world, that Texans were not only right in throwing off the government of Mexicans . . . but that they deserve the praise of all good people for changing a

41 Tyler, et al., Handbook of Texas, Vol. 4, 842.
wilderness into green fields and happy homes.” Morphis closed his Preface with the assurance that his object was “to amuse and interest, if not to instruct” and a presumptuous quotation of verse, the gist of which was that his book was a memorial to the figures of history that their names might not perish.\footnote{Dallas Daily Herald, 14 June 1874; James M. Morphis, History of Texas From Its First Discovery and Settlement (New York: United States Publishing Co., 1874), iii; iv; viii.}

Morphis’s work was a scissors and paste rehash of Kennedy and Yoakum, combining narrative, whole texts of original documents, anecdotes, and creative dialogue, such as an impassioned discussion between Sam Houston and his son over secession. While the title proclaimed its comprehensiveness, Morphis devoted only two and a half pages to the whole period from 1685 to 1823. The vast bulk of the work, Morphis devoted to the Texas Revolution. The Civil War received a dozen or so pages of conciliatory prose, which suggested that Texas had actually benefited from the outcome.\footnote{Ibid., 454; 463.} He followed his account of the war and Reconstruction with chapters on railroads, land titles, towns, rivers, agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and education, all in lively dialogue ending with an example of a Texas tall tale and a poetic benediction to progress.

Morphis’s history, not surprisingly, was well received by the reading
public both at home and abroad. The New York Turf, Field and Farm called it an "exceedingly clever production, in which the dignified and grave march of the muse of history is now and then pleasantly interrupted by those racy anecdotes so descriptive of frontier life." Following the book's release, the Dallas Weekly Herald praised it for its "humorous anecdotes," "droll" narration, and "pen pictures." Apart from those features, the editors noted that the book also contained valuable information and historical data for those wishing to 'read up' on Texas.44

Morphis's peculiar concoction of fact and fiction was not the only, or even the first, effort to fashion a usable past for post-Reconstruction Texas. Another antebellum immigrant, DeWitt Clinton Baker, turned out two historical works in the early 1870s. While the later of these contributed to knowledge of Texas's history, the earlier volume contributed greatly to promulgation of Texas' mythology.

Baker settled in Austin in 1850. A lifelong devotee of public education, one of his earliest projects was the founding of the city's first public library. He variously engaged himself as a pharmacist, businessman, Bible society activist, essayist, poet, and tax collector, but his devotion to education was the thread that ran through all his activities and endeavors. Perhaps for this

---

reason more than any other, he typified the changes occurring in the second half of the nineteenth century. Baker has been described as an urban progressive.\(^4^5\) He was elected school trustee of Travis County in the 1850s or 1860s (depending on the account consulted), and appointed to the state school examining board by Governor E. J. Davis in 1872. During this period Baker became involved with the Republican administration’s attempt to institute a public school system that mandated compulsory attendance, teacher certification, and uniform textbooks. In 1873, he published *A Brief History of Texas From Its Earliest Settlement* intended for use in schools, which, in large measure, exhibited the moralism typical of Romantic histories and the themes of liberty, nationalism, and progress. The state board adopted Baker’s book, but revisions of the school law in 1873, over Davis’ veto, began the dismantling of the public school system and effectively doomed the textbook. Texans complained that it expressed anti-southern views, although no such bias is readily apparent.\(^4^6\)

---


Having failed to appeal to the public with a traditional history but convinced of its importance, Baker tried another tactic calculated to be more palatable to his audience. His second book, _A Texas Scrapbook_, appeared in 1875. Like Morphis's _History_, it was a subscription book. Although this venture proved a financial disaster to both author and publisher, Baker clearly intended to make money from its publication, and that aim no doubt influenced his approach to the endeavor. The book was a compilation designed for the casual reader. Like so many other volumes produced in the decade following the Civil War, it reflected the antiquarian's bent for "embalming the memory of the past" and "enshrining it in the present." The volume included anecdotes, poems, speeches, statistics, descriptions of climate and natural history, long lists of individuals, and biographical sketches of war dead, veterans of San Jacinto, and others who played some role in Texas history. With this format, Baker's compilation avoided any conclusions that might be construed as political bias and offered something for everyone: uninterpreted facts, colorful romantic narrative, and even sentimental poetry. Twentieth century historians have praised it as a reference and research tool. However, Robert A. Calvert correctly identified its significance at its own time as representative of Texans' concept of history.

47 As per letters from A. S. Barnes to DeWitt Clinton Baker, Oct. 19, Nov. 4, and Dec. 23, 1874, and Jan. 5, Mar. 5, and Mar. 19, 1875, Baker Papers.
which was characterized by anxiety to glorify their past and capture nostalgia
for pioneer life that, with the proliferation of railroads and the appearance of
the "machine in their Garden," many feared was disappearing.\textsuperscript{48} In this
respect, Baker's \textit{Texas Scrapbook} very much represented the insecurity of
changing times following the Civil War when reality and new ideas were
challenging long-held assumptions, and industrialization was threatening the
long-cherished ideal of an agrarian republic.

As one result of the \textit{Texas Scrapbook}'s lack of financial success, Barnes
sold the plates for the book's engravings to another publisher, and all but four
of the thirty-two engravings appeared in a later subscription history of Texas,
Homer S. Thrall's \textit{A Pictorial History of Texas, From the Earliest Visits of
European Adventurers, to A. D. 1879} (St. Louis: N. D. Thompson & Co., 1879).
Thrall, a Methodist minister and educator, was himself an example of a new
breed of Texas historian in that, like Baker, he authored more than one
publication on the subject, and like all his predecessors since Yoakum, he
wrote as a resident of the state. He arrived in Texas from Ohio in late 1842
and began what would become a fifty-year ministry. As a circuit rider, he
became acquainted with many settlers of Austin's original colony, veterans of

\textsuperscript{48} Quote, D.W.C. Baker, comp., \textit{A Texas Scrapbook. Made Up of the History, Biography, and
Miscellany of Texas and Its People} (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1875), 5; Jenkins, \textit{Basic
Texas Books}, 10; C. W. Raines, \textit{A Bibliography of Texas} (Austin: Gammell, 1896), 18;
Calvert, "Introduction," xxii.
the war for Texas independence, political leaders, and Texas Rangers, acquaintances to whom he attributed his interest in Texas history. At various times over the years he taught school and served as college trustee. Between 1872 and 1889, he published five widely read books related to Texas, the first being a *History of Methodism in Texas* in 1872. As a teacher, Thrall evidently perceived, as had Baker, the need for a standard textbook on Texas history. His slender volume, *A History of Texas*, first appeared in 1876 and was later expanded and reprinted.49

In the Preface to the 1876 volume, Thrall stated that his purpose was to give "a clear, concise, and accurate history of Texas." He admitted that such an aim precluded elaborate discussion or minuteness of details.50 He chose for this history a distinctly textbook format. For the first time since Morfi and Pichardo, Texas history was presented in numbered paragraphs. Thrall's numbers corresponded with questions at the bottom of the pages over the material contained in each paragraph. He attributed his sources to Yoakum, Kennedy, Foote, Holley, and personal interviews. Thrall opened his text with the landing of LaSalle, obviously believing, despite Yoakum's

49 *A History of Texas, From the Earliest Settlements to the Year 1885. With an Appendix Containing the Constitution of the State of Texas, Adopted November, 1875, and the Amendments of 1883. For Use in Schools, and for General Readers* (New York: University Publishing Co., 1885; other books by Thrall were *A Pictorial History of Texas From the Earliest European Adventurers, to A. D. 1879* (1879), *The People's Illustrated Almanac, Texas Handbook, and Immigrants' Guide* (1880), and *A Brief History of Methodism in Texas* (1889).
50 Thrall, *History of Texas*, 3.
admonition that Texas history preceded that event, anything prior to be irrelevant to the young minds of late nineteenth-century Texas. Probably reflective of the aftermath of Civil War, Thrall treated controversial subjects like slavery and Indians in the early Anglo-American settlements with studied neutrality. He avoided the suggestion that most colonists actually approved of the slave trade or that the Mexican government was actually oppressive in its enforcement of its prohibition. Thrall devoted a total of two paragraphs to the matter and only about three pages to the native tribes and Indian relations. In contrast, he devoted six pages to the siege of the Alamo, where he rejected Filisola’s report that Travis had early proposed surrender in exchange for the lives of his men. He gave three pages to an account of the battle of San Jacinto. In keeping with the highly condensed format, Thrall’s style was terse. His second history of Texas, *A Pictorial History of Texas From the Earliest Visits of European Adventurers...* was considerably more colorful and attracted considerably more attention. It was largely promotional in the same vein as immigrant guides of the late 1840s and 1850s: “To the hardy poor man who expects to make his living by honest industry and to raise his

