

# **Rosalie Hart Priour and Annie Fagan Teal: Loyalty to the Land in the Irish Colonies of Mexican Texas**

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## **Abstract**

With the opening of Mexico's northern border in the late 1820s, many foreign emigrants left their homelands for the wild Texan frontier. The offer of land and opportunity was especially appealing to many Irishmen. Consequently, a great many Irishwomen soon found themselves alongside their husbands and children struggling to survive in an unknown land. Rosalie Hart Priour and Annie Fagan Teal both accompanied their families into Texas in the early 1830s with the dream of owning land. Their experiences during the initial overseas journey, colonization, and through the Texas Revolution reveal not only the hardships they endured, but also give insight into the mind-set of frontier women, and a better understanding of what it was that drove them to leave their homelands for a wild, and unknown country. As disease, revolution, and disorder attempted to pull the people from their land, many men and women's loyalty and even identity changed in order to maintain a hold on the land first given to them by Mexico.

In the immediate aftermath of Mexican independence from Spain, Mexico was faced with the enormous task of securing its northern provinces from illegal colonizers, a task that had always proven elusive for Spain. The long and bloody war with Spain had left Mexico vulnerable, as it well knew, and anxious to secure, maintain, and populate the northern province state of Coahuila and Texas to not only prevent any possible aggression from the United States, but to make use of a land that was rich in natural resources. After failed attempts to relocate native Mexicans into the area, the Mexican government passed the Colonization Act of 1825, and began to open up great tracts of land to foreign emigrants for colonization. Using a system of *empresarios*, Mexico created contracts with twenty-five men of differing backgrounds who assured the government of their loyalty to Mexico, and ability to bring good, quality families into Texas.<sup>1</sup> Of these twenty-five, nine would fulfil their contracts by bringing in families, but "all the attempts made by European *empresarios* ended in

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/irishcolframe.htm>.

failure, with the exception of two pairs of Irishmen who were partially successful in founding colonies in south Texas” (Davis 2002: 72).

The Irish partnerships of James Hewetson and James Power, and John McMullen and James McGloin were responsible for relocating hundreds of men, women, and children directly from Ireland into the Texas frontier. For many Irishmen, this offer of land was worth the certain hardship that came with settling new land. Irishwomen, however, were far less likely to have made the journey had they not been accompanying their husband or family. Annie Fagan Teal and Rosalie Hart Priour were two such women who accompanied their families into Texas in the 1830s. Teal and Priour both left writings that give great insight into the specific hardships of colonizing south Texas, as well as giving an idea of how gender played a role in the different ways that men and women perceived themselves and those around them at different moments in early Texan history.

The Irish colonies of San Patricio and Refugio have often been viewed as indicative of Mexico’s preference for the Irish as colonists when in all reality this was not the case. While the presence of the Irish in south Texas was a part of the Mexican government’s decision to colonize and populate Texas with foreign emigrants, it was not, as some historians put forth, a direct attempt to specifically and purposefully bring in an Irish population. In order to create a Texan population that was loyal to Mexico, the federal government placed stipulations in its colonization acts that allowed them to determine who would be allowed to colonize and where. By all accounts, the Irish should have been perfect candidates for Mexican colonization because of their shared Catholic religion, their history of oppression, and their seeming loyalty to a country that was offering land in what many viewed as paradise. The Irish, however, were very similar to many other frontier groups who lived in “a world of exceedingly fluid identities” (Reséndez 2004: 3). The Irish colonists and *empresarios* entering Texas moulded their identities in different ways to most benefit themselves and the land they had acquired. Irish *empresarios* adapted to and immersed themselves into the Mexican culture, while promoting the rich and vast Texan territory to land hungry Irish families. Irish women not only interacted with Indians and Mexicans to survive in an unknown land, but many who were widowed also went to great lengths to retain possession of the land contracted to them through their husbands. Likewise, though most Irish colonists arrived while Texas was a part of Mexico, they soon became immersed in the Texan culture, sharing in the Texan struggle for independence. *Empresario* James Power, who had once promoted his Irish identity as proof that he would remain loyal to Mexico, was politically active in Texas’ next step towards U.S. annexation. Although Mexico and Ireland had many shared characteristics, the lure of land proved more important than a shared religion or history of oppression. The Irish colonists’ loyalty lay with the land they had acquired, their identities

bending to accommodate those who would support them. With their eyes firmly set on the land they had acquired, the Irish colonists of San Patricio and Refugio were instrumental in not only colonizing south Texas, but in securing Texan independence and eventual annexation to the United States.

