Irish progenitors of Texas

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“THE IRISH PROGENITORS OF TEXAS”

An Unwritten Story of Early Days in Texas, Which Deals
With the Adventures and Experiences of Colonists, Who
Came From Ireland to Find New Homes and Freedom in a
Land Untrampled and Unhampered By Tyrannical Rule.

(EDITOR’S NOTE—In presenting this story of early Texas days, we believe we
are adding some new and interesting facts to the already glorious history of Texas.
No little effort has been exerted in ferreting out the facts upon which the story is
based, and, while some of the incidents related have all of the ear-marks of mytholog­
ical impossibility, even to the extent that they stagger credulity, as the writer says,
they are only amazing because they have not before been told. The old documents
which are reproduced in connection with the story, shedding as they do a flood of
light upon the days when things were young in Texas, have, we think, a rare his­
torical value.)

WITHIN the narrow confines of San Patricio and Refugio coun­
ties, which border the Texas coast immediately north of the
city of Corpus Christi, in the far gone days of yester years have
been enacted some of the most thrilling events that adorn the
pages of the yet untold history of Texas; events that tell a story of
patriotism, perseverance and fortitude that finds no parallel in the annals of
any nation, things that almost stagger credulity.

Texas boasts of a history which for its splendid achievements and
noble examples has not yet been approached in any quarter of the world
in ages past. Her Alamo, her Goliad, and her San Jacinto will remain
forever fresh and green in memory’s book for generations yet unborn to
conjure with. Men may come and men may go but the sacred recollec­
tion of Texas heroes and their deeds will live on forever.

But as thrilling and as inspiring as were those achievements of Texas
heroes which, told in song and story, are as familiar to the student of history
as Bunker Hill or Gettysburg, the half has never yet been told. For there
is a story of early Texas days which, though yet untold, challenges even
the gruesome sacredness of the Alamo and the magnificent glories of
San Jacinto. An astonishing declaration? Yes, so it is, but let the reader
suspend judgment until he has heard the story. Let him first consider
this; that there are worse things in life than death, that it is sometimes
easier to die than live, and that death which rescues men from torture and
sin is often a blessing in disguise.

Men will fight and die for a flag. Yes, for that emblem of home
and motherland will they walk forth to the cannon’s mouth, into the
very jaws of death, and when “all gashed and gory and stretched upon
the cumbered plain,” as their life’s blood slowly ebbs its fitful course, smile
and sing because the nation has been saved. What is it? It is what we
call patriotism; it is that sublime emotion which, tuned and pitched on high
by martial stir of fife and drum, drives men to death. When they die
monuments are erected to their memory; they are called patriots.

But there was a day in Texas when no flag unloosed its folds to the
breeze, when no martial music roused the souls of men, and yet there
were men who fought and died and yet more lived, to preserve the homes
they had built in a foreign land.

Listen to the story. It is a story of men who followed “the sign of
the cross” into the wildness of the wilderness, and under its protecting
arms laid the foundation upon which civilization might erect her temple magnificent and where government might take her seat.

If there is one institution which more than any other has inspired men to great things in the world's history, that institution is religion. For government men will suffer, for home and native land they will die, but for religion they will live lives of never-ending torture, when death would be as but a refuge for the weary soul. This unwritten story of Texas tells of men whose lives were a monument to a religion, men who followed "the sign of the cross" to a foreign land, and there lived and died beneath its shadow that their children's children might enjoy the exalted state of personal liberty and religious freedom which is vouchsafed to all mankind in Texas today.

More than two hundred years ago, when the ownership of Texas was an undetermined question between France and Spain, the latter nation set herself to a plan whereby she hoped to indelibly stamp the likeness of herself and her institutions upon the disputed territory that its possession would drift to her as a matter of course. In that day and time, even as today, the supremest institution of authority and power in Spain was the Roman Catholic church. It was the life blood of the State no less than the vitalizing influence of its people. It looked to the Holy Church for the solution of its social and political problems. It was the foundation upon which the nation had been established, and it was likewise looked to for the means of extending the nation's power.

The plan which Spain adopted to effectually and permanently establish her authority in Texas was, therefore, conceived in religion. Franciscan friars were sent from Spain and Mexico, then a Spanish province, into Texas, and by the close of the eighteenth century they had erected a chain of missions from the Sabine river on the east to the Rio Grande on the south. This era is commonly known in Texas history as the "Mission Period." In the year 1790, when the completion of the mission of "Our Lady of Refuge" at Refugio brought this period to a close, Texas, then spelled Tejas, was firmly annexed to Catholic Spain, both religiously and politically.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, aside from a handful of soldiers of fortune, who had drifted to Texas in search of quick wealth and buried treasure, there were, practically speaking, no white men in Texas. Meanwhile, Mexico grew, prospered and became powerful. Her people wearied of the rule of the mother country and longed for independence. In the year 1823, the power of Spain was overthrown and the Republic of Mexico was born.

Conscious of new-found power, and exalted even to the point of arrogancy, the new republic forthwith began to cherish the dream of empire. There to the northward was that great wilderness called Tejas, with her marvelous resources and possibilities which, though now smoldering in dormancy, needed but the trade winds of colonization to fan them into a consuming flame. And that land Mexico decided should be the scene of the exploitation of her dream. She would hold out enticing inducements to such new-comers as might fit her fancy and fulfill the obligations she might impose, and she would hold them in safe subjection by compelling their obedience to stringent laws which would insure the supremacy of Mexico forever.
In the prosecution of this colonization scheme the two fundamental conditions to which colonists had to subscribe, and to which all other considerations were made secondary, were that the colonists should (first) be of "the Catholic apostolic Roman religion," and (second) that they should swear allegiance to the Republic. As an inducement, the government promised to each colonist who would meet these conditions a grant of land. With a view of facilitating colonization, extravagant grants comprising thousands of acres were offered a few individuals who would assume the role of "empressarios" (colonizers), and undertake the task of inducing others to take advantage of the government's offer.

