Center Launches U.S.-Mexico Website

The U.S.-Mexico War is the largest and most significant armed struggle between two nations in the western hemisphere. In Mexico, the war left a legacy of bitterness that can be seen to this day. In the United States, tensions between North and South soon eclipsed the clash with Mexico in the national imagination. Abraham Lincoln alluded to these tensions when he described the United States in 1858 as “a house divided.”

A decade earlier, however, North America was a divided continent, the site of conflict between two republics that had forged two very different destinies since winning their independence from European powers.

For the past two years, the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies and the Library at the University of Texas at Arlington have been working to develop A Continent Divided: The U.S.-Mexico War, a website that examines the 1846-1848 conflict. As its title suggests, the website is dedicated to presenting the war as a truly binational struggle, to shine a light on a neglected period in the history of both countries.

UT-Arlington is uniquely positioned to undertake this project. For almost forty years, the university has acquired a national reputation in the study of the American Southwest, due in no small part to the generosity of Jenkins Garrett, a Fort Worth attorney. Garrett became interested in the war with Mexico in the 1950s, at a time when the conflict was not even listed as a separate category by collectors. In the years that followed, he amassed what would become the largest private collection of books, broadsides, song sheets, military documents, lithographs, maps and ephemera on the U.S.-Mexico War. In 1973 Garrett donated to UT-Arlington his collection of more than 10,000 separate items on Texas and the war with Mexico, a bequest which formed the core of the library’s Special Collections. Most of these textual materials are unique to UT-Arlington’s Special Collections and have never been accessible online. The archive is particularly strong in Mexican sources, with more than 500 proclamations issued by Mexican political and civilian authorities.

Just as this digitization project aims to bridge the histories of two very different nations, it also seeks to serve two separate audiences. Scholars actively engaged in research and teachers looking for ways to engage their students tend to approach the same subject in very different ways. It is hoped that this project will be of benefit to researchers by making available for the first time online one of the largest collections of primary source materials on the U.S.-Mexico War. At the same time, this website is also designed for teachers, by providing educational resources that can be used in the classroom. Ultimately, the goal of A Continent Divided is to promote interest at every level in the issues that confronted the two North American republics as they struggled to define themselves during their early national periods.

The A Continent Divided project began in 2011 with a $10,000 start-up grant from UT Arlington’s College of Liberal Arts. The following year the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies received a $30,000 grant from the Summerlee Foundation. Funding to continue the multi-year project into the 2013-14 academic year has been provided by the College of Liberal Arts, the Library, and the Office of the Provost.

When completed, the website will be the most comprehensive internet resource on the U.S.-Mexico War.

The site currently features more than 300 separate items from Special Collections, consisting of a wide range of manuscripts, printed matter, and graphic materials. Two of Special Collections most significant holdings, the Grayson Prevost Papers and the Joseph Meginnes Journal, have been entirely transcribed and uploaded to the site. Grayson Prevost served as a surgeon in Zachary Taylor’s army; his letters and journal provide valuable insight into the early stages of the war. Joseph Meginnes served as a private in Scott’s army that occupied Mexico City in 1847-48. A prolific writer, his journals offer a glimpse into one of the least studied phases of the war: the nine-month occupation of Mexico City by U.S. forces. In addition, the site features more than fifty translated Mexican

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proclamations, as well as more than thirty biographies of key participants and a dozen contextual essays.

Although the site has only been operational for the past year, it has already garnered considerable interest. By the summer of 2013, the site was receiving an average of 3,000 hits per month. Organized topically, the site currently examines such subject areas as: the Road to War, Camp Life, and the Battle of Monterrey.