Irish history is often identified by three distinct types of historical writing on immigration patterns, which Graham Davis, a leading historian in Irish and Mexican connections, very effectively applies to the historical writing on the Irish in Texas. These patterns encompass oppression, compensation, and contribution history. Oppression history regards the Irish as victims of involuntary emigration due to English brutality and laws (Flannery 1980: 13). Compensation history builds on the oppression angle, but tends to create more of a heroic view of Irish history, treating Irish emigrants to Texas as “masters of their own destiny” who chose to find a way out of their misery and seek new opportunities (Davis 2002: 47). The last way that historians have written about Irish emigration to Mexico is through contribution history, which highlights the ways in which a previously held back Irish population was able to make veritable contributions in building communities and nations. Davis, in his book *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas*, attempts to “overcome the traps” of both oppression history and contribution history (Davis 2002: 5). Davis incorporates a more inclusive history, which focuses on the Irish in Texas while at the same time placing them in the context of the larger world around them.

Though stories of specific women are retold throughout the scholarship, few historians have developed upon the specific experience of women in the Irish colonies. Their experiences during the initial overseas journey, colonization, and through the Texas Revolution reveal not only the hardships they endured, but also give insight into the mind-set of frontier women, and a better understanding of what it was that drove them to leave their homelands for a wild, and unknown country. Irish emigrant Rosalie Hart Priour vividly recounts her and her mother’s experiences in the Irish colony of Refugio in southern Texas (Priour).<sup>2</sup> Her account, along with many other women’s, shows an incredible ability to adapt, survive, protect, and eventually thrive. Despite death, disease, and war many women were able to hold on to their land grants, create thriving stores, and become teachers or nurses. There is also evidence to show that women relied heavily on a spiritual understanding of their sufferings and successes.

Much of the scholarship surrounding the Irish colonies of San Patricio and Refugio also include reasons why Mexico would have preferred Irish

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<sup>2</sup> Priour’s autobiography was part of a manuscript generously provided by Keith Petrus.

emigrants as colonizers. Although there are indications that Mexico may have believed it would benefit from Irish settlers, “it soon became evident that far from being a bulwark against American penetration, as some Latinos may have hoped, these Irish quickly became an integral part of the Texan community...their [Irish] identity was soon discarded; they became Texan in every sense.” (Murphy 1952: 46) The Irish pioneers’ desire to obtain, hold onto, and expand on the land given to them by Mexico is evident throughout most of the scholarship and primary sources that surround the Irish colonies.

