

WHAT WENT WRONG? HOW ARROGANT IGNORANCE AND CULTURAL
MISCONCEPTIONS TURNED DEADLY AT THE SAN ANTONIO

COURTHOUSE, MARCH 19, 1840

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2008

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Copeland, Cristen Paige, What Went Wrong? How Arrogant Ignorance and Cultural Misconceptions Turned Deadly at the San Antonio Courthouse, March 19, 1840.

Master of Arts (History), May 2008, 116 pp., references, 83 titles.

Although the Council House Fight is well written about in the annals of early Texas history, this all-encompassing study will reveal a whole new picture. Unlike previous works that maintained one point of view, multiple perspectives were analyzed and explored to allow a more comprehensive view of the Council House Fight to emerge.

Primary focus on social and cultural misunderstandings, as well as the mounting hostility between the Penateka Comanche and Texians across the frontier, will demonstrate their general distrust and hatred of the other. Detailing their complicated relationship will prove that neither the Texians nor the Comanche were without blame, and both shared responsibility for the deterioration of events on and before March 19, 1840.

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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Texas in the 1840's was the setting for intermittent warfare between the Texians and the Indians who resided within the country.¹ As settlements grew and more land was required, increased contact and resistance from the Indians of Texas resulted. The greatest of these threats to white settlement were the Comanche warriors. Many attempts to create peace and frontier stability failed because most Texians were unwilling to share *their* land, and the Mirabeau B. Lamar administration declared war on the native population.² The Council House Fight was one influential battle within the larger untraditional war that raged between the Euroamerican settlers and the native populations that troubled the Republic. For years the Indians have been blamed for what occurred in San Antonio on March 19, 1840, citing past difficulties and deceptions on the part of the Penateka Comanches that were present that day.³ But the

¹ The term Texian will be used throughout the paper, and is more time appropriate than the present-day Texan spelling. The term Euroamerican, white, or Anglo settler or colonists is also used interchangeably throughout the paper, and all refer to the same people. These terms are not meant to minimize the contributions made by the Tejanos, African Americans, or Europeans of the region, but refer to the majority population of early Texas.

² In Lamar's first message to Congress, he proclaimed that Texas was to begin "an exterminating war upon their warriors, which will admit no compromise and have no termination except in their total extinction." Lamar's First Message to Congress, December 21, 1838, *The Papers of Mirabeau B. Lamar*, Eds. Charles A. Gulick, Jr, Katherine Elliott, and Harriet Smither, 6 vols., (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1921-1927), 2: 346-369; David La Vere, *The Texas Indians* (College Station: University of Texas A&M University, 2004), 184; F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xv; Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 168-169.

³ Historians who have blamed the Comanches will be discussed further in Chapter 2. These include Josiah W. Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas*, (Austin: Hutchings Printing House, 1889); and Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century a Frontier Defense*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935).

Texians were also guilty in their dealings with the Comanches. This thesis will argue that neither the Texians nor Indians were without blame, and both shared responsibility for the deterioration of events on and before March 19, 1840.

Years before the Americans came to dominate the region, both the Spanish in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the Mexicans beginning in 1821, had difficulty dealing with the natives, especially the Comanche. The Lipan Apache were the first major threat to the Spanish colonization of Texas, but they were quickly replaced by a more fierce opponent. As the more dominant nomadic group, the Comanche moved further and further south, lured by European goods and horses, and pushed the Apache closer to Spanish settlements. Eventually unable to sustain the constant raids of the Comanche bands, the Apache of the San Antonio region reached out to Spanish officials for protection in the form of a mission and a presidio. Established in 1757, the Mission Santa Cruz de San Saba was destroyed by Comanche attacks, and was never rebuilt.⁴ Motivated by the necessity for peace in the region, the Spanish sought negotiations with many of the Comanche bands, and peace treaties were signed in October 1785.⁵ Peace lasted for much of the Spanish rule in Texas and remained mutually beneficial for both groups, granting Comanche access to European goods, and the Spanish security on the frontier.⁶ The intrusion of illegal traders from the United States in Texas caused renewed difficulties in the region because they traded guns and ammunition to the Comanche. Angry with the Spanish for failing to maintain their promises in the treaty of 1785, the

⁴ Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1992), 161.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 191; Thomas Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History, 1706-1875*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 178.

⁶ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 191

Comanche began a series of raids against the settlements of San Antonio in 1818.⁷ In response to an official inquiry based upon the complaints made by one of the members of the Bexar ayuntamiento, an army officer, Juan Antonio Padilla, submitted a report calling the Comanche “treacherous, revengeful, sly, untrustworthy, ferocious, and cruel, when victorious; cowardly and low, when conquered,” and claimed they were “inconsistent in their friendships and break their contracts for any cause.”⁸

Despite the relative peace enjoyed throughout Texas, the Spanish lost control of the region to Mexican revolutionaries in 1821. Independent Mexico sought to strengthen their defenses against the presence of illegal American entrepreneurs and Indian attacks on the frontier. Their first step toward achieving this goal was to allow Stephen F. Austin to bring three hundred American families to settle in Mexican Texas. The Mexicans hoped to create a “nucleus of Roman Catholics” to help curb American expansionist efforts inside Texas.⁹

The early Texian leadership did not want war and initially wanted to coexist peacefully. But repeated Indian attacks angered many of the colonists, and the people’s demands for retaliatory raids were too strong for men like Austin. Though the Comanche would become the most fearsome and dangerous enemies of the Texians, it was mostly the Karankawas, and the Tonkawas, Wacos, and Tawakonis that troubled the first American settlers. During this time of great demand to stop the Indians from continuing

⁷ Joyde Lynn Dickson Schilz and Thomas F. Schilz, *Buffalo Hump and the Penateka Comanche*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980), 6.

⁸Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 193. The term ayuntamiento refers to a particular town’s council. Juan Antonio Padilla’s response to the complaints made by the council in Bexar, or the San Antonio region, was called “Barbarous Indians of the Province of Texas.” See Mattie Hatcher Austin, “Texas in 1820,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 23 (April 1920), 47-68.

⁹ Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 7.

their raids against the Texians, Austin organized the first group of Texas Rangers to defend the frontier settlements.¹⁰

In June of 1822, a schooner, the *Only Son*, arrived in Texas with one of the first groups of Austin's colonists. When the immigrants moved inland, the Karankawas attacked and killed the guards and took the supplies still aboard the ship. This became a pattern for the early Texas colonists: the Indians would attack when they found whites alone or in small groups. Though Austin preferred peace, the conflict that existed between the Karankawas and the colonists made that impossible.¹¹ It was not only the memory of these early interactions with the Indians of Texas, but later colonists' own experiences within and outside the settlements for years to come that helped create a fear and hatred for the natives in the mindsets of the Texians.

Indian depredations continued to plague the area, and in 1823 Mexico concluded a peace treaty with the Comanche Indians in which they promised to stop the raids committed by their young warriors in return for increased trade. As the opportunity for trade lagged, internal divisions led some Penateka Comanche bands to seek continued peace with the Mexicans, while others chose to conduct raids into Mexican settlements. As the Texian revolutionary threat grew inside the province, the Mexicans shifted their focus to that threat. Although the American settlers attempted to enlist the Indians of

¹⁰ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 115.

¹¹Stephen F. Austin to Military Commandant, April 20, 1824, *The Austin's Papers*, Ed. Eugene C. Barker, Vols. 1 and 2 and Supplement, (Washington D.C.: American Historical Association, 1919-1928), Vol. 3, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1926), 1:768; Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 136-137. The information in the majority of this paragraph can be found in Cantrell's work.

Texas against the Mexicans, few joined their revolutionary efforts, and the Comanches played no military role for either side.¹²

Conflict between the Texians and the Indians continued after Texas won its independence. The American settlers that formed a majority of the new populace of the Republic of Texas were mostly from other southern states, and had experience dealing with Indians.¹³ In fact, some of the Indians that now occupied Texas had been forced there and away from their traditional homelands in other parts of North America years earlier by Americans pushing frontier settlement westward. Just as their predecessors before them, the Texians sought ways in which to deal with their Indian problem.

During his first term as president of the Republic of Texas, Sam Houston dealt with the Indians in a different way than most Texians wished, and he sought treaties and other more peaceful solutions. But after the election of Lamar, who began a war of extermination, conditions worsened inside the Republic. Lamar had developed his hatred for Indians early in his career under the tutelage of Georgia Governor George M. Troup, whom he had served under as a private secretary. In Georgia there had been a bitter struggle between the state and the federal government concerning the removal of the Creek and Cherokee Indians from lands that they had rightfully claimed. A treaty had been signed at Indian Springs and was ratified by the Senate, but quickly came under controversy when the majority of the Creek nation began to renounce its signing. President John Quincy Adams investigated the Creek's claims and "found the treaty had been obtained by fraud, refused to proclaim it in effect, and ordered that new negotiations

¹² Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 9-14.

¹³ Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin*, 110.

should be begun.” Angered, Lamar organized the Georgia militia to resist Adams’ demands, and this experience left a bad taste in Lamar’s mouth for the Indians.¹⁴

Lamar’s first opportunity to initiate his Indian policy began with the Cherokee in East Texas. The Cherokee had come to Texas around 1824, under the leadership of Chief Bowles, and settled on land highly desired by many white settlers coming to the territory.¹⁵

For years following the Texas Revolution, Texians continued to fear an alliance between the Mexicans and Indians of Texas. In 1837, the existence of an alliance between the Cherokee and the Texians became more obvious when tribal and Mexican officials met in Matamoros.¹⁶ President Lamar, influenced by his involvement in the Georgia Creek Wars, believed if Indians were to remain in the Republic they should obey the same laws as its citizens. Since proof was coming forth of a relationship between the Cherokee and the Mexicans, Lamar believed their “treasonable correspondence” should be punished, and the Cherokee were asked to leave.¹⁷

Worried about what might result from a Cherokee alliance with the Mexicans, the Texian Congress passed, and Lamar signed, a bill in December 1838 that provided for the protection of the northern and western frontiers of Texas. The bill called for a military road to be built from Kiamisha Red River to the Nueces River, along which forts will be

¹⁴ Donaly Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid: The Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1987), 2.

¹⁵ Second Annual Message to Congress, November 12, 1839, *Lamar Papers*, 3:159-183; for more information concerning Mirabeau Lamar, see Stanley Stiegel, *The Poet President of Texas: The Life of Mirabeau B. Lamar, President of Texas* (Austin: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1977), 9-13.

¹⁶ Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 13. The knowledge of this incident to the Texians is demonstrated in Sam Houston’s May 5, 1837 report to the Texas House of Representatives, in which he informed them of a possible alliance.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

erected. The bill also provided for an offensive operation against the Indians by calling for a regiment of eight-hundred and forty men to serve for three years. On December 29, an additional bill for eight more companies called for mounted volunteers to serve six months. The Texians feared what might develop as a result of the Cherokee's dealings inside Mexico, and began planning for the Republic's protection.¹⁸

President Mirabeau B. Lamar's plan to expel the Cherokees of Texas suited the anti-Indian policies of Secretary of War General Albert Sidney Johnston and Commissioner of Indian Affairs George W. Bonnell. In his letter to the Cherokee, Lamar informed them that the Republic of Texas would not tolerate their treason, nor would it allow the Cherokee to get away with their role in the Cordova Rebellion.¹⁹ In response, Chief Bowles, leader of the Cherokee in Texas, agreed with Lamar's claim that the Indians and the white man would never be able to live together in peace. Further, Chief Bowles requested compensation for the improvements made upon the land that they planned to evacuate, and President Lamar agreed, but warned the Cherokee to leave in peace or he would send troops to escort them from the land. Commissioners among the Cherokee sent to expedite their departure tried to reach a peaceful conclusion. They pronounced that "every means to effect a friendly negotiation" was used, "but without

¹⁸ Henry S. Foote to M. B. Lamar, September 15, 1839, *Lamar Papers*, 3:108-110; Vicente Cordova to Manuel Flores, July 19, 1838, *The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest, 1525-1843*, 5 vols., (Austin: Texas State Library, 1959), 1: 8; Anson Jones to John Forsyth, December 31, 1838, Texas Secretary of State Diplomatic Correspondence – Letter Books, 1836-1846, Texas State Library and Archives.

¹⁹ Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 16. The Cordova Rebellion was an uprising of approximately one hundred Mexicans and four hundred Indians, presumably Cherokee, that rose against the newly formed Republic of Texas in the early part of August 1838. Led by Vicente Cordova, a resident of Nacogdoches, the rebellion was quickly thwarted. Future evidence pointed more and more toward a Mexican – Indian alliance against the Republic of Texas. *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Cordova Rebellion," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/jcc3.html> (accessed October 31, 2007).

success, and at noon on the 15th day of July announced their failure.”²⁰ A fight ensued, and it was not until Christmas Day that all of the Cherokee were finally forcibly removed to Indian Territory.²¹

The expulsion of the Cherokee in 1839 was a result of a number of factors. Not only did Texians fear their partnership with the Mexicans, but they also wanted more land in Texas, land that was already inhabited by the Cherokee.²² As seen by their expulsion of the Cherokee, many Texians did not want to coexist with the Indians.²³ And with the removal of the Cherokee, the most dominant Indian threat to the Texians, as well as the greatest barrier to further settlement, became the Comanche. These Indians continued to make raids on American settlers and, to the horror of the Texians, they took white captives and ransomed them for European goods.²⁴ Past attempts at peace with the Comanches had resulted in numerous failures.²⁵ Like many other nomadic Indians, the Comanche were a collection of several autonomous groups with different names and customs.²⁶ Treaties with one band had no bearing on another, and the Texians continued

²⁰ Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 18.

²¹ J. Love to M.B. Lamar, April 13, 1841, *Lamar Papers*, 3:507-508.

²² The Texians would also fear Comanche involvement with the Mexicans in the future. J. Browne to A.S. Johnston, September 13, 1839, *Lamar Papers*, 3: 106-107.

²³ Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas*, 22: “Our people along the border settlements had suffered so much at the hands of the red devils.”

²⁴ Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas*, 22: “This was not the first time the Comanches had feigned friendship and expressed a desire to cease hostilities towards the whites in order to throw the settlers off their guard so that they might more effectively raid the country, commit murders and then suddenly return to their mountain homes”; Ron Tyler, et al., eds., *The New Handbook of Texas*, “Indian Captives,” 6 vols., (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 3:826-827.

²⁵ Treaty Between Texas and the Comanche Indians, May 29, 1838, in Dorman H. Winfrey (ed.), *The Texas Indian Papers, 1825-1843*, (Texas State Library: Austin, 1959), 50-52.; Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 165.

²⁶ La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 188, 134, 148; Newcomb, *The Indians of Texas*; Noah Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State or Recollections of Old Texas Days*, Compiled by Nanna Smithwick Donaldson, (Austin: Gammel Book Company, 1900), 135.

to misinterpret Comanche social structure and organization.²⁷ Combined with their lack of understanding of the Comanche people and the continued depredations committed against the settlers on the frontier, the Texians saw little choice but to wage war on these perceived enemies of the Republic. For most Texians to co-exist with the Indians, especially the Comanche, was simply not possible.

Apprehension, as well as defiance, also characterized the way in which Comanche often viewed future relations with the Texians. Not only had raids continued among the American settlements, but Texian retaliatory attacks were as devastating if not more so to the Comanche people. Also infuriating many Comanche were the constant incursions of the Americans upon their traditional hunting grounds.²⁸ Many unfair treaties continued to take more and more land away from the Indians, and many natives refused to negotiate and forfeit more lands to the Texians.²⁹ An example of this loss of Comanche land due to Texian intrusion was the establishment of the city of Austin in 1839. It existed far north of the center of the population, and was laid out in accordance with Lamar's plans. The city actually had a view of the Comanche hunting and camping in the hills along the Colorado River overlooking the site of Austin from the north and west.³⁰ As settlement grew in this area of Texas, so too did the tensions between the Texians and the native.

²⁷ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 184; La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 149, 184; Smithwick Memoirs, 135.

²⁸ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 165; La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 134; Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: The Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land*, (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 53.

²⁹ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, xv, 165, Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State*, 134; Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 56.

³⁰ Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 19.

While some were able to co-exist, most Comanche simply could not negotiate a meaningful and lasting treaty that could satisfy both parties.

Countless skirmishes, battles, raids, and atrocities were committed by both the Texians and Indians in the Republic.³¹ The Council House Fight was no different; it is just another example of the many different tragic events that took place between the Texians and the Indians, more specifically the Penateka Comanche, during the pre-statehood years in Texas. Early in January 1840, a small group of Comanche approached San Antonio with the desire to set a future date to negotiate a lasting peace with the Texians. Terms were discussed and agreed upon, and the Comanche promised to free all of their American captives and return with a larger delegation to finalize the discussions. Worried that the Comanche would not honor their end of the bargain, the Lamar administration immediately dispatched troops to San Antonio. When a group of sixty-five Comanche arrived on March 19, 1840, the Texians were angry that they brought only one American captive with them, Matilda Lockhart. Matilda's condition was very poor, and she claimed her abusers planned to trick the Texians and ransom their remaining American captives one by one. Angered that the Comanche had broken their promises once again, the Texians confronted the twelve principal chiefs that had assembled inside San Antonio's Council House. When the Comanches denied the charges, the Texians placed them under custody until the remaining American captives could be freed. Outraged, one chief rushed to escape, and a fight ensued inside the Council House.

³¹ Lamar's First Message to Congress, December 21, 1838, *Lamar Papers*, 3:346-369.

Within minutes, all twelve chiefs had been killed, and fighting spilled out onto the streets of San Antonio.

At the end of the day thirty-five Comanche and seven Texians had been killed, and other Indians had been captured and imprisoned by the Texians.³² With so many dead, most of them Comanche, many people began to ask a lot of questions that remain today. With the scarcity of primary documentation for the event, it has been easy for others to put their own spin on the situation. Were the Indians to blame for tricking the Texians to believe they would freely surrender all of their white captives unharmed? Or were the Texians at fault for detaining and slaughtering these men who had entered their town under a banner of peace? The answer is not so clear cut, and is really much more complicated, lying somewhere in between these two extremes. Neither group is without blame, and both the Texians and the Penateka Comanche share the responsibility for the deterioration of events that led to the Council House Fight. Their past difficulties, arrogant ignorance of each other's culture, expectations, and determination had led to a point of no return for a peaceful conclusion to Texian-Comanche relations in the Republic.

³² Hugh McLeod's Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, *A. J. Houston Papers, Texas State Library and Commission*.

A HISTORIOGRAPHY

Published accounts of Texas history are filled with information concerning the early years. Older accounts are rooted primarily in first hand knowledge and include little academically based research. As time progressed, historians published studies founded on second hand knowledge, and critically written accounts remained sparse. Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, academics began to narrow their fields of research, and the foundations of contemporary work flourished. Soon studies became more and more specific, less biased, and better researched. The most recent histories are just more thorough and critical analysis's of studies begun in the late twentieth century.

A perfect example of the evolution of how historians have portrayed early Texas history is seen with the March 19, 1840, incident of the Council House Fight. Divided into five separate groups, it is easy to see how the way historians view this event has changed over time due to the times and type of published material available. The first category consists of early or pre-twentieth century accounts, characterized by works such as John Wilbarger's *Indian Depredations in Texas*. The second category is made up of works from the first half of the twentieth century, and is defined by works such as Walter Prescott Webb's *Texas Rangers*. The third category includes studies published in the second half of the twentieth century, like W.W. Newcomb's *Indians of Texas*. The fourth category is made up of works from the 1990's, and is characterized by studies such as Thomas Kavanagh's *The Comanches: A History, 1706-1875*. The fifth and final

category consists of studies published in the twenty-first century, such as David La Vere's *Texas Indians* and Gary Clayton Anderson's *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing of the Promised Land*. All five categories of work demonstrate that the Council House Fight has always been viewed as an influential event of the early nineteenth century in Texas.³³

While virtually all early Texas history studies include at least the mention of the Council House Fight, they do not fully explore the entire situation. Missing is a balanced examination of the fears, motivations, and consequences of the Texians and the Indians actions, and how or why they led to this battle. In viewing the entirety of the situation a better understanding will emerge. The days of viewing the deaths of these Anglo men as a result of Indian wildness and ferocity is replaced with the realization that both sides experienced tragedy, and both sides shared blame for what occurred there that day.

While this particular study does not necessarily include any new information, it does in fact include a fresh new comprehensive approach that allows the reader to understand the Council House Fight in the broader context of early Texas history, and its importance to the future of Texian-Indian relations. This work is also aimed at leveling the playing field on which to view the Texians and Comanches to facilitate a more thorough understanding of their relations leading up to March 19, 1840.

