

## *The KGC in Texas, 1860-1861*

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THE KNIGHTS OF THE GOLDEN CIRCLE—A SECRET, PRE-CIVIL War, pro-Southern organization—seemed to synthesize the diverse ambitions, fears, and frustrations that had plagued the South since the 1830's. Nourished by plans to extend slavery, it brought into focus Southern thinking on Manifest Destiny, the Monroe Doctrine, and the several theories of States' Rights. It relied heavily on the various notions of tropical expansion, and it drew kinship support from the Southern Rights Clubs, the Order of the Lone Star, the Know Nothings, and the secession fever of the early 1850's. It brought together men who desired adventure, fame, and fortune. It appealed to those who feared the influx of foreigners and the spread of Roman Catholicism. It offered a weapon to Southerners who resented the unrelenting, oftentimes abusive efforts of the abolitionists.<sup>1</sup>

The chief designer and promulgator was George W. L. Bickley, an ambitious, vain, and possibly brilliant man who was a novelist,

<sup>1</sup>Because graphic materials are the mainstay of the historian, researchers can be beguiled easily—and frequently have been—by the several accounts, exposés, and documents pertaining to the KGC. This glut of source material details the ambitions rather than the accomplishments of the group and hence does not make the KGC amenable to orderly description, evaluation, or academicism. It is nonsensical, therefore, to attempt blandly, and without numerous qualifications, the stereotyped appraisal. Three noteworthy articles on the KGC are Mayo Fesler, "Secret Political Societies in the North During the Civil War," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XIV (September, 1918), 183-286; Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," *American Historical Review*, XLVII (October, 1941), 23-50; and C. A. Bridges, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: A Filibustering Fantasy," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLIV (January, 1941), 287-302. All three of these articles are scholarly and make fine contributions concerning the filibustering scheme. None was meant to be definitive of the KGC's secession activity. Secret societies are open to both misunderstanding by observers and mishandling by writers. One of the most obvious examples of mishandling is James Farber, *Texas, C. S. A.; A Spotlight on Disaster* (New York, 1947), 13-14.

historian, and doctor of eclectic medicine. During the period 1854-1861, he used the title "President and Commander-in-Chief of the KGC American Legion," and in the code of the KGC he was referred to as "56." Some believed that, among other things, Bickley had been trained at West Point,<sup>2</sup> which he entered through the influence of Henry Clay of Kentucky, but records at the institution disclose that no one by that name ever attended the United States Military Academy.<sup>3</sup>

Didactic and verbose, Bickley had a penchant for clandestine groups and a knack for drawing up grandiose plans on paper. He readily concocted elaborate and detailed rules and regulations for the KGC, with maxims for every conceivable behavior and endeavor, much regalia and undercover protocol, and designs for emblems and costumes—costumes for special occasions, for each office or rank, and the three degrees, or divisions. Each degree had

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<sup>2</sup>*Southern Argus* (Norfolk, Virginia), May 16, 1860. Equally conflicting are statements concerning Bickley's birth date and name. Without a citation, Crenshaw writes that Bickley was born in southwest Virginia in 1819. Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," 24. Gloria Jahoda cites the Nyberg Mss. (Papers in the possession of Mrs. A. A. Nyberg, Urbana, Illinois) for the statement that Bickley was born on July 18, 1823. Jahoda, "The Bickleys of Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXVI (October, 1958), 478. *Southern Argus*, May 16, 1860, lists the date of birth as July 18, 1820. Writers are even uncertain about Bickley's Christian names. Crenshaw, again without a citation, but in agreement with the *Southern Argus*, May 16, 1860, says that "his full name was George William Lamb Bickley." Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," 24n. Jahoda, fully aware that Bickley's maternal grandfather was a Lamb, states that Bickley's three given names were George Washington Lafayette. Jahoda, "The Bickley's of Virginia," 478. Once again Jahoda uses the Nyberg Mss. as a source. A. A. Urban, who knew Bickley well enough to receive from him the "K. G. C. Alphabet," indicated in a signed statement in the Bickley Papers, referred to below, that his names were George Washington Lamb. For other biographical data see Harvey W. Felter, *History of the Eclectic Medical Institute, 1845-1902* (Cincinnati, 1902), 110-113. See also Bickley (George W. L.) Papers (Records of the War Department, Office of the Judge Advocate General, Record Group 153, National Archives, Washington). These papers, hereafter cited as Bickley Papers, were accumulated mainly during the formative years of the KGC. They were removed from Bickley's possession at the time of his arrest in 1863. To these have been added reports dealing with the investigation and identification of Bickley by federal authorities. Both Fesler and Crenshaw used the Bickley Papers. Bridges did not cite them. A microfilm copy of the papers is in the Southwest Collection, Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas, which has also obtained photocopies of a small collection of Bickley Papers in the Nicolay and Hay Collections (Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois).

<sup>3</sup>Sidney Forman, archivist and historian for the Academy, to R. S. D., August 26, 1957.

a home and foreign department, and each required an initiation fee and weekly dues. The first degree, Knights of the Iron Hand, was military in nature. The second degree, Knights of the True Faith, was financial. The third degree, Knights of the Columbian Star, was ultra-secret and essentially political.<sup>4</sup>

While working for the alleged advancement of Southern interests, the KGC passed through two major phases. At first—as an antagonist of abolitionism—it was concerned with extending Southern institutions into new territory; during the second phase, the Knights—singly, and in spontaneous segments—were active protagonists of secession.

As friendly military colonists, the Knights were, during the first phase, to infiltrate Mexico lawfully; later they were to revolt and set up a new government with Bickley and the third degree Knights in charge. This new territory could then be annexed to the United States as additional Southern states or it could continue independently as an adjunct of the South. It was envisioned that such a nation, with Havana, Cuba, as the geographical center, would extend in a circle around the rich Gulf region. This proposed country surrounding the Gulf of Mexico probably suggested the term “golden circle.” Bickley boasted that this agricultural, “republican” empire, built upon slave labor, “. . . shall vie in grandeur with the old Roman Empire.”<sup>5</sup>

Of course, Bickley at one extreme and most abolitionists at the other extreme were seemingly oblivious to the fact that geographical factors in parts of Texas and Mexico imposed a limit to the immediate further territorial extension of the staple-slave complex.<sup>6</sup> Another obstacle was the German strip across South-Central Texas where frugal and industrious German emigrants

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<sup>4</sup>For details of the three KGC degrees, see J. W. Pomfrey, *A True Disclosure and Exposition of the Knights of the Golden Circle* (Cincinnati, 1861), 6-44.

<sup>5</sup>*Degree Book* (n. p., n. d.), 6, Bickley Papers. Almost all basic KGC documents carry references to the Roman Empire. A rare, post-secession ritual, *K. G. C. First, Or Military Degree* (ca. 1861), 8-9, mentions in some detail the methods and accomplishments of the Roman Empire.

<sup>6</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas: A Saddle-Trip on the South-western Frontier* (New York, 1857), 440-457. The Olmsted thesis has been expanded by Charles W. Ramsdell, “The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVI (September, 1929), 151-171; and Walter Prescott Webb, “The Great Plains Block the Expansion of the South,” *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review*, II (1929), 3-21.

raised cotton without the help of the Negro. Detailing facts and figures of this unheard of phenomenon, Frederick L. Olmsted offered the German farm culture as proof that slavery was both foolish and unprofitable.<sup>7</sup> Cognizant of the problem, the Knights took pride in the fact that by 1858, castles, or lodges, had been built in Texas which

showed themselves worthy of their calling, and, if anything, rather distanced those of the Gulf States in promotion of the "good cause." [They did this in spite of the] one great obstacle . . . the large, free-laboring German population.<sup>8</sup>

And Bickley, armed with his own imposing and interesting set of calculations, openly sought to refute the Olmsted theory.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas*, 433. Due to cleaner picking, "German cotton yielded a higher price in the markets of the world. . . ." Weston Joseph McConnell, *Social Cleavages in Texas; a Study of the Proposed Division of the State* (New York, 1925), 165. For an Appraisal of Olmsted's "free-soil" enthusiasm see Laura Wood Roper, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Western Texas Free-Soil Movement," *American Historical Review*, LVI (October, 1950), 58-64.