In the article, “Texas as Viewed from Mexico,” historian of Mexican and Latin American studies, Nettie Lee Benson puts forth compelling evidence as to why Mexico would have specifically preferred Irish settlers in Texas. According to Benson, the “Mexican empire would suffer an irreparable loss if through misfortune, that beautiful province should be removed from its control. Texas needed to be preserved because of its importance and no other means for accomplishing this remained than populating it” (Benson 1987: 227). Established in 1821, Mexico’s Committee on Foreign Relations quickly developed methods in which to introduce foreigners to Texas. According to Benson, “the matter upon which they worked primarily was an agrarian and colonization law for the provinces of Texas and California” (Benson 1987: 225). In a report made by the committee, it was recommended “that settlers should come first from New Orleans” (Benson 1987: 225). New Orleans at this time was a hub of cultural diversity filled with American traders and merchants, various groups of Europeans emigrants, Mexicans, and Native Americans (Oberste 1953: 22). The report’s second proposal for population into Texas was to be from the Mexican empire itself. The Mexican government believed that “Mexico had many poor people, who, by gaining some land, would be converted from idleness to usefulness, something to their own advantage and to that of the State” (Benson 1987: 226). The last source of population that the report puts forth was to be from Europe. Benson argues, “The United States owed its great growth to this [European] spirit of emigration. If, however, the door should be opened to the European nations to populate Texas...[families] would abandon the idea of going to the U.S. and would fix their eyes only upon Texas” (Benson 1987: 226). From this initial report, Benson further asserts “among the European nations, the Irish would be the most desirable settlers...they were loyal Catholics, had suffered the most cruel persecutions without hesitating in their perseverance...[had] outstanding moral virtues; their industry and love of work had no limits; they were not friend to England or the United States” (Benson 1987: 227). Though this initial report raises reasonable evidence that Mexico desired Irish colonizers, further research into the Mexican Colonization Law of 1825, as well as the land grants that were given out in later years, reveal that no clear plan for implementing this was ever developed. Instead, it was the desire for land that created urgency in

those who would petition Mexico for the right to colonize within Texas. Included in those petitioners, were the partnerships of Irish entrepreneurs James Power and James Hewetson, and John McMullen and James McGloin.

Though little is known about the early lives of the Irish *Empresarios*, it has been established that “through marriage, political association, and language ties, the Irish *empresarios* were incorporated into the rich Hispanic culture of Mexico” (Davis 2002: 75). John McMullen, after arriving from Ireland in 1810, married a Mexican widow named Dona Esther Espadas. It was not uncommon for European men to marry Mexican women, especially those with wealth and influence. For the Irish *empresarios* this was not only beneficial politically, financially, and socially, but it also allowed them to begin to identify more as Mexicans than as Irishmen. In the 1820s, “[McMullen] moved to Matamoros, Mexico, on the border of the province of Texas, where he continued to make a living as a merchant” (Davis 2002: 73). According to San Patricio memoirs, collected by Rachel Hebert Bluntzer, McMullen “could now speak and read the Spanish language, and had made influential Mexican friends; this would be an asset to him in any enterprise which he might undertake in Mexico” (Bluntzer 1981: 15). Upon introduction to James McGloin, the two began a partnership, and in 1828, sought permission to introduce Irish families into Texas for colonization.

The Power and Hewetson relationship began in the years after Hewetson left Ireland for Philadelphia. He later relocated to Saltillo and Monclova, Mexico where “he was engaged in mercantile, manufacturing, and mining enterprises and became an influential figure in government circles in the province of Coahuila and Texas” (Davis 2002: 74). Hewetson became a Mexican citizen in 1827, about a year after partnering with James Power to start the Refugio Colony, and in 1833 “married a wealthy widow, Josepha Guajardo” (Davis 2002: 74). Similarly, James Power, native of County Wexford, Ireland, first emigrated to Philadelphia before moving on to New Orleans, and eventually to Saltillo and Matamoros, Mexico where he met and married the daughter of a Mexican captain. Davis makes the compelling argument that “it surely [was] not a coincidence that both Power and Hewetson married into high-ranking Mexican families. This was not only politically astute in recommending themselves to government officials in Mexico, but also represented something of greater significance” (Davis 2002: 75). In order to secure a strong population “the plain intent of the colonization law was to...merge foreign elements with the Mexican nationality by rewarding immigrants who married the native born with an additional premium of land” (McBeath 1953:11). Hewetson and Power were seen as loyal Mexican citizens, well adjusted into their adopted country, and as long as land was the reward, they would continue to act so.

