

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SECTION

SAMUEL BANGS: THE FIRST PRINTER IN TEXAS

The date and the personalities involved in the introduction of the press into the southwest have been subjects for research and speculation for many years, and, as the region was once a part of Mexico, the search for data which would throw light upon the problem has not been limited either to the United States or to English-speaking historians. J. Eleuterio González, in writing of Nuevo Leon,¹ devotes considerable space to his belief that the Anglo-Americans who came into Texas in 1813 brought with them a press which was captured at San Antonio by the Mexicans and taken to Monterey; but neither in the official report of the battle nor in the list of captured goods is there any reference to a press or parts of a press.² In some brief unpublished notes, H. R. Wagner states that the first document printed in the southwest which has come to his knowledge is a proclamation of Arredondo, which was issued at Monterey on July 21, 1820.³ Other writers have referred to the press brought into Texas by the Long expedition in 1819⁴ on which a newspaper, the *Texas Republican*, was printed. Of this paper three numbers were reported by other papers in the United States⁵ as having been received.

From evidence that there was a press in Texas in 1819 and also one in Monterey in 1820, Wagner jumps to the conclusion that the Monterey press was the press of the Long expedition, thus:

¹ *Colección de Noticias y Documentos para la Historia del Estado de Nuevo León* (Monterey, 1867).

² Mexico. Archivo General. Historia, Operaciones de Guerra, Arredondo, 1813-1820. Translation in the *Quarterly* of the Texas Historical Association, XI. 220-236.

³ Ms. notes on early printing. Photostat copy in University of Texas Library.

⁴ Lamar Papers. Calendar no. 703, Lamar's Life of Long. Original in State Library. Printed in *Lamar Papers*, II. 59. Calendar no. 1966, Eli Harris, Providence, Louisiana, January 18, 1841, to M. B. Lamar, in III. 483.

⁵ E. W. Winkler, "The Texas Republican", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, VI. 162-165; VII. 242-243; XVI. 329-331 C. S. Brigham, "Bibliography of American Newspapers" in *Proceedings of American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, XXXV. 98.

There is no doubt that Long's second expedition had a press which was captured, and probably the printer himself, as Bangs was in the expedition and captured, and a short time afterwards he appeared as a printer.⁶

But who was Bangs and how did he get either to Texas or to Monterey? Was Wagner correct in stating that Bangs was with the Long Expedition? Both questions remained without an answer until a letter signed by Samuel Bangs and written at Saltillo in 1822⁷ revealed the facts connected with his trip to Texas and Mexico. Where he came from remained a mystery until a reference of Benjamin Lundy gave a clue.⁸ Later his name appeared as the publisher of the first "war" newspaper of the Mexican war. It became increasingly evident that a knowledge of the details of even twenty years of Bangs's life would throw some light on the history of the early press in Texas and northern Mexico. With this object in view the task of tracing his career was begun. The search has led from Boston to Mexico City, with many stops en route.

From Lundy's clue that Bangs was a native of Boston, some facts of interest in connection with his life were established. He was a son of Samuel Bangs, Jr., born in 1769, and of Harriet Grier, also of Boston. His father died before 1800, and in that year the will of his grandfather, Samuel Bangs, Sr., was probated. By this he left to "Samuel and Harriet Bangs, minors under 14, children of Samuel Bangs, late of said Boston, glazier, deceased", his property; and William Hawes was appointed their guardian.⁹ On November 10, 1801, a new guardian was appointed for both children still "under 14", and on August 18, 1806, a guardian was appointed for Harriet, but Samuel was no longer mentioned. He must then have been born about 1794 of a family prominent in the locality.

We still know nothing of Samuel's education or preparation for business. Whether he was apprenticed is still a question. For ten years he is hidden in the clouds of obscurity, from which he emerges, not in Boston, but in Baltimore, where, in the capacity of printer

⁶ Ms. notes.

⁷ Samuel Bangs, Saltillo, to Servando Teresa de Mier, Mexico, July 13, 1822. Original in the Mier Papers.