Plans are currently underway to add new subject areas in 2013-14, including Women and War and the War at Home. The site can be accessed at: http://library.uta.edu/ussmexicowar/index.php

Center to Host Environmentalist Author William deBuys

William deBuys, author of seven books on the environment, will deliver a lunchtime presentation on his most recent book, A Great Aridness: Climate Change and the Future of the American Southwest (Oxford University Press, 2012). Often mentioned alongside such authors as John McPhee and Wallace Stegner, Bill deBuys is a scholar who speaks and writes with passion about environmental stewardship. In A Great Aridness, deBuys ranges from Las Vegas to Mesa Verde to the Glen Canyon Dam as he examines the implications of a drier future for the American Southwest. His work transcends the regional, however. For example, his work also examines the U.S.-Mexico border, the dependence of both countries on the Colorado River, and its implications for the ongoing immigration debate. DeBuys explains why we should care about these places, and asks us to consider the national and international importance of climate change in the Southwest.

DeBuys’s earlier works include Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range (University of New Mexico Press, 1985); River of Traps (University of New Mexico Press, 1990), which was recognized as a New York Times Notable Book of the Year and was one of three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in general non-fiction in 1991; Salt Dreams: Land and Water in Low-Down California (University of New Mexico Press, 1999); and Seeing Things Whole: the Essential John Wesley Powell (Shearwater Press, 2001). DeBuys is currently working on a book of the Southwest’s most iconic sites, such as Acoma, the Grand Canyon, and Carlsbad Caverns.

The talk is scheduled from 12-1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 12, 2014, and will be held in the Sixth Floor Parlor of the UT Arlington Main Library. The event is free and open to the general public.

Pulitzer Prize Winner to Speak at Cynthia Ann and Quanah Parker Symposium, April, 2014

Pulitzer Prize winner Glenn Frankel, author of the recent bestseller, The Searchers: The Making of An American Legend, will take part in a two-day symposium on Cynthia Ann Parker and Quanah Parker in the spring. The symposium will take place on two consecutive days, April 17-18, in the Sixth Floor Parlor of the Main Library. On Thursday, April 17, at 12:30 p.m., F. Todd Smith (University of North Texas) and Joaquín Rivaya-Martínez (Texas State University) will examine the lives of Cynthia Ann Parker and Quanah Parker; in the larger context of nineteenth century Comanche-Anglo relations. On Friday, April 18, at 1 p.m., Frankel, Randi Tanglen (Austin College), and Dustin Tahmahkera (Southwestern University) will examine the ways in which these events have been portrayed in popular culture, focusing on the captivity narrative in American literature and film. Professor Frankel, who is chair of the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, will discuss his book, a history of the Parker Raid in 1836 and its development as an iconic western by director John Ford featuring John Wayne, at a Friends of the Library meeting at 7:30 p.m. that evening (see page 4 for a review of the book). All events will be free and open to the public.

In conjunction with the symposium, the Center will bring to campus the photographic exhibit, “The Story of Cynthia Ann and Quanah Parker,” a collection of 45 photographs on loan from the Texas Lakes Trail Heritage Program, and will be held in the Library Parlor from April to May, 2014. (see page 5 for a review of the book)
Center Fellow Updates

Sam W. Haynes edited with former Center Fellow Douglas Richmond an anthology of essays, *The Mexican Revolution: From Conflict to Consolidation, 1910-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013). In April he organized and delivered a paper at the 48th annual Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures, “Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution.” The conference papers will be published in 2014 by Texas A&M University Press, and will be edited by Dr. Haynes and Dr. Gerald Saxon. He continues to serve as managing editor of the website, *A Continent Divided: the U.S.-Mexico War*, a joint project of the Center and the Library, and is working on a book on the Texas Republic.

Stephanie Cole is researching gender, interracial marriage, and women’s work in the formation of Jim Crow society in Texas. She recently participated in a panel at the Texas State Historical Association annual meeting, and continues to serve in various capacities in that and other professional organizations in an effort to both enrich scholarly attention to, and expand public awareness of, women’s history in the state. Her co-edited volume, *Texas Women, American Women: Their Lives and Times*, will be published by the University of Georgia Press in 2014.

