

The Origin of the Gillespie Mission

By JOHN ADAM HUSSEY

ON THE seventeenth of September 1845, the United States Ship *Brandywine* arrived at Hampton Roads, Virginia, after a cruise of two years and four months, during which she had touched at ports in Brazil, India, Ceylon, China, the Philippines, the Hawaiian Islands, the Society Islands, and Chile. Among the officers of her complement none would seem to have been looking forward with more pleasure to a change of duty than was the commander of the *Brandywine's* Marine guard, First Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie. The maintenance of his little command, composed chiefly of foreigners, in a state of soldierly efficiency had severely taxed the Lieutenant's powers of discipline. The Irish he had found especially difficult to handle.¹

In fact, the experiences of the voyage had so impressed Gillespie with the necessity of having more Americans in the Marine guard that, with characteristic energy and lack of reticence, he reported his views on the subject to the commandant of the Marine Corps, Brigadier General Henderson, immediately upon his arrival in port:

The crew of this ship is comprised of some of the most hardened spirits an officer ever had to deal with. If the present system of shipping men should continue, and the discipline of the Navy continue to be undermined also, by the interference of the civil law upon every trifling occasion, I fear the time is not far distant, when it will require a strong breastwork of bayonets in the hands of the Marine Guard, composed of native born Americans, to protect the quarter-deck from insult and outrage.²

The officer who gave voice to these alarming remarks was no callow youth inexperienced in the ways of soldiers. In 1832, he had been a sergeant of Marines, twenty years old, and recommended as having had a "good classical education" and as being faithful in the performance of his duty. That same year he had been commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps. Although he had been born in New York, his appointment was from New Jersey, the home of his guardian. Six years later, in 1838, had come his promotion to the rank of first lieutenant. By the time of his assignment to the *Brandywine*, Gillespie had already served on three vessels in the Pacific and had seen duty as a station commander.³

The type of service to which Gillespie was looking forward upon his return from the long voyage in the *Brandywine* is shown by a letter which he wrote to Brigadier General Henderson from Norfolk on September 21. It reads as follows:

Sir

In consequence of the delicate state of my health, which will prevent my performing Garrison duty this winter, I am induced to request orders to take charge of the Clothing

Store at this place—I have been informed by Lieut Stark, that he expects orders for sea service; however, should such not be the fact, I feel that the General Commanding will recognize my claim to the position, after having served so long a period at sea.—

It is very probable I will march my Company to Barracks on Wednesday 24th inst, at which time I will be obliged by receiving [sic] the orders requested.⁴

Three days later the Commandant informed Gillespie that it would give him great pleasure to assign the Lieutenant to the requested duty provided the disbursing staff of the Corps approved and the service required such a detail, which necessity the General considered doubtful.⁵ This reply must have dashed considerably Gillespie's hopes of an easy berth, but his spirits would have been raised had he known that events were already transpiring which were to bring him a duty more attractive and more romantic, if more strenuous, than the ordinary routine of the service could have given him any reason to anticipate.

On the day before the *Brandywine's* arrival at Hampton Roads, a most important meeting of President Polk's Cabinet had been held in Washington to discuss the reestablishment of friendly diplomatic relations with Mexico—relations which had been upset and finally broken off by a series of events culminating in the annexation of Texas. Late dispatches from the confidential agent of the United States in Mexico, and from the United States consuls at Vera Cruz and Mexico City, indicated that Mexico would not declare war on the United States nor would she even "invade" Texas. What was more, there seemed to be an earnest desire to receive a commissioner from the United States. A suitably qualified envoy, reported the secret agent, "might with comparative ease settle *over a breakfast* the most important national question."⁶

Here seemed to be the realization of Polk's long-held hopes that the differences with Mexico might be settled peaceably.⁷ The Cabinet agreed unanimously that a minister should be sent forthwith to the southern republic. It was decided that John Slidell, of New Orleans, should be offered the mission. The Cabinet was also in complete harmony with the President's idea that one great object of the mission was to be the settlement of a permanent boundary between the two countries, for the furtherance of which purpose Slidell was to be instructed to purchase Upper California and New Mexico.⁸

In his discussions with his Cabinet at this meeting of September 16, 1845, Polk made the first known official announcement of his desire to acquire California for the United States. The idea, however, had long been in his mind. By the time of his inauguration on March 4, 1845, the far-flung Mexican province on the Pacific was already an object of interest to the American people, and many were openly expounding upon its importance to the United States. As early as 1835 our Government had earnestly endeavored to purchase California soil, and the efforts had been continued in later years. Polk was quite in accord with a well-established national policy,

then, when, shortly after taking office, he announced privately to the Secretary of the Navy that the annexation of California was to be one of the four great aims of his administration.⁹ The naval commander in the Pacific was early ordered to seize the region immediately if war should break out with Mexico.