⁸ *Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy* (Philadelphia, 1847), p. 154.

⁹ Dean Dudley, *History and Genealogy of the Bangs Family* (Boston, 1896); Probate Records of Suffolk County, XCVIII. 696.

he joins the Mina expedition, bound for Mexico.¹⁰ From this point on, it is possible to follow the thread of his career by tracing the more prominent individuals with whom he was associated. One of these was Dr. Servando de Mier, a Mexican friar, whose career reads almost like a story book.¹¹ After being exiled from Mexico by ignorant and superstitious ecclesiastics, persecuted in Spain, secularized by the pope, and almost starved to death in France, he had sought refuge in England, where he met Francisco Xavier de Mina, who was fired with enthusiasm to bring about the freedom of Mexico. Into this project Mier entered with his whole heart; and together they procured a boat and supplies with which to carry out their object. With them from England they brought a small portable press.¹² The first stop was made at Baltimore, where they hoped to obtain further financial aid and to buy more supplies. There the services of Bangs as a printer were secured. In September, 1816, the expedition set sail, with the leaders well satisfied with the support and encouragement received. After various experiences, for complete harmony did not at all times prevail among these apostles of liberty, the party halted on Galveston Island. Here Bangs issued a *Manifiesto* of Mina, dated Galveston, February 22, 1817. The document has been reprinted by Bustamante¹³ who states that on the verso appears the notice: "Impreso por Juan J. M. Laran y S. Bancs".

There is further documentary evidence—his own printing—by which to trace Bangs for a time from this point. He was at the mouth of the Rio Grande on April 12, 1817;¹⁴ he disembarked at Soto la Marina in May, 1817, and celebrated that event by printing a patriotic song in five stanzas composed by Joaquín Infante.¹⁵ The colophon of this poetic effusion reads: "Soto la Marina, 1817. Samuel Bangs, impresor de la division auxiliar de la republica mexicana".

¹⁰ Samuel Bangs. Application for Land, 1830. Original in State Land Office, Austin, Texas. Spanish grants, XXX, 200-230.

¹¹ J. E. González, *Biografía del benemérito Mexicano D. Servando Teresa de Mier Noriega y Guerra* (Monterey, 1876).

¹² Hernández y Dávalos, *Documentos para la Historia de México* (Mexico, 1877-1882), VI, 847.

¹³ Carlos Maria Bustamante, *Cuadro histórico* (México 1843-1860, IV, 317-323; 337 note; W. D. Robinson, *Memorias de la Revolución* (London, 1824), p. 59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 333.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 329.

He also printed several numbers of a *Boletín*, some copies of which still survive.¹⁶

But poetry and newspapers were soon to be driven from Bangs's mind by sterner facts. When Mina decided to advance to the interior of Mexico with a part of his force, he left Bangs and Mier at Sota la Marina, where they were soon captured by Arredondo, the royalist leader in that section of Mexico. At this time Bangs would have shared the fate meted out to almost all the rest of the party—immediate execution—had Arredondo not realized the utility of the press and his need of a printer. The life of Mier was spared because Arredondo knew the great respect in which he was held, not only in Mexico but also abroad; nevertheless he was put in chains, hoisted on a mule, and taken overland to the vile fortress of San Juan de Ulloa in the harbor of Vera Cruz. Not until 1822 did Bangs learn that Mier, after being ordered transported to Spain, had escaped at Havana and was again in Mexico. In a letter to him, Bangs recounted his own experiences as follows:

I am well and have been in this town [Saltillo] three months since I came with the Commandante Gaspar Lopez; for you know how Arredondo took possession of the press when we were made prisoners and that I had the good fortune to have my life spared as I was a printer. Since then I have exercised my profession for the government at a salary so miserable that I could hardly subsist; even now I am paid only 18 pesos a month, but with treatment as contemptible as if I were a prisoner. These gentlemen do not remember that I also exposed my life for the liberty of the north; although it was not effected as we had planned.¹⁷