Robert B. Fairbank’s manuscript has been accepted by Temple University Press for publication, *The War On Slums in the Southwest, Public Housing and Slum Clearance in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, 1935-1965* will be published as part of a series entitled Urban Life, Landscape, and Public Policy. In addition, he has a forthcoming book chapter entitled “The Morrill Land-Grant Act and American Cities: The Neglected Story,” to be published in a volume commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Land Grant Act. He also gave a paper last fall in New York City at the Sixth Biennial Conference of the Urban History Association entitled “Accidental Cities? The Rise of Suburban Cities in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolis, 1945-1970.”

Sonia Kania has begun new research related to her collaboration on the Cibola Project. She, along with two colleagues, are working on an edition of Pedro de Nájera’s *Relación de la jornada de Cibola* from 1596, a text dealing with Coronado’s search for the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola.

David Narrett has a forthcoming book, “Adventurism, Intrigue, and Empire: The Struggle for Mastery in the Louisiana-Florida Borderlands, 1762-1803,” which is to be published by the University of North Carolina Press in the fall of 2014.


Gerald Saxon is currently associate professor of history at UT Arlington after having spent twenty-five years in library administration at the university, including seven years as dean of the library. He is working on a biography of Texas empresario Sterling Clack Robertson (1785-1842). In March 2013 he received the John H. Jenkins Award for the best research proposal on Texas history sponsored by the Texas State Historical Association, the oldest learned organization in the state. His two most recent books are *Collecting Texas*, with Thomas Kreneck, published by the Book Club of Texas in 2010, and *Historic Texas from the Air*, with David Buisseret, Jack Graves, and Richard Francaviglia, published by the University of Texas Press in 2009. He is also president of the Texas Map Society.

Webb Lectures on Texas Revolution To Be Published

In the spring of 2013, the Center co-sponsored with the department of History the 48th Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures. The theme of the 2013 lectures was “Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution.” As its title suggests, the conference sought to offer new perspectives on a topic which has attracted surprisingly little attention from scholars who specialize in the history of the United States or Mexico in the early nineteenth century. With the goal of examining the larger implications of the struggle for Texas’ independence, the Center assembled an international group of scholars, whose research seeks to integrate the Texas borderlands into a broad, geopolitical and cultural framework.

In addition to Center director Sam W. Haynes, the featured speakers were: Eric Schlereth, University of Texas at Dallas; Will Fowler, University of St. Andrews, Scotland; and Miguel Soto, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico. The evening keynote address was delivered by Amy S. Greenberg, Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania.

The essays are currently being edited for publication by Dr. Haynes and Dr. Gerald Saxon. They are scheduled for publication as an anthology in 2014 by Texas A&M University Press. Dr. Gregg Cantrell, Erma and Ralph Lowe professor of history at Texas Christian University, will write an introduction to the volume.
Robert Caldwell Receives Hall-Kohfeldt Scholarship

Robert Caldwell has been named the recipient of the Ida V. Hall and George Kohfeldt Scholarship. The scholarship assists students whose work focuses on the Native American Southwest. Robert Caldwell is a second year student in the Transatlantic History PhD program. Robert continues to do wide-ranging research on American Indians in Texas and Louisiana. He presented his research at the American Historical Association’s 127th Annual Meeting in January 2013 in New Orleans. He will also be presenting a paper, “Apaches in Louisiana?: The Ebarb Community’s Lipan Connections” at the March 2013 meeting of the Texas State Historical Association. He is currently exploring indigenous toponyms (place names) and icons of American Indian settlements on 18th and early 19th century European and American maps.

Wes Wettengel Receives Garrett Endowed Fellowship

Wes Wettengel is the recipient of the Virginia and Jenkins Garrett Endowed Fellowship for 2013. This annual award recognizes the best undergraduate or graduate student doing work in the field of the American Southwest researched primarily in UT Arlington Libraries’ Special Collections. Wettengel is a graduate student in the History department doing research on the US-Mexico War. He expects to defend his master’s thesis, entitled “Samuel Hamilton Walker: The U.S.–Mexico War, Mass Media and the Creation of the Common Hero,” this fall. His work focuses on Walker’s celebrity as the first non-elite war hero in American military history. Wes currently serves as a research assistant for the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies on its A Continent Divided: The U.S.-Mexico War website project.

