

# THE POET PRESIDENT OF TEXAS

The Life of Mirabeau B. Lamar,  
President of the Republic of Texas

By Stanley Siegel



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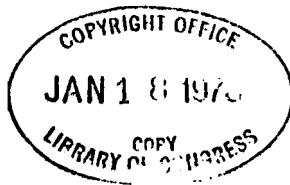
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For Norma



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DESIGNED BY LARRY SMITHERMAN

# Preface

In a very real sense, the history of Texas from the Revolutionary era through secession was dominated by Sam Houston. Conqueror of Santa Anna at San Jacinto, dynamic President during the period of the Republic, and later friend of the Union as a United States Senator and state Governor, Houston has attracted many biographers. Yet, perhaps, only Marquis James and Llerena Friend have done their subject full justice.

By contrast, relatively little attention has been focused upon Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar. Specialists in American literature have pointed to his importance as a poet of the ante-bellum South, but only two complete "life and times" biographical accounts have preceded this study. Lamar's accomplishments in the field of social legislation while President of the Republic, his battlefield heroism demonstrated at San Jacinto and during the Mexican war, and his role as a fledgling American diplomat in Central America, merit further study. If this work prompts continued investigation into the Georgian's life and career, the author will count himself well satisfied.

As is customary, I wish to thank all those who rendered assistance to me in the completion of this project.

Houston, July 27, 1977

Stanley Siegel



## Early Life

Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar was born on August 16, 1798, near Louisville, then the capital of Georgia. Of French descent, his father, John Lamar, representing the fifth generation of his family to settle in the New World, married Rebecca Lamar, a first cousin. Four sons and five daughters were born to this union and the demands of a large family combined with the relocation of the state capital at Millidgeville, compelled a move to the western part of the state. Here at Eatonton, along the banks of the Little John River, John Lamar styled his new plantation estate, Fairfield, and here young Mirabeau grew to manhood.<sup>1</sup>

Fond of rural life and a member of a closely-knit family, Lamar's boyhood verged on the idyllic. The steady round of farming chores left some stolen time for reading Gibbon and Scott, and a youthful devotion to Byron foreshadowed Lamar's own career

as a poet. However, the decision of his older brother, Lucius, to journey north for study under Judge Tapping Reeve at the famous Litchfield Law School in Connecticut, prompted Lamar to consider his own formal educational future. Desultory attendance and a non-disciplined approach to his studies at both Millidgeville and Eatonton Academy did not augur well for the future. Princeton was briefly considered, but the expense of maintaining Lucius in his law studies and, shortly thereafter, Thomas in a pre-medical program at the University of Mississippi, coupled with Lamar's own lack of purpose mitigated against a university career.<sup>2</sup>

Adrift and still undecided as to a vocation in life, Lamar eagerly accepted an opportunity in 1819 to accompany Willis Roberts, a long-time friend of his father's to Cahawba, Alabama, for the purpose of opening a general store. Recently admitted into the Union as a state, much of Alabama was still raw frontier. Cahawba, just west of the Georgia line and situated at the junction of the Cahawba and Dallas Rivers, had been designated as the state capital and promised to be a likely spot for commercial activity.<sup>3</sup> However, contrary to fond expectations, the business did not thrive. Competition from other more well-established firms, a devastating flood in 1825, and the relocation of the seat of government at Tuscaloosa in 1826, combined to persuade Lamar to dispose of his interest in the venture. Looking back on the experience, candor also compelled him to admit that his romantic, somewhat dreamy temperament was ill-fitted for the precise demands of store-keeping.

With what funds he could still command, Lamar decided to remain in Cahawba, whose society he found congenial, and put his literary skills

to some use. Accordingly, he purchased a half interest in the *Cahawba Press*, one of the two weekly journals in town. In association with William Allen, a transplanted Bostonian, the copublishers struggled valiantly to make a financial success of their fledgling paper. Seeking advertising revenue and cultivating political influence, Lamar travelled over much of the state, but ultimately to no avail. The loss of revenue and influence associated with the removal of the state capital and consequently its share of the legislative printing, forced the *Press* to suspend publication. With its demise, Lamar returned to his family in Georgia.<sup>4</sup>

Lamar's journalistic experience, though frustrating, had given him some insight into southern political life. Believing that he had a flair for the science, Lamar was drawn to Georgia state politics through his acquaintance with Joel Crawford. The latter, law partner to Lamar's brother, Lucius, was one of the manipulators of George Troup's rise in state politics and when Troup was elected governor in 1823, Lamar was offered and accepted the post of private secretary to the governor. Relations between the chief executive and his secretary were always cordial and Lamar virtually became a member of Troup's private household.<sup>5</sup>