³³John Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas*, (Austin: Hutchings Printing House, 1889); Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1935); W.W. Newcomb, *The Indians of Texas: From Prehistoric to Modern Times*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961); Thomas Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History, 1706-1875*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); David La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, (College Station: University of Texas A&M Press, 2004); Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: The Ethnic Cleansing of Texas, 1820-1875*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

Many works contributed to the production and research of this study, and many perspectives were used to provide a more thorough review of the Council House Fight. Surveys of early general Texas history, Texas Ranger history, general Indian history, Indian depredations, Comanche history, and early Texas settlers' memoirs and histories were all consulted, as well as period newspapers, military records, and an examination of Spanish and Mexican controlled Texas and Indian relations.

The first category of sources concerning the Council House Fight originate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and they include personal and second-hand accounts. Some of these works are memoirs or journals, while others are the work of early historians. These books provide a glimpse into the past, but more importantly they allow readers to see how the people of the period viewed the events that they experienced and then recorded. Sometimes the truth is not as important as how it was perceived at the time, especially concerning the natives of Texas. These early works include Henderson K. Yoakum's *History of Texas*, Wilbarger's *Indian Depredations*, John Henry Brown's *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*, Noah Smithwick's *The Evolution of a State, or Recollections of Old Texas Days*, Mary Maverick's *Memoirs*, John H. Jenkins' *Memoirs*, and "Rip" Ford's *Texas*.³⁴

³⁴ Henderson K. Yoakum, *History of Texas: From its First Settlement in 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1846*, (New York: Redfield Publisher, 1855); Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations*; John Henry Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*, (Austin: L.E. Daniell, 1880); Noah Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State, or Recollections of Old Texas Days*, Compiled by Nanna Smithwick Donaldson, (Austin: Gammel Book Company, 1900) Rena Maverick Green and Maverick Fiarchild Fisher, eds., *Memoirs of Mary A. Maverick: A Journal of Early Texas*, (San Antonio: Alamo Printing Company, 1921); John H. Jenkins, ed., *Recollections of Early Texas: The Memoirs of John Holland Jenkins*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958); Stephen B. Oates, ed., *Rip Ford's Texas*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963).

Many books have been written examining the earlier years of Texas' existence. The most notable early work is Yoakum's 1855 work, *History of Texas: From its First Settlement in 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1846*. Like other writers of his time, he demonstrates his bias when describing the Comanches as "a party of savages," and he calls the Council House Fight a "remarkable fight" because the Texians killed or captured all the Indians except one man, a Mexican, whom they allowed to escape. Yoakum provides little information or details about the event, and his only explanation for what occurred after that day is cited from the *Houston Telegraph* on April 15, 1840, that claims the woman sent to recover the other white captives after the fight returned with two white captives and four or five Mexicans and proposed an exchange of prisoners. The article claims that the woman was willing to negotiate for the rest of her people with horses, but that Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher declined the offer, demanding that all the other white captives be brought in first. This implies one of two things, either the Comanches continued to refuse to turn over their captives, or that there were no other white captives. Either way, the blame shifts, and is never clarified.³⁵

While other works have made the same claims, more recent research does not support this rendition of the story. Henderson's work is out of date, and newer studies provide a better basis for review. Two such contemporary works are Greg Cantrell's 1999 *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*, and Randolph B. Campbell's 2003 *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*.³⁶ Both books provide an excellent overview of pre-

³⁵ Henderson K. Yoakum, *History of Texas*.

³⁶ Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Randolph Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); both works will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Republican Texas, and Mexican-Texian relations, as well as much more. Included within their texts are examples of early Indian-Texian interaction and problems, as well as the general condition of the territory.

Wilbarger's book, *Indian Depredations in Texas*, is a publication that combines stories of more than two hundred and fifty Indian attacks in Texas from the 1820's to the 1870's. He provides another perspective on the Council House Fight at a time when early published accounts were still fresh in readers' minds. Wilbarger, unlike many other authors, is very obvious in his dislike of the native people of Texas, referring to them as "red devils," and makes several racially prejudiced assertions. He blames the Indians for the event, ignoring the fact that the Indians might have considered the Texian decision to imprison them in the council room as an initial act of war. Wilbarger also claims the whole incident was a ruse by the Indians to gain access to the town in order to raid it, commit murders, and take prisoners. In the end, he also states, unlike the majority of writers, that several days later all of the white prisoners were brought in and an exchange ensued, which is both unsubstantiated and unlikely. Wilbarger's work is highly skewed because he shared the emotional sentiments of the survivors of the early years of Texas. Wilbarger came to Texas with his brother Josiah around 1830 and settled in Bastrop County, and by 1833 his brother was scalped by Indians. Because of his personal involvement and hatred of the natives, Wilbarger harshly condemns the Indians and makes no attempt to consider their points of view, culture, or history.³⁷

³⁷ Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations*, 22.

Firsthand published accounts of the early years in Texas were provided by Mary Maverick, Noah Smithwick, John Henry Brown, and John Holland Jenkins. Each of these works combined with the previously mentioned books provide a more complete picture of the events surrounding the Council House Fight as viewed by witnesses, contemporaries, and early historians. Smithwick and Brown were both actively involved in military campaigns of the 1800's. Smithwick was also closely acquainted with several prominent figures in Texas' early history and many Indians, including Comanche chiefs. Brown was not only a participant in Texas military campaigns, he also recorded many of these events for the *Texas Sentinel* and the *Advocate*. Brown also published other books such as *the History of Texas, 1685-1892*, and *the Life and Times of Henry Smith, the First American Governor of Texas*.³⁸ Jenkins, like Brown, was a professional writer. At the age of sixty, in 1884, he began to work for the *Bastrop Advertiser* and to publish accounts of his childhood in early Texas. For this thesis, the most important of these published memoirs is found in the writing of Maverick. She, as well as her husband, were residents of San Antonio in 1840 and witnessed some of the events of the Council House Fight. Maverick's memoirs provide the most detailed account of Matilda Lockhart's abuse at the hands of her Indian captors and provide details not found elsewhere. Her memories were not recorded until later in her life, and were eventually assembled, and published, by her family members in the early twentieth century, and therefore must be scrutinized as a source that became widely available long after the event.

³⁸ John Henry Brown, *The History of Texas, 1685-1892*, (St. Louis: L.E. Daniell, 1892-1893); John Henry Brown, *The Life and Times of Henry Smith, the First American Governor of Texas*, (Dallas: A.D. Aldridge and Company Printers, 1887).

Rip Ford's Texas is a compilation of John S. Ford's recollections, personal experiences, and other first-hand accounts. Ford lived from 1815 to 1897 and, after moving to Texas in 1836, was employed as a doctor, member of the Republic of Texas Congress and later the State Senate, Texas Ranger, Confederate officer, and journalist. He took part in numerous Indian fights from 1850-1859, was a member of the Secession Convention in 1861, and became a charter member of the Texas State Historical Association. As a journalist and editor of numerous publications, Ford wrote historical articles promoting an interest in Texas history. His personal narratives published in this book must also be scrutinized for historical accuracy, and viewed based upon a historical snapshot of early Texas historians.

The second category of sources concerning the Council House Fight that have been examined for this study include historical works from the early twentieth century. The authors included are James T. De Shields, Rupert Richardson, and Walter Prescott Webb, and while their works are as Eurocentric as the authors in the first category, they are less biased. These men are also different from the previous groups because they are more removed from the events of 1840. Professional historical analysis increases and personal biases decrease, and therefore a more accurate picture of the Council House Fight emerges.³⁹

DeShields' *Border Wars of Texas* is a result of his many experiences and collections. DeShields was born in 1861 and came to Texas after the Civil War and

³⁹James Thomas DeShields, *Border Wars of Texas*, (reprint, Waco: Texian Press, 1976); Rupert Richardson, *The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement*, (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1933); Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1935).

began collecting and selling manuscripts, books, and pictures. His work's primary sources are based predominantly upon first-hand accounts of acquaintances, and therefore should be viewed with a measured amount of suspicion. And as to be expected, parts of DeShields, book do not match, and details are not always consistent. His explanation of the Council House Fight does not contribute any significant new information to the overall history of the period. His book also provides little or no detail on the subsequent negotiations other than to claim that several Comanches almost immediately showed up under a white flag just outside of town to exchange several of their young white captives. This book should be approached for further review, with the understanding that his work's flaws can not be judged with a contemporary eye.

The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement, was written by professional historian Rupert Richardson, and contains well-researched yet out-of-date information. Richardson's book is a history of the Comanche Indians who lived in the plains region south of Arkansas River. He blames them for retarding the occupation and settlement of Texas starting in the early eighteenth century. His book contains a good example of an early study of the Council House Fight, post-survivors, and is often cited in more recent works on the topic. Richardson provides little detail leading up to March 19, 1840, and even less on what happened afterward. He briefly describes the fight and calls it a great blunder. While Richardson adds to the overall history of the Comanche people as they pertain to Texian settlement, his work only scratches the surface of this period's history. While Richardson sheds the bias of nineteenth century Texians, he reveals a persistent bias of his own.

While the events that took place in San Antonio in 1840 during the Council House Fight did not directly involve Texas Rangers, many of the men present were past and future Ranger enlistees and volunteers. Therefore it is prudent to consider these works in a study of the Council House Fight, and Indian-Texian relations at the time. One such important study regarding the Texas Rangers was written by Walter Prescott Webb. Webb, a doctoral graduate of and professor at The University of Texas in Austin, devoted his life to the teaching and study of the American West. He was the Director of the Texas State Historical Association in 1939, and began the work known today as the *Handbook of Texas*, an invaluable resource for any level Texas historian. His book, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense*, was an early definitive work on the Texas Rangers and grew out of extensive research combined with campfire stories retold to the scholar by Texas Rangers. For an early publication, his subject heading “The Council House Fight and the Slaughter of Comanche Chiefs,” reveals his attempt at academic neutrality. But throughout his narrative his description of the “savages” tells a deeper tale. His work provides an excellent overview, but is outdated and inadequately describes the roles and motivations of the natives in the region and how it influenced their relations with the Texian settlers. Webb also fails to mention any of the ensuing negotiations for the remaining hostages of both the Texans and the Comanche.⁴⁰ Webb brings more research and an attempt at academic rigor, but fails to overcome the biases of the Texas historians who taught him his craft.

⁴⁰ Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959); Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Frontier*, (Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2003); Webb, *The Texas Rangers*, 27.

The third category of sources examined in this study includes works published in the second half of the twentieth century. W.W. Newcomb's *The Indians of Texas*, Mildred Mayhall's *Indians Wars of Texas*, Schilz's *Buffalo Hump*, Brice's *The Great Comanche Raid*, Joseph M. Nance's *The Texas-Mexican Frontier*, Elizabeth John's *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds*, and David Weber's *The Mexican Frontier*, are all examples of works more specific in nature and less Eurocentric than the previous categories. These authors' historical analysis of the time period surrounding the Council House Fight incorporate more ethnocentric considerations, and they are therefore more thorough.⁴¹

Newcomb's *The Indians of Texas*, is one such ethnocentric study in which the Indians of Texas are the main characters of the book. Newcomb was a curator of anthropology for the Texas Memorial Museum from 1955 to 1957, and approaches his book about the Indians of Texas as a survey. He presents the ethnography of the Indian tribes that have resided within the limits of present day Texas since the beginning of the historical period, and at its time of publication provides a new outlook on the Council House Fight. Newcomb strays from previous publications and renames the event on March 19, 1840, the Battle at the San Antonio Courthouse, presenting a more balanced perspective of the event. Newcomb declares that a lack of communication, previous

⁴¹ Mildred Mayhall, *Indian Wars of Texas* (Waco: Texian Press, 1965); Jodye Lynn Dickson Schilz and Thomas F. Schilz, *Buffalo Hump and the Penateka Comanches* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1989); Donaly Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid: The Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1987); Joseph Milton Nance, *After San Jacinto: The Texas-Mexican Frontier, 1836-1841* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Elizabeth Ann Harper John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: the Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the South* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982.)

depredations on both sides, and the many other misunderstandings between the Texians and the Penateka Comanche were the causes of the Council House Fight. His book becomes one of the first works to examine more thoroughly the angle that neither group was more at fault than the other, and that the Texians' as well as the Indians' deceit is to blame. Newcomb also offers the possibility that Chief Mugara's claim that Matilda Lockhart was their only captive under his authority was plausible, and that if there were more Anglo captives, they might have been under the control of other unaffiliated Comanche groups. His book offers new thought provoking ideas, and begins to question what is known and accepted about the Council House Fight.⁴²

Another often cited source from this time period is Mayhall's *Indian Wars of Texas*. Mayhall, a writer, historian, and teacher, taught anthropology at the University of Texas and history at Stephen F. Austin University. This publication was written in response to years of frequently asked questions from students in her Texas history classes. Mayhall, unlike many other academics, claims that Texians first sought peace with the Comanche, and their entrance into San Antonio was a response to these appeals. But Mayhall, like other early authors, glorifies the fight of the Texians. While describing the event as a fiasco that resulted in no bettering of relations with the Comanche while causing the loss of thirteen white captives, Mayhall minimizes the losses suffered by the Indians. The captives referred to are the supposed Texians still in the possession of the Comanche when they received notice of their losses in San Antonio, and were assumed to

⁴² Newcomb, *The Indians of Texas*, 350-351.

be killed in retaliation. Mayhall clearly emphasizes the Texians loss, while diminishing the losses of the Penateka Comanche.

Joyde and Thomas F. Schilz collaborated on the 1980 work, *Buffalo Hump and the Penateka Comanches*. This book covers a much smaller time period than most, focusing on the life and times of Buffalo Hump. This in-depth narrative is specific to one band of the Comanche people, the Penatekas. Schilz describes all aspects of Comanche life, culture, traditions, and history during the nineteenth century. Buffalo Hump, who rose to power in 1849, is depicted as a strong uniting leader who helps his people weather the storm of American immigration into Texas. In the course of describing Comanche Indians as a people, Schilz also does an excellent job of placing them in the center of the upheaval of the mid-nineteenth century southern frontier life. And although this book is very specific to a particular time and place, it serves both the historian and casual reader well.

Brice, author of *The Great Comanche Raid*, comes the closest to a secondary publication fully explaining the events following the Council House Fight. This book is an excellent example of how a specific topic that has been written about before comes to be examined more thoroughly in the later half of the twentieth century. Where the book lacks, in terms of the events occurring on March 19, 1840, is in his description of the events in the days and years leading up to that day, but that is because it is beyond the focus of the book. Overall Brice, a Senior Research Assistant of the Texas State Archives, does an excellent job of examining Mexico's involvement in the attacks on Victoria and Linnville in 1840, and the effect of these conspiracy theories on the people

of the Republic of Texas. His argument is well made, and causes the reader to question preconceived notions that the Comanche's motivation for the raid was solely a retaliatory attack following the Council House Fight, and that Mexican forces may have played a larger role than first assumed.

Other important works in this category that do not directly include descriptions of the Council House Fight include Joseph Nance's *After San Jacinto: The Texas-Mexican Frontier, 1836-1841*. His work, like many others, adds little to the discussion of the events of March 19, 1840. Instead, Nance contributes fresh information to the lasting effects of the Council House Fight. He describes the difficulties and embarrassments of this event on the diplomatic front. Trying to procure a loan for the mounting debt of the Republic, General James Hamilton, Commissioner of the Republic in Europe, reports the effects of the killing of Comanche in San Antonio on his negotiation process, as well as other concerns. Discussed in no other published source found, Nance has shown an important long-reaching impact of the Council House Fight.

John's *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest 1540-1795*, is another example of a general study of Indians and their relationships with the Europeans they encountered in the southwest. Her synthesis of two and one-half centuries of Spanish and French contact with the Native American people within the Spanish provinces of New Mexico and Texas, and French Louisiana, recounts the events of almost every recorded exchange of significance. Her narrative describes how the Indians coped with revolutionary changes, and grappled with problems of defense, adjustment and survival. John clearly establishes the

chronology and identity of the principal participants over an extended period of time, and thus her work reads like an encyclopedic account. John relied upon various primary documents, including the voluminous compilations published by G.P. Hammond, Herbert E. Bolton, Charles W. Hackett, A.B. Thomas, and Pierre Margry, and the unpublished accounts in the Bexar Archives, the Spanish Archives in New Mexico, and the collections of the Archivo General y Publica de la Nacion at the University of Texas and the Bancroft Libraries. John's work was the most comprehensive account of this time and period at the time of publication, and today remains an excellent source for historians.

Weber's book, *The Mexican Frontier*, is a synthesis based largely upon the work of other scholars. His work fills the gap in publications concerning the Mexican-American borderland during the years 1821 to 1846. Weber, a Robert and Nancy Dedman Professor of History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, received his doctorate in Latin American History at the University of New Mexico. Teaching at Southern Methodist University since 1976, he also chaired the History Department from 1979-1986, and served as president of the Western History Association. Although this book does not include a discussion of the Council House Fight, it still plays an important role in setting the stage for the conflict between the Comanche and the settlers of the borderland region.

The fourth category of sources consulted for this study include works published in the 1990's. The books include Stanley Noyes' *Los Comanches*, Thomas Kavanagh's *The Comanches*, Frederick Wilkins' *The Legend Begins*, Donald Chipman's *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*, David Weber's *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, Jesus de la Teja's

San Antonio de Bexar, Gary Anderson's *Ethnogenesis and Reinvention*, and Gregg Cantrell's *Stephen F. Austin*. As the trend continues, the late twentieth century works become increasingly less Eurocentric and biased, more specific, and more thorough⁴³

Noyes' book, *Los Comanches*, is a sweeping history of the Comanche Indians who dominated the Southern Plains from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, or their "Golden Century". Noyes, a poet and teacher from Santa Fe, New Mexico, provides an excellent look inside the life and culture of the Comanche Indians during this time period. Noyes goes further than other studies when he acknowledges that both the Indians and Texians were equally to blame for the blunders made at the Council House Fight. He explains it was their "arrogant ignorance of the other" that contributed to the deterioration of events. Noyes, reveals his untraditional academic style when he describes the situation inside the council room that day. He writes, "the room became still. Flies buzzed. Through open windows came the quiet laughter of bystanders outside..." Noyes reduces his academic credibility further when he boldly claims that Matilda Lockhart was raped. While this information may be presumed, it is a bold claim that cannot be made without corroboration, or at least without explication.

⁴³ Stanley Noyes, *Los Comanches: The Horse People, 1751-1845*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Kavanagh, *The Comanches*; Frederick Wilkins, *The Legend Begins: The Texas Rangers, 1823-1845*, (Austin: State House Press, 1996); Donald Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992); Jesus Frank de la Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar: A Community on New Spain's Northern Frontier*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin*.

While his book helps to set the stage for the events surrounding the Council House Fight, his florid writing style hinders his full credibility.⁴⁴

On the other hand, Kavanagh's book provides an in-depth historical study of Comanche social and political groups, and unlike Noyes, Kavanagh's work more represents a more traditional academic study. Kavanagh, a curator of collections at the William Hammond Mathers Museum at Indiana University, uses a contemporary ethnohistorical method, and uses historical and anthropological archives in Spain, Mexico, and the United States to complete his work. Kavanagh provides little to no description of the event, and assigns little blame to the Comanches. He claims that there is little evidence to implicate the Comanches involved in the Council House Fight, and claims later raids made in and around San Antonio cannot be clearly identified as Comanche. This assertion, although a shift in bias, demonstrates a clear inability to remain neutral on the subject matter and creates more questions than answers. Kavanagh also departs from most other studies when he boldly claims that it was not Matilda Lockhart who was recovered that day by the Texians from the Comanche. He claims, because primary documentation points to Lockhart's accusations against the Penatekas as the cause of the Texians' greatest anger, that she must have been recovered at an earlier date. Apparently the Texians had time to gather much information, and then use it against the Indians on that day. While this assertion makes basic sense, such a note would have been made by the military men in charge, or at least by Mary Maverick, who is credited with taking care of Lockhart after her redemption the day of the Council

⁴⁴ Noyes, *Los Comanches*, 282 (first quote), 283 (second quote).

House. Kavanagh's book, despite its flaws, does provide a necessary framework to understand the Comanche of this time period. Both his and Noyes' works on the Comanche help to complete a more thorough account of the Council House Fight than has been published before.

Wilkins adds little new information to the discussion concerning the Council House Fight in his book, *The Legend Begins*. He spends more effort concentrating on the Republic, and therefore provides a better view of the era surrounding the Council House Fight than other Texas Ranger historians. Wilkins spent twenty-five years with the United States Army's public information program, and holds his degree in history from Southern Methodist University. His other works include *Defending the Borders: The Texas Rangers, 1848-1861*, and the *Highly Irregular Irregulars: The Texas Rangers in the Mexican War*.⁴⁵ While his work provides essential information concerning not only this time period and the Texas Rangers, his work is incomplete. Simply identifying the Indians as characters who fought against Texians is not enough! Wilkins acknowledges his focus on the settlers and their defense forces, but fully understanding the natives helps the reader better appreciate the people and the situation and what the Rangers were trying to protect the colonists from and why.

