

## **The Mexican Soldier Skulls of San Jacinto Battleground**

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The Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground

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During a two-month visit to Texas in 1837, one year after the battle of San Jacinto, the American naturalist John James Audubon mentioned in his journal that a beef contractor for the army who lived near San Jacinto battleground promised him some skulls of Mexican soldiers. Audubon also wrote that he visited the battleground himself and while there he saw the remains of Mexican soldiers scattered on the field. Whether he actually obtained skulls was a mystery to Texas historians until 2009 when the skulls of six Mexican soldiers from the battleground were discovered to exist in the Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia. According to crania catalogs published in 1849 and 1857, all six of these skulls were sent to Dr. Morton, a physician who lived in Philadelphia, and five of them came from Audubon.

The revelation of these skulls not only adds to our knowledge of Audubon's trip to Texas, but represents an exciting opportunity to learn more about the battle of San Jacinto through biological evidence. The Friends of the San Jacinto Battleground began working with Dr. Janet Monge, Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, to make these skulls available for a forensic analysis. Through the efforts of Friends President Jan DeVault, Dr. Doug Owsley, Curator and Division Head for Physical Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, was contacted. He agreed to conduct a forensic examination of these skulls, each of which bore markings of a violent death. In January 2010, Dr. Owsley and his team of specialists from the Smithsonian conducted the examination at the Penn Museum with the assistance of Dr. Monge. Dr. Owsley's analysis will be presented publicly for the first time at the Battle of San Jacinto Symposium on April 17, 2010 at the University of Houston.

This essay examines the documentary sources referring to the Mexican dead at San Jacinto to provide historic context to Dr. Owsley's presentation. Exactly what happened to the Mexican dead is touched upon in only a few eyewitness accounts and for this reason the record is fragmentary and incomplete. Nonetheless, there is enough source material to provide a basic understanding of this topic.

### The Battle of San Jacinto

After the fall of the Alamo on March 6, 1836, and the surrender of Col. James W. Fannin's men at the conclusion of the battle of Coleto Creek on March 20, the only Texan military force standing in the way of Mexican General Santa Anna's advance into the Texan settlements was the army under the command of General Sam Houston. For

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four weeks, Houston led the Texas army eastward from Gonzales in an attempt to avoid another tragic encounter with the Mexican army while at the same time looking for an appropriate opportunity to take the offensive.

The opportunity was forced on him when Santa Anna crossed the Brazos River near present day Richmond with about 675 men on April 14, leaving the bulk of his army on the Brazos under the command of General Vicente Filisola. Santa Anna's objective was Harrisburg, on Buffalo Bayou, where the Texan cabinet was meeting without any military protection. According to Pedro Delgado, who was with Santa Anna, this division consisted of the battalions of Matamoras, Aldama, Guerrero, Toluca, Mexico, and Guadalajara together within one piece of artillery (a six-pounder, commanded by Lieutenant Ignacio Arrenal), and fifty mounted men of Tampico and Guanajuato who acted as Santa Anna's escort.<sup>2</sup>

The Texan cabinet fled Harrisburg hours before Santa Anna's arrival on the night of April 15. The next day the Mexican cavalry, under Col. Juan Almonte, reached Lynchburg ferry on the San Jacinto River. Unable to cross, Almonte rode eight miles south and seized the supplies and servants of Col. James Morgan at the settlement known as New Washington (now Morgan's Point) on upper Galveston Bay. Santa Anna burned Harrisburg on April 17 and joined Almonte the next day at New Washington where they remained until April 20.

Santa Anna's rapid movement to the east left Houston in his rear. Houston responded by crossing the Brazos near present day Hempstead and in a rapid march through what is now northwest Harris County arrived at Buffalo Bayou opposite Harrisburg on April 18. He learned from a captured courier that Santa Anna had split his forces and was now occupying New Washington with the intention of marching to Lynchburg ferry to cross the San Jacinto River. Houston reacted to the news by crossing Buffalo Bayou on April 19 and marching to the ferry landing on the morning of April 20, arriving only hours before Santa Anna's appearance. The Texans found cover in the trees and woods along Buffalo Bayou. The battle commenced that morning with an artillery duel and the day ended with an inconclusive cavalry skirmish.