Troup came into office after a typical bitterly-contested Georgia campaign. A Princeton graduate and celebrated attorney before he turned to politics, Troup gained much popularity throughout the South because of his defiant stand against the administration of John Quincy Adams. In 1825 the President negotiated a treaty with the Creeks residing in Georgia to cede all of their lands except a strip west of the Chattahoochee River. Objecting on the basis of a prior agreement

signed by the state in which the Indians gave up all of their lands, the governor threatened to call out the state militia if the federal government persisted in its policy.<sup>6</sup> A proclamation to this effect was drafted by Lamar, foreshadowing his stand against the Cherokees in Texas in 1839. Finally, the question was linked to state politics and the national election of 1828 when Jackson's supporters in Congress lauded Troup's conduct and castigated Adams' interference in "local matters."

The year, 1825, was also marked for Lamar by a sentimental visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to the United States. Returning in triumph to the nation he had befriended during the Revolution, General Lafayette was received in Savannah by Lamar, as the official emissary of the state, and then conducted back to Millidgeville for the formal welcome by Governor Troup and members of his administration.<sup>7</sup> Proud of his French ancestry and stirred by the military pomp of the reception, Lamar then acted as a guide as Lafayette and his party toured the lands of the Creek Nation in Georgia. Far removed from factional state politics and the abrasive conflict between Georgia and the federal union over the Indian question, Lamar later recalled Lafayette's visit as the high point of his tenure as private secretary to Governor Troup.

Not all of Lamar's time had been spent in the performance of official duties. Indulging his bent for poetry and his interest in the young belles of the area, he paid court to Olivia Roberts at Mobile, Anna Cowles in Macon, and Sarah Rossetter at Millidgeville.<sup>8</sup> Yet nothing came of these encounters and it appeared that at the age of twenty-seven Lamar was slipping into confirmed bachelorhood when his marriage to Miss Tabitha B. Jordan was

announced. They had met for the first time when Lamar resided in Cahawba and he had visited her frequently at her home in Perry, Alabama, just across the state line. Friendship ripened into love and the appearance of a would-be rival determined Lamar to take a bold approach. On January 1, 1826, they were married at Perry and after a brief honeymoon the couple returned to Georgia to set up housekeeping.

Troup's defeat at the polls in the gubernatorial election of 1828 dictated Lamar's return to the field of journalism. The townsite of Columbus, astride the Chattahoochee River, had recently been laid out and the chance to be first on the scene was attractive.<sup>9</sup> Also the rural area was an appealing setting in which to raise a family. A daughter, Rebecca Ann, had been born just prior to the move to Columbus and additional children were certainly anticipated. Some apprehension over the frail state of his wife's health, compounded by a nasty fall from a carriage, marred these otherwise busy and happy times.

The Columbus *Enquirer* commenced publication on May 29, 1828. So that his readers would be under no misapprehensions, Lamar promised to be guided by the "political principles of Thomas Jefferson and Governor Troup."<sup>10</sup> Subscription rates were set at three dollars a year if paid in advance or four if paid at the end of the year. As was true with most frontier editors of the period, Lamar devoted most of his columns to political questions and hewed, generally, to a pro-slavery, states rights doctrine. His stint as a journalist also gave the aspiring writer an opportunity to review books of poetry and to indulge his own beginning tastes in that direction. Finally, the pages of the *Enquirer* reveal Lamar as a tireless booster of Columbus

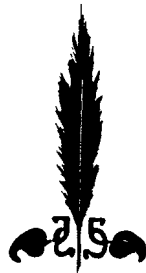
and its potential for economic growth and development.<sup>11</sup>

For some time Lamar had been contemplating a return to politics and in 1829 he was elected to the Georgia senate, representing Muscogee County. Financial considerations dictated a sale of one-half interest in the *Enquirer* and for a time Lamar doubled as editor and state legislator. His initial term in office was so successful that reelection appeared a certainty when tragedy struck with devastating effect. On August 20, 1830, his wife, Tabitha, passed away after a lingering siege of tuberculosis and Lamar immediately withdrew from the senatorial contest.<sup>12</sup> Widowed, the father of a young daughter, and with his own health in a delicate state, Lamar sought solace in his travel. Two poetic elegies dedicated to his wife's memory, "Thou Idol of My Soul," and "At Evening on the Banks of the Chattahoochee" date from this time of turmoil and grief.<sup>13</sup>

Returning to Georgia in 1832, Lamar announced as a candidate for the United States House of Representatives. However, the party caucus meeting at Millidgeville refused to endorse his candidacy and running as an independent, Lamar was soundly defeated. Following this reversal, he became active in the formation of the Georgia States Rights Party.<sup>14</sup> Organized at Millidgeville in November, 1833, resolutions were passed assailing Jackson's proclamation in connection with the threat of nullification in South Carolina. The Force Bill was bitterly denounced and in a subsequent address, Lamar heaped praise upon the political theories implicit in the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798 which sustained the doctrine of nullification.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, a second unsuccessful race for Congress convinced Lamar to dis-

pose of his interest in the *Enquirer* and seemed to mark an end of his political ambitions.