<sup>8</sup>*An Authentic Exposition of the "K. G. C.", "Knights of the Golden Circle"; or A History of Secession from 1834 to 1861* (Indianapolis, 1861), 12-15; hereafter cited as *An Authentic Exposition*. Although evidence, especially in newspapers, is scarce concerning the origin and early history of the KGC, this exposé contains several chapters dealing with KGC activity in 1855, 1856, 1857, and 1858, and quotes (pp. 9, 10) data from the New Orleans castle, which supposedly existed prior to 1859. The Knights themselves published some historical information in a basic KGC document, *Address to the Citizens of the Southern States* (n.p., n.d.), a rather lucid statement drawn up by Knights assembled in convention in 1860. This paper, hereafter cited as *Raleigh Address*, states (p. 17) that the KGC was organized at Lexington, Kentucky, on July 4, 1854, by five men who answered a call from Bickley. What could the Knights gain by falsifying the date of origin? If these men—some of whom did not like Bickley—accepted the date 1854, it must be close to the truth. Bridges accepted the date and used it in his article. Bridges also found evidence of a castle which was operating in 1859 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Did this lodge spring into existence without the benefit of historical development? Also, printed materials in the Bickley Papers carrying the date 1859 indicate that the KGC was a going concern by September, 1859. Moreover, as early as 1858, Bickley "organized" the American Colonization and Steamship Company to serve as a financial nucleus around which he could try to gather capital for carrying out KGC objectives. The point is that it does not seem logical to assume that an organization such as the KGC would spring into existence full blown in 1859 or on any other date. Rather, the KGC began much in the way outlined in the *Raleigh Address*—as a small, ineffective group gathered around Bickley. Then through the years the movement spread over the South. It should be remembered that this was a secret and revolutionary group with little desire for publicity in the early stages of development. This probably explains the absence of "proof of existence" in newspapers, 1858 and earlier.

<sup>9</sup>Bickley did this in a speech. A fragmentary copy of the speech is in the Bickley Papers. Following the war, many Knights admitted that abolition was a good thing,



Also, magnetized by the self-aggrandizing effects of his fantastic plot, he forged ahead, ever steering his campaign toward the Southwest. On September 12, 1859, he issued a KGC proclamation:

Soldiers—the time approaches when we must take the field . . . let us think for a moment what we propose: the invasion of a nation by a new and vigorous race—the overthrow of old social systems, and the establishment of new ones—the disarming of hostile factions and the erection of peace establishments—the overthrow of prejudice, and the endoctrination [*sic*] of the people with new ideas of progress and prosperity . . . and now young men, what have you to gain by this work? The Knights of the Golden Circle opens for you new fields of industry and enterprise. It gives you the quarry from which to hew out the statue of your own fortunes . . . it tells you that your flag is glorious, and that you can and should keep it so; that the land [of Mexico] is inviting and pleasant to look at; that there is fortune, fame, wealth, and glory for you. It tells you to plant your flag and your schools on every hill top and in every valley; to make [Mexico] shine once more resplendant [*sic*] in the galaxy of nations . . . study our organization . . . and then tell us if you too, will wear the cross of honor? Tell us if you are not willing to help direct the events of the age.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps one of the chief allurements of Mexico was the instability of its government. In the three and a half decades since the separation from Spain, Mexico had had thirty-two administrations and at the beginning of 1860 was the scene of violent fighting between the Juárez and the Miramón forces. Moreover, up along the Rio Grande, in Northern Mexico, a bandit gang led by Juan Nepomucena Cortina was ravishing the country-side and even pillaging some Texas villages. It did seem that the time was right for someone to move in and restore order in Mexico or, in KGC parlance, “. . . adopt the policy of Rome . . . [for] as Rome conquered countries, so she civilized and enlightened them.”<sup>11</sup>

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economically. Thomas Troupe Gammage, a prominent Texas Knight, pointed out that slavery was both an expensive and an annoying system of labor; and, in support, he asserted that his father had to practice law to maintain his slaves. William S. Speer (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the New West* (2 vols.; Marshall, Texas, 1881), I, 264-266.

<sup>10</sup>K. G. C. *Proclamation*, September 12, 1859, Bickley Papers.

<sup>11</sup>K. G. C. *First, Or Military Degree*, 8.

Bickley claimed that both the conservative Miguel Miramón and the liberal Benito Juárez factions had asked for American (KGC) assistance. And early in 1860, the Knights made a deal with Manuel Doblado of the Juárez group. According to this arrangement, the Knights were to be rewarded liberally in both land and money. All they had to do was to enter Mexico and reach the city of Monterrey.<sup>12</sup>

Other major developments during the first half of 1860 included the activity of Governor Sam Houston of Texas, an abortive movement of Knights toward Mexico, and a KGC convention at Raleigh, North Carolina. Sam Houston had a long-nurtured desire to establish a protectorate over Mexico; he figured it would catapult him into the White House. For this reason he pleaded with the War Department for arms and ammunition; he dickered with British capitalists for financial support; and he played along with the KGC.<sup>13</sup>

Although Houston did not condone the KGC philosophy on slavery nor the disunionist aspects of the group, there is evidence that he was willing to court the favor of the KGC as long as his "protectorate" was in the making. Following his initiation into the order,<sup>14</sup> KGC recruiters let it be known that the old warrior, backed by British funds, was to lead 12,000 Knights into Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

Writing to Governor Houston from Marshall on February 20,

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<sup>12</sup>Mexican participation is mentioned in several places, including the *Dallas Herald*, February 15, 1860. Excerpts from the ritual of the first degree were published in the *Louisville Journal*, July 18, 1861. Harvey W. Felter states that "... we have seen letters written by both Miramón and Juárez proffering co-operation, grants of land, and other great advantages." Felter, *History of the Eclectic Medical Institute*, 112-113.

<sup>13</sup>Llerena Friend to R. S. D., August 21, 1957, states that she worked hard trying to find out "about Houston and the Knights of the Golden Circle." She mentions that "Thomas Carothers, with whom Houston had such a prolific correspondence about matters political in 1860 and earlier, was a leader of the Knights' castle at Huntsville." She also points out that "... [Ben] McCulloch, who was to be Houston's 'Big Captain,' was the leader of the Knights when they took over command at San Antonio from Twiggs." In summary, Miss Friend states that the most definite relationship cited in her book, *Sam Houston, the Great Designer* (Austin, 1954), is the correspondence with Greer and that "I think Houston was willing to use the Knights if they played his way."

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Troupe Gammage told his biographer that in 1860 he "assisted in initiating General Sam Houston into the Knights of the Golden Circle, with the view to making him a leader." Speer (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the New West*, I, 265.

<sup>15</sup>James Pike, *Scout and Ranger* (Princeton, 1932), 124.

1860, Elkanah Greer brought the situation into sharp focus. Greer was a planter, merchant, ardent states' righter, veteran of Mexican War duty with Jefferson Davis' Mississippi Rifles, and "Grand Commander of the KGC in Texas."<sup>16</sup> Greer wrote:

I had a interview last night with "Dr. M. D. K. Taylor" who has just returned from Austin. He told me, he had a conversation with you . . . on the Rio Grande subject and that you had "Telegraphed" [*sic*] to Washington the true State of Affairs, and that if they delayed action, you would move instantly in the matter . . . I have the honor to tender to you, our Sovereign head, a Regiment of "Mounted Volunteers" which we have already organized east of the "Trinity" river, and are now ready to move at a moments notice.<sup>17</sup>

On February 29 Houston replied to Greer that the state was bankrupt and that

I am in daily expectation of Despatches [*sic*] from Washington in reply to a Telegram which I sent, some days since, as well as Despatches [*sic*] by Express. So soon as I hear from Washington, I will apprise you of their import.

The want of grain as well as grass, on the route to Rio Grande, would render the advance of a force at this time, impracticable. "We will see" as Old Father Ritchie used to say.<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, Albert Miller Lea and his brother, Pryor Lea—confidants of Governor Houston—contacted Colonel Robert E. Lee, who had just arrived in Texas as commander of the Eighth Military District. On February 24, in the second of several letters concerning this exciting development, Albert M. Lea wrote to Houston from Goliad that

[Colonel Robert E. Lee] would not touch any thing that he would consider vulgar fillibustering [*sic*]; but he is not without ambition,

<sup>16</sup>Walter P. Webb and H. Bailey Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas* (2 vols.; Austin, 1952), I, 730.

<sup>17</sup>Greer to Houston, February 20, 1860, Governors' Letters (Archives, Texas State Library, Austin). Taylor, a prominent politician, served twenty-four years in the Texas legislature and was the Speaker of the House of Representatives in the 8th and 10th legislatures. Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, II, 715.

<sup>18</sup>Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker (eds.), *The Writings of Sam Houston 1813-1863* (8 vols.; Austin, 1938-1943), VII, 495. One could argue that Houston's reply to Greer is too cryptic to prove his involvement. Spelled out, Houston was offered KGC troops by recognized KGC authority, and he did not close the door to acceptance.

and *under the sanction of the Govt.* might be more than willing to aid you to pacificate Mexico; and if the people of the U. States should recall you from the 'Halls of the Montezumas' to the 'White House' at Washington, you will find him well fitted to carry out your great idea of a Protectorate.<sup>19</sup>

It was only after an amount of corresponding and conferring—including a rush trip by Houston to San Antonio to face Lee—that the Colonel graciously declined the invitation to participate, and it soon became evident that Houston could not quite muster the wherewithal for the venture.<sup>20</sup> But it is interesting nevertheless, to contemplate on the course history might have taken had Houston and Lee and Bickley been able to merge their energies.