---

61 Ibid., 53. Thrall noted that a few Africans had been smuggled into Texas, and there was some apprehension that the traffic might become extensive. The convention at San Felipe in 1833 denounced this trade. He further stated that, despite the prohibitions of 1829 and 1830 against the introduction of slavery, colonists continued to bring negro servants, passing them through the Custom House at New Orleans. Masters, also, entered into peonage contracts with their slaves that the Mexican government recognized as binding.
family where they will enjoy the advantages of good schools and churches, probably no portion of the American continent offers such advantages as Texas. Here labor is always in demand at a remunerative price; provisions are cheap; here is land for those who wish either to lease or purchase; tenement houses are furnished to farm laborers; and a permanent home may be acquired upon accommodating terms.\textsuperscript{52} Although Thrall's \textit{Pictorial History of Texas} has been subsequently quoted by other writers, some contemporary Texans took immediate and intense umbrage to it. In a review that appeared in the \textit{Galveston News}, Temple Houston issued a blistering indictment of the work. "Its title to "history" is fatally defective, because of its glaring inaccuracies and numerous errors," he ranted. Most of the errors he specifically cited had to do with geographic descriptions and not history. Nevertheless, Houston continued, "Its malicious insinuations stamp its author as a man unfit to follow the exalted calling of the historian."

Houston's numerous charges included plagiarism and omission or slighting of individuals (mostly lawyers or judges) whom he considered more worthy than those Thrall included in his "Biographical Sketches of Distinguished Characters in Texas." In his passionate criticism, Houston revealed much about the degree to which nativism colored the historic perception of many Texans: "It matters not in my eyes what faults these brave men may have

\textsuperscript{52} Thrall, \textit{Pictorial History of Texas}, iv.
had, or how bitterly they hated my father, they loved Texas, and that single fact throws a halo of brightness around their memories, and I will not silently see their glorious names, resplendent with deeds done for Texas, sullied and clouded by the hand of an alien and a stranger. . . . I denounce his work as a stigma on the name of history, as a fraud on the people of Texas, as an insult to their intelligence, and as containing libelous attacks on the character of one of her dead soldiers." While Thrall's work was not a great literary achievement nor a particularly scholarly or insightful history, neither did its flaws warrant such vituperation. Woe be unto the hapless historian who failed to write what these Texans did not want to hear!

One veteran of the Texas Revolution kinder in his criticism of Thrall was Reuben M. Potter, another self-styled historian. "Mr. Thrall deserves great credit for his efforts to keep alive the names of so many of the pioneers and veterans," he told M. A. Bryan in 1883. As a historian, Potter represented one of the most obvious changes in the writing of Texas history to take place in the late nineteenth century. A New Jersey native, he came to his interest in Texas by way of Mexico, where, from 1827-1833, he worked as agent of a commercial house in Matamoros. During the Texas Revolution he

---

54 Reuben M. Potter to M. A. Bryan, Aug. 15, 1883, Reuben Marmaduke Potter Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.
successfully obtained a decree of amnesty from the Mexican government for twenty-one Texans held prisoner in Matamoros. By 1837, he had become a Texas resident and served as a customs officer until 1845. He served as a translator for the Texan government on various occasions and, as a member of the U. S. Quartermaster Department in San Antonio in 1861, was briefly imprisoned there by Confederate forces under Ben McCulloch.

Following the Civil War, Potter did quite a bit of writing. He earned a reputation as an authority on the Alamo. His short articles on the Texas Revolution began to appear in print as early as 1860. Many of his articles dealing with the history of Texas appeared in Eastern papers and periodicals such as the New York Times and Magazine of American History beginning in the late 1870s. Like Navarro, Potter confined his historical writing to a series of articles on specific topics rather than attempting a broad history or a single volume. Like Navarro, he wrote chiefly to correct the record, and, like Navarro, he wrote with the authority of an eye-witness, but also with the incisiveness of a clinician. “The details of the final assault [on the Alamo] have never been fully and correctly narrated, and wild exaggerations have taken their place in popular legend,” he wrote in his earliest article to appear in the Magazine of American History. “The reason will be obvious when it is

---

remembered that not a single combatant of the last struggle from within the fort survived to tell the tale, while the official reports of the enemy were neither circumstantial nor reliable. When horror is intensified by mystery, the sure product is romance.” Potter acknowledged that a great deal of collection, evaluation, and comparison of sources was necessary to arrive at a reliable conclusion as to what actually happened. He pointed out flaws in Yoakum's highly respected account and asserted that statistical and direct data was necessary to obtaining a clear historical understanding of events. “The account of the assault which Yoakum and others have adopted as authentic is evidently one which popular tradition has based on conjecture,” he warned. To correct this situation, Potter offered detailed measurements and even a drawing of the layout of the Alamo that supported his own conclusions about what must have taken place. He tackled with aplomb one of the most sensitive and historically controversial issues concerning defenders of the Alamo. While admitting that no small part of the group were ruffians and filibuster types, he noted that there were also “those fighting for the safety of their nearby families, and like Bonham and Crockett who had an honest faith in their espoused cause, and these, plus the situation, raised the lowest of the garrison to the thrill of patriots and made them braver and more
courageous than they really were," an observation unnoted by Yoakum but remarkably similar to that of William Kennedy nearly forty years earlier.56

Also like Navarro, Potter was one of very few writers in the nineteenth century to recognize the contributions of Mexicans in the Texas Revolution and to deal with racial myths perpetuated by Anglo-American and European historians.57 Essentially debunking the romantic explanation for the success of the Texan rebels, based on ideas of Providence and racial superiority, Potter, echoing Filisola, suggested that racism had less to do with the historical perception of Mexico than the dreadful mistakes of her individual leaders. "It was the bad luck of fools which rendered Mexico powerless and made Texas her match in spite of odds," he wrote in a historical essay in 1883. "They won for Mexico the loathing and contempt, and for Texas sympathy, of the civilized world, and in many direct and countless indirect ways tended to uphold the latter." Like Yoakum, Potter wrote more favorably of Sam Houston than most historians up to that time. "The history of the Republic of Texas is much of it a history of popular illusion and Houston did

more than any other one man to avert its ruinous effects," he wrote.\footnote{First quote, Reuben M. Potter, “Texas Admitted to the Union,” \textit{Magazine of American History} 10 (Aug. 1883): 110; second quote, Reuben M. Potter, “The Battle of San Jacinto,” \textit{Magazine of American History} 4 (May 1880): 348.} While Potter's apparent and consistent high regard for Houston might easily be regarded as bias, his defense of the General did much to balance the treatment of Houston's role in Texas history to that date.

Another of Potter's important contributions to Texas history was his rationale for its study. From his earliest published articles on the subject, Potter perceived events in Texas in terms of their impact on the larger context of the United States and the world. "As Valmy was the parent of Jemmapes, and consequently the progenitor of Austerlitz and Waterloo, so San Jacinto begot Palo Alto, and Palo Alto begot Bull Run and Gettysburg. A small rock at the source may give a wide divergence to a river, and a petty contingency at a critical point may thus turn the course of history."\footnote{Reuben M. Potter, “British & Northern Abolition,” \textit{Galveston Civilian}, 1845, republished as “A Prophetic Article Published in the \textit{Galveston Civilian} in 1845,” (New York: s.n., 1863); quote, Potter, “The Battle of San Jacinto,” 349.} Potter's statement placed him among the first to offer a practical reason for studying Texas history beyond reiterating the themes of liberty, patriotism, progress, and Manifest Destiny. Ironically, Potter is probably better known for his sentimental poetry, “Hymn of the Alamo,” written in 1836, than for his later articles on the Texas Revolution and Republic. Yet, his articles, though
narrative, were notably free of sentimental rhetoric. Potter’s direct approach to historical evidence and matter-of-fact style reflected a changing climate of opinion as America neared the final decades of the nineteenth century and the close of the frontier.

The third quarter of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of changes in the American climate of opinion. While the work of men like Darwin and Buckle redefined society’s understanding of science and its application to human life, the American Civil War had a more immediate effect on history writing, particularly in the South—beforehand by inspiring historical defenses of the Cause, afterward by quieting southern interest in history. As a contemporary of that era remarked upon reading Charles Ramsdell’s 1910 work on Reconstruction, “I have been rereading your Reconstruction in Texas and realize more than ever the great importance as a historical record. The present generation knows absolutely nothing of that period in our history, because it was so extremely painful to those who passed through it, that their pens refused to write of it, their tongues were silent from excessive emotion at the mere thought of trying to relate its humiliating experiences.”