Beset by private sorrow and political disappointments, Lamar was shaken by still one more blow. Though seemingly blessed with a successful career at the bar and surrounded by an adoring wife and children, his older brother, Lucius, took his own life on July 4, 1834, apparently in a fit of derangement.<sup>16</sup> The death was perhaps even harder to bear because of the persistent strain of melancholia which Lamar, himself, labored under and the thoughts of suicide which intruded upon his own consciousness. Once again only travel and a change of scenery could provide the necessary balm. Intrigued by the ripening controversy in Texas which dominated the columns of Southern newspapers and attracted by the Texas letters of James W. Fannin, a former Georgia friend, Lamar decided to cross the Sabine and see for himself.<sup>17</sup>



# Footnotes

1. Philip Graham, *The Life and Poems of Mirabeau B. Lamar*, 5. Mirabeau and his brothers were named by an eccentric bachelor uncle, Zachariah Lamar. The names he selected for his nephews reflected his interest in history and the reading he was pursuing at the time of their birth; Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, Mirabeau Buonaparte, Thomas Randolph, and Jefferson Jackson Lamar. Lamar's sisters bore more conventional names.
2. Wirt A. Cate, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar; Secession and Reunion*, 17.
3. Anna M. G. Fry, *Memories of Old Cahaba*, 10-12. A. B. Moore, *History of Alabama*, 82.
4. Graham, *Life of Lamar*, 13.
5. Asa Kyrus Christian, "Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (1920), 155.
6. William T. Hagan, *American Indians*, 74.
7. Anne C. Loveland, *Emblem of Liberty; The Image of Lafayette in the American Mind*, 162.
8. Fry, *Memories of Old Cahaba*, 16.

9. Ellis Merton Coulter, *Georgia; A Short History*, 218-19.
10. Charles A. Gulick, Jr. and Others(eds.), *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar*, V, 29.
11. *Columbus Enquirer*, August-September, 1829, as quoted in, *Lamar Papers*, V, 28-47.
12. Graham, *Life of Mirabeau B. Lamar*, 25.
13. J. Frank Dobie, *Guide to the Life and Literature of the Southwest*, 185.
14. Coulter, *Georgia; A Short History*, 223.
15. *Lamar Papers*, I, 165.
16. Cate, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar; Secession and Reunion*, 21.
17. Philip Graham(ed.), "Mirabeau Lamar's First Trip to Texas," *The Southwest Review*, XXI (1936), 370.

## The Final Decade

Nine years of life remained to Lamar as the last decade before the Civil War commenced. During this span as repeated threats of secession were voiced, questions of national consequence became paramount. Lamar would render one final service in the field of diplomacy and at the time of his death the prospects for stability and harmony within the Union appeared remote.

When the terms of the Compromise of 1850 were made public, Lamar was in Georgia attending to long-neglected family business. Critical of the Omnibus Bill as a whole, he was particularly bitter about the settlement of the Texas-New Mexico boundary dispute favorable to the territory of New Mexico. While he proclaimed himself content with the assumption of Texas debts in exchange for transfer of title to the state's public lands to the federal government, he lamented the failure to include all of the lands west of the Rio Grande as within the boundaries of Texas. Speaking in Macon, Lamar reminded his audience that the purpose of his Santa Fe expedition was to prove title to that area and that a major cause of the Mexican War had been to win the territory in dispute. Perhaps slightly overcome with his own rhetoric, Lamar concluded by expressing his fears for the stability of the Union and likened the federal government to a "Russian Empire which makes a Hungary of the South."<sup>41</sup>

Another matter which claimed his attention was the possibility of a rebellion in Cuba. On numerous occasions, Lamar had declared his sympathies for the Cuban rebels in their struggle against Spain and had compared them to the Texans who had wrested their independence from Mexico. South

of the 36°30' line, established by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, Cuba, freed from Spain, was a potential slave state in the American Union. The fact that slavery already existed on the island and that a sugar plantation economy reigned made the situation all the more attractive. However, after some correspondence with leaders of a proposed expedition outfitting in New Orleans, Lamar declined to participate stressing the dangers involved and the bleak prospects for success. Events bore out his judgement, since the Lopez expedition was easily beaten back by Spanish troops and most of its participants died before firing squads in Havana.<sup>42</sup>

