

THE LIFE OF GEORGE FISHER  
(1795-1873)

AND

THE HISTORY OF THE  
FISHER FAMILY IN MISSISSIPPI

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Sand" creek, near the Big Black River in Claiborne County. He was always hopeful of making his fortune, or of becoming a man of some public importance in the Mexican government, and of arranging for his family to emigrate to Texas.

## II. Escoseses and Yorkinos (1825-1830)

When George Fisher went to Mexico City, "impelled by love of adventure," he arrived on a new scene at a critical moment in its history and soon took part in its current "excitements."

Mexico's Declaration of Independence from Spain had been made in 1821, after which it was briefly a monarchy or "Empire." Then "Emperor" Iturbide had been overthrown by young General Santa Anna who—since it was he who declared the Republic—for several years thereafter appeared as a "liberal" Republican. The two main parties, or their leaders, though nominally either Centralist or Federalist,<sup>15</sup> continued for years merely to gain enough military power to overthrow each other, without much progress ever being made by Federalists toward their aim of self-government for states within a Federal union, and without the Centralists achieving dictatorships that were proof against violent overthrow by rebel "liberals" or "patriots."

By 1825 the Centralists in Mexico City were usually also Monarchists, seeking perhaps some Bourbon prince—and they were Freemasons. Or rather, the "Escoseses" or Scottish Rite Masons were usually Monarchists, while the more recently founded "Yorkinos" or York Rite Masons were active Federalists—striving, said the Centralists, to increase self-government so that the region called Texas would sooner or later be taken over by the United States of the North. The American minister, Joel R. Poinsett, may or may not have been secretly empowered to buy Texas from Mexico; he was expected by President John Quincy Adams to negotiate a boundary line. His efforts were impeded by the British, and all proposals by the United States were delayed and blocked by the chronic suspicions of Mexico.<sup>16</sup> After a Centralist revolution, Poinsett became *persona non grata* in Mexico City; for it was he and his Federalist friends who had founded the anti-Centralist lodges of York Rite Masons there. Livingston says it was George

Fisher who took the lead in this, and it may well be that he was a "front" for Poinsett:

Zealous in everything he undertakes, [Fisher] was active in establishing lodges, a Grand Lodge, Chapter, and Grand Chapter in the City of Mexico in 1825, being assisted by the Hon. J. R. Poinsett, American Minister, and Governor Vidal, formerly of Louisiana.

According to the accepted historical account,<sup>17</sup> the Federalist leaders—General Guerrero, a distinguished officer in the revolutionary struggle against Spain; Lorenzo de Zavala, Senator, and later Governor of the State of Mexico;<sup>18</sup> and several other senators and cabinet officers—had formed five York Rite lodges in opposition to the Centralists' Scottish Rite ones. Zavala states that they then asked Mr. Poinsett to obtain for them a charter from the Grand Lodge in New York. Poinsett did so; but he tried to remain in the background, as he was then attacked quite viciously by the Centralists. The very success of the Federalists' governmental reforms labeled them "Yorkino" and "Americano," and Poinsett was denounced as an ambassador who played Mexican politics. When in January, 1830 at the "reiterated demand" of the Mexican government, by then Centralist and anti-American, Poinsett left Mexico, George Fisher accompanied him to New Orleans, "having been engaged in procuring material for Mr. Poinsett's work on Mexico."<sup>19</sup>

Andrew Jackson, elected President of the United States in 1828, soon sent the clever promoter Anthony Butler to take over the place left vacant by Joel R. Poinsett. Butler, through five years of ostensible negotiations over boundary lines, kept the Mexican government firm in its suspicions that the United States would seize the first opportunity to acquire Texas in one way or another.

But to go back to 1825: Fisher's Masonic connections brought him into close association with prominent political leaders, and he had a chance to learn much about the game of Mexican politics, one that was neither dull nor safe. It was played for high stakes and complicated by the fact that leading players sometimes changed sides, while lesser ones sought to retain their jobs, if possible, under changed administrations and with imperfectly reconstructed loyalties. Recriminations and self-defenses were delivered in the

highest style of classic oratory, that of Cicero against Catiline. When Bravo, who was Vice-President of Mexico and Grand Master of the Escoseses, led a revolt, he was suppressed; Bustamente became Vice-President. But then two Yorkinos clashed: President Guerrero overcame War Minister Pedraza in a *coup* accomplished with some riot and pillage in the capital. This shift should have been favorable for George Fisher, who was a friend of the grim old Guerrero; Fisher did seek to serve him during his brief presidency in 1829. But then during a surprise invasion by Spain, repulsed at Tampico by the gallant General Santa Anna, President Guerrero (on the whole Federalist) was, early in 1830, overthrown by Bustamente (on the whole Centralist).<sup>20</sup> It was at this point, as we have seen, that Poinsett and Fisher left Mexico.

The prominent Yorkino-Federalist, Lorenzo de Zavala, had been a friend to George Fisher. As Governor of the State of Mexico he had in 1829 approved the special decree of the legislature of that state whereby Fisher had become a citizen of the Republic.<sup>21</sup> During his precarious presidency, Guerrero had appointed Zavala as Secretary of the Treasury and head of his cabinet. Zavala's friendship was one in every respect well worth having, and no doubt under a continued stable Federalist regime Fisher's prospects would have been bright indeed. But when, early in 1830, the Centralists took over, Zavala decided to tour the United States and study the principles and practice of representative government—that is, he too was "out," and his hopes for a truly "republican" Mexico were dimming.

Zavala had at first promoted Fisher's interests in two ways—a sub-partner in his contract to establish a colony in the Nacogdoches region, Zavala to settle 500 families, Fisher bringing in 40 of these on 20 *sitios* or square leagues. Also, Zavala had helped him to get a Guerrero appointment as chief collector of customs at the port of Galveston. The city was as yet non-existent, but the bay received the waters of the Trinity River and the San Jacinto, and it was just east of the mouth of the Brazos. The customhouse would regulate the commerce for both Nacogdoches and San Felipe, the two fast-growing regions of such importance for the future.

Increase in Anglo-American population had been encouraged, but now it was feared. Leaders of both political parties had begun to favor planting colonies of Europeans or of Spanish-speaking Mexican farmers, if any could be found willing to move into the Texan wilderness. For several years the able and astute Manuel de Mier y Terán, Commissioner of Colonization, had been traveling about Texas, drawing up a plan to save Texas for Mexico. First, in order to deprive the Americans of their advantage in labor-power, Negro slaves must be prohibited. On September 15, 1829 President Guerrero decreed the abolition of slavery in all of Mexico, and the Texan colonists, who could not raise cotton or sugar without slaves, hated Guerrero. But since Terán, now Commandante General of the Eastern States, was not yet prepared for the military occupation of Texas, he wrote to his friend Stephen F. Austin that he had got Texas exempted from the decree; the colonists loved Terán. They did not want Texas to be bought by Anthony Butler for the five million dollars said to be authorized by President Andrew Jackson; they wanted to be loyal to the Mexican Constitution of 1824, which guaranteed their land titles, and they wanted to be let alone.

Now in the new Centralist regime, the Minister of Foreign Relations, Lucas Alamán, had just steered through Congress what came to be known as the Law of April 6, 1830. It applied to all of Mexico, but bore hardest on Texas. To Terán's general plan for Mexican colonization, abolition of slavery, and establishment of customhouses, all to be enforced by a military occupation, was added Alamán's Article Eleven: the prohibition of further immigration from the United States. All this seemed to spell ruin; therefore Austin could not believe that his friend Terán would enforce it. The colonists awaited a sign of change, and it was to be the arrival of George Fisher at Galveston.<sup>22</sup>

But to go back: We have seen that Fisher had sailed with Mr. Poinsett to New Orleans. From there on February 10 Fisher writes to Zavala, who was still in Mexico City, that it will not be necessary to go to New York to find financial help. Emigration is so abundant that in a few years Texas will be the most populous of Mexican states.

For this reason it is necessary that without delay I leave for Texas to mark out the boundaries of the twenty *sitios* ceded to me, thus impeding the excessive colonizing by the emigrants from the U. S., who go to Texas in great numbers, like locusts. If proper attention is not given now to the marking out of the land, there will soon be difficulties of titles and ownership . . .

I would advise you . . . to start colonizing the 500 families on the land you hold, but not through a Company. Neither should you sell the lands; but start colonizing, using your own means, and through the help of an intelligent and trusted agent; for the population of immigrants already living on your land is numerous . . . They would be willing to become your colonists as long as their land is secured . . .

It is easy to guess Fisher's candidate for the intelligent and trusted agent. He sees the need for haste. If they could register as part of their 500 the "American" families already there as squatters, they would be far better off than if they waited until after the new laws went into effect; after that, they would have trouble with the hopelessly entangled claims of those already there. Fisher continues:

Before the six years that the law allows you, you will have 500 families settled; if emigration continues as it is now, I say not 500 but 2000 . . . Without any loss of time, go to your lands in Texas, either from the U. S. or overland; resigning all public office, give preference to this matter which will without doubt provide for you considerable fortune.