On the morning of April 21 Santa Anna was reinforced with about 615 men under the command of Martin Perfecto de Cos, bringing Santa Anna's division to about 1100 soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Houston had at the time about 800 to 900 men. Late in the afternoon, Houston's men marched across the prairie separating the two armies and attacked the

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<sup>2</sup> "Mexican Account of the Battle of San Jacinto By Colonel Pedro Delgado, of General Santa Anna's Staff," republished in John J. Linn, *Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Texas* (New York: D&J Saddler, 1883), pp. 225-46. According to research by Dr. Gregg Dimmick, the units that departed the Brazos with Santa Anna on April 14 were the Matamoras Battalion and the preferential companies of the Guerrero, Aldama, Toluca and Primero Mexico Battalions.

<sup>3</sup> According to Dr. Dimmick, Cos arrived with the preferential units of the Guadalajara Battalion after leaving about 100 on the route to guard supply wagons which never made it to San Jacinto.

Mexican lines. Delgado described the scene as follows:

I saw our men flying in small groups, terrified, and sheltering themselves behind large trees. I endeavored to force some of them to fight, but all efforts were in vain; the evil was beyond remedy. They were a bewildered, panic-stricken, herd. The enemy kept up a brisk cross-fire of grape on the woods. Presently we heard in close proximity the unpleasant noise of their clamors. Meeting no resistance, they dashed lightning-like upon our deserted camp. Then I saw his excellency [Santa Anna] running about in the utmost excitement, wringing his hands and unable to give an order. General Castrillon was stretched upon the ground, wounded in the leg. Colonel Trevino was killed, and Colonel Marcial Aguirre was severely wounded. I saw also the enemy reaching the ordnance-train and killing a corporal and two gunners who had been detailed to repair cartridges which had been damaged on the previous evening. Everything was lost.<sup>4</sup>

The Mexicans resisted for less than 30 minutes before scattering in confusion. For the next few hours Mexican soldiers were hunted in the grass and water, surrounded and killed. Not until Col. Almonte was allowed to surrender at dusk did the killing end. According to Houston's report of the battle 630 Mexicans were killed and 730 were taken prisoner. Santa Anna escaped the battleground but was captured the following day and brought to the Texas army camp on Buffalo Bayou.

The "battle of San Jacinto," as this brief engagement came to be known, was followed by the retreat of the remnant of the Mexican army under Filisola's command beyond the Rio Grande. The battle became the concluding military event of the Texas Revolution and was recognized by Texans as the decisive battle that won Texas independence from Mexico. San Jacinto enabled the establishment of the Republic of Texas in the fall of 1836 which later led to the annexation of Texas to the United States in 1845.

All three presidents of the Republic – Sam Houston, Mirabeau Lamar, and Anson Jones – were veterans of the battle. In 1846, Houston joined Thomas J. Rusk, another San Jacinto veteran, as the first two U.S. Senators from Texas. Twenty-two of the state's 254 counties are named for San Jacinto veterans, including three counties named for Texan soldiers killed in the battle (Hale, Lamb, and Mottley).<sup>5</sup> San Jacinto County is named for the battle itself. The anniversary of the battle was celebrated as early as 1837 and "San Jacinto Day" (April 21) along with "Texas Independence Day" (March 2) became the first official Texas state holidays in 1874.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, pp. 233-34.

<sup>5</sup> Bell, Brewster, Briscoe, Burleson, Coleman, Cooke, Deaf Smith, Franklin, Hale, Hockley, Houston, Jones, Kleberg, Lamar, McCulloch, Mottley, Rusk, Sherman, Tom Green, and Williamson counties.

<sup>6</sup> Texas Legislature, 14<sup>th</sup> Session, Joint Resolution 7 (1874).

## The Dead of San Jacinto

Only nine Texans were killed in the battle. One of the dead -- Olwyn Trask, who was wounded during the cavalry skirmish on April 20 -- appears to have died in Galveston several days after the battle. The other eight were buried next to each other in a trench near the edge of the Texas army camp on Buffalo Bayou. Their resting place became the nucleus of the cemetery for the town of San Jacinto that existed at the ferry landing from about 1837 until the hurricane of 1885. By 1867, only one soldier's board headstone could still be seen, that of Benjamin R. Brigham. The Texas Legislature appropriated \$1,000 in 1856 to erect a fence around the graves and place a monument at the site, but no monument was erected until 1882 when a blue marble obelisk was placed at the head of Brigham's grave. This monument, still standing, was commissioned by the citizens of Galveston and has become known as the Brigham Monument.<sup>7</sup>

The Mexican dead never received comparable attention. A correspondent of the *New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin* visited the battleground several days after the battle and published this report:

I took a deliberate look over the field 3 days after the battle. The sight was horrible. Here lying in clusters, there scattered singly -- the ground was strewed with dead men, dead horses, guns, bayonets, swords, drums, trumpets -- some shattered and broken -- books, papers, shoes, sandals, caps -- the chaos of a routed army was strewed upon the ground -- in a confusion which the imagination cannot conceive -- the natural eye must behold, to be convinced of the reality. The faces of most of the dead were as black as negroes -- horribly swollen and distorted -- the tongues protruding -- the skin blistered -- the limbs in many instances swollen, elevated and half extended -- horrible disgusting masses of corruption.<sup>8</sup>

Many Mexican soldiers fled the slaughter on horseback toward the west in an effort to reach General Vicente Filisola, commander of the remaining Mexican Army stationed on the Brazos River, twenty miles away. Texan cavalry chased in pursuit. William S. Taylor was with the Texan cavalry and left this account:

While pursuing the Mexicans on the road to Vince's Bridge, we overtook numbers, their horses being too tired to enable them to escape; and as we overtook them, we felt compelled to kill them, and did so, though on their knees crying for quarter, and saying, "Me no Alamo--me no la Bahia," meaning that they were not in either of those horrible massacres. As there were but some fifteen or eighteen of us, and some sixty of the Mexicans we were pursuing, besides Santa Anna, Cos, and several other officers, we saw it was impossible for us to

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Rice Brigham entry in L.W. Kemp Papers, San Jacinto Museum. Accessible on-line at: [http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org/Herzstein\\_Library/Veteran\\_Biographies/San\\_Jacinto\\_Bios/biographies/default.asp?action=bio&id=2936](http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org/Herzstein_Library/Veteran_Biographies/San_Jacinto_Bios/biographies/default.asp?action=bio&id=2936)

<sup>8</sup> *The Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 11, 1836 (article copied from the New Orleans Bulletin).

take prisoners, and we had but little disposition to do so, knowing they had slaughtered so many of Fannin's men in cold blood; after they had surrendered as prisoners of war, under solemn treaty stipulations that they should be sent safely to New Orleans. For about half the distance from the battleground to Vince's Bridge, the road was strewed, every few hundred yards, with dead Mexicans, as we took no prisoners in this pursuit.<sup>9</sup>

A few days after the battle, Margaret McCormick, a widow who owned the land where the battle was fought, confronted General Houston and in angry manner demanded that the Mexican dead be buried. John J. Linn recorded the incident as follows:

Mrs. McCormick, on whose estate the principal portion of the slain lay, called at the headquarters of the commander-in-chief and requested him to cause "*them stinking Mexicans*" to be removed from her land. "*Old Sam*" replied with mock seriousness: "Madam, your land will be famed in history as the classic spot upon which the glorious victory of San Jacinto was gained! Here was born, in the throes of revolution, the infant of Texan independence! Here that latest scourge of mankind, the arrogantly self-styled 'Napoleon of the West,' met his fate!" "To the *devil* with your glorious history!" madam replied. "Take off your stinking Mexicans."<sup>10</sup>

Despite this plea, the Mexican dead were not buried by either army. Some accounts indicate that the Texans did not bury the Mexican dead because they did not have enough men to perform the task while guarding the prisoners and equipment at the same time. Other accounts indicate that Texan soldiers were assigned the task of burying the dead Mexicans, but were too repulsed at the grisly task and refused to do so. There is also an account indicating that Santa Anna was asked to order his men to bury the dead and that he refused, expressing indifference and suggesting instead that the bodies be burned.<sup>11</sup> Santa Anna never mentioned the Mexican dead in his post-war accounts published in 1837 except to assign blame for the loss to General Manuel Castrillón who was one of the Mexicans killed at the battle. A letter written from Galveston on May 29, over a month after the battle, reported that Mexican corpses were still on the battleground along with more than 200 rifles that were broken to pieces, "beating out the brains of the Mexicans."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> William S. Taylor, "Pursuit of Santa Anna and His Cavalry After They Had Commenced Their Flight From the Battlefield of San Jacinto," published in the 1868 edition of the Texas Almanac and reprinted in James M. Day (compiler), The Texas Almanac 1857-1873: A Compendium of Texas History (Texian Press: Waco, 1967), pp. 537-40.

<sup>10</sup> Linn, Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Texas, cited above, p. 264.

<sup>11</sup> See the accounts quoted in the appendix to this essay.

<sup>12</sup> Mobile Morning Chronicle, June 11, 1836, reprinted in Virginia Free Press (Charlestown, Virginia), June 30).