During more than a decade, from the beginning of the Civil War until near the end of Reconstruction, personal reminiscences, adventure

---

60 Adele B. Looscan to Charles Ramsdell, Apr. 4, 1916, Texas State Historical Association Records, Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.
stories, and biographies filled the void. Both new scientific theories and war
challenged basic assumptions that had provided the themes and determined
the subjects, methods, and style of history writing throughout the nineteenth
century. People of the Confederacy had to come to terms with the reality of
the Lost Cause despite their long-held conviction that right always
triumphed. Texas reacted with a renewed sense of romantic nationalism,
nativism, and interest in its origins.

As Americans moved westward in ever greater numbers, society, in
general, became more interested in sectional and local history. They also
became much more interested in particulars than in comprehensive history.
Evidence of these changes manifested themselves in the writing of Texas
history between 1850 and 1880. Texas historians during this period were
Texas residents more often than not. Most concentrated their efforts on
particular aspects of Texas history rather than comprehensive works. Men like
Gouge, Yoakum, and Potter went to some lengths to be scholarly in their
methods and scrupulously thorough in their collection, evaluation and
documentation of sources. At least two authors treated the role of Tejanos in
Texas history. At the same time the era of the Revolution and Republic were
more romanticized than ever before, for emotional and ideological purposes
instead of pragmatic ones. Texans found the past useful in supplying them
with a positive sense of identity following the humiliation of the Civil War and Reconstruction. They turned for validation of that identity to the last comprehensive history written before the war, a history written by a Jacksonian ideologue. It was this history that became the standard for school texts in the 1870s and was still proclaimed the definitive history of Texas at the turn of the century. The Texas myth had come of age. It had become entwined with Texas history no longer out of expediency but because it defined how Texans saw themselves, the embodiment of their collective memory.

Perhaps more importantly, with its colorful, improbable adventures, it had captured the interest and imagination of both critics and general readers not only in Texas but all over the United States.
EVERY TEXAN HIS OWN HISTORIAN

Changes in the intellectual and institutional context of American life that began in the 1850s became more pronounced in the 1880s. History writing in the last two decades of the nineteenth century bore witness to the adage that the more things change the more they stay the same. By the early 1880s, changes in the climate of opinion in the United States had become noticeable although the traditional American view remained a powerful influence. A new generation of historians, trained in scientific norms, looked down on George Bancroft’s romanticism and religiosity and sought to apply the latest scientific methods, but they still tried to assimilate American history to a pattern of unchanging principle. The main difference in the climate of opinion, at least one historian has suggested, had more to do with method than belief. The idea of moral progress persisted, but the mode changed from literary artistry to scientific procedures.\footnote{Dorothy Ross, “Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century,” \textit{American Historical Review} 89 (Oct. 1984): 921. Ross’ article, pp. 909-28, discusses this thesis in depth, arguing that neither the American public nor American intellectuals ever fully accepted European historicism; David D. Van Tassel, “From Learned Society to Professional Organization: The American Historical Association, 1884-1900,” \textit{American Historical Review} 89 (Oct. 1984): 948.} Earlier historians
had transcendental faith in progress; the newer generation had facts to support the hypothesis. The assumption remained the same. Evidence of both the paradigm shift and the resistance to change manifested itself in Texas historical writing in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Historian David D. Van Tassel marked the founding of the American Historical Association in 1884 as the climax of an epoch in American historiography. It was from that point, he contended, that one of the major shifts in American history-writing occurred: the shift in dominance from amateur to professional historian. This organization was led by a band of young scholars, most of whom had studied in Germany, and who, by the 1880s, were ensconced in history departments of major American universities. The “clear-cut” ideal upon which these scholars founded their Association, according to Progressive historian Charles Beard fifty years later, was the effort for “objective truth,” “presented to the world first in Germany and later accepted everywhere.” These new professionals set as one of their goals a unitary science of history.² In theory, their methods were based on the natural sciences, and though they recognized that they could not

formulate historical laws based on repeated, controlled experiments, they believed they could, by gathering sufficient data from the past, test certain historical hypotheses. One of these a priori theses, based on the laws of evolution, was the "law of inevitable progress."

The scientific historians acknowledged no lineal, spiritual, or intellectual connection between themselves and the romantic nationalists, yet their major premises remained remarkably the same. Leopold Von Ranke was probably most representative of this rather paradoxical approach. The first honorary member of the American Historical Association, Ranke's contribution to historical science was to apply to modern history those documentary and philological methods which had been developed for the study of antiquity. He straddled the line between romanticism and realism as perfectly as anyone of the time. He was the "supreme representative of the romantic reaction against the universalistic, 'materialistic,' and 'critical' philosophical thought of the Enlightenment." Ranke has been described by later historians as a "thorough-going philosophical idealist" in believing the world to be divinely ordered and decipherable through "intuitive contemplation" or "divination." At the same time he set an example for

---

3 Van Tassel, Recording America's Past, 172; David W. Noble, The Paradox of Progressive Thought (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 3-33, 246-56.
scientific historians by studiously abstaining from moral judgments and emphasizing critical method in historical research. He might be considered the epitome of the view that writing history was both a science and an art.

No one could be more convinced than I that historical research requires the strictest method: criticism of the authors, the banning of all fables, the extraction of the pure facts . . . But I am also convinced that this fact has a spiritual content . . . The external appearance is not the final thing which we have to discover . . . It is our task to recognize what really happened in the series of facts which German history comprises: their sum. After the labor of criticism, intuition is required.\(^5\)

Despite the fundamental similarities in their thinking, however, increasingly the amateur historians found themselves "given the cold shoulder" by their professorial colleagues.\(^6\)

One of the largest distinctions between the two classes was the amateur historian’s penchant for accumulating the minutiae of history. They attempted to preserve everything of importance to the community’s past. They collected the papers and accounts of pioneers, businessmen, lawyers, and ministers, and recorded the development of local administration, economy, schools, churches, and other mundane affairs. They believed the whole of human endeavor within set limits of time should be taken as the subject of historical study. In contrast to the European historical tradition,


theirs was a new and democratic history. They recorded history to preserve a sense of continuity and an understanding of America's historic mission for an otherwise diverse and relatively rootless people.\(^7\) Trained historians rejected this concept of history for a narrower vision. Their concept of science and scientific history was much more down-to-earth and non-theoretical than Von Ranke's, to which they attributed the severance of history from philosophy and their factual, realistic approach. Professionals like J. Franklin Jameson found these collections of local historical and antiquarian societies curious, miscellaneous, and "un-programmatic" and prided themselves on taking a much more critical approach to sources. Professionals put great emphasis on critical examination of original texts, on checking evidence, and on bibliographical apparatus. But scientific history involved more than a critical approach to evidence; it subordinated romantic values to a scientific spirit that was impersonal, collaborative, secular, impatient of mystery, and concerned with the relation of things to one another rather than their relation to some ultimate reality.\(^8\)

The new historical movement signaled the shift in American culture from romanticism to realism. The realistic historians did not necessarily

\(^7\) Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past*, 177-78.

exceed the romantic historians in factual accuracy. They sought to correct the subjective errors of romantic history by letting facts speak for themselves. They welcomed specialization and monographs on limited subjects. In order to handle subjects beyond the research of a single specialist, they published large collaborative works. They detached themselves from their subjects and did not submerge themselves in the mood and feelings of the situations they wrote about as the romantic historians had done. And to avoid the pitfall of subjectivity, they refrained, with varying degrees of success, from passing moral judgment on men and movements.\(^9\)

The scientific program undertaken by the professionals did heighten uniformity in historical writing, as Jameson envisioned, but at the expense of individuality and, it seemed, at the expense of audience. Americans had traditionally held an ambivalent attitude toward the past.\(^10\) In one sense they viewed their past as a burden. In the Protestant millennial view, the American republic would usher in the final salvation of mankind and, consequently, the end of history. In the republican perspective, the creation of a new kind of democratic republic in the Constitution would protect republican values from the corrosion of time, and, with the huge reservoir of

---


land in America, insure perpetual progress, thus achieving the millennial goal in a kind of institutional immortality.