The Texas Map Society Fall Meeting

The Texas Map Society’s Fall Meeting this year was held on Saturday, September 28, at the DeGolyer Library at SMU in Dallas. Three excellent speakers presented topics related to the overall theme of “Urban Maps and Plans”: Dr. Ron Tyler, former Director of the Amon Carter Museum and the Texas State Historical Association, talked on “Texas Bird’s-eye Views, 1871-1912”; Dr. Kathryn Holliday, UT Arlington architectural history professor, presented “DFW Piece by Piece: Using Maps to See the City Grow”; and Dr. Paula Lupkin, UNT art history professor, spoke on “Mining Data and Maps: Exploring the Great Southwest and the Geospatial Humanities.” As usual, there was much more than fine scholarly talks to stimulate and entertain those who attended. On Friday, September 27, there was a tour of and a reception at the fabulous private Harlan Crow Library in Dallas, one of the most impressive private libraries in the country. This also included a stroll through Mr. Crow’s “Garden of Evil” — filled with statues of fallen dictators — an experience not to be missed! Following the map presentations on Saturday, Dr. Alan Lowe, Director of the George W. Bush Presidential Library, spoke on the planning and building of that institution. TMS attendees then toured the impressive library after Dr. Lowe’s presentation. A reception followed at the Bush Library’s Café 43. For more information see the Texas Map Society website at http://www.texasmapsociety.org/events.html.

Center Fellows

Sam Haynes, Professor of History and Center Director
Stephanie Cole, Associate Professor of History
Chris Conway, Associate Professor of Modern Languages
Imre Demhardt (Ex-Officio), Professor and Garrett Endowed Chair in the History of Cartography
Robert Fairbanks, Professor of History
Sonia Kania, Associate Professor of Modern Languages
David Narrett, Associate Professor of History
Ken Roemer, Professor of English
Gerald Saxon, Associate Professor of History
Tales of Blood and Longing: A Review of Glenn Frankel’s
The Searchers: The Making of An American Legend

by Christopher Conway

Glenn Frankel’s *The Searchers: The Making of An American Legend* is an inspired joining of American history with Film History. The history part goes like this: on May 19, 1836, a party of Comanche raided a white settlement called Parker’s Fort north of Groesbeck, Texas. They killed five settlers and took five captives: the eighteen year old Rachel Plummer, who was pregnant at the time, her one year old son James Pratt, nine year old Cynthia Ann Parker, eight year old John Richard Parker and a young woman named Elizabeth Duty Kellogg. All five were recovered, but the story of Cynthia Ann Parker, who lived for twenty-four years among the Comanche, became the stuff of myth. What made her story legendary was that she married a Comanche Chief named Peta Nocona and gave birth to three of his children, among them a boy named Quanah who grew up to become the last great leader of the Comanche nation.

The Film History part of the story is that in 1956, John Ford adapted a novel by Alan LeMay titled *The Searchers*, which was loosely based on the story of Cynthia Ann Parker. Ford’s movie, starring John Wayne and Natalie Wood, is a dark western that highlights the theme of race hatred and revenge. The movie has become canon in Film and American Studies university classrooms because of the way it blends the conventional, triumphant iconography of the frontier with a more nuanced and disturbing view of the theme of hatred. For example, when Ford has John Wayne scalp the Comanche chief Scar at the end of the movie, the viewer is confronted with the collapse of the racialized opposition between civilization and barbarism that defined the western genre. Enter Glenn Frankel, who combines the story of the real Cynthia Ann Parker with the story of the making of John Ford’s movie, which is commonly featured in the “best of” lists as one of the greatest American films ever made.

