

*A Letter of Don Damian Manzanet to Don
Carlos de Siguenza Relative to the Discovery
of the Bay of Espiritu Santo*

1690

SPAIN'S FIRST OCCUPATION OF EAST TEXAS

. . . When I was in Mexico and had spoken to His Excellency [the Viceroy of New Spain] at different times concerning a second expedition to the bay of Espiritu Santo and a visit to the Tejas His Excellency resolved to call a general meeting in order to decide what should be done. Taking for granted the information given by Captain Alonso de Leon about a settlement of Frenchmen among the Tejas, and concerning the death of those who had settled on the bay of Espiritu Santo, it was uncertain whether some French vessel might have come afterwards with settlers for the bay; besides, there were other grounds for action in the fact that the Tejas were asking for priests for their country. All these grounds being taken into account in the general meeting, there were various opinions, and finally His Excellency decided that a second expedition should be undertaken to the bay of Espiritu Santo. Previously Captain Alonso de Leon had already made known to His Excellency all that was necessary for that journey in case it should be undertaken. His Excellency ordained that Captain Alonso de Leon should go as commander, taking with him a hundred and ten soldiers—twenty from the presidios of Viscaya, those nearest Coahuila, forty who enlisted in Sombrerete and Zacatecas, the rest from Saltillo and the Nuevo de Leon—one hundred and fifty loads of flour, two hundred cows, four hundred horses, fifty long firelocks, twelve hundred weight of powder, and three hundred weight of shot. They were to inspect the bay of Espiritu Santo and to ascertain whether there were any Frenchmen left of those who used to live there, or whether others had recently arrived; the wooden fort built by the French was to be burnt down, and Captain Alonso de Leon was to communicate with the Governor of the Tejas from the bay of Espiritu Santo as to whether he would be willing to have the ministers of the Holy Gospel enter into his territory, as he had promised Father Fray Damian Manzanet a year previous. If the governor consented, then they should escort the priests, proceeding with every precaution, and should dispatch an order requesting and charging the Very Reverend Father Commissary General to send with Father Fray Damian Manzanet those of the brethren of the Holy College of the Cross who should prove suitable, the said father to decide how many priests would be needed at first. At the same time he was to be provided with all the necessaries for the journey. And I, being present at this general meeting, remarked that I would take along three priests for the Tejas, myself being the fourth, . . . and in the event of the Tejas receiving the faith, then the college should send whatever other priests would be required. This was resolved by the general meeting. . . .

We left Coahuila [Monclova] for the Tejas on the third day of the Easter feast, March 28, '90. When we left, the twenty soldiers from Vizcaya had not yet arrived. The forty from Zacatecas were for the most part tailors, shoemakers, masons, miners—in short, none of them could catch the horses on which they were to ride that day, for when they had once let them go they could manage them no longer. Besides, we had saddles that could not have been

worse.

Thus we went on travelling by the route described in the journal which was kept of this expedition. What I noticed was that on our first trip we had found many Indians along the rivers and everywhere else, while this time we went to inspect the bay of Espiritu Santo and returned to the Guadalupe river without having found a single Indian in all the country. Twenty of us reached the fort built by the Frenchmen, the rest remained with the horses by the Guadalupe river. We saw no trace of Frenchmen having been there during our absence, all being as we had left it the year before, except that certainly there were signs that the Indians had dwelt there. I myself set fire to the fort, and as there was a high wind—the wind, by the way, was from the sloop brought by the Frenchmen, which had sunk on entering the bay—in half an hour the fort was in ashes. This was at the hour of noon; afterwards we went down to the coast of the bay, all along the banks of the arroyo by which the Frenchmen passed in and out of the bay with their barges and canoes. And after we had arrived, some of the soldiers of Reyno de Leon said that they wished to bathe, in order to be able to tell that they had bathed in the sea, this being esteemed so remarkable a thing that they carried away flasks of seawater which later, in their own country of Monterey, it was held a great favor to try and to taste, because it was sea-water. . . .

We returned to the main body of the army, . . . [and on April 29] we left for the country of the Tejas, and . . . [on May 9 reached the Colorado River where Indians were encountered who] said that further along there were other Indians, and with them two Frenchmen. Leon . . . sent for them and they came. The one was named Pedro Muni [Pierre Meunler], a Creole, from the city of Paris, the other, Pedro Talo [Pierre Talon], a Creole, from New France; these had firelocks, a sack of powder, and shot, more than twenty reales of the lowest value, in silver, Spanish money, and eighty gold eight-dollar doubloons, French money. . . . One of the two Frenchmen mentioned, P. Muni, must have been about twenty years old; the other, Pedro Talo, eleven or twelve. . . .

