

## Páez in Philadelphia

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**A**N OPEN BAROUCHE, escorted by Major General Robert Patterson and an honor guard of the Philadelphia Greys and Washington Greys delivered General José Antonio Páez, refugee President of Venezuela, to the doors of Independence Hall on the second of October, 1850. One of the most popular military figures of the day had returned for an official welcome from the city where he had landed in exile ten weeks earlier.

The greying, sixty year old cowboy soldier had recently emerged from rigorous imprisonment but with "eyes bright, his forehead high," he drove to meet Mayor Joel Jones from the Walnut Street Wharf, where his New York steamer had landed after stopping first at Tacony to pick up a citizens' welcoming committee. The Mayor, who also had been in poor health, made an effort and delivered the customary greeting, assisted by Edmund A. Souder, Chairman of the Reception Committee, and surrounded by the gentlemen of the City Councils. The Councillors, in fact, had met the General on the dock on July 26 upon his arrival in the country from St. Thomas, and good naturedly came back to do it all over again.<sup>1</sup>

The Venezuelan hero replied in Spanish, which was interpreted by his aide. Prominent citizens were then introduced and the bow-legged General, proud in patent leather boots, was escorted to his quarters in the Washington Hotel, a square west on Chestnut Street. Shortly after he arrived he showed himself upon the balcony and was repeatedly cheered by a crowd outside. Crowds continued to cheer Páez during his eight years enforced residence in the United States, the only period in his eventful life of which little has been known.

José Antonio Páez (1790-1873) was in a country which in its enthusiastic pleasure in his role as a South American patriot never hesitated to throw the mantle of Washington or the musket of Davy Crockett across his willing shoulders. There was no soldier then living in the world who could boast of more personal exploits, "writ-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* (Phila.), Oct. 2 and 3, 1850. Letter, William Morris to Charles Swift Riché, Oct. 2, 1850, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereinafter HSP).

ten with his lance in almost every town, every village and every hamlet of Venezuela.'<sup>2</sup> His early career was well known in Philadelphia to which he was to return six times during the exile he spent largely in his home at 99 West Twenty-Sixth Street, New York (the house now demolished), secretly fomenting propaganda and counter-rebellion, raising funds and always planning his return to Venezuela, where his partisans were equally busy. Of these subsequent visits, five were private and the last even more publically triumphant than the first.<sup>3</sup>

It was the Philadelphia press, stirred by William Duane's popular *A Visit to Colombia in the Years 1822 & 1823*, which developed local interest in Venezuela. For years news reports described the rise to fame of the herdsman of the Llanos, who, during the War of Liberation led his band of mounted plainmen to defeat the Spanish forces in four significant battles (killing 39 Spaniards with his own hands in one) and who, after his great triumph at Carabobo, had brought Venezuela within Simón Bolívar's republic of Gran Colombia and then revolted against the Liberator to become the first president of the new Venezuelan nation from 1830-1835. Páez served again as president in 1839-1843, and dictator in 1846.<sup>4</sup> He was the leader of the clerical or Conservative party. Upper class merchants and planters dominated his government, he encouraged foreign technology and secured trade treaties for his country and looked with special favor upon American investment in Venezuela.

<sup>2</sup> *North American and United States Gazette* (Phila.), Nov. 6, 1858. A somewhat chilly note was struck at the outset of the exile in a quickly forgotten article published in the *New York Daily Tribune*, Oct. 14, 1850, which attacked Páez as a political agitator and his actions as unconstitutional. His justification, published in the *Tribune*, Oct. 29, 1850, was reprinted in a laudatory pamphlet, *Documents Relative to the Public Life of General José A. Páez* (New York, 1854), 67 pp. (HSP).

<sup>3</sup> Except where another source is specifically referred to, the schedule and activities of all but the final visit are found described in the correspondence of John Dallett 1809-1862, in his Letter Press Book, III (microfilm copy in the University of Pennsylvania Library): October, 1850 (pp. 59-61, 76), February, 1851 (pp. 82, 84, 86), December, 1851 (p. 106), November, 1852 (pp. 137-139), February, 1854 (pp. 248, 254, 257). Correspondence dealing with the filibustering expedition is on pp. 263-264, 278-279, 284, 288. Letters of Dallett to Páez are dated April 1, 1851 and May 12, 1853 (pp. 94, 192). The collected Papers of Páez are currently being edited by Dr. J. Leon Helguera, North Carolina State College, under a grant from the John Boulton Foundation, Caracas, and will be published.