Other important works in this category that do not directly include a reference to the Council House Fight include Chipman's *Spanish Texas*. Chipman, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of North Texas in Denton, taught courses and wrote

⁴⁵ Frederick Wilkins, *Defending the Borders: The Texas Rangers, 1848-1861* (Austin: State House Press, 2001); Frederick Wilkins, *The Highly Irregular Irregulars: The Texas Rangers in the Mexican War* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001).

numerous books related to Spanish Texas and Spanish Borderlands. In 2003, King Juan Carlos I of Spain knighted him as a Caballero of the Royal Order of Isabella the Catholic, the highest honor that can be accorded to a non-Spaniard. His book spans over three hundred years of Spanish presence in Texas, and highlights the continued influence of their reign in present-day Texas. This valuable one-volume account of Spanish Texas allows readers to get a thorough overall history. This work also details Comanche history and relations with the early European presence, and it demonstrates the long-lasting difficulties of establishing diplomatic ties with the Indians. Overall, this book is an indispensable source for the time period, and helps set the stage for the Council House Fight in 1840.

Another source in which the Council House Fight is not directly mentioned is David J. Weber's *The Spanish Frontier in North America*. Weber like Chipman was also awarded membership in the Royal Order of Isabella the Catholic in 2002, and in 2005 Mexico named him to the Order of the Aztec Eagle. His book detailing the Spanish frontier does not only include Texas, but also New Mexico, Florida, and California, as well as all the other Spanish holdings in North America. As the definitive work in its subject, Weber details the impact of Spanish colonization on Native Americans and the effect of Native Americans on Spanish settlers. While the years of Spanish rule in Texas predate 1840, this book, like Chipman's, does much to set the stage for future diplomatic relations and difficulties. But unlike Chipman, whose focus remains upon Texas, Weber helps broaden the scope to all Spanish landholdings and place Texas in context with other parts of the American southwest.

Another excellent example of a typical 1990's, more specifically ethnocentric work is De la Teja's book, *San Antonio de Bexar: A Community on New Spain's Northern Frontier*. Though this work does not include the time period of the Council House Fight, it traces the development of San Antonio as an extension northward of Spanish frontier settlement, and its emergence as an important community. Not only does this study detail early Spanish hostility with the Lipan Apache, Comanche, and other Norteno groups, but De la Teja also describes San Antonio as an important staging point for New Spain's assault on the Indians. He declares that the sole reason for the province's existence was to act as a buffer against alien encroachment, either European or Indian. San Antonio was developed in isolation amidst hostile Indian country, and its first citizens were paid for their inconveniences. Indian raids into Bexar immediately angered its residents, beginning a long history of violence between the Bexareños and Texas Indians. Intermixed with these early battles were times of limited peace with the different native groups in the area. In 1759 a war council of the governors of Texas and Coahuila, as well as other government officials, met in San Antonio to discuss the Indian problem and stage an offensive against the Apache, and by the mid-1760's Bexar served as the northeastern linchpin of defense against the Plains Indians.⁴⁶

Following the 1763 French transfer of Louisiana to Spain at the end of the Seven Year's War, Spain called for a reevaluation of New Spain's northern frontier. The Marques de Rubi was appointed for this inspection, and he recommended the retention of San Antonio de Bexar and La Bahia as Spanish settlements in Texas. He also advised

⁴⁶ De la Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar*, 13 (first quote).

that San Antonio become the capital as well as the point of contact between the Spanish and the Plains Indians. His suggestions were put into effect, and almost eighty years later at the time of the Council House Fight, San Antonio remained a largely important highly populated area, charged with maintaining an open policy for peace negotiations with the Indians in the vicinity. De la Teja's book does an excellent job of setting the stage for future hostilities, and of laying the foundation for the reasons behind the deterioration of events on and before March 19, 1840.⁴⁷

Anderson's book, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention*, deals with the dramatic demographic and environmental changes that transformed the lives of the indigenous people of Texas as a result of the European arrival in the area. Anderson explains this process of ethnogenesis, a process of change necessary for their survival following European contact and the shifting of markets and economies. While this book does not directly include a discussion of the Council House Fight, Anderson helps the reader better understand the fluidity of early Texas culture among the Native Americans, and the ever changing dynamics of their relations with the Europeans they encountered.

Cantrell's work is the first major study covering the life of Stephen F. Austin since Eugene C. Barker published the *Austin Papers* and *The Life of Stephen F. Austin*.⁴⁸ Cantrell, previously of the University of North Texas, is the holder of the Erma and Ralph Lowe Chair in Texas History at Texas Christian University. His book is mostly

⁴⁷ De la Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar*, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Eugene C. Barker, *Austin Papers*, 2 vols. and Supplement, (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1919-1928), vol. 3, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1926); Eugene C. Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1925).

concentrated on Austin's life and leadership of the first American settlers in Texas, as well as his personal motivations and handicaps. While this book does not include an examination of the Council House Fight, his work provides a detailed description of this early Texas period, and the Colonists' first experiences in the territory. Understanding these early encounters with the environment and native population helps the reader to better appreciate the mindset of these colonists, and the men and women that would follow.

The fifth and final category of sources consulted for this study include works published in the twenty-first century. The contemporary historians included are Robert Utley, Richard Bruce Winders, Randolph B. Campbell, David La Vere, Gary Clayton Anderson, F. Todd Smith, and Stephen Moore. Each of these studies are even more detailed than previous publications, and begin filling the voids of previous more general works. Some of these studies also begin to examine interactions more thoroughly and to consider relationships between Texians and Native Americans from a less Eurocentric perspective. Overall, these authors' professional methods and innovative ideas have helped advance the field of early Texas history.⁴⁹

Robert M. Utley's work is a good example of a contemporary all-inclusive study, but it essentially covers the same material as Frederick Wilkins. Both of these studies concentrate almost exclusively on the Texian settlers and the Texas Rangers from their

⁴⁹ Robert M. Utley, *Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002); Richard Bruce Winders, *Crisis in the Southwest: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle over Texas* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002); Campbell, *Gone to Texas*; La Vere, *The Texas Indians*; Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*; F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Stephen L. Moore, *Savage Frontier, Volume III: Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, 1840-1841* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2007).

earliest years. Neither book sufficiently illustrates the Native Americans of the region, or adequately depicts the difficulties and motivations for the settler-Indian relationships and or battles. Utley has long been regarded as a leading scholar of the frontier army and Indian-white relations in the West, and has published other works such as *Lone Star Lawmen: The Second Century of the Texas Rangers*, and the *Indian Frontier, 1846-1890*.⁵⁰ His first book on the Texas Rangers discusses them as frontier defenders starting in the 1820's and as a professional law enforcement agency in the 1870's. Utley's rendition of the Council House Fight at first glance appears to describe the events of the day in an accurate and unbiased way. He goes as far as condemning the Texians' actions, but then his true intentions become clear. Utley says of the Comanche, "they caused their own demise by fighting instead of yielding themselves as hostages..." This statement clearly outlines Utley's intent to blame the Comanche for the fighting that broke out that day and exonerate the Texians. While Utley's work provides an excellent overall picture, it does not go into detail on a number of topics relevant to this study.⁵¹

Winders' *Crisis in the Southwest* places Texas in the context of the thirty-year struggle between the United States and Mexico over Texas. Winders holds his doctorate in United States History from Texas Christian University, and he has served as historian and curator of the Alamo in San Antonio since 1996. Winders places the struggle for Texas at the center of three inextricably related stories, the difficult relationship between the United States and Mexico during the first half of the nineteenth century; the territorial

⁵⁰ Robert Utley, *Lone Star Lawmen: The Second Century of the Texas Rangers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier, 1846-1890's* (Albuquerque: New Mexico, 1984).

⁵¹ Utley, *Lone Star Justice*, 27 (first quote).

expansion of the United States; and the argument over the expansion of slavery. Winders helps expand the story of the struggle for Texas independence past the thirteen days at the Alamo, but his work on and about the Council House Fight adds little to scholarly discussions and falls in line with other general works of his generation of scholars.

Campbell's work is as thorough a comprehensive evaluation of the history of Texas as one volume will allow. *Gone to Texas* is revered as the definitive work in its field, and makes Campbell an authority that can not be ignored. As past president of the Texas State Historical Association, and a Regents Professor of History at the University of North Texas, he speaks with an authoritative voice. Campbell has also published other Texas works such as *Sam Houston and the American Southwest* and *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865*.⁵² *Gone to Texas* begins from the first arrival of humans in the region up to the dawn of the twenty-first century in less than five hundred pages. His inclusion of the Council House Fight thus validates the event's importance to the general history of Texas. Campbell discusses some problems with the Comanche Indians before 1840, but due to the nature of the book he does not go into enough detail for a more through look into these early Indian difficulties as is needed for this particular study. The book is also difficult to use for research purposes, for it lacks any specific citations or footnotes one can review for validation or further examination. And while Campbell's work only briefly mentions the Council House Fight, the value of

⁵² Randolph Campbell, *Sam Houston and the American Southwest*, (New York: Longman, 2002); Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

this work lies in its ability to link the multitudes of different events in Texas history, and show their importance to one another.

W.W. Newcomb's work was updated in 2004 by David La Vere, an ethno-historian and professor at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, who specializes in American Indian and American Western History. La Vere presents a complete chronological and cultural history of the Texas Indians from twelve thousand years ago to the present. He does an excellent job, unlike many other published sources, explaining why understanding Comanche organization is important to discerning what went wrong in San Antonio that day. He also explains that previous treaties made with the Penateka Comanche by the Texians were made with specific groups, and that there were no unified Penateka people, therefore when the Texians blamed all Comanche for breaking past promises, they were simply ignorant of Comanche culture. And while La Vere provides a very good description of the event, it is both brief and not complete. He talks little of the events that followed and includes almost no discussion of the ensuing negotiations for the exchange of prisoners. And last but not least, the book overall is missing a lot of information concerning previous conflicts between the Comanche and the Texians, because the book concerns all the Indians in Texas and not just the Comanche. Both La Vere's and Newcomb's work help establish a framework for understanding the situation between the Texians and the Indians in Texas prior to the Council House Fight. Their work on the Indians, combined with the studies previously mentioned that concentrate on Texians or Texas Rangers, help provide a more complete picture of the complex events surrounding the Council House Fight.

One of the most recent accounts of the period surrounding the Council House Fight is Gary Clayton Anderson's 2005 *The Conquest of Texas: The Ethnic Cleansing of Texas, 1820-1875*. Anderson, a professor of history at the University of Oklahoma, specializes in ethnohistory and the history of the Native Americans of both the Great Plains and the American Southwest. He has published other works such as *Little Crow, Spokesman for the Sioux*, and *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention*.⁵³ Anderson leads the field in revising the way in which knowledge of this time period is viewed. While he does an excellent job citing sources not used elsewhere, he also takes the liberty of making assumptions disguised as fact. For example, he suggests that Secretary of War Albert S. Johnston's appointment of General Hugh McLeod and Colonel William G. Cooke as peace commissioners was a bad decision because they "disliked Indians and could not patiently participate in a debate with Indians," without any evidence of such a harsh accusation. Anderson also makes claims that once assembled in the council room, "the smoking took less time than usual- the Indians wanted to get down to business." He provides no proof of such an allegation, insinuating that the Indians were really intent on brokering peace, and nothing else. Anderson also claims that papers in the United States and in Europe were outraged at the Texians' actions in San Antonio, but manages to only cite one paper in the southern United States. Anderson is also overly critical of Texians, and in direct contrast to Utey, Webb, and Wilkins, he assigns little or no fault to the Indians. He criticizes Texian

⁵³ Gary Clayton Anderson, *Little Crow, Spokesman for the Sioux* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986); Anderson, *The Indian Southwest, 1580-1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

decisions to bring troops to San Antonio for peace talks, but he ignores past difficulties between the two groups and the breakdown in past negotiations. He talks little about the ensuing negotiations or even the precise events of that day. And last but not least, Anderson downplays the accusation of many concerning Matilda Lockhart's condition, claiming that there is no evidence of her abuse. He fails to describe past captives' abuse at the hands of the Comanche, instead claiming that even her sister-in-law said nothing of it to her mother in a letter just a few weeks later. Where this is very interesting and insightful information not found elsewhere, its deletion does not discount the probability of Matilda's suffering, and could simply be an attempt to avoid an unpleasant topic.⁵⁴

Anderson provides a new perspective on the Council House Fight, and this revisionist viewpoint causes him to rename the event the Council House Massacre, implying the Texians massacred the Indians who died there seeking only peace. While Anderson makes a good attempt to change past perceptions that the Indians were to blame, his complete reversal simply ignores the fact that the Texians were not the only ones at fault that day. Overall, Anderson's work is an excellent rewritten version of early Texas history, but like its predecessors it must be viewed in context with other works of the period.

Smith's *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859*, has been the most excellent source to provide a more complete story of the circumstances leading up to the Council House Fight, as it concerns the Comanche Indians. Smith, a professor in the Department of History at the University of

⁵⁴ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182 (first and second quotes).

North Texas, outlines the rise and fall of Indian dominance in the southwest, and attributes their decline to the advancing white settlement of the region. This time period before the Council House Fight and after the creation of the Republic is lacking in publications, and Smith helps bridge this gap in published Indian-Texian history. His accounts of the years before 1840 demonstrate why the Texians distrusted the Penateka Comanche, and why the Penateka were declining in power and how they needed peace with the Texians to survive. Overall this book provides a strong foundation for this thesis's argument concerning the period leading up to the events of March 19, 1840.

Moore's 2007 *Savage Frontier, Volume III: 1840-1841*, is an indispensable resource for studying this time period and topic as well. His focus on the evolution of the Texas Rangers and frontier warfare in Texas during 1840 and 1841 provides one of the most balanced and up to date works available today. Moore does an excellent job intermixing the story of the Council House Fight with the state of affairs in the Republic at the time, connecting the story to the rest of the Republic. He also combines the story with detailed information concerning weaponry, ammunition, military organization, background, and future endeavors to add depth and understanding to the story not found elsewhere. But upon further examination, Moore falls victim (like many of his predecessors) to providing non-factual or unproven questionable information without presenting it as so. Primary documentation is scarce because of the timing of this event, and not all information can be identified without question. He also heavily depends on more current Texas Ranger published secondary sources, and does not include any books from a different point of view, such as Indian-based or ethnocentric studies. But overall,

Moore's work is still the best account of the Council House Fight available in secondary sources. He not only does a good job setting up past difficulties between the Comanches and the Texians in this volume and his previous two, and he goes further than most authors by detailing the subsequent prisoner exchange following the events of March 19, 1840. Where Moore fails is in his description of the Comanche people and culture, and how that played a very specific role in the Council House Fight and its outcome. For further information leading up to 1840-1841, Moore has published two previous volumes of *Savage Frontier*, Volume I on 1835-1837, and Volume II on 1838-1839.

While the earliest accounts of the Council House Fight provided little more than personal anecdotes and biased analysis, other studies from later in the twentieth century contributed more specific details. And as the twentieth century proceeds, more specific and academically based studies have increased and added to previous research to update their validity and relevance to a more educated readership. But, while studies of early Texas history are dominated by works that take account of the Council House Fight, no product has included a comprehensive view of the incident. Studies of early Texas history, Texas Ranger history, Indian and Comanche history, as well as first hand accounts of settlers, have all contributed to this thesis. Though the Council House Fight has been told and retold for almost two centuries, this study places the event within the context of early Texas history as well as Indian-Texian relations. Thoroughly examining the Comanche and their previous dealings with the Texians has allowed a new view of the Council House Fight to emerge, as well as a way to evaluate these early Texians and the Comanche in Texas.

COMANCHE RELATIONS

The Americans that came to Texas encountered many hardships on the frontier. The central threat and barrier to their settlement were the native people of the region, especially the Comanche. The Comanche Indians dominated the southern plains and still today are the most well recognized of the Indian tribes of Texas.

The Comanche, or *Nermernuh*, were a hunter-gatherer society originally of the Northern Shoshone people from the mountains of Wyoming.⁵⁵ In the late seventeenth century, their lives were revolutionized when they acquired horses from the Spanish. They eventually migrated south, and were the last indigenous group to arrive in Texas, sometime around 1700. The first actual documented evidence of the Comanche's arrival in Texas is dated 1743, when they appeared in the Spanish settlement of San Antonio in search of their enemies, the Lipan Apaches.⁵⁶ Unlike other groups, the Comanche did not descend upon the plains in one unified body; they traveled in many different family groups at different times. Despite their lack of unity, the Comanche's entrance into the region drove out other natives such as some Jumano, Pueblo, and Apache people.

The Comanche remained a nomadic people, whose range extended from the Red River area all the way into northern Mexico. Once established in Texas, they hunted buffalo, which provided them food, clothing, and shelter. The Comanche, a powerful

⁵⁵ Stanley Noyes, *Los Comanches: The Horse People, 1751-1845* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), xix. *Nermernuh*, or "the People" is what the Comanche people actually called themselves.

⁵⁶ "Comanche Indians" in Ron Tyler et al., eds., *The New Handbook of Texas*, 6 vols. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 2:242-245.

society, soon dominated the southern plains and much of its commerce. As a result, Americans and Comanches developed a trade network long before Anglo colonization, but as these same American settlers began to permanently encroach upon their hunting grounds, their relationships deteriorated.⁵⁷

The Comanches were made up of different independent divisions, bands, and families.⁵⁸ At one time, there were over a dozen different Comanche bands, varying in size, the territory they occupied, and in some cultural respects.⁵⁹ In Comanche culture it is taboo to say the name of a deceased relative, therefore group names evolved in a way that made it nearly impossible to list or trace the many different bands of Comanche history.⁶⁰ According to the Comanche Nation of today, there may have been as many as thirty-five groups at one time, but in the nineteenth century there were five clearly identified Comanche bands.⁶¹ These include the *Penatuka*, or “Honey Eaters Band,” also referred to as the “Quick Striking Band”; the *Yapaituka*, or “Root Eaters Band”; the *Noyuka*, or “Wanderers Band”; the *Kwaharu*, or “Antelope Eaters Band”; and the *Kuutsutuka*, the “Buffalo Eaters Band.”⁶²

Because of the unique nature of Comanche organization, attempts to create peace treaties often failed. Democratic principles were deeply embedded in Comanche political organization. Each tribal division or band had two chiefs, a civil or peace chief, and a

⁵⁷ Tyler, “Comanche Indians”, *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:242-245.

⁵⁸ David La Vere, *The Texas Indians* (College Station: University of Texas A&M Press, 2004), 134.

⁵⁹ W. W. Newcomb, Jr., *The Indians of Texas: From Prehistoric to Modern Times* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1961), 352.

⁶⁰ Thomas Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History, 1706-1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 10-12.

⁶¹ Barbara Goodin, *The Comanche Nation*, “History”, (Lawton, Oklahoma: The Comanche Nation), <<<http://www.comacnhenation.com/>>>, (accessed October 20, 2007).

⁶² Ibid.

war chief. The position of civil chief was largely advisory, for he lacked the power to compel obedience. These positions were not hierarchical, and band members chose who would lead by community consent. Chiefs retained their authority as long as they were able to maintain the confidence of their band members, and leadership positions often passed within the same powerful families. The individual Comanche remained free to do as he wished, which contributed to the weakness of civil or peace chiefs as war leaders evolved into civil headmen as Indian–white violence grew. The societal structure was not rigid; bands coalesced and broke apart depending on the needs and goals of the members. Their rather loose social organization allowed individuals to cross not only between bands, but divisions as well. When one band of the Comanche signed a peace treaty, it in no way bound other bands to its promises. Further complicating peace negotiations was the fact that leaders elected to represent the Comanche divisions to American authorities were considered intermediaries with limited influence. The power granted them by their people gave these “chiefs” no influence or authority beyond a specific diplomatic context. But while some were only “spokesmen”, many were also political leaders of local and larger social and political groups. American, Spanish, and Mexican officials had difficulty understanding the different cultural practices, and often misunderstood Comanche organization, making attempts to work together difficult if not impossible.⁶³

Working with the Comanche remained complicated but not impossible for some groups. Spanish Indian policy initially encouraged peace and stability in their territories,

⁶³ Joyde Lynn Dickson Schilz and Thomas F. Schilz, *Buffalo Hump and the Penateka Comanches* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980), 2-3; Kavanagh, *The Comanches* , 15, 121-126.

and punished raids and killings as well. But as frontier violence continued, the Spanish “encouraged warfare between Indian nations as a means of breaking their power.” The ensuing cycle of violence and times of relative peace directly influenced the development and growth of the Spanish settlement at San Antonio de Bexar, beginning in 1716. Developed as a paramilitary settlement, San Antonio de Bexar’s citizens were situated in the center of hostile Indian territory and were compensated for their willingness to occupy such dangerous territory for the Spanish crown. San Antonio was developed in isolation far north of other Spanish colonies, and was meant to serve as a buffer from European and Indian encroachment.⁶⁴

As the French threat in East Texas grew in 1719, Bexar was reinforced until eventually five missions inhabited by Coahuiltecan Indians thrived in the vicinity, protected by the local presidio from their enemies the Apache, Comanche, and other Norteno groups.⁶⁵ The first hostilities the citizens of San Antonio encountered were the Lipan Apache in the 1720’s. The Apache usually raided for horses, and because their enemies the Comanche were encroaching upon their territory, the Apaches wanted access to the European goods they had been accustomed to and were now cut off from in New Mexico.⁶⁶

The Spanish had a difficult time dealing with these natives, because unlike the Spanish social structure, the Apache and Comanche as well as other nomadic Indians

⁶⁴ La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 142; James M. Daniel, “The Spanish Frontier in West Texas and Northern Mexico”, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 71 (April, 1968), 481-95 (quote); Jesus Frank de la Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar: A Community on New Spain’s Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 7, 15.

