

APPLETON OAKSMITH, FILIBUSTER AGENT

By JOHN J. TEPASKE*

No phase of the manifest-destiny movement created more excitement in the American press than the Nicaraguan expedition of the filibuster William Walker.¹ In this, "the most audacious piece of unofficial imperialism in the history of American foreign politics,"² Walker planned to establish a Central American empire that would ultimately include Spanish Cuba. Whether Walker's conquests were, like Texas, to be annexed to the Union is conjectural, but in the United States he had many adherents. Of these none labored more earnestly to organize American support for the Nicaraguan undertaking than Appleton Oaksmith, the filibuster's chief agent during 1856.

Oaksmith's place in this enterprise has received little attention. In his own narrative Walker fails to recognize this ambitious manipulator, who became his chief diplomat,³ supply agent, recruiter, and financier in the United States. Oaksmith's papers have lain in the musty, termite-ridden attic of his North Carolina home for almost eighty years. Their discovery now reveals Oaksmith's vital importance to the Walker cause and brings to light new information about filibuster organization and techniques during this restless era.

A brief narrative of Oaksmith's kaleidoscopic career will best explain the underlying motives for his participation in Walker's venture.

He was born on St. Valentine's Day of 1827 in Portland,

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¹ The standard work on Walker's expedition is W. O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers* (New York, 1916), hereinafter cited as Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*. Walker's own account, *War in Nicaragua* (Mobile, 1860), is the best military narrative.

² Quoted from Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1823-1867* (Baltimore, 1933), 230.

³ Oaksmith's diplomatic activities constitute a separate story, but his duties as Minister Plenipotentiary of Nicaragua to the United States took much of his time and effort during the summer and fall of 1856.

Maine.⁴ Although he had no formal education, he learned from his cultured mother, who taught him four languages and stimulated his interest in the arts and sciences.⁵ In 1843 he added to these already varied studies by sailing to the Orient. Two years later he returned to the new family home in New York City.

By 1845 travel and reading had developed the eighteen-year-old Oaksmith into an urbane man of experience, but they did not prevent a costly involvement with a charming New York woman. Debts incurred during this affair became so oppressive that they caused his hurried departure for Panama in 1847.⁶ Here he spent three uneventful years as a shipping agent. Unhappy in the tropics, Oaksmith then went to San Francisco to pursue the same occupation. He also became a leading member of a vigilance committee, established after the great fire of 1851 to deal with lawlessness in the devastated city.

His shipping agency was a dismal failure. He therefore bought a small ship with money obtained from a law suit and in 1851 put to sea. He visited Mexico, Peru, Brazil, and finally Africa, where he evidently hoped to secure a cargo of slaves.⁷ As he sailed up the Congo River in June, 1852, hostile natives attacked his ship. Luckily for the har-

⁴ His father was Seba Smith, a Portland newspaper editor; his mother was Elizabeth Oakes Prince Smith, a poet and writer. Both achieved prominence in mid-nineteenth century American literary circles. See the sketch of Elizabeth Oakes Prince Smith by Louise M. Moore and Robert W. Bolwell, and of Seba Smith by Mary Alice Wyman, Dumas Malone and Others, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: 20 volumes and index [with Supplementary Volumes XXI and XXII], 1928-), XVII, 260-261 and 345-346 respectively. See also Mary Alice Wyman, *Selections from the Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes Smith* (Lewiston, 1924), and *Two American Pioneers* (New York, 1926). The manuscript autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes Smith is in the Elizabeth Oakes Smith Collection, New York Public Library. Appleton received his first name from a former president of Bowdoin College, of which his father was an alumnus. He adopted the name Oaksmith early in his career to have a more distinguished title for his business activities.

⁵ *Weekly Record* (Beaufort), November 18, 1887.

⁶ Journal of Appleton Oaksmith, Acapulco, Mexico, April 18, 1851. Appleton Oaksmith Papers, Manuscript Division, Duke University Library, Durham, hereinafter cited as Oaksmith Papers.

⁷ Despite Oaksmith's vigorous denials, the suspicion of Brazilian officials that his ship was a slaver, his own failure to denote the intended cargo, and the native attack on his ship all lead to the conclusion that he was seeking slaves. For Oaksmith's denials see Journal of Appleton Oaksmith, At Sea, April 26, 1852, Oaksmith Papers.

assed Oaksmith, a nearby British man-of-war intervened at the last moment and beat back the savages.⁸ This incident, however, forced him to leave Africa without his intended cargo. Late in 1852, after a stop in Haiti, he returned to New York.

A more sedentary life proved less exciting but more profitable for Oaksmith. In New York he established another shipping firm and became immediately successful, but this prosperity lasted only a short time. In 1855 he became enmeshed in the abortive Quitman scheme to supply Cuban revolutionists with arms and ammunition.⁹ A year later his activities on behalf of William Walker entangled him in even deeper financial troubles, wiping out whatever wealth and reputation he may have acquired before 1855. From 1857 to 1861 he became successively a magazine editor, railroad speculator, and paper mill owner.