Two or three years after the birth of the Mexican Republic, four Irishmen came to Texas as agents for a number of Irish Catholic families who were dissatisfied with that condition of affairs at home which would not permit an adherent to the Catholic faith to own land, with a view of looking over the situation and investigating the opportunities for home-building in Texas. These Irishmen were James McGloin, John McMullen, James Power and James Hewetson. They were evidently pleased with the prospect, for they immediately proceeded to Saltillo, then the capital of the state known as Coahuila and Tejas, and made application to the governor for grants of land upon which they agreed to colonize several hundred Irish families who would, of course, be willing to subscribe to the conditions of the Mexican colonization law.

McGloin and McMullen received a grant of land located on the north bank of the Nueces river, about fifteen miles from its mouth, in the county now known as San Patricio, and Power and Hewetson secured a similar grant surrounding the Mission of Refugio, at the present site of the town of Refugio, the capital of Refugio county.

So far as it is possible to ascertain, the original application made to the Mexican government by McGloin and McMullen is not now extant, but we believe that the verbatim English copy of the application submitted by Power and Hewetson, which we are able to reproduce here- with, has a rare historical value as a commentary upon that early period of colonization in Texas. As far as an exhaustive investigation is able to show, this is the first time that such a document has been given to print. The application follows:

(Seal of the Executive of the State of Coahuila and Texas.)

Most Excellent Sir:—Don Santiago Hewetson, a Mexican citizen by law, a resident of Monclova, and at present in this capital, for himself and in the name of Don Santiago Power, an alien, a native of Ireland, with all due respect would represent to your excellency; that knowing that the littoral territory lying on the coast of the Mexican Gulf between the mouth of the Nueces river and that of Lavaca Creek, and from the Bay of Galveston at the mouth of the Trinity river to the Sabine, is vacant, and wishing to form thereon a colonization establishment with the families of the country and foreign from Ireland, I request that your excellency be pleased to admit the indicated project upon the following basis and conditions:

The territory being demarkated as has been indicated, including the ten littoral leagues, the designation of this colony shall come up to forty leagues on a line parallel with the Sabine river to the coast of the Mexican Gulf. These territories shall be settled within such term as may be
Church of "Our Lady of Refuge," at Refugio, Standing on the Ground Consecrated by the Historic Mission.
ascribed to me with four hundred industrious families of good moral character, of the Catholic apostolic Roman religion, one hundred of whom shall be Mexicans and the remainder Irish, for whose transportation a safe ship shall be procured on the account of the company. I do likewise offer to leave at the disposal of the government of the Mexican nation all those points that may be suitable for the construction of arsenals, fortifications and other public works conducive to the safety and integrity of the territory according to the judgment of competent officers appointed by said government. In all other cases I will subject myself with the new colony to the constitution and general laws of the nation, and to the constitution and particular laws of the State and other conditions and regulations upon colonization. Therefore, I pray that your excellency be pleased to admit this project and to grant me the favor I am claiming wherein I shall receive mercy. Saltillo, Sept. 29th, 1826.

(Signed) SANTIAGO HEWETSON,

Juan Antonio Padilla, Sec'y.

From the foregoing it will be observed that Power and Hewetson, in addition to the grant in the vicinity of the Mission of Refugio, also desired to colonize that large portion of Texas, known today as East Texas, from near the present site of Houston to the Sabine river, the eastern boundary of the State. In submitting the application to the president of the Republic, the governor of the State of Coahuila and Texas made the following statement, which is a correct English translation, and which tells why Power and Hewetson did not procure the desired grant:

"The littoral territory from the Bay of Galveston to the Sabine river and the frontier leagues on said river, which Citizen Hewetson intends to colonize, have been claimed with priority by Citizen Pedro Elias Bean (a colonel in the Mexican army), whose application I have returned to your excellency with a favorable recommendation by letter No. 33, of Sept. 18th last past. By virtue whereof and limiting myself to the application of the present empressario, I see no obstacle on the part of this government to permitting him to colonize the vacant littoral territory from the mouth of the Guadalupe river into the sea to the Lavaca creek, which is the territory accepted by the colonization law of August 18th, 1824, upon the terms and conditions expressed by him, provided that it be the pleasure of his excellency, the president, to approve the indicated project. God and Liberty. Oct. 2nd, 1826."

VICTOR BLANCO.

Juan Antonio Padilla, Sec'y.

In compliance with a later application, however, the Mexican government extended the Power and Hewetson grant from the Guadalupe river, its northern boundary, southward down the coast to the Nueces river. This concession was probably granted in lieu of the government's failure to provide the land Power and Hewetson asked for in East Texas.

Following are some of the conditions imposed by the Mexican government to which Power and Hewetson were compelled to agree in order to secure the government's approval of their project:

"Article 2. In view of the described territory, the empressarios remain obligated to introduce and settle on their own account two hundred instead of four hundred families which they offer, it being an expressed..."
condition that one-half of this contract shall be Mexican families and the rest alien families from Ireland.

"Article 4. Whenever any land may be required as useful and advantageous, owing to its locality and circumstances, for the construction of some fortress, wharf or store for the defense of the port or establishment of public administrations, the empressarios shall have no right to prevent the occupation of any lands or interesting point that it may be advantageous to take for any of the indicated objects, or any other not herein expressed.

"Article 6. The families, besides being Catholics, as the law requires, must be of good character, establishing these qualifications with certificates by the authorities of the country whence they come.

"Article 7. It is an obligation of the empressarios not to introduce or permit within their colony criminals, vagrants, or men of bad conduct. They shall cause all persons in such circumstances to leave their territory, and in case of resistance the armed force must be resorted to.

"Article 8. To this end whenever there shall be a sufficient number of men, the national civic militia shall be organized in full compliance with the law.

"Article 10. After the particular application of land to colonists and of premiums to the empressarios shall have been made, the government alone shall have power to dispose of the lands remaining vacant.

"Article 11. Official communication with the government or authorities in the State and all public instruments and deeds must be written in the Castillian language.

"Article 12. In all other cases not expressed in the article of the present contracts, the empressarios shall subject themselves to the general constitution and laws, and to the particular constitution and laws of the State.