But much as Polk wanted California, he was not willing to let the matter of its acquisition interfere with his primary object at this time—the restoration of “those ancient relations of peace and good will which formerly existed between the Governments and the citizens of the sister republics.” From the final instructions to Slidell it is clear that the purchase of California was not to be pressed to the point of arousing antagonism on the part of Mexico.¹⁰

The President realized that buying California was not an absolute necessity. He was fully aware that other forces were already at work which would bring the province peacefully into the Union. Official dispatches from Thomas O. Larkin, the American consul at Monterey, California; writings of British, French, and even Mexican agents and journalists; and jingoistic articles in the American press made it perfectly clear to the Government and the Nation that the ever-swelling tide of emigration from the United States to California must within two or three years bring about the separation of that department from Mexico.¹¹ In other words, the “Texas game” was being played again. How far the administration was cognizant of these movements is shown by instructions sent to Larkin on October 17. If the people of California should desire to join the United States, the Consul was told, their “true policy” for the present should be “to let events take their course.”¹²

To the minds of many patriotic Americans, however, there lay in such a program one grave danger—the possibility that California might come under the sway of Great Britain or France, either through direct transfer on the part of Mexico or through the province declaring itself independent and seeking the protection of one of these powers. For years the State Department had been bombarded with official warnings of the intrigues of England and France in this regard, and denunciations of English “schemes” in relation to California figured prominently in the public press. Although it has been demonstrated that there was actually little danger of either of these powers taking California, the fear that they would do so was widespread in the United States, and in this suspicion President Polk actively shared. But in mid-September 1845, the administration does not seem to have been contemplating any specific measures to counteract foreign influence. It was evidently considered sufficient that American emigration to California was increasing and that the Monroe Doctrine existed as a general warning that European interference would not be tolerated.¹³

The Washington correspondent of the New Orleans *Picayune* probably

reflected the views of official circles when he wrote on September 17, "It is predicted that Mr. Polk's administration will be signalized by the settlement of the Oregon question satisfactory to the American people, by the peaceful acquisition of the Californias, and by the adjustment of all our claims upon Mexico."¹⁴ To be sure, on that same day newspaper articles indicating that Mexico's attitude might still be warlike had caused the Cabinet to determine to delay Slidell's departure until more positive reports were received. But this measure does not seem to have interfered seriously with Polk's belief that peace would prevail. In a letter to our minister to Prussia on September 26, 1845, Secretary of State Buchanan wrote, "... the probabilities are that there will be no actual hostilities."¹⁵ On October 17, orders to the commander of the squadron in the Pacific contained assurances that war with Mexico would be "contrary to present expectations"—a highly significant statement in view of the fact that an officer so far removed from the source of direct orders imperatively required an indication of the Government's general policy.¹⁶

From this course of comparative inactivity in regard to California, Polk and his chief advisors were rudely shaken on October 11, 1845. On that day there reached the State Department an alarming letter from Thomas O. Larkin, dated July 10, 1845. The Consul at Monterey stated that the agent of the Hudson's Bay Company in California had formerly supplied arms and funds to the native residents to expel their Mexican governor, but now there was "no doubt" in the country that Great Britain was instigating and financing a Mexican expedition to subdue California. Furthermore, there were British and French consular agents in the department, although they apparently transacted no commercial business. The unmistakable implication was that these two officials were there chiefly to foster the political designs of their respective governments on the province.¹⁷

The sensation created by this dispatch was heightened by another received the same day from W. S. Parrott, the United States secret agent in Mexico. "Everything coming from California excites great interest here in English circles," declared Parrott. "The British legation is all alive on such occasions."¹⁸ This information was made more plausible by earlier reports from him indicating that the English naval force in the Pacific was being strengthened to take California in the event of war between the United States and Mexico and that an Irish priest, Eugene McNamara, had on foot a project to establish a colony in California.¹⁹

These advices taken together, and the Larkin letter above all, determined Polk to change his policy in regard to California.²⁰ The course of letting the province ripen like a plum until it was ready to fall into the hands of the United States of its own accord was to be continued, but in addition active measures were to be taken to counteract the designs of European nations upon the region. This decision was deliberate and it was secret. The Presi-

dent himself seems to have been chiefly responsible for formulating the course of action, and James Buchanan, Secretary of State, and George Bancroft, Secretary of the Navy, were the main agents in carrying it into effect.²¹ Within six days after October 11, the program was decided upon and steps to bring it to fruition were put in motion. The policy had four main phases:

First, in addition to his consular activities, Thomas O. Larkin was appointed a confidential agent to foster friendly feelings towards the United States among the Californians and to counteract the machinations of any foreign emissaries in that area. His instructions from Buchanan dated October 17, 1845, state very clearly what was expected of him and also indicate the policy of Polk towards California.