Oaksmith also drifted into politics and became an active member of New York's Tammany Hall. Working through this organization, he and others arranged mass meetings to work up support for Walker in 1856.¹⁰ Later in 1861 he became a leader of Tammany's Union League—a committee of New York Democrats seeking peaceful solutions to sectional problems. As one of three commissioners appointed by the League, Oaksmith was to discuss grievances with leading southern statesmen and consider conciliatory proposals.¹¹ Unfortunately, he and his two cohorts never carried out their charge. War broke out in April, 1861, forcing the League to abandon its plans.

Oaksmith's return to the shipping business at the beginning of the Civil War marked his investment in another illicit enterprise. In the fall of 1861, he outfitted a slaver in Boston, hotbed of New England abolitionism. Not even a pro-slave

⁸ Journal of Appleton Oaksmith, off Shark's Point on the Congo River, June 27, 1852, Oaksmith Papers.

⁹ Oaksmith's part in this venture is set forth in the Journal of Appleton Oaksmith, May 26, 1855-October 18, 1855, Oaksmith Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Oaksmith Collection.

¹⁰ See the *New York Herald*, May 10 and May 24, 1856, and the discussion of the episodes below.

¹¹ Copy of credentials given to Appleton Oaksmith by the Union League, New York, January 28, 1861, Oaksmith Papers.

speech in Old North Church could have created more of a stir, and in December he was indicted for his part in the venture. Imprisoned at Fort Lafayette, he had nine months to mull over his indiscretion while awaiting trial. In the meantime, however, with the help of friends who bribed his guards, Oaksmith escaped to Portland, Maine, where he was sheltered by his maternal grandmother.¹² Here he stayed until late in 1863 when he left for England.

In England he became captain of a blockade runner. Sailing between Liverpool and Galveston, Texas, Oaksmith provided the Confederacy with English guns and ammunition in return for southern cotton. His first voyage early in 1864 was without incident, but on his second trip later in the year, a fast Union frigate overtook him near Galveston. He ultimately had to abandon his ship and its valuable cargo, escaping in a small boat. After some time spent floating in the Gulf of Mexico, he reached Tampico and from there got passage back to England.¹³

Oaksmith could not return to the United States at the close of the war because of the Boston slave-trading charge still pending against him. Thus he remained in England where he continued to make his living as a sea captain. In 1869, however, he left this nomadic life to become associate editor of the London *Cosmopolitan*. During the Franco-Prussian War, he went to France as correspondent for the London *Globe*.¹⁴ At the same time, he helped draw up a plan to furnish military and naval supplies to the embattled French.¹⁵ Again, whatever hopes he entertained for quick profits vanished. The French surrendered before the plan could be put into effect.

Oaksmith was nostalgic for the United States after eight long years in a foreign land. Hoping the passions of war had

¹² *Boston Herald*, January 6, 1862, and the *Raleigh News*, July 11, 1879, which prints an account of the *Boston Herald*, September 11, 1862.

¹³ The details of the escape were provided by Oaksmith's daughters, Mrs. Dorothy Agrillo and Miss Geraldine Oaksmith in an interview in Brooklyn, New York, April 13, 1952.

¹⁴ Articles written by Oaksmith for both the *Cosmopolitan* and the *Globe* may be found in a scrapbook in the Oaksmith Papers.

¹⁵ Agreement over the formation of the William Frear Company, London, December 12, 1870, Oaksmith Papers.

cooled, he and his family left England in June, 1872, on Oaksmith's vessel, the "Troubadour." A few months later he dropped anchor in Beaufort Harbor, North Carolina. On the outskirts of nearby Morehead City, he and his family made their home.

The slave-trading affair still hung ominously over him, and early in 1873 he went to Washington in an effort to erase the stigma of this unfortunate act. The story of this visit is still circulated in the Morehead City area. Oaksmith, it appears, obtained a personal interview with President Grant without disclosing his true identity. After a short conference, Grant signed a pardon for him. When the President asked why he pleaded so earnestly for this man, Oaksmith smugly replied, "Because I am Appleton Oaksmith."¹⁶ Thus absolved, he returned to North Carolina.

As his first southern business venture he accepted the general managership of the Midland North Carolina Railway Company. This organization hoped to build a railroad from Knoxville, Tennessee, across North Carolina to a proposed terminus in Beaufort.¹⁷ As spokesman for the company, Oaksmith went before the House of Representatives in Raleigh in February, 1873, but failed to persuade skeptical legislators to finance the railway.¹⁸ A visit to England for the same purpose later in the year proved equally unrewarding.¹⁹ Returning to Beaufort, he resigned his post with the railroad early in 1874.²⁰

After this business failure Oaksmith entered local politics. In 1874 he won election to the North Carolina House of Representatives on the Republican ticket, which opposed the Ku-Klux Klan. In the House he introduced a bill authorizing his Carteret County constituents to compromise their

¹⁶ This account was related by Mr. Leslie Davis of Beaufort, in an interview on December 14, 1951.

¹⁷ The Midland North Carolina Railway Company Charter, New Bern, February 12, 1873, Oaksmith Papers.

¹⁸ John Morehead to Appleton Oaksmith, Charlotte, February 23, 1873, Oaksmith Papers.