During the Gilded Age, increasing industrialization, the creation of a permanent class of wage earners, and visible distinctions of wealth, all purportedly the result of progress, threatened the traditional view of progress in ominous ways. It was a period in which Americans experienced dramatic changes that directly challenged their historical self-perception. Progress, instead of fulfilling republican destiny, seemed to have led America into corruption and to be destroying the agrarian and harmonious social basis of republican virtue. Additionally, America was essentially a nation of frontiersmen, and the challenges of day-to-day existence precluded dwelling too much on the past. They were much more concerned with the present and the future. “The American mind,” observed a writer in the Nation in 1877, “does not dwell on the past, does not easily recall it, forgets as freely as it forgives, and only by a miracle secures for its legislation and its institutions an historical development.” Yet, a usable past was needed to give shape and substance to national identity. As Edward Everett declared in 1824:

“Divisions may spring up, ill blood may burn, parties be formed, and interests
may seem to clash, but the great bonds of the nation are linked to what is past.\footnote{Notes," Nation 23 (Jan. 18, 1877): 41; Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 6, Edward Everett quoted, 4.}


Bancroft told readers that Progress was the \textit{idea} of liberty that triumphed in American history. He reduced Protestant and American liberty to the idea of individuality and, then, described it as a reassuringly unchanging principle that was being progressively realized in history.

Furthermore, Bancroft emphasized, in romantic fashion, that progress was not only individual, it was democratic. Progress was the voice of the people that carried history forward, \textit{their} ideas that constituted true progress.

George Bancroft's \textit{History of the United States} was the biggest seller in the nineteenth century. Henderson Yoakum, in Texas, wrote in a similar vein.

Their explanation for the amazing success of Anglo-Americans against
overwhelming odds was Providence, the Divine Hand of God in the affairs of men.  

When the experiences of the Gilded Age thrust America for the first time "fully into history," Americans found themselves faced with evidence that long-held principles of Progress, republican institutions, and American mission were no longer assured, and that novelty, contingency, and moral uncertainty could no longer be avoided. Not surprisingly, they did not readily accept such unsettling implications and reacted by seeking escape from history. They turned instead to nostalgia, not just for purposes of escapism, but also because, as one intellectual historian has explained, nostalgia, in its creative manifestations, helped them legitimize new political orders, rationalize adjustments and perpetuation of old social hierarchies, and construct acceptable new systems of thought and values. The creative manifestations took the form of all kinds of public monuments, the refurbishing and perpetuation of myths and, sometimes, the development of

---


conflicting or contradictory traditions in the same locale.\textsuperscript{16}

Patrician history, exemplified by Motley, Bancroft, Prescott, and Parkman, retained the discursive, narrative form while professionals eschewed all literary pretensions. The stylistic ornaments, vivid scenes, and epic subjects of romantic history, however, were simply more captivating to general audiences than the unembellished scientific facts. As romanticism gradually gave way to realism, professional historians would find an audience, but it would not be the contemporary reading public. Henry Adams acknowledged this when he boasted of his \textit{History of the United States of American during the Jefferson and Madison Administrations}: "I am writing for a continent of a hundred million people fifty years hence."\textsuperscript{16} In the waning years of the nineteenth century, the critical historians appealed to a different audience than the patrician historians they were displacing. Professionals replaced the patricians as the history writing elite, but they did not write for a democratic audience. The new elite found an equally elite audience, themselves.

\textsuperscript{15} Kammen, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory}, 295-96. Kammen has defined nostalgia as a concept that tends to deny the notion that progress or change is necessarily for the better. He observed further that it is especially likely to occur in response to dramatic changes such as revolution or civil war, rapid industrialization, or the crumbling of a venerated value system. All those phenomena, he pointed out, were present in the United States between 1860 and 1917.

The very gradual paradigm shift from romanticism to realism in historical method was tentative but discernible in Texas during the third quarter of the nineteenth century in the writing of monographs and the appearance of history textbooks for common schools. This trend continued in the final two decades of the nineteenth century, particularly with the establishment of a department of history at the University of Texas. Resistance to it also continued to be evident, particularly in the emergence of a prodigiously creative nostalgia.

Perhaps the first volley fired strongly in behalf of scientific Texas history was the work of Hubert Howe Bancroft. Bancroft represented the changes in multiple ways. He was detached from his subject both literally and figuratively. He neither resided in nor visited for any length of time in Texas, and he endeavored to produce a history that would present the readers with all the facts from which to make their own deductions and form their own opinions. “It was ever my aim to tell the story clearly and concisely, taking a common-sense practical view of things, and arranging them in natural sequence,” he explained in a defense of his work.17 Bancroft also represented the new methods of critical history by assembling a staff of specialists to assist him with the research and writing of a mammoth comprehensive

history. In fact, he considered this "system" to be his greatest achievement and contribution. "My system," he wrote, "applies only to the accumulation and arrangement of evidence upon the topics of which I and consists in the application of business methods and the division of labor to those ends. By its aid I have attempted to accomplish in one year what would require ten years by ordinary methods; or on a complicated and extensive subject to collect practically all the evidence, when by ordinary methods a lifetime of toil would yield only a part." "In long and complicated subjects to which my method is applicable, and which cannot be successfully treated by any other, I am inclined to regard the division of labor as an advantage in itself."\(^{18}\)

His "system" combined the proclivities of the antiquarian with the methods of the professional historians. In his effort to "exhaust" the subject, Bancroft produced, as he intended, a summation and critical digest of all published knowledge concerning the natural, cultural, and political history of the entire western half of the North American continent. He began the work in 1874 after retiring from a highly successful career as a bookseller, printer, and publisher, and by 1890 he had published thirty-nine large volumes. He had started collecting Californiana about 1859 for a Pacific Coast Handbook he published with the idea that the editor would find it convenient to have all the books on the subject brought together. His collection grew by leaps and

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 593; 600.
bounds, partly because he realized that limiting research to the confines of state or national borders was impossible if it were to be historically and geographically sound, and partly because he concentrated on content rather than format, collecting every item with the slightest bearing on the subject. In 1869, in order to house his mammoth project, he erected a building that became known as the "history-factory." He hired a staff of six hundred to assist with the collecting, research, and writing. Bancroft himself edited.\(^{19}\)

Bancroft's two volumes, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas, 1531-1889*, appeared in 1883 and 1889.\(^{20}\) They were enormously important to Texas history for several reasons, but never much appreciated by contemporary Texans. Not only had Bancroft amassed far more sources than any of his predecessors, he was the first historian of the nineteenth century to treat Texas history in a larger historical and geographical context, that of Mexican history as well as the history of the American West.\(^{21}\) He also accomplished what Yoakum had first attempted by beginning Texas history with the explorations of Hernan Cortés. His research included Mexican sources to which Yoakum had alluded. Like the trained historians of the scientific school, he focused on institutions in an attempt to convey a sense of

---

\(^{19}\) John Walton Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1946) is the only complete account of Bancroft's life and work.

\(^{20}\) Actually, 1521-1889, as the first chapter covers the years 1521-1530.
Texas's growth beyond its rough frontier and revolutionary epoch toward a more cosmopolitan future. Although the style was narrative, Bancroft abandoned almost entirely the portrayal of history as adventure.

Nevertheless, like the romantics, Bancroft portrayed Texas as an example of Anglo-American progress. Indicative, perhaps, of the Gilded Age, he still viewed history as the anticipation of empire; only his villains had changed. Instead of savage Indians and tyrannical Mexicans, civilization had to conquer speculators, railroads, monopolies, plutocrats, and other assorted evils of the commercial republic.

The first volume covered the Spanish Southwest in general with emphasis on Texas. The second volume covered the history of Texas in the nineteenth century through 1888, with additional chapters on education, industry, commerce, and railroads. Eleven chapters dealt with the Mexican border states. Though there were errors, the two volumes comprised, without question, the most comprehensive and critical treatment of Texas ever to be written. In the terms that Bancroft originally approached his task, it remains the best critical digest of published knowledge available through 1888.

Bancroft considered his project no less ambitious than the works of Edward Gibbon, Francis Parkman, and George Bancroft and just as worthy of

---

21 According to John H. Jenkins, Basic Texas Books, 13, the list of "Authorities Quoted" in the first volume alone contained over 1200 printed works, not including manuscripts.
fame. He realized that his endeavor would not likely be profitable considering the immense cost of its production. He expected, however, to be recognized as a scholar and literary figure and respected among the elite of the world's learned men. This desire was evident in many of his essays, such as the chapter on "History Writing" in his *Essays and Miscellany*, published in 1890. These works clearly revealed that he not only collected books, he read them. The quality of his personal essays, not to mention the sheer magnitude of his work, made such expectations seem reasonable and well-deserved. Bancroft went to great lengths to market his history and to insure a favorable critical reception, and, eventually, the venture did yield a sizable profit.