"And his excellency the governor and attorney in the name of the empressarios having agreed to every one of the articles of the present covenant, obligated themselves reciprocally to punctual compliance herewith."
The lengthy document of which the foregoing articles comprise a part was signed by the proper officials of the Republic on the 11th day of June, 1828, and all obstacles to the coming of the Irish colonists were removed.

As has already been stated, the original papers of negotiation between McGloin and McMullen and the Mexican government are not now extant, but inasmuch as the transaction was contemporaneous with that of Power and Hewetson, it is reasonable to suppose that it was brought to a successful consummation about the same time.

As soon as the necessary preliminary arrangements had been satisfactorily adjusted with the Mexican government, the “empressarios” returned to Ireland, their native land, to report to their countymen the results of their visit to America and to arrange for ways and means of bringing their friends to Texas.

Concerning the early history of the McGloin and McMullen colony, the sources of information are somewhat meager and obscured by the passing years. Some old moth-eaten and time-worn records now on file in the county of San Patricio, however, indicate that a colony consisting of about forty families landed at a point called McGloin’s Bluff, now known as Ingleside, on Corpus Christi bay, in about the year 1830. The newcomers immediately set out on foot to the colony site, which was called San Patricio de Hibernia (Saint Patrick of Ireland), about twenty miles inland.

Respecting the Power and Hewetson colony, the records are fortunately clearer. About ten years ago, a litigation involving the validity of the title to a large tract of land which was included in the original grant of the Mexican government to Power and Hewetson, brought forth an interesting statement from one of the then few survivors of the original colony that, now preserved in the court records of the county, sheds a
flood of light upon the time-dimmed mysteries of the early turbulent days when history was young in Texas. The story is gleaned from the testimony of Mrs. Rosalie B. Priour, now deceased, who at the time the statement was made was 70 years of age, and who as 8-year-old Rosalie Hart accompanied her father to Texas with the colonists. Divested of the interrogatories and the repetition that usually infest legal statements, Mrs. Priour's story is as follows:

"I was born in County Wexford, Ireland. I do not remember the parish in which I was born, but it joined the parish of Ballagarret. After waiting some time at Liverpool for our ship to start for America and after spending Christmas in Liverpool, we embarked upon our ship and started for America shortly after Christmas of the year 1833, or in the early part of 1834. My father's family, consisting of himself, my mother and three children, two sisters and myself, came to America as colonists from Ireland with Mr. James Power, Sr.

"My father's family, together with all the colonists who came over on the same vessel with me, settled in Refugio county, in the town of Refugio, upon lots donated to each head of the family. Mr. James Power held meetings at the house of his sister, Mrs. O'Brien, in Ireland, where he told his friends and acquaintances that gathered there about America and the advantages to be secured there by colonists, and among other inducements told them that each family, or head of family, would receive a land grant of one league and one labor of land from the Mexican government, and that each single person would also receive a land grant, but of smaller quantity. Mrs. O'Brien, sister of Mr. James Power, also came to America as a member of the colony.

"The only relations Mr. James Power had with whom I was acquainted in Ireland were his sister Mrs. O'Brien, above mentioned, and her husband and their children. I think Mrs. O'Brien had three or four boys and three girls. The only names of her children that I can now remember are those of her sons, Morgan O'Brien and John O'Brien, and her daughters, Agnes or Aggie, and Mrs. Bowers, whose Christian name I have forgotten.

"Farming was the occupation of Mr. O'Brien and his family, his son Morgan being about 23 years old, and his son John about 15 years old when they left Ireland, as well as I can remember. (Mr. John O'Brien was the father of Mr. John O'Brien, who is one of the most prominent and influential citizens of Refugio today.) The family of Mr. O'Brien, as well as all the rest of the colonists who came to America on the same vessel on which I came, were tenant farmers, none of them owning any land in Ireland. Their object in coming to America was to secure lands of their own, my recollection being that under the law in force in Ireland at that time, no Catholic was permitted to own land, with only a few exceptions.

"My father's family started over to America in a ship containing about 350 persons, colonists.

"These colonists embarked on one of the largest sailing vessels afloat in those days, starting from Liverpool to America."
"I was born August 1, 1826, and at the time of the departure of this ship from Liverpool was about 8 years old.

"I cannot say what arrangements were made between Mr. Power and other colonists, but I think it was the same as he made with my father. Mr. Power was to charter the ship and land us at Copano, Texas, for a certain sum of money, payable in Liverpool before we would embark. I have often heard my father and mother say that all the other colonists made the same arrangements and the same payments for their passage to America. Each head of a family provided himself and his family with provisions and supplies enough to last for one year and brought it along on board the ship, including farming implements, etc., all of which was paid for by the colonists themselves. The colonists were all farmers, with the exception of four or five who came out as hired men and servants.

"My recollection is that the ship on which we sailed from Ireland had three masts. I do not remember the dimensions of the ship, only that I have often heard it alluded to by my parents and others as one of the largest ships going in those days.

"My recollection and understanding from my parents and others is that Mr. James Power, Sr., had made a personal canvass in various parts of Ireland in search of colonists who would come back to Texas with him and accept land grants offered them through him by the government of Mexico, Texas being at that time a part of Mexico. The colonists assembled at various times in various ways in Liverpool, preparing to embark on the ship at the time fixed for sailing. I do not remember how long we waited in Liverpool for the sailing of the ship, only that it was during the Christmas holidays of 1833, for the vessel departed from Liverpool very soon after Christmas. Most of the colonists who came over with Mr. Power are long since dead. Among the few now living, so far as I know, are the following: Mrs. Peterson, now living in Corpus Christi; Mr. Wm. St. John, of Refugio; Mr. Redman, in Refugio county, between Refugio and St. Mary's; the O'Dochartys, two old maid sisters, according to my understanding, still living at the Mission. (All of these survivors are now deceased.)

