

Script Episode 12 – Changes in Mexico and Spain

Hello folks, I'm Hank Wilson, your Time Traveling Texican and welcome to an episode of The Hidden History of Texas.

In this chapter I will discuss Changes in Mexico and Spain during the early part of the 19th century. This is the years, 1800 to 1812.

If you ask many people in the United States when Mexican Independence Day is, they'll tell you it's on May 5th, or as it is commonly known, Cinco De Mayo. Well, that's not correct, it is another example of how many Americans really don't have any idea about history, Cinco De Mayo actually celebrates the Anniversary of the Battle of Puebla, a holiday celebrated in parts of Mexico and the United States in honour of a military victory in 1862 over the French forces of Napoleon III. It actually took place 40 plus years after Mexican independence from Spain.

Mexico celebrates its independence on September 15th, because that is when the struggle for independence began. It was September of 1810 and Father Miquel Hidalgo, the parish priest of the small town of Dolores in central Mexico, uttered the country's cry for independence. Mexican historians call it the Grito de Dolores (Cry of Dolores). Father Hidalgo called not only for liberation from Spain, but also for the end of slavery and the return of lands to the Indigenous inhabitants.

As with many times when someone tries to be a leading voice in change, Father Hidalgo paid a heavy price for his actions. In 1811 after leading a failed rebellion that collapsed at the edge of Mexico City, he tried to escape to the United States. However, he was captured by Spanish soldiers, expelled from the priesthood, and then executed by a firing squad. His efforts led to his name becoming a symbol for the independence movement to many Mexicans. Thus many historians believe that the date of September 16th is the real date that Mexico declared its independence from Spain. It would take another 11 years of struggle before Spain would accept Mexico's independence and in that time Texas was pretty much ignored. It was too far north, and the Spanish had other, to them, more important concerns. The United States was becoming one of those concerns.

In 1803 the United States purchased Louisiana from France, and settlers had begun to move into that territory. Spain and the United States had a disagreement over borders and were on the verge of military action. In 1806 Gen. James Wilkinson and Lt. Col. Simón de Herrera, the American and Spanish military commanders, entered into an agreement which declared the disputed territory Neutral Ground. While in theory, this made sense in reality the boundaries of the Neutral Ground were never officially surveyed and written down. The two sides issued a very vague statement that the Arroyo Hondo on the east and the Sabine River on the west were the boundaries.

The 'neutral zone' didn't quite work out as Spain hoped. At the time Spain was rapidly losing ground in Florida to France and struggled to keep America from taking more territory. Prior to 1810 there were numerous rebellions both in the Americas and in Spain itself and as a result, between the years of 1810 - 1813 Baton Rouge was incorporated into the United States. The next few years were tumultuous, and by 1819 Spain was ready to relinquish much of its holdings in the Americas. The 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty recognized that the United States got the Floridas. Spain retained title to Texas and the Sabine and Red rivers officially marked the Texas-Louisiana border. The area previously known as the Neutral Ground became a permanent part of Louisiana and that eventually proved to be a disaster for Spain and then Mexico.

Between 1805 and 1810 increased settlement raids by native tribes who fought Spain's movement into their territory, led Spain to attempt to grow the population of the region. In 1810 Governor Manuel María de Salcedo estimated the Neutral Ground population, including Bayou Pierre, at approximately 190 persons. Once that area became part of the United States a large number of Spanish subjects in Louisiana wished to avoid United States jurisdiction and they applied for admission to Texas. This offered Spanish authorities an important opportunity to redress the lack of population on the frontier.

Even though technically Texas remained under Spanish rule, major portions of it were beyond Spanish control. While the East Texas Caddos, the Akokisa on the coast and north, and the Karankawa to the south, due to illness and other factors were in decline, other Texas tribes had considerable control of territory.

The Comanches and Wichitas were the dominant peoples in the north and west part of the region. This would add to the pressure that Spain and Mexico would come to feel, as those groups had become comfortable in trading with Anglos.

More pressure was to come from Apaches, both the eastern Lipan and the Mescaleros. They had been forced southward from their original territory in West Central Texas by the Comanches, had reached an agreement with the Spanish authorities of Texas, Coahuila, and Nuevo Santander which helped to maintain peace. Once Hidalgo's revolt started there was a cut-off in funds to support the "peace through purchase" policy of gift-giving, the Apache's intensified their raiding during this last decade of Spain's presence in Texas. It was an economic move on their part as these they sought to acquire what commodities they could so they could trade with the ever-growing number of American traders along the Red River country.

By 1812, following the war of 1812, the "Indian removal policies" of the government, forced tribes such as the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, as well as Alabamas and Coushattas all moved into Spanish Texas. While initially these

people's were welcomed, eventually they became dependent on American traders and their manufactured goods and alcohol. Prior to this time, due to the presence of soldiers and settlements such as San Antonio and Goliad helped the economy of Texas. Spain did have some success populating Texas, but those gains were lost when Mexico experienced it's turmoil between 1811-1813.

Between 1811 and 1813, Texas was the scene of two episodes of the rebellion against Spanish rule. After that a number of invasions, some tied to the continuing struggle against Spanish colonial rule and some not, kept the Spanish military on the defensive. Eventually, the pressure both internally in Mexico and Texas would help Mexico attain it's independence.

Next time, I will discuss 1815 to 1821 and see how the turmoil in Mexico was taken advantage of by Texas Anglos. So until then,

I'm Hank Wilson, your Time Traveling Texican and this has been another episode of The Hidden History of Texas.

Talk with you soon, God Bless y'all.

Reference Sites

Texas State Historical Association - <https://www.tshaonline.org/home/>

<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/texas-in-the-age-of-mexican-independence>