On 18 August 1824, the central government of Mexico passed the national colonization law, which authorized all of its states to enact colonization laws in accordance with the new national law (McBeath 1953: 6). The 1825 State Colonization Laws of Coahuila and Texas, thus called “All foreigners, who in virtue of the general law, of the 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1824, which guarantees the security of their persons and property, in the territory of the Mexican Nation, wish to remove to any of the settlements of the State of Coahuila and Texas, are at liberty to do so; and the said State invites and calls them.”<sup>3</sup> Contracts were made between the State and the *empresarios* with provisions for fulfilling each contract. Nearly each contract gave the same conditions, which included: a statement of the boundaries of the proposed colony, the introduction of at least one hundred families for colonization, the promise that all families introduced would be of Catholic religion and have good moral character, all communication with the government to be written in Spanish, the ejection of any criminals found to be within the colony, and finally the stipulation that all *empresarios* should fulfil their contractual requirements within six years of signing their contract with the government (McBeath 1953: 9). Within the contracts, the specific instruction to include families as opposed to single males bears great significance. Mexico’s plan to populate Texas was dependent upon colonists bringing and creating families to set down roots in the land. This was a significant part of Mexico’s plan to create a thriving population in Texas. When Mexico made known that it was offering land grants, both Irish partnerships were quick to realize the potential opportunity. As compensation for their labour in bringing in colonists, *empresarios* also “received about 23,000 acres of land for each one hundred families actually brought to Coahuila and Texas as settlers” (McBeath 1953: ii). The provisions set forth in the contracts were nearly uniform, with the exception of the contract of Power and Hewetson.

In her masters dissertation, Sister James Joseph McBeath states, “The two Texas Irish colonies of Refugio and San Patricio...were unique in so far that they were the only two colonies officially sanctioned during the colonial period for the introduction of settlers from Europe” (McBeath 1953: iii). Her assertions are not clearly delineated, however, as comparison of the two contracts actually show that it was only the contract of Power and Hewetson that made the explicit demand for Irish emigrants. Under Article 2 of the Power and Hewetson contract, it states, “The *Empresarios* are obliged to introduce and establish as their own charge two hundred families in lieu of the four hundred which they offered to do. It being an express condition that one half of this enterprise must be Mexican families and the remainder foreigners from Ireland” (Oberste

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/irishcolframe.htm>.

1953: 12). The contract of McMullen and McGloin similarly states in Article 4 “the *Empresarios* John McMullen and James McGloin are bound to introduce the two hundred families they offer, within the term of six years from this date, under the penalty of forfeiting the rights and privileges granted to them by said law” (Oberste 1953: 19). The next article goes on to demand Catholic families of good character, but in no other place does the contract ask specifically for Irish to be introduced.

The Mexican government, as well as the Irish *Empresarios*, would have been well aware of the many shared characteristics between the Irish and Mexican people. The introduction of native Irish in the Power and Hewetson petition was thus most likely a way “to gain the trust and confidence of Mexican government officials and to secure the contract in the face of a powerful suspicion of all foreigners” (Davis 2002: 72). By reassuring the Mexican government that they would not be bringing in American colonizers, Power and Hewetson not only showed their loyalty to Mexico, but also maintained that their colonizers had no previous loyalties to the bordering United States. Davis argues, “Their Irish identity was important in persuading the Mexican government that Irish migrants would make good settlers and act as a buffer against the potential aggression of the United States” (Davis 2002: 73).

By 1828, both Irish partnerships had received contracts from the Mexican government allowing them to introduce foreign colonists into Texas. McMullen and McGloin’s petition was quickly approved and in order to fulfil their contract, they immediately began recruiting Irish families who had immigrated into the United States. They recruited the majority of their families from New York “through newspaper advertisements and in interviews with prospective settlers” (Davis 2002: 83). Other families made their way independently to Texas.

Annie Fagan Teal was one such colonist to make the journey with her family, arriving in Texas in 1829 when she was fifteen years old. Originally published in “By the Way” magazine in 1897, the “Reminiscences of Mrs. Annie Fagan Teal later appeared in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in 1931. Teal’s account had been collected and written down by Mrs Thomas O’Connor of Victoria, Texas. Teal’s narrative begins with her parents’ decision to leave Ireland for New York. Within a few years they were settled near St. Louis, Missouri; however, the country was “thinly settled by whites, Sioux Indians forming the greater part of the population, the climate cold and no Catholic church near” (Teal 1931: 317). The lack of a Catholic community appeared to have weighed heavily on Teal’s mother who “was anxious to leave and find a home where her children could be brought up under the influences of her own church. New Orleans was selected” (Teal 1931: 317). Although Teal’s mother reached New Orleans, she died soon after, and in 1829, the Fagan family relocated to Texas.

