

## **WILSON COUNTY'S PARTICIPATION IN MEXICO AND TEXAS STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE FROM SPAIN**

In 1811 Spain claimed much of the land of the North American Continent west of the Mississippi River. The Louisiana Purchase narrowed Spain's holdings, but it was a large territory. This territory was called NEW SPAIN and it was divided into provinces. Texas was one of its provinces and it was ruled by a Spanish governor. Orders from Spain trickled down to the governor. Napoleon's troops invaded Spain and took Madrid in 1808. The Spanish King, Charles IV and his son, Ferdinand VII were placed under house arrest. King Charles IV gave up the Spanish throne in favor of his son, Ferdinand VII, but Napoleon Bonaparte handed the throne to his brother, Joseph Bonaparte. There was confusion about who ruled New Spain. Many people in New Spain (including Mexico and Texas) believed that the wrong king was on the Spanish throne. On September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo rang his liberty bell at his parish church in the Villa of Dolores. He believed that French sympathizers in Seville would surrender New Spain to France. Father Hidalgo called on the Mexican people to defend their country for King Ferdinand VII and the Holy Religion. A revolution began. Many conflicts developed throughout Mexico between people loyal to Spanish rule and the resident people.

Texas was no exception. San Antonio was the capital of Texas and that is where the governor resided. In 1811 the Spanish Loyalists were overthrown in a bloodless coup brought about by Juan Bautista de las Casas, a retired army officer. He assumed the leadership of the local individuals who were disgusted with the local Spanish Government. The Spanish Governor was removed from San Antonio. Las Casas then assumed the role of governor of Texas. His leadership was seriously lacking. He showed little tact or consideration for the prominent Spanish people in and around San Antonio. Soon, unrest developed and there was a call to return to Spanish control.

Among those people disgusted with las Casas were the Zambrano brothers. The Zambranos were very influential in the area and staunchly loyal to the Spanish Government. Unhappy with the political situation, some members of the family left San Antonio and retired to their ranch, Laguana de las Animas. The ranch was located on the west side of the San Antonio River between the mission ranches, Las Cabras and Valero in southern Wilson County. The ranch was a fairly short distance from San Antonio and it was possible for the family to keep abreast of developments in San Antonio. Las Casas had won the support of the local population.. However, he had neglected to gain the confidence of the military officers, the large ranchers, and prominent citizens. He also lacked the skill in disposing of property confiscated from the Spaniards loyal to the crown.

As discontent with las Casas grew, royalists would journey to the Zambrano ranch to discuss an overthrow of las Casas. In a short time, Macario Zambrano's son, Juan Manuel Zambrano was convinced to return to San Antonio and assist in rescuing Texas from las Casas and his rebellious group. Juan Manuel Zambrano was a colorful person

and was a man to be reckoned with. He was a sub deacon of the church, but spent time gambling and visiting cantinas. He had a cavalry sword strapped to his waist and liked to engage in brawls. He readily accepted the challenge. On his return to San Antonio, Juan Manuel held a closed meeting with several close associates in the town home of his brother. Among the group was Erasmo Seguin. The major result of this conference was to begin a grass roots whispering campaign to enlist support of other prominent citizens and army officers. Zambrano even extended this bold whispering campaign to selected members of the enemy group.

As had been planned, Zambrano gathered with several of the prominent royalists on the evening of March 1, 1811. The group marched to the army barracks, disarmed the sentries and captured the officers in command. Quickly, the recently developed grapevine system of communication relayed this event throughout the town. By midnight the counter-revolution proved to be successful. The group of citizens decided to elect a Junta (governing body) to head the movement. Juan Manuel Zambrano was elected president by a majority of the votes. All the elected officials were immediately sworn in to defend the King of Spain, the Catholic faith, and the country. The group then marched to the living quarters of las Casas, woke him from his sleep and informed him of the change in government. He was arrested without resistance.

Compiled from archives of the Wilson County Historical Society by Gene Maeckel and Maurine Liles,  
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