With Bangs's printed documents and this letter in existence, the whole theory of Wagner concerning the transfer of the press and printer of the Long expedition to Monterey is exploded. The Long press was destroyed on the spot by the royalists.¹⁸ The press on which the Galveston document was printed was an English press which was taken to Mexico by Mier and Mina,¹⁹ and Bangs had been with it from 1816 until 1822 when he was still operating it at Saltillo,

¹⁶ Reprinted in Genaro García, *Documentos históricos* (Mexico, 1910), IV. García adds the information that it was printed on a portable press in charge of Samuel Bangs. See Introduction, p. xv.

¹⁷ Samuel Bangs, Saltillo, to Servando de Mier, Mexico City, July 13, 1822. A. L. S. 2 ff.

¹⁸ Eli Harris to M. B. Lamar, January 18, 1841, in Lamar Papers.

¹⁹ Statement of Mier before the Inquisition: "Desembarcó Mina su imprenta portatil que traía de Londres" (Hernández y Dávalos, VI. 807).

to which place the seat of government had been removed. There remains small doubt that he was the printer of the 1820 Monterey document referred to by Wagner as the earliest printed in the southwest.

There is other evidence by which Bangs can be traced through the next decade. In 1823 a list of voluntary [?] subscribers to a fund wherewith to assist the government was published in the columns of the official organ at the capital. What do we find there, but the item from Saltillo that "el impresor, Samuel Bangs" will donate 2 pesos from his monthly salary to the cause.²⁰ Evidently Samuel was still in Saltillo and still a printer. From this point on, for a time, the career of Bangs again became temporarily enshrouded in mystery. But entries in the *Journal* of the congress of Coahuila and Texas for 1830²¹ once more established his whereabouts. On January 1 that year he applied to the governor of that state for Mexican citizenship; his application was approved on the 14th; and by decree number 112 José Manuel Bangs was made a citizen of the state of Coahuila and Texas.²² The seeming discrepancy in the names is cleared up by the postscript to Bangs's letter to Mier in 1822 in which he explained that when the Mexicans baptized him into the Catholic church they changed his name from Samuel to José Manuel, but he continued to sign himself Samuel in order that Mier might recognize him.

The explanation of Bangs's sudden desire for Mexican citizenship and further details of his career between 1823 and 1830 came from a most unexpected quarter. In the records of the state land office at Austin, Texas, is an application for a six-league grant of land on the Colorado signed by José Manuel Bangs at Saltillo on January 27, 1830.²³ In this document Bangs recounts that on the 26th of September, 1816, he left Baltimore with Mina and disembarked at Sota la Marina, in May, 1817. From that time until 1821, he was a prisoner of Arredondo and forced to work as a printer on the government press. In 1823, he returned to his native land, but moved back to Mexico in 1827 when he took with him a printing press which he set up in Victoria and later sold to the government of Tamaulipas; he then established himself at Saltillo with another press which he later sold

²⁰ *La Gaceta de Mexico*, February 20, 1823.

²¹ Transcripts in the library of the University of Texas.

²² Gammel's *Laws of Coahuila and Texas*.

²³ Spanish Grants, XXX. 200-230.

to the state of Coahuila and Texas. On that press he had been employed steadily until 1830, but since he desired to settle in Texas and devote himself to agriculture, he made application for the six-league grant on the Colorado.

A part of this statement is substantiated by a further record found in Boston. On the 12th of May, 1824, Samuel Bangs, printer, of Boston, applied for the partition of land on the east side of Fort Hill, to "the moiety of which" Samuel Bangs was "seized in fee simple".²⁴ In his letter to Mier two years earlier he had stated that he had resources upon which he could count.