As for me, I will make it a point to comply with my contract. I will go on to Nacogdoches rather than to New York, and from there I will go to Galveston. From there [Galveston] I will be able to give news as to what is going on in the customs of that port to the Deputy of San Luis de Potosi and to the Supreme Government.<sup>23</sup>

That is, Fisher had already been appointed as an agent of the government not only to establish a customhouse in Texas, but also to make reports on the general situation there. He hoped, in spite of the recent political changes, to hang onto his job. He feared

(quite rightly) that Zavala was about to give over the empresario rights to a company that would have the capital needed for promotion.

That Fisher was quite uncertain of his own situation is shown in the letter which he wrote on the same day to Anastacio Zerecero, a friend of both Zavala and Poinsett. He has, he says, received no commission, credentials, instructions, or money for expenses. But that customhouses should be established is evident: the Texans are exchanging cotton for sugar, flour, agricultural implements, and cloth of all sorts, this flourishing trade going through their ports without legal sanction. The Mexican government ought to set up proper consular procedures, and also keep out runaway slaves and other undesirables; the problem of contraband tobacco is also serious.

This informative letter was, a little later, introduced as evidence in Zerecero's trial for conspiracy, and thus (through various channels) brought to the attention of Bustamante—who ordered copies sent to the Governor of Coahuila-Texas and to Commissioner Terán. The implication was that it *was* high time to stop this long-established smuggling of tobacco, and this emigration of undesirables to Texas. But in the meantime George Fisher's appointment as collector of customs remained unconfirmed, his advice to Zavala unheeded. Within a few months Zavala went to the United States and made over his empresario contract to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Co. of New York.<sup>24</sup>

The uneasy Fisher remained in New Orleans, except for a visit home in February-March, until well into April. He continued to write letters to officials of the national government of Mexico, and to those of the state of Coahuila-Texas, concerning the problems arising from the increase of population and trade in East Texas. It was evident that a system of tariff regulation was long overdue; whether the Mexican government was capable of setting up a reasonable one, and whether George Fisher was likely to administer it reasonably, remained to be seen.

At his home he no doubt discussed the Nacogdoches project with his wife Elizabeth. She may have been dubious about leaving the security and responsibility of the plantation home to start anew in Texas. Their son Hiram was now nine years old, George was

seven, John was four. (A new baby, to be named Maria Louisa, would be born in the ensuing November, as we learn later). Elizabeth might recall the Davis family's long overland journey from Maryland only about twenty years before, with household goods and Negro servants and little children. But so far as we know she made no objection to the plan, and certainly her husband expected to take his family to Texas as soon as he could himself become established there. Since George Fisher was a Mexican citizen with an interest in a colonization contract already made, the new law should not keep them out. He got back to Texas soon after it was promulgated.

### III. Collector, Secretary, Secret Agent (1830-1831)

Early in May, 1830 George Fisher appeared at San Felipe. After a conference with Stephen F. Austin, he decided to establish the customs at Galveston temporarily, mainly to stop the contraband trade in tobacco being carried on with the United States and Cuba.<sup>25</sup> Fisher was still working in the dark, having received no instructions from the Mexican government, but Austin treated him with courtesy and respect. Fisher asked his advice on the Nacoches colony; Austin suggested he consult General Terán.

On May 18, Fisher was officially recognized by the local government, the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe. He then announced in the *Texas Gazette* that he was placing the main customhouse at the mouth of the Brazos, but also placing a deputy on Galveston Island; ships on entering port must present manifests of cargo, and passengers must have passports. The *Gazette* also published an editorial by Austin himself: all citizens must unite to aid the collector of customs in regularizing the situation, and in doing away with all smuggling. Fisher advertised for bids for constructing a brick building at Brazos bar, and a lighthouse on Galveston Island. Upon July 1 he received his first order from General Terán—and it was an order to suspend operations!

As it was dated May 24, most of Fisher's work had been done since it was issued; had his administration been legal? Fisher was quite sure that the suspension was because of his Federalist connections—his appointment by Guerrero and his association with Zavala and Poinsett. Fisher wrote to General Terán, explaining in

detail both his attempt to establish the customs at Galveston, and his contract with Zavala.<sup>26</sup> All the "correspondence" (and much of it still exists) dealing with Fisher's efforts in 1830 may now strike us as a comedy of errors; but both he and Stephen F. Austin felt much genuine anguish, as they worked at cross purposes, each at some length and at great distance explaining matters to General Terán at Matamoros. Two sharp strokes suffered by Fisher: First, in June, Fisher had embargoed the schooner *Canón* with contraband tobacco from New Orleans, but (still without orders from the "Supreme Government") he found he had to proceed according to state law and through the local authorities—who politely ignored his appeals. It was while he was "keeping watch" on board the *Canón*, wondering what to do next, that he received Terán's suspension order.<sup>27</sup>

Second, though he had apparently been dropped by Zavala, and hardly knew whether he had a right to "colonize" or not, an article printed in a Centralist paper, attacking Poinsett and Zavala, charged that Zavala had authorized George Fisher to sell land in their grant and that Fisher had no doubt been selling to the Anglo-Americans!<sup>28</sup> . . . The *Texas Gazette*, now anti-Federalist, on July 19 carried an article critical of Zavala and Poinsett. Fisher, aware that times had indeed changed, remained in San Felipe. He would be glad to serve under Terán, if Terán needed him. He still wanted to live in Texas, but the only way to "colonize" seemed to be to join Austin's colony.

General Terán explained to Austin that the customhouse had been opened prematurely, and Austin agreed. It certainly had been: Terán did not yet have troops enough to enforce his "plan," and he was not yet ready for any trouble with the Texans. In fact, he was not yet perfectly sure of the stability of the Centralist régime of Bustamante, though he himself was now, in a sense, one of its important members, or administrators. He could not afford failure, and with great urbanity of manner he put in much hard work. He was probably glad to have available a man of Fisher's ability and education, though any appointment must come from Terán, and not from Guerrero. Terán had difficulty enough "administering" Texas from Matamoros at the mouth of the Rio Grande, simply because of distance, uncertainty of communications, bad weather,

epidemics, lack of revenue, and the fact that few Texans knew Spanish, and fewer Mexicans knew English. Meanwhile, Terán was expected to pay his troops out of money collected in custom-houses yet unbuilt; but until he had troops how could he enforce the customs regulations? George Fisher had indeed rushed things a bit.

Fisher himself had now become insecure and frightened. He was convinced that Zavala was assigning their contract to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Co., and that his high hopes were gone. General Terán could not yet establish his line of custom-houses, and Fisher was not sure how he stood with Terán. He applied for acceptance as one of Austin's colonists, and on July 17 Austin recommended him to the Governor of Coahuila-Texas:

Citizen George Fisher . . . is married, father of several children, of good moral character, with personal qualities and virtues that are a credit to his industry, much aptitude in business, knows various languages, among them Spanish and English. I consider that he can be useful in these colonies where there is a lack of intelligent people who can understand so easily both languages.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time Austin recommended that Fisher be employed as Secretary by the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe. Fisher accepted the position on July 19, subject to the wishes of General Terán. The records had sometimes been kept by Austin's close friend and trusted partner, Samuel M. Williams, who knew Spanish and who was not only a member of the Ayuntamiento but who was, in a sense, Austin's "second in command" in the affairs of the colony. Both men, and especially Austin, had long been overburdened with the labors of pen, ink and paper, most business being necessarily conducted through long personal letters about whose delivery the only certainty was delay. George Fisher's services were more than welcome. We may at this distance say that it seems regrettable that his personal and professional pride made him continue to see himself as an official of the Mexican Government rather than a colonist under the mild paternalism of Stephen F. Austin.

He hoped to be both. He was listed in the Register of Families as a merchant from Mississippi, with a wife, three children, and

seven dependents; he received one *sitio* of land, petitioned for the share allowed for families, and bought six town lots. At their meeting on August 2, the Ayuntamiento voted to pay Fisher eight hundred dollars a year, payable quarterly, with extra pay for translating the official communications from the Political Chief, and the Acts from the beginning of the year.<sup>29</sup>

On September 16 there was a celebration of Mexico's Independence Day, "Jorge" Fisher being on the committee-in-charge. If it was a happy day, it was the last happy one he was to have in San Felipe—for on it Stephen F. Austin told him they were no longer friends. Austin writes on September 17 to Terán:

. . . It pleased me very much to learn through your letter that Col. Juan Davis Bradburn is coming to Texas, to take charge at Galveston.

. . . It is not in the interest of Texas, considering the present state of things, to have an administrator appointed for Galveston who is not a native Mexican. Besides, he should be a man with much patience and prudence; the one who appeared here [Fisher] does not seem to me to have those qualities.<sup>30</sup>

The reason for Austin's change of opinion follows: Fisher has been reporting as prevalent the very conditions which had made necessary the Law of April 6, and which might even (if rumor be true) make the present anti-American regime seek to put an end to the colony.

We think that George Fisher had been trying to prove to General Terán that a customhouse was indeed overdue, and that Fisher would make a well-informed and zealous official within it; but he had committed the fatal error of overreaching himself and destroying his own best opportunity in the Texas of 1830. Austin goes on:

I have read with no little surprise the letter which Mr. George Fisher wrote to you, a copy of which was sent to the comisario here. In it mention is made of the African Negro slave trade with the Island of Cuba, of contraband trading, smuggling, etc. Such a letter could harm us very

much with the Government of Mexico; it could produce false impressions, as the things mentioned are untrue.<sup>30</sup>

When this man arrived here, I treated him with frankness and gave him the consideration deserved by a government agent (as I thought he was); but he has returned the favors badly. For that reason, I told him yesterday that all friendly relations between us were ended.