Readers of Frankel’s book who are familiar with Ford’s *The Searchers* will probably be most curious about the historical person that inspired the character of Ethan Edwards, played by John Wayne. In the movie, Edwards is a fearless, battle-hardened Confederate veteran with a sketchy past. Ford immortalized his capacity for savagery, and his inability and unwillingness to belong in the company of men, with one of the most poignant and iconic images in the history of American film: Ethan Edwards, standing alone, framed by the blackened door frame of the homestead of the Jorgensen family as they tenderly walk the Natalie Wood character across its threshold into the civilized world of the family hearth. In this scene, Ford situates the viewer inside the house looking out at the wild man who has rescued the captive, and who, by some sudden, paralyzing intuition, realizes that he doesn’t belong there and that he cannot enter that space.

The real Ethan Edwards was James Parker, whose daughter Rachel Plummer was kidnapped by the Comanche alongside his grandson James Pratt and his niece Cynthia Ann. James Parker was an on-and-off Texas Ranger and a self-styled Baptist minister with a taste for drink. In a series of bold, failed expeditions, he tried to track the captives, enduring great hardships, and killing more than one suspicious Comanche in the name of revenge. He might seem a heroic figure, albeit an imperfect one, but when Parker found his grandson James, he feuded with the boy’s father over ransom money and refused to return him. Frankel’s portrait of Parker underlines his volatility and barely contained violence, as well as the fact that everywhere he went he seemed to make enemies. In comparison to this character, Wayne’s Ethan Edwards is a pale shadow of anger and alienation, tempered by gentle melancholy.

Perhaps the most compelling story of all in Frankel’s book is Cynthia Ann’s Comanche identity. Cynthia Ann was rescued twenty-four years after her abduction, and long after she had become, by necessity, a Comanche. The memories of her earlier life at Fort Parker had faded over time as she forgot English and gave birth to Pecos, Quanah and the infant girl Prairie Flower, who was with her when she was rescued. Since there are no accounts of what precisely Cynthia Ann experienced during her decades long captivity, Frankel provides clues based on the experiences of other captive women, including Rachel Plummer, who wrote a brief account of her captivity. Frankel sketches the day-to-day chores of women among the Comanche, such as tanning buffalo hides and looking after the horses. He doesn’t shy away from detailing the cruelties inflicted on white captives, such as the brutal murder of Rachel’s newborn son before her very eyes, and the probable, though not explicitly documented claim that rape was used to terrorize her and other captives. Notwithstanding, Frankel is careful to not fall into the trap of reinscribing racist stereotypes, and he makes it a point to speak contextually about Comanche culture and also acknowledges their humanity.

It is haunting to read of Cynthia Ann’s return to white society while under the protection of her elderly Uncle Isaac of Birdville, Texas. Frankel paints a picture of a woman who is completely brokenhearted over her separation from the Comanche and most especially her sons Quanah and Pecos. During this, her second abduction, Parker became an object of curiosity, paraded in public and misunderstood at nearly every turn. Frankel movingly evokes the image of Cynthia Ann tied up outside a country store in a torn Calico dress, crying and muttering in Comanche while white children gaped at her. He also tells the story of how she sat for a continued on back page
‘Imitating the Example of our Forefathers:’
The Texas Revolution as Historical Re-enactment

Sam W. Haynes
Professor of History

F or all the scholarly attention which the Texas Revolution has received, it is often viewed as an event somehow disconnected from the history of its larger North American neighbor. This is understandable, given the simple fact that Texas lay outside the nation’s borders during the first half of the nineteenth century. As a result, they have generally tended to cede the study of this event to historians of the state, whose exclusive focus on the region has served to reinforce popular notions of a unique past.

Yet Anglo-Texan colonists were, of course, Americans, having only recently migrated into Mexican territory in search of economic opportunity. As such, they shared with citizens of the United States a cultural heritage which set them apart from the Tejanos who would also rebel against the Mexican government in 1835. Of particular importance to Americans during this period was a deep fascination of, and reverence for, the revolutionary world of their forefathers. By the mid-1820s, Americans were in the grip of a patriotic mania, occasioned by the fiftieth anniversary of the nation’s independence. In 1824 the Marquis de Lafayette, who had served as George Washington’s aide-de-camp, crossed the Atlantic for a year-long tour of the country he had helped create. The adoring crowds that greeted the war hero wherever he went signaled a longing among Americans to reconnect with an idealized past. At the same time, the frenzied jubilation was accompanied by the melancholy awareness that the revolutionary generation was passing from the scene. The anniversary prompted Americans to take stock of their society, and many questioned whether they had fulfilled the promise of the revolutionary era.