"The voyage from Liverpool to New Orleans was in the main uneventful, except for a severe storm in the Bay of Biscay, when all passengers were ordered below deck and hatches fastened down. My father having been a custom officer or "water guard" at Cork, in Ireland, I was accustomed to the water and not afraid of the storm, so I concealed myself in one of the old hatches and remained on deck throughout the storm. On the ocean I remember seeing a very large merchant vessel following close to our vessel for several days, and that the colonists were alarmed for fear we were being pursued by pirates, until finally the other vessel came in bidding distance and proved to be a friendly merchantman. Our ship was so crowded that all available space was occupied by the colonists, who furnished their own bunks, or beds, and their own provisions, and did their own cooking and household duties, the same as they did at home. I remember that on reaching the coast of Florida our
captain was afraid to venture through Florida straits on account of the great size of the ship, and to avoid danger, coasted around the island of Cuba into the Gulf of Mexico. While passing out and owing to the great heat of the sun on the ship’s deck, my little sister, Elizabeth Hart, then about 5 years old, received a sunstroke from which she soon died and was buried at sea, which occurrence I remember very distinctly. She was a great favorite with the officers and crew, and my parents were unable to prevent her from staying on deck in the hot sun.

“Our ship was sixty days out of sight of land and about two months and a half making the trip from Liverpool to New Orleans, but the voyage in the main was rather a pleasant one, and all of the passengers kept healthy. After reaching New Orleans all the passengers remained or had their headquarters on the big ship, where we had to wait, to the best of my recollection, two or three weeks, before we were transferred to the two schooners that brought us to Aransas Pass. One of them, named the Wild Cat, made the trip in twenty-four hours. I cannot remember the name of the schooner which my father’s family came on, but it was about forty-eight hours making the trip. On nearing Aransas Pass, we could see the schooner, the Wild Cat, and that it had run ashore.

“Col. Power ordered the captain in my hearing at the point of his pistol to change his course and avoid running his vessel aground. But after casting anchor for the night, the captain of our schooner weighed anchor and in the night also ran our schooner ashore. My understanding at the time of the grounding of the schooners was, and has been ever since, that both of them were unseaworthy and heavily insured, and their owners had arranged with the captains to wreck them in order to obtain the insurance money. Luckily, no lives were lost by the grounding of the two schooners, and the remainder of the colonists were transferred by lighter to Copano, where the old Mexican custom house then stood. It was a small brick house near the shore of Copano bay, but the building has since been destroyed. My impression is that this building stood near the mouth of Mission river.

“After the grounding of the schooner off Aransas Pass, an epidemic of cholera, supposed to have been contracted in New Orleans, broke out among the colonists. My recollection is that about 250 persons died and were buried at sea. A child of Mr. St. John, brother to Mr. Wm. St. John, now at the Mission, died, and through sympathy for the grief-stricken parents and their horror of burying their child at sea, I remember seeing my father and Mr. Paul Keogh take the child in a little boat to St. Joseph’s Island, where they buried it. After burying the child, Mr. Paul Keogh fell sick with the cholera and died on St. Joseph Island and was buried there by my father, who remained with him to his death. After an absence of about forty-eight hours from the schooner my father returned. As soon as my mother and I saw him, we were frightened by his gaunt and distressed appearance, and we could see that he was seriously ill, but he told us that he was only weak from hunger, and that he had had no nourishment except water, which he found by digging with his spade on St. Joseph’s Island. After my mother and I
A Grove of Palms in the Rio Grande Valley. An Evidence of the Tropical Characteristics of that Region.
had administered to my father's wants, he was taken suddenly very ill and died about twenty-four hours afterwards, and one hour after our landing from the lighter at Copano, where he was buried by my mother and a Mr. Hart (no relation to my parents), who was already living in Texas and happened to be at Copano.

"I saw them wrap my father in a blanket and bury him. I was very sick and lying on a pallet with him when he died. I thought at first that he was only sleeping, but when I tried to awaken him, I found he was dead.

"From some reason which I do not now remember, we had to remain about two or three weeks on the schooners after we were grounded, waiting for the lighters to transfer us to the landing at Copano. After landing there, we were put under quarantine and guarded by Mexican soldiers about two weeks on account of the cholera epidemic, amid the greatest suffering and distress. Finally we were hauled on ox wagons from Copano to the Mission Refugio.

"Most of my information as to the means of support of the colonists after we reached the Mission was obtained from my mother and other members of the colony, but I remember seeing the colonists working their fields, planting their crops and making their living in various ways. At first most of them farmed together in one large field, which they fenced together in the bend of the river by way of convenience and economy.

"If the colonists had not brought supplies with them it would have been impossible to have obtained even the necessities of life at that time in Texas, to say nothing of luxuries. The manner of life of people in Texas in those early days was very simple and very much the same in all the families of my acquaintance. On our arrival at the Mission, a Mr. Quirk had a lumber house of one room which was for many years the only lumber house in the colony, as lumber could not even be procured to make coffins, and the dead were buried in blankets."

(Mrs. Priour, together with the several members of the original colony enumerated by her as living at the time of her statement, which was made in February, 1896, is now deceased. Only one person, a Miss Hynes, now residing near Refugio, now lives from the colony that Power and Hewetson established under the sheltering shades of the old Mission of Refugio, three-quarters of a century ago. She was but a mere strip of a girl when the colony reached Refugio, and the passing years, resting not lightly on her shoulders, have so benumbed her recollection that the memory of those early days is now lost to her.)

Those early days in the existence of the San Patricio and Refugio colonies were of the sort that try the very souls of men. Unfortunately for history and those who love to indulge in hero worship, the records of those early experiences have been cruelly emaciated by the palsied hand of Father Time. Apart from the few records of valorous deeds which the scantily written history of Texas has seen fit to recount, the only source of information is the fireside lore which has been handed down by word of mouth from grand-sires to their children's children. And what a glorious story it is and what
a proud ancestry does it bequeath to those manly Irish-Americans who are the bone and sinew of that substantial citizenship of San Patricio and Refugio counties today. Time has not tainted the blue blood which the colonists planted there three-quarters of a century ago. No tarnish of alien dye has yet contaminated its pristine purity. The people who live there today are all chips from old blocks.