"The future destiny of that country," said the Secretary of State, "is a subject of anxious solicitude for the Government and people of the United States." For this reason Larkin was to exert the "greatest vigilance" in discovering and defeating any attempts which might be made by foreign governments to acquire control of the region, for the President "could not view with indifference the transfer of California to Great Britain or any other Power." On the other hand, the United States had "no ambitious aspirations to gratify" and no desire to extend its federal system over more territory than it already possessed, "unless by the free and spontaneous wish of the Independent people of adjoining Territories." The exercise of compulsion or improper influence to accomplish such a result would be repugnant "both to the policy and principles of this Government." But, should the people of California "desire to unite their destiny with ours, they would be received as brethren," whenever this could be done "without giving Mexico just cause of complaint." Larkin was on "all proper occasions" to warn the government and people of California of the dangers and miseries of European dominion and was "to arouse in their bosoms that love of liberty and independence so natural to the American Continent."²²

Second, Commodore John D. Sloat, commander of the United States squadron in the Pacific, was to communicate frequently with Larkin and, like him, was to ascertain the nature of the designs of the English and French in California and the political leanings of the population. "You will do everything that is proper," he was ordered on October 17, "to conciliate towards our country the most friendly regard of the people of California."²³ Almost identical orders were given on the same day to Commodore Robert F. Stockton, who was to deliver both the dispatch to Larkin and the orders to Sloat after first making a stop at the Hawaiian Islands.²⁴

Third, John Slidell, as a part of his mission to Mexico, was to ascertain if there were any schemes afoot to transfer California to England or France and, if so, to exert all his energies to prevent their consummation. He was told emphatically that "whilst this Government does not intend to interfere

between Mexico and California, it would vigorously interpose to prevent the latter from becoming either a British or a French Colony." To guide him, Slidell was given a copy of Larkin's instructions and was given permission to correspond freely with the Consul at Monterey on the subject of foreign danger.²⁵

Fourth, a special confidential agent of the President was to be sent to California by a quick overland route. With him was to go a copy of Larkin's instructions, which it was assumed he would deliver before Commodore Stockton could arrive at Monterey with the original document. The agent was to be made well acquainted with Larkin's mission and was to "co-operate as a confidential agent" with Larkin in carrying the Consul's instructions into execution.²⁶

As early as October 17, 1845, it had been decided to entrust this delicate secret mission to Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie, who by that date had arrived in Washington from Norfolk. Beyond the fact that Gillespie was available for the duty and spoke excellent Spanish, no special reason for his selection is known.²⁷ To the Secretary of the Navy was entrusted the task of arranging the details of Gillespie's journey, and it was to that official that the Lieutenant was to make his reports.

For the sake of secrecy, it was agreed that Gillespie should assume the guise of a merchant traveling both for business reasons and to improve his delicate health. Without attempting to set an exact route, it was decided that an overland journey across Mexico would be best for the purposes at hand, Gillespie to trust to finding a passage to California in a merchant ship when he should arrive on the West Coast.

It seems to have been on October 17 that Gillespie was dispatched to New York to work out the details of his passage to the Gulf coast of Mexico and to determine upon his road to the Pacific. He was probably already on his way when two official orders which mark the formal beginning of his mission were issued on the eighteenth. One, from the headquarters of the Marine Corps, ordered him to report to the Secretary of the Navy for such duty as might be assigned.²⁸ The other, from Secretary Bancroft, read as follows:

You will proceed to New York pursuant to the instructions already communicated to you by the Department, and having fulfilled them you will return and report in person to the Secretary of the Navy.²⁹

While Gillespie was off making traveling arrangements, Bancroft was busy creating a fictitious commercial background for the newly made merchant. In his necessity he turned to an old and intimate friend, Samuel Hooper, of the Boston firm of William Appleton & Company. This well-known commercial house conducted an extensive business along the California coast, maintaining there a permanent agent and sending regular ships to engage in the hide and tallow trade.³⁰ The combination of friend and firm

was ideal for Bancroft's purposes. On October 17, he wrote Hooper the following letter:

Private and confidential

My dear M^r Hooper,

I wish to get for M^r Archibald H. Gillespie a letter of introduction to your business agent at Monterey, if you have one there and if not to your correspondent nearest Monterey. Let the letter run, so that if he shall be examined as an American, the paper may show that he goes to your correspondents to ascertain the security & condition of your affairs there.

Write such a letter as you are willing to do, & send it [to] me by return mail if convenient.

Yours most truly

GEO BANCROFT

Washington, D. C. Oct. 17, 1845.

My best regards to M^{rs} Hooper, & M^r Sturgis.³¹

Four days later Hooper forwarded to the Navy Department the requested letter introducing Gillespie to Henry Mellus, the company's agent in California. At the same time, the Boston merchant announced that one of his firm's ships, the *Barnstable*, was to sail for that region in about two weeks, and as Gillespie would undoubtedly reach there before the vessel, Hooper was taking the liberty of inclosing an unsealed business letter to Mellus with the request that the Lieutenant deliver it. "I trust the form of my letter will meet your views," he wrote to Bancroft. "It will not be necessary to deliver the introductory one and from the other M^r Mellus would infer only that we had offered M^r G. a passage in the *Barnstable*."³²

As Hooper had said, William Appleton & Company was very circumspect in mentioning Gillespie to Mellus in the open letter which was to pass through Bancroft's hands. "We write this letter to go by Mr Gillespie who thinks he shall be with you sooner than by going in the *Barnstable*, and fearing it might otherwise be inconvenient to him we give him this unsealed," read the communication. "As you are not personally acquainted we have written a[n] introductory letter for him—We shall write you more fully by the Ship," it concluded.³³

In a sealed letter forwarded several weeks later on the *Barnstable*, William Appleton & Company lost much of its reticence in discussing Gillespie. The communication to Mellus was, in part, as follows:

Enclosed you have copies of our letters of the 28th April via Mexico & of the 21st October by Mr Gillespie sent unsealed that it might not be taken from him in Mexico—it was written, as also one of introduction to you that he might if necessary appear to be going out for business purposes for us.—We do not know the object of his visit to California, but were requested to give him a Letter of introduction to you. It is probable funds will be placed with us for his expences if so we shall give him authority to draw on us.—Should he have such a letter of Credit you may find it convenient to take his drafts on U. S. or assist him in negotiating them. He is now in New York waiting we suppose for an opportunity to embark for Mexico. . . . We recommend Mr. Gillespie to

your attention, as he may have it in his power to give you early information in case of any difficulty or to render you assistance. We do not know him personally and have given him Letters to you at the request of others.³⁴

Meanwhile, Gillespie was having his troubles in New York. Detained by a steamboat accident, he did not reach the city until late on the afternoon of Saturday, October 18. It was Monday before he could begin his inquiries in relation to travel across Mexico. By Monday evening he had eliminated the Porto Bello route as unsatisfactory due to there being little chance of catching a trading vessel to California from the western end of that road. And by Thursday he had been unable, as he termed it, to learn anything more than that a vessel would sail for Vera Cruz about November 5 and that the Vera Cruz route was the best across the country. He suggested to Secretary Bancroft that inquiries be made of commercial firms through the collector of the port at New York with a view to securing confidential information and letters which would represent him as a commercial character.³⁵

On October 25, Bancroft informed Gillespie that all the mercantile letters which probably would be needed had already been obtained. Thus further inquiries in New York were unnecessary, and the Lieutenant was given permission to arrange passage on the vessel leaving for Vera Cruz early in the next month. "You will so arrange your visit to Washington as to return before her day of Sailing," Gillespie was ordered.³⁶

During Gillespie's absence, events were taking place in Washington which appear to have caused a change in the duties of his mission. On October 24, President Polk invited the influential Senator Thomas H. Benton to make a call on him and sought his advice concerning both Oregon and California, although there had been no intercourse between the two men since the Missouri Senator had bitterly denounced the rejection of Van Buren by the Democratic Convention of 1844.³⁷ In relation to California, the President told Benton of his fears that Great Britain "had her eye on that country," and the Senator agreed that no foreign power ought to be permitted to colonize the region. But Benton expressed his conviction that Americans would settle on the Sacramento River and ultimately hold the country. The expedition of Benton's son-in-law, Frémont, and the intention of that officer to visit California before his return to the United States were also discussed.³⁸

Up to the date of this conversation, there is no known evidence that Polk intended to have Gillespie make contact with Frémont in California. It seems probable that it was while discussing the route of the explorer with Benton that the President first conceived the idea that the Senator's famous young son-in-law might be of use in forwarding the administration's program. At any rate, within a few days after October 24, indications begin to appear in the records that one object of Gillespie's mission was to be a meeting with Frémont.

On October 27, Buchanan wrote to Larkin enclosing a package for Captain Frémont, which the Consul was to forward if a safe opportunity presented itself. Another letter of the same date to John Black in Mexico City shows that this packet was to be entrusted to the regular mails across Mexico. On the copy books of the State Department both of these letters are marked "cancelled," indicating that some other method of transportation was decided upon for the parcel. It is known that Gillespie did deliver to Frémont a package of letters from Senator Benton and his family; and, according to sworn testimony, this was the only packet delivered to the explorer by Polk's agent. It seems logical to assume that the package which Buchanan was willing to entrust to the uncertainties of the ordinary mails was composed of the Benton letters and that, since it had been decided to have Gillespie make contact with Frémont, the delivery of the documents was entrusted to him somewhat as an afterthought and perhaps as a gesture of friendship to Senator Benton. The other possible view, that, because these family letters were to be delivered and because it seemed expedient to have Gillespie deliver them, the idea developed of making Frémont a party to Polk's program does not seem so probable.³⁹

If sound, this reasoning would lead to the conclusion that the delivery of the Missouri Senator's letters was not originally contemplated as one of the objects of Gillespie's mission and that the contents of the letters were not vitally concerned with the Government's plans for California. This theory is strengthened by what is known about the contents of Benton's letters. One of them, at least, seems to have been written after the Senator's conversation with Polk and, evidently, after some discussion with Buchanan. Benton informed the explorer of the administration's fears of foreign influence and seems to have intimated that the explorer himself might soon hear from the Secretary of State. Frémont later testified under oath that passages of the letter were "enigmatical and obscure," but he seems to have derived enough knowledge from them to reply to his father-in-law a few days after receiving the communication that intelligence of British trading activities among the Indians of southern Oregon might be "worthy of Mr. Buchanan's attention" and that "your letter led me to expect some communication from him, but I *received nothing*."⁴⁰

Although he did tell something of the Administration's views in his letters, Benton did not send any instructions to Frémont from Polk or Buchanan. As late as November 1846, Benton seems sincerely to have believed that in the Bear Flag affair Frémont had acted solely on his own responsibility and as a victim of circumstances.⁴¹ Evidently he did not hear of any instructions to Larkin until 1847, and not until February 1848 did he learn the exact contents of those instructions.⁴² Furthermore, it is certain, in view of Benton's strong desire for peace with Mexico at this time, that he did not suggest to Frémont that he start a forcible revolution in California.⁴³

Whatever may be the validity of the cancelled letters in the State Department as evidence to support the view that the determination to include Frémont in the Government's plan was not part of the original program, it is clear that by November 3, 1845, that decision had been made. On that date Buchanan wrote for Gillespie a letter of introduction to Frémont, representing the Lieutenant to be a visitor to the "north-west coast of America on business."