If additional evidence were needed to prove that Bangs were indeed the government printer, it could easily be supplied from the numerous documents still in existence which bear his name as printer. Many of these are in the Bexar Archives; many others are still in their neat, clean covers in the Archivo General de México.²⁵ He was still in Saltillo as late as 1832, for Decree number 195 exempts him, on the ground of having a family born in Mexico, from the ruling of Decree 183, which prohibited persons not born in Mexico from selling any goods except "by the half or entire mule-load".²⁶

Just when Bangs moved back to Tamaulipas is not clear, but he was employed as the government printer there in 1835 when Lundy made his trip through the region. With him were his wife, a native of lower Virginia, and two sons, living in comfort and ease, if not in affluence, and enjoying to a high degree the confidence of the Mexicans. When Lundy brought to Bangs a letter of introduction from a mutual friend, the rabid abolitionist was cordially received by the Bostonian, and soon Lundy was appealing for aid in securing a grant of land in Mexico on which to establish a colony of free negroes and escaped slaves. Bangs was at once interested, and through his influence the grant was made in Bangs's name, but some time was allowed the empresarios to bring out their colonists. Lundy returned to the United States to secure funds and to send on the colonists.²⁷

But before another year had passed conditions were such that

²⁴ Land Records, Suffolk County, CCXCI. 226.

²⁵ Many of these were in the Archivo general de la Secretaría de Gobernación which has, since the revolution, been transferred to the Archivo General. In 1930, due to lack of space, these archives had still not been housed with the main collection.

²⁶ Laws of Coahuila and Texas, Decrees nos. 195 and 183.

²⁷ Benjamin Lundy, *Life, Travels and Opinions*, pp. 154, 161, and 164.

Lundy found it inadvisable to dispatch colonists and Bangs found it desirable to leave Mexico. The revolution in Texas interfered with their plans, and the death of Bangs's wife decided him to remove his children from danger. While at Matamoras, en route to New Orleans, in March, 1836, he met James Ogilvy, a Scotchman who had been active in land matters in the region for several years, and to him Bangs gave a general power of attorney with full authority as agent to carry out the original terms of the grant.²⁸

Just where Bangs went or how he occupied himself during the next three years is open to question. Ben Stuart, who knew him intimately for many years, states that Bangs returned to the United States, married Miss Caroline French, moved to Mobile, and there set up a printing office.²⁹ From another source we learn that he married the first time in Baltimore, went to Mexico, and there amassed considerable wealth. Having lost his wife, he returned to Baltimore, married a second time, and moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. After a short residence there, he returned to Texas, landing at Galveston in 1839.³⁰

At least there is documentary evidence which shows Bangs at New Orleans in December, 1838, with his eyes turned toward Texas.³¹ Ogilvy was trying to get a confirmation of the Tamaulipas grant from the government of that state or to dispose of the claim in a profitable manner. He was also handling Bangs's claim for the six league grant applied for in 1830. Apparently a two-league tract had been surveyed for him on the Brazos by Isaac Cummings, who failed to sign the field notes. As Bangs was not at hand to see that the necessary formalities had been complied with, the title was still faulty. The matter of clearing up this claim is noted day by day in

* "Diary of Adolphus Sterne" in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXX. This was really the diary of James Ogilvy, but the editor did not realize the fact until after the first part of the manuscript was in print.

* "History of Texas Newspapers". Ms. in the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

* "Printing in Galveston" in *Galveston City Directory*, 1859. This excerpt and that from the Stuart Ms. were furnished the writer by Mr. Frank C. Patten, Librarian of the Rosenberg Library.

* Ogilvy's Diary under date of December 12, 13, 20, 25, 28, 29, 1838, and January 8, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 26, February 8, 11, 22, 26, 27, March 5, 7, 14, 15, 19, 29, April 2, 6, 7, et passim, indicates Bangs's whereabouts, intentions, and the closeness of the relations between the two.

the *Diary*. In January 1839, Ogilvy records that Bangs was still in New Orleans waiting on his wife who had been twice wrecked in coming down the river. In February, he noted his unsuccessful attempts to secure work for Bangs on the *Telegraph* in Houston. In March, he records that Bangs was in Galveston, where he had already acquired title to a city lot, as well as to one in Houston.