There is irony in Austin's pleasure in the coming of Colonel Bradburn; he was later to be found to have less patience or prudence than George Fisher. As for Fisher's report on the bringing in of contraband, including African slaves, that charge may have been all too true; but its very truth made Fisher doubly obnoxious. At any rate, Fisher had written it in the previous June, when he thought he was a customs officer doing his duty, and Austin's indignation may sound trumped up. But Austin was now "insecure" himself, uncertain of the true attitude of either Commissioner Terán or President Bustamante toward himself—that is, toward his colony, for it was for him his life.

Austin, always oddly emotional and confidential on paper, though cool and distant in daily contacts with his public and his people, goes on to confide to his dear friend Terán how weary he is of his life as Empresario:

Fighting against jealousy, slander, and ingratitude tires me out . . . The settlers are . . . foreigners not only to the Empresario, but to themselves—to the country, the laws, the government, the language . . . Jealous of each others' rights, of a thousand and one imaginary things, one day they . . . denounce the Empresario as a rogue and a schemer, the next day cover him with glory. Besides, the colonization laws are a maze of confusion, darkness, and difficulty.<sup>31</sup>

Because of the countless revolutions in Mexico, one cannot tell from one month to the next which party will hold the reins. "I should not get discouraged after nine years, but there are times when I am very heavy of heart." Terán, too, was heavy-hearted at times.

What happened next is not very clear, except that there was "war" between Citizen Fisher and the officials at San Felipe, as

soon as they became sure that he had been informing upon them in some fashion. Each side now hoped to injure the other in the eyes of Terán, or of the Political Chief, or of the Governor of Coahuila-Texas, or of whoever might be in power in the City of Mexico. Two who disapproved of George Fisher were Comisario Williams of San Felipe and Alcalde John Austin of Brazoria, the two who knew most of what actually did come in and out of the Brazos, or Galveston Bay.

By October the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe was determined to expel this troublesome Secretary. As one rereads Williams's voluminous and excitedly written minutes, one wonders why these officials should have become quite so perturbed at Fisher's reports. What harm could he have done these innocent and loyal colonists? Of course it is true that they were unwilling to become embroiled in Mexican party politics, and afraid to cause offense to the incomprehensible Centralist regime. The presence of a "spy" put them into a panic. At a special meeting called at 5:00 P.M. on October 5, 1830, with Samuel M. Williams acting as Secretary, it was voted to inform Fisher of his dismissal and to request him to deliver up all papers in his possession.

The council charged that Fisher by his actions and conduct appears strenuously anxious to trammel the body in difficulties to further his own individual views; . . . also the said Fisher has latterly declared . . . that . . . last year while residing in Mexico he acted as a secret emissary and spy of General Guerrero the then president of the Republic, and consequently opposing . . . the work of reformation, and the restoration of the Constitution and Laws from the shackles which burdened them.<sup>32</sup>

That is, in 1830 the colonists saw Bustamante as the restorer of the Constitution, Guerrero (whom Bustamante's firing squad had in any case executed on February 14) as a rebel.

And since Fisher has been acting as secretary to this body he has endeavored to take advantage of their total ignorance of the Spanish language, and cause the body to declare by its official act that the members were partisans,

and entered into the views and feelings of political parties, without informing the members . . . when they had always manifested to Fisher that as adopted citizens they owed obedience to the Constitution and laws.

It is not quite clear here whether Williams meant that Fisher tried to make the Ayuntamiento appear to be Centralist or Federalist; but Williams (who knew Spanish very well indeed) emphasizes the members' ignorance of the official language through which they were governed and in which they were required to conduct all business in Texas.

Unacquainted with the Castilian language, they could not prudently enter into political questions which they could not understand.

The Ayuntamiento then charges Fisher with the "false" report that it was a practice of the colonists to bring in Negro slaves from Havana. A "mild note" of dismissal directed Fisher to deliver up all their official records.

But this he "refused" to do! On the evening of October 16, at another special meeting, with only four members present, Chairman (and Alcalde) Barnett stated that two important "original" drafts were missing: that of their "answer" to the Ayuntamiento of Saltillo (the capital of Coahuila-Texas), and that of their "answer" to the four deputies, all dated September 27, 1830.<sup>22</sup> Fisher had duly transcribed them into the proper record book, but now he said he had burned the originals.

The members voted to go immediately that night to Fisher's room, led by the Alcalde and accompanied by the sheriff. There Fisher, "instigated by the basest passions of the human heart," repeated that he had burned the two "originals." But when the sheriff began to search his luggage, packed for his departure, Fisher quietly produced the documents from some packets securely tied and wrapped in clothing, taken from a locked trunk. (A later version of the tale is more exciting: Fisher attempted to swallow the "most important" document, but being seized by the throat—by the sheriff?—was forced to disgorge it). Further search revealed copies of a number of other documents made from originals which had been properly deposited in the archives.

All this was worse than embarrassing for George Fisher: it was ruinous. We may be deeply shocked that this nefarious agent tried to make off with public records "for the purpose of creating confusion and excitement." Or we may observe that it would have been more prudent for him to have left the two "originals" and to have made extra copies of them for his own use. Or we may ask: what harm could have been done to San Felipe by Fisher's "use" of records of communications already on file in Saltillo? Possibly both San Felipe and Saltillo feared the reactions of Mexico City, or of Commandante General Terán in Matamoros. At any rate the loyal colonists were thrown into deep apprehension, and they said it was because Fisher's Spanish wording (false, or over-vehement?) made them seem guilty of taking sides in Mexican party politics.

It is true that in one of the "originals" the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe does express a decided opinion that the "four deputies" (favorable to San Felipe) should *not* be removed (because of the "Jalapa plan," a proviso for enforcing party loyalty). But how could this be George Fisher's wording? For in a long and confused letter to Lucas Alamán, the powerful Minister of Foreign Relations, and author of the disturbing Article 11 of the Law of April 6, Stephen F. Austin agonizingly explains that George Fisher had taken the original of the letter addressed to the Ayuntamiento of Saltillo *because* this "original" was in Austin's own handwriting, and *because* (in order to help the cause of Guerrero or the Federalists) in this way Fisher had hoped to plant doubts against Austin's loyalty to the Republic!<sup>24</sup> But—in this case, Fisher could not possibly have done the wording; Austin had done it, as he here admits, and he now fears Alamán's disapproval. We can see that, whatever the cause, the leaders at San Felipe "had the wind up," and in fear of having given offense to the existing "regime," they hasten to discredit Fisher before he can discredit them.

The apprehensive officials did not yet know of a letter which Fisher had written on that same day to Terán, informing him of his suspicions that both John Austin, a leading citizen of Brazoria, and James Breedlove, the Mexican Vice-Consul in New Orleans, had interests in the American schooner *True Blue*, aground on Brazos bar with 400 quintals of contraband tobacco. John Austin had threatened Fisher, saying that "if I did not leave this colony,



such and such things would happen to me." Fisher concludes, "... in case I should have to remain in this place, giving advices to the Supreme Government of the happenings on this coast, my person, the safety of which I believe much threatened, should be protected."<sup>35</sup>

But before worse could happen Fisher was in Matamoros, in the state of Tamaulipas. The Texans had repulsed the self-important customs collector . . . Or they had unmasked a Federalist spy . . . Or was he a Centralist counter-spy? Their uncertainty as to Fisher's loyalties reflects their own dilemma: how to prove the loyalty of their colony to the Republic, under a Centralist regime with a plan to liquidate the colony and possibly the Constitution of the federal Republic as well. As for the wicked spy: Terán had suspended George Fisher as collector, and could not acknowledge him as secret agent; San Felipe had dismissed him as Secretary; Zavala would not use him as agent in his colony, and Austin had expelled him from his. Fisher was indeed "out"—all the way out of Texas.

One is a bit surprised at how vehement, or even abusive, the calm and mildly tolerant Austin could become in his dislike or fear of George Fisher. One passage in the long letter to Alamán is of interest to us as descendants, as it concerns the Fisher family. Austin begins by showing Fisher as Federalist and Yorkino:

When this man Fisher arrived here last spring, he . . . tried to fill me with fears as to the intention of the present administration regarding Texas. I told him I was against the unconstitutional methods of Guerrero; but . . . he represented all the members of the present regime (called by him "Escososes") to be mortal enemies of all settlers in Texas . . . At this point I wrote, on the 18th of May, a letter to the Vice-President.<sup>36</sup>

Austin had written, on May 17 and 18, to President Bustamante, to Terán, and to others, letters protesting the Law of April 6 as unjust, unconstitutional, and ruinous to Texas. Now in October he intimates that he had been too much influenced by the Federalist Fisher.

Then he proceeds to show that Fisher was not even a loyal Federalist:

Finally some comments were published in the *Gazette* of this town, on June 10, and he suddenly changed . . . his way of thinking. He started arguing in favor of the Jalapa Plan, saying that he had been cheated by Zavala and Poinsett.