As it turned out, the spring of 1860 was marked by the first of two attempts to get Knights into Mexico overland through Texas. The Dallas *Herald* brazenly encouraged the KGC, "Let these Texans range on the Mexican Frontier and infuse some of the Anglo Saxon ideas of progressiveness into the stupid, leaden souls of that people,—and then the world will witness a change."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Lea to Houston, February 24, 1860, Governors' Letters. Lea (1808-1892) was a graduate (1831) of the United States Military Academy and quite active on the Texas scene, as was also his brother, Pryor Lea (1794-1879), a lawyer who served in the Texas Secession Convention. Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, II, 39-40. The KGC was very active in the Lea family bailiwick—Goliad, Refugio, and St. Mary's. Although there is no proof it seems highly probable that the Lea brothers were Knights. On March 1, 1860, Colonel Robert E. Lee acknowledged receipt of A. M. Lea's letters of February 24, 25, and 26. Lee's letter was passed on to Houston. It is now framed and housed in the Archives of the Texas State Library. In this letter Lee expressed admiration for Houston. He indicated that he was in sympathy with those concerned with border troubles. He made it clear that he would not move against Mexico without the sanction of the Constitution and laws. Also see Walter P. Webb, *The Texas Rangers, A Century of Frontier Defense* (Austin, 1935), 206-207.

<sup>20</sup>In the Bickley Papers there is an unidentified newspaper clipping—probably from the *Mobile Mercury*, April 6, 1860—which indicates that the trip was made before March 20, 1860. The item is headed "Texas Correspondence, San Antonio, March 20" and signed "Lay Around." The crux of the item is "... he [Sam Houston] made a flying visit to San Antonio a few days ago, his object being to consult Col. Lee ... what his mission was is unknown. One thing is certain, however, it was not without object." To recapitulate: Houston, early in 1860, wanted to take Mexico; Bickley, during the same period, had a similar ambition. A situation existed where they could have joined forces. There were those who desired this. The Lea brothers, (suspected Knights) worked hard trying to get Robert E. Lee involved in the Houston scheme. Greer, Bickley's representative in Texas, tried to get Houston to take over a KGC unit and lead it into Mexico. Also, it is highly interesting to note that the clipping concerning Houston's visit with Lee in San Antonio was found among the cherished possessions of Bickley.

<sup>21</sup>Dallas *Herald*, February 29, 1860. Also, according to the *Herald*, February 1,

By the middle of March, many Knights had congregated at Gonzales on the Guadalupe River in south-central Texas. This rashness agitated the frustrated Governor, and on March 21, 1860, he ordered the war-like activity to end.<sup>22</sup> But, in spite of this and other troubles—including the absence of Bickley, who was detained in New Orleans with “summit” problems—the roads toward the border were dusty for several weeks as small and large groups, on horseback and in wagons, made their way toward the Rio Grande.<sup>23</sup> It was almost summer before the illogical and un-co-ordinated effort petered out.

At this point, the spring of 1860, the stamina of the KGC was on the wane, and the responsibility for this rested with Bickley. His tendency to exaggeration must have lost him many followers. Sam A. Lockridge, for instance, was a professional filibusterer who had spent considerable time and money (about \$40,000) with William Walker and others.<sup>24</sup> Walker had been “. . . duly furnished and equipped with ships, men, and money by the liberal

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March 28, and April 11, 1860, the following troops, among others, were active: one company, Henderson, Texas; the Cherokee Grays (mounted), commanded by Thomas Troupe Gammage, Rusk, Texas; one regiment (mounted), commanded by George W. Chilton; one company, commanded by Dr. O. S. Davis, Sulphur Springs, Texas; and one thousand Knights in Baltimore, Maryland—men of respectable families—“are being drilled for the purpose of invading Mexico.”

<sup>22</sup>Proclamation of March 21, 1860, Governors' Proclamations (Archives, Texas State Library, Austin), 43-44. This act followed closely Houston's disappointing conference with Colonel Lee.

<sup>23</sup>Bridges, “The Knights of the Golden Circle: A Filibustering Fantasy,” 291-295.

<sup>24</sup>Lockridge to Major S. P. Heintzelman, April 27, 1860, Heintzelman (Samuel Peters) Papers and Journal, 1856-1860 (Library of Congress, Washington). A microfilm copy is in the possession of Miss Llerena Friend, Austin, Texas, who generously lent it to the author. Earl W. Fornell states that Lockridge was active with Walker, that 200 of his men from Texas left New Orleans for Nicaragua on September 13, 1856, and that Lockridge left the United States with 283 Texans late in November. Fornell, “Texans and Filibusters in the 1850's,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LIX (April, 1956), 416-417. The *Austin State Gazette*, August 22, 1857, quotes the *New Orleans Delta*, August 6, 1857, as follows: “General Walker (if he wants to go to Nicaragua again) can get all the men he needs in Mississippi alone. . . . I [S. A. Lockridge] have just paid a flying visit to my old home in Yallabusha county and I find a warm interest manifested in favor of the American cause in Central America—they believing it to be the only hope for the extension of Southern institutions on this continent.” S. A. Lockridge.” Although not a delegate, Lockridge was active in the Texas Secession Convention. He was a bearer of dispatches from Howell Cobb, president of the Confederate Congress, to O. M. Roberts, president of the Texas Secession Convention. See Ernest William Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas, 1861* (Austin, 1912), 208-209.

members of the KGC and sent to 'take Nicaragua' " but did not.<sup>25</sup> Lockridge maintained that

at one time I virtually promised to act with them [the KGC] . . . I had the pledge of their leaders that the President and cabinet were with them heart and soul and that they had plenty of arms and munitions and the promise of the steamship companies . . . for transportation . . . [and] an agreement with Juárez or his party, to enter the country without violation of laws.<sup>26</sup>

On such a basis, Lockridge believed that the venture would be successful. But after making a pointed investigation, he discovered that the leaders had stretched the truth. They did not have the support claimed. Although he disengaged himself from the venture, actually he respected many of the Knights, for he added,

I must say, there is [*sic*] some of the finest men in our country in the association of the KGC an[d] they are forming under or upon a different basis in Texas and other states and may yet succeed in their objects.<sup>27</sup>

Another reference to the deterioration of Bickley's leadership is couched in J. W. Barrett's letter to Governor Houston:

you are doubtless familiar with the organization now maturing for the conquest of Mexico. An interprise [*sic*] of such magnitude requires a head, and I must be permitted to say one of more note and influence than him under whose directions this organization has been so far matured.<sup>28</sup>

Then, sometime during February, 1860, Greer and Sam J. Richardson, a KGC major from Marshall, Texas, went to New

<sup>25</sup>*An Authentic Exposition*, 10. Fornell also refers to the KGC in Texas at this time; he draws his information from the correspondence of Arthur T. Lynn, British Consul in Galveston. Fornell, "Texas and Filibusters in the 1850's," 427. These letters are dated April-December, 1860, and refer to a "new expansionist organization . . . [which had] no direct relationship with the expedition led by Walker, even though, in a general sense, the movement possessed similar aims and appealed to the same type of Texas citizens."

<sup>26</sup>Lockridge to Heintzelman, April 27, 1860. Via rumor, many big names were linked to the KGC including Jefferson Davis and John C. Breckinridge. The latter, while serving as vice-president of the United States, allegedly wore emblematic jewelry in Washington. Representative S. S. Cox of Cincinnati did in fact serve as congressional spokesman for the KGC in 1860. *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Barrett to Houston, February 20, 1860, Governors' Letters.

Orleans to confer with "the leaders of the KGC" and, specifically, they discussed with Bickley the unsatisfactory "state of affairs."<sup>29</sup> After all, in Texas the Knights were on the march! Where was Bickley's main force from the deep South?

Immediately after this parley, Bickley left for Alabama and Georgia to "raise means to outfit more divisions," but, unable to do this and having been put on the spot by the Texans, Bickley's position obviously was in jeopardy. It was also believed that the KGC was suffering from infiltration by some who wished to break it up. So it was that Bickley's General Order No. 546, dated at Mobile, Alabama, April 6, 1860, began to circulate through Southern newspapers. This document called for a final convention of Knights to meet "at headquarters in Raleigh, North Carolina on May 7, 1860."<sup>30</sup>

The convention lasted through May 11. It was a productive session with delegates mending fences and re-grouping for further, and more effective, endeavors. One of the dramatic highlights was the resignation of Bickley from the top office. But after an investigation he was reinstated, and full confidence was expressed in his directorship. In addition, the Knights corrected certain organizational ills and vigorously sought to bring the group into better accord with immediate Southern needs. Also, they prepared for public dissemination the lengthy and informative *Address to the Citizens of the Southern States*, explaining the philosophy and objectives of the KGC. It boiled down to this: make the South strong in the Union or powerful outside the Union.