¹⁹ Oaksmith wrote glowing accounts of economic possibilities in North Carolina. See the article by him entitled, "North Carolina and Her Future," *Cosmopolitan* (London), August 28, 1873.

²⁰ Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors, Midland North Carolina Railway Company, New Bern, April 9, 1874, Oaksmith Papers.

state debts.²¹ He also introduced and was instrumental in the passage of a bill repealing the Beaufort town charter.²² Otherwise his term in the House merited little attention, and he did not return to Raleigh for another term.

Failure, sickness, and tragedy highlighted Oaksmith's last years. In an effort to contest Wilmington's monopoly of North Carolina shipping, he proposed the dredging of the Neuse River and Beaufort Harbor.²³ He also advocated the erection of dry docks in the Morehead City area.²⁴ Another far-sighted plan called for the development of nearby beaches into resort playgrounds.²⁵ Oaksmith schemed and connived to see these projects through, but lack of financial backing, an unreceptive populace, and restricting malaria attacks frustrated him at every turn. Only through the labor of his devoted wife Augusta, who operated a small ships' store on the shores of Beaufort Harbor, was his family able to survive.

Hand in hand with business setbacks came severe attacks of malaria.²⁶ The tragic drowning of his four daughters on a holiday outing in 1879 only weakened him more and upset his already precarious mental and physical balance.²⁷ In 1886 care by specialists in New York City evidently cured him of his recurring malady, and he returned to North Carolina.²⁸ The next year, however, he suffered another seizure, this time accompanied by paralysis. He again went to New York for treatment but failed to recover. Oaksmith died there on October 29, 1887.

Underlying motives, in any case, are difficult to determine. Yet a brief look at Oaksmith's varied career indicates that

²¹ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at its Session of 1874-'75* (Raleigh, 1875), 252-253, hereinafter cited *Journal of the House, 1874-'75*.

²² *Journal of the House, 1874-'75*, 507, 535-536.

²³ Appleton Oaksmith to the United States Engineer's Office at Norfolk, Hollywood, August 24, 1878, Oaksmith Papers.

²⁴ Contract for the establishment of the Beaufort Marine Railway Company, New York, November 12, 1877, Oaksmith Papers.

²⁵ Appleton Oaksmith to J. W. Seligman, Hollywood, July 30, 1879, Oaksmith Papers.

²⁶ Alvin Oaksmith to Appleton Oaksmith, Patchogue, June 8, 1877, Oaksmith Papers.

²⁷ Appleton Oaksmith to Zebulon Vance, Hollywood, December 9, 1879, Oaksmith Papers.

²⁸ Appleton Oaksmith to Elizabeth Oakes Smith, New York, August 15, 1886, Oaksmith Collection. This letter describes his stay in New York.

association with the Nicaraguan enterprise was entirely in keeping with his character. Time after time his impetuosity threw him into similar activities in many corners of the world. Imaginative but questionable schemes with possibilities of big profits inevitably attracted him, whether these were supplying a filibuster with guns and equipment, fitting out a slaver, or running a blockade. As an experienced sea captain and dealer in supplies, he could realize high profits should his dangerous investments prove successful. Quick to gamble, Oaksmith surely loved the excitement surrounding his adventures. A less apparent but significant motive for his filibuster predilection was his drive for fame. Walker's victory in Nicaragua would have assured him an important place in the filibuster's Central American empire, in a little pond, it is true, but still he could have won the prominence he desired.

The immediate cause of his interest in Walker is more apparent. On March 18, 1856, General Domingo Goicouría, the Cuban patriot and Oaksmith's intimate friend and associate in 1855, wrote from Granada, Nicaragua, requesting two hundred rifles and sufficient cartridges for them.²⁹ Oaksmith immediately settled a law suit with the New York supply house, William Hitchcock and Company, and opened the way for procurement of supplies for Walker.³⁰

In New York he became acquainted with the filibuster's most avid supporters. In April he met Major George Hall, hero of the Mexican War, son of a former Brooklyn mayor, and Walker's principal agent in New York at that time. It was Hall who obtained and sent supplies and recruits from the Atlantic States to Nicaragua on the ships of the financier Cornelius Vanderbilt. It was this same Hall who enlisted Oaksmith's help in planning a mass meeting to stir up support for Walker in New York City.

Tammany Hall members played a large part in fostering the filibuster cause in New York, and Oaksmith joined them on May 6 to draw up plans for the mass meeting. Conspicuous

²⁹ General Domingo Goicouría to Appleton Oaksmith, Granada, March 18, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

³⁰ Agreement between Appleton Oaksmith and William Hitchcock and Company, New York, April 14, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

among the pompous schemers at the Saint Charles Saloon were Hall and Tammany politicians like John Clancy, New York City Alderman from the Fifth Ward.³¹ They set May 9 as the date for the public gathering in National Hall. It was to express sympathy with the cause of liberty in Nicaragua and to obtain pledges of money and supplies for Walker's "struggling patriots." Their handbill vigorously headlined: "No pent up Utica contracts our powers. The whole boundless continent is ours."³²