⁶⁵ La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 10. The term Norteno collectively classifies Plains Indians such as the Hasainai, Tonkawa, and Comanche.

⁶⁶ De la Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar*, 8-10.

were not one united people, but a group of independent bands or people. And as the Spanish concluded peace treaties with one group, another continued to raid their settlements. Rural property, livestock, and lone ranch hands were always at risk, and outlying ranches were largely abandoned. Agriculture based on crops and livestock faced problems expanding beyond the immediate vicinity of San Antonio due to these constant threats that also forestalled the development of formal, well-organized estates, or haciendas.⁶⁷ As a result, Spanish officials renewed their efforts to make peace with the Indians, and eventually the Apache received a mission and a presidio to help protect them from Comanche and Nortenos.⁶⁸ For decades Tonkawas, Yojuanes, Bidais, Karankawas, Yrripiames, and others had sought Spanish protection, and the new alliance between the Spanish and the Apache angered these groups. To these natives, the Spanish became their new enemy, and war was declared against them.⁶⁹

In 1757, the Spanish completed the mission of Santa Cruz de San Saba for the Lipan Apache. Angered at their new alliance, the Comanche attacked the mission on March 16, 1757. They stole horses and goods, killed cattle and oxen and eight people, and set fire to buildings they had already looted. Those who were not decapitated, scalped, or otherwise brutalized made their way to the presidio, where they safely waited out the assault. The mission of Santa Cruz de San Saba was the only Texas mission

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4, 117.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest 1540-1795* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 266, 347-48; Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1992), 158-160.

⁶⁹ La Vere, *Texas Indians*, 143.

destroyed by Indian attack, and was never rebuilt.⁷⁰ When conditions worsened as violence increased, the Spanish changed their policy. For the remainder of the eighteenth century the Spanish would make friends with the Apache's enemies, and wage war on the Apache, as well as conclude treaties with other groups like the Comanche, and encourage them to fight the Apache as well.⁷¹

Spanish Indian policy was thus always changing for their different needs, and was never simple. In the summer of 1785, the Spanish sent emissaries out among the Comanches, inviting them to a peace conference at San Antonio de Bexar. Three chieftains accepted, and a treaty was signed with the Eastern Comanche in October 1785. Many promises were made to one another, as this end to hostilities was to extend to all Spanish settlements beyond Texas borders. The Comanche pledged to ransom or return all Spanish captives, not allow foreigners into their villages, and continue their war on the Apache Indians. Both the Comanche and Spaniards assured each other that friends and enemies of both parties would remain their friends and enemies. And last but not least, the Spanish promised to present the Comanche with annual gifts. Because this peace was mutually beneficial, it lasted for the next thirty years. The Comanche loved their annual gifts that demonstrated their authority, and eventually the Indians were given muskets,

⁷⁰ Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1992), 161; Ynforme del Capitan Rabago y Teran, 25 February to 21 April, 1767, Archivo General de la Nacion, Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin: information can be found in William E. Dunn, "The Apache Mission on the San Saba: Its Founding and Failure," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 17 (April 1914), 409-11.

⁷¹ Catherine Price, "The Comanche Threat to Texas and New Mexico in the Eighteenth century and the Development of Spanish Indian Policy," *Journal of the West*, 24 (April, 1989): 38. The Spanish concluded a treaty with the Nortenos, and encouraged the Comanche and Wichita Indians to wage war on the Apache.

powder, and shot.⁷² As a result, the Spanish overlooked the occasional raids made by the Comanche in Texas, and even bought captives from México that the Comanche brought to San Antonio de Bexar to ransom.⁷³ The Spanish controlled Texas settlement of San Antonio de Bexar experienced many difficulties, but firmly established itself as a place for future engagements, both violent and diplomatic with the Indians of Texas.⁷⁴ The Comanche remained at peace with the Spanish for the remainder of their rule in Texas, but it hinged on the fact that the Spanish provided them with gifts, profitable trade, and waged war on their shared enemies, the Apache.⁷⁵

Eventually a treaty was signed with the Western Comanche in 1786, but confusion still existed, and Spanish officials appealed to the Indians to appoint one leader to represent their entire tribe for future affairs. Ecueraacapa stepped up to the challenge, but his limited time of united leadership ended with his death in 1793. The Spanish presence in Texas was minimal and most of their relationship with the Comanche was based upon trade that was mutually beneficial. The Comanche would help keep the Americans out, as enemies of Spain, and in return they would receive highly desired luxury items like metal goods, and more importantly, the horse. The Spanish looked at the natives as a buffer between their settlements and the United States, and overall welcomed their residence within the territory.⁷⁶

⁷² Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 198-199.

⁷³ Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 3.

⁷⁴ De la Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar*, 13-14.

⁷⁵ Dunn, "The Apache Mission on the San Saba," 379-414; "Santa Cruz de San Saba Mission", Tyler, *The New Handbook of Texas*, 5:884-885.

⁷⁶ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 148-149.

As trade increased between the Spanish and the Comanche, so too did the Comanche's desire to obtain more goods, especially guns. Eventually some guns were traded between the Spanish and the Comanche, but when they could not get what they wanted from the Spaniards, the Comanche turned to illegal American traders.⁷⁷ For example, Cordero, a prominent Penateka Comanche leader, was on good terms with American traders and Indian agents in Natchitoches, Louisiana, who had given him a military uniform, a sword, and a letter attesting to his friendship with the United States. Such items were regarded as visible signs of the chief's power and increased Cordero's prestige among his people.⁷⁸ Americans provided guns, metal implements, beads, cloth, vermillion, and even arrowheads in exchange for buffalo robes and furs, as well as stolen mules and horses from Spanish-controlled Mexico. Many of these illegal American traders on the South Canadian and Red Rivers also encouraged raids on Spanish outposts. This alliance complicated Spanish-American relations, which were already hostile, and - relations between the Spanish and Comanche, who had been bound by treaty to keep one another's friends and enemies.⁷⁹

As a result of Comanche trade with the Americans, the Spanish bought their own American goods and employed Samuel Davenport to run a trading post at Nacogdoches to counteract the influence of illegal American traders in the region.⁸⁰ The Spanish new policy had some success, as Cordero, as well as other Comanche, became dependent on

⁷⁷ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 198-199

⁷⁸ La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 55.

⁷⁹ The information from the majority of this paragraph comes from Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 4-5, unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁰ Samuel Davenport was given a monopoly on trade with all Indians from the Spanish, and worked for the firm of the House of Barr and Davenport beginning in 1798. J. Villasana Haggard, "The House of Barr and Davenport," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 45 (July 1945), 66-88.

trade with Davenport.⁸¹ But a shift away from trade with the Spanish accelerated after 1812 when an American filibustering expedition to overthrow Spanish authority, led by Augustus W. Magee and Jose Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara, captured Nacogdoches, Goliad, and San Antonio. Eventually they were defeated on the Medina River in 1813, but this embarrassment to the Spanish only served to demonstrate their weakness, and confirm that American interest in Texas was growing.⁸²

Throughout Comanche history in Spanish Texas, San Antonio de Bexar remained a hot bed for activity. On June 22, 1818, the Penateka Comanche launched a series of forays against the city. The Spanish were able to drive them off, but only after they had lost dozens of horses and several children were captured. These violent incursions were becoming common place to Spanish settlers on the frontier, and had a great effect on the Spaniards' morale.⁸³

The last eight years of Spanish rule in colonial Mexico were rife with turmoil that kept royal officials from sending the Penateka Comanche their gifts. These problems also kept Spain from sending troops to the region to control the frontier, and as a result, Spanish hide hunters and refugee tribes from central Texas and the United States entered Comanche territory. Among the refugee tribes were the Creeks, Cherokee, and Choctaw, who all contributed to the decimation of the buffalo herds and therefore threatened mass starvation of the Comanche Indians. Coupled with a small pox epidemic in 1816 that

⁸¹ Samuel Davenport to Jose Maria Guadiana, 23 September 1809, Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

⁸² The Gutierrez-Magee Expedition was supplied with arms and ammunition by Samuel Davenport, who also joined the mission. Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 4-5; Harry McCorry Henderson, "The Magee-Gutierrez Expedition," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 55 (July 1951), 43-61.

⁸³ Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 6.

killed an estimated four thousand Comanche, the decrease in buffalo had a detrimental effect on their people.⁸⁴ As a result, leading Comanche chiefs, such as Gonique and Barbaquista, favored raids against the Spaniards.⁸⁵

After a series of revolts that grew out of the increasing political turmoil both in Spain and Mexico, a treaty was signed granting Mexico independence on August 24, 1821.⁸⁶ Mexico wanted to strengthen their defenses against illegal American filibustering expeditions and Indian raids. As a result, Stephen F. Austin and his father were granted permission to settle three-hundred American families in Texas, to act as a buffer from illegal American incursions and settlement into the area. But an unforeseen result of this colony was the American's refusal to recognize Indian claims to land, resulting in increasing tensions and violence with the Indians of the region. Indian concepts of communally owned hunting territories contradicted American ideas of individual land ownership, and the appeal of free and open land, and the potential opportunity to accumulate wealth, was too strong for the newcomers. Although initial contact with Austin's colonists was peaceful, relationships soon deteriorated and the Comanche began to distinguish their American trading allies from the Anglos that had settled in Texas. Conflicts arose, raids increased, and unable to get any help from Mexico, Austin enlisted

⁸⁴ John C. Ewers, "The Influence of Epidemics on the Indian Populations and Cultures of Texas," *Plains Anthropologist* 18 (1973), 108.

⁸⁵ The information in the majority of this paragraph can be found in Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 5, unless otherwise noted.

⁸⁶ A financial crisis emerged in Mexico and Spain, aggravated by an economic downturn that caused disruptions in overseas trade, and coupled with a bad harvest, Mexicans grew increasingly tired of their colonial leaders. The final push for independence resulted from Mexico's reaction to revolutionary movements in Spain that undermined Spanish authority. Tyler, "Mexican Texas" *The New Handbook of Texas*, 4:689-695.

Comanche enemies, such as the Cherokee, Tonkawas, and Lipan Apaches, to attack the Comanche, and sell him their stolen horses.⁸⁷

As violence grew, Mexicans as well as some Comanche groups looked towards amity, and on January 10, 1823, many Penatekas, including Barbaquista, Gonique, and Spirit Talker, visited Mexico City. A treaty was agreed upon and signed, and Mexico and the Penatekas enjoyed peace for a few years. The Comanches pledged to restrain their young men from future forays into Mexico, and in return, Mexico promised to establish trading posts along the Texas frontier.⁸⁸

The citizens of San Antonio de Bexar experienced another devastating raid by the Comanche in July of 1825. Two hundred and twenty six Comanche men, some traveling with their wives and children, rode into the town where they stayed almost a week. For six days, these Comanches attacked and looted stores and homes, carrying off whatever they wanted. This long episode of terror for the people of San Antonio was not soon forgotten, and continued to add to their hatred and fear of the Comanche people.⁸⁹ Once again, the Mexicans had to fight the Comanche. In 1827, following a defeat at the hands of a joint force of Mexican soldiers and Lipan Apache, the Penateka Comanche signed a second peace treaty with Mexico.⁹⁰ Consequently, Chief Paruakevitsi visited various Penateka Comanche groups to solicit a united front, and he formalized negotiations in San Antonio that October. Overall, at least for the short term, the treaty was successful,

⁸⁷ Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 7-11; other information can be found in Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁸⁸ Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 9-10.

⁸⁹ David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1982).

⁹⁰ Antonio Elosua to Bustamante, July 23, 1827, Bexar Archives, Center for American History University of Texas at Austin.

and the Comanche even assisted the Mexicans in a war against the Wichita Indians. In an accident outside San Antonio that threatened an end to their peace, Paruakevitsi was killed by Mexican forces, but many of the Penateka tried to maintain peace with Mexico. As a sign of good faith, the Comanche returned many stolen horses to Mexican officials in San Antonio. While the successes of these meetings kept most of the Comanche from raiding Mexicans, or causing more problems in their territory, not all young warriors were concerned with the implications of breaking their peoples' promises, and some smaller raids continued.⁹¹

Angered at the lack of promised trade, and possibility of personal recognition, young warrior chiefs continued to conduct raids into the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Nuevo Leon, attacking coaches, kidnapping women, and stealing their horses and mules. As hostility increased, Mexican officials such as Manuel de Mier y Teran ordered Elosua, the ayudante inspector of Coahuila and Texas at San Antonio, to proceed against the Comanche who did not immediately present themselves as friends of Mexico in the San Antonio region.⁹² Elosua dispatched Captain Manuel Lafuente with one hundred thirty-two soldiers and sixty-six militiamen to seek hostile Indian groups, such as the Tawakona, Waco, and Comanche. On November 13, 1831, they attacked a Tawakoni village on Cowhouse Creek, where Comanche Chief Barbaquista and his son were killed.⁹³

⁹¹ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 137, 143.

⁹² Manuel de Mier y Teran to Antonio Elosua, 23 August 1831, Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

⁹³ Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 10-13.

Mexican efforts to rid their land of Comanche ultimately proved unsuccessful. But despite the fact that several Comanche groups were still at war with Mexico, many groups continued to solicit peace with the Mexicans until early 1832. Incorey and other Comanche leaders brought goods like furs, bear grease, and pemmican to San Antonio for trade that year while unbeknownst to them, Mexican officials were preparing for more campaigns against the Comanche.⁹⁴ Hostilities had increased between the Comanche and Mexicans, as well as with other Indian groups in Texas. In 1832, the Apache, Kichais, Tawakonis, and Tonkawas came together to fight Mexican forces. Coupled with the fact that there was a growing unrest among the Anglo population within Texas, Mexico faced a multi-front war. And at the same time, Mexico was concerned with preventing an Anglo-American uprising.⁹⁵

Angered that violence still raged in Texas, Mexican officials decided to retaliate against the Penateka Comanche for breaking their promises made in the peace treaty signed a few years before. The Mexicans appealed to the Shawnee Indians for assistance, and a campaign against the Comanche began in early 1832. Camped outside of San Antonio, the Shawnee waited patiently for Comanche Chief Isayona to lead his people out of the city after a visit to trade their goods with the local people. Ambushed, Chief Isayona was killed, and the Penatekas were defeated. Following the assault, Shawnee forces entered San Antonio, requesting additional troops from the Mexicans for another attack against the Comanche. The newly combined force gave chase to the fleeing

⁹⁴ Manuel Bauagan to Antonio Elosua, 27 February 1832, Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

⁹⁵ The information in the majority of this paragraph can be found in, Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 13, unless otherwise noted.

Comanche, and after a few days a battle between these groups ensued and resulted in the death of thirty Comanche. The Mexican's Indian policy had shifted, and their new objective was to completely drive the Comanche out of Texas altogether.⁹⁶

Over the next year, the Mexicans were unable to stop the constant attacks and counter-attacks of the Comanche. But while some Comanche continued to raid the Mexicans, others still sought peace. In February of 1834, a group of four hundred Comanche traveled to San Antonio in hopes of opening a new negotiation that would lead these two groups to peace. As a sign of good faith, the Comanche returned one hundred-fifty stolen horses and mules taken by young tribesmen. Impressed with this overture, and facing a rebellion from their American colonists, the new commanding general of the Eastern Interior Provinces, Martin Perfecto de Cos, decided to pursue peace. In August of 1835, Cos met with a group of three hundred Comanche in Matamoros and agreed to end hostilities between the two groups.⁹⁷

Relations between the Comanches and Mexico remained strained. Comanches continued to make raids and stole Mexican and Tejano horses and mules, which they traded with Americans in Louisiana. Acting as the middlemen, the Comanche would buy guns and ammunition and trade and arm more westerly tribes, potentially creating more trouble for Mexico. Mexican officials believed these illegal American traders who had set up posts on the Red River were continuing to incite Indians to attack Mexican settlements. For example, there was proof that Holland Coffee met with some Comanche

⁹⁶ Jose Guadalupe Ruiz to Elosua, February 4, 1832, Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin., 147; Elosua to Teran, February 18, 1832, Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, 148.

⁹⁷ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 144.

in 1835 and asked them to go into the interior and kill Mexicans and steal their horses and mules for a more lucrative Indian-American trade arrangement.⁹⁸ Whatever the case, Comanche-Mexican alliances and relations was continuing to decline despite some apparent successes.⁹⁹

By 1835, the entire frontier was in flames and both the threat of an Anglo-American revolt, as well as an Indian uprising, seemed definite.¹⁰⁰ Mexican officials worried the Indians would ally themselves with the Texians, and made attempts to stop such an alliance. Until the first significant fighting on October 2, 1835, when Texian revolutionists skirmished with Mexican troops at Gonzales, both the Texians and Mexicans worried that the other had enlisted the Indians of Texas for help. Such a partnership could have proved crucial for victory. Early in 1836, as war raged in Texas, the provisional government appointed Edward Burtleson to lead a commission to arrange a peace treaty with the Comanche of Texas. But because of his limited authority, and inability to promise a reservation or a permanent frontier home, his efforts were unsuccessful. Despite initial failures, Texian officials continued to try and enlist Comanche assistance. Southern Comanche groups simply ignored these efforts, while northern bands stuck to their homesteads for the time being. In 1837 the Texian government continued to solicit the Comanche, and Cherokee Chief Bowl was sent to visit the various Comanche bands. Because Texian politicians regarded Comanche

⁹⁸ Holland Coffee was accused of inciting Indian depredations through trade relationships, by giving the Indians guns and whiskey in exchange for stolen cattle and horses. Glenna P. Middlebrooks, "Holland Coffee of Red River," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 69 (October 1965), 145-162.

⁹⁹ The information in the majority of this paragraph can be found in Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 95-97, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰⁰ Domingo de Ugartechea to Martin de Cos, 2 June 1835, Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

hunting lands as public domain, and refused to make any concessions the Comanche sought, Chief Bowl's efforts were also unsuccessful. The Comanche played no role in the Anglo-American effort for independence, or in Mexico's struggle to control their rebellious province.¹⁰¹

In the years following the Texas Revolution, Comanche raided farther and farther south from Laredo into Matamoros, and hindered Mexico's attempts to regain control of the territory. But their raids throughout Texas complicated Texian efforts as well to maintain control of their new land and further settle its frontier. Mexico sought new alliances to achieve their goals, and many of their plans involved alliances with the different Indian tribes in Texas, including the Cherokee, who were eventually driven from Texas soil in 1839. The threat of a second Indian war, fought on two fronts, was troublesome, and rumors of Mexican-Indian alliances continued to plague the Republic of Texas.¹⁰²

The Indians used their power to their advantage, and continued to play the Texians and Mexicans off of each other as fears of a second war grew.¹⁰³ Western newspapers reported that the Comanche had declared war on the Texians and would "second the operations of General Santa Anna." Stephen F. Austin himself had written to President Andrew Jackson charging that "Santa Anna is exciting the Comanches and other Indians who know nothing of law or political division of territory and massacres have been committed in Red River within the United States."¹⁰⁴ Mary Maverick in her

¹⁰¹ Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 14-15.

¹⁰² Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 86-89.

¹⁰³ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 156.

