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THE KARANKAWA INDIANS: THEIR CONFLICT WITH THE WHITE MAN IN TEXAS

Thomas Wolff

The Karankawa Indians, whose aboriginal homeland was on the east coast of Texas, were first encountered by non-Indians when Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and his men came upon them soon after A.D. 1528. From then until the demise of the Karankawa in 1858 the relationship between these Indians and Spaniards, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Mexicans and Anglo-Americans passed through various phases, all of which are outlined here.

INTRODUCTION

The dramatic struggle for the control of Texas included the protracted efforts by Spaniards, Frenchmen and Texans to subdue and civilize its many Indian tribes. The Karankawa Indians, living in the vicinity of Matagorda Bay, resisted the ever-increasing pressure of the white man to rule this humid coast. The following is an historical account of the varied relationships between the Karankawa and their white antagonists. It describes the bitter contest between this small tribe and non-Indians which extended over a period of three centuries.

Very little is known about the culture of the Karankawa. These Texas Indians lived near the sea where they depended on fishing and gathering. They lacked a complex political organization, and at the time of their first contact with the white man they lived in small domestic units. The tribe included the following groups of Indians: Cujanes, Guapites (Coapites), Cocos, and Copanes.¹ Although these Indians were reputed to practice cannibalism, it should be noted that this was neither a unique nor even a particularly shocking thing for Indians of this region and for other peoples living elsewhere in the world. Unfortunately, all historical material on the Karankawa depicts them in a prejudiced manner. The published data concerning the Karankawa comes from writers among their enemies. Hence the student of this tribe must take into consideration the bias of the available sources.

NUNEZ CABEZA DE VACA TO ESPIRITU SANTO

The last remnants of the ill-fated Narváez expedition of 1528 to occupy Florida were the first whites to come into contact with the Karankawa. Upon being shipwrecked on the Texas coast, Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and the few survivors of the abortive Florida venture met the Karankawa either at Galveston or Velasco Island.² The Indians were not unfriendly to their visitors. The Spaniards, being ill-equipped for the climate and exhausted from their recent tribulations, were threatened with starvation and, in their desperation, were driven to cannibalism. According to Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, "At this the Indians were so startled, and there was such an uproar among them, that I verily believed if they had seen this at the beginning they [the Indians] would have killed them [Spaniards], and we all would have been in great danger."³

The initial meeting between the Karankawa and the Spaniards was thus not marked by violence. According to Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's words, the Karankawa were upset by the Spaniards' actions, not vice versa. In the duration of the contact between these Indians and their white adversaries the latter never witnessed an actual act of cannibalism.

The story of the French in Texas began with a visionary's dream and ended in an explorer's nightmare. The great French explorer, René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, tried to establish a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River but passed the river delta and founded it instead in Texas in 1685 at Matagorda Bay. When seven or eight of his men tried to construct a canoe the Karankawa seized a few of the Frenchmen, whereupon La Salle was forced to retrieve them. Henri Joutel, chronicler of the La Salle venture, remarked how the Indians stole blankets from the wrecked vessel Aimable. Later the Karankawa killed two colonists after they had regained some of the stolen blankets.⁴

La Salle built a fort which he named Fort St. Louis, constructed with timber from the Aimable. He often went on exploring missions and left Joutel in charge. The latter related how the Karankawa would at night "... range about us, howling like Wolves and Dogs; but two or three Musquet Shots put them to Flight."

La Salle decided to found another settlement further inland on La Vaca River at the head of Matagorda Bay. Joutel was ordered to recover timber from the first site. Upon returning there he discovered that the Indians had "...discover'd our Timber, and carry'd away some Planks, to pick out the Nails there were in them, which they value very much to point their Arrows."⁵

Ninety-five years later when the Spanish priest and chronicler Fray Juan Agustín Morfi wrote his History of Texas, 1673-1779, he based his own account on the Spanish edition of Antoine Prévost's Historia General de los Viajes, published in Madrid between 1763 and 1791. Morfi noted that in 1685 the Karankawa, "with whom no definite alliance had been possible, killed two of his men [French] almost before his eyes, an incident that confirmed him in his [La Salle's] determination to leave the country of this barbarous people."⁶

When the Karankawa heard of La Salle's departure for New France and subsequent murder in 1687 they attacked the twenty or more men and women at the French settlement, massacring all but five. They tattooed the surviving Frenchmen and forced them to follow the Karankawa on their hunts and war expeditions.⁷ The events which marked the contact between the Frenchmen and Karankawa set a precedent for most of the white men who attempted to settle permanently in the coastal area.

The La Salle venture in Texas stimulated the Spaniards into active exploration of the area and led eventually to a more pronounced interest in colonization. The Spaniards learned of La Salle's activities when they captured a French vessel whose crew told of French activity in Texas,⁸ and when La Salle sent out Jean Henrie to explore the coast (the country?) to the west of Fort St. Louis. Henrie was captured by scouts from Monclova and taken to Monterrey and thence to Mexico City. He described exactly the location of the French fort.⁹ News of the French stimulated the Spanish search for Fort St. Louis. The Marqués de Sguayo, Governor of Nuevo León, dispatched Captain Alfonso de León, Governor of Coahuila, to locate the fort. On April 22, 1689, the Spaniards, with the help of Indian guides, arrived at Fort St. Louis. Near the fort the Spaniards found two Frenchmen, Jean L'Archévêque and Santiago Grollette.¹⁰

Captain León, having accomplished his task, returned to Mexico. In the following year he was sent to Texas primarily to discover if any French had returned to their Texas colony; he was also to burn Fort St. Louis.¹¹