Teal's reminiscences describe the early colonists as being "surrounded by Mexicans and Indians, they learned to fear neither, as they were never harmed during all the long years they lived among them. Women and children went from house to house, or roamed over the broad prairie without accident or harm" (Teal 1931: 320). Other colonists' descriptions of interactions with the Indians and Mexicans reveal that though Teal "was familiar with many of the customs of the different tribes around them," actual relationships between colonists and natives were somewhat more complicated (Teal 1931: 323). Teal and her family would eventually become colonists in Refugio.

Because McMullen and McGloin aimed their recruiting at Irish immigrants already resident in New York, they were able to more quickly bring in settlers to the San Patricio colony. In contrast, according to Davis, "recruitment for the Power-Hewetson colony in Refugio was undertaken under the severe pressure of the deadline for the fulfilment of the contract, due to expire in June, 1834" (Davis 2002: 88). Since 1826, two years prior to signing their contract, Power and Hewetson had gone up against powerful opposition regarding the area of land allocated to their colony. According to historian Andrés Reséndez, the *Tejano* colony of Goliad "vigorously protested the decision of the state government to give Irish *empresario* James Power...lands in the extinguished mission of Refugio. Members objected to a land policy that so blatantly favoured Anglo-American developers while impinging on the rights of Mexican Texans who had owned these lands 'from time immemorial'" (Resendez 2004: 72). Although Power and Hewetson secured their contract in 1828, all attempts to extend the terms of the contract met without success. Power then decided to embark for Ireland himself, in October of 1833, in order to gain enough colonists to meet the provisions of the contract (McBeath 1953: 40).

By January of 1834, Power's charismatic recruitment, no doubt made all the more convincing because of his desperate situation, had met with success. He and 350 other colonists soon set sail on a journey fraught with tragedy to a land that had been hailed as a paradise on earth. Irish emigrant Rosalie Hart Priour, from County Wexford, Ireland, recalls not only the voyage to Texas, but also the way in which Power enticed the Irish to Texas with stories of beautiful terrain and abundant riches. Priour recalls that Power described Texas as one of the "richest countries in the world...with gold so plentiful you could pick it up under the trees" (Davis 2002: 89). Priour's father, Thomas Hart, was especially inclined to try his luck in Texas. In the few years prior to Power's visit, Thomas Hart had gone from a being a relatively well-off Water Guard, to a down and out farmer in County Wexford (Priour 17). Commissioned in a lighthouse in Roches Point, Cork, Thomas Hart had made a significant amount of money from the English government by turning in smuggled goods.



Despite his success, his wife, Elizabeth Hart, begged him to leave his post and take up fifty acres of land, given to her by her father, in County Wexford (Priour 16). According to Priour, her “father began farming, but knew no more about it than a baby, [and] consequently did not succeed very well” (Priour 19). She goes on to describe her father as one who “was very generous, and knew nothing of the value of money...he was often applied to for assistance...But the result of his generosity was that in three years the twenty-five thousand dollars we had in the bank in Wexford was all gone and nothing left except the farm” (Priour 20). Priour and her family were one of the first families that sailed from Ireland to the Mexican province of Texas in order to join the colony of Refugio. Power’s assurance that Texas was a land of opportunity surely influenced Thomas Hart’s decision to bring his family to Texas.