Austin himself had written the "comments," explaining to the colonists that the new Centralist regime was not planning, after all, to ruin Texas. Fisher, just suspended by Terán, had been disturbed at the situation of his family in Mississippi:

At this point he told me, appearing very discouraged, that he was poor, with a family to support, that he wanted to establish himself in this colony, and asked me for a recommendation to the governor of the state. Unfortunately, I do not have a suspicious character, and I proceeded to recommend him . . . and he was given a job, provisionally, as secretary.

I cannot tell in a letter all the bad things this man had planned . . . I think Fisher's objective was to plant doubts in the Government against me, in order to obstruct all action; then he would disturb order and public peace, to help the Guerrero party. This man has learned to knit political nets in a very shrewd school.<sup>36</sup>

But would a truly shrewd man have brought everyone against him? It seems rather that Fisher, after making some initial efforts to influence the colonists toward the Federalist point of view, had been rather desperately trying one expedient after another to find a place for himself in a changed Texas, or Mexico. Actually he and Stephen F. Austin had been doing much the same thing. Themselves "liberal," they feared what the Centralist regime would do to both themselves and their worlds. But they accommodated themselves to it, and in so doing became confused and distrustful and on the defensive. These letters of Austin's, quoted out of context, still make Fisher appear to have been a major threat to the liberty and life of Texas.

Family tradition, based on the childhood memories of his sons, says that Fisher was at home in Mississippi at the end of November,

1830 when Maria Louisa was born. But there seems no time for a visit by then. A letter addressed by Fisher to Godwin Brown Cotten, editor of the *Texas Gazette*, is dated from Matamoros on November 29. But this letter, which complains of an injurious editorial in the *Gazette* of October 23 regarding Fisher's conduct as collector at Galveston (that is, his seizure of the *Canón* with its contraband), and his behavior as Secretary of the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe, is very brief. As it concludes, "The shortness of time does not permit me to answer in full,"<sup>37</sup> we may infer that he was at that point hastening home. He would have reached Mississippi about Christmas, or quite soon after the baby's birth. This November letter appeared with one addressed on February 9, 1831 to the editors of the Matamoros *Advertiser*, asking that they print both. That is, Fisher's two letters together, both in Spanish, form an "Extra," a broadside in two columns, printed February 10, 1831. We suppose that he had just returned to Matamoros from his visit home, discovered that Cotten had never printed his letter of November 29 (and had in January sold the *Gazette*). Now, from Matamoros, Fisher did what he could to resume the defense of his conduct during the autumn before.

Fisher wrote on February 19, 1831 to the Governor of Coahuila-Texas, asking for certified copies of the documents which the members of the Ayuntamiento had taken away from him, and which, as he explains in a formal petition, he needs for use in his defense. We now see that the supposed "theft" had been due in the first place to his usual desire for full and correct documentation in his own behalf. It is true that the *Gazette's* attack upon him had not been printed until October 23, or after his dismissal; but Fisher must have been collecting data for defense from the time the feud began in September. Fisher petitions the Governor:

George Fisher . . . having finished his defense against the slander published in the Texas Gazette No. 45 of last Oct. 23, as ordered by the constitutional Ayuntamiento of San Felipe de Austin, against the good name and reputation of Fisher, has made reference to various decrees passed by the Honorable Congress of Coahuila-Texas, as well as to other governmental orders prepared by the

Supreme Government in matters bearing upon that defense.

That is, he had written a defense in which he referred by memory to the documents; but he cannot make exact references.

These have been used as proofs . . . but since he lacks some of the documents mentioned, he begs that Your Excellency be pleased to order that notarized copies be given to him. These he can use as protection, in the manner most fitting . . .<sup>38</sup>

Fisher concludes by asking that this be done for the sake of mercy and justice.

Stephen F. Austin, serving as deputy in the Legislature at Baitillo, and maneuvering through this same governor to obtain empresario rights to the region to the north, already claimed by Sterling C. Robertson, heard rumors that George Fisher was about to publish a book against him. In a letter to his partner Samuel M. Williams on March 12, 1831 Austin shows his perturbation:

He believes that nothing was wanting but a leader among the settlers to turn them all against me. I fear the main object is to try and create parties in the colony, and by that means ruin us all.

He adds:

I shall leave Fisher to the colony. If the people there do not think I merit their support, I will submit, for it will convince me that justice, honor, and gratitude have abandoned the earth.<sup>39</sup>

But Fisher, unable to obtain his documentation—apparently the Governor made no reply to him—published no book in his own defense, much less an attack upon Austin.

Instead, in a small broadsheet printed on both sides, with Spanish and English text in parallel columns, Fisher merely made a second and somewhat fuller reply to the charges printed in the *Gazette*. This broadsheet, printed at Victoria, in Tamaulipas, consists of a letter to the editors, dated July 14, 1831; a certificate from General Terán, dated May 3, to the effect that the closing of the customs at Galveston had not been due to any mismanagement by Fisher; and a further note from Fisher stating that he had been

trying to help both the colonists and the Mexican Government when he gave a true picture of affairs in Texas.<sup>40</sup>

All this has been Prologue. We come now to Act I of the tragic-comedy of the "Disturbances at Anahuac," a sort of Boston Teaparty before the War of Independence. To students of this heroic period in Texas, George Fisher, the high-handed collector of customs, is usually presented as a villain, an agent of the despotic system imposed upon true-hearted Texans. It may be permitted to his great grandchildren to amend the statement to read: "He got himself into a false position for a time in Texas; but he too was a Texan."

#### IV. Disturbances at Anahuac (1831-1832)

By the summer of 1831 General Terán had collected a more or less adequate supply of rather inferior Mexican troops, both infantry and artillery, and had got them distributed to his widely scattered colonial garrisons, both inland and along the Texas coast. Those sent to the vicinity of Galveston were put under the direct command of the rigid and morose Colonel Juan Davis Bradburn, who from his ramshackle "fort" at Anahuac at the mouth of the Trinity would now ruthlessly enforce the regulations administered by the customs officials of the whole area. He had already caused hard feelings in nearby Nacogdoches, and had come into conflict with the Governor of Coahuila-Texas.<sup>41</sup>

In February, 1831 a special land commissioner had arrived on the lower Trinity to issue land titles from the Governor to the scattered settlers who had for a decade squatted outside the limits of any empresario grants. Bradburn arrested the commissioner for violating the Law of April 6, 1830 and annulled the ayuntamiento authorized at Liberty by the Governor. Stephen F. Austin vehemently advised his own colonists to remain calm and to take no part in the quarrel, which seemed to be a conflict in authority between the state and the "Supreme Government." Nevertheless, the settlers along the Brazos stood ready to resist any overt act of Bradburn against themselves, and they expected him, before long, to begin to enforce the contradictory customs regulations "against" them.<sup>42</sup>

In September, 1831 General Terán ordered George Fisher to return to Galveston Bay and to set up a permanent custom-house on Point Bolivar. He would have Lieutenant Juan Pacho as chief clerk and assistant. Lieutenant Juan Iberri Landavaco would be in command of a regular guard; if necessary, he could call on Bradburn for reinforcements. Fisher was also to establish an effective branch near Brazoria to collect duties, and to put a stop to the long-established smuggling up the Brazos. He appointed Francisco Masue y Duclos, a clerk in the customhouse at Matamoros, to be assistant collector there,<sup>43</sup> whenever he should arrive.

Terán took great care with his plans, and sought to prepare for all likely contingencies. Fisher was to order lumber from Florida to build houses at Brazos Bar and on Point Bolivar. Terán wrote both to Austin and to the authorities at Bexar that since the laws still allowed the free importation of "necessities" by the colonists, there was hardly enough else to require the custom-houses; nevertheless, he must guard the coast of Texas and prevent traders' bringing in goods intended for sale in the interior. George Fisher's troubles with the Ayuntamiento need not keep him from being a good collector; besides, the Ayuntamiento had acted arbitrarily and illegally. Let the past be forgotten, and let Fisher limit himself to the affairs of his office, without mixing into those of municipalities or individuals. The irregular coastline provided many anchoring places for ships, and the Texans had long held mistaken ideas with regard to customhouses; but there need be no trouble. If any arose, Austin and Williams were to notify both Bradburn and Terán at once.<sup>44</sup>

General Terán even accompanied George Fisher to Galveston Bay in November. He wanted to meet Stephen F. Austin, but Austin had been ill and was still unable to leave San Felipe. On November 24 Terán sailed for Matamoros—or tried to. His schooner ran aground near Anahuac, and Fisher joined him again. Together they halted a vessel coming in loaded with goods and supplies bought in New York. The owner, James Reed, was planning to sell them in the store he and his partner, Colonel James Morgan, owned at Anahuac. Reed refused to pay any duties without an exact appraisal. Apparently Terán estimated a possible

total of one thousand dollars, and Reed agreed to pay it at Anahuac. Terán then sailed. When George Fisher made a detailed appraisal of the goods, his total came to five thousand. Morgan refused to pay such import duties, and Fisher seized and stored the cargo. In the ensuing struggle, Fisher "fled to Bradburn, whom the owners threatened to resist by "arming their Negroes," if necessary. Finally they compromised by paying two thousand dollars to Juan Pacho.<sup>45</sup>

Bradburn, aware that he must stand firm, tightened the whole military occupation, "closing" all the ports of Texas except Galveston. Until buildings could be erected on Point Bolivar, this meant that ships would have to go all the way to Anahuac. Fisher issued an order to that effect, dating it as of November 24, 1831, the day of Terán's departure. Since, because of bad weather, neither Duclor nor Landavaco had ever arrived, the branch customhouse at Brazos bar, or Velasco, had never been put into operation. Fisher now directed the captain of the small guard stationed there to order all vessels bound for Brazoria to turn back and go to the fort at Anahuac to clear with customs. Likewise the Brazoria merchants must go there to bond their goods. Those shipping cotton or other Texas products, or the captains of the ships, must go there to get clearance permits.<sup>46</sup> This situation was expected to be temporary; but since compliance meant a long and impracticable journey of over a hundred miles by land or by water, the order was keenly resented in Brazoria and up the Brazos. Its issuance was attributed to Fisher's desire to retaliate for the insults suffered the previous year in San Felipe. Bradburn's attempt to enforce martial law within ten leagues of the coast was understood to be part of the unresolved conflict over the establishment of the municipality at Liberty.