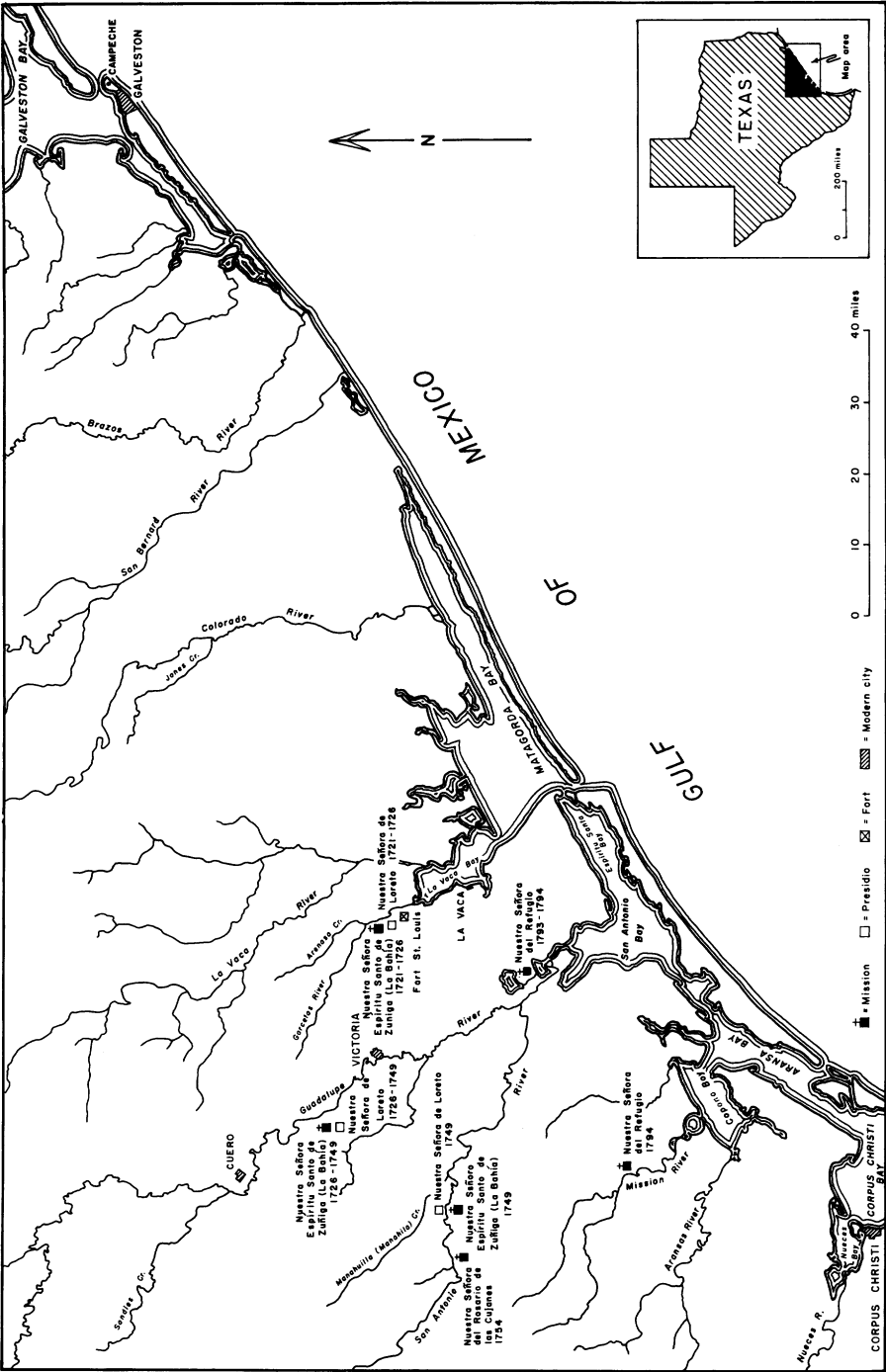
On his return trip León learned that the Karankawa living near the burnt fort were holding captive two French boys, Robert and Lucien Talon, and their sister Marie Madelaine. A few Spaniards under the captain returned to the coast, found the three children, and bargained for their release. The Karankawa reluctantly released them for ransom. Meanwhile the inquisitive Spaniards had annoyed the Indians by peering into their "ranchitas" and by committing other ungracious acts. A skirmish resulted and two arrows struck Leon in the side. Luckily for him, his suit of mail prevented fatal wounds. Four Indians were killed and two were wounded while the Spaniards lost two horses. The small rescue party then returned to the main group and continued back to Mexico.¹²

In 1691 Captain Domingo Terán led a combined land-sea expedition to Texas to strengthen the recently established missions and to look again for the French. Both the land and the sea expeditions were mismanaged and were forced to return to New Spain.¹³ After this expedition Spanish interest temporarily lapsed.

In 1719 a war between France and Spain began in Europe. In May of the same year the French seized Pensacola and the Sieur de Blondel, French Commandant of Natchitoches, moved against San Miguel de los Adaes in what is now western Louisiana. Upon reaching this Spanish outpost he "very courteously informed the only two occupants who were at home that day, 'a lay brother and a naked unarmed soldier,' that they were his prisoners."¹⁴ Two years later Bernard de La Harpe and St. Denis led a combined land-sea expedition to reoccupy Matagorda Bay. La Harpe landed at the bay, but the Karankawa welcome forced him to leave quickly. This was the last French attempt to occupy the Texas coast.

Continued French action encouraged the Spaniards to occupy permanently the area of Matagorda Bay. In 1722 the Marqués de Aguayo, as a symbol of the renewed Spanish interest, led an expedition to Texas and the coast, and on April 6 of that year his subordinate, Captain José Domingo Ramón, established the presidio of Nuestra Señora de Loreto on the site of the French fort.¹⁵

The same year witnessed the construction of the Mission Espíritu Santo de Zuñiga (La Bahía). Aguayo left ninety men



at the presidio and returned to New Spain¹⁶ after turning over the mission to Father Patron, a member of the Franciscan College of Our Lady of Guadalupe of Zacatecas. The Karankawa, whose recent hostility had discouraged French penetration, were not at first antagonistic to the Spaniards. A few Karankawa and neighboring tribesmen living around Matagorda Bay moved near the newly founded mission-presidio complex. The situation looked promising for the Spaniards. In contrast to the recent warlike behavior, one of the mission fathers noted a new manifestation: "It was seen that they were very docile and would enter readily upon the work of cultivating the earth and their souls the more because they live in greater misery than the other tribes, since they subsist altogether upon fish and go entirely without clothing."¹⁷

This tranquility of the Matagorda Bay colony was soon dramatically disrupted. In 1723 a skirmish occurred between the Karankawa and some presidial soldiers, in which Captain José Domingo Ramón, leader of a 1716 expedition to the Texas coast and captain of La Bahía, was killed. After this incident the Indians left the area and became hostile to the Spaniards. Father Morfi, in commenting on the episode, noted that it was "a misfortune brought upon himself [Ramón], by his pride, cruelty and ignorance."¹⁸ When Herbert Eugene Bolton later wrote "The Founding of Mission Rosario," he noted that the Karankawa often returned and made reprisals and that they continued these tactics for the next twenty-five years.¹⁹ In 1726 the Karankawa outrages and their danger to the Spanish settlement forced the Spaniards to move both the mission and the presidio inland to the Guadalupe River where they remained until 1749. By moving inland and away from the habitat of the Karankawa they weakened the control of the mission and the presidio over the Indians. In reality, the Karankawa had once again scored a victory over their adversaries and reduced the Spanish claim to the Texas coast. An assessment of the failure of La Bahía mission can attribute it to the Spaniards, not the Karankawa.