¹⁰⁴ Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 249.

memoirs noted that “during July 1838, many rumors from the west came to effect that an army of Centralists was marching to capture Bexar, also that the Comanche nation had entered into a treaty of alliance with the Mexicans and would act with them for our extermination.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, Chief Bowl and a group of militant Cherokees met with General Jose Urrea, the commander of Mexican troops in Matamoros. Bowl claimed that all of the other East Texas tribes, except the Shawnees, Delawares, and the Kickapoos, were ready to fight alongside the Mexicans. As a result, Houston issued a proclamation calling for several East Texas communities to form militias to defend against an Indian uprising.¹⁰⁶ On August 20, 1838, citizens near the Red River killed Don Pedro Julian Miracle, and a diary running from May 1829 to August 11, 1838 was found on his body. In these papers were more incriminating evidence of an attempted conspiracy among the Indians against the Texians. Later on May 18, 1839, Lieutenant James O. Rice and seventeen men of Captain M. Andrew’s company of Texas Rangers attacked a party of twenty to thirty Indians and Mexicans on the San Gabriel Fork of Little River, twenty five miles from Austin. Three men were killed by the Texians, one of which was Manuel Flores, a Mexican. On Flores’ body, more papers were found that alluded to a plot to get the Indians to start a general war against the Texians. The plan called for the Mexicans to simultaneously attack the Republic at the start of a general Indian uprising. At this time, it was well known that the Cherokees had visited Mexico and talked with them more than once between 1836 and 1838. The Mexicans had lured the Indians with the guarantee of future possession of their hunting grounds in Texas, something the natives highly desired.

¹⁰⁵ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 159-160.

The Texians were facing multiple enemies to the west and south, and the possibility of their collaboration would have made it difficult for the settlers to fight a two front war.¹⁰⁷

As the dominant Native American force in the southern plains, the Comanche posed the most serious threat to settlers.¹⁰⁸ As “Lords of the Plains”, their excellent horsemanship allowed them to master the art of hit-and-run tactics.¹⁰⁹ They would usually travel by night and attack isolated homesteads and ranches on the outskirts of towns, sometimes carrying off livestock and captives. As a result, companies of Rangers were formed to patrol the routes the Comanche were known to take. Many of these encounters are remembered in early Texas sagas, like the attack on Fort Parker where several American settlers were killed and five taken captive, including the famous nine year old Cynthia Parker.¹¹⁰ Texian leaders such as Houston worked diligently to establish a peace between the Republic and the native populations, much to no avail. Houston’s peace efforts with the Comanche were hampered because the Texas Congress refused to agree to a boundary line, defining their space, and the edge of Texas settlement. Hostility continued, and right up to the Council House Fight in 1840 no peace was known.

The practice of captive taking among the North American Indians goes back to prehistoric times, and continued to incite great fear amongst the American settlers of

¹⁰⁷ Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 48-49.

¹⁰⁸ Donaly Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid: The Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 1987), 21.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Bruce Winders, *Crisis in the Southwest: The United States, Mexico, and Struggle over Texas* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2002), 44.

¹¹⁰ Tyler, “Comanche Indians”, *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:242-245. Cynthia Ann Parker spent the next thirty plus years in captivity, married the famed Chief Nocona, and mothered the last great Comanche leader Quanah Parker.

Texas. The first instance in Texas also correlates with the first Europeans who appeared in the territory in 1528 when Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and three other survivors of the expedition of Panfilo de Narvaez were taken hostage. Throughout the years, captives became another important item to be taken away during the numerous raids that were committed against the Spanish, Mexican, other Indians, and Americans by the native peoples.¹¹¹ And they became a major issue for the growing Anglo population in the late 1830s, which led directly to Council House Fight.

The men, women, and children that were captured by the Indians were taken for different reasons. Some were abducted to replenish the losses suffered during warfare. Others were taken to be tortured in the spirit of revenge against anyone the Indians viewed as an enemy. Captives were also taken to ransom or gain bargaining power with another group.¹¹² Once held, many captives, if not killed, were rescued or ransomed by Texas Rangers, soldiers, Indian agents, or traders.¹¹³ But the high prices or goods that were paid to ransom some of these captives only served to increase the “incentive for [future] abductions” of Euroamericans by the Indians.¹¹⁴ Texans were very fearful of being taken hostage by Indians, and this served as the motivation for many retaliatory raids and attacks on the native peoples of Texas. In a letter to President Mirabeau B. Lamar in June 1840 A. M. M. Upshaw demonstrated the way in which some American captives were treated among the Comanche a few months earlier. He wrote, “One of the

¹¹¹ La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 182.

¹¹² Tyler, “Indian Captives”, *The New Handbook of Texas*, 3:826-827. The article claims that the third reason, to gain bargaining power was an ever growing occurrence in Texas. Captivity usually led to their early deaths before or just after redemption.

¹¹³ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182.

¹¹⁴ La Vere, *The Texas Indians*, 183.

principal men of the Chickawas went last winter on a trading expedition to the Comanche, where he saw several white prisoners...he says that the prisoners are women and boys all of which are in a reached [wretched?] condition.”¹¹⁵

The vicious cycle of retaliatory attacks between the Texian colonists and the Comanche created a very unstable frontier. As years passed and the Republic of Texas was established, many native groups sought peace as often as war. In the years leading up to the Council House Fight, many of these episodes became essential to understanding the atmosphere that existed among the colonists and Indians in Texas. In early 1836, several western newspapers reported that the “Comanches have declared war against Texas.”¹¹⁶ In February 1838, one hundred Penateka Comanche entered San Antonio to invite the Texians to travel to with them to the Hill Country to discuss peace between the two groups. Moseley Baker, a member of the Texas Congress, accompanied the group to their encampment on the Colorado River. There he met with fifteen headmen, and noted that the Comanche had made a declaration for a boundary line, defining their territorial limits. They claimed nearly a quarter of the “finest country in Texas...the territory north and west of the Guadalupe Mountains, extending from the Red River to the Rio Grande”.¹¹⁷ Though they sought peace, they “would listen to no terms unless the government secured to them the full and undisturbed possession” of the land north of the divide between the Colorado and the Guadalupe rivers west of Bastrop. More terms were discussed, and it was agreed that they would return to San Antonio to finalize the treaty at

¹¹⁵A. M. M. Upshaw to M. B. Lamar, June, 18, 1840, Winfrey and Day, *The Texas Indian Papers, 1825-1843*, (Texas State Library: Austin, 1959), 1:114-115.

¹¹⁶ Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 15.

¹¹⁷ Letter from R.A. Irion to Sam Houston, March 14, 1838, Winfrey and Day, *The Texas Indian Papers, 1825-1843*, (Texas State Library: Austin, 1959), I: 42-45.

a later date. Such a promise, if ever actually considered, which it likely was not, would require government authorization. Houston received notice of these negotiations from Robert A. Irion in March, detailing Colonel Henry Karnes report of the event, and sought further guidance from Houston for the planned future engagement.¹¹⁸

Karnes was described as a short thick red headed man, uneducated, modest, and generous, according to Mary Maverick. His name, she said, should incite terror among Indians. Karnes had been held captive by the Comanche years before.¹¹⁹ Karnes reported to Irion that he was fearful that the Texian motives had been misrepresented by the Mexicans and Americans to the Comanche, who were told “that our only objective is to acquire land unjustly.” Karnes further stated that he did not want to reinforce these perceptions by making false promises to them. They wanted a boundary line, and Karnes reported that they said they will kill all the surveyors on their land, who were already operating within their claimed territory. In his letter to Houston, Irion noted that “The Commissioner of the Land Office has issued orders instructing surveyors to confine their operations...which if obeyed may prevent intrusion upon the Indian territory.” Colonel Karnes also reported a conspiracy among the Indians of Texas. He feared the Shawnee were working among them trying to draw the Comanche into an alliance and “influence their minds against the Texians.” Last of all, Irion’s letter informed Houston that Karnes

¹¹⁸ Letter from R.A. Irion to Sam Houston , March 14, 1838, Winfrey and Day, *The Texas Indian Papers*, I: 42-45.

¹¹⁹ Information concerning Colonel Henry Karnes, a participant in the Council House fight, is found in Rena Maverick Green and Maverick Fairchild Fisher, eds., *Memoirs of Mary A. Maverick: A Journal of Early Texas* (San Antonio: Alamo Printing Company, 1921), 30. Indians called him “Captan Colorado” (Red Captain) and spoke of him as “muy wapo” (very brave). As a captive, he was admired greatly by the women because of “his hair of fire”, and they liked to touch it and repeatedly tried to wash the red color out. When the color would not fade or wash out many of the women cut pieces of it to keep.

planned to meet the Comanche when they reported back to San Antonio, present them with gifts, negotiate “without indicating the precise limits of the territory which will be secured to them,” and assure the Indians that the Texians had no intention of hurting them or taking away their rights.¹²⁰

Chiefs Eswacany and Essomanny led an embassy of one-hundred fifty to San Antonio in May of 1838 to meet with Texas officials.¹²¹ The Comanche’s only demand was a boundary line, but the Texians refused to discuss it. Realizing nothing would become of these negotiations; the Comanche accepted a few customary gifts and left the city.¹²² At the same time negotiations were going on with the Comanche in San Antonio, so too were negotiations with another group of Penateka Comanche in Bastrop County. Led by Chief Muguara, and a few warriors, they appeared at Coleman’s Fort on Walnut Creek, asking for a commissioner to be sent to their camp to discuss a treaty. Noah Smithwick, a Ranger officer, was sent with the embassy back to Muguara’s village on the Colorado River. Once there, Muguara complained to Smithwick that the Texians were invading their territory, “building houses and fences, and the buffalo get frightened and leave and never come back, and the Indians are left to starve...if the white men would draw a line defining their claims and keep on their side of it the red men would not molest them.”¹²³ Smithwick regrettably informed Muguara that he had no authority to

¹²⁰ Letter from R.A. Irion to Sam Houston , March 14, 1838, Winfrey and Day, *The Texas Indian Papers*, I: 42-45: The letter details Karnes report of the agents that were sent to the Comanche, as well as a letter from General A.S. Johnston.

¹²¹ Other spellings include Essowakkenny.

¹²² Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 164-165.

¹²³ Noah Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State or Recollections of Old Texas Day*, (Austin: Gammel Book Company, 1900), 123-138.

authorize such a treaty, which was often the problem, and asked the Comanche to meet with Texas President Houston in Houston, the Republic of Texas' capital.¹²⁴

In May of 1838 a Comanche delegation of approximately one hundred met in Houston to finalize the terms to a treaty between the two groups. Texian who saw the Comanche entrance into the city describe their observations to local papers. Spanish legends of the Comanche attributed a reputation of bravery and ferocity to these Indians of Texas, but that was not what these citizens saw.¹²⁵ The June 1838 *Houston Telegraph* and May 30, 1838 *Texas Register* printed the comments of these Texians, who reported that the Comanche looked like “diminutive, squalid, half-naked, poverty stricken savages...mounted on wretched horses and mules.”¹²⁶ These descriptions could depict a people in a declining state, or could simply be reflective of the Texians' racially prejudiced views of the Indians they perceived as inferior, or possibly could be a combination of the two.

By the 29th of May, the “Treaty of Peace and Amity” was secured. Present at the negotiations were Irion as Secretary of State and Ashbel Smith as Commissioner on the part of the Republic of Texas, and Comanche chiefs Muguara, Muestyah, and Muhy. Despite Muguara's insistence, the treaty did not identify or mention Comanche land holdings. In the treaty the Comanche “promise[d] to bring to just punishment such individuals of their tribe as may commit any depredations upon the property or injure the persons of any of the Citizens belonging to the Republic of Texas.” They pledged to

¹²⁴ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 165.

¹²⁵ Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 256-257.

¹²⁶ *Houston Telegraph*, June 1838; *Texas Register*, May 30, 1838.

trade only with appointed trade agents, and to keep them safe. They also agreed to meet with the President of Texas on the second Monday of every October. In the treaty the Comanche were also obligated to restore any stolen goods, and they promised to stop stealing, raiding, and killing livestock. They also agreed to ally with the Texians and help fight their enemies, including other Indians. They were asked to wear a star to identify themselves to their Texian friends and show that they would not kill or steal from the whites. Furthermore, the Texians made some minor concessions as well. They pledged to appoint an agent for the Comanche to “superintend their business, and protect their rights.” The Texians also promised to punish “any citizen of the Republic according to Law, who may in any way infringe on the rights of the said Comanche or injure them in any way whatsoever,” as long as the Comanche kept their end of the bargain. And last but not least, the Texians promised to restore any stolen goods and prevent any further raids upon the Comanche.¹²⁷ When it was over, and before the natives departed the city, Houston gave the Comanche gifts, including a white flag representing peace and a passport that read these Indians were “friends and brothers of the Texians.”¹²⁸

The treaty proved completely ineffectual. The Comanche were angered that the Texians would not delineate a boundary line. As a result the Comanche killed a few traders who traveled to their village, and a series of skirmishes ensued. According to citizens of San Felipe, this same band stole several horses in the vicinity of San Antonio not long after these peace talks concluded. Mary Maverick recorded an incident on June

¹²⁷ The Treaty Between Texas and the Comanche Indians, May 29, 1838, Winfrey and Day, *The Texas Indian Papers*, 1:50-52.

¹²⁸ Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 259.

29, 1838, in which thirty eight Comanches came to the edge of town (San Antonio) and killed two Mexicans and stole one boy. She also noted that on June 13th, a German and another Mexican had been killed by the local Comanche. In August, Texas Rangers fought a group of Penateka Comanche near the Medina River. And on August 10, Colonel Karnes attacked a party of two-hundred Comanche at Arroyo Seco and reportedly killed Essomanny. On September 8, approximately seventy Comanche, angry about the events at Arroyo Seco and seeking peace with the Texians, visited Bastrop. On October 20, 1838, Texian surveyors were attacked by Comanche west of San Antonio. Thirteen Texians responded and were quickly surrounded, eight Texians were killed and four were wounded. Five days later the Battle at the Andarko Village ensued, and Chief Esawacany was reportedly killed.¹²⁹ Penateka Comanches, reportedly of Muguara's band, also raided settlements along the Guadalupe River, where thirteen year old Matilda Lockhart was abducted. Numerous skirmishes plagued the frontier, and other Comanche parties raided various settlements in Texas and Mexico, kidnapping women and children and stealing horses and other livestock. Finally, on December 21, 1838 a bill was passed to establish a regiment of over eight hundred men for the "further protection of the frontier against the Comanches and the other Indians". The act also provided for eight companies of mounted Ranger volunteers. By the end of 1838, the Treaty of May 29th had been completely forgotten by the Penateka Comanche and the Texians.¹³⁰

But the Indians were not the only culprits for the decline of the Comanche and Texian treaty and relationship. The Texians also played a role, and Texian forces, in

¹²⁹ Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 259-261.

¹³⁰ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 171 (quote), 165.

conjunction with Indian auxiliaries, waged brutal warfare against the Penateka on the Western frontier. Attitudes worsened when Mirabeau B. Lamar was elected president and initiated a campaign of extinction. On Feb. 15, 1839, John H. Moore, sixty-two other whites, and Chief Cuelgas de Castro's fifteen Lipans attacked Muguara's camp.¹³¹ In Moore's report to Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston, he said that he led three volunteer companies that were formed under the government authorization of the 25th of January, to "proceed against the Comanche and other hostile Indians in our northwest frontier." He further reported that on the 13th, his spies, a Lipan hunting party, discovered an Indian encampment on a small stream called Spring Creek, a tributary of the San Saba River. The companies marched under the cover of timber and waited until after sunset to move closer. After daybreak, against Castro's advice, Moore dismounted most of his men and attacked the village. He ordered the Lipans on horseback to stampede the caballado on the left flank. The La Grange company under the command of William M. Eastland formed the right wing, and the Bastrop company under Noah Smithwick's command attacked the center of the village, "slaughtering the enemy in their beds." The Indians soon recovered and retreated to a deep rut. After several failed attempts to counterattack the Texians, finally a white flag was brought to Moore's men by a man and a woman, and a parley ensued. The Indians said they had five prisoners and wished to exchange them for the Indians captured during the fight. They claimed to have had one middle aged women, a fifteen year old thought to be Matilda Lockhart (daughter of Andrew Lockhart, a member of one of Moore's companies), and the other

¹³¹ Ibid., 174.

three were presumed to be the three children kidnapped in the same place as Matilda . But unknown to the Texians was the fact that the Comanche captured by the Lipans had already been executed, and no exchange could be made. The Lipans also walked away with ninety-three horses and forty-six mules, according to Moore. After the news, the Comanche warned the Texians that their numbers were increasing, and they were working with the Shawnee against the Republic. In reporting the event, Moore said that his enemy's loss "must have been considerable...very great," and that the Texians only lost one man in battle and another from a mortal wound a short time later.¹³²

The Penateka responded by attacking settlements along the frontier, but by summer the Texas forces forced Penateka bands to retreat all the way to the Colorado River. In the fall, smallpox reduced the already declining people by killing a large number of Indians. Weakened, some bands decided to pursue peace with the Texians. Historian John Henry Brown suggests that there may have been another treaty between the Texians and Comanche after this event. He insinuates that the number of hostages recovered from Indian captivity in the winter of 1839-1840 demonstrates the presence of a treaty, but the details of any such treaty, or ransoming of captives, are not known today.¹³³

In Maverick's memoirs, she alone recorded another incident between the Comanche Indians and the Texians that further helps to understand the mindsets of both parties at the time of the Council House Fight in the spring of 1840. She recalled an

¹³² Captain J.H. Moore's Report to Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston, March 10, 1839, Winfrey and Day, *The Texas Indian Papers*, I: 57-59.

¹³³ Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 174.

event just before March when ten visiting Americans and ten Mexicans went to see the countryside before returning home. Just after sunset Mr. “Talking” Campbell, a member of the party, came riding back into town reporting that the Comanche had gotten between the party and San Antonio, blocking their path back. He said that he had a fast horse and was able to get through unharmed. The next morning another party from San Antonio went out to find their friends, and found their dead bodies, naked and hacked with tomahawks. In addition to their mutilation at the hands of the Indians, they had also been partly eaten by wolves throughout the night.¹³⁴

Conflict between the Texians and the Comanche had been growing since the early days of European settlement in the territory. Neither the Comanche or Texians understood each other’s values or organization, and this directly led to increased conflict between the two parties even while many sought peace. The days, weeks, and years leading up to the Council House Fight were rife with hostility. Not only had the Comanche brutally waged war on the Texians, and continued to appear to break their promises with the settlers, but the Texians had also waged a counter-war on the natives, and did very little to develop any lasting peaceful solutions.

¹³⁴ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 21.

THE COUNCIL HOUSE FIGHT

Years of contact with the Indians of Texas lead to many violent encounters, and ultimately to their expulsion from the state of Texas. The Comanche had been the greatest threat to settlers of the plains, and continued attempts to create peace failed, resulting in renewed hostilities. While many Comanche bands and individuals continued to raid Texian settlements, others, weakened by disease and warfare, sought peace. One of the latter was the Penataka, and their apparent effort to secure a negotiated peace led to one of the bloodiest clashes between Indians and Texians in the history of the Republic of Texas.

On January 9, 1840, three Comanche and their Mexican captive rode into San Antonio seeking peace between the Texians and their group of Penateka Comanche. According to Gary Anderson's *The Conquest of Texas*, a small white boy, presumed to be John Horn, was also given at this time to the Texians.¹³⁵ The Comanche came to the center of town and called for Col. Henry Karnes, whom they knew from his previous captivity, fights, and past peace negotiations, San Antonio was the largest community within a reasonable distance of their villages and was a likely place for the Comanche to meet with the Texians. Not only was it a site of previous peace negotiations, but it possessed the manufactured goods the Indians desired.¹³⁶ The possible motivations for

¹³⁵ Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: The Ethnic Cleansing of Texas, 1820-1875* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 181. But no mention is made of his presence in Henry Karnes letter to Secretary of State Albert S. Johnston, January 10, 1840, Dorman H. Winfrey and James M. Day, eds., *The Texas Indian Papers, 1825-1843*, (Texas State Library: Austin, 1959), 1:101-102.

¹³⁶ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 181.

seeking a lasting peace have been attributed to many factors, such as the losses caused by small pox, retaliation raids made by the Texians, as well as apparent threats made to the Comanche by warriors from the Arapaho and Cheyenne Indians.¹³⁷ Most likely it was a combination of all these factors and its results on their people. Their power in the region was declining, and though they might not have really wanted to make serious concessions to the Texians, they realized it was the only way they were to survive. Varying levels of opposition to submitting to the Texians among the Comanche are evident in the continual light and isolated resistance on the frontier following these talks.¹³⁸

Among the Comanche delegation that appeared in San Antonio that day, the most distinguished one appeared to be a “priest”, according to Karnes.¹³⁹ The apparent religious leader told the Texians that eighteen days prior, a General Council of the Penateka Comanche had convened and agreed to seek a truce with the Republic of Texas.¹⁴⁰ The man, who claimed to have been deputed by the council to solicit a peace, told Karnes “that the nation will accept of Peace on any terms; being sensible of their inability to contend with the Texas forces.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, he affirmed his people’s desire to work with the Texians, and demonstrated their dedication to the peace process,

¹³⁷ Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 171.