## Skull Collecting at the Battleground

Instead of burying or burning the bodies, the Texas army avoided the unpleasant stench of decaying corpses by simply moving away. In early May, the army's camp and the Mexican prisoners were relocated a few miles up Buffalo Bayou. The problem of the corpses at that point fell to the local citizens. According to William P. Zuber:

When all their flesh had disappeared, the cattle of that locality chewed their bones, which imparted such a sickening odor and taste to the beef and milk that neither could be used. The citizens finally buried the bones, except some of the skulls which the cattle could not chew, to stop the ruin of the beef and the milk. Some of the skulls were found on the ground years later.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, the place where the bones were buried was not marked. No burial site has since been discovered despite concerted efforts to locate it. Zuber's reference to skulls left on the ground is corroborated by other accounts.

When John James Audubon came to Texas in April 1837 the existence and availability of Mexican skulls appeared to be common knowledge. On April 29, while he was at Galveston, Audubon wrote that a contractor supplying beef for the army, who was from Connecticut and had a family residing near the battleground, promised him some Mexican skulls.<sup>14</sup> A few weeks later, after visiting the town of Houston, he paid a visit to the battleground. In 1838 he wrote that while on the battleground "we saw scattered the remains of numerous individuals destroyed in that bloody fray."<sup>15</sup>

On February 11, 1838, John Hunter Herndon recorded in his diary that he visited the battleground and while there, "obtained many skulls [sic]." One week later, while in Galveston, Herndon wrote that Dr. Watson "drank whiskey out of a skull that had yet brains in it." He offered this poem, as recorded in Herndon's diary:

'This when living was not worth a pin, But now how precious with good liquor in.' – Dr. Watson.<sup>16</sup>

In November 1841, Josiah Gregg, a noted explorer who published *Commerce of the Prairies* in 1844, spent the night at the home of Martin Hardin at Lynchburg,

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<sup>13</sup> William Physick Zuber, My Eight Years in Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p.97.

<sup>14</sup> Lucy Audubon, The Life of John James Audubon, the Naturalist (New York: G.P. Putnam & Son, 1869), p. 409.

<sup>15</sup> John James Audubon, Ornithological Biography, Vol. IV (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1838), p. xviii.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Forest Muir (ed.), "Diary of a Young Man in Houston, 1838," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Vol. 53, pp. 287-88. See also Max Freund (translator), Gustav Dresel's Houston Journal: Adventures in North America and Texas, 1837-1841 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954) , p.31.

immediately across the San Jacinto River from the battleground. Hardin was married to Nicholas Lynch's widow who was at the same home just prior to the battle. When the topic of discussion turned to the Mexican dead, Gregg wrote that Mr. Hardin "assured us that the cattle, etc. had chewed up nearly all the human bones that had remained strewn on the ground of several hundred Mexicans killed at the battle of San Jacinto." This observation resulted in a discussion among Hardin, Gregg, and another lodger as to why the cows would be interested in chewing the bones. Gregg attributed this phenomenon to the scarcity of limestone in the area and that the bones contained lime which the cows craved. He rejected the theory that they were chewing the bones for salt. The lodger disputed this explanation and argued that a cow would lick and chew the bones simply "because she likes the taste of it."<sup>17</sup>

### The Discovery of Mexican Skulls in 2009

In January 2009, a routine Internet search for items related to San Jacinto produced the surprising discovery of a reference to the battle in a catalog of human crania published in 1857. Prepared by Dr. J. Aitken Meigs, Librarian of the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, the "Catalogue of Human Crania, in the Collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia" was based largely on the collection of a Philadelphia physician named Dr. Samuel G. Morton. Morton, during his lifetime, had published three editions of his own crania catalog. The third and last edition was published in 1849.<sup>18</sup>

The Meigs 1857 catalog contains descriptions of seven skulls of San Jacinto Mexican soldiers complete with a description of their head wounds as follows:

- 555. Mexican soldier, aetat. [age] 40, with three cicatrized gunshot wounds through the right parietal bone. Slain at the battle of San Jacinto, in Texas, A.D. 1836.
- 556. Mexican soldier, aetat. 40, with cicatrized depression of the frontal and nasal bones. Slain at the battle of San Jacinto.
- 557. Mexican soldier, aetat. 40, slain at San Jacinto. A rifle ball has entered the occipital bone and passed out of the left parietal.
- 558. Mexican soldier, aetat. 40, slain at San Jacinto. Skull perforated by a ball.