<sup>4</sup> In this year his name was given to a Philadelphia vessel, *Páez*, a 235 ton bark built for Dallett Brothers' Red D Line. The vessel was in their packet service to Venezuela until 1857. Port of Philadelphia, Registrations of Vessels, #1 of 1846 and #166 of 1857, National Archives.

Following an attempt in 1848 by the Conservative Congress to impeach Páez's Liberal successor, General José Tadeo Monagas, civil war broke out and lasted intermittently until August, 1849, when the Gran Llanero capitulated and was imprisoned in the stifling fortress at Cumaná. Released in the summer of 1850, he was exiled to St. Thomas and from there came to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Philadelphia threw itself into the entertainment which marked the week's visit of the exile. What José Antonio Páez did and what he saw forms a classic example of a welcome given to a public figure a century ago and in fact, follows a pattern which, for better or worse, has changed little since. The official pattern of the Páez reception, once set, repeated itself in the colossal welcome given the following year to the Hungarian hero, Kossuth, and later, in 1853, to President Pierce.<sup>6</sup>

Commodore Read, superintendent of the Navy Yard, who with the military veteran Patterson, was one of the city's two chief greeters, received the General from Venezuela with full honors in his great sheds on the Delaware on the second day of the visit, after a stop at the library of The Athenæum on Washington Square. The red sandstone library building, with its gilded interior decor, a recent architectural adornment to the city, housed one of the distinguished libraries in town. Reading, chessplaying and smoking probably subsided during the creole hubbub while the Venezuelans solemnly recorded their names in the register: the General, his son Ramón, and the gentlemen of the entourage.<sup>7</sup>

The visitors were taken to the public schools and then to another architectural asset of Philadelphia, Girard College, the Greek Revival temple created by architect Thomas U. Walter, whose acquaintance Páez had made seven years before during Walter's sojourn in Venezuela to lay out the breakwater at La Guaira. Girard College was the most beautiful structure of the day and gave a spectacular emphasis to the vogue for classical design which Páez also saw in the waterworks at Fairmount, another stop on the tour planned by the Councils.

<sup>5</sup> An account of the arrival of Páez in Philadelphia in the bark *Fairmount* may be found in José Antonio Páez, *Autobiografía* (New York, 1946 reprint), II, 479. His years in the United States are not discussed.

<sup>6</sup> J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia 1609-1884* (Philadelphia: 1884), I, 702-703, 708.

<sup>7</sup> The two Páez were accompanied by Venezuelan Conservatives Juan Bautista Purroy, Juan de T. Martín, Jr., F. Palacios and Ramón Francia and by several non-Venezuelans including Tomás Terry, the Cuban banker. *Record of Strangers, The Athenæum of Philadelphia 1847-1956*, 75.

Everywhere the Venezuelans went they were stared at and cheered. Albert Newsam, the lithographic artist, came up with an old print of 1829 representing General Páez in military regalia and redrew it for a lithograph by Duval.<sup>8</sup> Even Root's Daguerreotype Gallery capitalized on the visitor's popularity, obtained a sitting and put José Antonio in their window in company with Jenny Lind, then appearing at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Henry Clay, Mr. Barnum and Fanny Kemble.<sup>9</sup>

During the week, private entertainment at dinner was provided by Charles Swift Riché and the brothers John Dallett and Henry Carpenter Dallett, three Philadelphia merchants engaged in the Venezuelan trade, whose friendship with Páez dated in each case from their own residence in Venezuela.<sup>10</sup> On Tuesday, October 8, after looking in at the Panorama of Mexico, General Páez had a visit from John Dallett and his friend, David Sands Brown, proprietor of the Washington Cloth Mills at Gloucester, New Jersey, who invited the party to visit his factory the next day.