¹³⁸ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 171.

¹³⁹ Karnes uses the term “priest” to refer to a Comanche man who appeared to be a religious leader of the Indians present that day.

¹⁴⁰ It is not really known how many bands were present. It is not likely that all Penateka Comanche bands were represented.

¹⁴¹ Karnes to Johnston, January 10, 1840, Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 1:101-102. Later, in Hugh McLeod’s Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers, Texas State Library and Commission, he stated that the chief who took part in these initial negotiations was Muguara himself, and he made no mention of a priest. This information is not necessarily contradictory, for both men could easily have been present.

by detailing their defiance to efforts among the Cherokee and Mexicans to “stir up a general war” against the Texians.¹⁴²

Karnes demanded that in order for any negotiations to take place, the Comanche must release all their American captives, which the Texians estimated at thirteen. The Texians also demanded that the Comanche abandon Central Texas, cease interfering with Texas incursions, and avoid all white settlements.¹⁴³ A future date of negotiation was agreed upon, and initial peace terms were finalized. In twenty to thirty days, a large delegation, including the principal chiefs, would return to the city with all of their white captives, and negotiate a lasting truce. Karnes reported that he treated the Indians well, and gave them their customary gifts before exiting the city.¹⁴⁴

In Colonel Karnes’ report of the event to the Secretary of War, Albert Sidney Johnston, he noted that the Penatekas’ “known treachery and duplicity, induces me to put little faith in them.”¹⁴⁵ Oddly enough, Karnes claimed that the delegation of Penateka Comanche were too large to take hostage. Taking a group captive that were proposing future peace negotiations was not a common practice, and his apparent apology is concerning and confusing. Maverick offered one explanation, that “this was the third time these Indians had come for a talk pretending to seek peace and trying to get ransom money for their American and Mexican captives.”¹⁴⁶ Knowing of this past deception

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ron Tyler ed., “Council House Fight”, *The New Handbook of Texas*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 2:365-366.

¹⁴⁴ Henry Karnes to Albert Sidney Johnston, January 10, 1840, Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 1:101-102.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Rena Maverick Green and Maverick Fairchild Fisher, eds., *Memoirs of Mary A. Maverick: A Journal of Early Texas* (San Antonio: Alamo Printing Company, 1921), 22.

might serve to better understand Karnes' motivations here. But if these men were considered dangerous enough to take into custody, why would Karnes have given them gifts upon their departure? Was his first goal to incarcerate the Indians, and because it would not feasibly work, was a peace treaty a suitable alternative to him? Furthermore, Karnes requested that one or two commissioners be sent to San Antonio in order to better secure and negotiate a peace with the Comanche. He asked that they be accompanied by a "force sufficient to justify our seizing and retaining [them] as hostages," if needed.¹⁴⁷ The Texians had an upper hand in the discussions, risking the loss of nothing of real substance to the Indians, but because of past failures, and blunders, certain reasonable precautions taken by both parties was understandable.¹⁴⁸

Upon receiving the report from Colonel Karnes, Secretary of War Johnston chose two commissioners, Adjunct General Hugh McLeod and Col. William G. Cooke, to negotiate a peace with the Penateka Comanche band that had requested the truce. Johnston ordered the men to inform the Indians that the Republic "assumes the right, with regard to all Indian Tribes residing within the limits of the Republic, to dictate the conditions of such residence," and that they should live accordingly, and only then would they be granted the peace that they so desperately sought.¹⁴⁹ He also ordered the commissioners to inform the Comanche that the citizens of the Republic had the right to occupy any vacant lands, without the fear of an Indian raid into any of their communities.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Karnes to Albert Sidney Johnston, January 10, 1840, Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 1:101-102.

¹⁴⁸ Frederick Wilkins, *The Legend Begins: The Texas Rangers, 1823-1845* (Austin: State House Press, 1996), 41. There is no evidence one way or another that Karnes was purposefully setting a trap.

¹⁴⁹ Albert S. Johnston to William S. Fisher, January 30, 1840, Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, I:105-106.

Johnston clearly stated that it was essential that the Comanche understood that they were “prohibited from entering our settlements.”¹⁵⁰ His continued distrust of the Comanche also led the Secretary of War to order Lt. Col. William S. Fisher to lead three infantry companies to San Antonio to await the arrival of the Penateka Comanche. These companies were drawn from Edward Burleson’s Frontier Regiment, which had been disbanded before the holidays.¹⁵¹ He further ordered Fisher to seize the Indians if all of their American captives were not returned to the Texians as promised. If that happened, the Texians were to allow the leaders to send messengers back to their village and secure the release of the remaining captives. If all American prisoners were eventually freed, so too would the Texians free Comanche captives. This plan had never been attempted before by the Spanish, Mexican, or the Texians.¹⁵² But, according to Johnston, this would all be avoided if the Penatekas brought all of their captives: “they will therefore be received with kindness and permitted to depart without molestation,” and the troops would not be used.¹⁵³ Johnston also noted that he was aware that gift-giving was usually a custom when negotiations were pursued with the Indians, but that the practice should be done away with in the future. This is a curious statement for a man trying to pursue a peace with the Comanche. It appears that Johnston understood the Texians’ advantage over the Indians and, in a slightly risky political and diplomatic maneuver, he refused to

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182.

¹⁵² Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182.

¹⁵³ Albert Sidney Johnston to William S. Fisher, January 30, 1840, Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 1:105-106.

cooperate with them any more than was absolutely necessary. The orders were issued, and the commissioners as well as the troops left for San Antonio.¹⁵⁴

In San Antonio, on March 19, 1840, the Día de San Jose, two Comanche scouts arrived in the city to inform the commissioners of the approaching Indians.¹⁵⁵ Soon after, sixty-five Comanche men, women, and children entered San Antonio with only one American prisoner. Leading the delegation was a bald-headed medicine man, Muguara, who had worked with the Texians before with the failed Treaty in May of 1829. Not only did Karnes, who had lived among the Penateka as a captive, confirm this, but Noah Smithwick, a familiar character in early Texian/ Indian episodes, had also lived among Muguara's band, and recognized him as well. In fact, Smithwick had spent over three months living with the Comanche trying to secure another treaty which was never signed. Muguara had been elected the main peace chief by the Penateka General Council that had formed not long before they came to San Antonio.¹⁵⁶

Rupert Richardson claims that though these leaders were supposed to have been the principal chiefs of the Comanche, Muguara was not the head chief of the Penatekas. Further, he declares that if the men present were the principal chiefs of the Penateka Comanche, they would have been accompanied by a more substantial force and not the small group that traveled with Muguara that day.¹⁵⁷ There is a problem with this assumption. The Penateka's small mixed-gender group suggested they were not

¹⁵⁴ Ibid; Lamar's First Message to Congress, December 21, 1838, *Lamar Papers*, 2: 346-369. This was reflective of Lamar's Indian policy, discussed earlier in Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁵ Maverick *Memoirs*, 107. Día de San Jose or "Day" or "Feast of Saint Joseph".

¹⁵⁶ Karnes to Johnston, January 10, 1840, Winfrey and Day, *Texas Indian Papers*, 1:101-102.

¹⁵⁷ Rupert Richardson, *The Comanche Barrier to South Plain Settlement* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1933), 112.

expecting any sort of military force. Not only were women present, but they brought their children, and their wares to exchange for local goods. It can therefore be safely assumed that these men could be, and likely were, as they claimed the principal chiefs, who brought along with them members of their families including elders, women, and children not expecting any hostilities. Because of Chief Muguara's past involvement in peace negotiations, his leadership could have represented the Comanche's peaceful intentions. No proof exists that the Penatekas were warned of the Texians' intentions to hold them captive if all the American prisoners were not freed. The fact that the Comanche did not bring all of their prisoners did not seem to concern them; this would not have been the first time the Comanche had ransomed their captives after a meeting.¹⁵⁸

Many small and not very consequential details are contended by some scholars. For example, the position and authority of the chiefs are questioned. Richardson claims that not only was Muguara not the head of the southern Comanche, but other well known chiefs were missing. Isomania was the worst of the depredating chiefs, and according to Richardson was not present that day. This information creates little controversy and could be easily explained in a number of ways. While it may add to the knowledge of which chiefs were not there, it does not contradict what has always been reported, that these men were the principal civil chiefs. There is no way of knowing just how many different bands of Penatekas gathered in general council days before, and these chiefs could have represented a group not as well known to the Texians but still highly respected among the Comanche. Or, it could be simply explained by further examining

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

the social structure of the Comanche, as previously discussed. The general council could have chosen the peace chiefs among them to represent their peaceful interests to the Texians.¹⁵⁹

The peace delegation of the Penateka Comanche brought with them only one white captive, fifteen year-old Matilda Lockhart, and one young Mexican boy.¹⁶⁰ As the deputation entered the camp, Matilda, the young captive of the Penateka, was being used as a herder for their extra ponies. She had been captured in December of 1838 with her younger sister, and possibly with two other children of her family.¹⁶¹ Two unsuccessful excursions were made to free the young captives, one to the head of the Guadalupe River in late 1838, and another by John Moore in 1839 to Spring Creek.¹⁶²

When Matilda was handed over to the Texians she was in a “frightful condition.” She told them stories of sexual and physical abuse, and accused her captives of great torture.¹⁶³ According to Mary Maverick, Matilda appeared very bad, and described that “her head, arms, and face were full of bruises and sores, and her nose actually was burnt off to the bone, all the fleshy end gone and a great scab formed on the end of the base. Both nostrils were wide-open and denuded of flesh.” Furthermore, she told Maverick that the Indians beat her, and would “wake her from sleep by sticking a chunk of fire to her flesh, especially to her nose, and now they would shout and laugh like fiends when

¹⁵⁹ Richardson, *Comanche Barrier*, 112-113.

¹⁶⁰ Tyler, “Council House Fight”, *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:365-366”. The Handbook claims several Mexican children were brought in.

¹⁶¹ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 22. Maverick claims only one Mexican was brought in; According to Tyler, “Council House Fight”, *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:365-366, Matilda was captured with the four young children of Mitchell Putnam.

¹⁶² Tyler, “Council House Fight”, *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2: 365-366.

¹⁶³ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 171.

she cried.”¹⁶⁴ Matilda was embarrassed about her condition and did not want to be seen. Her scars were severe and probably sickening, and most likely people were staring at them. The Comanche typically treated captives very brutally in order to instill a sense of fear in their prisoners.¹⁶⁵ Matilda was taken to Maverick’s home, where she was bathed, dressed and cared for until her brother picked her up a few days later.¹⁶⁶

When questioned, Matilda claimed there were other white captives that the Comanches had not brought and that the Indians planned to ransom them in the following days.¹⁶⁷ McLeod in his letter to President Lamar reporting the day’s events noted that Matilda seemed to be a very intelligent girl. He repeated that Matilda claimed she had seen several other white captives that the Penateka Comanche were holding several days before at their principal camp.¹⁶⁸ Presumably this is the same camp that was assembled to authorize the deputation that first came into San Antonio several days earlier seeking a peace between the two groups. She further explained that the Indians were going to demand a “high price for her” and bring in the rest of their American captives one at a time. In Maverick’s memoirs she goes into more depth than McLeod does in his report to President Lamar describing the situation. Maverick claimed that the Comanche wanted the Texians to send traders to their camp with “paint, powder, flannel, blankets, and such

¹⁶⁴ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 32.

¹⁶⁵ F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 175.

¹⁶⁶ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 32.

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182.

¹⁶⁸ W.W. Newcomb Jr., *The Indians of Texas: From Prehistoric to Modern Times* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1961), 350. Newcomb presumes that “it is likely that this was the only captive this band had” and the Euroamericans she saw belonged to other bands or subgroups.

other articles as they should name to ransom the other captives.”¹⁶⁹ According to her, there was precedent for this type of arrangement. Previously the Comanche had asked for particular goods in exchange for their American captives, and they were brought directly to their camp by Texian officials. When tragedy struck and smallpox killed several Indians, the Texian traders were blamed for the epidemic and killed. Incidents like this only weakened Texian trust in the Comanche, and made them more suspicious of their promises. Maverick also noted that Matilda never really recovered from her ordeal, and survived no more than two or three more years.¹⁷⁰

After Matilda was presented to the Texians as the Comanche’s one and only American captive, the twelve principal chiefs were directed toward the local jail. Attached to the jail was a council room that was part of the courthouse originally built in the 1740’s. The complex was known as the Casas Reales, and had once been the official residence for Juan Maria Vicencio de Ripperda, the first Spanish governor of Texas to make his headquarters in San Antonio (which in 1770 was known as San Fernando de Bexar).¹⁷¹ It had also once been the home of the prisoners of the Philip Nolan expedition. The one-story stone court house was on the corner of Main Plaza and Calabosa (Market) Street.¹⁷² As negotiations began, outside the council house in the courtyard (which later became the City Market in Market Street), the other warriors amused themselves, and the townspeople who had gathered, by shooting their bows and arrows at different targets.

¹⁶⁹ Maverick *Memoirs*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182.

¹⁷² Donaly Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid: The Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic* (Austin: Eakin Publishers, 1987), 23; Mildred Mayhall, *Indian Wars of Texas*, (Waco: Texian Press, 1965), 21: Calabosa Street is present-day Market Street.

Other curious citizens, including Maverick and her friend Lucinda Higginbotham, watched from the safety of their homes.¹⁷³

Once assembled in the council house, the principal chief, Muguara, was asked about the other captives. According to McLeod, it was Muguara himself that had days before promised to return all of the Penateka's American captives. The Chief responded by telling the Texians that Matilda was their only hostage, and the others belonged to other bands, therefore out of his authority or jurisdiction. If it is presumed that the principal camp assembled several days before the Penatekas had first entered San Antonio was the same camp that Matilda remembers, then all the tribes present were represented by Muguara, his authority, and his promises made to the Texians. So when he entered San Antonio on March 19, 1840 without all their American captives he had broken his promise that was essential to their peace talks, and the possibility of entering into a treaty with the Texians. To add to his apparent dishonesty, Muguara further acknowledged that they had violated all their previous treaties with the Texians, and according to McLeod, tauntingly demanded that new confidence be reposed in this situation. After the Chief's assurance that there were no other captives under his custody, he responded, "How do you like that answer?"¹⁷⁴ It can not be known for certain if Muguara actually made such a statement, or if it was misinterpreted, or even simply misunderstood. However, it was perceived as a negative, even sarcastic remark that heightened the tension in the room.

¹⁷³ Maverick *Memoirs*, 22. Higginbotham's husband received a slight wound in the melee that was to follow several minutes later.

¹⁷⁴ Hugh McLeod's Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers, Texas State Library and Commission.

Lieutenant Colonel Fisher was then ordered to march his companies into the immediate vicinity of the Council House. The Texians again confronted the twelve Comanche chiefs inside the council room, and in accordance with Secretary of War Johnson's orders and Colonel Karnes' recommendations, decided that the chiefs had to be detained.¹⁷⁵ McLeod noted that it was "the only alternative left us." The Texians had a Tejano interpreter that knew Comanche, and he was asked to relay the message of their detainment to the chiefs. Aware of the outrage that would result on behalf of the Penatekas, the interpreter slowly moved toward the door and exited immediately after delivering the Texians' message.¹⁷⁶ The chiefs were informed that they could send several of their young men back to their camp to retrieve the other captives. The Texians further explained to the Indians that they would not be released until the captives were safely returned to San Antonio. Capt. George T. Howard's company was ordered into the council room and into the adjoining room in the back near the courtyard, where the other Comanche warriors were. Once inside, he placed sentinels at the doors, and across the room to act as their guards. There were no more negotiations to be made between the two groups at that time, and Texian officials descended from the platform.¹⁷⁷

What happened next is debated between some historians. According to the report he issued to President Lamar, McLeod stated that the chiefs tried to follow the exiting Texian officials out of the building. It was in those next few moments that the Penatekas decided to fight rather than submit to the Texians and their detainment. One sprang to

¹⁷⁵ Hugh McLeod's Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. *Houston Papers*, Texas State Library and Commission.

¹⁷⁶ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182.

¹⁷⁷ Hugh McLeod's Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. *Houston Papers*, Texas State Library and Commission.

the back door and attempted to pass the sentinel, who presented his musket to the chief in an attempt to stop his escape. When stopped, the Comanche chief apparently stabbed the sentinel in his side, though some have suggested the enraged chief stabbed the sentinel before being presented with his weapon. Captain Howard tried to stop another escaping Penateka and also received a stab to his side. As he fell to the ground, Howard ordered a soldier to shoot his attacker, who was killed immediately. By this time all of the Indian chiefs had drawn their bows and presented their knives to the Texians still in the room, ready to continue the fight that had already begun. Colonel Fisher ordered his men in the council house to “fire if they do not desist,” then according to McLeod the Indians rushed the Texian troops in a last attempt to escape their captivity. Now under attack, the troops were ordered to “fire!” Within a very short time, fighting subsided inside the room, and all twelve of the Penateka Comanche chiefs lay dead.¹⁷⁸

Before the council room could be cleared, Captain Howard and his men were ordered to the front of the building complex in order to cut off any attempted retreat in that direction. The wound he received moments earlier was very severe, and Captain Gillen was ordered to relieve Howard of his command for the remainder of the affair. As the fight came to an end inside the Council House, it was just beginning outside.¹⁷⁹

Captain William D. Redd’s Company A was stationed in the courtyard, to watch the other Comanche warriors. Upon hearing the war whoops from inside the Council House, the Indians became immediately aware of their leader’s trouble. Mary Maverick

¹⁷⁸ Hugh McLeod’s Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, *A. J. Houston Papers*, Texas State Library and Commission.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

noted that the whoops were “so loud, so shrill and so inexpressibly horrible,” that it was hard for the Texians to quickly comprehend its implications.¹⁸⁰ The warriors understood instantly and immediately attacked the Texians in the yard, killing Judge Thomson. As pandemonium erupted, many Penatekas fled and were shot in their backs and killed while escaping across the river. The few Indians that actually made it across encountered a small party of mounted men under the command of Colonel Lysander Wells. Colonel Wells, riding north on Soledad Street, was elegantly dressed and mounted on an equally impressive horse. He was not yet aware of the degeneration of negotiations and was just as surprised as the Indians must have been when they met one another. Wells was attacked by a fleeing Comanche who tried to take over his horse’s reins.¹⁸¹ According to Mary Maverick, Colonel Wells shot and killed his attacker almost immediately, but the April 22, 1840 *Telegraph* and *Texas Register* reported differently.¹⁸² The paper claimed that Wells was equipped with a new Colt Revolver that would not fire because the wedge was placed improperly. Furthermore, it said that his Indian attacker grabbed his gun, and in the ensuing struggle was able to take it away from Wells. Luckily for the Colonel, one of his men came to his aid and was able to kill the Indian. The papers reported that Wells “sat back in his saddle and cursed the Comanche and Sam Colt in equal measure.”¹⁸³ Eventually all the fleeing Indians were killed or captured, except one renegade Mexican who was allowed to escape.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰Maverick, *Memoirs*, 33.

¹⁸¹Wilkins, *The Legend Begins*, 79.

¹⁸²Maverick, *Memoirs*, 24.

¹⁸³ John Henry Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas* (Austin: L.E. Daniell, 1897), 77.

¹⁸⁴ Hugh McLeod’s Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers, Texas State Library and Commission.

Citizens and soldiers of the Republic fought with the Comanche, and desperate fights between the Penatekas and the Texians sprang up all over town. Several Indians sought refuge, barricaded themselves in nearby stone houses, and continued to fight. One warrior, possibly two, fled inside Higginbotham's kitchen and refused any request to surrender made to him by the Texians through some of the captured Comanche women.¹⁸⁵ In McLeod's letter to Lamar he claimed that the barricaded Indian killed and wounded several of the Texians, which is possible but highly unlikely. His people might have been partly responsible, but not all the men dead were killed by the Indians--some Anglos died due to friendly fire. It is more likely that McLeod was justifying the Texians' next course of action with respect to this particular warrior. Shortly after midnight, the Texians climbed on top of the home, and Anton Lockmar and another man dropped a blazing candlewick ball soaked in turpentine through a hole made in the roof. Scared, or perhaps injured by the object dropped, the Indian exited Higginbotham's home and was immediately shot and killed.¹⁸⁶ The Texian troops stationed in San Antonio for the fateful day, as well as the other citizen soldiers that immediately sprang to action when they were not required to do so, demonstrates the Texian tradition and societal demands placed upon the settlers living on the frontier.