Coincidentally, a new, excited upsurge of virility seemed to be instilled in the members as it became increasingly apparent that the growing KGC lodges, or castles, in each of the slave states were actually the nucleus of a Southern army; moreover, it was believed in various quarters that Southern governors might have a need for these units soon after the coming national election.

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<sup>29</sup>*Raleigh Address*, 22. See also *Dallas Herald*, March 28, 1860, quoting the *Harrison Flag* (Marshall, Texas).

<sup>30</sup>[*Mobile Mercury?*] April 6, 1860, Bickley Papers; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, April 7, 1860.

With this in mind, Bickley began to expend every effort to get underway the move to Mexico. He was convinced that this would aid the South in her hour of danger and Mexico in her time of distress. Through the newspapers in July, he ordered the estimated 100,000 Knights to be in camp in Encinal County, Texas, by October 1, 1860. He reminded them to "bring your wagons and your mules, oxen, horses, cattle, spades, axes, camp kettles, each two blankets, provisions and all materials useful to a Mexican emigrant."<sup>31</sup> At the same time, he urged Southern slave owners to support the cause. To them he asserted, "you have a direct slave interest of two thousand, eight hundred million dollars . . . if you give the KGC one dollar each for the slaves you own we will duplicate your interest in the Union."<sup>32</sup>

The big move never came off. Early in October, some small detachments did try to unite in South Texas, but Bickley's main force did not materialize. The imminent, show-down presidential election was taking precedence over all things. It must have had a thwarting effect on the plot to seize Mexico.

On October 10, 1860, Bickley arrived in Texas,<sup>33</sup> where, allegedly, Knights had already raised \$498,000 in money and materials.<sup>34</sup> He found the citizens restless, excited, and expectant. Immediately he began to capitalize on this unrest. Working from headquarters in San Antonio, he stumped the state, feverishly lambasting the abolitionists and promoting the KGC. He got good response. Large, curious crowds met him everywhere, and in the course of an evening, eager Texans pressed forward to pay the fees and take the degrees.

It was on October 31, just two weeks before the fateful election, that Bickley—"a tall, fine-looking, middle-aged gentleman, having an uncommonly fine expression of countenance, and a high intellectual forehead"—made his pitch at the courthouse

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<sup>31</sup>Richmond *Whig* (Virginia), July 17, 1860. Encinal County was never organized and was abolished in 1899. Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, I, 567.

<sup>32</sup>Richmond *Whig*, July 17, 1860.

<sup>33</sup>Dallas *Herald*, October 17, 1860, quoting the Galveston *News*, October 11, 1860.

<sup>34</sup>An open letter in the Richmond *Whig*, undated clipping, Bickley Papers.



square in the city of Houston.<sup>35</sup> The town had already been softened by a new popular song which the *Telegraph* surmised "will be the death of us yet. . . . Dixie is screeched from morning to night."<sup>36</sup>

Following the speech, over forty "gentlemen of Houston" became Knights. In reporting this event, the *Telegraph* stated that although no movement would be made against Mexico until after the election, "The day may come when the Lone Star flag will again court the free breezes of heaven; a civil war may be forced upon us. . . . Therefore we bid the K's.G.C. God speed."<sup>37</sup>

Bickley's weekly progress report on November 3, 1860, stated that "in the last ten days, eleven companies were equipped and provided . . . [and that] during the past week working and flourishing castles" were established in seven cities.<sup>38</sup> All in all, there were at least thirty-two castles in twenty-seven Texas counties.<sup>39</sup> It is believed that, amid the dissatisfaction following the

<sup>35</sup>Dallas *Herald*, November 14, 1860, quoting Houston *Telegraph*. Friend, *Sam Houston, the Great Designer*, 330, says the date was November 8, but according to Works Projects Administration, *Houston, A History and Guide* (Houston, 1942), 70, the date was October 31, and this date seems to be correct. According to the Dallas *Herald*, November 21, 1860, Bickley was in Marshall on November 7. He could not have performed in Houston, far downstate, on the following day. Moreover, Bickley's letters as published in the Houston *Telegraph* are dated as follows: Huntsville, November 3; Marshall, November 12 and 15. Jimmie Hicks, "Some Letters Concerning the Knights of the Golden Circle in Texas, 1860-1861," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXV (July, 1961), 82, 83, 85.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Works Projects Administration, *Houston, A History and Guide*, 70.

<sup>37</sup>Dallas *Herald*, November 14, 1860, quoting Houston *Telegraph*. At this time, E. H. Cushing was in control of the *Telegraph*. He served as editor and eventually became sole owner. He was an ardent supporter of William Walker, advocated reopening the slave trade, wanted to take Cuba, and seemed to be very strong for the KGC. It is not known if he was a member. See Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, I, 449; and Fornell, "Texans and Filibusters in the 1850's," 414.

<sup>38</sup>Dallas *Herald*, November 14, 1860. The total number of first-night initiates in the seven cities was one hundred and ninety-eight.

<sup>39</sup>For Texas towns known to have KGC castles see Table 1. See also Bridges, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: A Filibustering Fantasy," 300; Hobart Huson, *Refugio, A Comprehensive History of Refugio County from Aboriginal Times to 1955* (2 vols.; Woodsboro, Texas, 1955), II, 5-7, 141; and Hicks, "Some Letters Concerning the Knights of the Golden Circle in Texas, 1860-1861," 80-86. Some of the other Texans active in KGC affairs were T. S. Cook, La Grange; Ned P. Clifford, Navasota; Captain Bart Simms, Caldwell; and Davis C. Jones (Surgeon, 2nd Regt., KGC), Owensville.

TABLE 1. TOWNS KNOWN TO HAVE KGC CASTLES

TOWN	COUNTY	PERSON IN CHARGE
Alleyton	Colorado	John K. Hanks
Austin	Travis	George W. Harris
Bastrop	Bastrop	Capt. John B. Lubbock
Booneville	Brazos	Capt. James Guest
Brenham	Washington	Dr. John Lark
Caldwell	Burleson	Capt. John L. Winston
Cameron	Milam	
Castroville	Medina	
Chappell Hill	Washington	Geo. W. Chappell
Columbus	Colorado	Prof. H. A. Tatum
Dallas	Dallas	
Eagle Lake	Colorado	I. J. Frazier
Gonzales	Gonzales	A. D. Harris
Helena	Karnes	Capt. John Littleton
Houston	Harris	Capt. W. Edwards
Huntsville	Walker	Thos. Carothers
Independence	Washington	Capt. Thos. B. Haynes
Jefferson	Marion	
La Grange	Fayette	Col. B. Shropshire
McKinney	Collin	
Marshall	Harrison	Sam J. Richardson
Navasota	Grimes	Jno. L. Lloyd
New Braunfels	Comal	
Owensville	Robertson	D. U. Barziza
Pleasanton	Atascosa	
Rusk	Cherokee	Thomas Troupe Gammage
St. Mary's	Refugio	*
San Antonio	Bexar	Major S. Sampson†
Seguin	Guadalupe	J. Wright
Sulphur Springs	Hopkins	
Waxahachie	Ellis	

\*Hobart Huson writes that the St. Mary's castle was most likely organized by the Hobby brothers, Alfred M. and Edwin E., and that the latter served as secretary. Huson, *Refugio*, 5. Years later, Edwin fathered a son, William Pettus, who was to serve Texas as governor (1917-1921). Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, I, 819.

†San Antonio had at least one castle on November 13, 1860. It was headed by Major S. Sampson. Hicks, "Some Letters Concerning the Knights of the Golden Circle in Texas, 1860-1861," 85. By February 17, 1861, San Antonio had two castles according to Winkler, *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 277. One of these was named the Charles Bickley Castle in honor of General Bickley's nephew, Charles, who served as aide-de-camp at "Headquarters, American Legion, K. G. C." in San Antonio.

election—in which no votes were cast in Texas for the victorious Lincoln ticket—the members of the local KGC units ordered the mass meetings and torchlight parades which built up the hysteria that moved the citizenry to disunion. Eyewitnesses contend that in Texas the KGC was a ready-made vehicle for secession, and it might be that the KGC was equally effective in other parts of the South. It was alleged, for instance, that

every castle is, in truth, a regular military company, the State Legions are brigades, and the American Legion is an Army . . . thousands of castles have been drilling two and three times per week, for several years.

. . . the Knights of the Golden Circle are the secessionists proper, and their history is the history of secession from a small and insignificant band of kidnappers and fillibusters [*sic*], they have gradually increased their numbers until they are to be counted by thousands in the Southern States of the Union, and by dozens in the Border Free States . . . they are the most dangerous of enemies. . . .<sup>40</sup>

But, because Bickley and the KGC national headquarters were in Texas, most of the KGC's post-election, pre-Confederate news data centers were in the Lone Star State.