Although Lamar declined to follow Lopez, his stay in New Orleans did prove fortuitous in one respect. Visiting at the home of Mrs. John A. Sattle, the daughter of an old Texas friend, Lamar was introduced to Miss Henrietta Maffitt. One of three Galveston sisters famed for their beauty, Henrietta was twenty-four years old to Lamar's fifty-three at the time of their acquaintance. In addition, she had recently announced her engagement to a suitor in Galveston. Nevertheless, the two people were thrown increasingly together, probably at the design of their hostess, and romance flourished. Married early in February, 1851, they travelled throughout the South while maintaining a kind of base at Macon. There, early in 1852, a daughter, Loretto Evalina, named for two of Lamar's sisters, was born. The birth of this second child, in the same city where his first daughter, Rebecca Ann, lay buried, was a particularly poignant experience for Lamar and his new wife.<sup>43</sup>

The ex-President and his new family were back in Texas in 1853. Professing no interest in local politics, Lamar declined comment on Houston's



re-election to the United States Senate, though it must have revived painful memories of the unsuccessful attempt in 1847 to deny Houston his seat. A member of the state legislature then, Lamar appeared interested now only in the publication of a collection of his poems and the improvement of his financial prospects. Encouraged by his wife and friends, though fearful of the critical response, Lamar finally agreed to accept funds for publication from his nephew, Lucius Mirabeau Lamar, in exchange for title to a portion of his Texas lands. Entitled "Verse Memorials" and brought out in September, 1857, the slim volume was marketed by W. P. Fetridge and Company of New York. However, shortly after the sale of the first printing, the publishers were compelled to declare bankruptcy. Financially, the results were disappointing and the book appears to have met a tepid critical response as well.<sup>44</sup>

The debts which burdened Lamar's Richmond plantation and the uncertainty surrounding his other land holdings combined to create a severe financial strain. He viewed as a hopeful sign Buchanan's election to the Presidency in 1856 on the Democratic ticket and Southern influence in the new administration was also an encouraging omen. Friendly to the Pennsylvanian and anxious to obtain some preferment for himself, Lamar journeyed to Washington, attended Buchanan's inauguration and conferred with his choice for Secretary of State, Lewis Cass.<sup>45</sup> Then he met with Senator Rusk and Senator John A. Quitman of Mississippi who jointly drafted the following letter on Lamar's behalf to Governor Henry A. Wise of Virginia, a power in Democratic party circles and advisor to Buchanan on questions of patronage:

Genl. Lamar is an applicant for the appointment of resident minister to some of the European or South American Republics or would accept the Governorship of a Territory and as we are extremely desirous that he should receive the appointment, we take the liberty of invoking your assistance in his behalf, believing that an expression of your wishes and opinion in the matter will have great weight with the President. Should you think proper to lend us your aid in procuring the appointment for our friend, we are satisfied that neither yourself nor the country will have any cause to regret the act. It is hardly necessary to say that Genl. Lamar has been through a long life a true democrat, devoted to the State-right principles. He is induced to make the present application from pecuniary distress; and we know of no one more entitled than himself to the sympathies of his party, as well as the confidence of the nation.<sup>46</sup>

These overtures had their desired effect when in the summer of 1857, Lamar received the appointment of Minister to the Argentine Republic.<sup>47</sup> However, the salary was less than the recipient had anticipated and financial worries still lay heavy on his mind. Writing to Howell Cobb, Treasury Secretary in Buchanan's cabinet and an old Georgia friend, the Texan wondered if he might not have additional time before taking up his new post in order to settle his "tangled pecuniary affairs."<sup>48</sup> At the same time he contacted his cousin, Gazaway, now back in Savannah and proposed the exchange of his most desirable Texas lands in return for the cancellation of his existing indebtedness. Proud and conscious of his former position in Texas, it must have pained Lamar to write the following words:

As a matter of course, I have no right to require any friend to incur risk or hazard of pecuniary loss on my account; I do not mean to do it; but where a favor can be extended which will relieve the recipient from great embarrassment and mental distress,

without inflicting the slightest injury to him who grants it, I think there can be no impropriety in soliciting it. I ask this favor because my whole happiness is involved in it. — It may be a small affair to you, but it is one of vital importance to me. It will relieve me from a mountain of miseries — restore my peace of mind — and secure a little repose for me between this and the grave.<sup>49</sup>

This personal appeal fell on deaf ears and Lamar was forced to satisfy his indebtedness by pledging \$1,000.00 annually from his anticipated salary as Minister to the Argentine Republic. That his cousin's conscience may have bothered him somewhat may be inferred from the comment, "Of course, I expect you to go off angry with me, because I need my monny [sic],"<sup>50</sup> at the conclusion of his letter, demanding payment in cash and not in land.

