

FURTHER LETTERS OF ARCHIBALD H. GILLESPIE

*October 20, 1845, to January 16, 1846,
to the Secretary of the Navy*

With an Introduction by RICHARD R. STENBERG

A NUMBER of letters written to Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft by President Polk's special agent to California, Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie, dated February 11, 1846, to July 8, 1848, with an introduction by Mr. George Walcott Ames, Jr., were published recently in this *Quarterly*.¹ The idea of sending Gillespie to California as a secret agent was conceived apparently by the administration in connection with Secretary Bancroft's instructions to Commodore Sloat of October 17, 1845, and Secretary of State Buchanan's equally well-known instructions to Thomas O. Larkin, American Consul at Monterey, of the same date. Gillespie was, in fact, mentioned in Buchanan's letter to Larkin. Buchanan stated that Gillespie was about "to proceed to Monterey and will probably reach you before this despatch. He is a gentleman in whom the President reposes entire confidence. He has seen these instructions and will cooperate with you in carrying them into execution."²

The correspondence between Gillespie and Bancroft herewith presented precedes in time that published by Mr. Ames and apparently completes the publication of Gillespie's letters to the Navy Department with the exception of one letter. He twice mentions having written from Tepic under date of February 3, 1846.³ Search in the archives of both the Navy and State Departments and in the Polk Papers in the Library of Congress has failed to bring it to light.

New York October 20th 1845

Sir

Having been detained by an accident to the Steam Boat, I did not reach this City until late on Saturday afternoon, and Sunday following, I could not make any enquiries in relation to the travel across the country until to day, in which I have been engaged all the morning—

I find that the journey from Portobello, the Port near Chagres, is impracticable, there being no vessels on the West Coast trading sufficiently far to the Northward, & that all the goods taken from this side go no farther than San Jose, which is not immediately on the coast— I am told that there is much travel Westward from Belise, a port further north, and from John L. Stevens Esqr. I hope to obtain all the necessary information to-morrow—

Hargous & Bro' have nearly all the trade with Vera Cruz in their hands, but a passage to that Port could be obtained without their Knowing or Suspecting the business of the passenger—

Hoping in my next to give you some decided information,

I have the honor to be
Very Respectfully
Your Mo obt. Servt.
ARCHI. H. GILLESPIE

New York Octr. 23d 1845

Sir

Since my last communication, I have been unable to obtain any further information than that, a vessel will sail for Vera Cruz about 5th proxo., and that it is decidedly the most favorable road across the country— Howland and Aspinwall [merchants] are constantly sending to Masatlan by way of Mexico, and much information might be obtained from them confidentially, if the enquiry were made by the Collector of the Port—The merchants do not like to give information to private individuals, fearing competition in the trade, but there is not one who would refuse or decline giving it for Government purposes, if asked by Mr. Lawrence—In this way letters representing the Bearer as a commercial character might be obtained, & the secrecy of Government Kept inviolable—

I will be obliged by your favoring me with instructions if I should engage a passage in the vessel to sail the 5th proxo., & whether I shall apply to Mr. Lawrence for assistance in getting letters &c.

I purpose leaving this [city] for Washington on the 26th inst.

Hoping to hear from you by return of mail, in haste,

I have the honor to be
Sir, Very Respectfully &c
ARCHI H. GILLESPIE

Navy Department
October 25th, 1845

Sir,

Your letter of the 23d instant has been received.

Inasmuch as I have obtained such mercantile letters of introduction as you will probably need, it will be unnecessary for you to make any inquiries of Mr. Lawrence.

In accordance with your suggestion you are at liberty to take passage in the vessel to sail for Vera Cruz about the 5th proximo, and you will arrange your visit to Washington [so] as to return before her day of sailing.

In the event of my absence from Washington at the time of your arrival

here you will learn my wishes and receive your letters from Mr. Appleton, Chief Clerk in the Department.

Respectfully

Yours

GEO BANCROFT⁴

Lieut. A. H. Gillespie
New York

Sandy Hook [N. Y.]
November 16th 1845
4 P.M.