"I do not deem it probable that he will fall in with you," the Secretary wrote for Mexican eyes, "but if he should, allow me to bespeak for him your friendly attention. He will be able to communicate to you information of the health of Mrs. Fremont and of Col. Benton and his family."⁴⁴

When Gillespie left Washington for California he carried with him the packet of Benton letters, and he also, according to the sworn testimony of both Gillespie and Frémont, had been directed to acquaint the explorer with his instructions, which, as they were explained to Frémont, "had for their principal objects to ascertain the disposition of the California people, to conciliate their feelings in favour of the United States, and to find out, with a design of counteracting, the designs of the British government upon the country."⁴⁵ He was not instructed to order Frémont to stir up a violent revolution in California against the Mexican authorities.⁴⁶

With these new determinations Gillespie was acquainted upon his return to Washington from New York in the last days of October. At about eight o'clock on the evening of the thirtieth, the Lieutenant called upon the President to receive his final instructions.⁴⁷ Upon leaving he seems to have carried away the impression that the great objective of his mission was to be the encouragement of the native Californians of their own free will to declare themselves independent of Mexico and through their friendship for the United States to seek the protection of the Union.⁴⁸

During this short visit to the capital, Gillespie worked out with the Navy Department the final details of his trip. It was decided that instead of relying upon a merchant vessel to carry him from the west coast of Mexico to California, he was to apply to Commodore Sloat for passage in a ship of war.⁴⁹ He was to commit to memory the dispatch to Larkin and destroy the written copy before his arrival at Vera Cruz, and, in general, he was to report to Bancroft all the facts observed en route which he deemed of interest to the Government.⁵⁰

On November 1, Buchanan wrote for him a non-committal personal letter of introduction to Larkin,⁵¹ and on the same day Bancroft issued him the following order:

In further prosecution of the duties assigned you by the Department, you will proceed without delay to New York, and will consider yourself on Special Service.⁵²

In obedience to these instructions, Gillespie directed himself to his point of departure. How he fared there is shown by the following letter:

New York November 10th 1845

Sir

The sailing of the *Petersburgh* has been delayed until Thursday 13th inst, in consequence of the Shippers having disappointed the owners—I have just been on board of the Brig, and find them loading with much despatch, which induces me to believe there will not be a further delay.

A letter of Credit being necessary to enable me to draw upon Messrs Appleton & Co, I will be obliged if you would address them upon the subject, requesting them to send me a letter by the first mail after the receipt of your advice—

When with Mr Buchanan I omitted to request the letter to the Consul at Vera Cruz, spoken of by His Excellency the President—As it may be of importance, I will be obliged if the same were sent me by return of mail.

To the Honorable
the Secretary of the Navy
Washington⁵³

I have the honor to be
Very Respectfully
Your M^o obt Serv't
ARCHI H. GILLESPIE

Once more Bancroft bestirred himself on behalf of the President's agent. On November 12, he wrote to Hooper and William Appleton & Company requesting that a power to draw on their house for any sum not exceeding twelve hundred dollars be forwarded at once to Gillespie in New York. The draft was sent to Gillespie two days later and reached him in time for him to draw upon his credit to the extent of \$500 before his departure.⁵⁴ The Secretary also supplied the Lieutenant with the desired letter of introduction to the consul at Vera Cruz.⁵⁵

Finally, on November 16, Gillespie's long delayed departure was accomplished. In a letter from the brig *Petersburgh* off Sandy Hook just before the pilot was dropped, the excited agent wrote a farewell letter to the Secretary of the Navy. "Be pleased to express to His Excellency the President, how grateful I feel for his confidence," he begged, "& assure him at the same time, that he will find it has not been misplaced." After further effusive thanks to Secretary Buchanan and to Bancroft himself, for the honors heaped upon him, Gillespie brought his communication to a dramatic climax. "I trust," he wrote, "that should I be successful I may not be forgotten, & will receive the only reward a Soldier aspires [sic] to obtain."⁵⁶ Gillespie was off on his great adventure.

NOTES

1. A. H. Gillespie to F. A. Parker, At Sea, July 18, 1845; A. H. Gillespie to A. Henderson, Hampton Roads, September 17, 1845, Letters Received File (original MSS in Office of the Major General Commandant, United States Marine Corps, Navy Department, Washington, D. C.).

2. A. H. Gillespie to A. Henderson, Norfolk, September 17, 1845, Letters Received File.

3. "A. H. Gillespie, Service Record" (MS in Office of Naval Records and Library, Navy Department, Washington, D. C.).