Nos. 555 to 558, inclusive, from J.J. Audubon, Esq.

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<sup>17</sup> Josiah Gregg, Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg, Vol. 1 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> J. Aitken Meigs, M.D., Catalogue of Human Crania, in the Collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Based upon the Third Edition of Dr. Morton's 'Catalogue of Skulls,' &c. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1857).

772. Singularly formed skull from the battle-field of San Jacinto, in Texas, A.D. 1836. I.C. 79 Dr. Trudeau.
689. Mexican Indian, slain at the battle of San Jacinto, in Texas, A.D. 1836. Man, aetat. 30, I.C. 91. W.M. Blackford, Esq.
690. Mexican soldiers, with a cicatrised saber wound of the os frontis. Mixed Indian and Spaniard? aetat. 30. Slain at San Jacinto, Texas. I.C. 81. J.J. Audubon, Esq.

This remarkable discovery seemed to confirm that Audubon did indeed collect skulls during his trip and that he sent them to Dr. Morton. However, the question remained as to whether these skulls still existed. The quest then turned to Morton's 1849 catalog which was found on microfilm at the University of Texas at Dallas Library. The 1849 catalog listed all seven skulls and described them identically.<sup>19</sup> This confirmed that the skulls had indeed been collected by Morton rather than having been added to the collection after his death in 1851.

Following phone calls and emails to the Academy of Natural Sciences (still in existence in Philadelphia), I was told that the collection was maintained at the Academy until the 1930s when it was transferred in bulk to the University of Pennsylvania. Additional phone calls and emails led to Dr. Janet Monge, the Keeper of Physical Anthropology at the Penn Museum. Dr. Monge confirmed that all of these skulls still existed in the collection, now called the Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection. Remarkably, the mystery of Audubon's skulls had been resolved and biological evidence of Mexican soldiers for the first time would become available for scientific analysis using modern procedures.

Dr. Doug Owsley's forensic analysis of the skulls in January 2010 revealed that skull number 772, attributed to "Dr. Trudeau," was a female Native American with bone preservation different from the other San Jacinto skulls. As a result, Dr. Owsley concluded that this skull was from an unknown burial site and could not have been a San Jacinto skull. However, all of the others, including numbers 555, 556, 557, 558, 689, and 690, were acknowledged as valid San Jacinto battleground skulls. Of these six skulls, five were donated by Audubon according to Morton's catalog, although it is not clear if Audubon himself selected these skulls from the battleground or whether the army beef contractor he met or someone else gave him one or more of the skulls.

The only skull not associated with Audubon is skull number 689. The Morton 1849 and Meigs 1857 catalogs indicate that the donor of this skull was "W.M. Blackford, Esq." This is probably William Matthews Blackford (1801-1864), a lawyer who lived in Fredericksburg, Virginia, between 1825 and 1842, placing him in the town during the period when the skull would have been found and donated. In 1842, President John Tyler

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel George Morton, *Catalogue of Skulls of Man and the Inferior Animals in the Collection of Samuel George Morton* (3d ed.) (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Thompson, 1849). The first two editions of Morton's catalog could not be located.

appointed him United States charge d'affaires at Bogota, New Grenada (now Colombia), and he served in that position until 1842, when he returned to Virginia. He later moved from Fredericksburg to Lynchburg, Virginia. He and his wife raised five sons who fought in the Confederate Army.<sup>20</sup>

A photograph of Blackford-donated skull 689, supplied by the Penn Museum, shows the following inscription in cursive writing on the skull itself:

From the Battle Ground of San Jacinto  
Presented to Doc. James Cooke  
By Charl. A. Pearson  
Presented to Doc. Saml Morton Philad by  
James Cooke, M.D. of Fredericksburg, Va.

The inscription appears to be similar to a “chain of title.” Although Blackford’s name is not mentioned, both he and Dr. James Cooke most likely knew each other because both were residents of Fredericksburg, Virginia, during the years after the battle of San Jacinto when skull collecting occurred on the battleground. Of great interest is that Dr. James Cooke’s brother was William G. Cooke, who came to Texas in 1835 and participated in the battle of San Jacinto as an aide to Sam Houston. William also appears to have been living in Houston at the time of Audubon’s arrival in May 1837.<sup>21</sup> The skull’s reference to Charles A. Pearson is likely a reference to a man of the same name who purchased a league and labor of land in Houston on March 5, 1837, shortly before Audubon’s arrival.<sup>22</sup> Additional research is needed to piece together the connections between these men and to determine when and under what circumstances Blackford came across this skull, but it is certainly possible that Dr. James Cooke’s brother or Audubon himself may have had a role in obtaining this skull.