But he never received the respect and recognition for which he yearned. In Texas as elsewhere, critics focused on the ethics of his "system," which, in their view, credited him with the work of others. In 1895, C. W. Raines stated, "Were I restricted to a single book on Texas, I would, without hesitation, take Bancroft's History ..." The *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, however, commenting on an article by William Alfred Morris concerning Bancroft's twenty-volume *History of the Pacific States*, made much of Morris's allegation that the North Mexican States and Texas were

---

not Bancroft's work at all and belittled his role, if accurate, as managing editor: "Mr. Bancroft's lack of frankness, his failure to apprehend the ethics of authorship, could not fail to bring discredit upon his work." The writer of this note went on to concede that though Bancroft's history of Texas contained errors, and though even he omitted extant material unknown to him, the historian of the future would have to work upon the foundation he had laid. Ever after, the history of Texas would have to be thought of in its relation to the history of Spanish North America.  

Bancroft's critical reception underscored the growing elitism of professional historians. They tended to dismiss his work as local history and western local history at that. Critics who denounced Bancroft for his "history factory," ignored the similarity between his methods and those of young men from European "seminaries," who were establishing "literary factories" at eastern universities like Harvard, or Leopold Von Ranke, who used the work of countless graduate students in the writing of his universal history, or, as David Van Tassel has pointed out, many other scholarly cooperative projects of the same period.  

---

In fact, Texas history in the last decade of the nineteenth century was the subject of a number of cooperative "memorial" or "vanity" histories, all of them by amateurs. The most voluminous of these was another massive comprehensive history compiled by Dudley G. Wooten, a lawyer who had been educated at Johns Hopkins, was instrumental in chartering the University of Texas and was a founder of the Texas State Historical Association. Wooten's endeavor represented Texas's historical consciousness in the late nineteenth century in combining adherence to romantic principles with the more recent scientific method in the gathering of specialized monographs, in its post-Reconstruction nostalgia and, possibly, as an extension of that nostalgia, in its bigness. The work consisted of two oversized volumes totaling nearly 1800 pages. As evidence of Wooten's romantic orientation, the compilation began with a reprint of Yoakum's History of Texas, which Wooten and others attempted to correct through the addition of annotations. The remainder of the voluminous text consisted of chronologically arranged essays and memoirs on Texas history from Austin's colony to 1897, some of them book-length. Wooten concluded with a lengthy summary of the significance of the last fifty years of the century and pages of statistical tables. His own contributions on Spanish and Mexican land titles, Texas land laws, and the results of Texas's progress since statehood were praised as "scholarly, statistical, and devoid of
moral judgment," which a reviewer in *The Dial* deemed "noteworthy contributions to the history of the Southwest." C. W. Raines, reviewing the work for the *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* called it the "New Yoakum." "Considering its conglomerate character, this work is something more than a history in the ordinary acceptance of the term," he wrote.25

Raines, State Librarian of Texas, and generally considered a professional historian, reiterated earlier critics of Yoakum, stating that "with whatever defects it might have, [it] is the accepted standard of authority today, having more merit than any other history of the state ever written by a Texan."26 With respect to the objectivity question so much in vogue in the late nineteenth century, Raines noted that Wooten had been "an ardent secessionist and an honest doctrinaire of the Calhoun school of State Rights politics" but had nevertheless produced "the most impartial history of Texas for the period covered that has ever been written." The most revealing comment by Raines, however, might be his review of Oran Roberts's contribution on Civil War and Reconstruction: "Reconstruction was the

---


26 Ibid., 91. This is an important distinction. Two years earlier, Raines, in reviewing Bancroft's *History*, had declared it to be the one indispensable work on Texas history. See Raines, *Bibliography*, 21.
hideous nightmare worse than war for Texans. The exasperating events of this period are given within without loss of temper, but the tyranny of the Davis administration does not escape recital and the proper condemnation."

A myth for coping with Civil War and Reconstruction had obviously been immediately constructed and embraced by amateur and professional historians alike. "Calmness" of recital they equated with detachment and objectivity. Raines criticized Roberts only for his unscientific probing for the "philosophy of events." He concluded by comparing Wooten's *Comprehensive History* with Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of North America.*

Wooten's collaboration with publisher William Scarff was, in essence, a memorial to the events of Texas history and those who participated in them. It was by far the most comprehensive of such memorials, but it was certainly not the only one. Veterans of the Indian wars, Andrew Jackson Sowell and John W. Wilbarger, produced books that were part compilation and part chronicle. The contributions to these works consisted not of specialized

---

27 Raines, Review of *A Comprehensive History,* 91; 93.
research but of memoirs and recollections. These books characterized numerous works, large and small, published between 1883 and 1899.

Personal journals and reminiscences found their way into print during this period in record numbers. As the Revolutionary generation aged and began to die out, Texans became conscious of the need to preserve the memory of men and deeds. In an effort to gain support for the preservation of Texas history, all kinds of personal accounts were regarded as history and used to keep alive these memories. This outpouring of nostalgia in the guise of history became more democratic than ever. Authors came from every walk of life. Women, too, recorded and published their memoirs. Some retained the exciting, colorful style of romanticism, but some, like Will James, studiously avoided the sensational and tried to give straightforward accounts.

One of these personal memoirs, which the author expanded into an attempt at comprehensive history, was that of John Henry Brown. John H. Jenkins called Brown's *History of Texas From 1685 to 1892* "the earliest comprehensive history of Texas written by an active participant." Brown had


29 Will S. James, *27 Years a Maverick, or, Life On a Texas Range* (Chicago: Donahue & Henneberry, 1893).

served as an Indian fighter with the Texas Rangers, as a colonel in the Texas militia during the Mexican War, as Adjutant General under McCulloch during the Civil War, as mayor of Dallas, and as a leader in drafting the 1876 Texas Constitution. At various times he had been a printer and newspaper publisher. He spent fifty years collecting material for his history and four years writing it. Brown acknowledged the current demand for history based on facts and information: “Eschewing fiction and exaggeration and guided by the spirit of truth and justice, this work is given to the people of Texas.”

However, Brown provided an example of the historical consciousness that subscribed to unchanging principles of earlier days with the opening sentences of his introduction in which he dismissed the significance of any events in Texas prior to Anglo-American settlement in 1822: “From the latter year we trace all of Texas identified with those principles of liberty, and representative, constitutional government held, at least by all English-speaking people, to be essential to the continued progress and happiness of mankind.” One reviewer wrote that it was “the most thorough, impartial and accurate history of Texas ever published.” Another stated that his work could “be scrutinized in vain to find a deliberate utterance antagonistic to public or private virtue or unfaithful to the glory of Texas,” which, as John Jenkins
pointed out, was the work's chief shortcoming. Despite his claims of impartiality, Brown was utterly biased and selective in his presentation of facts and devoted to romantic assumptions about liberty, progress, and Providence.

The efforts to publish standard history textbooks in the third quarter of the nineteenth century continued in the final decades. The passage of the Public School Act, as well as the widespread call for history instruction in schools and universities, inspired half a dozen or so textbooks in the 1890s. These histories seemed to be written more with a purpose than a thesis. They were characterized by a patriotic emphasis and provincial orientation. Their purpose, according to Anna J. Pennybacker in *A New History of Texas for Schools*, was to present “varied and romantic scenes” that would “cultivate true patriotism.” Mrs. Pennybacker was a public school teacher from Palestine, Texas, whose textbook enjoyed great popularity. First published in 1888, it was revised and reprinted in 1895, 1898, and 1900. The publishing team of William Scarff and Dudley Wooten, having completed their opus, published an ambitious school history in 1899. In it Wooten acknowledged a debt to H. H. Bancroft and Justin Winsor as well as a score of specialists on

---

various aspects of Texas history including William Corner, Adele Looscan, Andrew J. Houston, and E. T. Dumble. Mary M. Brown's *A Condensed History of Texas for Schools* (1895), which relied heavily on her husband John Henry Brown's *History of Texas*, was intended to assist the teacher “to kindle the fire of patriotism in the breast of the pupils.” Brown himself published *A School History of Texas From Its Discovery in 1685 to 1893* (1893) in the same year that the second volume of his *History* came out. Even more nostalgic was *Under Six Flags, The Story of Texas* (1897) by M[ollie] E[velyn] M[oore] Davis, a writer of fiction and poetry. “The history of Texas is far more than a romantic legend. It is a record of bold conceptions and bolder deeds; the story of the discoverer penetrating unknown wildernesses; of the pioneer matching his strength against he savage; of the colonist struggling for his freedom and his rights.” Davis's little volume illustrated the acceptance of nostalgia in place of history in late nineteenth century Texas. Even more important, Davis directly addressed the frontier influence in shaping Texans’ and Americans’ concept of the meaning of history.

Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, first expressed in an address to the American Historical Association in 1891, was America’s most

---


popular explanation of itself, and, according to historians Michael Kraus and David D. Joyce, it has held that place from its publication in 1893 to the present. With Turner, Texas history became not just America's history, but the image the world at large carried of American history, because Texas epitomized the American character as Americans believed it to be: rugged, individualistic, optimistic, and democratic. These were the unchanging principles to which American historians, whether romantic or scientific, whether amateur or professional, paid homage.\textsuperscript{34}

Professional historians in Texas shared this conception of American and Texas history as surely as the average citizen. As historian John Higham has observed, the argument sparked by the Turner Thesis over the influence most responsible for shaping American history and forming a distinctive national character never spread beyond the confines of American universities." In the popular mind, the vision of the pioneer as the quintessential American never wavered.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, the establishment of a department of History at the University of Texas did have an impact in the last years of the nineteenth century. The movement in Texas toward a uniform historical method received possibly its greatest impetus from two

\textsuperscript{34} Kraus and Joyce, \textit{The Writing of American History}, 239; See Higham, \textit{Writing American History}, 119.

\textsuperscript{35} Higham, \textit{Writing American History}, 119.
professors who, with Wooten and others, helped to establish the Texas State Historical Association. They were George Pierce Garrison and Lester Bugbee.

Garrison initiated the professionalization of Texas historiography as the chair of the newly created Department of History at the University of Texas in 1889. He was professionally trained as a historian at the University of Chicago. Garrison had moved to Texas from Georgia in 1874. He carried with him the influence of his southern heritage, and his writing reflected the influence of traditional nineteenth-century themes of moralism and patriotism. He also exhibited the influence of late nineteenth-century American expansionism and naturalistic trends such as the theory of Social Darwinism, which became associated with the concept of "a new manifest destiny." Yet, as opposed to previous Texas historians, who saw nationalism almost exclusively in local terms, Garrison, significantly, portrayed Texas history as an aspect of United States history. "The best history is that which gives the clearest explanation of the unfolding of national life," he wrote. Thus, he succeeded where Bancroft failed to inspire Texas historians to interpret and write about Texas not only as part of a larger event--the

---

36 George P. Garrison, "Scientific and Literary Historians," Popular Science Monthly (Nov. 1900), 92; see David W. Noble, Historians Against History, 3. Noble's thesis asserts that the concept of American deliverance from the vicissitudes of history found its final expression in Jacksonian democracy, which embraced moral progress and the beneficent power of the Union simultaneously.
westward movement of the United States--but also as part of the by-then prevalent idea of a larger manifest destiny.

In his most important local study, *Texas: A Contest of Civilizations*, Garrison revealed the influences of nationalism, social evolution, manifest destiny, and the germ theory, which had been advocated much earlier in the nineteenth century by Henry Adams, John Burgess, and other scholars who had studied in Germany. "Monroe's famous message in 1823 officially asserted that the period of colonization from overseas was at an end; but this did not stop the flow of population, nor the shifting of political boundaries with the advance of the United States. Now the great American Republic not content with having expanded from the Atlantic to the Pacific, has added to its dominions, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines." He vigorously declared that Moses and Stephen Austin planted "the [Teutonic] germ of a new civilization in the Texas wilderness, and its subsequent development to a higher form of life." These ideas had appeared earlier in the writing of some Texas historians, but Garrison represented the scientific historian who at least professed a belief that the historian must present things as they were. However, he did not very well escape the contradiction between scientific history and America's romantic view of nature and destiny. "In Garrison,"

---

recalled former president of the University of Texas, H. Y. Benedict," the scientific historian was ever subordinate to the patriotic citizen. He . . . firmly believed that history revealed an unceasing moral purpose running through the ages . . . and that the experience of the past could profitably brought to bear on the problems of the future." He believed that the advance into the West produced the distinctive characteristics of Americanism, and he saw Texas history as part of this westward movement. He also believed that natural selection had produced in the pioneers their energy, adventurousness, willingness to take risks and endure hardships, and he believed that these rugged individualists were nearly exclusively Anglo-American and had brought the germ of institutions inherited from England into the West well before the flow of European immigration. He analyzed the problem of nationalism and sectionalism in this light and concluded that the nationalizing tendencies evidenced by United States westward expansion were too strong to be overcome.\textsuperscript{38}

Despite his rather romantic view of nationalism, his potential influence as a scientific historian was mitigated by pressure from an even more conservative Texas political sentiment. Prodded by citizens embittered by Civil War and Reconstruction, the Texas legislature adopted a resolution on

\textsuperscript{38} Quote, H. Y. Benedict, "George Pierce Garrison," \textit{Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association}, 14 (Jan. 1911): 175.
June 9, 1897, demanding an investigation into teaching at the University of Texas that allegedly failed to emphasize support for southern traditions and institutions. Garrison succeeded in institutionalizing professional history and making Texas history the subject of scholarly study, but he did not entirely depart from the legacy that Anglo-Americans conquering the frontier imparted to Texas prior to the Civil War, and the programs he established bore the stamp of his professional philosophy.

A student of Garrison's, Lester Gladstone Bugbee, contributed significantly to the professionalization of Texas history and, along with Garrison, helped lay the groundwork for a "Texas School of History." Although Garrison viewed Texas history as part of the American West, he also acknowledged it as part of a distinct Southwest region, a primarily geographical concept important for its recognition of the Spanish heritage of that portion of the United States. Bugbee represented the bridge between the nationalistic emphasis of Garrison and the regional approaches to Texas history beginning with the Southwestern emphasis.

Lester Bugbee was born in Texas, the first historian of the nineteenth century to claim the distinction. He attended the University of Texas where

---

he completed a master's thesis on the history of Stephen F. Austin's colony, using the records of the General Land Office and documents published in the histories of Foote and Yoakum. At Columbia University he came under the influence of scholars Herbert Levi Osgood, John Bassett Moore, E. R. A. Seligman, John W. Burgess, and William A. Dunning. In his brief career as a professional historian, Bugbee produced a relatively small amount of published material, articles that appeared between 1897 and 1900 in scholarly journals, but the influence of his work proved significant. Bugbee helped to change the romantic tone of historical writing about the period of Texas' colonization, revolution and republic, and the causes of the Mexican War.

But, appropriately, Bugbee's greatest service was perhaps as an educator, not just of university students but of ordinary Texans whom he advised and encouraged. Ladies' magazine editors sought his opinion, and amateur historians sought his endorsements. Echoing William Prescott, they obviously believed "interest" to be of paramount importance in writing history. "What do you consider the best text book on Texas history?" inquired one member of a women's club. "Mrs. Pennybacker is not authentic, but exceedingly interesting. . . . What are the most interesting things written about Texas?" Mrs. Pennybacker herself assured him that she would be
delighted if he could deem hers the best text book extant on Texas History for
the common schools. She needed recommendations, she said, “from the
leading Texas school” concerning her book to convince the school board to buy
it.  

Garrison and Bugbee probably made their greatest impact on Texas
history in organizing the Texas State Historical Association than in their
writing. The need for such an organization was undeniable, coming so late as
it did, to locate, collect, preserve, and publish the materials for Texas history.
Garrison realized that, given the political pressures on the university, history
could only be promoted in Texas by getting as many citizens involved as
possible. “Our intention,” he told former governor Oran Roberts, “is to send
circular invitations to a number of persons from whom we may hope for
efficient cooperation throughout the state to be present, or, at any rate, to
become members, and we wish to have the names of a few well-known
citizens of Texas signed to the call.” He was also smart enough to realize that
the best way to disarm potential enemies was to invite them into one’s own
camp. Hence, when he resolved to form a historical society, he appealed to
history-minded citizens and high-ranking politicians. The pages of the

---

41 Maggie Watters to Mr. [L. G.] Bugbee, June 16, 1897; Anna J. H. Pennybacker to [L. G.]
Bugbee, Oct. 2, 1897, Lester Gladstone Bugbee Papers, Center for American History,
University of Texas-Austin.
Quarterly were filled with reminiscences and nostalgia of countless amateur historians whom Garrison, as editor, instructed in scientific methods as he published their work. Roberts became the Association's first president.42

Given Garrison's background and world view, it would be difficult to say whether he succumbed to conservative political pressure or won it over to his view when, in fact, there was not a vast gulf between them. But Garrison's clashes with the powers of state politics clearly revealed that Texas nativism and post-Civil War nostalgia overwhelmingly informed the historical consciousness of Texans at the turn of the century. And Garrison responded to it and to the realization that professional methods of research, to be of value, ultimately must be transmuted into common knowledge: in the words of historian Carl Becker, "that pattern of remembered events, whether true or false, that enlarges and enriches the collective specious present of Mr. Everyman." In allusion to the quip that history was a trick the living played on the dead, Becker wrote: "The appropriate trick for any age is not a malicious invention designed to take anyone in, but an unconscious and necessary effort on the part of 'society' to understand what it is doing in the light of what it has done and what it hopes to do." Historians by profession

share in this necessary effort. "But we do not impose our version of the human story on Everyman; in the end it is rather Mr. Everyman who imposes his version on us."