4. Letters Received File (in Office of the Major General Commandant, U.S.M.C.).

5. A. Henderson to A. H. Gillespie, Washington, September 24, 1845, Letter Book No. 3 (MSS in Office of the Major General Commandant, U.S.M.C.), p. 653.

6. W. S. Parrott to J. Buchanan, August 26, 1845, as quoted by Jesse Siddall Reeves, *American Diplomacy under Tyler and Polk* (Baltimore, 1907), p. 271.

7. It is not the purpose of this article to present the arguments supporting the contention that Polk's policy towards Mexico at this time was one of peace, so long as the national honor could be preserved. A convenient presentation of the subject will be found in Justin Harvey Smith, *The War with Mexico* (New York, 1919), I, 127-31. See also George Lockhart Rives, *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848* (New York, 1913), 2 vols.; and Eugene Irving McCormac, *James K. Polk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1922). For the opposite view, that Polk's policy was to provoke war, see Richard R. Stenberg, "The Failure of Polk's Mexican War Intrigue of 1845," *Pacific Historical Review*, IV (March 1935), 39-68. It is often stated that Polk's orders to Taylor during the summer and fall of 1845 to occupy the area between the Nueces and the Rio Grande were definite attempts to provoke Mexico into armed conflict. Polk, however, was bound to hold the area regarded by Texas as her own, that is, to the Rio Grande; but he seems to have sincerely believed that this could be done without resort to war. In his diary for September 1, 1845, he gives the following account of a conversation between himself and Senator W. S. Archer, of Virginia: "The military and naval preparations which had been made by the Administration were spoken of, and Mr. Archer concurred in an opinion, expressed by the President, that the appearance of our land and naval forces on the borders of Mexico and in the Gulf would probably deter and prevent Mexico from either declaring war or invading Texas." James K. Polk, *Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845-1849*, Milo Milton Quaife, ed. (Chicago, 1910), I, 12-13.

8. Polk, *op. cit.*, I, 33-35.

9. For detailed evidence supporting the statements made in this paragraph see Smith, *op. cit.*, I, 323-24; Robert Glass Cleland, *Early Sentiment for the Annexation of California* (Austin, [1915]), pp. 1-45; *Century Magazine*, XLI (April 1891), 923.

10. J. Buchanan to J. Slidell, Washington, November 10, 1845, Instructions, Mexico, XVI, 1-22 (MSS in Archives, Department of State, Washington, D. C.); printed in John Bassett Moore, ed., *Works of James Buchanan* (Philadelphia, 1909), VI, 294-306. It is significant that had Mexico accepted Polk's offer to settle the debts for a Rio Grande boundary, Polk would have deprived himself of his means of bringing pressure on Mexico to cause her to sell California.

11. See Cleland, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-73; Smith, *op. cit.*, I, 320-22.

12. J. Buchanan to T. O. Larkin, Washington, October 17, 1845, Larkin Documents, III, 337 (original MSS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley); printed in this *QUARTERLY*, V (September 1926), 298-301, and elsewhere.

13. See Cleland, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-97; Smith *op. cit.*, I, 323-24; E. D. Adams, "English Interest in the Annexation of California," *American Historical Review*, XIV (July 1909), 744-63. An excellent treatment of a phase of the British interest is L. G. Engelson, "Proposals for the Colonization of California by England in Connection with the Mexican Debt to British Bondholders, 1837-1846," in this *QUARTERLY*, XVIII (June 1939), 136-48.

14. New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, September 27, 1845, as quoted in Cleland, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

15. J. Buchanan to H. Wheaton, Washington, September 26, 1845, Polk Papers, 1st Series, Vol. 73 (MSS in Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.).

16. G. Bancroft to J. D. Sloat, Washington, October 17, 1845, in Sloat Manuscripts (MSS in Templeton Crocker Collection, California Historical Society, San Francisco); printed in this *QUARTERLY*, II (July 1923), 167-70.

17. T. O. Larkin to J. Buchanan, Monterey, July 10, 1845, Monterey, Consular Letters (MSS in Archives, Department of State), I.

18. W. S. Parrott to J. Buchanan, Mexico, September 2, 1845, Mexico, Despatches (original MSS in Archives, Department of State), XII.

19. Cleland, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

20. There can be no doubt but that Larkin's letter was the decisive factor. In a private letter to Louis McLane, Minister to Great Britain, dated Washington, October 14, 1845, Buchanan made clear the great importance attached to Larkin's dispatch of July 10, 1845. Polk Papers, 1st series, Vol. 73. See also Buchanan's instructions to Larkin, October 17, 1845.

21. The frequent references to the President in the Larkin and Slidell instructions clearly reveal Polk's guiding hand.

22. J. Buchanan to T. O. Larkin, Washington, October 17, 1845, *supra*. In addition, Larkin was instructed to keep the State Department informed on the general course of events in California and to send detailed reports on the commerce, resources, and population of California, paying particular attention to the political leanings of certain classes of the inhabitants. It is an interesting fact that on October 2, 1845, a private letter was written to Polk from New York suggesting that the United States install an agent in California to protect American citizens and to thwart English schemes. Whether more than a consular agent was intended is not clear. What effect, if any, this letter had on Polk's policy is not known. Levi D. Slacum [?] to J. K. Polk, New York, October 2, 1845, Polk Papers, 2d series, Vol. 23.