This yearning for national renewal continued long after the republic celebrated the jubilee in 1826, and can be seen in virtually every aspect of American life, from politics to the performing arts. It can be seen, too, in the behaviors of Anglo-Texan colonists who began to take issue with the policies of the Mexican government in the 1830s. And none were more thoroughly influenced by this revolutionary heritage than a small group of radicals who would be the driving force behind the crisis in Texas. They shared a deep connection to an American historical experience that served to compromise their loyalty to the Mexican republic. This was not true of all Texas colonists, of course; the province’s leading moderates, most notably Stephen F. Austin, lent their full support to the Constitution of 1824, and took their obligations of Mexican citizenship very seriously. But those who gravitated to the radical camp in the early 1830s, men like Brazoria planters William H. Wharton, Robert M. Williamson, and Branch T. Archer, expressed political dissent in thoroughly American terms. They upbraided as tories those who did not share their stalwart opposition to the Mexican government, quoted liberally from the writings of prominent American revolutionaries in their public addresses and private correspondence; and established committees of correspondence to deal with their grievances modeled after those of the American colonial resistance.

This historical frame of reference appears especially significant given the absence of anything remotely resembling a unifying revolutionary agenda for the better part of 1835. Notwithstanding the aura of inevitability that has attached itself to the Texas Revolution, one finds no outpouring of popular discontent within the Anglo-Texas community as a result of the Plan of Cuernavaca, by which Mexican president Santa Anna abolished the federalist Constitution of 1824. Indeed, one finds little serious public opposition to the centralist government until July, amid rumors that a contingent of troops would be sent to Texas and forcibly quartered in settlers’ homes, inviting comparisons to the British parliament’s passage of the Quartering Act of 1765. Even then, support for armed resistance did not crystallize until Mexican troops finally arrived in mid-September, only two weeks before hostilities began.

How, then, did the Anglo population coalesce so quickly? The shift in public opinion toward the radical faction may be attributed in large part to its leaders’ ability to frame the growing crisis between Texas and the new centralist government in terms that Anglos understood: as an extension of a struggle deeply rooted in their own historical memory. “Despotism” and “tyranny” would serve as the shorthand by which they raised the stakes in their confrontation with Mexico City and roused a hitherto disengaged community to action. Although, at this early stage of the crisis, the political discourse in Texas still seemed to hinge upon the future of Mexican federalism, the radicals’ appropriation of language associated with an American revolutionary tradition proved enormously effective in undercutting Anglo-Texan loyalties to the Mexican nation-state. “Centralism,” declared William Barrett Travis in August, 1835, “is but another name for monarchy.” By conflating these terms as symbols of oppression and framing the debate as a struggle between “patriots” and “tories,” the radicals skillfully managed to isolate the voices of those counseling caution.

Isolated, too, were those Tejano federalists who had initially...
expressed support for the Anglo-American cause. To be sure, Anglos may have shared with some Mexican-Texans a common set of republican principles and a demand for greater self-government. But Tejano federalists acted upon a wholly different set of historical assumptions than their Anglo allies. While they could express a deeply-felt admiration for Jeffersonian republicanism, the American Revolution remained for them a purely ideological abstraction. Anglo-Texan colonists, on the other hand, continued to observe Independence Day and Washington’s Birthday, celebrations which served to reinforce pre-existing national attachments. Anglo leaders sought to emulate the oratorical style of revolutionary firebrand Patrick Henry, whose signature phrase, “Liberty or Death!” would become the watchwords of Anglo resistance. Robert M. Williamson

Wharton reminded one audience that the Texans were “gallantly contending for the same sacred principles for which Henry thundered—Washington conquered—and Warren died.”

became known as the “Patrick Henry of the Revolution” after his July 4 address to a San Felipe gathering, a speech widely regarded as one of the most effective in warning colonists of the dangers resulting from the recent change of government in Mexico City.