My dear Sir

After frequent delays I have the pleasure to announce to you my departure for my place of destination, and I can only reiterate what I have already expressed, that if energy & perseverance will carry out your instructions, they will not be wanting to make my mission successful—

Be pleased to express to His Excellency the President, how grateful I feel for his confidence, & assure him at the same time, that he will find it has not been misplaced—

To Mr Buchanan pray offer my thanks, & though I may not be able to express my feelings, it will show to him, that I am not unmindful of the distinction with which I am honored, & that I will use my endeavors to follow his directions, & to serve my country with fidelity & devotion—

To you, Sir, I cannot say what I would wish, at a moment like this, setting forth on an adventurous enterprize; but I can assure you, you will not regret having named me for this service, & that it will ever be borne in grateful remembrance, & I trust, that should I be successful I may not be forgotten,— & will receive the only reward a Soldier aspires to obtain—

We will soon discharge our pilot, & the Brig Petersburg will be well on her road to Vera Cruz—in haste

I am Sir

Very Respectfully Yours

ARCHI H. GILLESPIE

Vera Cruz December 13th 1845

To the Honorable
the Secretary of the Navy
Washington

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you of my arrival at this place on the 10th instant, after a passage of twenty-four days, having had head winds and much stormy weather— The Despatch was destroyed and thrown overboard the night before we came into port, in accordance with my instructions; and it was well I did so, for my luggage underwent the very closest search.

It is a very fortunate circumstance that I arrived here in a private vessel, as in the transaction of the most trifling business, our Countrymen are very closely watched; and also, under the existing state of public affairs and the rumors which are in circulation, the object of my travelling across the country would at once have been suspected.—As it is, not the least suspicion can be entertained, as the travel of private individuals to Masatlan is constant and unnoticed.

I find the feeling in Vera Cruz is very much in favor of war, and although the people in general may wear a semblance of friendship, they are decidedly inimical to our Countrymen; and notwithstanding Mr Slidell was received with all the honors, a Salute from the Castle and a Guard of honor at the landing, the papers have not noticed or mentioned his arrival. They do not seem to bear in mind the utter impossibility of going to war—they are without funds, their Troops are in great want, and every resource appears to be exhausted.—They are without the means for necessary expenditures at this moment, and the advances made upon Custom House paper are almost beyond credence— I have seen a great many Troops of the Southern Republics in want and distress, but I have never met with any that would compare with these in Garrison here, for the misery of their condition—They are said to be 4000 strong— I have seen the greater part of two Regiments—they are composed of Indians generally, some few negroes, are very poorly equipped and officered—and judging from their want of Knowledge of the Manual are new levies, or “forced volunteers” as they are generally called. The men are quite small—I doubt if they would average five feet six in height, slightly built, and are sluggish in the extreme in their movements—I am very credibly informed, that there are Troops in the Castle, that have not left it for many months, in consequence of not having clothing sufficient to cover their nakedness, and the filthiness of their condition is quite disgusting—

There is still a great deal of feeling among the Troops in favor of Santa-Anna, which was evinced on the night of the 11th inst, when the 8th Regiment endeavored to rise and declare in his favor. It seems, that Saturday (13th) was the time fixed for the revolt, but the Colonel, who is quite a young man of much intelligence, having become somewhat intoxicated at a dinner with some of his friends, determined that his Regiment should rise that night— Having assembled and armed all the officers and troops, he was about to cry “Viva Santa Anna,” when the Governor of Vera Cruz with a superior force, marched into the quarters and took the party prisoners— The Colonel and officers are now in prison, and ’tis rumored, that the Troops are to be scattered among the different Corps of the Army— This affair has made no noise, and is not even talked about as any thing important, yet a desire is evinced to learn something of the state of feeling in the other Garrisons in the Country— It is also positively asserted, that Santa-Anna sent over from Havana by the

last Steamer, \$6000 to clothe such Regiments as would pronounce in his favor; and it is supposed by some, that through the passage of this money into certain hands, the revolt was discovered by the Authorities.