There came also to that spot an Indian who was thoroughly acquainted with the road into the country of the Tejas, and he showed us the way until we met with the governor of the Tejas [on May 18], together with fourteen or fifteen of his Indians, and the Indian whom we had sent to him with our message. . . . As soon as the governor saw me he came forward to embrace me; we sat down to talk by signs—this being the most usual mode of communication in those regions; and he produced a small sack of powdered tobacco, of the kind which they grow, and another small sack of *pinole*, white, and of very good quality. . . .

Three days later, on Monday, May 22, 1690, we entered the village [situated northwest of the present town of Weches in Houston County]. It was raining heavily on our arrival. That year it had, up to that time, rained but little, and already the corn was suffering from the drought, but every day of the eleven that we spent in the village it rained very hard. . . .

We came to the governor's house, where we found a number of Indians—men, women, and children. Kneeling, we concluded the Litany, and we blessed the house. Soon the governor and the other Indians came up to kiss my robe, and the former bade us enter, in order to look at his house. The house is built of stakes thatched over with grass, it is about twenty *varas* high, is round, and has no windows, daylight entering through the door only; this door is like a room-door such as we have here. In the middle of the house is the fire, which is never extinguished by day or by night, and over the door on the inner side there is a little superstructure of rafters very prettily arranged. Ranged around one-half of the house, inside, are ten beds, which consist of a rug made of reeds, laid on four forked sticks. Over the rug they spread buffalo skins, on which they sleep. At the head and foot of the bed is attached another carpet forming a sort of arch, which, lined with a very brilliantly colored piece of reed matting, makes what bears some resemblance to a very pretty alcove. In the other half of the house, where there are no beds, there are some shelves about two *varas* high, and on them

are ranged large round baskets made of reeds (in which they keep their corn, nuts, acorns, beans, etc.), a row of very large earthen pots like our water jars, these pots being used only to make the *stole* when there is a large crowd on the occasion of some ceremony, and six wooden mortars, for pounding the cam in rainy weather (for, when it is fair, they grind it in the courtyard)....

Using the Frenchman as an interpreter I told the governor with many kind expressions that his house was very fine, and that I heartily appreciated his desire to have the priests in his household, but that since we had to build a house for the celebration of masses, it might be well to build likewise a dwelling for the priests, because they must needs live near the church. Thereupon the governor said that we should build the house in the most suitable place, that he would show us the village, and that I might choose the spot. We agreed to visit the village on the following day in order to look for a favorable location for the church and the priests' dwelling; accordingly next day we went with the governor, who took us to the place the French had selected for their settlement, pleasantly and favorably situated on the riverbanks. We did not locate the convent there because it was so far out of the way of the Indians. Just at that spot they showed us two dead bodies of Frenchmen who had shot each other with carbines. All this day we were unable to find a place which suited me.

The next morning [May 26] I went out with Captain Alonso de Leon a little way, and found a delightful spot close to the brook, fine woods, with plum trees like those in Spain. And soon afterwards, on the same day, they began to fell trees and cart the wood, and within three days we had a roomy dwelling and a church wherein to say mass with all propriety. We set in front of the church a very high cross of carved wood. . . .

"When the church and the dwelling intended for the priests had been finished [on May 31] they carried into these buildings all that was to be left for the priests, and on the morning of the first of June, the octave of the feast of Corpus Christi, we consecrated the church and celebrated mass, after which the Te Deum Laudamus was sung in thanksgiving, the soldiers firing a royal salute. The church and village were dedicated to our Holy Father St. Francis. . . .

If the Tejas asked for priests and desired baptism, the priests were to remain there. And if the Tejas proved quite friendly and no danger was to be expected at their hands, no large garrison was to be left behind; if, on the other hand, they proved troublesome, as many soldiers should remain as seemed needful, according to the advice and with the consent of Father Fray Damian Manzanet. It was at no time necessary for the safety of the priests to leave soldiers among the Tejas, for from the very first they welcomed us with so much affection and good will, that they could hardly do enough to please us. Yet, in the face of all this, Captain Alonso de Leon made arrangements to leave fifty men, under the command of Captain Nicolas Prietto, an incapable and undeserving old man. . . .

However, in the end, it was arranged that the three soldiers recommended by me should remain there. They were willing to do so, and we're quite content. . . .

On the 2nd of June we took our departure, and the priests walked with us a little way out of the village. Then we took leave of one another with many tears of joy and gladness, for these men did not sorrow at being left behind, nay, rather, they gave thanks to God for having merited such a grace as to be called to save the souls of the heathen. ...

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