The Saloon conference also drew up an imposing slate of speakers. Among those asked to attend—with two days' notice—were the Democratic presidential aspirants Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois and Lewis Cass of Michigan. Other luminaries included Robert Toombs and Alexander Morton of Georgia, Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana, John Quitman of Mississippi, J. B. Weller of California, and Hiram Walbridge, Daniel Sickels, and Gilbert Dean of New York. Even today, in the age of the jet airliner, two days warning for such an occasion would be extremely presumptuous. In 1856 it was preposterous. The *New York Daily Tribune* noted that it would be easy to excuse the absence of the distinguished orators whose names were obviously being used to attract a crowd. Perhaps the notice of the meeting meant to invite the speakers as well as the audience. Surely the crowd would have to be content with the "smaller fry."³³

The May 9 meeting was nonetheless large and enthusiastic. A noisy crowd of 1,500 people filled National Hall and spilled over onto the steps outside. Though none of the important speakers appeared, the Tammany Hall "smaller fry" on the rostrum read telegrams from both Cass and Morton, which expressed sympathy with the meeting. Oaksmith read the resolutions drawn up by the planning conference, three of which stood out. First, the United States should recognize the Walker Government in Nicaragua; second, the United States should renounce the neutrality laws which prevented American recruits from going to Walker's aid; third, financial

³¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1856.

³² Original draft of handbill, New York, May 6, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

³³ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1856.

help must be given Walker to carry on his campaign in Central America. Several august politicians like John Clancy delivered eloquent manifest-destiny speeches. H. N. Wild, a New York City Councilman, pledged five hundred rifles and five hundred thousand cartridges for Walker. He commented that he would rather see them sent to Nicaragua than to Kansas.³⁴

Press reaction to the gathering varied. The *New York Daily News* applauded the "intense and profound attachment of the true people to the cause of liberty in Central America."³⁵ Strong support also came from the *Herald* and the *Sun*.³⁶ Among the opponents, the *New York Daily Times* pointed out that the "Democrats of Tammany never presented a more imposing list, and never fell further from fulfillment of their promises."³⁷ The *Mirror* classed the leaders of the meeting as "politicians of the office seeking stamp."³⁸ The *Evening Express* joined the critics of the meeting with less caustic but derogatory comments.³⁹

Response to the meeting could not have delighted its planners more. The adulation of the overflow crowd and the appearance of their names in all the New York newspapers prompted plans for another, larger gathering. Forsaking the Saint Charles Saloon for the more elegant Astor House, Oaksmith and his cohorts met on May 16 to lay plans for a May 23 meeting. Elaborate preparations called for one hundred cannon to announce the assembly, this time to be held in the park rather than National Hall in order to accommodate a larger crowd. The attraction of the cannon made an impressive list of speakers unnecessary, for the new slate was much less pretentious than the previous one. Press relations became Oaksmith's charge while Clancy, Wild, Hall, and others arranged for the cannon, invitations, music, and speakers.⁴⁰

³⁴ *New York Herald*, May 10, 1856.

³⁵ *New York Daily News*, May 10, 1856.

³⁶ *New York Herald*, May 10, 1856; *Sun* (New York), May 10, 1856.

³⁷ *New York Daily Times*, May 10, 1856.

³⁸ *Evening Mirror*, (New York), May 10, 1856.

³⁹ *New York Evening Express*, May 10, 1856.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the planning conference, New York, May 16, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

Tammany's artillery did its job well. The guns enticed between five and fifteen thousand people into the park.⁴¹ Except for the booming of the cannon and the marked increase in attendance, the second meeting followed the pattern set by the first. The same militant speeches prefaced pleas of aid for Walker. From the podium Oaksmith repeated the resolutions of the previous meeting, reveling in his newfound glory. Despite the noise of the crowd, which at times bordered on rowdiness, there is no record that this enthusiasm brought about donations or promises such as H. N. Wild had given earlier.⁴²

At the close of the meeting, its leaders and most of the raucous audience organized an impromptu parade. Led by the music of Shelton's band, they stepped gaily up Broadway to the Metropolitan Hotel, temporary residence of Walker's new Minister to the United States, Padre Agustín Vijil. The crowd called noisily for the Padre, who finally appeared on the balcony of the hotel. He thanked the crowd for its reception with a few remarks in Spanish, interpreted by the ubiquitous Oaksmith. The parade then moved down Broadway and dispersed.⁴³ Press comments on the second meeting and the parade differed little from reactions to the first, as the New York papers hewed to the same lines.

Major Hall also led Oaksmith into recruiting for the filibuster cause. Early in 1856 Hall had encountered many obstacles in securing men for Walker, largely because of the vigorously upright District Attorney of New York, John McKeon. McKeon had challenged the legality of Hall's methods and attempted to prosecute all those Hall enlisted to fight in Central America.⁴⁴ A second difficulty was the opposition of Cornelius Vanderbilt, who possessed the charter of the Accessory Transit Company and owned the ships on which recruits travelled to Nicaragua. Initially, he offered free passage for 250 volunteers. Then in March, 1856, Walker turned the charter over to Charles Morgan and Cornelius Garrison, two

former officers of the Accessory Transit Company. Vanderbilt was enraged and vowed to destroy Walker and his ex-employees.⁴⁵ At the same time, he offered Oaksmith a high-paying position with his firm for assistance in wrecking the filibuster movement and in ruining Morgan and Garrison. Oaksmith refused the tempting offer, however, and cast his lot with the filibusters. He had already tasted imminent glory in the two mass meetings.⁴⁶ Still, the interval between Walker's confiscation of Vanderbilt's charter and the reinstitution of the Nicaraguan run by Morgan and Garrison was critical, as it left Hall without ships for carrying recruits to Central America.