In assaying the situation Major J. T. Sprague, U.S.A., stated that competent authority believed eight thousand Texas Knights could be brought into the field at four days' notice and that, due to this display of force, and in view of the "harmony and secrecy,"

they hold in subjection the sentiments and conduct of the entire population of the State. At the *Castles* reports are made in regard to individuals, their conduct and opinions, and transmitted, for final action and investigation, to the headquarters.<sup>41</sup>

Confessing that he stood by while an "active conspiracy" led to "open rebellion," Colonel Charles Anderson proclaimed that,

you will be surprised to hear . . . that, excepting South Carolina alone, Texas had more to do with starting that colossal blunder and crime [the Civil War] than any half dozen other States of the Confederacy, and that, without the movements of Texas, the Rebellion would have aborted in its earliest stages, and closed as a ridiculous farce. . . .

<sup>40</sup>*An Authentic Exposition*, 77.

<sup>41</sup>J. T. Sprague, "The Texas Treason," *The Rebellion Record*, ed. by Frank Moore (12 vols.; New York, 1864-1868), XII, 109-111.

I discovered these movements in the organization and action of a treasonable association. I repeat the word "treasonable," with its fit adjectives, pure and simple, logical and legal, deliberate and of malice prepense! This body was . . . commonly known by their initials of "KGC's."<sup>42</sup>

James P. Newcomb, vehement unionist editor of San Antonio's *Alamo Express*, put it this way:

Now commenced the execution of the designs of the conspirators, the election of Mr. Lincoln was declared sufficient cause for disunion, and every man who would not subscribe to that declaration was denounced as a submissionist and an abolitionist. . . . [every knight was] sworn to treason . . . from the fact of its perfect organization and secrecy it was a powerful instrument in the hands of the conspirators. . . . Through this organization the first secession convention was effected. . . . [and the KGC] furnished the vigilance hanging committees, and to them belong the credit of the murders and the arsons committed during the secession times.<sup>43</sup>

Following the logic of these assertions, it would seem that the KGC had a bearing on the calling of Texas' secession convention, the election of delegates to the convention, the conduct of the convention, the popular vote on the secession ordinance, and the seizure of the state.

Interestingly, an amount of correlative data can be brought to light on these points, but there is such a regrettable paucity of verifiable evidence that "conclusive statements" merely define the darkness, not pierce it. As a result, the impact of the KGC in Texas during these crucial days is an inconclusive, tantalizing enigma.

#### THE CALLING OF TEXAS' SECESSION CONVENTION

In regard to one of the "many public meetings [from mid-November through December, 1860] . . . at which the convening of the legislature in extra session was requested,"<sup>44</sup> Anderson noted that the day after the news of Lincoln's election reached

<sup>42</sup>Charles Anderson, *Texas, Before, and on the Eve of the Rebellion, A Paper Read Before the Cincinnati Society of Ex-Army and Navy Officers, January 3d, 1884* (Cincinnati, 1884), 1, 8.

<sup>43</sup>James P. Newcomb, *Sketch of Secession Times in Texas* (San Francisco, 1863), 6.

<sup>44</sup>Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 7.

San Antonio, a meeting was called for November 24 for all Breckinridge and Lane supporters to take action for the secession of the state; engineered by the KGC, it was a "cut and dried affair."<sup>45</sup>

A mass meeting at Marshall produced a resolution stating that the election of Lincoln was a violation of the spirit of the Constitution and should be resisted by the states.<sup>46</sup> During the evening the Lone Star flag was hoisted, and among the several speakers was the KGC Commander Elkanah Greer, who charged that

a more consummate piece of folly could not be committed than to wait for the North to inaugurate her withering, dishonoring, and diabolical policy. The overt act has been committed [in Lincoln's election]. Let the South speak out, or forever hold her peace.<sup>47</sup>

And, in anticipation of the secession of South Carolina, Greer tendered that state the services of his perennially available mounted regiment of Texas volunteers.

At Waco on November 16 "two companies of military" were organized, the Lone Star flag was waved from a number of buildings, and, in a torchlight procession, "'old Abe' was rode on a rail."<sup>48</sup> It was also at Waco that James Pike—who believed that "the people were either deceived into secession, lied into it, or driven into it"—saw orators "ring the Southern heart" and urging that the South secede by fair means or foul.<sup>49</sup>

Bitterly, Newcomb asserted that "in January 1861, sixty irresponsible persons, issued a call for a convention, to meet in Austin on the 28th of that month, to consider the relations of Texas

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<sup>45</sup>Anderson, *Texas, Before, and on the Eve of the Rebellion*, 14-15.

<sup>46</sup>Francis Richard Lubbock, *Six Decades in Texas*, ed. by C. W. Raines (Austin, 1900), 302. No date is given for this meeting, but the *Dallas Herald*, November 21, 1860, says that Bickley was in Marshall on November 7. Hicks has Bickley there on November 12. Hicks, "Some Letters Concerning the Knights of the Golden Circle in Texas, 1860-1861," 82-83. Thus it is likely that he was on hand for the meeting mentioned by Lubbock. If so, he must have been gratified at the secession fever generated by such speakers as W. B. Ochiltree, J. M. Clough, Eli H. Baxter, and Pendleton Murrah.

<sup>47</sup>Lubbock, *Six Decades in Texas*, 303.

<sup>48</sup>*Dallas Herald*, November 21, 1860.

<sup>49</sup>Pike, *Scout and Ranger*, 126-127, 131.

with the Union.”<sup>50</sup> Anderson claimed that a majority of these men were “clerks in the department at Austin, and, as I believe, all Knights of the Golden Circle. . . .”<sup>51</sup>

#### THE ELECTION OF DELEGATES TO THE CONVENTION

In broadside fashion, Newcomb defamed the election as follows:

This call [for an election] recommended the Chief Justises [*sic*] of the different counties, to order the opening of the polls at the different precincts, as in regular elections. This recommendation was acted on by all the justices already in the treason, and where they took no notice of it, polls were opened by the “K.G.C.”<sup>52</sup>

Corroborative of Newcomb’s charge that the election was looked upon as a farce was the assertion by Pike that the young and fanatical secessionists pushed through the election of delegate Richard Coke (later governor and United States senator) with a light vote “because no man ventured to tender his ballot without being prepared to defend it with the pistol and bowie knife.”<sup>53</sup> Pike gave the McLennan County vote as being Coke, 196, and Lewis Moore, 94, for a total of 290 votes cast. At this time there were about 1,000 free white males over twenty years of age in the county,<sup>54</sup> which means that over 29 per cent of the eligible voters cast ballots.

#### THE CONDUCT OF THE CONVENTION

Well aware of the futility of trying to trace KGC activity, Anna Irene Sandbo generalized that

to what extent, however, the order influenced the secession convention, directly or indirectly, must remain a matter of surmise. The most that one can safely say is that probably the order encouraged secession and the extension of slavery, and that it was

<sup>50</sup>Newcomb, *Secession Times in Texas*, 7.

<sup>51</sup>Anderson, *Texas, Before and on the Eve of the Rebellion*, 37.

<sup>52</sup>Newcomb, *Secession Times in Texas*, 7.

<sup>53</sup>Pike, *Scout and Ranger*, 128.

<sup>54</sup>Unless cited otherwise, all statistical materials are from the writer’s unpublished statistical study of secession times in Texas. This intensive analysis draws upon data in the United States census, published election returns, and other sources. It is an attempt to measure objectively the effect of the KGC on secession in Texas.

a factor of some importance in forming and uniting public opinion at this time.<sup>55</sup>

As an indirect blanket minimization, Ralph A. Wooster's refutation of a "great planter conspiracy" appraised the 177-man body as follows:

a comparatively early middle-aged, small slaveholding, Southern-born group, with lawyers and farmers predominating . . . a rather typical cross-section of Texas society in 1860 . . . [with] few of the great planters present.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, it must be remembered that among the 166 delegates favoring disunion there were several known Knights such as Alfred M. Hobby,<sup>57</sup> Colonel John A. Wilcox, Thomas Saltus Lubbock, and John Littleton, as well as many of the caliber of Pryor Lea, Philip N. Luckett, and George W. Chilton, who may be strongly suspected of KGC affiliation.<sup>58</sup> To smoke out the top suspects would require the compilation of great amounts of circumstantial evidence.

#### THE POPULAR VOTE ON THE SECESSION ORDINANCE

On February 23, 1861, Texans, alone among all Southerners, were afforded the opportunity of voting on the secession issue. This they did midst wild excitement and with "intimidation and violence" often replacing argument.<sup>59</sup> On March 4 the Secession Convention in adjourned session counted the votes and announced these results:

For Secession	46,129	76%
Against Secession	14,697	24%
TOTALS	60,826	100%

<sup>55</sup>Anna Irene Sanbo, "The First Session of the Secession Convention of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (October, 1914), 175.

<sup>56</sup>Ralph A. Wooster, "An Analysis of the Membership of the Texas Secession Convention," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXII (January, 1959), 327.