By the late nineteenth century it became clear that Americans in general, and Texans in particular, could not or would not relinquish their romantic world view. Nearly every aspect of life was changing in the last two decades of the nineteenth century: urban-industrialism was overtaking agrarianism, scientists and mathematicians like Henri Poincaré were challenging the perfect order of Newtonian mechanics, the scientific method was overtaking literary methods of writing history, and the patricians, who had been the elite of American history writers, were displaced by the professional elite, though, in principle, they differed little from one another.

In Texas, as in the United States at large, the population reacted to the unsettling effects of war, industrialization, and threats to basic assumptions that had guided their thinking for generations by retreating into nostalgia, clinging stubbornly to the unchanging principle of moral progress, creating myths in the guise of history. Becker suggested that everyone embroiders personal experience with memories of things reputed to have been said and done in past times that he or she has not known. It doesn’t matter that these

---

memories be completely true, said Becker, only that they be useful. People will hold in memory only those things which can be related to their ideas of themselves. “The history which [the individual] imaginatively recreates as an artificial extension of his personal experience will inevitably be an engaging blend of fact and fancy... In part it will be true, in part false; as a whole perhaps neither true nor false.”

The greatest difference between the professional, scientific historians and their patrician, romantic predecessors was their audience. “The history that lies inert in unread books does no work in the world,” observed Becker. The professional historians gained dominance in the writing of history, but they lost the wide readership of their amateur, literary counterparts. Instead, professional historians wrote for one another, and Everyman became his own historian.

Texas history in the late nineteenth century became the province of every man and women in a very real sense. Much of published history consisted of their personal accounts and memoirs. Many of the changes wrought by the shift from romantic to realistic paradigm were evident in the proliferation of monographs and short articles, compilations, and memorial

---

44 Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 17; quotes, Carl Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian,” 230.
histories. The greatest influence of scientific history manifested itself in the publication of school histories and the establishment of a Department of History at the University of Texas for training Texas historians. The work of Wooten, Garrison, and Bugbee provided a new method for would-be Texas historians to follow, but one that incorporated the romantic ideals cherished by the chivalric South, embodied in the code of the West, and embraced by Americans in their attempt to escape temporal history in a spatial one. Ultimately, professional historians in Texas found themselves constrained to join with amateurs in perpetuating the collective memory written and published in these decades on an unprecedented scale by Texans for Texans about Texans. Because Texans epitomized the American character as Americans and the world at large believed it to be, they exported their mythistory to a receptive audience that has continued to cherish the image throughout the ensuing century.
CHAPTER 7

TEXAS, THE ETERNAL FRONTIER

How one judges Texas historians depends on how one defines history, and every generation has had more than one definition. Historian Peter Novick described the attempt to define historical objectivity as "nailing jelly to the wall." The expression applies equally well to the attempt to define history in general. Rationalists called it philosophy teaching by examples. During the height of Romanticism, Napoleon called it a fable agreed upon. Critics and historians of the late nineteenth century insisted that it was a science from which laws of human nature could be derived. Throughout the nineteenth century some scholars insisted that history was an art, some called it a science, and some said both art and science. No single definition adequately describes the writing of Texas history during any given period, much less throughout the century from 1800 to 1900, except in the broadest of terms. History, generally, may be defined as the organized past. Within that definition, each generation grappled with its own idea of history, always

influenced by the “climate of opinion” and the needs of society. Carl Becker has noted that there are really two histories: what actually happened and what we remember. He is but one among many who have pointed out that perfect knowledge of what actually happened is virtually, if not totally, impossible to ascertain, leaving room for creative memory. Examining the connection between collective memory and national identity, Michael Kammen has observed that “societies tend to reconstruct their pasts, rather than faithfully record them, with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present.”

This organization of a usable past, regardless of the method employed, provided the fundamental character of Texas history in the last century.

Texas history in the nineteenth century began with the defense and justification of the status quo. Catholic brothers, Juan Agustín Morfi and José Antonio Pichardo, educated in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, applied both reason and experience to the writing of history. Though men of God, they were rationalists, seeing cause and effect as determined by the acts of men and the quirks of nature rather than as the hand of God in human affairs. Both believed that the facts, properly stated, would speak for

---

themselves, and they strove to bring the past to bear on the present. They made a self-conscious effort to be objective and scientific, conducting exhaustive, critical research and presenting it in concise narratives supporting their respective theses. Yet their descriptions of Texas evinced an already age-old theme of the redemptive qualities of the New World paradise.

The intrusion of Anglo-Americans into Texas following the Louisiana Purchase gave rise to new uses for history. In reviewing the work of the Texas State Historical Association in 1927, President T. J. Harwood noted that Texas history had been treated as "a romance, a tragedy, an epic poem of physical beauty in spots and at times; a desert and butt for ridicule . . . at other times; a call to the land hungry and adventurous; and the battleground of rival nations; the inspiration of political feuds; and angry controversy between partisan historians." In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, well-educated, genteel but otherwise mostly ordinary individuals wrote about Texas. They were American or European visitors and observers attracted by the promise of a second Eden and curiosity about the Texas Revolution. Their writing was influenced by romantic themes of liberty, patriotism, progress, and Providence. They relied on these themes enacted in Texas to create interest but conscientiously sought and relied on primary

---

sources for authenticity. On the whole, their writing was balanced between pro-Texan and pro-Mexican biases, but both historical objectivity and romantic virtues were organized for the promotion of personal interests at a time when society valued history for its utility. Like their Spanish predecessors, they, too, saw Texas as a land of promise, an opportunity to redeem themselves in one way or another.

T. F. Harwood described the period after the Revolution as “the era of partisan history, at times acrimonious, increasing in geometric progression.” Indeed, this period produced passionate and colorful writing designed to attract and persuade popular and political audiences. In the interest of their various causes, writers transformed romantic themes into myths that supported their arguments more effectively than mere facts. They expanded the westering myth, incorporating republican ideology and moral justification for American territorial expansion. They had access to more documentation than ever before but did not take uniform advantage of it. Conscientious writers made a more complete picture of Texas history while others chose to make a more colorful and fantastic one. Both methods employed history as means to an end: William Kennedy, for example, who thoroughly researched and documented Texas' history in order to make a convincing case for British

---

4 Ibid., 5.
recognition of the Republic, and Rev. A. B. Lawrence, whose hastily researched and flamboyantly written history served as promotional literature and sermon combined.

Mid-century brought changes to the nation and to the writing of Texas history. In contrast to the previous generation of curious observers and political activists, Texas historians from the middle of the nineteenth century onward were most often residents whose sense of identity was vested in Texas' past and whose future was vested in its present. Indian wars and the Mexican War during the 1840s had drawn adventurers to Texas and liberal land laws had drawn those desperate to succeed. People whose lives lacked luster eagerly embraced the colorful personae of local heroes. With the influx of immigrants of widely diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences, the need for a cohesive national history arose and with it the real flourishing of Texas mythology. Texans found their national history couched in the romantic terms of a Jacksonian ideologue. At the same time, Texas's first national historian, Henderson Yoakum, heeded the increasing demand for thorough research, use of original sources, and scrupulous documentation. He exposed and incorporated more new information than the most diligent of his predecessors and acknowledged the existence of even more. His skillful blend
of romantic idealism and scientific method defined Texas history for the remainder of the century.

In general, historians in the third quarter of the nineteenth century began to turn their interests toward local history and the study of particulars. As a result, writers produced monographs and articles on specialized topics that blended anecdotal, narrative, and documentary history rather than the comprehensive works of earlier years. Some astute writers attempted to incorporate the role of Tejanos into Texas's national history during these formative years between 1850 and 1880.

In Texas, as elsewhere in the South, the Civil War had a chilling effect on Texas history writing, but Reconstruction produced a paradoxical resurgence. Education reforms and public school laws resulted in the writing of Texas history for schools. On the other hand, writers of school histories, reacting with renewed romantic nationalism, turned for a positive sense of identity to the ideological antebellum history of Henderson Yoakum. In a rare period when Texas had few flamboyant heroes, the writers of school texts appropriated the heroes of an earlier time and elevated them in the collective memory to mythic proportions.