On the eve of his intended departure for the Argentine Republic, Buchanan offered Lamar another diplomatic assignment, the final decision to rest with the Texan. The post of Minister to Nicaragua became vacant and the opportunity was made more attractive when the position of Minister to Costa Rica was combined with it. The compensation of \$10,000.00 annually, substantially more than Lamar would have received had he gone to the Argentine, proved decisive. At the age of fifty-nine, weary and in fragile health, Lamar began preparations for his journey to Central America. Departing shortly after Christmas, 1857, he arrived in Nicaragua in late January, 1858.<sup>51</sup>

The major task facing Lamar was to secure ratification of a treaty of commerce, friendship, and navigation which had been negotiated at Washington by Secretary of State Cass and Jose de Irisarri, Nicaraguan Minister at Washington. The purpose of the Cass-Irisarri negotiation was to guarantee

the transit route across the isthmus of Nicaragua which had been placed in jeopardy and closed during the filibustering era of William Walker. Signed at Washington, November 16, 1857, the treaty sanctioned the employment of American troops to protect the transit route, but only upon a specific request from Nicaragua. Resentment over Walker's activities and fears that the United States stood ready to grant covert aid to other filibustering groups were obstacles which Lamar must initially surmount in order to guarantee some degree of success for his mission.<sup>52</sup>

Lamar's arrival in Central America signalled the commencement of regular diplomatic relations between Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the United States. Prior to that the American government had been served (on an irregular basis) by appointees dispatched to resolve a crisis after it had developed. Shortly after he learned that Lamar had been named to succeed him, William Cary Jones, "Special Agent of the United States to Central America," in a letter to Secretary of State Cass, lamented the difficulties of his position:

The newspaper accounts from the United States had me to suppose that a functionary of ample powers & unequivocal official position will soon be present here. Whoever he may be, I hope that he will be a man of courage & will, & be backed by a steamer of war constantly on each coast. Short of this, American citizens & their interests in this State may as well be abandoned, and even an appearance of respect for the government of the U.S.<sup>53</sup>

Lamar presented his credentials to Nicaraguan President, Tomas Martinez, an outspoken opponent of the Cass-Irisarri treaty. However, the Minister of Foreign Relations, Gregorio Juarez, was some-

what more sympathetic and requested that the American Minister document arguments in favor of ratification before the treaty was submitted to the Nicaraguan Senate for approval. Before marshalling his points, Lamar felt impelled to point out the difficulties inherent in his assignment in a letter to Secretary of State Cass:

Indeed I feel almost confident that the treaty will be ratified by the next steamer in spite of the prevailing fears that, instead of its closing, it will only open the door to Filibustering. This is the great dread of the nation.

There is in all this country a deep seated terror, that when the Americans are admitted into it, the natives will be thrust aside — their nationality lost — their religion destroyed — and the common classes be converted into hewers of wood and drawers of water.<sup>54</sup>

Turning then to the task at hand, Lamar began the work of compiling a lengthy memorandum for Juarez's use in arguing for ratification. He stressed the commercial advantages which would accrue to Nicaragua in increased trade with the United States and warned that the local administration should not become too dependent on British favor and influence. Also, he discounted the prospects of war between the United States and England or France over a guarantee of the transit route. Finally, he insisted that American life and property would be protected and the isthmus remain open even if Nicaragua refused to cooperate.<sup>55</sup>

The Cass-Irisarri treaty carried by one vote in the Nicaraguan Senate. However, President Martinez refused to complete the ratification procedure by signing the treaty. Instead he drafted a vitriolic statement addressed to all Central American nations, attacking the intervention of the United States in their domestic affairs.<sup>56</sup> A new Minister of For-

eign Relations, Don Pedro Zelendon, was named and in June, 1858, Senior Irisarri, wrote to Secretary of State Cass and requested an extension of time for the ratification of the treaty. Additional time was necessary for the settlement of a dispute involving the banks of the San Juan River, claimed by both Nicaragua and Costa Rica. A successful negotiation of this question, Irisarri insisted, would clear the way for ratification of the treaty, assurance of the integrity of the transit route, and possible construction of a canal under American auspices.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, Nicaragua was simply playing a delaying game while carrying on talks with a French corporation for the construction of a canal. A condition precedent to this was the settlement of the boundary dispute with Costa Rica and this was accomplished after talks between Presidents Martinez of Nicaragua and Mora of Costa Rica. Early in July, 1858, Felix Belly, agent for Milland and Company of Paris, announced the conclusion of a convention for the opening of an inter-oceanic canal through the St. John River and Lake Nicaragua. The Belly canal contract stipulated that construction must begin within two years, that upon completion the canal would be under French management, though available to the ships of all nations upon the payment of a uniform toll. Also the French government was given the right of stationing two warships on Lake Nicaragua while the canal was under construction.<sup>58</sup> The statement concluded with an attack against filibustering activities supposedly encouraged by the American government and the necessity of Nicaragua and Costa Rica seeking French protection against such incursions.

