Texas State Library

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MEMO TO: Chris LaPlante

FROM: Michael R. Green

DATE: July 26, 1991

SUBJECT: Mexican Battle Flags

Five days after the Battle of San Jacinto, General Sam Houston issued orders to the Texas troops en marche from the East, recounting the defeat of Santa Anna and enumerating the "vast amount of property taken." Included in the listing were "three general standards" of the Mexican Army.

At least one of these trophies apparently remained with the Texas Army for the remainder of the century. On December 15, 1900, the flag of the Matamoros Battalion was transferred from the Adjutant General's Department by CPT Lamb Seiker, Quartermaster of the Frontier Battalion. This acquisition joined at least one other tricolor of the Toluca Battalion and are carried together in an early accession ledger (306-52), c. 1904.

On June 19, 1925, the Texas Library and Historical Commission loaned two of the Mexican battle flags to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Museum under the authority of Chapter 146, General Laws of Texas, 39th Legislature, Regular Session (1925). One of these is positively identified as the Toluca Battalion flag; the other was probably the flag of the Guerrero Battalion, although the transfer form very nebulously describes it as a "Mexican flag."

In early 1931, Fannie M. Wilcox, Acting State Librarian, solicited quotes for repairing several "silk and bunting" flags, approaching "manufacturers and dealers in flags, banners, and lodge supplies" and the U.S. Bureau of Standards. The latter referred her to the Smithsonian Institution, which suggested that she contact the service academies at West Point and Annapolis and Katherine Richey, daughter of Amelia Fowler who restored the Star-Spangled banner. Mrs. Richey first restored the Seven Pines Flag and other Confederate banners followed.

The first of the three Mexican standards to be restored was probably the Guerrero battle flag. The flag was shipped in June of that year and was returned to the Library in July of the next. The "beautifully embroidered" banner was finished on the wrong side making the inscription read backward. The mistake was judged to be irreversible;

but when the state was ready to restore the next Mexican flag in 1965, the Library once again wrote to Richey. The letter was returned marked "deceased." The search for a new restorator included the Witte Museum in San Antonio; Fort Lee, Virginia; the Great Plain Historical Museum; the British Museum; the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C.; Dee and Hattie Cleaners in Dallas; and the Michigan Historical Commission. The last mentioned organization referred the State Library to Josephine Rosser of Fort Montgomery, New York, who, after a screening by the Library and a legislative committee, restored the flag of the Toluca Battalion and returned it June 9, 1966.

House Concurrent Resolution 99, 60th Legislature, Regular Session, temporarily transferred the Toluca Battalion banner to the San Jacinto Museum of History, where it could "be viewed by many Texas citizens and others visiting this historic site." Title remains with the State of Texas, and the Texas Library and Historical Commission (now the Texas State Library and Archives Commission) retains the right to take possession at any time.

In January, 1980, the Matamoros and Guerrero Battalion flags were taken to the Conservation Center at Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum for conservation. Because funds appropriated for the restoration of the flags in custody of the Library and Archives Commission proved insufficient, the necessary restoration work on the two Mexican battle flags was not completed, and these were returned to the Texas State Library, December 6, 1988.

MexFlags