<sup>57</sup>Huson, *Refugio*, II, 5.

<sup>58</sup>For the list of delegates see Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 405-408. Charles A. Russell, a Knight from Helena in Karnes County, was a member of the adjourned session. *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>59</sup>Charles William Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas* (New York, 1910), 19. O. M. Roberts knew there were wrongs and outrages committed, but he believed that only a minority wanted to stay in the Union. Roberts, "The Experiences of an Unrecognized Senator," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, XII (October, 1908), 107.

Thus, in view of ratification by a large majority, the convention declared that Texas "was and had been since March 2nd A.D. 1861, a free, sovereign and independent nation of the earth . . . ." This announcement was responded to by "joyous cheering" and the Lone Star banner, which was placed upon the dome of the capitol, was "saluted by a discharge of artillery."<sup>60</sup>

Almost immediately, unionists charged that the vote was a reflection of minority sentiment. To some extent, this thought has persisted ever since among unionist sympathizers. In explaining the passage of the ordinance, the minority vote theorists have presented the following reasons: the unionists were relatively unorganized; rural voters were not exposed to the excitement in the towns and hence did not cast ballots; the secessionists, who "for the most part" controlled the machinery of election, committed unfair and fraudulent acts; many unionists were kept from the polls by intimidation; by election day, portions of the state had already been seized by the Committee on Public Safety (an organ of the Secession Convention); and unionists chroniclers—with exaggeration and fabrication—sought to shroud the results sinisterly by implicating the KGC. Anderson, for example, erroneously stated that KGC acts had so cowed the voting population that only half voted;<sup>61</sup> whereas, to the contrary, the aggregate vote compared very favorably to the previous state election. It was just forty-nine votes shy of the total cast in the hotly contested gubernatorial election of 1859. Moreover, in the 122 counties reporting, a majority of the qualified voters cast ballots. It would seem that, on the surface at least, the vote on the secession ordinance was democratically sound.

To find evidence of possible KGC influence, it might be rewarding to analyze closely the vote in the twenty-seven "KGC Counties"—those known to have castles. Indeed, the prospects are encouraging because of characteristics of the population. The KGC counties had 36 per cent of the state's slaves and 44 per cent of the Germans, or antislavery population. Also, each KGC county had a slave population, and almost half of the counties had

<sup>60</sup>Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 88, 88n. For different figures on the election returns, see Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas*, 19.

<sup>61</sup>Anderson, *Texas, Before, and on the Eve of the Rebellion*, 50.



a significant German population. Twenty-two of the counties gave majorities "for" secession. Five gave majorities "against" secession.<sup>62</sup>

Hypothesizing, it would seem that in a given county a combination of many slaves and few Germans would be reflected in a high "for" vote. Conversely, a county with a low percentage

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<sup>62</sup>See Table 2. For the purposes of this study, the best source for the number of eligible voters in 1861 was the number of free, white males over twenty years of age as enumerated in the United States Census of 1860. Also, according to the census, almost half of the foreign born population of Texas were Germans. These Germans were concentrated heavily in certain counties; hence, in these counties the terms "foreign born" and "German" are practically synonymous. See Olmsted's estimate of the German population by counties in 1857, *A Journey Through Texas*, 428-429, and Bieseles estimate of 1860 in Rudolph Leopold Bieseles, *The History of the German Settlements in Texas, 1831-1861* (Austin, 1930), 62, 64. Twenty-eight per cent of the foreign born population were Mexicans. These, too, were concentrated geographically, mainly along the Rio Grande border. Hence, in spite of the fact that Olmsted estimated that one thousand or more Germans lived in the Rio Grande counties, in several of these border counties "foreign born" is synonymous with "Mexican." General Bickley and his knights were not known to be active in these border counties, but four of the counties gave strong support to secession. The percentages of voters for secession were as follows: Cameron, 94.0; El Paso, 99.8; Webb, 100.0; Zapata, 100.0. Probably there were more than twenty-seven counties with KGC castles. For example, Young, McLennan, and Comanche counties can be suspected. Pike, *Scout and Ranger*, 124, 127-128, and 135-136. These counties favored secession, too, as did most KGC counties. The "for" secession vote percentages were as follows: Young, 84.0; McLennan, 75.0; and Comanche, 95.0.

To this day, rumors persist that Orange County had a castle. The vote there was truly KGC in character—98.0 per cent for secession, with only 29.8 per cent of the eligible voters voting—vote restriction perhaps? But no documentation has been found to substantiate KGC activity in this East Texas county.

Although Samuel Mather of Gabriel Mills (Williamson County) worked with and for the Knights and was extremely important to Bickley, there is no specific evidence that he established a castle in his home county. See Hicks, "Some Letters Concerning the Knights of the Golden Circle in Texas, 1860-1861," 83, 86. Even if he did, it was not successful because Williamson County failed to support secession. Only 42.0 per cent voted "for." Heading the anti-secession fight in Williamson County was Taylor Smith, who proclaimed that "Liberty will rule my place." William L. Mann, "Early History of Williamson County," *Williamson County Centennial, 1848-1948* (Georgetown, 1948), 30.

In addition to Williamson County, eighteen other Texas counties (including five KGC counties) failed to support secession. It is probable that the German element was a factor in nine of these. Another eight counties were in the northern part of the state, an area notably not pro-Southern. Although one of these North Texas counties, Collin, had a KGC castle, the citizens turned thumbs down on secession. The extremely low "for" vote (30.0 per cent) may have reflected the influence of J. W. Throckmorton. It was he who represented Collin County in the Secession Convention and openly sought to keep Texas in the Union.

of slaves and a high proportion of Germans would have a low "for" vote.

KGC influence would be suggested by a high "for" vote in counties with few slaves and many Germans or by an extremely

TABLE 2. SECESSION STRENGTH IN TWENTY-SEVEN KGC COUNTIES

COUNTIES	VOTE ON SECESSION				COUNTY POPULATION			
	NUMBER		PER CENT		SLAVES		FOREIGN BORN	
	FOR	AGAINST	FOR	VOTING	NUMBER	PER CENT	NUMBER	PER CENT
Atascosa . . . .	145	91	61.0	59.9	107	0.7	229	14.5
Bastrop . . . . .	335	352	49.0	63.4	2591	37.0	700	10.0
Bexar* . . . . .	919	730	56.0	42.0	1395	10.0	5283	36.5
Brazos . . . . .	215	44	83.0	54.5	1063	38.0	43	0.4
Burleson . . . .	422	84	83.0	56.7	2003	35.0	103	0.2
Cherokee . . . .	1106	38	97.0	59.9	3246	27.0	42	0.3
Collin . . . . .	405	948	30.0	69.3	1047	11.0	60	0.6
Colorado . . . .	584	330	64.0	72.5	3559	45.0	1166	14.8
Comal . . . . .	239	86	73.0	34.4	193	5.0	2186	54.2
Dallas . . . . .	741	237	76.0	50.7	1074	12.0	196	2.3
Ellis . . . . .	527	172	75.0	66.8	1104	21.0	38	0.7
Fayette . . . . .	580	626	48.0	60.6	3786	33.0	2027	17.5
Gonzales . . . .	802	80	91.0	67.9	3168	39.0	208	2.6
Grimes . . . . .	907	9	99.0	69.5	5468	53.0	275	2.7
Guadalupe . . .	314	22	93.0	37.6	1748	32.0	740	13.6
Harris . . . . .	1084	144	88.0	52.4	2053	22.0	2221	24.5
Harrison . . . .	886	44	95.0	59.8	8784	59.0	208	1.4
Hopkins . . . . .	697	315	69.0	66.6	990	13.0	27	0.4
Karnes . . . . .	153	1	99.0	29.8	327	15.0	458	21.1
Marion . . . . .	467	None	100.0	76.9	2017	51.0	106	2.7
Medina . . . . .	140	207	40.0	73.4	106	6.0	824	44.8
Milam . . . . .	468	135	78.0	68.4	1542	30.0	76	1.5
Refugio . . . . .	142	14	91.0	46.3	234	15.0	165	10.3
Robertson . . .	391	76	84.0	70.4	2258	45.0	74	1.5
Travis . . . . .	450	704	39.0	87.2	3136	39.0	560	6.9
Walker . . . . .	490	61	89.0	48.4	4135	51.0	166	2.0
Washington . .	1131	43	96.0	58.2	7941	52.0	1251	8.2

\*Includes figures from Wilson County which was created (from Bexar and Karnes) and organized in 1860.

high "for" vote in counties with many slaves and few Germans. Also, KGC influence might be suspected in cases of vote restriction, i.e., a low turnout of eligible voters in counties casting a high "for" vote.

At first glance, nothing seems amiss. With 32 per cent of the state's eligible voters, the KGC counties cast 32 per cent of the total vote—a perfect turnout and certainly not indicative of vote restriction. Also, with 36 per cent of the state's slave population, the KGC counties cast 30 per cent of the total "for" vote. This suggests that, as might be expected, the voters cast ballots for secession, thinking that this would protect their investment in slaves. In other words, they merely "voted their slaves." The figures below bear this out: the twenty-two "for" counties had higher percentages of slaves and lower percentages of Germans than the five "against" counties.