OBSTACLES TO EMPIRE

The Spanish Empire in the early eighteenth century not only covered a great amount of territory but also cost the Crown great sums to maintain. The Crown, always aware of this expense, was concerned with the elimination of any undue outlay. With an eye for economy in New Spain and Texas the Viceroy commissioned General Pedro Rivera to

tour the Texas area and to recommend methods of cutting expenses. Rivera visited La Bahía Mission and presidio in 1727 and commented in his report to the Viceroy that he regarded the Cujane, Coco, Guapite, Karankawa and Copane tribes as incapable of being reduced to mission life.²⁰ He therefore agreed to the transfer of the mission and presidio.²¹

By the 1730's the Karankawa and other Indian tribes of the Texas area had proven to be the principal obstacle to control of that northern outpost by Spain. In the late 1730's the Spanish authorities once again moved to strengthen their grip on Texas and its insubordinate aborigines. Added to the Indian problem was that of war with England and fear that the British would seize the Texas coast. On September 3, 1746, José de Escandón, Count of Sierra Gorda and former Corregidor of Querétaro, was appointed to conquer and settle northern Mexico and the vicinity of Texas from the Pánuco to the San Antonio rivers.²² He was made governor and representative of the Viceroy. The new governor was to survey and map the Texas region and acquaint himself with the Indians. Bolton reveals that the Spaniards hoped to reorganize the Gulf coast and also renew efforts to bring the Karankawa tribes under missionary control. He continues that "the principal aim of Escandón's work of reorganization in the northern part of Nuevo Santander was to subdue the insubordinate Karankawa tribes living along the coast. . . ."²³ Escandón believed that in areas where the reduction of natives was being carried on, civil pueblos were preferable to presidios.²⁴ Escandón's expedition of 1746 and 1747 went to the Río Grande. Meanwhile Captain Joaquín Orobio y Baterra, commander of La Bahía, went along the coast from the Guadalupe to the Río Grande thus becoming the first Spaniard to explore that particular portion of the coast.

The results of Escandón's mission were given to the Viceroy of New Spain on October 26, 1747. Escandón believed that soldiers should be given lands to settle. He recommended that only missionaries of tested ability should be called to work with the Texas natives, and families should be induced to settle the areas, for they would defend it with more vigor than paid garrisons. If soldiers had to be utilized they should be kept there only for one or two years. Of the fourteen mission settlements, Escandón recommended that one should be established on the banks of the San Antonio

River at Santa Dorotea, and to this site the mission and presidio of La Bahía should be moved. Their recent location on the Guadalupe River was unsuitable because of Indian hostility and the unhealthy climate. He noted that the cost of the mission's transfer would be slight since its construction had been only temporary. Escandón hoped that the new mission-presidio complex would be in the area where the Karankawa and Cujane might be congregated and finally reduced. After the first crop which was to be planted by soldiers and missionaries, civilians then could be induced to come and settle the vicinity. The authorities in Mexico City approved the move of the presidio and the mission, but not the utilization of colonists. In 1749 the presidio and mission were moved to their new location and established by Captain Joaquín Orobio y Bateria.²⁵

Between 1750 and 1752 problems within the Spanish colonial system developed. In some years the Querétaran fathers of Mission San Antonio de Valero (Álamo), which had been founded in 1718, and the Zacatecan friars of Espíritu Santo mission entered into a rivalry over who should control the wayward Cujanes. In 1751 a missionary at San Antonio noted that "in truth since the year 1733, when I came to this province, I have never heard that one of these Indians has attached himself to that mission."²⁶ Little progress had been made against the Cujanes, who were already living near the Espíritu Santo mission. Officials at La Bahía requested more men and supplies to cope with these difficult Indians. The rivalry involved not only movement of other Indians from the east Texas area but also abandonment of most of the east Texas missions. The result of the argument was a decision to keep the east Texas missions and to give the Cujanes of the Texas coast a new mission of their own in response to their request for such a mission.²⁷

The new mission was begun in November, 1754, and its name, Nuestra Señora del Rosario de los Cujanes, contained the Karankawa sub-tribal name of the Indians for whom it had been built. It was located on the San Antonio River, four leagues from the La Bahía presidio. By June 17, 1755, Captain Piszina of La Bahía noted that a wooden church had been completed. Two years later an irrigation dam had been built. The mission, although progressing, lacked funds to

establish adequate agricultural facilities. The Cujanes, no matter how eager they might have been for a mission, were slow to embrace Christianity. They came from time to time—often in great numbers—"but when provisions gave out they were perforce allowed, or even advised to return to the coast."²⁸

In terms of material prosperity the experiment was unfavorable and unprofitable. Its sad state was reflected in the record books of conversion for the years 1754 to 1758. These four years witnessed baptisms only in articulo mortis of twelve adults and nine children. By May, 1758, only one Indian living at Mission Rosario was baptized.²⁹

The above description reveals that Mission Rosario was not effectively serving as a spiritual and civilizing center. Father Juan de Dío Camberos explained the slow progress, in 1758, as follows:

If I had been over ready in baptizing Indians at the end of the four years you would have found the coast nearly covered with holy baptisms; but experience has taught me that baptisms performed hastily make Indians Christian who are so in name and who live in the woods indistinguishable from the heathen.³⁰

The overall picture of the success of the Spaniards with the Karankawa was discouraging to the former. The effect of the mission on Karankawa behavior was nil. As the Indians continued to thwart the desires of the Spaniards the missionaries were in constant fear of revolt and often appealed to the soldiers of La Bahía presidio for aid. On April 17, 1758, they finally were granted the long desired military protection.³¹

Ten years after Mission Rosario was founded only two hundred Indian baptisms had been performed. One to two hundred Indians lived in the surrounding area, but these were hard to control. When they were subjected to any corporal punishment they fled. In that year Father Jaspár José de Solís, inspector of the two Texas missions for the Zacatecan college, noted that the material wealth of the mission was good, but the Indians for whom Rosario had been founded preferred to live in "the woods or on the banks of some of the twenty rivers in these parts; or with... their friends and confederates, on the shore of the sea." Solís continued that the Indians were:

...all barbarous, given to idleness, lazy and indolent. They are very gluttonous and ravenous and eat meat almost raw, roasted and dripping with blood. In order to be at liberty in the woods or on the beach, they prefer to suffer hunger, nakedness and lack of shelter, which they do not suffer when they are in the mission, since the Father aids them in everything, in food and in clothing and in all other necessities and comforts. They are idle and given over to all kinds of vice, especially the vices of lasciviousness, robbery, systematic thieving and dancing.³²

In summing up the effect of Rosario it appears that the Spaniards, despite Escandón's idea for civil pueblos and the lack of a military force to handle the Karankawa, had been unsuccessful. The Cujanes had cost the Spaniards much effort, expense and time. The latter reaped few rewards but much moral and spiritual anguish. In short, the Spanish effort had once again failed; the Karankawa were victorious and continued to enjoy the benefits of Spanish civilization only in times of need.