The Irishmen who with their families had accompanied the empresarios to America had come bent upon building homes in a new land, where freedom was as free as the air they breathed and where no tyrannical hand was to wrest from them the right to own their own homes and worship the God of their choice according to the dictates of their own consciences, and they immediately set to work to improve the opportunity. The terrible trials and tribulations, the awful hardships they endured for more than a decade, no pen will ever picture, for those who suffered long and much have long since gone to the better land where no trouble is. Devastated first by shipwreck, then ravaged by pestilence, the few re-

Monument Errected by the State of Texas on the Plaza at Refugio to the Memory of Capt. King and His Gallant Band.
mainling colonists, never daunted, entered upon an existence of torment and torture which was even worse than the horrible end of their friends.

Happily the colonists had brought with them a limited supply of actual necessities with which to stay the hand of starvation. They also brought with them a few implements with which to till the soil. These, with their courageous, never-failing hearts, constituted their entire inventory of assets.

Indians and marauding bands of lawless Mexicans far outnumbered lawabiding men in Texas in those days. The colonists were hence compelled to live on the community plan. At San Patricio and Refugio, they cleared small plots of land and planted and harvested their crops together and divided the proceeds. Corn (Indian maze) and sweet potatoes were the principal crops. Other necessities, such as sugar and coffee, were procured from Mexican traders who were willing to exchange for such commodities as the colonists produced.

Except for occasional ox carts, a luxury enjoyed by only a few traders, there were neither vehicles nor means of motive power. But the land was overrun by great herds of wild mustangs, and with their help the Irish ingenuity of the colonists was not slow to solve the problem. Immense pens or stockades were made by implanting heavy branches of trees side by side upright in the ground. Reaching out in a diagonal direction from each side of an opening in the corral wings were constructed in a similar manner, sometimes extending for a distance of a mile or more. When this contrivance was completed, it had the appearance of an immense funnel with a catch basin at one end. A herd of wild mustangs that might be grazing in the vicinity would then be stampeded and rushed headlong into the funnel until the pen at the other end had been filled. The opening in the latter would then be closed upon the captive animals. It was only rarely, however, that the colonists were able to successfully pacify their captives, and the general rule was to catch the youngest colts, feed them on cow's milk which the kine would unselfishly dispense in the same manner as to their own offspring, and then train them as they grew older. This was the origin of the modern Texas cow pony, which holds the distinguished position of being the toughest and often most refractory member of the genus equus.

The same ingenuity provided the vehicles. At first logs of considerable diameter, with hubs affixed at either end, were the running gear of carts. This scheme was later improved upon, by using cross sections of logs for wheels. A vehicle constructed in this fashion, however, was very expensive, and for many years the conveyances most in vogue were drag sleds built of limbs of trees and moved on runners made of smooth logs.

Apart from frequent brushes with warring tribes of Indians and occasional raids of Mexican desperadoes, the first year or so of the colonists at San Patricio and Refugio was uneventful, but the inevitable conflict between Mexican arrogancy and deceit, and Irish fearlessness and self-reliance, was not long delayed.

Mexico's pre-eminent purpose in her scheme of colonization in Texas
A Southwest Texas Banana Grove, Less than Two Years Old, Bearing Fruit.
was to create a great and wealthy dependency that would make her rich. Her plans were well laid and the conditions which she imposed upon those to whom she granted her favors were exacting enough to have insured ultimate and unqualified success had she been dealing with an ordinary race of men. But unhappily for her she had not studied well the stuff of which her adopted sons were made. Over there in their native land beyond the sea, they had already drained the cup of tyranny to its dregs. They had already suffered much, too much, indeed, to, without resistance, accept a situation in the land where they sought refuge that was worse than that they had left behind. Had the early Texas colonists been of another race than sons of Erin—a race of men who knew how to turn the other cheek without returning the blow—the story of Texas independence might have been written in less brilliant colors or it might not have been written at all. It was the irrepressible, unrelenting cour-

age of the early Irish colonists that gave to Texas that glorious birthright of freedom and independence which her citizens enjoy today.

The causes leading up to the war between Mexico and her Texas colonists were various and numerous; too numerous, in fact, to be enumerated here. Suffice it to say, however, the real cause, the bed-rock cause, if you please, was a clash of nationalities one of which refused to be assimilated by the other and its customs.

Mexico's first move was an attempt to intimidate the colonists. Warnings were issued in circular form, printed in both Spanish and English, and distributed among the colonists over the signatures of high Mexican army officers and their rubricas (their seals or signs). The fac simile reproduction of an original copy of one of these warnings, signed by Martin Perfecto De Cos, a brigadier general in the Mexican army, and in-
spector for the Department of Texas, which is given herewith, is one of the few of these documents now extant. It was particularly directed to the colonists at San Patricio and Refugio.

THE BRIGADIER GENERAL

MARTIN PERFECTO DE COS,

Commanding General and Inspector of the Eastern Internal States.

IN THE NAME OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC:

I MAKE it known to all and every one of the inhabitants of the three departments of Texas, that whenever, under any pretext whatsoever, or through a badly conceived zeal in favor of the individuals who have acted as authorities in the state, and have been deposed by the resolution of the Sovereign General Congress, any should attempt to disturb the public order and peace, that the inevitable consequences of the war will bear upon them and their property, inasmuch as they do not wish to improve the advantages afforded them by their situation, which places them beyond the uncertainties that have agitated the people of the centre of the Republic.

If the Mexican Government has cheerfully lavished upon the new settlers all its worthiness of regard, it will likewise know how to repress with strong arm all those who, forgetting their duties to the nation which has adopted them as her children, are pushing forward with a desire to live at their own option without any subjection to the laws. Wishing, therefore, to avoid the confusion which would result from the excitement of some bad citizens, I make the present declaracion, with the resolution of sustaining it.

Matamoros, July 5, 1835.

Martin Perfecto de Cos.

Shortly after the circulation of this notice, a detachment of Mexican soldiers crossed the Nueces river from the State of Tamaulipas, of which the Nueces was at that time the northern boundary, and attacked San Patricio. The colonists had news of their coming and, considering discretion the better part of valor in the overwhelming preponderance of numbers, left their homes and went to the Mission of Refugio, thirty or more miles northward. The Mexicans tarried long enough to burn the abandoned cabins and hastened on to the Mission.