At half past nine the morning following, Brown was at the hotel with three carriages and "brought all hands down to the wharf and put them on board one of the large summerboats covered with flags" which took them down river to the mills. Páez and his companions toured the gingham mills, examined the machinery, drank "Twenty Dollar Champagne (the best in the country)" and were tendered a speech by Joseph R. Chandler, the city's representative in Congress, which, not surprisingly, named Páez as the "Washington of the South." The General, whose English was rudimentary at best, appeared much affected. Mr. Brown, involved in the Venezuelan importation of dry and fancy goods, possibly had an eye to the future and Páez's return to the helm of his misguided country.<sup>11</sup> Upon

<sup>8</sup> Probably never published. The proof is No. 221, Newsam Collection, HSP. The original print is reproduced in Ramón Díaz Sánchez, *Guzmán, eclipse de una ambición de poder* (3rd ed., Caracas, 1953), opposite p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> *The Public Ledger and Daily Transcript*, Oct. 5, 1850. An oil painting of Páez, owned by H. C. Dallett, had been hung in 1849 in the Annual Exhibition of The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Anna Wells Rutledge, *Cumulative Exhibition Record of Exhibition Catalogues The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts 1807-1870, The Society of Artists 1800-1814, The Artists' Fund Society 1835-1845* (Philadelphia: 1955), 13.

<sup>10</sup> The papers of Riché (1787-1877), president of the Washington Mutual Insurance Company and formerly a Puerto Cabello merchant, are in the Charles R. Hildeburn Papers, Swift-Riché Section, HSP. The remaining Dallett papers are privately owned.

<sup>11</sup> If Brown's Mills followed in the general pattern of foreign trade, they had not suffered under the Monagas regime. Venezuelan trade with the United States (imports and exports) amounted to \$2,997,000 in 1851 and rose to \$3,601,381 by 1854. Bureau of United States Foreign Commerce, *Report on the Commercial*

their return to Philadelphia, the visitors went to see the Eastern State Penitentiary in Brown's coaches and visited a Masonic Lodge. The evening wound up at Mr. Riché's in Clinton Street and the heroic recipient of Philadelphia hospitality left next morning at nine. Unfortunately, the General had forgotten to say goodbye to two of his principal hosts who were also left with a bill for \$40 worth of public music, the authorities having neglected to provide for it and afterwards refusing to do so.

Four months later, in February, 1851, Páez again stopped in Philadelphia, but merely overnight, to make amends for his manners, and went on to Washington to be guest of honor at a White House dinner for thirty six given by President Fillmore. Webster and Clay entertained him following his introduction on the floor of the Senate. Later in the year, Baltimore provided José Antonio with a public reception, largely instigated by the Brunes, shipping merchants in the Venezuelan trade, and in mid-December he spent a quiet day in Philadelphia on the return trip to New York.

It was not until November of 1852 that Philadelphia had Páez back again for ten days, this time with another son, Manuel. This was a private visit, or as nearly such as the ex-president's flamboyant personality would allow. The old man, who arrived unannounced, took Riché's niece to the theatre, dined with John Dallett at Parkinson's Gardens, a popular restaurant, and on the sixth day of his visit was guest of honor at a dance given at 705 Pine Street<sup>12</sup> by Henry C. Dallett. In the merriment of the evening, José Antonio "danced & flirted a good deal" and then, to the amusement of his friends, seized the violin from one of the orchestra and played to the guests. Every morning he "pranced up & down" in Chestnut Street in a theatrical manner, again delighting in being the center of public attention.

Two years of comparative quiet went by but rumors of Páez's political activities were rife in New York which had a sizable Venezuelan community including another former President, José María Vargas. It was constantly reported that José Antonio planned to build two large American steamers as a spearhead with which to launch an invasion of Venezuela and the reports, if wrong in fact, were right in theory. In January, 1854, the Venezuelan government announced in the American press that it had a "sufficient force ready at all points to put down any attempt," but when Páez came

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*Relations of the United States with All Foreign Nations, 1855-1856* (Washington: 1856), I, 627.

<sup>12</sup> Present number.

down to Philadelphia the following month it was openly "to get up a Filibustering expedition."<sup>13</sup> John Dallett refused to let the General broach the subject to him in any way. Reports of his attempt to raise funds or munitions worried the government at home and Don Ramón Azpurúa was hastily sent to Washington as Monagas' minister to keep an eye on the situation.