Priour describes the first part of the colonists’ journey as going “on splendidly. Nothing occurred to disturb the equanimity of the passengers for about six weeks. However, they had arrived at a time when the cholera was raging in New Orleans. People were dying so fast it was impossible to dig graves and the dead were buried in trenches” (Priour 27). Some historians estimate that up to 120 of these first colonists died from cholera, shipwreck, and Indian attacks before reaching their colony of Refugio (Davis 2002: 96). Priour’s autobiography also sheds light on the specific hardships that some women endured as colonists in south Texas. Priour’s mother, Elizabeth Hart, left Ireland with her husband and three daughters after contracting with Power for land in south Texas. Before even setting foot on their land in Refugio, Hart lost her five-year-old daughter to heatstroke, and her husband to cholera. Priour writes,

Oh! The horror of our situation, my dear good mother must have been a woman of iron nerve to bear up against such trouble as she had to go through. We were in a strange country, thousands of miles from our friends and relations, on a sand beach exposed to the burning heat of summer or drenched by rain through the day and at night surrounded by wild animals, not knowing the minute we would be drowned. Then there were thousands of naked savages even more to be dreaded than the wild beasts, and a company of Mexican soldiers on guard for the purpose of preventing us from moving from that place under two weeks time, for fear we would spread the cholera (Priour 36).

While in the midst of the chaos and tragedy, Priour maintained a spiritual belief in all that she did. Priour writes that as a child she did not fear death, but when spoken to about it would comment, “we have to die once and we may as well die now as at any other time. God can protect us from

danger if it is His Will to do so, if not, it is our place to submit” (Priour 24). Priour went on to Refugio with her mother and youngest sister, and though only seven years old, her “share of work was to cook, and keep the house clean, take care of my sister and carry mother's dinner to her” (Priour 38). Their arrival in Refugio coincided with the spread of dysentery, and Elizabeth Hart spent the first several weeks attempting to nurse many colonists back to health. Priour comments, “With all our exertions we could not save all, a great many died. It was dreadful to look at them after death” (Priour 38). Though the colonists could never have anticipated the tragic end of this initial journey, they were willing and able to sacrifice what they had in Ireland for the opportunity to own large areas of land in Texas.

Despite initial losses, Power was able secure passage for three more ships of Irish colonists. Upon arrival in Refugio, and with less than the 200 colonists contractually required, the *empresarios* became aware that many travellers were passing through Refugio searching for desirable lands to settle. According to McBeath, “Power and Hewetson prevailed upon these strangers to remain in the Refugio colony” (McBeath 1953: 66). Petitions were swiftly drawn up and presented to Governor Vidaurri of the State of Coahuila and Texas, and quickly granted so long as the new settlers “did not belong to a nation at war with Mexico, and that such colonists would have to be introduced to the colony before June 12, at which time the contract...would have expired” (McBeath 1953: 67). As a result, settlers from the United States, Scotland, England, Germany, Canada, Italy, and Greece all came to reside in Refugio. McBeath argues, “The inclusion of these settlers effectively changed the character of a colony originally intended for Irish and Mexicans exclusively” (McBeath 1953: 67). In his 1953 MA thesis, Edward Carew Murphy argues that instead of solely adopting Mexican customs and traditions, the “Irish quickly became an integral part of the Texan community. A love of freedom and hatred of military oppression were the heritage of centuries of British despotism and these qualities made them just as ready to espouse the cause of liberty as any colonists of other national origins...they would share in every step of the struggle for independence” (Murphy 1953: 46).

Mexican historian, Andrés Reséndez puts forth the argument that life on the Mexican border consisted of different groups of people who lived in a “world of exceedingly fluid identities” (Reséndez 2004: 1). Reséndez writes about the changing national identities on the frontier of Mexico’s northern border, while “[grappling] with the extraordinarily slippery question of how Spanish speaking frontier inhabitants, nomadic and sedentary Native American communities, and Anglo Americans who had recently moved to the area came to think of themselves as Mexicans, Americans, or Texans” (Reséndez 2004: 1). Reséndez gives strong evidence that at any given time on the frontier “choosing one’s identity could constitute an

exciting business opportunity, a bold political statement, and at times was quite simply a matter of survival” (Reséndez 2004: 2). This argument can readily be applied to the colonists in San Patricio and Refugio at the onset of the Texas Revolution.