	"For" Counties	"Against" Counties
Germans	10.0	16.0
Slaves	30.0	25.0

The hypothesis is borne out further by the results of a Spearman rank order correlation<sup>88</sup> which reveals a positive correlation (.728) between "for" votes and the proportion of slaves in the "for" counties. Moreover, specific evidence exists in the statistics of Guadalupe and Comal counties. These neighboring KGC counties were significantly populated with Germans, but Guadalupe, with a smaller proportion of Germans and a larger proportion of slaves, had a higher percentage of "for" votes.

<sup>88</sup>Charles Spearman's rank method of correlation is used to correlate two ordinal scales by "... taking the differences of ranks [from two sets of scores], squaring these differences and then adding, and finally manipulating the measure so that its value will be +1.0 whenever the rankings are in perfect agreement, -1.0 if they are in perfect disagreement, and zero if there is no relationship whatsoever." Herbert Arkin and Raymond R. Colton, *Statistical Methods* (New York, 1939), 85; Abraham N. Franzblau, *A Primer of Statistics for Non-Statisticians* (New York, 1958), 64; Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *Social Statistics* (New York, 1960), 317-318. The Spearman method is involved and laborious, but it is also satisfactory. This author's statistical study on the KGC was based on only twenty counties known to have had castles. The seven counties not included in the findings are Brazos, Burleson, Gonzales, Karnes, Marion, Milam, and Robertson.

	Guadalupe County	Comal County
Germans	13.6	54.2
Slaves	32.0	5.0
"For" Vote	93.0	73.0

But is this difference explicable only by slaves and Germans, or was, perhaps, the Guadalupe KGC more effective? This question is germane because the voting-the-slaves theory is not borne out in the comparison of two other KGC counties. Bastrop and Refugio counties had equal proportions of Germans, yet Refugio, with a smaller percentage of slaves, cast a much higher proportion of "for" votes.

	Bastrop County	Refugio County
Germans	10.0	10.3
Slaves	37.0	15.0
"For" Vote	49.0	91.0

Could it be that the Refugio KGC was stronger and more active? Certainly this is quite possible in view of the caliber of Knights in the area. But it also seems that KGC influence is substantiated by additional percentage statistics:

	Voters Voting	"For" Vote
Bastrop	63.0	49.0
Refugio	46.0	91.0
Comal	34.0	73.0
Guadalupe	38.0	93.0

As indicated above, the three counties giving substantial margins "for" secession had much smaller turnouts of eligible voters than Bastrop County, which gave a majority "against." Voter restriction is quite evident in the Karnes County record where only 29.8 per cent of the eligible voters turned out. The returns showed 153 votes "for" and one vote "against."

Voter restriction is suggested further by comparing the twenty-two "for" counties—strongly KGC—with the five "against," or weak KGC counties. On an average in the "for" counties, a cut back of 15 per cent in the turnout of eligible voters was accompanied by an increased "for" vote of over 40 per cent.

	Voters Voting	"For" Vote
"For" Counties	56.0	84.0
"Against" Counties	71.0	41.0
State	56.0	76.0

As a validation of this tendency, a Spearman rank order correlation shows a negative relationship of (.600) between the "for" votes and the eligible voters who cast ballots. Also, the above figures seem to offer evidence of the KGC's strength. Whereas the "for" counties had an average turnout equaling the state average, the "for" vote was in excess by 8 per cent.

KGC influence comes quickly into focus by comparing two counties in the heart of the German belt, Comal and Gillespie. Both were heavily populated with Germans. The former had a KGC unit; the latter did not. The presence of slaves was a negligible factor in that both counties had low percentages. Actually, Comal had higher percentages of both slaves and Germans. But the percentage of turnout at the polls was much less in the KGC county and the "for" vote was dramatically greater. In this case, the percentage figures indicate quite clearly that the KGC restricted the vote drastically in favor of the secession ordinance.

	Comal County	Gillespie County
Germans	54.2	50.0
Slaves	5.0	1.0
Voters Voting	34.0	61.0
"For" Vote	73.0	4.0

#### SEIZURE OF THE STATE

Knights participated on February 18, 1861, in the action causing the surrender of the United States garrison in San Antonio. The yielding of the garrison—a bloodless event, except that one double barrel shot gun slipped from a horse, discharged, and wounded seven men—saw the removal of United States troops from the city and the confiscation of Federal property worth one and a quarter million dollars. The Commissioners of the Committee on Public Safety had

called in the aid of the volunteer force under Col. Ben McCulloch; he arrived on the Salado [Creek], five miles from this city, on the

evening or night of the 16th inst, with about 500 men, and marched into town about 4 o'clock, A. M., with about one half of his force, when he was joined by about 150 K. G. C.'s and about the same number of citizens who were not members of the order, and about the same number from the Medina, Atascosa and the country west of the city.<sup>64</sup>

The companies identifiable as KGC, with their commanders, were as follows:

San Antonio Castle, Col. [John A.] Wilcox  
Charles Bickley Castle [San Antonio], Capt. [Trevanion T.] Teel  
Pleasanton Castle, Capt. Walker  
New Braunfels Castle, Capt. Thomas  
Seguin Castle, Capt. Herron  
Castroville Castle, Capt. [James] Paul<sup>65</sup>

One observer recorded that early in the morning of February 16, a man named Edgar, who was a clerk in the Quartermaster Department, headed up some city Knights who surrounded and captured the Federal Arsenal and Quartermaster Department in the Alamo.<sup>66</sup> This was possibly the same Edgar—Captain W. M. Edgar—whose Alamo City Guards, on March 4, under orders of the Commissioners of Public Safety, seized the public funds en route from the coast to San Antonio.<sup>67</sup>

The Dallas *Herald*, reporting that it was a Captain Reynolds who gave up the Alamo, added

hurrah for independent Texas. Hurrah for the noble band of K's GC who in the hour of need, prooved [*sic*] themselves so prompt in striking for the rights of the South! Hurrah for Texas and the Southern Confederacy.<sup>68</sup>

Estimates of the number of armed participants ran as high as "no less than 1200."<sup>69</sup> The main plaza looked like a vast military

<sup>64</sup>Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 274. See also New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February 26, 1861.

<sup>65</sup>Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 277, quoting Austin *State Gazette*, March 9, 1861.

<sup>66</sup>Newcomb, *Secession Times in Texas*, 11.

<sup>67</sup>Winkler (ed.), *Journal of the Secession Convention*, 286.

<sup>68</sup>Dallas *Herald*, February 27, 1861. This item is datelined San Antonio, February 16, an error.

<sup>69</sup>New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February 26, 1861, quotes the San Antonio *Ledger*, February 18, 1861, as saying the streets were crowded, but without drunks and disorder.

camp when Colonel Robert E. Lee arrived later in the day. He was shocked to see the milling mass of "McCulloch's Men" with their red insignias on coats and shirts. "I shall never forget," said Mrs. Caroline Baldwin Darrow, "his look of astonishment, as with his lips trembling and his eyes full of tears, he exclaimed, 'Has it come so soon as this?'"<sup>70</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Lee's "sense of propriety" was shaken greatly when the Commissioners—Phillip N. Luckett, Samuel A. Maverick, and Thomas J. Devine—promised to guarantee safe passage for him and his luggage if he would then and there resign his commission in the United States Army and take one under Confederate authority.<sup>71</sup> The worried and agitated colonel changed to civilian clothes, paced the floor all night, and prayed. As a neutral, he stayed in town for one week and upon leaving San Antonio made the remark, "When I get to Virginia I think the world will have one soldier less. I shall resign and go to planting corn."<sup>72</sup>

Early in March, while Knights elsewhere allegedly sought to assassinate Lincoln, "either on his journey to the Capitol or during the ceremony of inauguration,"<sup>73</sup> several Texas Knights were under orders, or awaiting orders, to occupy the extensive network of government posts in the state. Among those thus engaged were Sergeant C. Denman, with one corporal and fifteen men, Fort Stockton; Lt. J. C. Moody, with one corporal and fifteen privates, Fort Lancaster; Sergeant T. L. Wilson, with one corporal and fifteen privates, Camp Hudson; Capt. Trevanion T. Teel, with fifteen privates, Fort Duncan; and Lt. James Paul, with twenty-five mounted men, Camp Verde.<sup>74</sup> In the middle of March, R. H.

<sup>70</sup>Caroline Baldwin Darrow, "Recollections of the Twiggs Surrender," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, ed. by Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (4 vols.; New York, 1887-1888), I, 33-39.

<sup>71</sup>Carl Coke Rister, *Robert E. Lee in Texas* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1946), 158-159. See also Anderson, *Texas, Before, and on the Eve of the Rebellion*, 49.