That distinction might also have been applied to itinerant Methodist minister William P. Smith. Arriving in the village of Gonzales on the evening of October 1, 1835, Smith found approximately 160 armed colonists, who had refused to surrender to Mexican troops a cannon that had been loaned to the colony some years earlier. Smith delivered a rousing speech to the group, concluding as follows:

“The same blood that animated the hearts of our ancestors of ’76 still flows warm in our veins….Let us go into battle with the words of the immortal Patrick Henry, before the Virginia House of Burgesses, deeply impressed upon our hearts, when, with arms extended towards heaven, and with a voice of thunder, he exclaimed in the most patriotic manner: Give me Liberty or Give me Death!”

The skirmish the following day which famously ignited the insurrection offers an especially telling example of the ways in which the memory of the American Revolution informed the behavior of Anglo-Texas residents. Although the few extant eyewitness accounts offer no direct evidence that the volunteers who fired on Mexican troops on the banks of the Guadalupe River saw themselves as the descendants of Lexington minutemen, it was a parallel that certainly occurred to many Anglos in the days and weeks that followed. Anglo-Texan behavior had begun to take on a weirdly performative dimension, as colonists seized the opportunity to actually re-enact the events which had long been a conspicuous feature of their historical memory.

More than a justification for taking up arms, the public memory of the Revolution proved an equally potent recruitment tool once the war began. While continuing to inveigh against centralist tyranny, Anglo-Texan leaders now wove the familiar narrative of the thirteen colonies’ struggle against the British empire into their calls for community sacrifice. Echoing many of the same themes that had made the 1826 celebration a cultural touchstone for citizens of the American republic, Texan propagandists urged settlers to carry on the sacred legacy bequeathed to them by an earlier generation. For Anglo-Americans who had long stood in the shadow of their heroic forbears and yearned to match their accomplishments, armed resistance was no longer a simple matter of self-defense. It had become, in the minds of many, a duty owed to those who had forged the American republic, one which spoke to a potent, lingering need for validation. To drive the point home, Texas leaders relentlessly invoked George Washington, the national patriarch. Again and again, leaders of the rebellion asked colonists if they were the equals of their ancestors, urging able-bodied males to honor them through military service (an argument which carried with it the implicit warning that they would shame them should they fail in the endeavor). Similarly, officers in the hastily-organized Texas army recalled the heroics of the sons of ’76 to steel the resolve of men under their command. Such rhetoric appears to have had the desired effect, if the sentiments of one volunteer are any indication, who wrote to his brother that, despite the privations of soldiering, “all was sweet when I reflected on our forefathers in the struggle of liberty…”

From a practical standpoint, most Anglo-Texan leaders had always looked eastward, regarding financial and military support from the United States as vital to the success of the revolutionary cause. The earliest appeals for men and supplies issued by the General Council in the weeks after Gonzales emphasized the ties that bound the insurrectionists to their country of origin. Declaring that it was their intention to “to live free or die,” the delegates reminded Americans that “we are but one people,” whose fathers had fought “side by side” in the Revolution. When the Consultation finally met in November, it took steps to solicit American support, voting to send a three-man commission to the United States consisting of William H. Wharton, Branch T. Archer, and Stephen F. Austin. During the course of their whirlwind tour of several U.S. cities, the commission did not miss an opportunity to remind Americans of the similarity between the two independence movements, Wharton reminding one audience that the Texans were “gallantly contending for the same sacred principles for which Henry thundered—Washington conquered—and Warren died.”

The three men even collaborated on a new flag for the breakaway government, designed while delegates at Washington-on-the Brazos were issuing a declaration of independence that borrowed liberally in both language and structure from the document adopted by the Continental Congress in 1776. An early draft of the banner sketched by Austin featured a star on a background of thirteen stripes with the legend, widely attributed to Benjamin Franklin, “Where liberty dwells, there is my country.” Wharton suggested an alternative: in place of the star, the head of George Washington encircled by a glowing nimbus, with the phrase, “in his example, there is safety.”