After the initial hardships that came with beginning a new colony, in “1835 colonies at Refugio and San Patricio were beginning to grow and to become established...colonists in possession of their lands...proudly pointed out their leagues of land...satisfying the Irish love of land, because over the centuries this right had been denied them” (Oberste 1953: 147). Concerned with improving and settling into the new lands they had acquired, many of the colonists were unaware that Texas “had long been in a state of unrest because of many irreconcilable differences with the Supreme Government” (Oberste 1953: 151). In September of 1835, Refugio was occupied with Mexican troops, and “Power’s colonists [who] had already experienced the opposition of and disputes with the officials... were therefore not too favourably inclined towards the Mexicans” (Oberste 1953: 153). Similarly, historian Edmund Murphy argues that the chaotic nature of the Mexican government “did little to inspire loyalty among the Texan settlers” (Murphy 1953: 47). At the start of the Texas Revolution, the Irish, *Tejanos*, and Anglo-Americans “all employed the language of freedom...though their meanings varied according to circumstances and cultural values” (Davis 2002: 108). For the Irish colonists recently settled on their new lands, “the freedom to preserve life and their newly won land grants was a central concern” (Davis 2002:108). With the desire for land no doubt weighing heavily on their minds, many of the Irish colonists became fixated on independence for Texas.

Historian John Brendan Flannery utilizes the concept of contribution history of the Irish in Texas, especially during the time of the Texas Revolution. Flannery argues that although many “Irish...at first hesitated to take up arms against Mexico...[feeling] a loyalty to a government that had given them land and freedom and economic opportunity...with the outbreak of hostilities, they were to discover that the solid values of their Mexican neighbours were not reflected in the tyrannical government of Santa Anna. They then threw themselves wholeheartedly behind the Texan cause” (Flannery 1980: 68). Flannery details the contributions of San Patricio and Refugio colonists during the battles and skirmishes that became the fight for Texan independence. According to Flannery, “in terms of lives sacrificed, property lost and land despoiled, none gave more to Texas independence than the Irish colonists of San Patricio, and Refugio...sending wives and children to safety...most men joined the Texan volunteers and regular army units that took the field against Santa Anna” (Flannery 1980: 79).

Indeed, Priour comments on her own flight out of Texas stating, “Everybody had to leave their homes as if they were only to be gone a couple of days, as we were told. It was a sorrowful sight to see so many women and children driven from their homes, and not one in the crowd ever recovered anything that was left behind” (Priour 51). Priour and many of the Refugio colonists initially fled to Victoria, Texas, but were quickly warned that Santa Anna “had sent out a decree to his officers that everything in human shape over ten years of age were to suffer death...It was a perfect reign of terror. None knew the moment that they would be called to their last account, and their little children left to starve” (Priour 56). Priour’s account of the exodus out of Texas details how women and children walked through “swamp water nearly up to our knees and the weeds and grass were higher than our heads so that we were completely concealed” (Priour 59). Priour and her mother eventually made their way to safety in Mobile, Alabama.

In contrast to Priour, Teal reserves her anger and fear during this time towards the United States, rather than towards Mexico. In her reminiscences, “Mrs. Teal says that during and just after the war with Mexico there was more distress and trouble of every kind in the country than ever before, caused by robbers and followers of the American army” (Teal 1931: 324). Teal gives a scathing description of the day before Santa Anna was taken prisoner stating,

Men mounted on fine horses rode through the country, crying; ‘Run, run for your lives; Mexicans and Indians are coming’ ...a panic ensued; men, women and children on foot, on horses, with or without saddles, fled the country. Many sickened and died on the road. They were met on the road by a small band who took their guns from them. The alarm given the settlers proved to be a plan concocted to rob and pillage the country, which was done on a magnificent scale (Teal 1931:325).