On December 15 the *Sabine*, loaded with cotton, sailed from Brazoria without a permit. Captain Jerry Brown, with the help of William H. Wharton and the approval of John Austin, officer of the port, refused to get clearance papers from Anahuac. The guard at Velasco fired upon the schooner, but she proceeded. Several other boats also "ran the blockade" within the next few days; at least one of them fired upon the guard, wounding a Mexican soldier.<sup>47</sup> On December 16 the citizens of Brazoria, sup-

ported by many from San Felipe, held a "riotous meeting." They addressed a petition to George Fisher, asking that he rescind his order dated November 24. When Branch T. Archer and George B. McKinstry took it to him at Anahuac, Fisher said that General Terán had given orders and that he could not change them.<sup>48</sup> It was this order, and this refusal to rescind it, that made George Fisher become a hated symbol of Mexico's "tyranny" toward Texas. For the rest of his life he would try to explain that he had no discretionary power in the matter—that he was an officer of the Mexican Government, carrying out specific orders. But it was Fisher's stubborn courage that now caused the outraged colonists to "consider the conduct of the Mexican Government"—Bustamante's regime—in general.

On the day of the *Sabine's* defiance of the guard, Stephen F. Austin was in Brazoria. Hoping as usual to avoid an open clash, he had advised the officer in command of the guard to let the *Sabine* go, without the permit. Considering calmly the excited reports he began to receive in Matamoros, General Terán tried to make a fair and dispassionate decision: the skipper and crew of the *Sabine* were never to return, but the receiver's office should be moved from Velasco up to Brazoria, and Lieut. Juan Pacho be placed in charge. When upon his arrival there, Pacho saw a crowd gathering, he feared more riots. When someone then knocked down his orderly, Pacho fled. The Brazoria office remained vacant, and ships came and went. Soon the *Sabine* returned, against Terán's orders, bringing the two small brass cannon which Stephen F. Austin's cousin Henry Austin had, a few years before, thrown out of his famous steamboat, the *Ariel*, to lighten it enough to clear Galveston Bar. Brazoria was armed!

Meanwhile Austin had written amicably to Terán that with Juan Pacho to go to Brazoria, the "excitement" caused by George Fisher's unreasonable order of November 24 had passed. But now this further "excitement" led Austin in February, 1832 to request Terán to remove Fisher.<sup>48</sup> Terán's reply was an official rebuke for the disturbances and riot, and for Austin's own part in them! The time-lag, as usual, made official correspondence into a game of cross questions and crooked answers. At the same time, Terán wrote to Fisher saying that the order of November 24 had been imprudent,

and cautioning him against unjust or impolitic acts. It is hard to say just what his orders to Fisher and Bradburn had been in November.

But by spring Terán was anxious that there be no uprisings in Texas. Conservative, disillusioned, and not greatly impressed by anyone's excesses of zeal or of indignation, Terán intended to do his full duty to the Republic, to the limit of his inadequate resources. But now the unpredictable Santa Anna was leading a new revolution against the Centralists in the name of "liberalism," and it became part of Terán's duty to put down Santa Anna. Soon he saw how the tides would run.

Back in January the exasperated George Fisher had reported to the Political Chief at Bexar that the merchants of Brazoria were opposing "with armed hand" the enforcements of customs regulations; that a schooner had fired on the guard; that an attempt had been made to assassinate Juan Pacho; that vessels entered and left the port at Brazoria illegally—and that collections had not been sufficient to pay the expenses of buildings, supplies, and administration. When the Political Chief wrote to inquire about these difficulties, the Alcalde or president of the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe, having just petitioned for desired reforms, replied that Fisher's reports should be ignored—the greatest harmony existed between colonists and officials.<sup>49</sup> Again, everything was the fault of Fisher.

There was little harmony between the two officials at Anahuac. In April, Fisher was glad to move into the house newly completed on Galveston Island. But by this time he had sent in his resignation to Terán.<sup>50</sup> Fisher was ordered to hand over the customhouse to an assistant and to report to headquarters in Matamoros; he probably left Galveston on June 6, 1832.<sup>51</sup> If so, he could not have witnessed from Galveston Island the next act of the "Disturbances at Anahuac." Whether or not he took any part we do not know; the tale is told in several versions.<sup>52</sup>

Apparently Colonel Bradburn, having with forced labor rebuilt in brick the fort at Anahuac, arrested several prominent colonists for obstructing his military rule. One was Patrick C. Jack, who had organized a military company "for drill." Another was

William B. Travis (destined to die in command at the Alamo). Travis, a lawyer, had undertaken as attorney for the owner to recover two runaway Negro slaves that Bradburn had "harbored" by enlisting them into his detachment of troops. Community feeling was aroused against Bradburn and his "martial law," and the fort was surrounded by determined men from San Felipe, from Brazoria, and elsewhere in the region. They sent John Austin and Henry Smith<sup>53</sup> with perhaps 150 men back to Brazoria to fetch the two brass cannon; then in the name of Santa Anna and "liberalism" they drew up the Turtle Bay Resolutions, and prepared for a siege.

Before the cannon arrived, two things happened which made them unnecessary. First, Colonel Piedras, ordered several weeks before by General Guerra to come over from Nacogdoches, arrived at Anahuac and (somewhat unexpectedly) "pacified the disturbances" by securing the resignation of Bradburn and releasing Travis and Jack to the civil authorities. Bradburn disappeared, and his troops hastened away to join Santa Anna.

Second, on June 26 there occurred the Battle of Velasco. The vessel bearing the cannon from Brazoria was stopped by Ugartechea, the Mexican commander at Fort Velasco, and a sharp battle ensued, with casualties on both sides. The Mexican garrison was forced to surrender when its ammunition was exhausted, and it then withdrew by sea. Even if George Fisher was not in his newly built customhouse on Galveston Island through all this, he no doubt heard about it soon enough—and also that President Bustamante had been overthrown and that Santa Anna was in control. Fisher was probably as glad as anyone else could be that the military dispositions for enforcing the Law of April 6, 1830 upon Texas were now at an end.

When Fisher reached Matamoros that June, the city was being taken over by an old friend of his, the Yorkino-Federalist General José Antonio Mexía. Terán's administration as Commissioner of Colonization, though scarcely begun, was now at an end.<sup>54</sup> Only a few days before, Terán had written to Stephen F. Austin, who was attending a session of the Legislature held at San Antonio de Bexar, "The affairs of Texas are understood by none but you

and me, and we alone are the only ones who can regulate them." But now in Matamoros both Austin and George Fisher rejoiced at the downfall of the Centralist regime; and at the home of a "mutual friend," Maurice Hebenstreit, the two were reconciled,<sup>55</sup> all former bitterness to be forgotten and forgiven in the general amnesty.

Then Austin returned to his happy colony on board General Mexía's ship; for Mexía was going on a tour of inspection to determine whom the Texans were in revolt against. Just before they set sail they heard of the death, on July 3, of General Manuel Mier y Terán. He had fallen upon his sword.

#### V. Santa Anna, the False "Liberal" (1832-1835)

George Fisher, always fundamentally "liberal" in that he was a Federalist who desired freedom from oppression but order in government, had been in a false position holding office in a Centralist regime and trying to enforce its decrees upon his fellow-Texans. Now it was Stephen F. Austin who got into a position even more false and difficult: he became caught between his own people, many of whom now distrusted his friendship for Mexico, and the Mexican officials who would try to charge the long-suffering *Empresario* with treason.

Though Austin had always heretofore insisted that Texans take no part in Mexican party politics—they must simply obey the laws of the Republic to which they had sworn allegiance and from which they held their land titles—he now felt such joy at the prospect of a "liberal" regime relieving Texas from the ruinous Law of April 6, 1830 that he mingled credulity and expediency in his acceptance of Santa Anna as leader of the "democratic republican federal party."<sup>56</sup> Welcoming General Mexía at Brazoria, the joyful colonists denounced the late militaristic occupation under Terán, declared anew their loyalty to Mexico, and hoped for independent statehood with self-government in local affairs and their own Texas state capital at San Antonio de Bexar.