When the Mission at Refugio was completed by the Franciscan friars, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, they christened it "Our Lady
of Refuge,” and well, indeed, was it named. Behind its ponderous walls of three-foot stone, the mission colonists and the exiles from San Patricio sought refuge and found it. The Mexican army shortly arrived and readily appreciating the impossibility of a quick evacuation of the fortress, took up its position on a little knoll about two hundred yards east of the mission, a few hundred feet north of the point where the Gulf Coast Line bridge now spans Mission river. Under the cover of night a courier left the Mission and started across country to Goliad, a distance of about thirty-five miles, to convey the news of the invasion to the Texas patriots who were assembled at that point under Fannin. This emissary shortly returned with a company of soldiers under Capt. Ward, whom Fannin delegated to protect the colonists at the Mission.

In the meantime, however, the Mexicans had evacuated their position, and Ward, presuming that they had been effectually frightened and beat a retreat, proceeded down Mission river to attack some Mexican ranches. He had no sooner started, however, than the Mexican army reappeared and resumed its former position. This time it brought with it a four-pound cannon, which soon began to play upon the Mission, within which the colonists were sheltered. The walls at first resisted the bombardment, but under its continued violence soon began to weaken and crumble. Fannin was again communicated with and implored for aid. Capt. Aaron B. King and a gallant band of twenty-eight men immediately set out to the Mission’s rescue. Meanwhile, however, the four-pounder continued its unrelenting tattoo upon the Mission’s walls. One by one the great stones that stood implanted in the walls as though they had been there forever, crumbled to dust. If help should not soon arrive, that magnificent structure would totter to the ground and all hope would be lost. Help did not come and there was only one alternative—to capture the four-pounder.

As the shades of evening began to fall, six men, five dare-devil Irishmen and one German, the only foreigner among the refugees, kissed their wives and babies and stepped out under the golden sky of the dying day and gazed across the intervening space whither they were going to what seemed certain death. Grim, death-defying courage was written in their faces and a prayer was on their lips. Their lives and the honor of their loved ones were the prizes at stake.

The Mexican army was at its evening meal, with no thought of such a reckless move on the part of their enemies, whom they had already condemned to death. Stealthily and silently the stalwart six stole to where the cannon stood. They had loosened it from its anchorage and were about to make their escape undetected, when the Mexicans, yelling like fiends possessed, were upon them.

Of that remarkable battle between six adopted sons of Texas and that army of 500 Mexican soldiers, history gives no account, but if the story, as related by one who received it from her father, who was one of the dauntless six, can be relied upon, it must take its place in history as one of the most marvelous incidents in military annals. For half an hour the battle raged, and Mexican after Mexican bit the dust, never
to rise again. The people in the Mission, two hundred yards away, wit­nessed the combat from the narrow windows and prayed the God of their fathers, for the love of whom they had deserted their homes in their native land, to be merciful to them and to look with favor upon their contest.

History relates many instances of obvious divine intervention in war­fare, but no story of ancient, mediaeval, or modern times savors so much of the miraculous as does the story of that terrible struggle before the Mission of Refugio early in the year 1836. For the God of Nations heard the prayer that was lifted to His throne.

Suddenly the sound of battle ceased. An awful silence reigned, broken only intermittently by the groans of the injured and the wild curses of the dying. The heavy doors of the mission flung open on their rusty hinges, and through the hallowed portals walked, unharmed, the heroic six, dragging behind them the captured cannon. What a mighty cheer that must have been that mingled with the long pent-up tears of joy, echoed and re-echoed through the vaulted interior of that sacred structure, like the song of that heavenly host in old Judea on the memorable morn twenty centuries ago!

Strange and incredible as it may seem, only one of the valiant six suf­fered so much as a scratch from the encounter, and his, a mere flesh wound in the face, soon healed.

The next morning the remnant of the Mexican army withdrew and the colonists went out to the scene of the conflict of the night before to bury the enemy’s dead. In a narrow ditch surrounding the crude forti­fication the enemy had improvised, three hundred dead Mexicans were buried.

Meantime, Capt. Aaron B. King and his band of twenty-eight were hurrying to the Mission’s succor. In the eager zeal of their battle against time, they plunged headlong into Melon creek, a few miles from Refugio, and when they emerged on the other side, they discovered, to their sor­row, that their entire supply of ammunition had been wet, and was there­fore useless. While they were deliberating upon the best course to pursue, a band of Mexican rancheros, faithful to the home government, and under the leadership of a wealthy Mexican ranchman by the name of Carlos de la Garza, appeared, and, taking the helpless band captive, set out to the Mission to deliver them into the hands of the Mexican troops. They had proceeded but a short distance when they were met at a point about four miles north of Refugio by the retreating Mexicans. Capt. King and his men were at once turned over to the blood-thirsty fiends, whom it did not take long to determine the fate of their prisoners. What form of ignominious torture was meted out to King and his unfortunate followers the world will probably never know. At all events, their lives were sacrificed at liberty’s altar, and weeks later, when the battle of San Jacinto had been fought and the Mission refugees felt secure to desert their place of safety, the dry bones of King and his men, all that had been left by the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, were brought to the Mission and laid to rest under its protecting walls.
In the center of a little plaza, in the town of Refugio, there stands today a marble monument which bears this inscription:

"Erected by the State of Texas in memory of Capt. Aaron B. King and his gallant companions, who fell in her struggle for independence, March, 1836."


The decisive victory of the Texas patriots, under General Sam Houston, at San Jacinto, on April 21, 1836, and the assurance of independence which it vouchsafed, rekindled the dying embers of confidence in the hearts of the colonists and inspired in them a hope of a life less marred by toil and trouble than in the days that had passed since their coming to America.

When the welcome news of San Jacinto reached the Mission, the colonists came out of their hiding place and set to work to repair the damage the enemy had worked. The exiles from San Patricio returned to their former homes, raked away the ashes that marked the sites of their former dwellings, felled trees and built new homes. The corn fields that had been fired by the enemy were replowed and replanted, and within a few months things were about where the invasion had found them the preceding fall.