Teal’s deference to the Mexicans, despite her family’s support of Texan independence, can likely be attributed to her father’s escape during the Fannin massacre in 1836, in which an estimated three hundred and fifty-nine Texan supporters were “on direct orders from Santa Anna...marched out of the fort in three groups and shot down on the open prairie” (Flannery 1980: 78). According to Teal, and authenticated by several historians, “on the day of the massacre a boy came up to Mr. Fagan and told him he had orders to go into a certain orchard and remain until sent for...Mr. F., without understanding the strange command, did as he was told and had barely reached the designed place when he heard the heart rending cries of his comrades. Shot after shot followed in quick succession. Mr. Fagan’s Mexican friends had used this device to save his

life” (Teal 1931: 325). Teal later on in her narrative again describes the early years in Texas as being “a beautiful country – a land flowing with milk and honey; at peace with ourselves and all the world...until robbers came into the country, it was a happy, glorious time” (Teal 1931: 327). Teal died in 1897, having lived out her life with her family in Victoria, Texas.

At the end of the war, Texas had won independence, but at the cost of many lives, including those of the colonists. Though initially taking away the authority and privileges of the *empresarios*, eventually “The Republic of Texas honoured and validated all legal titles issued by the former State of Coahuila and Texas” (Oberste 1953: 256). The Irish colonists’ fight was not the ideological pursuit of freedom, but the fight to secure and hold on to the land that had been given to them. According to family record, Elizabeth Hart made “several trips between Mobile, New Orleans, and Refugio between the years of 1836 and 1840,” despite the chaos within the newly independent Texas<sup>4</sup> (Robeau 1966: 19). Her reasons for making these trips undeniably surrounded her desire to retain her lands in Refugio. In 1844, Elizabeth Hart returned to Texas, and established a permanent residence in Corpus Christi. Rosalie Hart Priour followed with her husband and family in 1851. Oberste argues, “Mexico could but take only a dismal view of its experiment in introducing colonists from abroad. The war of independence found the Irish aligned with the long-feared immigrants from the United States” (Oberste 1953: 228). The Mexican government believed that “the recruitment of foreign migrants who could bring their skills, enterprise, and capital to this land might help to restore the country and populate the northern territories” (Davis 2002: 19). With the constant threat of United States aggression looming over, “the Mexican government looked to European migrants to populate Texas to establish a safeguard against further ‘Americanization’ for the province” (Davis 2002: 20). While some historians have argued the Irish were the obvious candidates for invitation into Texas because of their religion and history, research has shown that land proved to be the motivating factor for the Irish, and was reflected in their changing identities as Irish, Mexicans, *Tejanos*, and United States citizens.

Within ten years the Republic of Texas would be annexed into the United States as the twenty-eighth state. James Power, who had signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, was the delegate sent from Refugio to the annexation convention in Austin on 4 July 1845 (Oberste 1953: 270). He was also one of the signers of the Texas State Constitution, newly adopted as a part of the United States. With Texas loyalty firmly aligned with the United States, the colonies of San Patricio and Refugio were able to once

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<sup>4</sup> Robeau is a descendant of Rosalie Hart Priour. Her manuscript is a part of the rare book collection in Watson Memorial Library in Natchitoches at the Northwestern State University of Louisiana. The library has no account of a publisher, but has publication dates between 1966 and 1985.

again take up their land with the promise of military support should Mexico ever try to encroach upon their lands again. It is of great interest that upon Elizabeth Hart's death, her last will and testament left forty-two hundred acres of land (roughly equivalent to the league and labour of land originally contracted with *Empresario* Power) to her grandchildren with "the balance of the land [left] to my daughter, Mrs. R.B. Priour, to use in the payment of my debts. My cattle and hogs and property in Corpus Christi and the Mission [Refugio] for my daughter" (Robeau 1966: 26). Despite the tragedy and chaos that enveloped so many of the Irish colonists in Texas, Elizabeth Hart had maintained control of the land originally contracted to her until her death in 1863. Mexico's call for foreign colonizers was designed to create a population that was deeply loyal to Mexico. However, it instead generated an overwhelming loyalty to the land that Mexico had extended to them.

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