### Morton’s Scientific Legacy

Samuel George Morton (1799-1851) was a Philadelphia physician who received his training from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. He began his medical career in 1824. In 1830, he commenced the study of “ethnology.” After delivering a lecture on anatomy, it occurred to him that in future lectures he should illustrate differences in the “five great races of man” by displaying real

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<sup>20</sup> See William Matthews Blackford Biographical Note, William Matthews Blackford Papers finding aid, Emory University Library, Manuscripts, Archives & Rare Book Library, accessible online at [http://marbl.library.emory.edu/findingaids/browse\\_results?q=findingaids/content&id=blackford48\\_100126](http://marbl.library.emory.edu/findingaids/browse_results?q=findingaids/content&id=blackford48_100126)

<sup>21</sup> See Harry Warren, “Col. William G. Cooke,” Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association, Vol. IX, No. 3, January 1906, pp. 210-11. See also the biographical entry on William Gordon Cooke in the L.W. Kemp Papers, San Jacinto Museum, published online at [http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org/Herzstein\\_Library/Veteran\\_Biographies/San\\_Jacinto\\_Bios/biographies/default.asp?action=bio&id=3021](http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org/Herzstein_Library/Veteran_Biographies/San_Jacinto_Bios/biographies/default.asp?action=bio&id=3021)

<sup>22</sup> See Harris County Deed Records, Book A. Page 29. This reference was provided to the author by Professor James Paulsen, South Texas College of Law.

skulls. But Morton found to his surprise that skulls “could be neither bought nor borrowed.” He decided, therefore, to collect his own. He enlisted the assistance of his friends “in every quarter of the globe” to amass a remarkable collection of crania that by 1849 included 867 human skulls and 601 skulls of the “inferior animals.” On his death, in 1851, Morton was vice president of the Academy of Natural Sciences. In his memory, a group of 42 men paid his estate \$4,000 to transfer the collection to the Academy.<sup>23</sup>

Morton’s “scientific” contribution to ethnology as a result of his crania studies was controversial and much debated in his own time and after his death. Morton measured the skulls to “compare the characters of the cranium in the different races of men ... not only in reference to exterior form, but also to internal capacity as indicative of the size of the brain.” He measured brain size by pouring white mustard seeds in the skulls. Later he substituted leaden-shot, one eighth of an inch in diameter. Morton’s theory was that intelligence among the races was directly related to brain size. The larger the brain, the greater the intelligence, and vice versa.<sup>24</sup> The San Jacinto skulls, described above, each have a reference to “I.C.,” which referred to “internal capacity” measured in cubic inches. Thus, skull 689, referring to “I.C. 91,” means that Morton found this skull to have an internal capacity of 91 cubic inches.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This biography is found in Meigs, Catalogue, cited above.

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent overview of Morton and description of his collection, see Emily S. Renschler and Janet Monge, “The Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection: Historical Significance and New Research,” in Vol. 50, No. 3, Expedition, pp. 30-38, accessible online at: <http://www.penn.museum/documents/publications/expedition/PDFs/50-3/Renschler.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Meigs, Catalogue, p. vii.

## Appendix A

### The following eyewitness accounts shed additional light on the Mexican dead at San Jacinto

#### John J. Linn

T.F. McKinney and myself, at San Jacinto, went to visit the field of battle. The ghastly spectacle of six hundred Mexican corpses festering in the sun met our gaze. The pockets of every one had been turned in the search for plunder. In passing the breastworks I noticed a man who was extracting the teeth of the dead Mexicans. He was a dentist from the United States, and was supplying himself with these valuable adjuncts of his trade.

We stood uncovered at the grave of our seven [sic -- there were most likely eight] slain heroes; and I could but recognize in this unparalleled result the immediate interposition of Divine Providence.

Three days after the battle a detail was made from each company to bury the [Mexican] dead; to this the men objected. I suggested to General Houston that some two or more hundred prisoners, under a strong guard, should perform this duty, which ought to be as agreeable to the one as disgusting to the other. Houston communicated the suggestion to Santa Anna, who replied that he was wholly indifferent and cared not what disposition was made of the bodies. He also volunteered that where fuel was abundant and convenient he generally found incremation a ready solution for similar problems. Here the matter ended. The stench became intolerable, and citizens living in the vicinity of the field were compelled to remove from their houses for some time.