On July 2, just before sailing from Matamoros, General Mexía had given George Fisher an appointment as accountant in the customhouse there. But in August Fisher had gone to Mexico City to help "promote the Liberal Cause."<sup>57</sup> A new era had begun,

but it was not one in which the dream of joining loyal Texan Mexicans with liberal Mexican Federalists to create a great Republic of self-governing and self-supporting states would ever come true. Two men who long believed it could were Fisher and Austin. Two others, who worked in very different ways to gain a different sort of future for Texas, were Sam Houston, a newcomer soon to become established in Nacogdoches, and Anthony Butler, an old hand who still came and went between Mexico City and Washington, D. C. by way of Washington County, and who was still "known" to carry five million dollars in his trousers pocket for the purchase of Texas by the United States of the North.

In October, 1832 the *Ayuntamiento* of San Felipe had called the first Convention to discuss statehood—that is, the separation of Texas from her "twin sister" Coahuila, not as a territory but as a state within the Federation. At the second Convention, held on April 1, 1833, the day of Santa Anna's triumphal inauguration as President of Mexico, Sam Houston was made chairman of the committee for drafting a state constitution, and Stephen F. Austin was delegated to present the case for Texas to the new President. Some Texans, cynical newcomers and disgruntled Old Timers, doubted that Austin would do more than go through the motions of presenting the petition. Mexico, disturbed at the idea of having within her Federation an "alien" state, an advance position for American invasion, would deny the proposal and then Austin would return with his usual plea for patience, fortitude, obedience, and "no disturbances." In fact, Stephen F. Austin was being put to the test; his colony (which except for his patience, fortitude, wisdom, and mystical devotion could not have succeeded at all) was now outgrowing his self-identification with Texas, his painstaking paternalism, as he himself knew. He knew too the uncertainties of his long journey to Mexico City and back, and the precariousness of his own health. He empowered his friend, business partner, deputy-*empresario*, Samuel M. Williams, to act for him during his absence, and he set off by way of San Antonio to Matamoros.

There he met the new Commandante General Filisola, successor to the tragic Terán. They discussed, among other things, the perennial problem of smuggling, which was, it seemed, even

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1843), I, 84-86, and II, 363-364. See below, pages 73-82, and Note 3.
2. John Livingston, "George Fisher, Secretary and Translator to the California Land Commission," *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living*, 4 vols. (New York: Cornish, Lamport and Co., 1853-54), III, pages 441-446. See below, pages 103-107, and 125-136, and Note 150.
3. Livingston, *loc. cit.*, page 446, calls Fisher "perhaps the best linguist living," since "he is a Greek and Latin scholar, and in addition to a knowledge of the Russian, Polish, Bohemian, Moravian, Slovak, Croatian, Dalmatian, and the language of the Montenegrini, speaks with fluency the following tongues: his vernacular, the Slavano-Servian, the Hungarian or Magyar, the German, the English, the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian."
4. See below, page 127.
5. Stephens says he sailed from Hamburg.
6. At present it is premature to do more than drop this hint. We await with eagerness the publication of a book by Mr. Vlaho S. Vlahovic of New York which may give us information on the origins and early life of George Fisher. Mr. Vlahovic in 1952 attended a reunion of the Fisher family in Cayuga, Hinds Co., Miss. With Lawrence E. Mallette and others he visited the site of the old Fisher (or Davis) cemetery near Reganton, on the Big Black River, in Claiborne Co., and he has at times corresponded with Mr. Mallette, and with Mary F. Parmenter.
7. Research on county records in Texas and in Mississippi, and in the State Archives in Austin, Tex., and in Jackson, Miss., has been done by Walter Russell Fisher, here and throughout.
8. George Fisher himself recorded his progress as a York Rite Mason in Port Gibson by writing it in the Fisher family Bible. See Appendix B. The records of the Port Gibson Lodge prior to 1867 were destroyed. Reference to a copy of the Port Gibson *Southern Reveille* for May 9, 1859, on file in the State Archives, shows:  
 Washington Lodge, chartered as No. 17 by the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, and registered as No. 3 by Mississippi, was chartered Jan. 8, 1820, and located in Port Gibson. The first officers were Israel Loring, Master; Claudius Gibson, Senior Warden; James Hughes, Junior Warden; George Fisher, Sentinel and Tyler. . . .  
 A volume in the State Archives, *Fraternalities, Societies, Civic and Religious Organizations of Claiborne County*, gives further data. It shows that George Fisher was accepted as Apprentice on Oct. 10, 1818, and as Second Degree Mason on Nov. 17, 1818.

9. State of Miss., Claiborne Co. Superior Court, April Term, 1822. Vol. 3, page 86.
10. George Fisher's various commercial enterprises can be traced through such notices in the Port Gibson and Natchez newspapers now in the State Archives. Though he went to Mexico in 1825, his name occurs until 1828-29.
11. The primary source for the birth dates of the Fisher children is the Fisher family Bible. See Appendix B, page 136.
12. Stephen A. Larrabee, *Hellas Observed: The American Experience of Greece, 1775-1865* (New York University Press, 1957), pages 66-68. The massacre in Chios in April, 1822 brought out meetings of public indignation in New York, in Washington—and in Natchez. Larrabee cites the circular letter, or Manifesto, by George Fisher, whom he calls a "native of Serbia," and says that Fisher sent copies from Natchez to Thomas Jefferson and to other leading figures. See Note 168.
- Because Fisher signed articles with the pen-names "Grecus," and "Greco-Americanus" (and used the phrase, "Greci Ritus Non Unitus"), he was sometimes thought to be a native of Greece. The Serbian Orthodox Church was, of course, closely affiliated with the Greek Orthodox.
13. Nathaniel E. Stephenson, *Texas and the Mexican War: A Chronicle of the Winning of the Southwest* (Yale University Press, 1921), Vol. 24 in the *Chronicles of America*, a series edited by Allen Johnson, gives a succinct account of these disputed episodes.
14. Freemasonry, as a nucleus for political and philosophical ideas, increased tremendously throughout the world in the 18th century. In France, and elsewhere upon the Continent, the secrecy of the international order identified it with "revolutionary" activities against Church and State. In the British Isles and in the United States it was broadly benevolent, in the name of the "Brotherhood of Man." But in Mexico it was completely political.
15. "Royalists" were numerous within Army and Church, and were always anti-American. Politically, they merged with Centralists.  
 Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana (1795-1876) was in power, as President, or as Dictator, or as General of the Army behind someone else, for perhaps eight times in his almost forty active years, and was put down as often. His last real triumph was in 1855.
16. Thomas Maitland Marshall, *A History of the Western Boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, 1819-1841* (University of California Press, 1914), in Chapters IV-VI, traces the efforts of Poinsett under Pres. J. Q. Adams, and of Anthony Butler under Pres. Andrew Jackson.  
 J. Fred Rippey, *Joel R. Poinsett, Versatile American* (Duke University Press, 1935), in Chapters VIII-IX, gives an account of Poinsett's adventures in Mexico, in Russia, and in South America. He does not mention George Fisher.

17. In his "Denunciation of Poinsett Because of His Relations with the York Masons," Chapter VI of his *Early Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and Mexico* (Cleveland: A. H. Clark Co., 1918), William R. Manning presents this view. He is favorable to Poinsett, the brilliant South Carolinian who was later U. S. Senator, and Secretary of War. Since Poinsett tried to remain in the background, it is quite likely that he was glad for George Fisher to seem to take the lead in founding lodges.

Letts cites an article, "Freemasonry in Mexico," *Masonic Review* for Aug. and Oct., 1858, published in Cincinnati, a copy being bound into the University of Texas copy of George Fisher's *Memorials*.

James David Carter, *Masonry in Texas: Background, History, and Influence to 1846* (Waco: Committee on Masonic Education and Service for Grand Lodge of Texas, A. F. and A. M., 1955), credits the above article to George Fisher. It is signed "Desaguliers," to whom Fisher is supposed to have furnished information. It furnishes evidence of the political misuse of the Masonic lodges by the Mexicans. See Note 157.

18. Lorenzo de Zavala (1789-1836) was born in Spain, grew up in Merida, Yucatan. He was a student of the works of Jefferson, a fighter for Liberty and Enlightenment through education and social reforms. At the setting up of the government of the Republic of Mexico, his was the first name signed to the Constitution of 1824. Through various vicissitudes, Zavala remained a Mexican Federalist. In 1836 he served as Vice-President in the *ad interim* government of Texas.

19. Livingston cannot be referring to Poinsett's well known *Notes on Mexico Made in the Autumn of 1822: Accompanied by an Historical Sketch of the Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1824; London, 1825), as this was written and published before Fisher went to Mexico. It may well be that Poinsett had employed Fisher to collect material for a further study which was not published.

In 1846 *DeBow's Commercial Review*, II, 27-42, 165-177, carried articles by Poinsett on Mexico, based on older material then made timely by the Mexican War.

20. The article "Mexico," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Eleventh Edition, 1911), conveniently outlines these complexities.

They are given in full by George Lockhart Rives, *The United States and Mexico* (1821-1848), 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), I, Chapter VII, "Mexican Politics, 1824-1830." Rives gives character sketches of the leading figures.

Guerrero, Grand Master of the Yorkinos, was the grizzled "hero" of the Revolution against Spain, of great personal courage. An uneducated Indian half-breed, he was unable to administer government or to grasp ideas.