Many of the Texians who were present for the battle are known from other events in early Texas and Ranger history. Captain Matthew "Old Paint" Caldwell was visiting

¹⁸⁵ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 26. Contradictory to what McLeod claims, Maverick reports that there were two warriors inside the house, and claims that the ball hit him on the head, hurt him, and drove him out of the home. Outside he was shot to death, while the other warrior upon exiting the home was killed with an axe to his head.

¹⁸⁶ McLeod to Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers, noted that the warrior was forced out.

San Antonio from Gonzales and took part in the fighting in a private capacity. He was unarmed, and was shot through the right leg. Mary Maverick notes in her memoirs that it was presumed he was injured by the first volley of shots fired by the Texian soldiers and not Indians.¹⁸⁷ It was also reported that Caldwell took a gun away from an Indian, killed him, and beat another Indian with the end of his gun after it had broke.¹⁸⁸ Another tale has Captain Caldwell throwing rocks at the Indians when he found himself unarmed and in the middle of a raging battle.¹⁸⁹ Other accounts, more likely than some of the previous stories, have John Dabney Morris as Caldwell's savior, shooting an Indian before he was able to shoot his already aimed weapon at the unarmed Caldwell.¹⁹⁰ Whatever the truth, his presence at this event is what was significant for his future career, credibility, and legend. A soon-to-be Ranger, Michael H. Chevallie, was also present. Chevallie was an army lieutenant who managed to get Mary Maverick to safety when she was caught unprotected outside her gates during the street battle.¹⁹¹ John Hemphill also fought against the Comanche that day in San Antonio. He would gain fame as one of the seven elected delegates from Texas to the Provisional Confederate Congress years later.¹⁹² Another young visitor, C. Y. Cayce, had been outside the front door when negotiations degenerated. According to Maverick he was killed almost immediately after the fighting began.¹⁹³ Lieutenant William M. Dunnington was also killed during the conflict by a

¹⁸⁷ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Wilkins, *The Legend Begins*, 79.

¹⁹⁰ Tyler, "John Dabney Morris", *The New Handbook of Texas Online*, 4:844. Morris was the First District of Attorney of the Fourth Judicial District, or Bexar County.

¹⁹¹ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 25.

¹⁹² Mayhall, *Indian Wars*, 199.

¹⁹³ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 25.

Comanche woman who shot an arrow through his body. It was reported that after he was shot, Dunnington fired and killed his attacker.¹⁹⁴ *The Texas Sentinel* on April 15, 1840 stated, “Her brains bespattered the wall; he turned around and exclaimed, ‘I have killed him, but I believe he has killed me, too,’ and fell and expired in twenty minutes.”¹⁹⁵ He was unaware that the warrior was a female because she was dressed like a man.

According to McLeod, he tells Lamar that it was “impossible to discriminate between the sexes, so similar in dress, and several women were shot. But when it was discovered, all were spared.”¹⁹⁶ Also involved in the action was John James, father of Vinton L. James. Unarmed, John was attacked and thrown to the ground by an Indian, and threatened with a large knife. John Dunn, later one of Hay’s Rangers saved James’ life by shooting his attacker in the head. In total, there were only a few Texian casualties, but the Comanche loss was great. To repeat the description of Mary Maverick, “what a day of horrors!”¹⁹⁷

In the end, a total of thirty-five Indians, as well as seven Texians, were killed. Of the Comanche, three were women, two were children, twelve were principal chiefs, and the remainder were young male warriors. Included in the dead were Muguara, Spirit-Talker, Eagle, and the father of Sanaco, a later chief of a group of Penateka Comanche who visited the Clear Fork Reservation in 1856.¹⁹⁸ All of the remaining twenty-seven

¹⁹⁴ Tyler, “Kenney’s Fort”, *The New Handbook of Texas Online*: Fort Kenney, at the Southern bank of Brushy Creek, sixteen miles north of Austin, was briefly renamed Fort Dunnington, for the late William M. Dunnington, killed during the Council House Fight, but plans fell through and it was renamed again Fort Kenney.

¹⁹⁵ *The Texas Sentinel*, April 15, 1840.

¹⁹⁶ Hugh McLeod’s Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers, Texas State Library and Commission.

¹⁹⁷ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 26.

¹⁹⁸ Mayhall, *Indian Wars*, 23. Sanaco was also known as “Buffalo Tar” or “Asphaltum”; Joyde Lynn Dickson Schilz and Thomas F. Schilz, *Buffallo Hump and the Penateka Comanches*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980), 19.

Indians were captured and imprisoned save one, who was sent back to the Comanche camp to secure the release of the remaining white captives.¹⁹⁹

The Texians lost an officer, two soldiers, and four civilians, while only three officers, one private, and four civilians were wounded. In his letter to President Lamar, McLeod listed the deceased: Lt. William M. Dunnington, First Infantry; Pvt. Kaminske of Company A; Pvt. Whitney of Company E; Judge Thomson of Houston; Judge [Sheriff] Julian Hood of Bexar; Mr. Casey of Matagorda County; and a Mexican, name unknown. McLeod also reported the Texian wounded to Lamar, which included Capt. George T. Howard; Capt. Matthew “Old Paint” Caldwell; Lt. Edward A. Thomson, First Infantry; Pvt. Kelly, Company I; Judge James W. Robinson; Mr. Higginbotham; Mr. Morgan; and Mr. Carson. Captain Howard, Lieutenant Thompson, and Private Kelly were injured very seriously.²⁰⁰ Deputy Sheriff Morgan was attacked by two Indians whom he both killed, but not before getting hurt himself. Overall, the Council House Fight was costly for both parties.

The Council House Fight was also a major military and diplomatic blunder for both parties. Both had ample reasons to distrust each other and take extra precautions, including fighting back and defending themselves. Neither group planned or even foresaw what occurred on March 19, 1840, and yet they were both to blame. The Comanche remained one of the most if not the most threatening groups to Euro-American expansion in Texas, and their apparent deception had angered the Texians. Likewise,

¹⁹⁹ For more information see Hugh McLeod’s Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers, Texas State Library and Commission. Following the Council House Fight, Pah-hah-yuco and Old Owl emerged as leading civil chiefs, and Buffalo Hump became the most prominent war leader, Schilz, *Buffalo Hump*, 21.

²⁰⁰ McLeod to Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers.

when negotiations soured and the chiefs were informed of their detainment, it served as sufficient cause for the Indians to strike back. Both groups considered the other to be at fault, and each felt forced by the other's actions.²⁰¹

The Texians entered a twelve day truce with the captured Comanches. At their request, a Comanche captive, the widow of a fallen chief, was released to journey back to their main camp to report the events of the day and secure the release of the other American captives still in their possession. Only after she returned with these hostages would the Indians captured by the Texians be freed. It was Spirit Talker's widow that was sent back to her people to recover the remaining white captives. She claimed she could return in four days with the captives, but twelve days was granted to provide her sufficient time. The Texians warned the woman that if she did not return in the given time they would assume the American hostages had already been killed by the Comanche in retaliation for their chiefs' deaths, and the Texians would be forced to kill the Penateka captives. According to McLeod, the woman was well mounted, given provisions and sent off. Both McLeod and Colonel Cooke remained in San Antonio to await her return, and when she did not come back in the prearranged twelve days, the Texians assumed the worst.²⁰²

²⁰¹ For more details on the dead and wounded see, Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 183; and Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations*, 24. Wilbarger gives information about the details of the dead and wounded; Mayhall, *Indian Wars*, 23; *The New Handbook of Texas* Places a George Washington Cayce, as present at the battle, and James W. Robinson as one of the wounded. He was a District Attorney and a school Commissioner.

²⁰² The majority of the paragraph is found within McLeod's Report to Lamar, March 20, 1840, *Texas Indian Papers*; But more information concerning personal observations may be found in Maverick Memoirs; and John Holmes Jenkins, ed., *Recollections of Early Texas: The Memoirs of John Holland Jenkins*, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1958).

All of the Texian's Comanche captives were eventually moved from the city jail to the San Jose Mission, and then to Camp Cooke at the head of the San Antonio River.²⁰³ Many of the people of San Antonio went to see them, and according to Mary Maverick many felt very bad for their situation. They were treated kindly, and were hired into local homes to live and work. And while some Indians were ransomed and exchanged, the rest managed to escape one way or another.²⁰⁴

Just after the Council House Fight, on March 26, 1840, Webster came into San Antonio with her three-year-old daughter on her back. Mary Maverick noted that she looked like an Indian dressed in buckskin, her hair was cut square across her forehead, and her exposed skin was sunburned dark. As she appeared in the city, Webster yelled that she had just escaped captivity to the citizens in the street. She had been wandering for several days and had no knowledge of the Council House Fight, or what had occurred there several days before. Webster was taken to John W. Smith's house and she and her daughter were fed. Then, five ladies, including Mrs. Jacques, Mrs. Elliot, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Higginbotham, and Mrs. Maverick bathed Mrs. Webster, and took care of her for the next several weeks. During this time, she told these ladies about where she had come from and what had happened to her before captivity.²⁰⁵

Webster, her husband, their four children, and two African Americans came to Texas from Virginia in 1838, and in August of that year traveled to their newly built home northwest of Austin. Just north of their home they camped one night at Brushy

²⁰³ Mayhall, *Indian Wars*, 25.

²⁰⁴ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 27. Further evidence that the remaining captives were divided among the families of San Antonio is found in McLeod to Lamar, August 28, 1840, *Lamar Papers*, No. 1874, Vol. III, 439.

²⁰⁵ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 33.

Creek, where a party of Penateka Comanche attacked them. All of the men were killed in the ensuing battle, and Webster as well as her ten- and two-year-old children were captured. Her “infant was taken from her arms and its brains dashed out on a tree, and her second child was killed.” Both Webster and her son, Booker, were tied to horses. Webster had “held her child of two years so tightly and pled for it so piteously that the Indians left it with her.” The three were taken into the mountains, where Booker was stripped and shaved and adopted into the family of an old woman who had recently lost her child. Soon after their arrival, Booker came down with “brain fever” or meningitis, and his new mother nursed him back to health. The Indians had allowed Webster to keep her daughter but had prohibited any contact with her son, Booker. The Indians worked Webster and made her cook and stake out the tribe’s ponies. Maverick claims she was beaten, but new scholars have questioned the authenticity of this accusation, citing the lack of evidence.²⁰⁶ After approximately nineteen months of captivity, Webster was finally able to escape. She learned of the Comanche’s proximity to San Antonio, and after a long day’s work she slipped away under the cover of night with her daughter on her back.

Some ethnocentric scholars have pointed to Webster and her two children’s captivity to explain Matilda Lockhart’s claims of the presence of other white captives among the Penateka Comanche. They have pointed out that Matilda was unaware that Webster and her daughter had already escaped their captivity, and therefore when the chiefs told the Texians in the Council House that there were no other American captives,

²⁰⁶ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 183.

they were telling the truth.²⁰⁷ But there is a major flaw in this argument. One, what about Booker Webster? He did not escape with his mother and sister and still remained with his Comanche captors. The only way this argument can be substantiated is if he was held by Penatekas outside of this group negotiating with the Texians in March of 1840, but this is not true. After further talks, the Texians were able to secure his release from these same Penatekas.²⁰⁸

Another unusual event related to the Council House Fight that was recorded by Mary Maverick concerned Dr. Weideman. Weideman, a bystander of the Council House Fight, had witnessed the day's events, and helped many of the Texian wounded in that violent encounter. He was a Russian sent to Texas by the emperor of Russia to find and report anything and everything he saw, including the vegetation and animals present in the territory. Maverick claimed the doctor recovered two Indian skulls and two entire bodies, victims of the Council House Fight, to preserve as specimen skeletons. He boiled the parts to clean off the bones, and dumped the water and remaining fleshy parts in the ditch that provided water for that part of the community. Since that was illegal, other citizens protested and he was arrested. In the end, Weideman was only forced to pay a fine.²⁰⁹

The Comanche were outraged at the events that took place that day in San Antonio. They considered their ambassadors immune from acts of war, and their view of the Texians worsened.²¹⁰ In the days and weeks following the Council House Fight, the

²⁰⁷ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 182.

²⁰⁸ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 27.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²¹⁰ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 183.

Texians and the Comanche each worked to free their captives held by the other group. The subsequent events lead to the redemption of several people, but the long term consequences of these actions eventually lead to the downfall of the domination of the Comanche people on the Plains of Texas.

On March 28, shortly after Webster's escape, a party of two to three hundred Penateka Comanche rode to the edge of San Antonio under the leadership of Isamini.²¹¹ He and another young warrior entered the town and brazenly rode into the public square. Dressed in full war paint, Isamini was almost completely naked, to the alarm of San Antonio's residents. The pair rode about brazenly, "offering fight and heaping abuse and insults upon the Americans."²¹² They proceeded down Commerce Street and then stopped in front of Black's Saloon, where Isamini "shouted defiance, he rose in his stirrups, shook his clenched fist, raved, and foamed at the mouth, according to one observer."²¹³ Probably nervous, and a little bit scared, the citizens of the town informed the Indians through an interpreter that the soldiers were stationed just outside of San Antonio all the way down the river at the San José Mission. Isamini and his braves then departed the city for the old Spanish mission.²¹⁴

Lt. Col. William S. Fisher had turned over his command to Capt. William D. Redd after his injury in the Council House days before, and Redd remained the Frontier

²¹¹ Alternative spellings include Isomania.

²¹² Maverick, *Memoirs*, 31.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Stephen L. Moore, *Savage Frontier, Volume III: Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, 1840-1841* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2007), 60-61.

Regiments' leader while Fisher tried to recover.²¹⁵ Captain Redd had come to Texas from Georgia with Mirabeau B. Lamar years earlier and was a Revolutionary veteran. When Isamini and other Comanche warriors approached San Jose Mission, Redd informed the Penatekas that there was a twelve day truce he must abide by, but that if they wished to return after that date he would be happy to oblige, because "we burn to fight you."²¹⁶ Isamini called Redd a liar and a coward as well as other insults, and he lingered around the outside of the mission for a while. It was hard to restrain the soldiers of the Frontier Regiment, and many were ordered into the mission church, where they were locked up and guarded to keep them from fighting the Indians on their own.²¹⁷

Inside the town, Lysander Wells, a non-commissioned officer, heard of these events and wrote Redd a letter personally insulting him and calling him a coward for not fighting the Indians. Adding to the insult, the letter was signed by several others, and upon receiving it, Redd challenged Wells to a duel. About this time, Lt. Col. Fisher decided to remove his force from the mission, and relocate them to the Alamo inside San Antonio. Now in closer proximity, Redd was able to challenge Wells, and they met at six in the morning where the Ursuline Convent stood in the late nineteenth century.²¹⁸ As a result of their duel, both men were fatally wounded. Redd was shot in the head and died immediately, while Wells was shot near his heart and died two weeks later. It was a sad loss for the Frontier Regiment. Both men had fought in the battle of San Jacinto, Wells

²¹⁵ Information found in a letter from Fisher to different newspapers alludes to the injuries he obtained from falling from a horse and not from the Council House Fight. Moore, *Savage Frontier III*, 60.

²¹⁶ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 31.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Moore, *Savage Frontier III*, 32.

as a cavalry leader and Redd as an infantryman. They were buried just outside the Catholic cemetery in San Antonio, in what is now known as Milam Square.²¹⁹

Some of these events are called to question upon reading Fisher's letter to a newspaper in which he reported on the day's events. He described Isamini as "well known...and sustains a great reputation for bravery."²²⁰ He discussed Isamini's desire to work with the Texians for peace and even cited a story told to him by the chief. Isamini, in an apparent attempt to prove his desire for peace, told Fisher he had killed a warrior who was trying to "excite the Comanches to offensive measures" the night before, after a council meeting of the Indians.²²¹ Fisher's discussion of the chief in such a friendly manner refutes Mary Maverick's descriptions of Isamini as a crazed war-hungry savage looking to fight, and causing the death of both Wells and Redd. The fact that the citizens felt fearful of Isamini's entrance into town can be easily understood by his appearance alone. Perhaps the people of San Antonio feared retaliation for the events of several days earlier, and pointed the Indians away from them and to the soldiers outside of town. If Isamini was really looking to fight, why would he have left the other several hundred warriors outside of the town? But it was Mary Maverick herself that provided another motive for the duel, and subsequent death, of both Wells and Redd. Apparently Wells had mocked Redd's relationship with a young woman who had traveled suspiciously to Texas with him from Georgia dressed as a young man. This explanation seems a more

²¹⁹ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 32. It is not know for certain why they were buried there.

²²⁰ *Telegraph and Texas Register*, April 22, 1840.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

plausible and deeply personal reason why he was willing to fight and defend both his and her honor.²²²

The events of the next few weeks in and outside San Antonio have conflicting accounts left by both Mary Maverick, in her now published memoirs, and in the report left by Captain George T. Howard in his letter to Lieutenant Colonel Fisher, on April 6, 1840.²²³ While both accounts describe the negotiations between the Comanche and the Texians, in the days following the Council House Fight, they diverge on some of the exact details. Because Captain Howard was more closely related to the negotiations, his account is relied on more heavily for piecing together the events of April of 1840, and the Texians attempts to recover all of the American hostages still held by the Penatekas.

On April 3, 1840, two Indians, a chief and a woman, came into San Antonio, calling out to the Americans.²²⁴ Howard described the male Indian as Pivia, who was “well known as a crafty and treacherous Comanche of some influence.”²²⁵ Pivia proposed a prisoner exchange in accordance with the agreed upon twelve-day truce, and informed the Americans that approximately twenty warriors were holding these Americans just outside of town. Howard told Pivia to bring in the Texian prisoners and an exchange of one prisoner for another would ensue. Lieutenant Colonel Fisher, still

²²² Maverick, *Memoirs*, 32. Maverick further explains that after Redd’s death, his marriage license to this young lady, and expressions of his love for her, were found in letters to family members found in Redd’s pockets, apparently proving his legitimate union to this woman.

²²³ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 32; Letter from Captain George T. Howard to Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher, April 6, 1840, John Salmon Ford, “*Memoirs*,” 7 vols., MS, Texas State Library, Archives Division, Austin, Texas, 2:229.

²²⁴ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 35.

²²⁵ Letter from Captain George T. Howard to Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher, April 6, 1840, John Salmon Ford, “*Memoirs*,” 2:29.

confined to a bed, ordered Captain Howard into San Antonio on April 5, 1840.²²⁶

Howard, now temporarily in command, brought Capt. James January's Company F and Capt. John Kennymore's Company C to town in order to secure the release of the other American captives.²²⁷

After further negotiation, it was decided that Damasio and Antonio Perez would be sent with the Comanche to their camp to continue the talks.²²⁸ These two San Antonio citizens were put in charge of an Indian woman and a nine-year-old to be exchanged for two Texian prisoners. Roughly an hour later, Damasio and Antonio returned to San Antonio with two redeemed captives. One was the five- or six-year-old daughter of Mr. Putnam, of the Guadalupe, and a Mexican child, approximately twelve years old and unknown to the Texians. Young Elizabeth Putnam was captured when she was only two, and had been adopted by a Comanche mother, for whom she continued to cry. According to Maverick, she could not speak any English, and appeared to be mistreated, with "many bruises and her nose was burnt partly off."²²⁹ Maverick also describes the prisoner exchange in her memoirs, and claims Booker L. Webster, was released at this time, but Captain Howard's letter to Fisher says his release did not come about until later.²³⁰

Fifteen minutes after Damasio and Antonio returned to San Antonio, Pivia followed with two more Texian captives. One was a boy taken from San Antonio in

²²⁶ It is disputed whether or not Fisher was still injured from a fall off of a horse, or from the Council House Fight. *Telegraph and Texas Register*, April 22, 1840.

²²⁷ Letter from Captain George T. Howard to Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher, April 6, 1840, John Salmon Ford, "*Memoirs*," 2:229.

²²⁸ According to Maverick, *Memoirs*, 35, and contrary to Captain Howard's letter to Fisher, she reports the Texians did not go back with the Comanche to their camp, but gave them "bread, piloncillos [brown sugar], beef," and agreed to talk later.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²³⁰ Letter from Captain George T. Howard to Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher, April 6, 1840, John Salmon Ford, "*Memoirs*," 2:229.