Weary of these troubles and impressed by Oaksmith's enthusiastic backing of the two mass meetings, Hall placed all recruiting correspondence in Oaksmith's hands and charged him with organization of a new recruiting system.⁴⁷ Oaksmith immediately began to answer inquiries from all parts of the United States about ways of joining Walker. He invited interested volunteers to act as his procurement officers in their home towns.⁴⁸ To insure discipline on the voyage to Nicaragua, he encouraged those enlisting from the same area to choose officers before they left for embarkation in New York.⁴⁹ Oaksmith clearly pointed out, however, that agents for Walker's government could not sign military recruits, only emigrants.⁵⁰ All volunteers thus became ostensible emigrants, as Oaksmith worked to circumvent any legal difficulties with McKeon and to prevent another "Crampton Affair."⁵¹

⁴¹ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 152.

⁴² There is no documentary evidence of such a meeting, but the account of Vanderbilt's proposal to Oaksmith was given by Mrs. Dorothy Agrillo in an interview in Brooklyn, New York, April 13, 1952. Oaksmith and Vanderbilt were acquainted, however, and corresponded later about another matter.

⁴³ Oaksmith Papers for late 1855 and early 1856 contain many letters to Hall requesting information about Walker.

⁴⁴ See papers for the month of June, 1856, *passim*, Oaksmith Papers.

⁴⁵ Appleton Oaksmith to James Neal, New York, June 14, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁴⁶ Appleton Oaksmith to E. D. Denson, New York, June 14, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁴⁷ John F. Crampton was a British diplomat accused by the United States Government of recruiting illegally for the British Army in the United States. See Richard W. Van Alstyne, "John F. Crampton, Conspirator or Dupe?" *American Historical Review*, XLI (1936), 493-502.

⁴¹ The hostile *New York Tribune* estimated 5,000 while the sympathetic *New York Herald* estimated 15,000.

⁴² *New York Herald*, May 24, 1856.

⁴³ *New York Herald*, May 24, 1856.

⁴⁴ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 140-148.

Oaksmith could not miss the opportunity to make a personal visit to Nicaragua and interrupted his recruiting activities in the early summer of 1856. On June 24 he left New York on the "Orizaba" to attend Walker's inauguration. On board the ship were a number of filibusters and many war supplies for the filibuster, yet the *New York Herald* wrote:

The only persons known to have filibustering tendencies that went off with the steamer were, Major George Hall, of Northern Light notoriety, and Appleton Oaksmith Esq. . . . These two gentlemen stood alone high up on the roof of the hurricane deck, and as the ship left the dock, they waved their handkerchiefs and smoked their segars [*sic*] in a perfect halo of present satisfaction and prospective glory.⁵²

Prospective glory was theirs, or at least imposing titles. Hall remained in Nicaragua as Commissary General of Walker's Army while Oaksmith became Minister Plenipotentiary of Nicaragua to the United States and Agent of the Nicaraguan Government.

Upon his return to the United States, Oaksmith optimistically laid down a plan of recruit procurement similar to one used by Walker's agents in New Orleans in 1855.⁵³ This new scheme established a Nicaraguan Emigration Agency, headed by a certain Alexander Lawrence. Its outward purpose was supplying information to the public on settlement prospects in Nicaragua; its more clandestine aim was to provide a clearing house for recruits and adventurers under the guise of a settlement promotion agency.

On August 28 the New York newspapers announced Oaksmith's plan. He offered single men 250 acres of Nicaraguan land and families 350 acres. Those taking advantage of the offer were to relinquish a parcel of this land to Lawrence, who would use it as his agency's capital stock. Single men gave up one hundred acres and families two hundred acres. Single men desiring free passage to Nicaragua gave Morgan and Garrison an additional sixty-six acres while families

⁵² *New York Herald*, June 25, 1856.

⁵³ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 139.

donated 133 acres. The Colonization Director of Nicaragua would allot the land upon the emigrant's arrival.⁵⁴

Response to the plan was meager indeed, for its ingenious provisions ultimately promised little to the prospective settler. A family emigrating to Nicaragua free received only seventeen of the 350 acres originally granted. Eighty-four acre plots for single men were more attractive, but there was no assurance their land would be anything but worthless tropical jungle. Nevertheless, while the agency failed to lure the steady, hard-working pioneer, it did provide a publicized information center for military prospects.

Oaksmith also encouraged recruiting agents laboring under his old system. Early in September he promised financial support to Colonel Jack Allen, his principal recruiter in the Kentucky-Tennessee area.⁵⁵ In the same month he appointed a new agent in New Orleans⁵⁶ and sent two more into the Southwest.⁵⁷ He also bolstered the few semi-official recruiters in smaller cities and towns.