Father Solís visited Mission Espíritu Santo, where he noted that in his opinion the Karankawa were more civilized and cleanly than those living at Mission Rosario. The Indians of Espíritu Santo, however, had the same inclinations as those at Rosario with respect to native dancing. Father Solís remarked that the padres had taught them new dances, but when the missionaries were careless the Indians would go off and dance their native dances, even though they were afterward moderately punished for it.³³

These comments of Father Solís reveal that he held much contempt for the Karankawa. In point of fact, indeed, he viewed all Texas Indians with a jaundiced eye.³⁴

SPANIARDS, FRENCHMEN, ENGLISHMEN AND INDIANS

The decade of the 1760's brought great changes in the size of the Spanish domain in North America when Spain acquired Louisiana and subsequently the British as neighbors and rivals for empire. The Spanish possessions now needed administrative reform and an improved system of defense. The Marqués de Rubí was sent in 1767 to visit the northern provinces and the presidio of La Bahía. He recommended a cordon of fifteen missions and presidio strongholds

at regular intervals between La Bahía, Santa Fe, San Antonio, and the Gulf of California.³⁵ The presidio of La Bahía should remain in its same location to protect the coast area and the various stock ranches.

Nicolás de Lafora, the chronicler of the Rubí expedition which visited the Presidio of Nuestra Señora de Loreto wrote of conditions at nearby Mission Espíritu Santo and Rosario. Of the former Lafora wrote that the Karankawa had abandoned it and that it had been repopulated with "Jaramanes and Tamiques who followed the examples" of the Karankawa and had mostly left the mission. Now "only twenty-three families, comprising thirty-nine persons—I should say ninety-three persons—remain there." Of nearby Mission Rosario, Lafora sadly wrote that there existed only "seventy-one baptized persons and thirty savages, many more having escaped to live at liberty with their relatives."³⁶

This report was instrumental in creating the New Frontier policy of September 10, 1772, which acknowledged Rubí's plans for abandonment of east Texas in favor of the coast and west Texas. With enlargement of Spanish territory and an increased Indian population, the Spaniards activated a new Indian policy which called for winning the alliance of all Louisiana tribes; keeping all tribes hostile to foreigners, especially to the British; cutting off foreign suppliers; excluding from Indian villages undesired persons; stopping the trade of horses, mules, and Indian slaves; preventing intertribal warfare as well as preventing the escape of apostates from missions to unchristian areas; terminating the taking of Christians for captives and holding them for ransom; and civilizing all the Indian nations. A last point in this program was to stop the raids of Karankawa on shipwrecked sailors and seamen on the Texas coast, regardless of nation or origin.³⁷ A glance at this Indian policy reveals that the Indians were the key to continued control of the vast Spanish empire in North America. Without their subjugation the Spaniards would be helpless in making their empire strong.

While the Spaniards sought to Christianize and reduce the Karankawa to mission life, other white men dealt with the Karankawa on a strictly economic basis. In the 1770's these Indians entered into trade with the French and English. After 1769 the presence of English seamen and traders on the coast with the Indians once again placed the Spaniards

in a precarious position. These Englishmen, by gaining Indian alliances, could undo all previous Spanish successes with the Indians. Often English seamen were wrecked on the coast, and in 1771 a party was picked up and taken to La Bahía.³⁸

In the fall of 1772 the English were reported to be in the vicinity of the Trinity River and to have cut wood for houses and traded with the Karankawa there. Captain Luis Carzola, commander of La Bahía, was ordered to investigate. Upon reaching the area Carzola related:

I discovered a ranchería of heathen Indians of the Carancahucas, Cocos and others.... Having managed to win their confidence, in order to inform myself concerning the matter that brought me there, and having seen in their possession sailors' shirts, others of fine cloth, red ribbons and pieces of chintz, I succeeded. They told me that they acquired all those things in trade with foreigners... and that they were even killing deer in order to get skins for trading for powder, balls and muskets as well.³⁹

Carzola noted that the Karankawa possessed muskets "whose English mark was on their barrels."

The Spaniards, who had never trusted the new French allies in North America, learned that the English and the French had worked to undermine Spanish ascendancy over the Karankawa. Carzola related that the French obtained muskets from the English to sell to the Indians "but that they would not allow the English to come to trade. One Englishman who came for this purpose managed to win the goodwill of the Indians whom he gave forty balls in exchange for a deerskin. The French caught him and sent word to Natchitoches whence ten soldiers came and took him away."⁴⁰

Thus by the mid-1770's the Spaniards were therefore motivated to control the coast for three reasons: to exclude the English; to stop illegal French trade; and to control the Karankawa. Another factor which influenced the situation in the northern provinces of New Spain was the constant reorganization of the area on a political basis. Inspectors general frequently visited the area and reported the condition of the province. During 1777 and 1778 the Commandante General de las Provincias Internas, Teodoro de Croix,

led an expedition to inspect the north Mexican states, including Texas. Accompanying the Commandante General was Fray Agustín Morfi, a noted theologian and preacher. Croix and Morfi visited the presidio of La Bahía, the Mission of Espíritu Santo de Zuñiga, and Mission Nuestra Señora del Rosario. In 1777 Morfi noted the combined population of the three establishments totalled 695 people.⁴¹

Morfi, with a vividness of expression which made him a popular orator in Mexico City, described the Karankawa as "vile, cowardly, treacherous and very cruel." He wrote that Karankawa warriors numbered 150 men. He found that the Indians resided on the islands of Matagorda Bay when weather permitted and on the mainland during the storm season. He noticed that the Karankawa often gathered on islands at the mouth of the Brazos and Colorado rivers where they found anchors, bells, pots, artillery, and wreckage from vessels not infrequently dashed on the shore. He added that the "horrors of such misfortunes are increased by the barbarous cruelty with which these wretches assassinate the miserable survivors that escape the rage of the waves. Many of them speak Spanish with great fluency, being, in many cases, apostates from our missions."⁴²

The friar's description of the Karankawa was grave, but his advice seemed to be that of an unworried man. At that time fifty white men were congregated at La Bahía. Morfi felt that only forty were needed if they performed their duties adequately. He believed that the Karankawa were cowards and "known to lack courage, for which reason, not having the material spirit of the others [Indians] they will be unable to start hostilities that cannot be quickly detected by vigilance." Morfi reinforced his own ideas for forty men at La Bahía by noting that foreigners were unable to effect a landing on the shores of La Vaca (Matagorda Bay) because the shallow water prevented the entrance of large vessels and the Indians, as was already mentioned, were so cowardly that their "undertakings are contemptible."⁴³