With Bangs there came to Texas at this time his two brothers-in-law, G. H. and H. R. French, both newspaper men, with whom his interests for the next several years were closely linked. At some time between the date of his arrival and April 15, the *Galvestonian*, a daily newspaper, began to be issued "from the office of Mr. Bangs".³² It was at first edited by "Plain" John Gladwin, but after the death of that gentleman in October, the editorship fell to H. R. French, under whose guiding hand it continued at least until May, 1840.³³ In September of that year the *San Luis Advocate* began publication at the small town of that name on Galveston Island, and the inclusion of an article "Mina and the Three Hundred", which ran from November 11, 1840, through February 5, 1841, suggests that Bangs was in some way associated with that paper, too.³⁴ After Number 41 had been printed the paper was removed to Galveston "in order to increase facilities for communication regularly with every section of the republic as well as with foreign nations", and the name was changed to the *Texas Times*. On March 11, 1843, G. H. French with G. L. Hamlin took charge of its publication.³⁵

Bangs was probably not interested in this paper, for just at the time of the decease of the *Advocate* he appeared as the publisher of the *Commercial Chronicle*, of which the fourth number was in circulation before September 8, 1842.³⁶ Of this paper, which changed its title to the *Independent Chronicle*, Bangs was editor, printer, publisher, and proprietor. In policy, the paper was anti-Houston, and for over a year its editor continued "banging", much to the disgust of the administration press. It was lamented by one of these gentlemen that Bangs's enthusiasm was not accompanied with a discretion

³² "Printing in Galveston" in *Galveston City Directory*, 1859, p. 89.

³³ *Austin City Gazette*, May 6, 1840.

³⁴ In an unsigned manuscript in the Dyer Collection, Rosenberg Library, it is stated that Samuel Bangs worked "for Mr. Pincus on the *San Louis Times*".

³⁵ *The Texas Times*, November 23, 1842; March 11, 1843.

³⁶ *The Redlander* (San Augustine, Texas), September 8, 1842.

and sense of propriety consonant with the dignity of the station which he had assumed. Nevertheless, all held a kindly feeling for him personally, perhaps, because, as one openly said, they did not believe that he would do any harm anyway.³⁷

It is very probable that the *Chronicle* was not a financial success; at any rate by November, 1845, Bangs was publishing another paper—the *Daily Globe*, of which B. F. Neal, the quondam editor of the *Galveston News*, was editor. It was printed on a small sheet, but the editorials were favorably commented upon by the editor of the *Telegraph*.³⁸ This paper cannot have survived long, at least under Bangs's personal supervision, for on January 1, 1846, he became the publisher of the first of the "war" newspapers.

The arrival of General Taylor with United States troops at Corpus Christi turned the eyes of Texas to that region. There Bangs thought he saw a great opportunity for a newspaper. He secured as a partner in the enterprise a local physician, Dr. George W. Fletcher, and as editor, José de Alba, one of the most important members of the Spanish speaking colony at Corpus. The first issue appeared on January 1, 1846, under the title of the *Corpus Christi Gazette*. It was no "two-by-four" paper, but a full sized sheet with four pages to the issue.³⁹ The type was new and good, woodcuts adorned the advertisements, and the whole paper bore evidence of the hand of an experienced printer which Bangs certainly was. As an index to life in Corpus at the opening of 1846 the issues of the *Gazette* are priceless. In politics the policy of the paper was neutral.

But the days of prosperity for Bangs in Corpus were numbered. During two months the *Gazette* sold well, but only too soon the troops were ordered forward to the Rio Grande. On March 11, the last were under way; and a few days later, in an almost deserted town, the twelfth and last number of the *Gazette* was issued. But already Bangs had a new project in mind. After finding a new partner, he loaded his press on an oxcart and moved on to Matamoras.

Early in June, a new paper, the *Rio Grande Herald*, was an-

³⁷ *Redlander*, October 7, 1843; January 13, 1844.

³⁸ November 19, 1845.