Bustamante was well educated; had served in the army of Spain; and his desire to establish a military despotism was prompted by his belief that only thus could he preserve civilization (and the Church).

Alamán, Secretary of Foreign Relations in 1830, with European education, a real "intellectual," became author of an authoritative history of Mexico. He saw Texas as the complex problem it was, but hoped Mexico could keep control of it for some years.

21. George Fisher was summoned home in 1828. His father-in-law, Reuben Davis, had died in 1821. Now his mother-in-law had died also, as well as two Davis heirs, and the remaining heirs were making certain settlements in regard to the family property. Fisher was cited in a Subpoena dated Nov. 10, 1828 and addressed to several of the heirs, to appear "in right of his wife" before the Judge of the Probate Court of Claiborne Co. See below, page 173.

He must have then returned to Mexico and been naturalized there. 22. Eugene C. Barker, "Stephen F. Austin and the Independence of Texas," *Texas Historical Association Quarterly*, XIII, 4 (April, 1910), 257.

Professor Barker, long head of the Department of History at the University of Texas, was a leading authority on Texas history. In this and other writings on the Texas Revolution, he shows the Law of April 6, 1830 as the first cause of conflict. By it the Centralists hoped to contain or control the *americanos* while they were still too few and too weak to revolt.

23. Translated into English by Geraldine Ortiz, Florida State University, Tallahassee, from the Spanish text in the *Austin Papers* ed. E. C. Barker. Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1919 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), II, 330.

The letter to Zerco is cited by Letts from the Manning Transcripts, *Relaciones Interiores y Exteriores*, 1830, in the University of Texas Library.

24. W. S. Cleaves, "Lorenzo de Zavala in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXXVI (1923-33). He left Mexico on May 25, 1830.

Zavala as Empresario did not own the land, and could not legally sell it outright; an empresario was an agent or contractor who agreed to bring in a certain number of families within a specified time. His nominal fees scarcely paid the expenses of surveying, executing papers, keeping records. He was given a "reward" in land, and expected to share in the successful development of his colony; but he was not to speculate or bring undue pressure upon colonists. His was an almost impossible assignment, and few empresarios besides Stephen F. Austin (with Samuel M. Williams) ever succeeded in it.

Zavala (with Fisher) could have registered many of the squatters already in East Texas, Fisher thought. But Zavala lacked capital and had now lost political backing. The new Law of April 6 forbidding further U. S. settlers, Zavala gave over his contract to the New York company and then, in Europe, made some effort to find colonists; but the contract was never fulfilled, and Zavala probably never meant to carry it through.

The articles, "Mexican Colonization Laws, 1821-1830," and "Land Grants," in the *Handbook of Texas*, II, give pertinent facts. The federal Congress of Texas passed the national colonization law on Aug. 18, 1824.



knew his agricultural colony could not raise sugar, rice, or cotton without it.

31. In their correspondence, Austin and Terán, who had seldom met, take the attitude that they are confidential friends trying to work out administrative and ethical problems which they alone understand. Yet on June 3, 1830 Henry Austin wrote from Matamorós warning Stephen that Gen. Terán was "known" to be planning Stephen's removal, as dangerous to security. Living as they did amidst rumor and uncertainty, both Terán and Austin became suspicious and anxious, sensitive, neurotic.

32. Barker, "Minutes of the Ayuntamiento . . .," *op. cit.*, 275, ff. To her biography, *Samuel May Williams (1795-1858)* (Galveston: Rosenberg Library Press, 1956), Ruth G. Nichols appends a calendar of all of Williams' carefully written documents, records, and letters. Many, dated 1830, refer directly to George Fisher's administration of the customs, and to the ensuing train of events.

33. San Felipe disagreed with Saltillo on the expulsion of four delegates (ones favorable to Texas) from the joint Legislature. For at least some of the documents in question, see *Austin Papers*, II, 499.

The "Minutes . . ." include a list, *op. cit.*, page 353. There seem to be nine "originals" and fifty-four "copies." It is hard to judge now which one, or ones, may have been "most important."

34. *Austin Papers*, II, 512, dated Oct. 18, 1830. After "exposing" Fisher's bad character, Austin gives details of his attempt to purloin the papers, and explains that San Felipe had merely considered Saltillo's actions unconstitutional.

35. Letts cites Barker Transcripts, Relaciones, Asuntos Varios, 1830-1834, caja 2, University of Texas Library.

36. *Austin Papers*, II, 512 ff. Trans. by Ortiz. Bustamente had been Vice-President; after he executed Guerrero he acted as President.

37. The Ayuntamiento decided on Oct. 18 to have the minutes of Oct. 5 and of Oct. 16 printed in the *Gazette*, copies then to be sent to the Chief of the Department (Ramon Musquiz had just taken that office), and to Commandante General Mier y Terán, "for the purpose of showing them the causes of removal of George Fisher, and his subsequent conduct." The *Gazette* for Oct. 23 published the minutes, with an editorial on Fisher which concluded:

These transactions will, no doubt, afford a salutary caution . . . to this colony, against future adventurers who may attempt to impose upon their generous and unsuspecting dispositions. While the inhabitants of this colony were in the wilderness, destitute of resources, and almost of hope, no one envied their situation. . . . now . . . speculators and adventurers, who are prowling and preying upon every inhabited spot on the globe will not let them pass unnoticed.

Thomas W. Streeter, *Bibliography of Texas, 1795-1845, Part II, Mexican Imprints* (Harvard University Press, 1955), Vol. III, Item 769, de-

*Home in Miss, Dec. 4, 1830.*

This law and the state law of Coahuila-Texas of March 25, 1825, became the basis of all colonization contracts affecting Texas, except Austin's first contract. The national law surrendered to the states most authority over colonization; hence the great desire of Texas to become a state, separate from Coahuila. Empresarios had six years in which to carry out contracts.

25. E. C. Barker, "Development of the Texas Revolution," Chapter XVI in his *Readings in Texas History* (Dallas: Southwest Press, 1929). A federal act of September, 1823 exempted colonists for seven years from duties on "necessities," but this exemption was nearing expiration, and Austin did not know what the new situation would be. The Mexican Government did not clarify the workings of the new Law of April 6.

It remained forbidden, in any case, to bring in tobacco from Cuba, or Negroes brought from Africa to the Havana slave market and then relayed secretly for sale in Texas. Confusion as to legitimate imports bred contempt for laws against "contraband," and even the respected leaders in San Felipe and Brazoria ignored, at times, all Mexican tariff regulations. The alleged lawlessness of Texans in this respect, held against them in their desire for more local self government, became a sore point with Stephen F. Austin.

26. Fisher wrote a full explanation to Terán on July 27, 1830. Letts cites Barker Transcripts, Guerra, Fraccion I, Legajo 7, 1836, University of Texas Library.

27. Letts cites Barker Transcripts, Relaciones, Asuntos Varios, 1830-1834, caja 2, University of Texas Library.

28. *Austin Papers*, II, 455. Trans. by Ortiz.

29. E. C. Barker, "Minutes of the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe de Austin, 1828-1832," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXII, 2 (October, 1918), 180 and ff.

30. *Austin Papers*, II, 483. Trans. by Ortiz.

Also, E. C. Barker, "The African Slave Trade in Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VI, 1 (July, 1902), 145-158. The pirate Lafitte had had a flourishing trade in "Africans" in Galveston Bay before 1821, when the new Republic of Mexico prohibited slavery and the slave trade. But the traffic was for years practiced secretly and profitably. Stephen F. Austin tried to believe that it did not continue. In 1832 (apparently just at the time George Fisher was being forced to resign; see Note 62.) "three prominent citizens" landed a shipload of African Negroes at Galveston. Barker, writing some seventy years later, says: "It is thought best to withhold the names." Only about ten months after that, the Second Convention on Statchood, April, 1833, was inspired by the current arrival of a shipload of African slaves to form a resolution condemning the practice.

This illicit trade, for the secret acquisition of new slaves, was not the same as the bringing in of slaves already owned in the U. S. This was condoned as a "necessity," and the slaves were listed as "indentured servants." Austin was inconsistent: he thought slavery wrong in principle, but he

scribes Fisher's broadside "Extra." Extant copies of the *Advertiser of the Port of Matamoros* are in the Texas State Library and in the University of Texas Library.

That Fisher himself "had the management of the printing press" in Matamoros is shown below; see note 59.

38. *Austin Papers*, II, 598. Trans. by Ortiz.

39. *Ibid.*, 611.

E. C. Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin* (Nashville and Dallas: Cokesbury Press, 1925), pages 343-371, gives a full account of the long and disastrous dispute between Austin (with his partner, Williams), and Sterling C. Robertson. It went on for five or six years, through the Revolution and really until Austin's death, and much of the evidence is contradictory. It began in 1830 (the time George Fisher was ousted as Secretary), as a result of the Law of April 6, which annulled all contracts with empresarios who had not already settled at least 100 families upon a grant.

At the same time, Terán as Commissioner of Colonization for the "Supreme Government" was about to implement his plan to establish colonies of 500 Mexican families at Galveston, at Lavaca, and at Tenoxtilan. Or perhaps he would have been ready, except that the various state governments would not cooperate. The Governor of Coahuila-Texas could still grant empresario contracts; and it seemed to the troubled Austin, in Saltillo for the coming legislative session, to be "best for Texas" for him [Austin] to control the vast area to the north of his borders—including Tenoxtilan, perhaps.