Oaksmith's early efforts had revitalized the recruiting work, but by September lack of co-ordination among Walker's adherents led to a decline in the number of men obtained. In August, for example, Fermín Ferrer, Walker's Secretary of State, signed an emigration agreement with a General William Cazneau of Texas. In negotiations conducted without Oaksmith's knowledge, the Texan was granted the right to procure 1,000 able-bodied colonists for Nicaragua.⁵⁸ On September 13 Cazneau wrote Oaksmith requesting details on travel arrangements.⁵⁹ In his cautious reply Oaksmith asked more information about Cazneau's activities.⁶⁰ The General arrogantly refused to give any details, stating that

⁵⁴ *New York Herald*, August 28, 1856. See also the Emigration Agreement, New York, August 30, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁵⁵ Appleton Oaksmith to Colonel Jack Allen, New York, September 1, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁵⁶ Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, September 11, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁵⁷ Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, September 23, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁵⁸ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 236.

⁵⁹ William Cazneau to Appleton Oaksmith, New York, September 13, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁶⁰ Appleton Oaksmith to William Cazneau, New York, September 18, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

he was proceeding independently.⁶¹ Later Oaksmith wrote to Walker with irritation that such unco-operative attitudes caused his plans to go "awry."⁶²

Recruiting factionalism also developed in New Orleans. Here Colonel John Jaquess had served as Walker's chief recruiter until the fall of 1856. Then on September 28 Oaksmith appointed a new agent, Pierre Mancosos, to take over the New Orleans office. Jaquess immediately protested his ouster and requested equal status with Mancosos.⁶³ For almost three weeks the New Orleans agents hurled strikingly bitter recriminations at one another with their reciprocal accusations of lavish spending, speculation, and indifference to the filibuster cause. Oaksmith finally smoothed out these difficulties by establishing two separate offices, but in the meantime recruiting work had suffered.⁶⁴

Reports of the New Orleans agents and others indicate why Oaksmith's recruiting system collapsed in the fall of 1856. Mancosos wrote pessimistically that "the approaching election engrosses all minds here" and that few would leave for Nicaragua.⁶⁵ Jaquess stated that failure to have ships ready to sail for Central America hampered his activities. Many of the men he had signed were returning to their homes.⁶⁶ Oaksmith believed that the inability of Walker to achieve a decisive military victory contributed to the scarcity of volunteers.⁶⁷ Newspaper accounts also painted a bleak picture of Walker's position and undoubtedly discouraged enlistments. Favorite themes of these papers were the sickness, poverty, death, and desertion, which were thinning the

⁶¹ William Cazneau to Appleton Oaksmith, New York, September 19, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁶² Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, September 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁶³ John Jaquess to Appleton Oaksmith, New Orleans, October 2, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁶⁴ Pierre Mancosos to Appleton Oaksmith, New Orleans, October 13, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁶⁵ Pierre Mancosos to Appleton Oaksmith, New Orleans, October 13, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁶⁶ John Jaquess to Appleton Oaksmith, New Orleans, October 2, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁶⁷ Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, September 11, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

ranks of Walker's vagabond army.⁶⁸ Walker's decree of September 22 establishing slavery in Nicaragua possibly deterred some Northern expansionists who would have fought for the filibuster. Oaksmith's earlier recruiting efforts had secured between five hundred and one thousand men, but by the end of October, he could persuade few new volunteers to go to Walker's assistance.

In the procurement of supplies, Oaksmith walked on more familiar ground. His knowledge of trade and shipping had been acquired from ten years' experience. In New York he had the reputation of one who dealt extensively in arms, ammunition, and goods of war.⁶⁹ Walker could have found few men better fitted than Oaksmith to take on his supply problems.

He quickly proved his mettle by obtaining many goods for shipment to the filibuster despite his absorption in recruiting and propaganda work. Among the supplies he shipped on the "Orizaba" on June 24 were five hundred percussion muskets, one hundred Sharp's rifles, 120,000 cartridges for the muskets, and fifty thousand for the rifles. He also sent bacon, bread, camp kettles, coffee, crackers, fives, spoons, and sugar.⁷⁰ These articles, which he remitted on credit, were originally intended for the 1855 Cuban expedition. Now their shipment to Nicaragua filled Walker's needs and gave Oaksmith hope of salvaging his earlier investment.

As Walker's official agent, he redoubled his supply procurement efforts upon his return from Central America in August. In Nicaragua the Quartermaster General's Department, the Ordnance Department, and the Commissary Department had given Oaksmith long lists of their needs.⁷¹ Awaiting him upon his arrival in New York were more requests which he was expected to satisfy.⁷² Altogether these requisitions pro-

⁶⁸ *New York Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1856.

⁶⁹ *New York Herald*, November 3, 1855.

⁷⁰ List of goods shipped on the "Orizaba," New York, June 24, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁷¹ Requisitions of the Nicaraguan Army, Granada, Nicaragua, July 16, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁷² F. F. Fischer to Appleton Oaksmith, Granada, July 25, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

vide an interesting commentary on Walker's situation. Those marked *A* listed absolute necessities; those marked *B* listed less significant items and so on to the *G* list. On the *A* requisition were account books, anvils, blankets, boots, buttons, drawers, hats, pants, kettles, and pots while arms and food were relegated to less important categories.

