# DeWitt's Colony

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# DE WITT'S COLONY.[1]

ETHEL ZIVLEY RATHER.

## I. *Introduction.*

The Anglo-American colonization of Texas was one of the most important movements of American history. From it followed logically and inevitably a series of events of the greatest significance in our national life. Texas, peopled by Anglo-Americans, could not long remain content under Mexican rule, and as soon as the colonists were given a reasonable occasion for rebellion their independence was a foregone conclusion. Separation from Mexico was but a preliminary step toward resuming allegiance to the mother country—a consummation much desired by the majority of the Texans from the time when they declared the independence of the republic. Annexation speedily led to war with Mexico, and the struggle which ensued resulted not only in the retention of Texas by the United States, but also in the acquisition of the whole Southwest from the Rio Grande to the Pacific. Thus the coming of the Anglo-American had wrought for Texas, within some three decades, results of far greater importance than all the Spaniards had done for the province during the previous three centuries and more.

For nearly two hundred years after the discovery of America

[1] Besides the well-known secondary authorities that have been used in the preparation of this paper, the most important printed works are

Spain was the unchallenged claimant of the territory lying adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico west of the Mississippi. Because none disputed her claim, and because her energies were absorbed in European struggles, she saw no necessity for taking measures to secure it. Therefore, she made no effort to occupy and colonize Texas until the news came that in 1685 there had appeared on the scene a formidable rival, France, and that a French settlement, called Fort St. Louis, had been established on Matagorda Bay. Spain's jealousy was at once aroused. She began a series of efforts—weak and inadequate, it is true, but still not wholly fruitless—to fasten her hold on Texas through the establishment of *presidios* and missions, by means of which it was hoped to civilize and Christianize the Indians and to make of them loyal Spanish subjects. As this means alone seemed insufficient for the purpose, Spanish families were shortly afterward sent to form pueblos and to furnish to the natives examples of culture.[1] The labor and

Gammel, *Laws of Texas;* Sayles, *Early Laws of Texas; Recopilacion de Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias; Coleccion de los Decretos y Órdenes que han expedido las Cortes Generales y Extraordinarias desde 24 de Setiembre de 1811 hasta 24 de Mayo de 1812;* White, *Land Law in California, Oregon, Texas, &c.;* Almonte, *Noticia Estadistica sobre Tejas; Filisola, Memorias para la Historia de la Guerra de Tejas;* Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes of the United States;* the Reports of the Bureau of Ethnology, and *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, 1885.* The greater part, however, of the material that has been used consists of manuscripts found in the following collections: The Bexar Archives and the Austin Papers (both collections in the possession of the University of Texas), the Texas Land Office records, the Nacogdoches Archives (in the Texas State Library), the Archives of Texas (in the office of the Secretary of State), and a few documents preserved in the office of Harwood and Walsh, attorneys at law, Gonzales, Texas. These materials are exceedingly fragmentary and disconnected, and it has required great labor to shape from them a consecutive account of the colony. It is hoped that further search in the archives of Texas and Mexico will bring to light records that will make it possible to clear up several points that I have not here been able fully to elucidate.

My acknowledgements are due to Messrs. Harwood and Walsh for placing at my disposal materials in their possession; to Mr. D. S. H. Darst of Gonzales for map 4 and for much information relative to early Gonzales; to Mr. W. N. Lawley of Gonzales and Mr. J. W. Pritchett of the Department of Engineering of the University of Texas for kindly assistance in copying the maps; and to Dr. George P. Garrison, Dr. Herbert E. Bolton, Mr. Eugene C. Barker, and Miss Lilia M. Casis, all of the University of Texas, for many valuable suggestions and corrections. —ETHEL ZIVLEY RATHER.

[1] Talamantes, Historia del Descubrimiento y poblacion de la Provincia de Texas hasta el año de 1730 (MS.), ch. 3, par. 28.

expense involved in this effort are almost incredible compared with the results attained. The conduct of the Spanish soldiers toward the Indians that were brought to the missions by the exertions of the *padres* was, as a rule, so bad that the converts usually deserted at the first opportunity. The Indians, therefore, made little progress in civilization, and Spanish families never came in numbers large enough to colonize the country. Though France practically gave up its claim to Texas, Spain, left in almost undisturbed possession, toiled slowly on for more than a hundred years at the colonization of the province with little result. The population of Texas at the beginning of the nineteenth century probably did not exceed seven thousand, including Spaniards, French, Americans, and the few civilized Indians and half-breeds.[1]

Now was inaugurated a series of filibustering invasions from the United States, beginning in 1800 and lasting until 1821, which helped to destroy the little that already had been accomplished. The Spanish colonists in Texas, especially those at Nacogdoches, became involved with the filibusters and suffered fearful punishment for what they scarcely could have prevented. Nacogdoches itself was nearly destroyed in 1819, and Texas was almost stripped of the signs of civilization as far west as Béjar.

Shortly after the beginning of the filibustering expeditions, however, Spain's claim to Texas was again threatened in a way that, had not other circumstances forbade, might have brought about a new effort on her part to accomplish the colonization of the province. In 1803, by the Louisiana purchase the United States acquired the claim that France had made to Texas, and Spain found this new rival much more aggressive. For a little while in 1806 war between the two countries seemed imminent. But it was averted by the Neutral Ground Treaty of that year, and finally on purchasing Florida in 1819, the United States definitely surrendered to Spain all claims to Texas.

But Spain had been too busy elsewhere to provide against threatened encroachments upon Texas or to take advantage of the clear field after the United States had withdrawn. Until 1814 she had been overtasked by the Peninsular War. Moreover her American colonists had risen in a general insurrection which she was unable completely to suppress, and which culminated in their independence, that of Mexico being acknowledged in 1821. With her strength and energy thus absorbed, it is not hard to understand why Spain did no more to colonize the northern parts of Mexico.

[1] Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, II 2.