23. G. Bancroft to J. D. Sloat, Washington, October 17, 1845, Sloat Manuscripts.

24. G. Bancroft to R. F. Stockton, Washington, October 17, 1845, quoted in Irving Berdine Richman, *California under Spain and Mexico* (Boston, 1911), p. 529. A copy of the orders to Sloat of October 17, 1845, in the Sloat Manuscripts is endorsed "Recd by Lieut Gillis 16th March 1846 by the Warren," indicating that the Navy Department took care to see that Sloat was informed of his orders before Stockton's arrival. George Bancroft, writing in 1886, says that Gillespie also carried a copy of these orders to Sloat. *Century Magazine*, XLI (April 1891), 923-24. This may be, but it is not likely that Gillespie would risk carrying written orders across Mexico, and he mentions destroying only one dispatch, i. e., the Larkin instructions. A. H. Gillespie to [G. Bancroft], Vera Cruz, December 13, 1845, Area Files, A-11 (original MSS in Office of Naval Records and Library); printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVIII (September 1939), 219-22. Gillespie did give Sloat some instructions, probably oral, on his arrival at Mazatlan, but these may have related only to Sloat's supplying a ship to take the agent to California. A. H. Gillespie to [G. Bancroft], Mazatlan, February 11, 1846, Area Files, A-9 (original MSS in Office of Naval Records and Library); printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVII (June 1938), 125-26.

25. J. Buchanan to J. Slidell, Washington, November 10, 1845, Instructions, Mexico, XVI, 1-22. Although Slidell's instructions are dated several weeks after October 17, it is likely that the decision to have him cooperate with Larkin was made at an earlier date.

26. J. Buchanan to T. O. Larkin, Washington, October 17, 1845, *supra*. It is to be noted that no mention of Frémont is made in these instructions. If, on October 17, it had been decided that Gillespie was to order Frémont to aid in carrying out the instructions, it would have been strange if their fellow agent, Larkin, to whom the instructions were directed, had not been informed of the existence of this third agent.

27. Concerning Gillespie's Spanish see T. O. Larkin to W. A. Leidesdorff, Monterey, April 19, 1846, Leidesdorff Papers (original MSS in Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino), No. 124. A possible but very far-fetched clue to political reasons for Gillespie's appointment may be found in the fact that in July 1845, a "Mr. Reckless of New Jersey, long known . . . as a gentleman who has taken a zealous part

in the struggles of the republican party," desired an interview with the President. H. D. Gilpin to J. K. Polk, Philadelphia, July 16, 1845, Polk Papers, 2d series, Vol. 18. Joseph W. Reckless, of Reckless Town, New Jersey, was Gillespie's guardian.

28. A. Henderson to A. H. Gillespie, Washington, October 18, 1845, Letter Book No. 3 (MSS in office of the Major General Commandant, U.S.M.C.), p. 622.

29. G. Bancroft to A. H. Gillespie, [Washington], October 18, 1845, Letters to Officers of the Marine Corps (MSS in Office of Naval Records and Library), No. 5, p. 386. Gillespie had intended to reach New York in time to do business on Saturday, October 18. With such intention, it is very unlikely that he left Washington after the Navy Department offices opened on that same morning.

30. For a demonstration of the close friendship between Bancroft and Hooper, see S. Hooper to G. Bancroft, Boston, October 1, 1845, G. Bancroft Papers (MSS in Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston). Samuel Hooper, the son of a European and West Indies merchant, was born in Marblehead, February 3, 1808. After making several far-flung commercial voyages, he became a junior partner in Bryant, Sturgis & Co. when twenty-five years old. In 1841, he joined William Appleton to form William Appleton & Co., and seems to have been the most active of the several partners. During 1851-54, and again in 1857, he was a member of the state legislature. In 1860, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives where he served with prominence for about fourteen years. He died in Washington in 1875. "Explanatory Resumes of the Manuscript Collections of Business Papers in the Treasury Room, Baker Library" (MS in Library of the Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, Boston). It is interesting to note that when the Government, in 1846, needed ships to transport troops and supplies to California, Bancroft proffered Hooper the chance to supply one and even offered to let Hooper see the bids of New York firms, which were lower than Hooper's. The *Loo Choo* was furnished by Hooper's firm.

31. G. Bancroft Papers. "Mr. Sturgis" is probably William Sturgis, a prominent Boston merchant, friend and frequent correspondent of Bancroft's.

32. S. Hooper to G. Bancroft, Boston, October 21, 1845, Area Files, A-11.

33. Wm. Appleton & Co. to H. Mellus, Boston, October 21, 1845, Letter Book (1845-1848) William Appleton & Co. (MSS in Gordon Dexter Collection, Library of the Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University).

34. Wm. Appleton & Co. to H. Mellus, Boston, November 10, 1845, Letter Book (1845-48) William Appleton & Co.

35. A. H. Gillespie to G. Bancroft, New York, October 20, 1845, and October 23, 1845, Area Files, A-11; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVIII (September 1939), 217-18.