Although he felt that a canal under French guarantee would never be built, Lamar was also

dubious concerning the ultimate prospects of an agreement between Nicaragua and the United States. In a communication to Cass, after having been at his post only a few months, Lamar summarized the problems inherent in his mission:

The great trouble with Nicaragua may be easily explained. She saw in the meloncholly [sic] results of the Walker War, how near she was being conquered by a handful of Filibusters — and from that day to the present moment, she has been oppressed with a sense of insecurity, so long as an American is allowed to tread her soil.

This sense of insecurity has been greatly augmented by the Cass and Irisarri Treaty; for Nicaragua believes that under the protection of that Treaty, combined with the facilities of the Transit, the Americans will pour into her territory in overwhelming numbers, and by their superior energy, knowledge, wealth and enterprise will soon possess themselves of all power and convert the country into an American Republic. The dread of being thus denationalized and her people degraded, is the great and probably sole impediment to a good understanding with her.<sup>59</sup>

Despairing of any definite action on the treaty, Lamar announced his intended departure for Costa Rica so that he might present his credentials to that government. Before leaving he presented some claims on behalf of American citizens, a task which had occupied much of his time since arriving in Managua. Then he was heartened by the receipt of a letter from President Mora of Costa Rica critical of the proposed French canal contract and emphasizing a willingness to hear the American view of the case. In the interim the Cass-Irisarri treaty, modified in some of its basic features after receiving President Martinez's signature was rejected by Secretary of State Cass and returned to Nicaragua for further action.<sup>60</sup>

Arriving at San Jose, Costa Rica, in September, 1858, Lamar found a cordial reception. A banquet was tendered in his honor by President Mora and shortly thereafter the American diplomat appraised the existing situation in a note to the State Department. He alluded to the genuine desire of Costa Rica to maintain friendly relations with the United States but observed that, "the fears of being overrun by the fillibusters, were so great, that Costa Rica would have thrown herself as a colony, into the arms of any power that would protect her."<sup>61</sup> Also, Lamar gave it as his opinion that any proposed union of Central American States along democratic principles, a policy once advocated by the United States, was illusory and wishful thinking at best.

While Lamar occupied his time in routine duties at San Jose, affairs came to a head concerning the transit treaty in Nicaragua. Late in January, 1859, a treaty was signed between Nicaragua and the British Commissioner, William Gore Ousley, sanctioning the use of British troops upon Nicaraguan soil to repel filibustering expeditions if it became necessary. When the Texan learned of this he returned quickly to Managua and was informed by Senior Pedro Zeledon, Nicaraguan Minister of Foreign Relations, that since the United States had failed to ratify the original Cass-Irisarri negotiation, Nicaragua felt free to conclude an agreement with England. A ray of hope was held out when Zeledon indicated his willingness to negotiate the same kind of treaty with the United States, if Lamar felt that ratification could be accomplished in the American Congress.<sup>62</sup>

The announcement that Nicaragua had turned to British officials for support intensified criticisms against Lamar from maritime interests in the

United States anxious to see construction of an inter-oceanic canal. Also abolitionist-inspired newspapers, convinced that Southern filibustering activities were responsible for Nicaragua's anti-American posture, accused the American Minister, a Southerner, of failing to adequately represent the interests of his government. Some of the more strident of these papers attacked Lamar personally and perhaps the worst example of this type of journalism appeared in the *Washington States*, February 8, 1859:

In the present critical condition of our Central American relations, moreover, it is little short of madness to leave the large interests we have at stake there in such incompetent and faithless hands. . . . That under such circumstances the defence of American honor and American interests against such odds should be intrusted to a Minister habitually disabled by habits of intoxication from any attention to public business — so careless of his personal dignity as to be seen openly lying in a public warehouse, without hat, coat, shoes or stockings — a subject of derision to strangers, and of pity and shame to his countrymen, — and so careless of the trust confided to him as to leave the most confidential papers of his mission scattered upon the floor and open to all, is certainly to be deplored.<sup>63</sup>