Friar Morfi became the author of History of Texas 1673-1779 and Memorias For the History of Texas. In the latter he described Karankawa cannibalism. This Spanish priest, although not personally a witness to the following ceremony, wrote about Karankawa cannibalism thusly:

The Carancaquases exceed all other nations in cruelty to captives as they also surpass them in cowardice and vileness. When they surprise their enemies in any way they unpardonably take the lives of the old of both sexes, whom they capture, eat the children, sell the boys, and keep the warriors for the dance and sacrifice to their false divinities, which they do in this manner: At the place where they hold the...[dance]... they drive a big strong stake deep into the ground; to this they securely tie the unhappy prisoner; they build a big fire all around him; all the ranchería, the tribe or the confederation arrive, and when they sound the funeral instrument called cayman, all begin to dance in a circle carrying in their hands well sharpened knives of iron [fierro] or flint, or a piece of shell. When they see fit they go up to the patient, cut off a piece of his flesh, pass it over the fire and dripping with blood, they eat it in sight of the victim, accompanying this by horrible gestures and incomparable [descomparades] voices. In this way they go on tearing the victim to pieces until he dies. Some do not put this flesh near the fire but eat it raw, making themselves festive, by spotting their faces with the blood.⁴⁴

In 1777 Captain Luis Andry was dispatched by His Excellency Señor Don Bernardo de Gálvez⁴⁵ from New Orleans to map, survey, and draw plans of Matagorda Bay and the Texas coast.⁴⁶ Upon reaching the Bay of Espíritu Santo he ran into disaster.⁴⁷ The ship was anchored off the coast when, supplies having been exhausted, Captain Andry ordered five sailors, including one Cristóbal Gómes who had previously been a soldier at La Bahía, to get food and supplies. Gómes had told the captain that being familiar with the Indians he would find it easier to obtain the needed supplies, and that they could continue to the presidio if what the Indians offered was still insufficient. Andry approved the Gómes plan and it was immediately put into operation.

When three to four days passed and Gómes and the other men did not return, Andry fired shots from the vessel and ran up its flag. Soon two Indians appeared claiming they were from La Bahía and that they had been sent by the presidio's

commander to inquire what was happening on the coast. Andry then sent two sailors to get the Indians and bring them to the vessel. Joseph María, an apostate of Mission Rosario, and Matheo, another Karankawa, came aboard Andry's vessel. They offered the captain meat and told him that the Indians living to the east were dangerous and that it would be advisable for the Spaniards not to land.

Andry thanked the Karankawa, inquired into the whereabouts of his five missing men, and asked Joseph María and Matheo to look for them. He also ordered that more meat should be brought. The two apostates agreed, leaving with three additional sailors who were never to return.

Soon Joseph María and Matheo returned to the ship, pretending that they had made arrangements to search for the five men, saying they were probably wandering through the forest. The second group of three sailors, the Indians stated, would remain on land and would take care of the meat to be brought. At this time the two Karankawas were really planning to kill all the Spaniards and to reduce their number so that they could take over the vessel. They were also stalling for time until more Indians appeared to help them in their scheme. Meanwhile, more and more Indians had come on board, and only Captain Andry, his son, the second captain, the coast pilot, and Thomas de la Cruz (the teller of the tale and lone survivor) were left aboard. Thomas de la Cruz heard shots while in the ship's hold and hid among the provisions. The Spaniards were massacred. When Andry and his son let the Karankawa enter their cabin they were killed. After the murder, Joseph María found Cruz and protected him from the rest of the Indians. The Karankawa, with much glee, then danced over the dead bodies, took off their clothing, and threw the mutilated bodies overboard.

From the vessel the Karankawa raiders took six swivel guns, two barrels of powder, three boxes of gunshot, eleven guns bearing the King's mark, and the foodstuffs. They then set the vessel adrift and sailed for land in two canoes. Upon reaching land they divided the booty. Joseph María, Matheo, and two other Karankawa returned to Mission Rosario, and on the way they raided a nearby village, stealing sheep and horses. At the time of this incident, fifty to sixty Indians were apostates living on the islands. They had many stolen firearms which had been damaged and neglected

through misuse, but their lack of technical knowledge prohibited them from following up their depredations.⁴⁸

The Andry affair shows that the Karankawa, though small in number, could damage the Spaniards despite Morfi's pronouncements. The affair was itself an important factor in stimulating another phase of Karankawa-Spanish relations—the punishment and attempted annihilation of the annoying Indians.

An example of such a plan is revealed in a letter of July 24, 1779, from Colonel Domingo Cabello, the Governor of Texas, to Bernardo de Gálvez, Governor of Louisiana. This letter describes how a missionary rescued Thomas de la Cruz from the Karankawa. Cabello thought that the way to punish Joseph María would be to send another ship and feign another Andry incident. This time, however, the crew would be well prepared and would arrest them.⁴⁹ Whether this plan was ever carried out or not is not revealed in the record.

Another plan for extirpation was presented by the Commandant General, Don Nicolás de La Mathe, under Governor Cabello of Texas. This plan called for construction of canoes to be built at the mouth of the Río Grande where they would be used to attack the Indians on their home islands. Other canoes would likewise be constructed at Opelouses. The Indians would be driven from Espíritu Santo Bay and forced to take refuge on the beach where troops from Espíritu Santo Bay would "be waiting to put them to the sword." The Mathe plan depended on the transfer of 100 men, including hunters and oarsmen, from Louisiana to Texas so that the hunters could attack the Indians and the oarsmen could operate the canoes. The point of departure for the raid was to be the mouth of the Río Grande, and the Commandant General was to furnish all the facilities for the expedition "solely for the interest of that booty which they will capture on the islands of the Karankawa of which they will take possession."⁵⁰ This plan, although still being considered in 1785, was not carried out. At that time a successful expedition against the Karankawa would have allowed utilization of the coastal area for construction of a port which could be used for trade with Florida, Mexico, and the Windward Islands.⁵¹

In the late 1770's the Karankawa dared even to threaten the missions and the presidios. At one o'clock in the morning of August 25, 1778, they raided the Karankawa mission

of Rosario, guided by apostate refugees who had been living among the mission Indians. The whole episode was carried out by twenty-five men and women. The commander of neighboring La Bahía chased the thieves with 127 soldiers, twenty presidial citizens, and twenty mission Indians. The followers overtook the culprits at dawn on the following day but were ambushed by the raiding Indians at a river. One soldier was killed and others were wounded. The Spaniards and their allies were prevented by the Indians' firepower from crossing the river and attacking their foes, who were concealed in a forest. The pursuers returned to La Bahía.⁵²

ATHANASE DE MÉZIÈRES AND THE END OF AN ERA

The era of the 1770's in Texas was one of readjustment to increased Indian violence and the revival of Indian strength. Into this confused scene entered Athanase de Mézières, a former French colonial frontier administrator. This Indian expert helped the Spaniards to maintain and hold their ground against Indian raids.