For a period of five years following the memorable visitation of the Mexican army, the existence of the San Patricio and Refugio colonies was comparatively uneventful. To be sure, there were frequent raids by the Commanche Indians, the tribe of redskins that infested Texas in those days, and on several occasions the colonists arose from their beds in the morning to find themselves "a foot," as an old-timer described it, their horses having been stolen by the Indians during the night. Once in a while the aborigines would go a bit farther and take captive a colonist or two who might perchance wander beyond the safety of the fold. On rare occasions only, however, did they fall in harm's way.

There is an elderly lady living at Refugio today who more than sixty years ago, as a young lady, together with her sister, was captured by a band of Indians. In accordance with the custom of their race, the redskins at once proceeded to initiate their captives into the mysteries of their order by shaving their heads and divesting them of their clothing. Without a pretense of any more serious indignity, the prisoners were placed on horses, behind their captors, and a start was made in the direction of the camping grounds. The lady who now lives at Refugio so persisted
in slipping from her mount that she was finally left behind. She was fortunately rescued by her brother, who had missed her and organized a searching party. Her sister, however, was carried to an Indian trading post, where, in due time, and in pursuance with the Indians' commercial customs, she fell into the hands of a friendly trader, who saw to it that she was returned to her home. Except for the indecorous initiation, she was little the worse for her experience.

During this early period Indians in Texas were by no means as vicious or treacherous as they became in later years, when white men began to encroach in too great numbers upon their happy hunting grounds.

While the records are scant, we must assume, taking no news as good news, that the five years succeeding Texas' wonderful victory over Mexico were prosperous ones for the sons of the old sod at San Patricio and Refugio.

In the fall of 1841, Sam Houston, the father of his country, the Republic of Texas, was for the second time elected president of the Republic. About the same time Santa Anna (his full name was Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna), the imperious one whom Houston and his little band had so summarily defeated at San Jacinto, was elected the chief executive of the Mexican nation.

Whether Santa Anna still cherished in his breast the vain dream of empire in Texas, or whether still nourishing the wound of defeat, he spitefully desired to show his contempt for the new order of things in Texas; or whether, indeed, the movement had his official sanction at all, history will probably never know, but nevertheless, in the winter of 1841-1842, bands of Mexican soldiers crossed the Rio Grande, and invading Texas, subjected the unsuspecting citizens to all manner of indignities before they had time to study resistance.

Both San Patricio and Refugio suffered, and the memorable events of the six years previous were partially re-enacted. San Patricio escaped serious consequences, but Refugio fared worse. A band of marauding bandits, under the leadership of one "Ortegon," rode into the settlement one evening after dark and made prisoner every man save one before the colonists hardly knew what had happened. The one colonist who did not surrender was Henry Ryals. Not knowing that his companions had been compelled to give up without a fight, when the attacking party appeared before his cabin and shouted their defies, he replied with gun shots which killed one Mexican outright and so seriously wounded another that he shortly died. But the odds were too great and Ryals had to surrender. When every able-bodied man in the settlement had been made a helpless prisoner, the first thing the bandits did was to strip them of their clothing and then rob the homes their captives were unable to protect. They pillaged, plundered and pilfered, appropriating what they could carry and burning the rest. Bed ticks and pillows were even emptied of their contents and added to the booty. As fast as the terrified women would pass out clothing to shield the nakedness of their tor-
mented loved ones, it was taken from them and consigned to the plunder.

When the outlaws had done what mischief they could, they tied their prisoners, with hands bound before them, to the tails of their horses, and started off at a brisk trot, which did not end until Burke's hollow was reached, six miles south of the Mission. Here Ryals, the only colonist who had showed fight, was strung to the limb of a tree and riddled with bullets.

A woman who, crazed by grief, had followed her husband to the scene, was struck over the head by a pistol in the hands of one of the bandits, in reparation for which the leader graciously permitted the husband to return to the mission with his wife. That man was Michael Fox. He and Mr. Cody, a cripple, whom the bandits did not molest, were the only men left in the colony. Jas. Fox, John Fox, Jas. St. John, Wm. St. John, John R. Baker, and a man named Hannibal, the other male members of the colony, were taken to Mexico where they were kept for several months. During their absence their families deserted the Mission and went over to a settlement on the San Antonio river, and remained there until the captives were released and returned from Mexico.

A lady residing at Refugio, whose father, Jas Fox, was one of the colonists taken to Mexico, says that her father rarely if ever mentioned the experience. He insisted that he and his companions were subjected to no unspeakable atrocities, and that, on the contrary, they were well treated in Mexico. In fact, wealthy citizens of Monterey contributed liberally to a purse to pay for their journey home.

This fact would seem to indicate that the Mexican attack upon Texas in 1841-1842 was engineered by certain over-zealous enthusiasts who anticipated some action on the part of their government (which was not taken), and who wanted to improve the fleeting moments.

From this time forward, the path of experience which the San Patricio and Refugio colonists trod, while by no means paved with roses, was quite smooth. To be sure, they had their share of pioneer difficulties and obstacles primitive to overcome, maybe more than their share, but the happenings of later days were belittled and overshadowed by the strenuous times of early days. Indian raids were frequent, but few men lost their lives. When Uncle Sam sent Taylor to Corpus Christi and then down to the Rio Grande, to establish the Texas boundary line at that stream, the colonists were ready to assist. Fifteen years later, when Texas, by a substantial majority vote, decided to join South Carolina and secession, the Irish offspring of the colonists concluded to stand by Texas, for whom their fathers had already fought and bled. F. A. Oldium, the captain of the company of forty Irishmen, under Lieut. Dick Dowling, who single-handed captured a Federal flotilla and took four thousand Federal prisoners at Sabine Pass, was born at San Patricio, the son of one of the original colonists. When war was declared, more than half of the able-bodied men at San Patricio and Refugio went over to Rockport and enlisted in a company that saw service in Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee. After Appomatox they came home again, just as
their fathers had walked out the Mission thirty years before after San Jacinto, and went to work. They had no slaves and the outcome of the war made no difference with them. They fought not for negroes, but for principle—for Texas—the land their fathers had fought for and saved from a heathen future—and her rights. Texas was safe and would have been safe any way the war might have gone.