Early in September, 1854, the American owned and manned steamer *Benjamin Franklin* was fitted at New York with ten thirty-two pounders and sufficient ammunition for a naval engagement. It was first reported that General Alvarez of Mexico was in the city fitting up an expedition to capture and plunder the newly built Mexican war steamer *Santa Ana* which was supposed to be departing carrying the seven millions of the Gadsden treaty money.<sup>14</sup> As the Páez revolutionists in Barquisimeto had been decisively defeated in a battle with government troops on July 27, it did not appear likely that any Venezuelan filibuster was brewing. Ramón Azpurúa, however, apparently knew that the destination of the steamer was not Mexico and caused the military authorities to embargo her. He also notified the Venezuelan consul at St. Thomas to arrange the seizure of the heavily armed and manned clipper bark *Catharine Augusta* which had quietly slipped out of New York ahead of the steamer.<sup>15</sup> Nothing irregular, however, was discovered aboard *Benjamin Franklin* in New York and she cleared on September 19 for St. Thomas.

Ten days later she arrived in that port in company with the somewhat damaged bark. Opinion on the island supported the theory that they were part of an expedition of General Páez who was supposed to be following in another steamer. The authorities at first would not permit the two vessels to land and ordered them to leave the port, but when the damaged condition of *Catharine Augusta* was made known, permission was granted for her to make the necessary repairs, accompanied by the steamer.<sup>16</sup>

About the same time Páez appeared in New Orleans which strengthened the rumor that he would embark from that port to join the "squadron."<sup>17</sup> This he never did, but his absence from New York until the end of the year was evidently a cold war move designed to

<sup>13</sup> Letter of John Dallett, Philadelphia, to John Boulton, La Guaira, Feb. 22, 1854. Letter Press Book, III, 248.

<sup>14</sup> *North American*, September 5 and 6, 1854.

<sup>15</sup> *North American*, Sept. 15, 1854.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 18 and 19, 1854. *Benjamin Franklin* remained harmlessly in St. Thomas until December when she was chartered by the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company as an inter-island passenger and mail carrier. *New York Daily Times*, Jan. 9, 1855.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1854.

encourage unrest in Venezuela. At any rate, word reached St. Thomas in November that the insurrection in Venezuela, to aid which the vessels had presumably gone out, had completely failed and they were left "in a very ridiculous posture."<sup>18</sup>

With the failure of the comic opera expedition, the General returned to New York and the parties where he appeared elegantly dressed in a black coat and white waistcoat with gold buttons, black trousers and the ever-present patent-leather boots. He cut a fine figure and spoke French and English now, tolerably well, and had a bowing knowledge of Italian.<sup>19</sup> His "martial bearing, frank manners and air of geniality" ever appealed to the American people who published the first biography of Páez in any book of reference, who hummed L. M. Gottschalk's piano *Marche de Nuit*, dedicated in 1856 "au General Don José Páez," and later remembered to buy his son Ramón's *Wild Scenes in South America; or, Life in the Llanos of Venezuela* when Scribners brought out an American edition.<sup>20</sup>

In 1858 came the moment for which José Antonio Páez had waited and planned for eight years. Political factions in Venezuela successfully united to defeat José Gregorio Monagas, who had succeeded his brother in the presidency, and then drifted away from liberalism to head the "Oligarchical" party. The opposition formed a revolutionary government, which in a curious reversal of roles became the "Liberal" party, and Páez was called upon to return as its leader. Venezuela suddenly shot into the news.

Harper's *New Monthly Magazine* quickly featured an article on life in Caracas in the July issue and a likeness of General Páez, from a photograph by Brady, was published in *Harper's Weekly* on October 30. Three days earlier Páez had arrived in Philadelphia where he put up at Girard House overnight on his way to Washington. On the twenty-ninth, the General, accompanied by Pedro José Rojas, president of the Venezuelan Commission delegated to invite his re-

<sup>18</sup> *New-York Daily Times*, Jan. 6, 1855. The same scare developed again in January, 1855 when the steamer *Massachusetts* was seized at New York on suspicion of being fitted out for an expedition either to Venezuela or Cuba. When searched by federal officers nothing was found but boxes full of cavalry saddles and holsters. However, *Massachusetts* sailed to Florida and actually planned to convoy invasion troops to Cuba. *North American*, Jan. 29 and Feb. 21, 1855.