Mézières was concerned with the English and their dealings with the Karankawa and the effect of these dealings on the Indians. He called for more direct action against the natives, and stated that if such action was not taken the British would gain tremendous commercial advantage.⁵³

The Lieutenant Governor of Natchitoches also kept an eye on the movements of the apostate Karankawa. In a letter to the Governor of Louisiana he noted that they were dealing with traders at the Trinity River where they engaged in trade with horses and mules stolen from the Spanish missions.⁵⁴

The greatest accomplishment of Athanase de Mézières in relation to the Karankawa was his action in trying to stop their misdeeds and in attempting to curtail the menace of their hostility. One of his ideas was to refuse to grant them trade with outside traders and individuals. He wrote to Croix in 1778 that he had forbidden them trade because "that would give them encouragement when most decidedly they should be treated as an odious organization."⁵⁵

Another scheme of the Frenchman's was to use the neighboring Orcoquisas Indian tribe and friends of the Karankawa to help exterminate the Karankawa. Mézières hoped that if he distributed presents to the Orcoquisas the Karankawa would come to an assigned meeting place. "When the assemblage

has been affected [sic] the commandant will take all possible precaution not to leave alive any of those who have committed so many murders, in any case should they wish to defend themselves."⁵⁶ Mézières proposed to break up the tribe, and try to resettle the Karankawa "where they may lose the thought of returning to their perverse customs."⁵⁷

The most original tactic⁵⁸ of Mézières was to charge Gogoritos, chief of the Bidai-Arkakisa tribe, with the control of the Karankawa. In December of 1771, the chief stated:

I also testify that having been charged by said chiefs of Los Adaes and Natchitoches to prevent the Carancaoys, Coxos etc. who live near the sea from doing any more damage to the life or to the property of whites who may be shipwrecked on the coast, causing them, indeed, to rescue, entertain, and take them to Christian settlements, with especial promise that their services shall be remunerated, I have pledged my word.

In addition Gogoritos promised to return fugitives from Espíritu Santo mission.⁵⁹ None of his plans were activated.

In the mid-1780's another inspection of the Texas missions was carried out. Fray José Francisco López visited Espíritu Santo and Rosario. At the former López noted that many Indians had deserted the mission and that unless some preventive measures were taken Espíritu Santo would be "depopulated, abandoned and destroyed within a few years." There were 116 inhabitants at the mission, including thirty-one married couples, twenty to eighty years old; fifteen widows and widowers, thirty to eighty years old; and thirty-nine bachelors and children, one to twenty years old.⁶⁰

Mission Rosario, by 1785, had been closed. The friar lamented that the Indians of "this mission had fled to the coast on the persuasion of a peevish and very perverse Indian." López added that these coastal Indians spoke Spanish and "insinuated their way into the flexible, indiscreet, and contemptible minds of the mission Indians and stir them up until they ran away."⁶¹ The inspector warned that these coastal Indians might do likewise to the other missions.⁶²

The Indian report of 1785 was far from auspicious. But for the civil and military authorities, who strove toward the control and consolidation of Texas, and the missionaries, for whom hope is eternal, the situation demanded further

consideration. In the 1790's the missionaries established Nuestra Señora del Refugio, which, according to a modern historian, "represented one of the last flickers of Spanish energy and initiative on the northwestern Frontier of New Spain."⁶³

Mission Rosario, as already noted, had been abandoned in 1785, but in 1790 it was re-established by Captain Manuel de Espada of Espíritu Santo. Mission Rosario and Mission Espíritu Santo were to be the centers from which missionary work would be carried on with the coastal Karankawa.⁶⁴

The spark which set the missionaries on their task was the immediate rivalry between the apostolic colleges of Zacatecas and Pachuca for control of the Texas area, the former winning. The Franciscan father Fray Manuel Julio de Silva was elected by his order to begin work among the north Texas tribes. Silva and his companion, Father José Mariano Garza, then decided to work among the Karankawa, and they tried to establish a mission.⁶⁵

On March 31, 1791, a Karankawa chief, Fresada Pinta (Spotted Blanket), appeared at Rosario, and on leaving promised to return in ten days to conduct Silva to visit his people. Later, another Karankawa chief, Llano Grande (Big Plain) imitated Fresada Pinta's actions. In response to these invitations Silva, on April 12, departed with Fresada Pinta for the village, and once there he said nothing about his proposed mission, but rather spent his time making friends among the Indians. When Silva returned to the Rosario Mission, the Karankawa declared that the missionaries would always be welcomed at their village, even if the Indians were at war with the civil and military authorities.⁶⁶

Silva was then recalled to Zacatecas. The Karankawa project was now entrusted to Father Mariano Garza. He made many trips to the coast, but he, too, never mentioned the prospect of a mission. On October 31, Garza chose a site at the junction of the San Antonio and Guadalupe rivers. He then returned to La Bahía. Final approval was granted on December 31, 1791,⁶⁷ but lack of funds apparently held up actual construction until January 31, 1793, when the mission was begun under Father Mariano Velasco.⁶⁸

Mission Refugio was to serve the Indians from the villages of Fresada Pinta and Llano Grande. During 1793 temporary construction included six small wooden buildings with thatched roofs, a corral for cattle, and a large shed to

protect materials for the construction of a church. A stockade surrounded the mission complex. After the first year of no manual labor, the Indians were to practice agriculture and cattle raising, as the fathers believed that the Indians were not ready for such difficult tasks as weaving, pottery making, and tanning.⁶⁹

The Karankawa, although interested in the mission, were not always predictable. The padres, knowing the nature of their charges, prepared for the worst and hoped for the best. This philosophy allowed the friars to adjust to disagreeable events.

One Karankawa killed a soldier at Mission Rosario and fled to Refugio where he persuaded an Indian woman to talk to the padre who subsequently forgave the murderer on the condition that he join the mission. This Indian later killed a cow, and when reprimanded threatened the padre. He provided trouble for the next six years, later becoming a leader of a marauding band. In 1801 he was captured. While attempting to escape from La Bahía he wounded a soldier and was himself finally shot.