Although Lamar was advised by friends in Washington that President Buchanan and Secretary of State Cass had no fault to find with the conduct of his office, he grew increasingly discouraged with the lack of any specific accomplishment and in March, 1859, notified the Nicaraguan government of his intention to return to the United States. Upon learning of the treaty that Nicaragua had signed with Great Britain, Secretary Cass wrote to Lamar instructing him to demand his passports

and conclude his mission, but acting before he was in receipt of that communication, Lamar made one final attempt to wring some degree of success out of his stay in Central America.<sup>64</sup> Upon his own volition, he concluded the Lamar-Zeledon treaty of friendship, commerce, and navigation which gave to the United States exactly the same rights and privileges that Nicaragua had conferred upon Great Britain in the earlier convention. However, this treaty also ultimately failed of ratification because of Nicaraguan insistence that the United States "enforce its own neutrality laws" in suppressing filibustering expeditions before they could be launched from American ports.

Lamar's last official act before leaving Managua was to appear before the Nicaraguan Senate and urge the rejection of the Belly Canal Contract. He insisted that the effect of the negotiation was to make Nicaragua a virtual protectorate of the French and that Central American interests would be better served by seeking the good offices and friendship of the United States. Although the contract was eventually ratified, work on the proposed canal was never begun principally because of financial difficulties and the unspoken reluctance of Nicaraguan officials to incur the diplomatic hostility of the United States.<sup>65</sup>

Weary of his duties and burdened with a sense of failure, Lamar probably welcomed the State Department's decision to terminate his mission. Finances had prevented his family from joining him at Managua and he was most anxious to return to Texas. In August, his successor, Alexander Dimitry, arrived, and by September, 1859, Lamar was back in Washington. After meeting with Secretary Cass and reporting on his experience in person, he felt compelled, before departing for

Texas, to sum up his view of what American policy should be toward the emerging Central American nations. Perhaps the frustrations attendant upon his unsuccessful mission account for the harsh tone of his comments:

Central America can never advance without the aid of the United States. If these Republics are left to themselves they will inevitably become little more than French and British colonies. They are now sighing for that condition; and will soon sink into it, if we permit them to do so — I am not seeking the annexation of those States; but I do desire their good; and above all I do not wish to see our jealous rivals, engraft their institutions upon this country and rear up in our very front a mighty bulwark of power against us. — And this they are now seeking to do. — If we would arrest the work, there is but one way to do it, and that is to unfurl Monroe Banner on the mountain at once and defy the foe to strike it down if he can. — If we are afraid to do this, then let us revert back to our Colonial condition, and pay the Tea Tax without further complaint.<sup>66</sup>

While Lamar's diplomatic assignment had proven inconclusive, the added compensation as Minister to Nicaragua and Costa Rica had enabled him to bring his financial affairs under some degree of control and management. Rejecting invitations to visit old friends in Macon and New Orleans, Lamar was back in Richmond in early October, anxious to enjoy the ease and repose he had earned and to spend time with his wife and daughter. In this spirit he graciously refused to permit public dinners in his honor tendered by the cities of Houston, Galveston, and his own home town of Richmond. Privately, he indicated that he had no interest in returning to politics or official life of any kind, and wished only for

leisure time to pursue his oft-postponed work on Texas history.<sup>67</sup>

Appropriate to the season, preparations were under way at Lamar's residence for the celebration of the Christmas season. Friends and relatives had already arrived when early in the morning on Monday, December 19, Lamar complained of feeling unwell. A doctor was summoned and while he proceeded with his examination, Lamar remarked: "I feel very queerly, I believe I am going to die." A moment later he was stricken with a severe heart attack and died instantly. According to the medical understanding of the day, death was attributed to both a "heart ailment" and "apoplexy."<sup>68</sup>

"A worthy man has fallen; let his name be remembered by the people."<sup>69</sup> In this fashion did the editor of the *Houston Telegraph and Texas Register* lament the passing of Lamar. Another prominent journalist sadly observed that, "few of the men of '36 survive, they are fast passing away, and soon none will be left to tell the tale."<sup>70</sup> In fact, of the men of great consequence of the Revolutionary era, only David G. Burnet, a life-long friend and supporter, and Sam Houston, an implacable enemy, survived Lamar.

Appraisals of Lamar's life and contributions appeared in many newspapers in Texas and throughout the South. Without fail he was praised for his battlefield heroism at San Jacinto and for his adamant desire to submit Santa Anna to the mercies of a Texas court. Celebrated as the founder of the Texas educational system, he was also extolled for the passage of the 1839 Homestead Act, a statute which was at the time unique in the southern states. The expulsion of the Cherokees from the now choice lands in East Texas was

generally defended and charitable amends were made for his financial errors and the disastrous Santa Fe expedition. Finally, some speculated that at some future time Lamar might be best remembered for his poetry and contributions to the Southern literary movement.