<sup>19</sup> R. B. Cunninghame Graham, *José Antonio Páez* (Philadelphia, 1929), 293-295. The only posthumous biography of Páez in English, it makes no mention of his Philadelphia visits or associations.

<sup>20</sup> Páez's career was reported in *The Men of the Time* (New York, 1852), 399-401. *Marche de Nuit* (New York, 1856) is in the Edward I. Keffer Sheet Music Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia. *Wild Scenes* was printed in London and New York in 1862.

turn, and by General Herrán, the New Granadan minister, was presented by Secretary of State Cass to President Buchanan who bade Páez farewell in the name of the United States, "his second home." Mr. Buchanan called José Antonio the "Defender of Constitutional Liberty" and expressed his wish that Venezuela might consolidate her liberties under such an eminent leader.<sup>21</sup> The next day the President and members of the Cabinet attended a dinner given by Secretary Cass to the General and the Venezuelan Commission and the evening ended with the announcement by the Secretary of the Navy that a man-of-war, U.S.S. *Caledonia*, would be provided for the return of the General to his country.<sup>22</sup>

Then, on November 3, 1858, José Antonio Páez and the entire Creole Commission was received at Independence Hall. Philadelphia's Mayor, Alexander Henry, was presented with the decree of the Venezuelan government thanking his city, "with the cordiality of a mother who remembers the kindness bestowed upon her best loved son," for taking Páez to her bosom eight years before. Henry replied and was answered by Páez, in Spanish, his words being interpreted by Rojas, hand clasped to heart. The taciturn Mayor then concluded the sentimental proceedings with a speech which was publically noted as the longest one of his entire career.<sup>23</sup>

On the evening of Thursday, November 4, the day before General Páez returned to New York, the Venezuelan Commissioners were hosts at dinner at the Girard House as an acknowledgment of the reception given to the exile in 1850. Forty gentlemen sat down to "one of the most recherché and agreeable entertainments of recent date." Besides the gentlemen of the Venezuelan trade, the Mayor and General Patterson, the city was represented by Judges Cadwalader, Sharswood and Lewis and by Colonel J. Ross Snowden, Director of the Mint. Beck's Brass Band provided all the leading airs from *Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and other operas alternately with *Hail Columbia*, *Yankee Doodle* and the *Marseilles!* Señor José María Rojas, Venezuelan Congressman and newspaper editor, served as Master of Ceremonies in the flag-draped dining saloon. He proceeded to a string of toasts, drinking to the presidents of the two countries, to the "Cradle of Independence" (responded to very tersely by Mayor Henry), to the Volunteers of Philadelphia, the Judiciary and the Bar, to the Ladies of Philadelphia (answered by a former Consul in Venezuela who parried with a sentiment in honor of the

<sup>21</sup> *North American*, Oct. 30, 1858.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 1, 1858.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1858.

señoras of Venezuela), and to the Press of Philadelphia. Colonel Snowden spoke to the ninth and final toast, "The Currency of the United States," a bumper which all present doubtless downed with fervency.<sup>24</sup>

Dallett Brothers got a note off to José Antonio Páez just before he left Philadelphia, offering to place at his disposal "for the return of yourself & family and the Gentlemen of the Commission the entire Cabin of any of our vessels." Perhaps they did not know definitely of the arrangement for a national steamer to take the Venezuelans home but whether they did or not, they made the gesture to send Páez home in a Philadelphia vessel, even as he had come.<sup>25</sup>

Philadelphia read a few days later of the old General's fall from his horse, while reviewing State troops in New York, and of his pathetic exit from the United States on December 2, carried aboard the *Caledonia* in a litter, with the accompaniment of an imposing military escort and all the officialdom which New York could muster.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1858.

<sup>25</sup> A contemporary copy of the letter, dated Nov. 8, 1858, is owned by the author.