John J. Linn, Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Texas (New York 1883), pp. 263-64. Linn was on Galveston Island in April 1836. He left Galveston a few days before the battle on a steamboat loaded with reinforcements for Houston's army, but the steamboat foundered in Galveston Bay on the day of the battle. Several days later the boat arrived at the battlefield.

#### Mrs. Dilue Harris

I was on the battle field of San Jacinto the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 1836. ... We stayed on the battle field several hours. Father was helping with the ferry boat. ... The dead Mexicans were lying around in every direction. ... We left the battle field late in the evening. We had to pass among the dead Mexicans, and father pulled one out of the road, so we could get by without driving over the body, since we could not go around it.... The prairie was very boggy, it was getting dark, and there were now twenty or thirty families with us. We were glad to leave the battle

field, for it was a grewsome sight. We camped that night on the prairie, and could hear the wolves howl and bark as they devoured the dead.

Mrs. Dilue Harris, "Reminiscences," Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association, Vol. IV (October 1900). Dilue Harris (nee Rose) was a young girl at the time of the battle. She and her family were in the Runaway Scrape and crossed the battlefield twice – initially traveling east and across the San Jacinto River, and after the battle, returning on the same route. She later published a memoir based on her recollections, interviews with others and the diary of her father Pleasant W. Rose. The above excerpt is from her memoir and describes the return trip across the battleground.

### **Ramón Martínez Caro**

[A few days after the battle] I was informed that accompanied by one of Houston's aides I should go back to the battlefield to search for and bring back the portable *escritoire* and other belongings of the private secretarial staff of His Excellency [Santa Anna].

We left for the purpose, taking with us one of our soldiers to bring back whatever we found. To me alone was reserved the sharp pain of beholding our battlefield after the action. The first thing that met my eye – one that has remained engraved in my mind – was the sight of General Castrillon where he fell, already stripped of his clothes. A short distance from him and in the same condition I saw the bodies of Colonels Peralta and Trevino, Lieutenant Colonel Luelmo, and other officers whom I did not know, and about fifty soldiers. These were all the dead at which place which had been our battle line. ... I sat down for a moment to catch my breath, as if one could breathe in that atmosphere of sorrow and mourning, and busied myself with sad reflections, asking myself while I mused 'Where are our six hundred victims?'

The arrival of the [Texan] aide, who had left me alone, warned me that it was time to return. As we started back, I told him that I did not believe the number of the dead was as large as it was claimed, for both on our battle line and in our immediate vicinity the dead did not exceed one hundred. Wishing to satisfy my doubts, he led me to the entrance of the road [probably the New Washington Road] taken by our troops in their flight, and there I saw, both to the right and the left, as far as the eye could see, a double file of corpses, all men from our force. Moved by this sad spectacle – would that it had been the last – I still had the more bitter sorrow of being conducted a short distance to the left, where there was a small creek, at the edge of the woods, where the bodies were so thickly piled upon each other that they formed a bridge across it. 'At this place,' said the [Texan] aide, 'they rushed in such confusion and in such numbers that they converted the crossing into a mud hole, obstructing the way, and our soldiers in the heat of battle massacred them.' I turned my face in horror; and, noticing the effect produced on me, he repeated, 'Let us go.' 'Yes,' I replied, 'take me away from this place.' We made our way back to where the soldier was with the *escritoire*,

and he told me that he had seen both His Excellency's and my own bed a short distance away. I asked for permission to take them back to camp, and this being granted we returned to Houston's presence.

Martínez Caro served as Santa Anna's secretary and was present at the battle. He managed to surrender without being wounded. He later had a dispute with Santa Anna and published Verdadera Idea de la Primera Campana de Tejas y Sucesos Ocurridos Despues de la Accion de San Jacinto (A True Account of the First Texas Campaign and the Events Subsequent to the Battle of San Jacinto) (Mexico 1837), translated in C.E. Castaneda, The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution (1928), pp. 92 et seq.). The above quote can be found at pages 127-28.

### **Creed Taylor**

Dead Mexicans lay everywhere and in every position, some officers on their cots, enlisted men lay dead across the campfires, slain while preparing the evening meal. It was a gruesome scene I can never forget. The dead Mexicans were not buried---Santa Anna evinced no desire to have that done---but allowed them to remain where they had fallen.

...

I was told that a few days after the battle, a man was seen extracting the teeth of dead Mexicans, though the stench was something fierce. Be it known, however, that this enterprising fellow was not one of our comrades, but one of those who had flocked to the battlefield after the news of the victory. He was a dentist from the "States," and was supplying himself with the necessary adjuncts of his profession. No one disturbed him in his gruesome work.