Fresada Pinta, who had once wanted a mission, never joined Refugio. He stole cattle and small items from the mission. Later he attacked Refugio, killed a servant of the padre, and then escaped. Zertuche, a Rosario apostate who was described as the "worst Indian living under the sun," killed cattle and stole the Padre's mare.⁷⁰ Perhaps the worst deed was committed by El Surdo (Lefty) who openly insulted Father Velasco, stole his mare, and "brazenly rode away. On his way out he attacked and wounded a muleteer who was bringing in needed supplies."⁷¹ Generally the Indians frequented the mission in times of need, but preferred to stay away in times of plenty.

Individual Karankawa were indeed a problem. They could also be vexing as a group. When Father Velasco and Rodríguez attempted to explore the bay,

... the Indians agreed to take them. When the two came to the canoe, a group of Karankawa sat sullenly on the shore. When asked to get in and paddle, they merely grunted. The Padre tried to set them a good example and, smiling goodnatureedly, stepped into the canoe, almost capsizing it. The Indians laughed but offered no

help. Both Rodríguez and Velasco were unaccustomed to canoes so they were obliged to give up the trip. The Indians insolently leered and jeered at them.⁷²

The coastal area was considered a poor climate. As early as 1689 Father Damian Manzanet had noted its unhealthy climate, and Refugio's missionaries found it almost intolerable. In 1794 a petition was sent to Commandante Nava from Refugio, asking for a better site. On December 7, 1794, the Governor of Texas, Muños, ordered Juan Cortes of La Bahía to move the mission to Copano Bay.⁷³

The missions of Espíritu Santo, Rosario, and Refugio were not destined to be permanent institutions. In 1806 Rosario was merged with Refugio and its equipment was turned over to the civil authorities.⁷⁴ On February 8, 1830, Refugio and Espíritu Santo were secularized in accord with long-standing Spanish-Mexican policies.⁷⁵ The Karankawa who had withstood the efforts of the Spaniards and Frenchmen to settle the coast area were now to encounter a new threat.

PIRATES AND TEXANS

Two years after the Battle of New Orleans, Jean Laffite and his pirate band settled on the northeast end of Galveston Island. There they made their home for the next four years and established a village named Campeche near the channel into Galveston Bay. As the pirates spoke many different languages the settlement had an international atmosphere. Campeche was the scene of gaiety, gambling, drinking, and dancing, not to mention occasional fights and murders. The men, however, were usually well behaved since Laffite was apparently capable of stopping any melee with a harsh word.

Laffite's pirates were as daring on land as they were at sea. On Galveston Island his men faced a new challenge from the Karankawa. These Indians frequented the island and had often gone to Campeche, but had been expelled from the village for pilfering and were resentful. But the pirates had seen the Karankawa maidens and life at Campeche was boring. Four love-sick pirates abducted an Indian "princess," thus initiating a new type of clash between the Indians and their white antagonists. The Karankawa in return killed four buccaneers. Reciprocal insults called for war.⁷⁶ Laffite heard that the Karankawa, 300 strong, were encamped

on the west coast of the island and were preparing for a raid on the pirate village. With 200 of his most courageous men and two cannons, he attacked the Indians. The fighting was severe—two pirates and thirty Karankawa were killed. Many men in both armies were wounded. Two days later the Indians fled in their canoes to the mainland with the pirates in pursuit. Here a few more Karankawa were killed. The important victory was due cause for a pirate fiesta at Campeche, where Laffitte, despite his stern nature, relaxed long enough to "join the songs of the men, and was right merry." The pirates commemorated their fight with the Indians by calling it "The Battle of the Three Trees."⁷⁷

In 1821 Moses Austin received his grant to bring 300 families to settle in Texas between Galveston Bay and the Colorado River. When settlers came to Texas the Karankawa sought to impede their progress as they had done earlier with the La Salle expedition. Under the immediate auspices of his son, Stephen Austin, the ship John Motley landed at the mouth of the Colorado with settlers and supplies. The supplies were unloaded and four men were left on guard. The Karankawa killed the guards and carried the goods away. The terrified settlers moved up river where they suffered from lack of provisions. The incident "made it hopeless to expect any supplies in the future by the sea route and packing supplies from Natchitoches was a slow and costly operation."⁷⁸ The Karankawa had not only frightened the settlers by their deeds, but also brought forth the following comments from one colonist who wrote that the Indians were "...the most savage-looking human beings that I ever saw...their ugly faces were rendered hideous by the alligator grease and dirt which they besmeared from head to foot as a defense against mosquitoes."⁷⁹

The Colorado River in Texas provided one avenue for communication for the settlers. In 1823, three Texas colonists, Coy, Alley, and Clarke canoed up the Colorado with a boat load of corn and the Karankawa ambushed them. Only Clarke managed to escape. The following day the settlers retaliated by killing ten Indians. In the ensuing year Captain Horatio Chriesman had several skirmishes with the Karankawa on the St. Bernard River. Fifteen natives and three white men were killed near Jones' Creek.⁸⁰

The tactics of the Karankawa forced the colonists in

1825 to band together to rid themselves of the Karankawa. Austin commissioned Captain Abner Kuykendall to lead volunteers to expel the Karankawa from the Austin grant which extended to La Vaca River. The Texans chased the Indians to Manahila Creek (six miles east of Goliad) where a Catholic missionary from La Bahía interceded for the fleeing Karankawa. After talking to them the padre guaranteed the Texans that the Indians would never again appear east of La Vaca. This promise was not kept. A portion of the tribe returned to the Colorado, committed new depredations, and were subsequently punished. At the same time Texas settlers believed that many of the acts perpetrated by the Karankawa against inoffensive Texan hunting parties and ranches were done under the influence of Mexican authorities who were hostile to the American intruders.⁸¹

The Fredonian Revolt of 1826-1827 brought in Mexican troops to re-establish order in Texas. The Mexican General Anastasio Bustamante resolved to annihilate the Karankawa. The tribe was forewarned of impending doom, and with other tribes they made peace with the Mexicans. The new Indian boundary was fixed at La Vaca River and the aborigines temporarily observed the peace treaty.⁸²

KARANKAWA DEMISE

A decade after the Fredonian Revolt Texas gained her independence, but during the revolt the Texans tried to control Karankawa raids on livestock in the coastal area near the Guadalupe River. Chief José María and twenty of his warriors were killed during the war. The Texans also attempted to negotiate with the Karankawa. James Kerr, in a letter written in 1835 to the Committee of Safety and Correspondence, noted that he had been appointed to negotiate a treaty with the Indians whose chiefs had expressed a desire to enter into lasting peace with the Texans. He was to meet the whole nation the following day on the San Antonio River eighteen miles below Goliad. The Karankawa acknowledged the Texans as rulers of the area. Kerr argued that the treaty would free the thirty to forty soldiers who had been engaged in protecting the local ranches from the Indian raids against the settlers and their livestock. On October 31, 1835, one citizen at the Fort of Goliad noted that the Kerr expedition had been successful.⁸³