There was but one slave in San Patricio and Refugio counties, an old negro, dark as the proverbial ace of spades, named Hannibal Shaw. He was owned by a Mr. Dorsey, who came from East Texas, and whose grandmother paid $1650 in gold for Hannibal when he was a strapping lad of 15. Hannibal, 79 years of age, now lives at Refugio, where he has been living as he says, "for sixty odd yrs."

Today? Well, today is about the same as yesterday, only a little different. The dauntless men and women who braved the terrors of the wilderness to find a new home and religious freedom, are no longer there, but the same blood is there. Yes, it is there and, stalwart and stern as the Spartan’s, it will probably remain there forever.

Beautifully situated on a little knoll that caps the gently undulating, partly wooded prairie, half a mile northwest of the town of Refugio, is the town cemetery, and magnificent are some of the monuments it contains. Magnificent marble? Yes, but it takes more than marble to make monuments; it takes names. Read some of the inscriptions:

"In memory of our father, James Power, died August 15, 1852, aged 63 years. Native of Wexford County, Ireland. May his soul rest in peace."

"Thos. Coot, born in South Ireland, 1822, died in Refugio, 1897."


"John Fox, born in County Tipperary, Ireland, 1810. Died May 20, 1899."

"James Fox, born in County Wexford, April, 1813. Died October 26, 1899."

"Daniel Fox, born County Tipperary, Ireland, March 22, 1822. Died October 24, 1894."

"In memoriam: Here lieth two of Texas’ truest patriots, John Shelly, born Kyle, Tipperary, Ireland, May 1, 1825; died July, 1854. Lawrence Shelly, born Kyle, Tipperary, Ireland; departed from this life 1857."

"Mrs. Mary Shelly, born Grazac, Killanalie, Tipperary, Ireland, 1804; died Refugio, 1887. ‘May she rest in peace.’"

"Sacred to the memory of Sabina Fox, native of Ireland, Sligo County, 1799. Died 1876."

"Mary J., wife of John Dorsey, born Kildare County, Ireland, December 19, 1828; died December 19, 1893."

"John Murphy, born County Cork, Ireland, 1810; died 1880."

"Sacred to the memory of our beloved mother, Catherine Lambert, born Wexford County, Ireland, 1811; died October 24, 1891."
"Moses Simpson, born Armagh, Ireland, August 15, 1814; died June 26, 1890."

Like most tombstone epitaphs, aren't they? Yes and no. They give the date of birth, the date of death and the place of birth. Ah yes, place of birth, there's the story. Over there in Ireland they could not be men, the men they would be and had to be. And they came to Texas.

Today the names that appear most conspicuous among the citizens of San Patricio and Refugio counties are the same as those which stood high on the roll of honor seventy-five years ago. The McGloins, the Powers, the O'Briens, the O'Connors, the Welders, the Gaffneys, the Foxes, the Shellys, the Dorseys, the Lamberts, the Heards, and scores of other names as familiar half a century ago, are the leading citizens of both counties.

Strange to say, one of the empressarios of both the San Patricio and Refugio colonies have passed out of the doings of the colonists and their names no longer appear in the list of the descendants. Fifty years ago McMullen was murdered at San Antonio, and when the news reached San Patricio, his partner, McGloin, mounted a trusty horse and in a single night, without a change of mount, traveled the entire distance to the scene of the crime, one hundred and fifty miles away.

The name of Hewetson does not appear in any of the exploits of the colonists, except in the application to the Mexican government for the grant of land in which he was jointly interested with Power. The supposition is that his services were sought by Power because he was a citizen of Mexico and because of his knowledge of conditions and his consequent influence.

Not many years ago a railroad was built through San Patricio county to the coast. As a means of convenience, the county seat was moved from San Patricio to a new town called Sinton, located on the railroad and nearer the geographical center of the county. San Patricio now stands high and dry, so to speak, several miles from the nearest railroad, the channel through which the stream of progress flows.

Refugio has been more fortunate. A year ago the first railroad to invade the sacred precincts of Refugio county put a steel span across Mission River almost in front of the site of the old Mission, and turning slightly to the east to avoid a trespass upon the ground hallowed by the early colony, built a depot at the east limits of the town.

The coming of the railroad has as yet wrought but little change in the life of the people there. They get their mail a little earlier and find travel fraught with fewer difficulties than formerly, but otherwise the town, its people, and their customs, are unchanged.

In the year 1842 a bill was passed by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Republic of Texas incorporating the "Town of Refugio." This act of incorporation, a copy of which is now on file among the town records of Refugio, was signed by K. L. Anderson, speaker of
the House of Representatives, and Edward Burleson, President of the Senate and Vice President of the Republic, and approved by Sam Houston, President, on the 1st of February, 1842. Refugio is still operating under that charter, and inasmuch as all of the other early towns of Texas have amended their charters, it is doubtless the only town in Texas whose affairs are conducted under a law passed when Texas was a Republic.

On the site of the old mission of "Our Lady of Refuge" there stands today an imposing structure, which, though frame, boasts of interior furnishings that are surpassing in their magnificence. Decayed by time, crumbled by shots from the enemy's guns and defamed by bandits, the old mission was demolished in the year 1841, and in 1845 a second church was erected on the same foundation, from the debris of the first. A lady at Refugio has in her possession one of the old Spanish coins found in the cornerstone of the old mission. It bears the date of 1776, the year of Lexington and the American Declaration of Independence.

A few years ago the second church was found to be inadequate to the needs of the people, and the present frame structure was reared on the site consecrated by the heroic struggles of the early colonists and the historic mission. Immediately adjoining the church is the convent, the sisters in charge of which teach the public schools of Refugio.

Now that a railroad has come, times and conditions will, no doubt, sooner or later change, but come what may to herald the approach of things categorized with progress, the new order of things will never bring better or braver men than those staunch descendants of Erin, the sons and daughters of those early pioneers whom history will some day hail and honor as "The Irish Progenitors of Texas."