

THE OLD MEXICAN FORT AT VELASCO.

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In pursuance of a policy inimical to the interests of American colonists in Texas, and expressed in the decree of April 6, 1830, Mexican forts were built at Anahuac and Velasco. In 1832 the Velasco fort was invested with a garrison of one hundred and twenty-five men, under Colonel Dominic Ugartachea. Its location on the east bank of the Brazos river, just where the river emptied into the Gulf of Mexico, gave full command of all commerce entering the river. History contains no charge of arbitrary conduct on the part of Ugartachea, as was the case with Bradburn at Anahuac, and it was only when the fighting qualities of the commander and garrison bore the test of a severe battle that the fort became permanent. The hotly contested and bloody engagement of June 26, 1832, confers upon Velasco an honorable place in the annals of heroic warfare. The fort long remained a monument to the bravery of the men, who participated in the battle, but history is silent as to its subsequent uses. The question arises, was the fort repaired and manned by the government of the Republic of Texas, and when was it finally abandoned? A partial answer is contained in the experience of an old and highly respected resident of Brazoria county. Col. M. S. Munson, who, as a boy spent the summers with his family at Velasco, recalls an incident connected with a fort at that place occupied by a garrison of the Republic of Texas. While the date of the occurrence is not accurately fixed, it was some time prior to 1841. The facts are as follows: Among the officers of the fort at that time were Lieut. Redfield and Dr. Lynch, the latter held in high esteem as surgeon and citizen. One morning, about sunrise, as young Munson looked from his bed-room window, he saw a number of men not far from the house, and noticed that pistols were given to two of them, who were placed at a short distance from each other. A duel was on hand, which resulted in the death of Dr. Lynch, who fell at the first fire of Lieut. Redfield. Dr. Lynch was a general favorite in the community, and his sudden death made a deep impression upon the witness.

The fort built by the Mexicans is described by some writers as a log cabin fortress, but according to the recollection of many who remember its construction, it was not built in the log cabin style; logs were used, but in the manner of a stockade. The description by Col. Guy M. Bryan, who saw it when entire, and again when in ruins, is about as follows: The fort was circular in shape and composed of sound drift logs set perpendicularly in two circular rows, the space of several feet between them being filled in with sand. A mound of sand in the center, raised above the pickets, was surrounded with wood to prevent the sand being blown off. On this mound was mounted a nine pound cannon, which was on a swivel so as to make a complete circuit guarding the mouth of the river; it could not, however, be depressed so as to protect the immediate vicinity, hence on the night of the attack by John Austin, it could not play upon the Texians close to the fort, but was used against the schooner *Brazoria*, commanded by Capt. Wm. J. Russell.

The exact location of the old fort is attended with difficulty, on account of the changes wrought by winds and waves. In the course of sixty-six years accretions of land on the eastern shore of the river have been so marked, that a certain locality known to old residents as the site of the old fort, and which was quite near the river bank and gulf shore, is now several hundred feet from the former, while the gulf shore line extends a full quarter of a mile or more beyond its early boundary. These changes were effected chiefly by the destructive storms of 1875 and 1886, which submerged nearly all this low lying coast region.

Mrs. Ellen A. Shannon, who was born at Velasco in 1841, her parents, Henry C. and Pamela Wilcox, having moved there in 1837, gives a reliable account of the site of the old fort, which, she says, is now marked by her own residence. She lived at Velasco continuously until August, 1863, when she and her husband, James T. Shannon, moved away, not returning until June, 1867. Before their departure, her husband had often called her attention to one of the posts or upright logs of the old fort, with muskets stuck in it. During the civil war the Confederate soldiers used all the fences, posts, etc., of every kind for firewood, and probably every piece of iron that pertained to the accoutrements of an army.

Still, in 1875 the severe storm revealed evidences of the location of the old fort, for, according to Mr. A. G. Follett, Sr., it washed up a number of small Mexican coins of the value of twenty-five cents and small copper cannon balls on its site. The same authority, who settled at Velasco in 1838, agrees that Mrs. Shannon's house now marks the spot where once stood the old fort. Her house was built in 1887, in consequence of the one previously occupied by her having been seriously damaged by the storm of 1886. It is a plain wooden structure, one story high, containing about four or five rooms, with a neat flower garden in front.

There are remains of forts built by the Confederate State's government, in the neighborhood of Quintana and Velasco, whose earthworks rise to a considerable height above the surrounding level. The one on the west bank of the Brazos river, about a mile above Quintana, commands a long stretch of water; near the new town of Velasco are the remains of another, and still another lies on the east side of the river, at the drawbridge across the canal, which connects the Brazos river with West Galveston Bay. The existence of these remains of a former government in the same locality with the old Mexican fort is liable to cause confusion in the minds of future searchers after true historic localities.

The consensus of opinion of those who have known the country since its earliest settlement agrees in the location of the fort on the site indicated.