Whether Oaksmith furnished supplies for the army departments in order of their importance cannot be ascertained from receipts of goods sent; only medical articles have been itemized. Still he achieved some success and provided 248 cases of war supplies for Walker in the fall of 1856. In September the "Texas" sailed with 103 cases in its hold; in October the "Tennessee" left the United States with 145 more, testimony to Oaksmith's skill in handling the filibuster's supply problems.⁷³

Hand in hand with his responsibilities as purchasing agent went the duty of executing contracts already concluded by Walker's followers in the United States. Such a contract was effected by Francisco Alejandro Lainé, a Cuban friend of General Goicouria. Lainé had made an agreement for five thousand Minié barreled rifles with Benjamin Perkins, a Worcester, Massachusetts, manufacturer. Under its terms the rifles would be ready for Walker on October 20, 1856, at a cost of \$17.25 apiece. Financial arrangements called for a small cash down payment, but in the main, were predicated upon a proposed Nicaraguan bond issue.⁷⁴ Since Lainé left the United States on the "Orizaba" the day after signing this contract, Oaksmith became obliged to fulfill its terms.

When the October 20 deadline arrived, neither party could carry out its part of the bargain. Perkins had not manufactured the rifles, and Oaksmith had neither the cash down payment nor the promised Nicaraguan bonds. Thus, he and James Devoe, an agent for Perkins, made a supplementary agreement for 2,120 rifles instead of the five thousand originally promised but with almost identical financial arrange-

⁷³ Receipts of goods shipped on the "Texas" and "Tennessee," New York, September and October, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁷⁴ Contract between Benjamin Perkins and Francisco Alejandro Lainé, Worcester, June 23, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

ments.⁷⁵ Oaksmith also signed a large contract with William Hitchcock and Company for five hundred Sharp's rifles, one thousand Minié rifles, five hundred Colt revolvers, five thousand blouses, five hundred sabers, and innumerable other items costing \$250,000, again to be financed by the hoped-for bond issue.⁷⁶ This was by far the largest contract yet made for Walker but Oaksmith's last as the filibuster's official agent and ultimately his most miserable failure as supply negotiator.

Oaksmith's real problem lay not in his inability to contract for supplies but in his inability to pay for them. While Walker's backers in the United States were outspoken in support of his enterprise, they did not convert their effusiveness into dollars for Walker's treasury. All attempts to secure money from apparent friends of the filibuster in the United States failed miserably despite the pleas of Oaksmith, Morgan, and Garrison.⁷⁷ These men had made great financial sacrifices, albeit for personal prestige and profit; now they wished American believers in manifest destiny—for nobler motives—to do likewise. They were sadly disappointed.

Twice during 1856 Walker lost superb opportunities to get aid and money from Cornelius Vanderbilt. In March the rich shipping magnate had offered free passage to 250 volunteers, but Walker's untimely cancelling of the Transit Company's charter prevented recruiters in the United States from taking advantage of the offer.⁷⁸ Apparently, Vanderbilt was, or should have been, completely alienated by Walker's deed. Yet in August General Goicouria, who had returned to the United States, persuaded the then vengeful Comodore to advance the Nicaraguan Government \$100,000 for return of his old transit rights. Vanderbilt promised an additional \$150,000 during the course of the year, once the bargain was carried out.⁷⁹ Either unaware of his backers' desper-

⁷⁵ Contract between James Devoe and Appleton Oaksmith, New York, October 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁷⁶ Contract between William Hitchcock and Company and Appleton Oaksmith as agent for the Nicaraguan Government, New York, October 29, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁷⁷ Charles Morgan to Appleton Oaksmith, New York, September 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁷⁸ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 219.

⁷⁹ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 221.

ate financial straits or too stubborn to accept aid from a man who had sworn to ruin him, Walker refused the offer and admonished Goicouría for making the arrangements.⁸⁰

Lack of donations and Walker's rejection of Vanderbilt's proposal made recourse to a bond issue an extreme necessity if the filibuster was to continue in Central America. Plans for the issue evoked the enthusiasm of Oaksmith and others who were hard pressed to finance recruiting and to meet obligations incurred in supply contracts. When Oaksmith visited Nicaragua at the time of Walker's inauguration, he strongly advocated the vital need for the bonds and possibly drew up the provisions of the loan decree himself.⁸¹

The terms of the July 22 proclamation provided for issuance of \$2,000,000 in bonds of various denominations. The securities would mature in twenty years at an interest rate of seven per cent per annum, payable each year in New York. Plots of land in Nicaragua would serve as security for bond buyers should the Nicaraguan Government forfeit on any part of its obligations. Oaksmith was negotiator of the loan for Walker. Its avowed purpose was the development of the resources of Nicaragua, but its underlying intent was obviously the financing of Walker's Nicaraguan venture.⁸²

Oaksmith optimistically returned from Nicaragua by way of New Orleans. Here he discussed the bond issue with Pierre Soulé, M. Pilcher, and S. F. Slatter, adherents of Walker in that city. All three adamantly refused to support his new plan,⁸³ and later went to Nicaragua themselves to make their own loan arrangements. Their decree for \$500,000 in securities promised only six per cent interest secured by one million acres of public land. Unlike Oaksmith, these men were backed by a reputable bank, which promised to pay the interest. Ultimately they sold the few Nicaraguan bonds which were issued in the United States.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 221.