Much anxiety is evinced by the community at large, in relation to the expected revolution—It is supposed to day, that it has already taken place. General Paredes is at San Luis and declares that the new Congress shall not assemble, as it is composed of too many Deputies favorable to the system of Federation, which he is determined to oppose at all hazards. Gomes Farías is at Puebla, where he has a small party favorable to Federation, the reduction of the Tariff and Imposts, the Abolition of the Custom Houses in the interior of the Country, a general reduction of the Government expenditures, and an entire new system of accountability. Unfortunately this party is too small to succeed at this day, yet it is hoped by many, that the time is not far distant when the people will be convinced of the necessity of sustaining the party supported by the best and most enlightened men in the country. General Urrea is at Sinaloa, about two degrees and a half to the north of Masatlan, in the Department of Senhora [Sonora] y Sinaloa, where he has declared the Independence of that Department as a State; and it is rumored here, that he has requested the protection of the United States— Urrea has long opposed the Central Government, and will not consent to any other than the Federative System; but whether he will be enabled to sustain himself, I am unable to judge, as he is spoken of here by every one, natives & foreigners, in terms of disrespect and opprobrium. As it may be of importance for the Department to know the true position of affairs in that quarter, I will visit Sinaloa, if I should find it will not delay my arrival at the point of destination.

I shall proceed by the Diligence this evening, which having been engaged four days ahead, has prevented my leaving at an earlier moment. The Coach precedes the travel on mules some six or eight days and has lately passed without molestation.

I intend forwarding this communication by the St Mary's sloop of war, to sail in a few days for Pensacola— I am happy to find that there is little or no difficulty in sending correspondence across the Country—it being generally supposed that no letters of importance would be sent in the mails, and letters of foreign Commercial Houses always pass unmolested—however, I shall be governed by circumstances entirely—

I cannot close this communication without noticing and informing the Department of the great attention paid to the interest of the Government by our Consul, F. M. Dimond Esqr, whose true patriotism, really merits the applause of his countrymen, who, with the citizens of other countries and the Mexicans generally, pay him the greatest respect.

By the mail of this morning I learned, that our minister had not yet been presented to the President; nor could the Secretary name a day, when the

Consul informed him of the arrival of Mr Slidell, but hoped to do so in a short time.

I am, Sir,
Very Respectfully
Your Mo obt. Servt.
ARCHI H. GILLESPIE

Mexico [City] January 16th 1846

Sir

The Department will no doubt be much surprised, to learn that I have not proceeded further on my journey than this City, but its surprise will not equal the disappointment and the annoyance I have suffered. Upon leaving Vera Cruz, I was obliged to put my luggage upon mules, only the smallest quantity being allowed upon the Coach, and finding it impossible to take the route by Puebla, in consequence of the very much greater length of the road, and the certainty of exciting suspicion, this being the only route now traveled, I came to this City—to await the arrival of the arriero. In the meantime the revolution of General Paredes broke out—All the Troops were taken off of the road for the defence of the City, and fearing he would be robbed, the Muleteer remained at Pueblo, until he could be furnished with an Escort—Within the past week Troops having been sent upon the road, the Arriero came up with his Cargo—I shall immediately proceed, and will no doubt reach the [Pacific] Coast in twelve days. I am the more anxious to be upon the road, as some of our vessels of war are at San Blas or Masatlan.

My disappointment is very much lessened by the fact, that I have happened to be in this City—at a very interesting period, and one of the very greatest importance to the Country [California] I am about to visit—I have made myself well acquainted with all the circumstances of the revolution, and have collected facts which cannot fail to awaken the people of California, to the danger of their adhering to a Central Government, particularly, when it is composed of a grasping dishonest soldiery, and a despotic priesthood.

The principal object of Gen'l Paredes in making this revolution, was to destroy the parties favorable to the Federative System; and assisted by the Arch-Bishop (who saw in that system the entire overthrow of his power) he determined to seize upon the Government, although sent to the frontier to repel the expected invasion of the U. S. Troops.⁵

Under the legitimate President, Gen'l Herrera, an honest man, wanting in energy but very highly respected by all classes, the Army was losing its influence. A very large number of retired officers were thrown off of the list of pensioners, and those in service, saw that a reduction of their strength would take place, if that Administration were permitted to remain much longer in power. Consequently the Troops very generally pronounced in favor of Gen'l Paredes, who aided by the Church, and by funds which had

been sent to him for other purposes, was enable[d] to pay the arrears due the Troops, thus securing their feelings in an important manner. After this City had been declared in a state of siege more than a week, and the public mind had been in a state of very great excitement, anticipating, from the preparation which had been made, a vigorous and decided resistance to the entrance of Gen'l Paredes, fifty eight thousand dollars was circulated in the Garrison of the City,—on the morning of the 30th ulto. It immediately pronounced in favor of the plan of San Luis, at which place Gen'l Paredes first declared himself against the government of President Herrera, who a little more than a year since, was elected by the unanimous voice of the whole country.