1836, and the second was a little girl taken from a ranch near Goliad in 1838 or 1839. In exchange, Pivia seemed anxious to get a particular female held by the Texians. But after seeing her value, the Texians refused to release the woman, hoping to use her as leverage to secure the release of the other captives still held by the Penatekas. Howard noted in his letter that they knew the Comanche still held at least five more captives.²³¹ During previous negotiations, an American boy, a Mexican girl, and three Mexican boys had been presented to the Texians.²³² Maverick reported the incident slightly differently. She said that the woman Pivia in which was interested had a broken arm and was the widow of a chief killed in the Council House. She was highly desired because she owned many mules. According to Maverick, she refused to go with Pivia, and the Texians honored her wishes and told Pivia he had to choose someone else. In the end, he departed, unhappily, with another Comanche woman, a child, and a blind Indian the Texians had thrown into the deal to help satisfy Pivia's desires.²³³ As an observer of the events that were taking place in San Antonio, it is likely Maverick simply recorded what she thought she had observed, and her observations may be only partly true.

Before Pivia departed, it was agreed that the Texians would send two more representatives to the Comanche camp to select two more prisoners to bring home. In return, Pivia would be able to choose two more Indian captives (save the one woman) to be released. Dr. Shields Booker and Cornelius Van Ness, accompanied by Captain

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Apparently the three other Putnam children were with other bands of Comanche, because they were not a part of the prisoners presented to the Texians. Moore, *Savage Frontier III*, 40.

²³³ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 35-36.

Howard and several other armed and mounted citizens, proceeded to Pivia's camp.²³⁴

About three hundred yards from their encampment, Pivia and Isamini, as well as five or six young warriors, met the Texians. The warriors strung their bows and with arms ready the Texians were shown five prisoners. Talks lasted nearly an hour, "during which [they] were almost at blows."²³⁵ Finally, Isamini agreed to release an American boy (Webster's son, Booker), a Mexican girl, and one other captive. According to Maverick, Booker's head was shaved and "painted Indian style."²³⁶ Booker reportedly told the Texians that the Comanche had murdered captives after they received news of the events at the Council House.²³⁷

The delegations returned to San Antonio, and the exchange ensued. Afterwards, Howard talked to Pivia about the remaining captives the Comanche still held, and he tried to negotiate their release in exchange for all of the remaining Indian prisoners. Pivia assured the Texians that "he was a friend of the Americans," but warned them that "a portion of the Comanches wanted to fight." Howard responded that the Texians were "willing to make peace or war, and if they wished war, [they] were ready, and upon the first manifestation of hostilities on their part, [they] should save them the trouble of coming so far to attack [them], but would march [the] men up to their houses and fight them there." Before leaving, Pivia told Captain Howard that he was still "determined to

²³⁴ Dr. Shields Booker served in the Texas Army in San Jacinto and had treated the wounded during the 1839 Cherokee War. Cornelius Van Ness, previously of Vermont, had once served as secretary of legation for his father, the United States minister to Spain from 1829 to 1837. In 1837, he and his brother, George, had moved to San Antonio, where he had been appointed District Attorney of the Fourth Judicial District. Moore, *Savage Frontier III*, 38.

²³⁵ Letter from Captain George T. Howard to Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher, April 6, 1840, John Salmon Ford, "*Memoirs*," 2:229.

²³⁶ Maverick, *Memoirs*, 35.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*; as well as information from Moore, *Savage Frontier III*, 38, defines the majority of the information from this paragraph.

obtain” a particular female, and that he would do his best to buy the remaining American prisoners from other Comanche bands and bring them to San Antonio to exchange. Pivia claimed he was fearful that the Penatekas did not have enough captives to trade for the release of all the Indian captives still held by the Texians. But Howard assured the chief that the Texians would “receive runaway negroes” as well in order to make an exchange.²³⁸

In Howard’s letter to Fisher, he wrote, “I do not think any reliance is to be placed in their word.” He repeated the redeemed prisoners’ story that even while negotiations were underway, the Comanche were still planning to rob the army’s horse herd at the San Jose Mission. Howard told Fisher that if and when this proposed future exchange took place, and Howard was certain no more Texians were being held captive, that he would talk to Piava about the return of mules and horses the Comanche had stolen from the citizens of San Antonio. Howard was right to question the sincerity of Pivia’s desire to return, because no more recorded prisoner exchanges took place between these two groups.²³⁹

Following these events the regulars of the Frontier Regiment in San Antonio, who had previously had a good record, became quite unruly. In May, Pvt. John Robinson of Captain Howard’s Company C committed “an indignity” to a female Comanche captive, who had lost her husband, a chief, during the Council House Fight. As a result, Colonel Burleson ordered a court martial, and Robinson was whipped, his head shaved, and

²³⁸ Letter from Captain George T. Howard to Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher, April 6, 1840, John Salmon Ford, *Memoirs*, 2:229.

²³⁹ Letter from Captain George T. Howard to Lieutenant Colonel William S. Fisher, April 6, 1840, John Salmon Ford, *Memoirs*, 2:229.

driven out of camp on May 20th after being tarred and feathered. Not only had there been a duel that resulted in the death of two men, and a court martial, but there was also a mutiny. Many of the soldiers were mad because they had not been paid and angry they had not been stationed, as promised, at points on the frontier where they could cultivate land that would be given to them at the end of their enlistments. Apparently the mutiny was serious enough that Captain Woodhouse's Travis Guards from Austin were rushed to San Antonio to support the commander of the Frontier Regiment. Fortunately there were enough soldiers who still followed orders, and the mutiny was unsuccessful. As a result, five of the leading mutineers were jailed and two deserters were shot during the course of the actual mutiny.²⁴⁰

The Council House Fight has been described as a great blunder of the Texians by many scholars, but the events of March 19, 1840 are much too complicated for such a simple explanation. Many events, beginning with the first Euroamerican entrance into Texas, contributed to the overall mindset present in San Antonio during March of 1840. While hindsight might indicate the Texians' faults, the Comanche's inconsistencies and hostility against the colonists played an equal role in the deterioration of events that led up to the Council House Fight. If this battle had not taken place here, it would have somewhere else, and the beginning of the end for the Comanche's dominance of the plains of Texas would have just been delayed a little longer. A violent clash between these two groups was inevitable, and the Council House simply served as its arena!

²⁴⁰ This paragraph's info is in Moore, *Savage Frontier III*, 61.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE COUNCIL HOUSE FIGHT, AND THE COMANCHE'S FALL FROM DOMINANCE

Immediately following the Council House Fight the frontier was quiet, and there were no major raids or fights between the Texians and the Comanche. Though the Texians expected a large reprisal attack from the Penatekas, there were only a few small skirmishes. The Comanche had lost several of their principal leaders, and because their leadership does not hold hereditary power, some scholars have argued that perhaps it took time to regroup and reelect their leaders. But though the frontier appeared eerily quiet, it did not stay that way for long. The Texians were unaware of a large group of five hundred, possibly as large as one thousand Comanche, that gathered in July of 1840 under the leadership of a young chief, Potsanaquahip (Buffalo Hump).²⁴¹ Traveling with the warriors were their families, and several Kiowa and Mexican guides. Just one month later, the Texians would experience the Great Comanche Raid of 1840, “the boldest and most concerted Indian depredation in the history of Texas.” This series of events included “two of the bloodiest and most significant Indian battles Texas ever witnessed.”²⁴²

Knowing the Comanche would likely seek revenge for the Council House Fight occurring just weeks before, Secretary of War Branch T. Archer called for the formation

²⁴¹ Frederick Wilkins, *The Legend Begins: The Texas Rangers, 1823-1845* (Austin: State House Press, 1996), 80; F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 175; Ron Tyler et al., eds., “Comanche Indians“, *The New Handbook of Texas*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 2:242-245.

²⁴²Donaly Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid: The Boldest Indian Attack of the Texas Republic* (Austin: Eakin Publishers, 1987), 1.

of additional militia companies.²⁴³ After several weeks and no retaliatory attacks, the volunteers dispersed just before the expected raid actually materialized. In August, the Comanche moved virtually unnoticed south through the settlements to Victoria, Texas. On August 6, 1840, the Comanche were seen on the edge of town and were mistakenly identified as a friendly tribe of Lipans. Because the Indians were able to travel so far without being noticed, no warning had come to the citizens of the town. The Comanche attacked and killed a number of people, including several slaves in the fields. The attacking Indians also captured over fifteen hundred horses and mules, and left immediately for the coast. On August 8, they arrived in Linnville, Texas, a major port city for that part of the Republic. The Comanche were able to surround the town, killing two black men and a large number of cattle in the fields. They also burned and looted several stores, warehouses, and homes in Linnville. Surprised by the attack, citizens of the port fled to boats just offshore in order to survive the raid. Just as they had in Victoria, the Comanche escaped with a number of horses, mules, and a few captives. The attack resulted in the virtual destruction of Linnville, which never again regained prominence and later vanished due to the emergence of nearby Port Lavaca, Texas.²⁴⁴

Several days after the raid on Linnville, on August 12, 1840, Texian forces, including volunteers under Major General Felix Huston, and Tonkawan auxiliaries led by Placido defeated the Comanche at Plum Creek. Many notable figures were present at this fight, including Colonel Edward Burlison, Captain Matthew Caldwell, and Texas

²⁴³ Sam Houston Dixon, *Romance and Tragedy of Texas History* (Houston: Texas Historical Publishing Company, 1924), 266.

²⁴⁴ Tyler, "Comanche Indians", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:242-245.

Rangers led by Ben McCulloch. Following this victory, John H. Moore led an expedition against the Comanche on the upper Colorado River, where all Indians were either killed or captured. In the end, the Comanche lost most of their plunder from their raids on Victoria and Linnville, including the horses, cattle, and mules they had stolen. The defeat of the Comanche also frustrated any possible future Mexican plans to use the Indians of Texas as allies in any campaigns to retake the land they lost in 1836. After the 1840 raid, the only major depredation made by the Comanche was carried out against Mexicans in the states of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon. This last raid was regarded by many Texians as confirmation of a Mexican and Comanche alliance, and proof that the Indians were angry that Mexico had failed to support them as promised in their raids on Victoria and Linnville.²⁴⁵

It is probable that the Mexicans played a large role in the Comanche's decision to raid Victoria and Linnville, Texas. In late May 1840, Texian officials discovered that General Valentin Canalizo, the Mexican commander at Matamoros, again was trying to incite the Indians to make war on the Texians. The Mexican decision to meet with the Comanche was influenced by the fact that the Cherokee, whom they had previously talked with, no longer resided within Texas by 1840. It was not by chance that the Indians choose Victoria and Linnville as targets for their raids; attacking these communities served the general interest of Mexican conspirators as well as Indians.

²⁴⁵ Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 4; Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 176; Tyler, "Comanche Indians", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:242-245.; General Huston to Archer, August 12, 1840, in *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives Fifth Congress*, 141-43; Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 57; Samuel Houston Dixon, *Romance and Tragedy of Texas History; Being a Record of Many Thrilling Events in Texas History Under Spanish, Mexican and Anglo-Saxon Rule*, (Houston: Texas Historical Publishing Company, 1924), 268-269; Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 62.

General Canalizo's plan to recapture Texas required the thousands of horses and mules that the Comanche could take, as well as plunder from the well stocked warehouses in Linnville. Just as important, if not more so, was the targeting of Victoria by the Centralists of Mexico. Motivated by domestic conflicts within Mexico between the Federalists and the ruling party of Centralists, the latter sought to punish Victoria's role in a previous failed revolution.²⁴⁶ The revolution had erupted in northern Mexico when the federalist leaders of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila broke away from the Centralist government and organized a confederation known as the Republic of the Rio Grande. After a major defeat at the Battle of Santa Rita de Morelos on March 24 – 25, 1840, the revolutionaries were driven into the Republic of Texas.²⁴⁷ In Texas, the newly formed confederation made their headquarters at Victoria, where they asked for refuge and aid. Though Texas never officially granted the confederation recognition, many citizens openly embraced the Federalists. The Republic of the Rio Grande received supplies and recruited volunteers in the town, and because of its proximity many of these goods came through Linnville. And despite the casualty numbers, Donaly Brice, the foremost scholar of the Great Comanche Raid in 1840, points out that "During the raid, the Comanche very cautiously avoided a fight. They seemed to be interested in the plunder taken on their foray."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Cornelius Van Ness to Mirabeau Lamar, March 20, 1840, *Lamar Papers*, 5:413.

²⁴⁷ A battle was fought in 1839 between Centralist forces under General Mariano Arista and the forces of General Antonio Canales of the Republic of the Rio Grande. Arista won the battle and forced the government of the short-lived republic into exile. Tyler, "Antonio Canales", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 1:954-955.

²⁴⁸ Brice, *The Great Comanche Raid*, 59-61.

The amount of Mexican involvement in the Comanche raids on Victoria and Linnville in the late summer of 1840 is questioned by some scholars. Gary Clayton Anderson in his book, *The Conquest of Texas: The Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*, addresses this conspiracy only briefly, and instead insists it was the Comanche themselves that sought revenge. He states, for the Comanche, that honor dictated that the men lost during the Council House Fight must be avenged. They realized they were out gunned and needed weaponry sufficient to face the Texian's arsenal, and therefore they raided Texian stockpiles.²⁴⁹

Anderson does effectively demonstrate how the Council House fight reshaped Comanche relations with some of their rivals on the Great Plains. Indian trade was not good at this time, according to Anderson, because the economy had collapsed. In the mid-1830's Auguste P. Chouteau had brought the Comanche some muskets, but he had died in 1838, and his trading post had closed a year later.²⁵⁰ The depression of the late 1830's had driven Holland Coffee back into Texas, and by 1840, he was a member of the Republic's legislature, and out of the trade business.²⁵¹ The best option available to the Comanche for trade was Bent's Fort on the Upper Arkansas River, near La Junta, Colorado.²⁵² But the Bent brothers had strong ties with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians, both avowed enemies of the Comanche, which made it impossible to approach

²⁴⁹Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: The Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 185-186.

²⁵⁰Colonel Auguste P. Chouteau helped establish a trading post in present-day Cleveland County, Oklahoma, and developed alongside it was the frontier military post known as Camp Holmes. Tyler, "Coffee's Station", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:188.

²⁵¹ Holland Coffee operated a trading post known as Coffee's Trading Post, at occupied different locations along the Red River. Tyler, "Coffee's Station", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:188.

²⁵² Built in the early 1830's by brothers Charles and William Bent. Tyler, "Adobe Walls", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 1:35.

their post. Therefore in the summer of 1840, following the Council House Fight, a delegation of Penateka Comanche and some Kiowa Indians invited the Cheyenne and Arapaho to a peace council, in order to gain friendship and access to trade goods they needed.²⁵³

The ensuing meeting was very large, drew great curiosity from the inhabitants inside the adobe walls of Bent Fort, and was well documented. For two days the groups just sat and smoked, developing confidence and trust in the other, as their cultural traditions dictated. The ceremonies that followed led to fictive kinship adoptions, gift exchanges, and created familial bonds. Once firmly in each others' good graces, the Comanche asked their new friends for guns, blankets, and kettles, in exchange for a large number of horses. The Cheyenne introduced their new friends to the Bent brothers and trade began, and Bent's Fort as well as two others along the Arkansas River became a new source of munitions and supplies for the Comanche.²⁵⁴ As further proof of this new alliance, in the fall the Bents secured a license at St. Louis in order to trade legally with the Comanche, Kiowa, and Plains Apaches, but the Comanche had already disbanded and headed south with their new goods. Though the amount of Mexican involvement in the Comanche's plans to raid the Texas cities of Victoria and Linnville is questionable, it is likely they did play a part in the Indian's planning and execution. But without question, it can be deduced that the Comanche themselves were motivated enough to explore other options to wage war on the Texians. The "treaty marked the beginning of a lasting

²⁵³ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 186-187.

²⁵⁴ One of these other two Forts later became known as Adobe Walls. Tyler, "Adobe Walls", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 1:35.

alliance of Southern Plains Indians that came as a direct result of the events in San Antonio.”²⁵⁵

The disastrous effects of the Council House Fight had great consequences for each of the major parties involved. The Great Comanche Raid was the last major Comanche attack on the Republic of Texas. While minor skirmishes and depredations continued, the success of the Texians against their Comanche enemies eventually helped accelerate westward movement and create a more stable environment in which they could build their homes and raise their families. But in the shorter term, the death of the many Comanche chiefs proved to be a potentially disastrous consequence for the Texians trying to secure the existence of their newly formed Republic. Lacking funds, and worldwide legitimacy, Texians sought recognition to secure foreign loans for their emerging government. But when news of the Council House Fight reached leaders in Europe, their outrage greatly complicated loan procurement negotiations. General James Hamilton, Commissioner of the Republic in Europe, told Abner S. Lipscomb, Secretary of State, in a letter on July 28, 1840, that these killings were unforgivable, and when combined with other events, the Texians’ actions simply troubled the European diplomats too much.²⁵⁶

As for the Comanche, after the events of 1840, their future in Texas was bleak compared to what it had been before the American arrived. In 1845, the Republic of Texas was annexed by the United States government, which took over the administration of Indian affairs in the state. In 1849, the United States Army built a line of forts along

²⁵⁵ Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 187.

²⁵⁶ James Howard to Abner Lipscomb, July 28, 1840, Secretary of State Diplomatic Correspondence – Letter Books, Texas State Library and Archives.

the frontier to help better protect the citizens of Texas. In 1854 a twenty-three thousand acre reservation on the Clear Fork of the Brazos was established with just over three-hundred and fifty Penatekas in residence. With little interest, or skill, in farming, the reservation system made little sense for a hunter-gatherer people, and many Comanche continued to roam the frontier. Finally in 1859, the reservation system in Texas failed for the Comanche and they were relocated to Indian Territory near Anadarko, where they were assigned to the Wichita Agency.²⁵⁷ Following the Civil War, in 1867, the last treaty between the United States and the Comanche, the Treaty of Medicine Lodge Creek, was signed, and a reservation for the Comanche, Kiowa, and Kiowa-Apache was established in the southwestern part of Indian Territory. But problems continued, and the Comanche continued to make raids into Texas from their homes on the reservations in Oklahoma. In 1874, the Red River War began in a successful effort to drive all the Indians permanently into the Indian Territory and onto the reservations established for them by the United States.²⁵⁸

The 1875 United States Reservation Census sadly demonstrated that the Comanche people had dwindled to a mere 1,597 people. Their cultural values were constantly under attack, and their lifestyles were changing from those of hunters and warriors into farmers and stockmen. Unable to subsist on their own on the reservation, the Comanche badly needed support from the government. But by 1901, the reservation

²⁵⁷ The Wichita Agency was reestablished in 1871 on the north bank of the Washita River across from the site of the city of Anadarko, Oklahoma. In 1878 the Kiowa-Comanche Agency at Fort Sill was consolidated with the Wichita Agency at Anadarko, and in the fall of 1879 the Kiowas, Comanches, and Kiowa-Apaches at Fort Sill moved there. The new agency, was known as the Kiowa-Comanche Agency. Tyler, "Indian Relations", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 3:832-836.

²⁵⁸ Tyler, "Comanche Indians", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:242-245.

system came to an end when the remaining land was announced, promising each man, woman, and child a one-hundred and sixty acre allotment. Many Indians recognized that under this new system that they would lose much of their land, which they did, and they protested its enactment. Seeking jobs, and economic opportunity, many Comanche later left their allotments for greater opportunities in the city.²⁵⁹ Today, the Comanche Nation claims an enrolled tribal membership of 13,679 people, and they are strong and proud. Based at Lawton, Oklahoma, the Comanche Nation still celebrates its traditions and history in a large annual convention.²⁶⁰

The Council House Fight was one battle of many that occurred during the untraditional war fought between the American settlers and the Indians in what was to become the state of Texas. The central if not dominant threat to the existence and growth of American settlement in the Republic were the Comanche people, and vice versa. So after years of mutual resistance, distrust, and failed negotiations, which actually began long before the Americans came to Texas, it is no wonder that the events leading up to the Council House Fight deteriorated so quickly. Each group had their own valid motivations, and no one was more at fault than the other. In the context of past failures and violence, both groups had the right to be cautious and to defend themselves accordingly. An analysis of these cultural misconceptions reveals an arrogance and ignorance of each other that resulted in many raids, skirmishes, and atrocities committed across the Texas frontier, including the death of over forty people on March 19, 1840, at

²⁵⁹ Tyler, "Comanche Indians", *The New Handbook of Texas*, 2:242-245.

²⁶⁰ *The Comanche Nation*, "History", (Lawton, Oklahoma: The Comanche Nation), <<<http://www.comacnhenation.com/>>>, (accessed October 20, 2007).

the Council House in San Antonio.²⁶¹ The Long term consequences of this troubled relationship, including what happened at the Council House Fight, proved to be dangerous to both parties. While the Comanche lost autonomy and had to look to their enemies for support, the Texians lost their ability to strengthen their precious Republic when outraged Europeans refused to financial support.

²⁶¹ Hugh McLeod's Official Report of the Council House Fight to Mirabeau B. Lamar, March 20, 1840, A. J. Houston Papers, Texas State Library and Archives.

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