⁸¹ The date of the decree coinciding with Oaksmith's visit to Nicaragua strongly suggests that he drew up the terms of the decree.

⁸² Loan Decree of the Nicaraguan Government, Granada, July 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁸³ Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, August 9, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁸⁴ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 210.

Unsuccessful in New Orleans, Oaksmith returned to New York. He too hoped to obtain support for his loan promotion from a well-established bank. In September he requested and obtained an interview with the financiers Duncan Sherman and Company but could not keep the appointment because of pressing diplomatic business in Washington.⁸⁵ He asserted late in November that "reputable capitalists" were considering the bond issue,⁸⁶ but it is unlikely they were deliberating over the matter seriously. If Oaksmith had made contacts other than Duncan Sherman and Company, they are not apparent from his papers.

His failure to persuade a bank to promote the bond issue was only one reason for the ill-success of his efforts. More important was that Walker's star was waning in Nicaragua. Had the bonds been put on the market, there would have been few, if any, buyers. Oaksmith himself pointed out that to issue the securities, he needed a favorable moment like a decisive military triumph.⁸⁷ That moment never came.

Miscarriage of the bond issue project had disastrous results. Oaksmith had to cancel contracts with Perkins and Devoe for the Minié rifles and with Hitchcock and Company for the supplies worth \$250,000. The forfeiture of these agreements, countersigned for the Nicaraguan Government by Oaksmith, also destroyed whatever remained of his honor and reputation. He had spent his personal fortune for supplies. Now the added damage to his good name resulted in efforts to recoup his Nicaraguan losses elsewhere.

On December 1 he demonstrated his break with Walker by a contract with José Antonio Páez, the Venezuelan dictator who was attempting to re-establish himself in his country. Oaksmith promised to furnish Páez \$1,000,000 worth of arms and war supplies, goods originally earmarked for Nicaragua.⁸⁸ But like the large contracts made for Walker in October, this

⁸⁵ Appleton Oaksmith to Duncan Sherman and Company, New York, September 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁸⁶ Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, November 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁸⁷ Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, November 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁸⁸ Contract between Appleton Oaksmith and José Antonio Páez, New York, December 1, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

too came to nothing. Páez was evidently as poor as Walker and could not pay for the goods. Oaksmith thus failed to compensate for his losses by allying himself with the Venezuelan.

By the late fall of 1856, the Walker movement was rapidly losing its poise. The filibuster met almost continual defeat at the hands of the stronger Central American Allies—Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—while Oaksmith's setbacks in New York simply mirrored those of his chief in Nicaragua. Because of the failure of the bond issue, Oaksmith had to repudiate contracts for badly needed supplies. Lawrence had resigned his post as head of the Nicaraguan Emigration Agency and pressed Oaksmith for money due him.⁸⁹ Vanderbilt had Morgan and Garrison deeply involved in a law suit for their earlier activities in seizing the Transit Company.⁹⁰ The recruiting system had almost collapsed, and newspaper accounts of the Nicaraguan situation by even Walker's staunchest apologists were becoming dismal. Filibuster diplomacy also failed to secure recognition of the Walker regime by Pierce's administration.

Finally in a November 22 letter to Walker, Oaksmith aired his many grievances and indicated his reasons for severing connections with the filibuster movement. He first listed his accomplishments, both real and imaginary: he had acquired confidence for Nicaraguan securities, obtained three men from a reputable bank as negotiators for the bond issue, made a large number of supply contracts, organized an effective recruiting system, and secured influences which assured his acceptance as Minister from Nicaragua. He complained strongly, however, that he had used up his own money and incurred twice that amount in debts and bills to supply houses. He implored the filibuster to send him money and finally wrote:

No one man or body of men, shall with impunity undertake to sully the fair record of my connection with the cause of Nicaragua. If I abandon it I do so fairly and squarely and honorably—

⁸⁹ Alexander Lawrence to Appleton Oaksmith, New York, November 20, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.

⁹⁰ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 155-156.

if circumstances should induce me to continue with it, I shall insist upon the fullest justice being done to all of my actions.⁹¹

Oaksmith thus ended his association with Walker. Although he appeared at a mass meeting on the filibuster's behalf on December 20, his contract with Páez practically demonstrated his disaffection. Oaksmith's badly shaken financial position now overrode any serious ideological reasons he entertained for continuing support. His hope for quick profits had evaporated; his chance for fame and glory had disappeared. Walker's defeat was now inevitable.

Oaksmith had made his exit from the Walker movement. He had rocketed into prominence to become the filibuster's chief American leader during the summer and fall of 1856. His activities had spread to all fields of endeavor—diplomacy, finance, propaganda, recruiting, and supply. He achieved some notable successes but experienced even more discouraging defeats. Nevertheless, his activities demonstrate Walker's organization and methods in the United States. They also point up the American difficulties which contributed to the filibuster's ultimate defeat. In that period of expansion preceding the Civil War, there were limits to manifest destiny in the United States. Oaksmith's story attests to that fact.

⁹¹ Appleton Oaksmith to William Walker, New York, November 22, 1856, Oaksmith Papers.