<sup>72</sup>Darrow, "Recollections of the Twiggs Surrender," 36n.

<sup>73</sup>K. G. C.: *An Authentic Exposition of the Origin, Objects, and Secret Work of the Organization Known as the Knights of the Golden Circle* ([Washington?], 1862), 10; hereafter cited as *K. G. C.: An Authentic Exposition*. A copy of this rare pamphlet is in the Archives of the Texas State Library. See also *An Authentic Exposition*, 34-35.

<sup>74</sup>Winkler (ed.), *A Journal of the Secession Convention*, 305.

Williams, who joined Paul's encampment on the Medina River (about the middle of March), stated that there were about forty well armed members of the contingent, all of them "in high spirits and eager for a fight."<sup>75</sup>

A fitting *coup de grace* was executed about midnight on May 13 when ". . . a mob of 'Knights of the Golden Circle' and rangers, broke open my office [the office of the San Antonio *Alamo Express*], destroyed the press and material and then set fire to the building . . . [thus ended] the last Union paper in Texas."<sup>76</sup>

Jubilantly, the *Southern Confederacy* reported that

the *Express* has ceased its vile abuses of the South and the Southern Confederacy. We are astonished that the good people of San Antonio allowed that abolition sheet to live as long as it has. If we get clear of a few more in the same way, Texas will be free of incendiary newspapers. Won't Mr. Newcomb see the error of his way now?<sup>77</sup>

To save his skin, Newcomb "high-tailed it" for the border, but his convictions were not as shaken as his courage, for he reiterated that,

if there be any certainty in Heaven or on earth, the present Southern Confederacy must perish—it is founded on no principle of liberty or right—it is the work of satanic ambition, and terrible will be its end.<sup>78</sup>

Seizing Texas was not only the most effective but probably the last overt act of the original KGC as an identifiable collectivity. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the group had, to a certain

<sup>75</sup>R. H. Williams, *With the Border Ruffians* (London, 1907), 165-166. Williams was a member of the San Antonio Lodge of the KGC. *Ibid.*, 159-160. Paul, an officer of the KGC at Castroville, Medina County, Texas, was later (1861-1863) private secretary of Governor Francis Richard Lubbock. Sam Lanham to R. S. D., February 13, 1959. There is no documentation of Governor Lubbock's KGC ties, although in addition to his secretary, he was surrounded by Knights. His brothers, Thomas S. and John B. were active Knights.

<sup>76</sup>Newcomb, *Secession Times in Texas*, 12. Newcomb returned to Texas in 1867, continued his newspaper career, promoted the Republican Party, and served as secretary of state under Governor E. J. Davis. Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, II, 275.

<sup>77</sup>*Southern Confederacy* (Seguin, Texas), May 17, 1861.

<sup>78</sup>Newcomb, *Secession Times in Texas*, 12.



extent, fulfilled its secondary purpose. Certainly, with troubles closer to heart and home, the dream of a golden, tropical, circular empire faded away as all dreams do. While it is true that some units may have volunteered *in toto*—in keeping with obligations of the first degree “. . . we hold it to be our duty to offer our services to any Southern State to repel a Northern army,”<sup>79</sup> but, by and large, the Knights surrendered their identities in the ranks of the Confederate Army, individually. Elkanah Greer, at long last, was given the nod for military endeavors. He received the first colonelcy to a Texan from the provisional government at Montgomery, Alabama. His Third Texas Cavalry Regiment, in which George W. Chilton served as major, was a distinguished unit of Ross' Texas Cavalry Brigade.<sup>80</sup> Other prominent Knights in the service included Major Alfred M. Hobby (8th Texas Infantry Battalion), Dr. George Cupples (First Surgeon, 7th Regiment, Texas Mounted Volunteers), Lt. Colonel Samuel J. Richardson (Morgan's Texas Cavalry Regiment), and Captain Trevanion T. Teel (Teel's Texas Battery).<sup>81</sup>

Some claim that the KGC was organized in every northern state as “an auxiliary of the Southern Rebellion” to foment the fifth column activity which plagued the Yankees during the war.<sup>82</sup> For a time, not only the name but some of the forms and symbols of the KGC were used in conjunction with these treasonable organizations. At other times, they came to be referred to as the Order of American Knights, the Sons of Liberty, the Copperhead Movement, the Northwest Conspiracy, the Peace Party, and so on. Unconfirmed reports of sporadic use of “KGC” cropped up for

<sup>79</sup>“K. G. C. Obligations of the First Degree,” in *Louisville Journal*, July 18, 1861. It is believed that a Dr. A. A. Urban furnished the secrets for the newspaper. Major J. M. Wright to Brigadier General N. C. McLean, August 16, 1863, Bickley Papers.

<sup>80</sup>For a biographical sketch, see Victor M. Rose, *Ross' Texas Brigade . . .* (Louisville, 1881), 140-141.

<sup>81</sup>Lester N. Fitzhugh, *Texas Batteries, Battalions, Regiments, Commanders and Field Officers, Confederate States Army, 1861-1865* (Midlothian, Texas, 1959). Sketches of Cupples and A. M. Hobby are in Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, I, 447, 818.

<sup>82</sup>K. G. C.: *An Authentic Exposition*, 11. On August 28, 1861, the businessmen of San Francisco stated that there were sixteen thousand Knights of the Golden Circle in California. Richard Orton (comp.), *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1867* (Sacramento, 1890), 27.

years following the War, even as far afield as West Texas and the Territory of Oklahoma.<sup>83</sup>

As of March 1, 1861, the KGC headquarters was moved from San Antonio to Montgomery, Alabama, but Charles Bickley, a nephew of George, gave notice that all Texas applicants should contact George Cupples in San Antonio.<sup>84</sup>

After leaving Texas, George Bickley briefly engaged in secession activity in Kentucky before settling down in his native Virginia. His work was evidently effective, for one citizen of Louisville related that the 3,000 Knights there ". . . have had much more to do with the organization and support of the present rebellion than has been generally supposed," and the *Louisville Journal* said that the group "is now and has all along been the central sun of the secession party of Kentucky."<sup>85</sup>

Then, in July of 1863, as a Confederate surgeon, Bickley, with his wife, was arrested behind the Union lines in Indiana. It is not known what he was up to, but—referring to him as "Morgan's Spy"—some observers tried to link him with the bravura raid of Colonel John Hunt Morgan.<sup>86</sup> Regardless, Bickley was held and imprisoned as the chief of the subversive KGC, an officer of the rebel army, and a dangerous character. He was never tried and was not released from prison until October 14, 1865. At the age of forty-seven—dispirited and broken—he died in August, 1867.

Throughout his incarceration Bickley tried to play ignorant and innocent, but KGC papers were found in his captured trunk; and from Mrs. Bickley's under-clothing, female detectives removed the KGC star, the KGC seal, and other incriminating articles. Among the papers was an interesting picture of the KGC flag inscribed "Mexico and a United South." Another noteworthy document, signed by Bickley on December 14, 1862, in Bristol,

<sup>83</sup>For an example, see Webb, *Texas Rangers*, 339.

<sup>84</sup>Dallas *Herald*, February 20, 1861, quoting KGC General Order No. 31 as printed in the San Antonio *Herald*.

<sup>85</sup>*Louisville Journal*, July 18, 1861; *K. G. C.: An Authentic Exposition*, 9. An unidentified newspaper clipping in the Archives of the Texas State Library concerning the KGC states that the Kentucky Legislature passed a law against the KGC with a one to five-year prison term set as the penalty for KGC membership.

<sup>86</sup>See especially the report on Bickley by Larz [?] Anderson, Cincinnati, July 8, 1863, Bickley Papers.

Tennessee, contained a brief autobiography with this incredible statement:

I was thrown on the world penniless and friendless; yet with great energy I educated myself and rose to eminence in the profession of medicine. I have written many books, and vast quantities [of] minor essays on all conceivable subjects. I have built up practical secession and inaugurated the greatest war of modern times.<sup>87</sup>

Was this just more egocentrism? Or, was this the truth for a change? On the basis of currently available sources, it is obvious that, genetically, the KGC was a reflection of the times when men could feel but could not think. At best, the group was more an impression than an expression. Its essence therefore is not discernible *per se* in the visible or tangible world of acts branded "KGC." Its vita are embedded in the subtle, silent abyss of opinion, and they will be rectifiable only through research that is exhaustive as well as intensive. To effect any sort of an organic incarnation of the group, researchers will have to roll up their sleeves and dig into the scattered grass-roots archives of the local KGC chapters and then possibly a correlation of the secret KGC membership lists with participants in documented events will reveal the true deeds and dreams of this lost corps of double-lived Southern patriots.

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<sup>87</sup>Autobiographical sketch dated Bristol, Tennessee, December 14, 1862, and signed "Geo. W. L. Bickley, M.D.," Bickley Papers.