The commission’s appeals to a common heritage found a receptive audience in the United States. Long before it arrived, communities throughout the southern and Mid-Atlantic states, on
famous photographic portrait, with her daughter Prairie Flower nursing at her breast. When the photographer turned the camera toward her, she cried out in terror. In the photograph that was eventually taken, as in the documentary record, nothing evokes the fresh face of Natalie Wood from Ford’s retelling of Cynthia Ann’s life. As Frankel notes, in this photograph, Cynthia Ann seems strong, resigned and afraid. She seems poignantly real. Tragically, Prairie Flower died in the 1860’s, and her enigmatic and displaced mother followed, probably in 1870.

If James Parker was a searcher because he searched for his lost family members, and Cynthia Ann was a searcher because she longed to be reunited with the Comanche and her two sons, Frankel suggests that Quanah Parker was also a searcher, because he never stopped longing and looking for his lost mother. Frankel shows the ways in which Quanah continued his mother’s legacy of being a symbol of the blending of two cultures. Cynthia Ann’s captivity and return to white society turned her into an object lesson for her contemporaries about how the contact between white and Comanche was marked by violence and degradation. In contrast, Quanah Parker’s national celebrity as a friend of the White Man turned him into a nostalgic myth about the noble savage. But Frankel doesn’t stop here. In a brilliant joining of history and cultural history, he takes up the stories of the twentieth century custodians of the myths surrounding the raid at Fort Parker: the novelist Alan LeyMay, the director John Ford and the legendary actor John Wayne. Each of these men, brought together into the mythology of Cynthia Ann through the movie The Searchers, was also a searcher. When Frankel tells the story of their reputation, and their triumphs and failures, he weaves a tapestry that joins the past with the present in surprising ways. Ultimately, this allows Frankel to broaden the scope of his book to make it more universal, as if the story of Cynthia Ann, and of the making of western fictions about her on paper and on celluloid, is as much about the human condition writ large as it is about what it means to be an American. This poignant revelation recommends Frankel’s book to fans of both history and Hollywood.

The Texas Revolution as Historical Re-enactment continued from page 7

the basis of only a vague understanding of political events east of the Sabine, had established Texas committees to raise money and volunteer companies for the insurrection. Rare was the orator in these mass meetings who did not regale his audience with allusions to the American struggle for independence, or who failed to point out that France had once played midwife to a new nation, and it was now incumbent upon the United States to do the same. Supporters of the revolution exhorted young men to follow in the footsteps of Lafayette, who at the age of nineteen had fought for liberty in a new country.

After San Jacinto, the role of the American Revolution in the Texas creation narrative began to recede, as Anglo-Texans fashioned their own set of myths from the events of 1835-1836. Most colonists had assumed that Texas would be speedily incorporated into the American union. Fierce opposition to the expansion of slavery, however, soon derailed early attempts to annex Texas. Washington’s rebuff was the source of considerable resentment among Anglo-Texans, serving to undermine emotional ties to their country of origin.

Americans living west of the Sabine did not abandon the goal of annexation, which would ultimately be consummated in 1845. Nonetheless, during the Republic period Anglo-Texans had little choice but to craft a new historical narrative, one which de-emphasized the role of the United States and gave prominence to a self-conscious nationalism that stressed the region’s exceptionalist character. Even after statehood, Anglo-Texans would continue to cling to the pretensions of a unique identity, which can still be seen today.

In their search for the Texas Revolution’s underlying causes, historians have focused on the concrete: the many political and economic tensions between Anglo-Texan colonists and Mexico arising from disputes over representation, land, and slavery. But perhaps we might be well served to look beyond specific issues of contention toward something more elusive, more opaque: the broader mindset through which these issues are filtered, perceived and acted upon. Seeing themselves as part of a broader historical continuum, Anglo-Texans self-consciously strove to duplicate the heroics of an earlier generation. They had become, in a very real sense, re-enactors of the American Revolution.