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, the aftermath of war, industrialization, and the threat of science and the marketplace to basic
assumptions about life fostered a popular retreat into nostalgia. While histories written prior to the Civil War had been relatively balanced, and mythmaking had been contrived to serve specific ends, histories written during the Gilded Age tended to confuse the historical past with the specious present, defined by historian Carl Becker as a pattern of thought into which we weave “such actual or artificial memories as may be necessary to orient us in our little world of endeavor.” Monument building, the enshrining of historic sites such as the Alamo and San Jacinto Battlefield, the proliferation of memorial and vanity histories, all gave evidence to the crafting of a collective memory. In this process history writing became more democratic than ever. Meanwhile, students trained in history at universities in Germany and the United States rejected the literary history so appealing to general audiences and began writing for other trained historians.

Out of the surge of nostalgia, Texans busily became involved in building monuments to their remembered past and memorializing those who participated in it. This trend continued after the establishment of a department of history at the University of Texas in the 1880s. Much of what was published continued to be written by amateurs, long-time residents, whose assistance the professionals needed for the collection of historical

---

5 Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian,” 226-27.
materials and the promotion of institutionalized history in the conservative Texas political climate.

Modern historians have pointed out that "scientific" history involved changes of method more than of principles. This certainly appeared to be true in Texas where professionals and amateur historians continued to share romantic ideals and adherence to the principle of moral progress. George Pierce Garrison, founder of the department of history at the University of Texas, and Texas' first professional historian, was preceded by an amateur, Hubert Howe Bancroft, in his understanding of Texas history within the larger context of American history.

Garrison espoused the notion that Texas history was part of a westward movement that had begun with its English antecedents. A number of modern historians have agreed. They have viewed westward expansion as an extension of the New England Puritan millennial, spatial concept of history. In a historical sense, Texans were western in the same sense that all Americans were western. They understood their relationship to the past and future in terms of escape from history into millennial-utopian nature.⁶

Nineteenth-century views of Texas history persisted into the twentieth century not only in Texas but everywhere because Texas represented the wide

---

open spaces and thus perpetuated the spatial concept of history that had become traditional in America. If the United States lost its safety valve with the closing of the frontier in 1890, it found it again, intellectually, in Texas. It remains America's treasured symbol of the wild frontier, where rough and ready adventurers overcame always greater odds, and cowboys were modern-day knights in buckskins and ten gallon hats. Larry McMurtry observed of Walter Prescott Webb that in *The Texas Rangers* he was writing “not as an historian of the frontier but as a symbolic frontiersman.”Texans were the epitome of what Americans believed themselves essentially to be. What made the Texas myth so distinctive and so enduring was not its Texan-ness but its American-ness.

Twentieth-century historian, John Higham, attributed the perpetuation of the vision of the pioneer as the quintessential American to Frederick Jackson Turner. Not only did this vision remain firmly entrenched in America, he wrote, but “the world outside the United States kept much the same image. American scholars might attack the frontier theory as parochial, even isolationist; they might insist that it perpetuated an indigenous, primitive Americanism, and thus neglected the interconnections between the United States and Europe; but trans-Atlantic students of American institutions paid little heed. They continued--those who were not Marxists--

---

serenely to follow Frederick Jackson Turner.” Higham noted that Turner left a divided heritage because he provided a general theory, of value to everyone, on the influence of the frontier on American life, but that theory “gave academic respectability to the classic story of exploit and struggle among the men who ventured westward.”

Throughout the nineteenth century, Texas history was democratic, never the province of an elite. Texas historians, whether visitors or inhabitants, whether rationalists, romantics, or realists, whether amateurs or professionals, had a use for the past. When Texas myths emerged, they did so in response to some need either of partisan factions, as in the 1840s, or of society at large, as in the 1850s and 1870s. By the time Texas produced its first crop of professional historians, Texas mythology had, in a sense, been legitimized by a professional historian in the theories of Frederick Jackson Turner. New historians reject the pat explanations of the romantic historians and Turner but seem to make little headway against prevailing myths. Some attribute the difficulty to their eschewing of literary history, their inability “to bring history alive.” Although in order to displace old myths professional historians will undoubtedly have to appeal to a broader audience than other

---

professionals, the experience of the nineteenth-century Texas historians suggests that it is more than that. As scholar of the humanities James F. Veninga has written, "The Anglo-Texan story is . . . part of a much bigger story, and its myth is part of a much bigger myth. Now as then the historian must convey the usefulness of the past, its bearing on the present, means to an end. History as an end in itself has not proven useful. Veninga reminds us of the strikingly similar themes that occur in diverse cultures world-wide and in the diversity of Texas myths: Anglo-Texan, Western European, Protestant; Mexican-Texan, Spanish Catholic; Afro-American, and Native American. The challenge for the new Texas historians is not so much to rework old myths as to illuminate the shared culture of these multiple, sometimes conflicting histories and traditions. The myths that evolved in the nineteenth century remain useful to Texans and the world at large even in the late twentieth century. Not only do they continue to seem vital to Texans' ability to see themselves as a people and confront the future, as T. R. Fehrenbach maintains, but they continue to be cherished representatives of the American self. It is not too hard to believe that in Texas the wide-open spaces still exist and the frontier Eden, at least as a state of mind, is preserved for all.\(^{10}\)

---

WORKS CITED

*Primary Sources*

Manuscripts


Bugbee, Lester Gladstone. Papers. Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.

Dienst, Alex. Papers. Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.


Lamar, Mirabeau Buonaparte. Papers. Texas State Library, Archives Division, Austin, Texas.

Potter, Reuben Marmaduke. Papers. Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.

Pritchett, W. E. Papers. Dallas Historical Society, Hall of State, Dallas, Texas.

Rusk, Thomas Jefferson. Papers. Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.

Smith, Ashbel. Papers. Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.
Texas State Historical Association. Records. Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.


Yoakum, Henderson King. Papers. Center for American History, University of Texas-Austin.

Newspapers

*Dallas Daily Herald*. 1874-1875.

*The Dallas Morning News*. 1945.

*Dallas Weekly Herald*. 1874-1875.

Houston *Telegraph and Texas Register*. 1842

Huntsville *Bench and Bar*. 1857

Secondary Sources

Articles


“Book Reviews and Notices.” *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 8 (July 1904): 87-89.


"Historic Speculations." *Southern Literary Messenger* 6 (Sept. 1840): 606-08.


Shafer, Boyd C. “The Historian in America.” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 60 (Jan. 1957): 381-86.


“Thoughts on the Manner of Writing History.” *Southern Literary Messenger* 3 (Feb. 1837): 156-57.


Reviews


Books


Coleman, Robert M. *Houston Displayed; Or, Who Won the Battle of San Jacinto? By a Farmer in the Army*. Velasco, 1837.


Filisola, Vicente. *Representación Dirigida Al Supremo Gobierno ... En Defensa De Su Honor Y Aclaración De Sus Operaciones Como General En Gefe Del Ejército Sobre Tejas.* Mexico: Impreso por Ignacio Cumplido, 1836.


Fulmore, Z. T. *The History and Geography of Texas as Told in County Names.* Austin: Steck Co., 1935.


Houstoun, Mathilda Charlotte (Jesse) Fraser. Texas and The Gulf of Mexico; or, Yachting in the New World. 2 vols. London: John Murray, 1844.


James, Will S. 27 Years a Mavrick; or, Life On a Texas Range. Chicago: Donahue & Henneberry, 1893.


Kendall, George Wilkins. *Narrative of the Texan and Santa Fe Expedition,* Comprising a Description of a Tour Through Texas and Across the Great Southwestern Prairies, The Camanche and Cayuga Hunting-Grounds With an Account of the Sufferings From Want of Food, Losses From Hostile Indians, and Final Capture of the Texans, and Their March, As Prisoners, To the City of Mexico. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844.


Niles, John M. *History of South America and Mexico; Comprising Their Discovery, Geography, Politics, Commerce and Revolutions To Which is Annexed, A Geographical and Historical View of Texas, With a Detailed Account of the Texian Revolution and War*, by Hon. L. T. Pease. Vol. 1. Hartford: H. Huntington, 1844.


A Prophetic Article Published in the Galveston Civilian in 1845 [entitled “British & Northern Abolition”]. New York: s.n., 1863.


Rose, Victor M. Ross’ Texas Brigade, Being a Narrative of Events Connected With its Service and in the Late War Between the States. Louisville, 1881; reprint, Kennesaw, GA: Continental Book Co., 1960.


A Brief History of Methodism in Texas. Nashville: M. E. Church, South, 1889.


________________. *A Complete History of Texas For Schools, Colleges, and General Use*. Dallas: The Texas History Co., 1899.

Dissertations