³⁹ Volume 1, number 7, February 12, 1846, is in the library of the Wisconsin Historical Society; number 12 is in the Archivo General de la Secretaría de Guerra, Mexico City. References to the paper are in the *Texas Democrat*, May 6, 1846, and the *Daily Picayune*, January 6, 1846.

nounced as shortly to be published at Matamoras by Bangs, of the defunct *Gazette*, and Gideon Lewis, an editor of the *Galveston News*. The *Herald* never materialized, but in its stead, on June 24 the *Matamoras Reveille* appeared.⁴⁰ This paper, frequently confused with the *St. Louis Reveille*, from which it probably borrowed its title, was at first issued as a semi-weekly in both Spanish and English. The Spanish section was, however, soon dropped, and a separate paper in Spanish issued from the same press by different publishers. As the result of an objectionable article which appeared in the foreign paper, the office was closed in August by order of General Taylor, and no trace of further issues has been found.⁴¹

Just what Bangs did next is not so clear. He removed to Point Isabel, where, according to one authority, "he was wrecked and lost everything".⁴² Two other contemporary times serve to trace him during the next few years. Early in 1847, it was reported from Corpus that Bangs had returned home.⁴³ On November 1, 1848, he signed a deed in Galveston.⁴⁴ On June 2, 1849, there appeared in the *Corpus Christi Star* an account, taken from the *Brownsville Flag*, of an Indian attack upon the stage from Point Isabel. The proprietor, Mr. Bangs, and a passenger, Mr. Lombardo, were taken prisoners. Mr. Bangs was reported to have escaped later in a state of nudity.

At this point Bangs's connections with the southwest, and probably with the press, ended. He is reported by one authority to have removed to Kentucky and died there in 1853.⁴⁵ Another account says he died in Ashland, Kentucky, in 1850 or 51 or in 1855-56 [?].⁴⁶

At all events, his rewards were far different from his earlier expectations. From the Tamaulipas land grant he received nothing; Ogilvy died in 1840 before anything had been satisfactorily arranged. From his Texas grant of 1830 he received (1845) 1240 acres on the Colorado River which he promptly transferred to Charles Frisbie,

* *Daily Picayune*, June 14 and July 7, 1846. Volume 1, number 1, is in the library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

* *Daily Picayune*, July 16, 1846; *Northern Standard* (Clarksville, Texas), September 5, 1846.

* "Printing in Galveston", p. 90.

* *New Orleans Weekly Delta*, March 22, 1847, quoting from the *Galveston News* letter dated at Corpus Christi March 2, 1847.

* Index to Deeds Record, Galveston County.

* "Printing in Galveston", p. 90.

* Ben Stuart, Ms. "History of Texas Newspapers".

probably to secure funds for the Rio Grande expedition. During the next four years he parted with one piece of property after another, until by 1849 he had nothing left. His children by his first wife were by this time grown. One son worked on the *Galveston News* until his death in the seventies; the other son returned east to make his home. At the close of his press career Bangs had only his wife and a child born in Galveston in 1840 to make up his household. Of neither of these has a later trace been found.

The pioneer work of Bangs in connection with the introduction of the press into the southwest merits more than a passing mention. He printed the first document now known to have been printed on the soil of Texas. He operated the first press known in Monterey. He introduced the press into the states of Tamaulipas and Coahuila, and issued in the capitals of both of those states many documents and books. He printed the first daily in Galveston, and there published the *Chronicle and Globe* as well as worked on the *San Luis Advocate*. He printed the first "war" paper in Corpus in 1846 and at Matamoras the second paper in English published in Mexico. For more than three decades he devoted himself to furthering the interests of the community in which he found himself through increasing the power of the press in that locality. His pride in his work and the high standard he maintained are evident in the surviving copies of his Texas newspapers and the Mexican decrees and regulations which he issued. Blessed with vision and enthusiasm, he called both into play in extending the territory reached by the press. And since he was the first printer in the whole vast territory included in the states of Texas, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas, well does he deserve the title of the pioneer of the press in the southwest.

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