...

Strange to say our histories of Texas say little or nothing about the disposition of the Mexican dead at San Jacinto and the question is often asked if they were buried. As stated, they were not buried but left to decay where they fell. But the sequel proved that these carcasses should have been buried or burned. Dead Mexicans lay everywhere and in every position. It was a ghastly sight I can never forget. Santa Anna evinced no desire to have his slain men interred, and of course we Texans were not concerned about the final disposition of these unfortunate "greasers." The fact is that immediate burial of so large a number of corpses was rendered impracticable by the great fatigue which the Texans had endured, and by the care of the prisoners and captured army property. Soon the bodies, drenched by the heavy rains and heated by the burning sun, presented a fearful, most ghastly sight, swelling to enormous sizes and decaying with a revolting stench. No one, of course, wanted to engage in the gruesome work. The boys saying that they came to kill, but not to bury Mexicans, and it was jocosely suggested that a dead "greaser" would turn to a mummy---that there was not vitality

enough about them to cause decomposition; that at the Alamo and at Goliad our dead were burned, but that we would be more humane and leave the unfortunate Mexicans to rest in peace on the field.

From James T. DeShields, Tall Men With Long Rifles (1935), purporting to be the account of Creed Taylor as told to James DeShields. There are some questions surrounding this book because DeShields took Taylor's information from a third party interview and apparently embellished or borrowed information from others. For an excellent analysis, see Charles M. Yates, "In Search of Creed Taylor," published online at: <http://www.texianlegacy.com/taylor.html>

### **Pedro Delgado**

April 27: they kept us starving, sleeping in the mud, and exposed to frequent and heavy showers. Still more intolerable was the stench rising from the corpses on the field of San Jacinto, which they had not the generosity to burn or bury after the time-honored custom, regardless of their own comfort and health and those of the surrounding settlements.

Delgado was a Mexican Lt. Col. who was at the battle and surrendered. His journal was republished in Linn, Fifty Years in Texas, cited in the text.

### **Noah Smithwick**

The dead Mexicans lay in piles, the survivors not even asking permission to bury them, thinking, perhaps, that, in return for the butchery they had practiced, they would soon be lying dead themselves. The buzzards and coyotes were gathering to the feast, but it is a singular fact that they singled out the dead horses, refusing to touch the Mexicans, presumably because of the peppery condition of the flesh. They lay there unmolested and dried up, the cattle got to chewing the bones, which so affected the milk that residents in the vicinity had to dig trenches and bury them.

The battlefield bore testimony to the desperate hand-to-hand struggle our men had maintained – rifles broken off at the breech, the stocks besmeared with blood and brains, told but too plainly how foes had met their death. .... many a poor wretch was brained while on his knees, But with the blood of relatives and friends butchered in the Alamo and at Goliad crying for revenge, the Texans did not stop to reflect that these abject creatures were only tools.

Noah Smithwick, The Evolution of a State, or Recollections of Old Texas Days (Austin: Gammel, 1900; rpt., Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), p.92. Smithwick was not in the battle, but he served in the Texas army at the time and arrived at the battlefield

shortly after the battle occurred. See also Noah Smithwick's biography in the Handbook of Texas Online, at <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/SS/fsm50.html>

### **William P. Zuber**

After breakfast on the morning of the twenty-third [April 1836], I walked alone to the battlefield. The slain Mexicans were a ghastly sight. Exposed first to a drenching rain and then to a burning sun, they were decaying rapidly and could not be moved without breaking to pieces. They sent forth a sickening stench. As their number equaled that of our army, our men could not bury them, and they rotted on the field. When all their flesh had disappeared, the cattle of that locality chewed their bones, which imparted such a sickening odor and taste to the beef and milk that neither could be used. The citizens finally buried the bones, except some of the skulls which the cattle could not chew, to stop the ruin of the beef and the milk. Some of the skulls were found on the ground years later.

The bodies which I saw lay the thickest at the upper end of the 'breastworks,' but they were thick elsewhere as well. I did not go to the bay shore, where, it was said, they lay thickest.

William Physick Zuber, My Eighty Years in Texas, p.97. Zuber was in the Texas army at the time of the battle, but was stationed at the camp opposite Harrisburg during the battle. He arrived at the battleground two days after the battle. See also his biography in the Handbook of Texas Online, at <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ZZ/fzu2.html>