It may have been that of all the memorials and tributes to Lamar, that written by the editor of the *Galveston Weekly News* most nearly captured the essence of the man:

Would that we had the space to speak of his private virtues. Like Brutus, the elements were kindly mixed in him, and gentleness was his prevailing mood, but the flash of his eye was terrible when his justice was roused. He loved home, country, and friends, his attachments were strong, and he clung to old friends, to old scenes, and old recollections. The world who did not know him, will not miss him, but the chosen few who had confidence and knew him as he was, will ask themselves:

“When shall we look upon his like again.”<sup>71</sup>



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3. Henry S. Foote to Lamar, April 25, 1840, *Ibid.*, III, 379.
4. R. E. Handy to Lamar, February 17, 1838, *Ibid.*, II, 36.
5. Philip Graham, *Mirabeau B. Lamar*, 65.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Edward Fontaine to Lamar, November 16, 1843, *Lamar Papers*, V, 504.
8. Robert Neil Mathis, *Gazaway Bugg Lamar; A Southern Entrepreneur*, 32.
9. Lamar to T. P. Anderson and Others, *Lamar Papers*, IV, 116.
10. Joseph W. Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft: 1836-1845*, 230-31.
11. Annie Middleton, “Donelson’s Mission to Texas in Behalf of Annexation,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (1921), 275.

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13. Dorman H. Winfrey, "Mirabeau B. Lamar," *Heroes of Texas*, 108; James T. De Shields, *They Sat in High Places: The Presidents and Governors of Texas*, 169.
14. Seymour V. Connor, *Adventure in Glory: The Saga of Texas, 1836-1849*, 237.
15. Friend, *Sam Houston; The Great Designer*, 165.
16. Gazaway B. Lamar to Lamar, May 14, 1846, *Lamar Papers*, VI, 19.
17. Anson Jones, *Memoranda and Official Correspondence Relating to the Republic of Texas*, 247; Ralph A. Wooster, "Early Texas Politics; The Henderson Administration," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXXIII (1969), 181-82.
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20. Graham, *Mirabeau B. Lamar*, 246.
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22. Friend, *Sam Houston; The Great Designer*, 181.
23. Henry W. Barton, "Five Texas Frontier Companies During the Mexican War," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXVI (1962), 29.
24. Thomas H. Kreneck, "The Lone Star Volunteers: A History of Texas Participants in the Mexican War," 31.
25. Lamar to Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1846, *Lamar Papers*, VI, 69.
26. Hamilton P. Bee to Lamar, December 5, 1846, *Ibid.*, IV, 150.
27. Lamar to Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1846, *Ibid.*, 155.
28. Lamar to Burnet, March ? 1847, *Ibid.*, 165.
29. Gambrell, *Mirabeau B. Lamar*, 297.
30. Henderson to Lamar, August 17, 1847, *Lamar Papers*, IV, 177.
31. Houston *Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, September 30, 1847.
32. *Ibid.*, November 4, 1847.
33. Friend, *Sam Houston; The Great Designer*, 185.
34. H. G. Runnels to Lamar, December 11, 1847, *Lamar Papers*, IV, 188.
35. Friend, *Sam Houston; The Great Designer*, 187.
36. Gambrell, *Lamar*, 298.
37. John H. Reagan, *Memoirs; With Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War*, 53-54.
38. Lamar to James Webb, January 28, 1848, *Lamar Papers*, VI, 163.
39. Lamar to James P. Henderson, January 5, 1849, *Ibid.*, 168.
40. *Ibid.*, 196.
41. Gambrell, *Lamar*, 299-300.
42. Lamar to Narciso Lopez, April ? 1851, *Lamar Papers*, VI, 322-23.
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47. Harold F. Peterson, *Argentina and the United States, 1810-1960*, 351.
48. Lamar to H. Cobb, July 20, 1857, *Lamar Papers*, IV, 41.
49. Lamar to Gazaway B. Lamar, July 19, 1857, *Ibid.*, 40.
50. Gazaway B. Lamar to M. B. Lamar, October 26, 1857, *Ibid.*, 58-59.
51. Graham, *Lamar*, 85.
52. Albert Z. Carr, *The World and William Walker*, 175-76.
53. William Carey Jones to Lewis Cass, January 1, 1858, in W. R. Manning(ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Inter-American Affairs*, IV, 641.
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67. Graham, *Lamar*, 87.
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