Much of this "upper colony" had (perhaps) been granted to the so-called Nashville Company, with Sterling C. Robertson as empresario; yet he had made little effort to bring in any families, and his contract had been annulled. But he arrived in October, 1830 with nine families, and was now determined not to give up. A French company had applied for it. Robertson hoped that Austin would help him keep his rights. Later he discovered that the contract had been "secretly" obtained by Austin and Williams, who would settle 800 Mexican and foreign families upon it (immigration from the U. S. being prohibited by Article 11). Austin hoped this ruling would be repealed; meanwhile, he hoped to protect his northern borders, and benefit all of Texas. But Robertson turned against Austin, and gained some sympathizers.

To Williams on March 5, 1831 Austin wrote from Saltillo:

I wish the B [os] to take part in this. If he will, all is safe. I am operating on a pretty large scale for a taciturn and noiseless man, but I have no other object in view than the general prosperity of us all.

By "Boss" he may have meant Terán—or (more likely) [Bas] tamente.

All this is mentioned here to show that Austin's anxieties over the related problems of secret land deals and of contraband trade were tied in, in 1830-31, with fears that charges or disclosures by George Fisher would

injure him [Austin], and therefore jeopardize the future of Texas. Always, too, there were conflicts of interest and authority between Saltillo and Mexico City.

40. Streeter, *loc. cit.*, lists as Item 770 this *Guia del Pueblo*, Alcance al Num. 37 . . . . Imprenta del estado de Tamaulipas, dirigida por Juan Antonio Aguirre, Ciudad Victoria. 1831. Fisher's statement concludes that the charges published in the *Texas Gazette* and spread by the captain of the Cañón are slanders prompted by a spirit of persecution directed against him because he supported the rights of the nation and of the people of the colonies in Texas.

41. Bradburn, a native of Kentucky, had been in Mexican government service since 1817 when he entered in Mina's "invasion." He fled to New Orleans from Anahuac in July, 1832; he returned to Texas with the Mexican Army in 1836. *Handbook of Texas*, I.

42. Barker, "The Development of the Texas Revolution," *loc. cit.*, pages 159-164.

43. The events here presented are traced by Edna Rowe, "The Disturbances at Anahuac in 1832," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VI, 4 (April, 1903), 265-299.

Letts cites the official records and other original sources for the same period.

44. *Austin Papers*, II, 708.

45. Letts cites *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar*, III, ed. Charles A. Gulick, Jr., assisted by Katherine Elliott and Winnie Allen, Part I, 298.

46. *Ibid.*, 243.

47. Letts cites Barker Transcripts, Asuntos Varios, Relaciones Exteriores, 1830-1834, Comercio, University of Texas Library.

48. *Austin Papers*, II, 733; and 747.

49. Letts cites Horatio Christman, Alcalde, to the Political Chief, May 16, 1832, Bexar Archives, University of Texas Library. By this time, Ugartechea was building a fort at Velasco; he allowed a customhouse to be put at Brazoria.

On March 22 and on June 14 the Mexican consul at New Orleans had written to the Minister of Relations in Mexico City that Bradburn and Fisher were unpopular because they tried to be strict in enforcing the laws, and Americans look with evil eye on every officer who opposes violation of revenue laws—they have been so long accustomed to carry on contraband trade. Letts cites Barker Transcripts, Archivo General, Relaciones, 1806-1845, and Relaciones Exteriores, Asuntos Varios, Comercio.

50. Barker Transcripts, Guerra, Fraccion I, Legajo I, 1835 . . . .

51. On May 31 Terán wrote an *oficio* urging both Fisher and Ugartechea to be prudent until the arrival of Col. Piedras from Nacogdoches. Terán, judging from what Austin has told him, fears that Fisher might be assassinated; he orders him to Matagorda, then to Matamoros. Fisher

had probably reported the dangerous meeting called at Brazoria by John Austin on May 11, 1832. Branch T. Archer introduced a resolution proposing an attack upon the fort at Velasco; it failed to pass by one vote. Henry S. Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, (Philadelphia, 1841), II, 19.

52. John Austin, no relation to Stephen F. Austin, but a friend and associate, was the founder of Brazoria. Prominent for cattle and shipping interests, and owner of the first cotton gin in Texas, he was (after 1831) port officer and Alcalde at Brazoria. The fact that he countenanced the "riots" and the refusal of the *Sabine* and other vessels to submit to regulations, made these acts appear planned as insurrections. It seems to have been John Austin who was especially hostile to George Fisher. Henry Smith was one of the first to advocate Independence for Texas.

53. A colonel of the Texas National Guard, Andrew Jackson Houston, in his *Texas Independence* (Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1938), states in his Chapter XXV, "Operations of the Texas Navy," that when Bradburn was besieged at Anahuac in 1832, three Texas schooners set up a close blockade. After Bradburn escaped, and the prisoners were released, this "fleet" sailed for Galveston and there "captured the customhouse, with the collector, Jorge Fisher, a Greek-Mexican, and his force."

Incidentally, other modern writers who have known of George Fisher only as the customs collector who would not "cooperate," refer to him casually as a "Serbian adventurer," a "quarrelsome Turk," and . . . worse. The implication is that all the other Old Timers in Texas were correct, or consistent, or (at the same time) able to be anti-Mexican and loyal to Stephen F. Austin.

54. As soon as Santa Anna raised this revolt against Bustamante, it became General Terán's duty to keep the Eastern Interior States from declaring for Santa Anna. When Vital Fernandez, the governor of Tamaulipas, raised the standard of revolt, Terán attacked Tampico; on May 13 Terán was defeated. On June 27 when Terán wrote to George Fisher that he would arrange for him to have a place in the customhouse at Matamoros, that city had already been seized by General Mexía—who had already given Fisher an appointment. Fisher replied, not knowing that Terán had by then killed himself.

55. *Austin Papers*, II, 807.

56. By this new and risky policy, into which Austin had been hustled, Texas had declared for a Mexican revolution. Luckily Santa Anna was successful, and Texas was safe, for a time.

57. Fisher went to Mexico City in August, 1832 and his services were accepted by Brig. Gen. Lemus. A compromise was reached between Bustamante and Santa Anna: Pedraza was to be President until elections could be held in April, 1833, enabling the Republic to return to the Federal system. Pedraza took the oath on Dec. 26. George Fisher was given the commission of carrying to the Fort of Chapultepec the plan to be followed; and the garrison did pronounce for Pedraza, Dec. 27, 1832. Fisher's

special passport and a certificate of appreciation from Gen. Lemus are in the Fisher Papers, Texas State Library.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Austin Papers*, II, 947-950.

This letter has recently been used "against" George Fisher by Streeter's comments upon it in his *Bibliography of Texas (1795-1845)*, Part I, under his listing (as Item 384) of Fisher's *Memorials*, with which the letter has no connection. He identifies Fisher as a Hungarian by birth, whose real name is unknown, and then adds:

A linguist, an adventurer with physical and mental courage, an intriguer, inordinately fond of seeing his name in print, almost a blackmailer [], Fisher was one of the unusual characters who gravitated to Texas and enlivened its annals.

It is hardly "blackmail" to make no demands: Fisher says he could do harm, but has not; and he will never injure Texas. Perhaps the "almost" recognizes this. But Streeter then quotes from Austin's old letter of Oct. 16, 1830 to Alamán, in which the Empresario had called the reporter of contraband and copier of documents a "miserable adventurer without country or principles." Streeter remarks that though they had been "reconciled," Fisher's letter from Monclova shows that the reconciliation was "only upon the surface"! This is Fisher's point, exactly; Streeter's observation is an understatement. But Streeter does not pursue the subject farther, to Austin's profession of friendship for Fisher.

60. In the Lamar Papers, No. 1664, in the Texas State Library, George Fisher gives a *précis* of this *Exposé*, which he says was "on file in the Treasury Department," in Mexico City, in Spanish. He says it urged the Executive to present to Congress proposals for permitting the cultivation of tobacco in Texas; the opening of an inland waterway system connecting the Sabine River with the Brazos; the repeal of those revenue laws which prohibit necessities, by laying exorbitant duties on them; the establishment of post offices and post roads throughout Texas; building a line of military forts or blockhouses along the Río Bravo del Norte to Taos, in order to check the Indians. Fisher's "results" would be the increase of commerce, to the benefit of both Texas and Mexico as a whole. Put in moderate duties, reasonably administered, and the trade which now goes to Missouri would flow through Texas to the interior, he says.

61. In Note 52, above, we have indicated that Fisher may have again been threatened by John Austin in 1832.

62. Barker, *Life of Stephen F. Austin*, *loc. cit.*, cites testimony brought out on behalf of Sterling C. Robertson's claim that Austin and Williams, having got the "Upper Colony" away from him, were acting not as empresarios but as speculators. It was being said that John Austin had bought out Stephen's interest; that Benjamin Fort Smith had bought from John Austin an interest of 1200 leagues; that the privilege of locating claims could be bought at fifty dollars a league. Barker states that much of this was true.