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Lamar, Mirabeau Buonaparte

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Lamar, Mirabeau Buonaparte

Birth Date: August 16, 1798

Death Date: December 19, 1859

Politician, soldier, and second president of the Republic of Texas (1838-1841).

Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar was born near Louisville, Georgia, on August 16, 1798 and grew up around Milledgeville. He attended local academies, served as a newspaper publisher, was elected state senator in 1820, and ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Congress in 1832 and again in 1834.

Lamar made his way to Texas in 1835 to conduct studies of the area and to witness the burgeoning independence movement there, but he decided to stay and volunteered to serve with forces fighting for Texas independence. After rendering highly effective service in the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, he was commissioned a colonel and then enjoyed a meteoric political rise, including election as vice president of the Republic of Texas in 1836 and as the second president of Texas in 1838.

Lamar was a true Texas nationalist, envisioning an empire extending from the Sabine River west to the Pacific Ocean. As such, he vehemently opposed annexation by the United States. This nationalism included pursuing aggressive policies against Texas Indians, as opposed to the more conciliatory policies followed by his predecessor, Sam Houston, with whom he disagreed on most

issues. Lamar argued that Texas Cherokees did not have legitimate land titles from Mexico or Texas and had to be eradicated to open their lands to new white settlers.

In due course, on Lamar's orders, the new republic sent military forces against the Cherokees and their Native American allies. On July 15-16, 1839, Texas forces destroyed the Cherokees and their allies in battle in Van Zandt County, Texas. Survivors were forcefully drive out of Texas to Arkansas.

Further campaigns occurred against Comanche forces throughout Texas. During August 1840, Comanche raiders drove all the way to the Gulf port of Linnville, which they looted and burned. Texan forces retaliated and won a victory in the Battle of Plum Creek, near Lockhart, on August 12, 1840. The following year saw Lamar's administration launch an offensive against north Texas Wichita Indians, destroying several Wichita towns on the Trinity River in Tarrant County. Despite these successes, however, peace with the Comanches would be fleeting.

As president, Lamar used the United States and Great Britain in unsuccessful attempts to make peace with Mexico and then leased the Texas navy to Yucatán rebels. His administration also sought to retaliate against Mexico by sending an

expedition to Santa Fe, a city claimed by the Texas Republic under the terms of the 1837 Treaty of Velasco. The expedition proved disastrous. Its participants had inaccurate maps, endured intense summer heat with insufficient provisions, and ultimately surrendered to waiting Mexican authorities on October 5, 1841. These Texans were sent on a brutal forced march to Mexico City and then imprisoned in the notorious Perote prison.

Lamar's presidency left Texas virtually bankrupt, and he retired from politics altogether when his term ended in 1841. Lamar did fight in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), winning a citation for bravery for participation in the Battle of Monterrey (September 20-24, 1846). Promoted to lieutenant colonel, Lamar organized the Laredo Guards, a Texas volunteer outfit that patrolled the border between Texas and Mexico for raiding Comanches.

Following the Mexican-American War, Lamar retired to his plantation at Richmond, Texas. In 1857, President James Buchanan appointed him U.S. minister to Nicaragua and Costa Rica. In that position, Lamar worked to prevent the granting of a contract to the French to build an isthmian canal. In poor health on his return to Texas in 1859, he died on his plantation at Richmond on December 19, 1859. Lamar is best remembered as charming but impulsive leader who sought to achieve power for Texas without the requisite resources with

which to achieve it. Perhaps Lamar's most enduring legacy was his support of education in Texas; he is known as the "father of Texas education."

BERT CHAPMAN

See also

Cherokees, Comanches; Houston, Samuel; Monterrey, Battle of; San Jacinto, Battle of; Santa Fe; Texas; Texas Revolution; Texas-Comanche Relations

References

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