It appears, that Gen'l Paredes had funds sent to him for the purpose of procuring supplies for a part of the force under his command, which he was ordered to march upon California, where the Governor had refused to acknowledge the authority of the Government of Mexico. However, instead of using these funds for the purpose intended, he applies them to the payment of the Troops who were to march upon this City, thus leaving California apparently independent. In addition to the force which the former Government contemplated Gen'l Paredes would march against California, they were preparing an expedition by Sea. Two Brigs owned and commanded by Frenchmen under Mexican colors, have been lying at Acapulco for the last four months, at an expense of fifty dollars per day—a force over four hundred strong was sent to Acapulco, but was withdrawn upon the commencement of the revolution—350 Infantry, in miserable condition, came into the City from Acapulco a few days previous to the arrival of Gen'l Paredes—They have now joined his force, and nothing further is said about the preparations being renewed. The owner and Commander of one of the vessels is in this City at present, and says, “the new Government have done nothing upon the subject—they are too much occupied with their own particular affairs to think of me.”—

The Central Government of Mexico receives no aid whatever from California. For a long time it has not paid one dollar to the revenue, and the present revolution has done more to advance its independence than any other circumstance that could have happened. Much is said about the hostile position of the Departments far distant from the City of Mexico, but it is merely a war of words, for the new authorities are too much occupied with their own particular interest, and drawing attention towards Texas and the United States to notice very closely the proceedings of a department so very distant as California; and whatever may have been done by former administrations in relation to the sale of that province to a European power, I doubt very much if the present authorities would dare to enter upon any such negotiation, as one of the strongest reasons given for the overthrow of the Herrera

Government was, its having thought of entering into a Treaty with U. States for the sale of Texas.

Not one word is said in relation to Gen'l Urrea, or his movement at Sinaloa; yet every one joins in the opinion, that he is a very contemptible person and entirely without credit. He had a skirmish with a small force not long since and was defeated.

General Paredes entered the City on the 3d instant at the head of about eight thousand men. I was very much disappointed with the appearance of the Troops, having heard them spoken of as very superior in point of equipment and discipline.

Some two or three of the Cavalry Corps (which number in all about 2500) were stout men, in pretty good order; and there were but two Infantry Regiments worthy of note. One of these, is some 1200 strong, and composed of tall, strong looking men. All the others were miserable indeed, and completely worn out by long travel; are very small delicate men, and would not be taken into service in any other country. The Artillery about 200 strong, was remarkable, only for the very miserable condition of its appointments, and the decidedly ineffective appearance of the whole Corps. Considering the ensemble of this Corps de reserve, as this force of Gen'l Paredes is termed, I have no hesitation in saying, it is composed of the most miserable Troops I have ever seen. As it is a well known fact, that in the Spanish Americas the Indian Soldier will follow his officer to the death, I was very particular in observing each officer as he passed me, and I must say, a more pitiable collection never was seen with any soldiery— They are generally very young, quite small of stature, appear to have but little control over the men, and I am credibly informed, are almost entirely ignorant of the soldier's duties. There is no precision in their movements, nor the least bearing of the soldier about them. The Troops are very seldom drilled, and exercise of any kind is very rare; which I judge to be the fact, from an exhibition of firing, which took place in the Public Square a few mornings since. Several Regiments arrived after the main body entered the City, making the force in this vicinity for a few days, some 10,000 strong; which I consider, quite unequal to the strength of the Camp at Corpus Christi.

On the 11th inst General Ampudia left this City, at the head of a division some three thousand five hundred strong; 'tis said, to Garrison the towns at the north, but it is well known, that his destination is the frontier of Texas. This division is composed chiefly of the Troops Gen'l Paredes found in the city on his arrival, and as the campaign of Texas is far from being a favorite with the officers and men, they have gone on the march very much dissatisfied. General Arista who would not join Gen'l Paredes in his movement against the legitimate Government, has been suspended in his Command upon the frontier, and thrown out of employ.