During the war some of the Karankawa together with other Texas Indians served in the Mexican army. After the battle of the Álamó in 1836 the Texans retaliated by punishing these Indians for their crimes. These acts brought the Karankawa "into submission and made them perceive the necessity of being on better terms with their new rulers."⁸⁴

José María was the Karankawa chief at this time. His son Walupe (Guadalupe) was captured by the Mexicans and killed in spite of his tender nineteen years. The infuriated father then came on board the ship of a Texas settler with twenty of his followers and announced to the white man that he would take bloody revenge against the Mexicans. José María attacked the Mexicans, but he and the majority of his braves were killed.⁸⁵

After the death of José María, Antonio, who claimed that he was the brother of José María, became chief of the tribe. During Antonio's life and afterward the Karankawa diminished through the effects of consumption and other diseases. Brawls which occurred when the Indians were intoxicated further reduced the tribe.⁸⁶

By 1840 ten or twelve Indian fishermen families lived on Aransas Bay and the Nueces River. At this time the tribe included 100 Indian men, women and children. Noting the paucity of those Indians two French missionaries, Odin and Estany, tried to establish a mission for the Karankawa and other coastal tribes. One report states that a priest brought some of the tribe to Padre Island to educate them and to protect the natives from the Texas colonists.⁸⁷

An incident in 1844 indicated that the Karankawa were still dangerous. In November a portion of the tribe was encamped on the Colorado River fifteen miles south of Victoria near a site named Kemper's Bluff where the Kemper family lived. After killing one beef Kemper was approached by three or four Karankawa who demanded the carcass. Kemper refused their demand and was immediately shot with an arrow. He died shortly afterward. The fear of recrimination forced the Indians in 1845 or 1846 to flee with their canoes down the Guadalupe River and along the coast to the mouth of the Río Grande where they crossed the narrow bay to Padre Island.⁸⁸

A contemporary report of the era stated that by 1843 a portion of the tribe, which then included a scant forty or

fifty people, applied to settle in Mexico. Upon being granted permission they fled across the border.⁸⁹

The Karankawa by the 1840's consisted of two groups; one was settled on Padre Island while the other, as already mentioned, fled into the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. The latter group resided in the neighborhood of Reynosa. They lived in a vagabond fashion, plundered, and forced the Mexican government to organize troops to subdue them. A General Avalos was ordered to move the Indians to the vicinity of the border of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. The Karankawa gave rise to a dispute between the two states. The argument was resolved when the Karankawa were returned to Reynosa. After committing more robberies the tribe removed to Texas. On October 26, 1858, the judge of Rosario, Mexico, sent a message to the mayor of Reynosa that he had tried to arrest the Karankawa but that they had fled to the north side of the Río Grande beyond his jurisdiction. He added that the Mexicans and Americans should work together for the Indians' "arrest, since besides horses they have carried off, they have committed other robberies at La Mesa."⁹⁰

Later that year Juan Nepomuceno Cortina led a group of Texas ranchers against the recently returned Karankawa. The Texans surprised the Indians at their Texas hiding place and annihilated the remaining members of this vexatious tribe.⁹¹ The white man was at last master of the west Texas coast.

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NOTES

1. Bolton 1915: 281; Hodge 1907-1910: I: 657. For an ethnographic study of the Karankawa Indians, see Gatschet 1891.
2. Hodge and Lewis 1907: 51-52
3. Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca 1905: 63-64

4. Joutel 1962: 54
5. Ibid.: 48-64
6. Morfi 1935: 130
7. Gatschet 1891: 25
8. Garrison 1903: 26
9. Coopwood 1898: 163
10. Casis 1899: 289
11. Ibid.: 295
12. Ibid.: 309-10
13. Garrison 1903: 31-32
14. Hackett 1936: 162
15. Castañeda 1936-1958: II: 147
16. Garrison 1903: 78
17. Bolton 1906: 117
18. Morfi 1935: 244
19. Bolton 1906: 117
20. Bolton 1915: 286
21. Bolton 1906: 118
22. Castañeda 1936-1958: III: 139
23. Bolton 1915: 60
24. Bolton 1906: 120
25. Ibid.: 145-90
26. Bolton 1915: 286
27. Bolton 1906: 129
28. Bolton 1915: 318
29. Ibid.: 319
30. Ibid.
31. Bolton 1906: 118-36

32. Bolton 1915: 324
33. Kress 1931: 40-47
34. Ibid.
35. Bolton 1905: 76
36. Kinnaird 1958: 178
37. Bolton 1914: I: 72
38. Pichardo 1931: 394-95
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.: 395
41. Morfi 1935: 79
42. Ibid.: 80
43. Ibid.: 254
44. Chabot 1932: 51
45. Kinnaird 1946-1949: III: 86
46. Ibid.: II: 331
47. Ibid.: 325
48. Ibid.: 331-34
49. Ibid.: 350-52
50. Ibid.: III: 86
51. Ibid.: 126
52. Ibid.: II: 350-52
53. Bolton 1914: II: 293-94
54. Ibid.: 105-06
55. Ibid.: 190
56. Ibid.: 301
57. Ibid.: 302
58. Mézières had a plan similar to that of Mathe which would utilize people from Louisiana and Texas. See ibid.: 298-303.

59. Ibid.: I: 260-62
60. López 1940: 45
61. Ibid.: 48
62. Ibid.: 49
63. Dunn 1922: 174
64. Ibid.: 176
65. Ibid.: 179
66. Bolton 1916: 402
67. Castañeda 1936-1958: V: 76
68. Dunn 1922: 181
69. Ibid.
70. Castañeda 1936-1958: V: 106
71. Ibid.: 83
72. Ibid.: 82
73. Bolton 1916: 404
74. Walters 1951: 287-88
75. Ibid.: 299
76. Arthur 1952: 174
77. Saxon 1930: 220-21
78. Wortham 1924: 120-28
79. Ibid.: 127
80. Gatschet 1891: 30-31
81. Ibid.: 31-32
82. Castañeda 1936-1958: VI: 230
83. Binkley 1936: 25, 35
84. Gatschet 1891: 32
85. Ibid.: 48
86. Ibid. In 1838 the citizens of Live Oak Point, Refugio County, Texas, feared Mexican border raids. These

citizens also feared raids carried on by Karankawa Indians. See Nance 1963: 67.

87. Gatschet 1891: 49

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.: 51

91. Ibid.

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