About a week since, Eight Deserters from the Camp at Corpus Christi

arrived in this City in charge of an Aide de Camp of Gen'l Arista. I am very sorry to add, that two of them are native born Americans—Two are from Company E. 2d Dragoons. Three from Company B. of the same Regiment. One (an American named Smith) from Company G. 7th Infantry—One (a Swede) from the Corps of Flying Artillery—and the other, represents himself to be a Civilian, by birth and Station, but a citizen of Texas. The Dragoons brought with them the Saddles, and all were in their fatigue suit. They have had several interviews with Gen'l Almonte, who is now Minister of War, and two interviews with Gen'l Paredes—at the last, the latter offered Smith, from 7th Infantry, a Captain's commission, if he would join their service, and go upon the frontier with the Army. He refused it, telling the General, he had left the Army from being tired of the life and could not endure the calling any longer. Smith appears to be the leader of the party, and has every thing to say in relation to the *affairs of the party*. Two days since he applied to Gen'l Almonte for a *Carta de Seguridad* (a letter of security, which all foreigners are required to take out through the Consuls of their respective nations, or through the Governor of the Department in which he may reside) "as they wished to leave the City, their time being very uncomfortable, as their countrymen and the foreigners generally abused them for deserting." Gen'l Almonte told Smith to wait a few days, but if in the meantime, he or his friends should be maltreated by any person, on account of his desertion to let him know, and he would soon punish them. "The Government encouraged desertion from the American Camp and would protect those who deserted."

Gen'l Almonte is the prime mover of all the operations against Texas, and has been for some time very loud in his declamations against the United States; and now, as Minister of war he will do everything in his power to assemble a large force upon the frontier. He says, he will soon have some Thirty thousand men to march upon the small force at the Camp of Corpus Christi "as they intend to show the United States, that although they may retain possession of Texas, they shall not have any more Mexican Territory."

It is evidently the intention of the present Government to make a demonstration, with as large a force as it can raise upon the frontiers of Texas; and the general impression appears to be, that they will concentrate from all parts of the country a force not exceeding fifteen thousand men, and perhaps many of those may be new Troops, Indians forced into service having a musket in their hands for the first time. There is not the least expectation that they will declare war against the United States, but by actual aggression upon the territory of Texas, which will be done for the purpose of making a Treaty, which they say, "having arms in our hands, will save el honor nacional."—Some of the public prints in that portion of the country, through which General Paredes has just passed, have commenced hinting that such will take place, evidently desiring to prepare the people for such a result.

Should this Mexican soldiery dare to trespass upon the, now, territory of the United States, it is to be hoped, their principal officers will receive the punishment they so justly merit. The death of a few of them would be of very great service to the country, and would strike a panic in Mexico which would soon bring this Government to terms—the effect would indeed be beyond description. Several renegades from the Camp at Corpus Christi have circulated the report, that Gen'l Taylor is a mere farmer, and noted for cowardice; that the force is composed principally of foreigners, who being treated with very great tyranny by young American officers, will desert to the Mexican Army as soon as it shows itself. A large proportion of the population of the City believe the report, and require a terrible shock to awaken them to the truth of their arrogance and entire ignorance. It is to be hoped they may soon receive the lesson so much needed.

Gen'l Paredes in an order publish[ed] some days since, has restored to the pension list, all the names of retired officers which had been stricken therefrom by the former Government—thus showing, one of the principal policies of the new administration.

The Government is very much in want of money, and to raise a large amount immediately, it has given permission for the introduction of Foreign Cotton to the amount of \$2,000,000 duties. The only resource left open to them. This done without consulting the interest of the people of the Country, but merely for the particular purposes of those in power. Among the Cotton growers are some of the most influential men of the country, whose interest is particularly affected, while the Manufacturer is but slightly benefited; for the permit to bring in Cotton being given to a private individual, the price of the article is kept up although the demand remains the same. American cotton being so much better cleaned it is always sold before the Mexican. Cotton is now selling from 32 to 34 cts, while the Manufacturer obtains but \$5 50/100 pr piece for his cloths, which will not bear any comparison with those of U States. I have visited some of the manufactories near this City,—said to be the best in the country. I find them in bad order and badly attended. They are owned, with but few exceptions, by an inferior class of men, generally English and Scotch—some few Mexicans have also entered into the business, but have English or Americans to conduct the factories. It is said, that but one of the factories in the country, has succeeded and paid expenses; such cannot be doubted when it is known, that to set a factory in operation in the vicinity of this City, it cost at the lowest calculation forty dollars per spindle when the machinery is ready for work, without including the cost of the building or fixtures.

Most of the machinery in the country is from Patterson, N Jersey; and I am told, it would all be brought from there, was the price of Iron in U States reduced, so as to permit the machinery to be sold at the same price as that of England. The quality of American workmanship is said to be better, and the

cost of packing two thirds less than that of England. The duties on Iron in U States being so high several cargoes of machinery have lately arrived in this country from England—the Patterson Works not being able to compete with Birmingham in the reduction of prices.

The feeling of the people of this City is very violent against the United States and Texas, and previous to the overthrow of the late Government, abusive articles were constantly appearing in the Daily papers against the President, for thinking of receiving an Envoy from the U. States, whose presence they declared an insufferable insult to the City—and a degradation of the National honor. I pass among them unnoticed, no one recognizing me for an American, but frequently for “un Habanno.” I hear them boasting, their threats against the United States; and I am fully satisfied there is scarcely a man among them who would of his own consent, today march to Texas or would wittingly give one dollar to bear the expenses of others.

The President’s message having arrived by the Brig of war Somers, is just being translated, and in a correct manner. The first part of it appeared yesterday, consequently I am unable to state what impression it will make upon the people generally; yet I know, that those who were favorable to placing a Foreign Prince at the head of this Government, have received a shock which it will take them sometime to recover from. The Archbishop is at the head of this party, and one of his strongest reasons for supporting the Army, is, that he may have a strong force to sustain him in his views. He hopes and expects the assistance of France and England, which powers, report says, have promised a force of ten thousand men each, to maintain the new monarch on his throne. The English in the City cannot help admiring the message, whilst they are encouraged at the positions taken by the President.

There is nothing new today, except Gen’l Paredes having declined receiving the pay of President of the Republic, and will accept only that of General of Division. A hand bill is being circulated reminding Gen’l Paredes of his promise to make war upon Texas. It is of no importance, further than showing the feeling of the people.

Mr Slidell having informed me he had a copy of my instructions, I shall send this with his Despatch. We have been very little together, and so particular have I been to make my commercial character known, that the gentlemen of the house where Mr Slidell resides, have not the least idea of my being an officer. It is very much to be regretted that Mr. Slidell is not received here. His dignified and gentlemanly bearing, have already induced a respect, which I am sorry to add, report says, our former representatives, with but one exception, did not obtain.

Our Consul is very highly respected by all classes, both Foreign and Mexican, and watches the interest of his country with a zeal worthy of an American. Mr Black lives in a plain, quiet, unassuming manner, by which he avoids

public attention, and no doubt, obtains much valuable information for the Government.

Since my arrival here, I have heard Mr Larkin of Monterey, spoken of in the highest terms, as a man of exceeding shrewdness of character and the most perfect American in his feelings. My anxiety to hand him at an early day, the instructions of the Government is very great, and I shall use every exertion in my power to push forward on my road. I go to that Country with high hopes of success—the revolution has favored the march of Independence far beyond the expectations of every one of any reflection, and from what I can learn, I am quite sure the Californians will not be slow, to take advantage of a movement so decidedly in their favor.

My next communication I hope to date at San Blas or Masatlan.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Very Respectively
Your Mo. obt Sert—
ARCHI H. GILLESPIE

NOTES

1. See this *Quarterly*, XVII, 123-40, 271-84, 325-50, June, September and December, 1938. The letters published by Mr. Ames are to be found in Area No. 9 of the Archives of the Navy Department while the letters now presented are to be found in Area No. 11.
2. J. B. Moore, ed., *The Writings of James Buchanan*, VI, 275-78.
3. See letters dated Mazatlan, February 11, 1846, and Monterey, April 18, 1846, this *Quarterly*, XVII, June, 1938.
4. Filed with this letter is one addressed to Bancroft by the Boston merchant, T. Hopper, enclosing letters for the use of "Mr. G." dated Boston, October 21, 1845.
5. The Mexicans considered the Nueces River the western boundary of Texas and, because of the openly expressed Texan and American claim to the territory between that river and the Rio Grande, were expecting—and intended to resist—an American invasion of the territory in dispute.