36. G. Bancroft to A. H. Gillespie, [Washington], October 25, 1845, Area Files, A-11; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVIII, 218-19.

37. McCormac, *op. cit.*, pp. 385-86.

38. Polk, *op. cit.*, I, 67-72.

39. For the text of the two Buchanan letters and full arguments for the thesis set forth in this paragraph, see Josiah Royce, *California, from the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco* (Boston, 1886), pp. 142-47.

40. J. C. Frémont to [T. H. Benton], Sacramento River, May 24, 1846, in *Niles' Register*, November 21, 1846, pp. 190-91; also in this *QUARTERLY*, VI (March 1927), pp. 89-90; and 30th Cong., 1st sess., S. Exec. Doc. 33, p. 373.

41. T. H. Benton to [J. K. Polk], Washington, November 9, 1846, in *Niles' Register*, November 14, 1846, pp. 173-74.

42. T. H. Benton to J. Buchanan, [Washington, February 18, 1848], J. Buchanan Papers (original MSS in Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia). "Gen^l Cass has shewn me your note, & the draft of the letter to Mr. O. Larkin [sic]. . . . I do not

think it necessary, nor desirable, to publish the instructions, nor in fact, any part of them." See also Richard R. Stenberg, "Polk and Frémont, 1845-1846," *Pacific Historical Review*, VII (September 1938), 211-27.

43. For an illustration of Benton's aversion to war with Mexico, see Polk, *op. cit.*, I, 375-76. Benton also later clearly stated that Frémont had no orders to force a revolution in California. (See note 45.)

44. J. Buchanan to J. C. Frémont, Washington, November 3, 1845, in the Jefferson City, Mo., *Inquirer*, May 6, 1848, and elsewhere.

45. 30th Cong., 1st sess., S. Reports of Committees, 75, pp. 12, 30. It is not the purpose of this paper to present the arguments in favor of the position that Frémont was not ordered to stir up a revolution in California. However, for a new piece of evidence in this regard, see T. H. Benton to J. Buchanan, [Washington], July 20, 1848, J. Buchanan Papers. Frémont has been "alluded to on the floor of the House as an 'emissary' sent by the government to excite revolt in California in time of peace. . . . To go before Congress now for compensation would be to give a pretext for repeating such aspersions. He cannot consent to furnish any occasion or pretext for such injustice to himself or the administration." Also, in his letter to Buchanan of February 18, 1848, *ibid.*, Benton states that Frémont found foreign designs on California to be more dangerous than they were known to be in Washington and that they required "a remedy of a much stronger kind than the government contemplated."

46. Polk, *op. cit.*, III, 394-95. "A false impression is being attempted by the opposition in Congress . . . to the effect that this letter to Mr. Larkin contained instructions to produce a revolution in California before Mexico commenced the War against the U. S., that Col. Fremont had the authority to make the revolution. The publication of the letter will prove the falsehood of such an inference." It is possible that the main object of Gillespie's making contact with Frémont was to secure any late information the explorer might have on conditions in California. This possibility is borne out to some extent by A. H. Gillespie to [G. Bancroft], Monterey, April 18, 1846, Area Files, A-9; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVII (June 1938), 135-40. Gillespie says that he will follow Frémont and "should I obtain from him any thing of importance, will send a courier across the Southern country as you directed." Various letters written by Frémont in May and June 1846, in which the explorer states his peaceful intentions and his plans to return at once to the United States, would seem to bear out the contention that Frémont's participation in the Administration's program in California was not to be very active or of long duration.

47. Polk, *op. cit.*, I, 82-84.

48. A. H. Gillespie to G. Bancroft, Mexico, January 16, 1846, Area Files, A-11; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVIII (September 1939), 222-28.

49. A. H. Gillespie to G. Bancroft, Mazatlan, February 11, 1846, Area Files, A-9; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVII (June 1938), 125-26.

50. A. H. Gillespie to G. Bancroft, Vera Cruz, December 13, 1845, Area Files, A-11; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVIII (September 1939), 219-22.

51. J. Buchanan to T. O. Larkin, Washington, November 1, 1845, Larkin Documents, III, 362; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, V (September 1926), 297-98.

52. G. Bancroft to A. H. Gillespie, [Washington], November 1, 1845, Letters to Officers of the Marine Corps, No. 5, p. 387.

53. G. Bancroft Papers.

54. G. Bancroft to S. Hooper, [Washington], November 12, 1845, and G. Bancroft to W. Appleton & Co., [Washington], November 12, 1845, G. Bancroft Papers; W.

Appleton & Co. to A. H. Gillespie, Boston, November 14, 1845 (two letters), and I. H. Wright to W. Appleton & Co., Boston, November 24, 1845, Gordon Dexter Collection; W. Appleton & Co. to G. Bancroft, Boston, November 14, 1845, Area Files, A-11; and S. Hooper to G. Bancroft, Boston, November 18, 1845, Miscellaneous Letters, November 1845 (MSS in Office of Naval Records and Library, Navy Department), No. 76.

55. G. Bancroft to A. H. Gillespie, [Washington], November 12, 1845, G. Bancroft Papers.

56. A. H. Gillespie to G. Bancroft, Sandy Hook, November 16, 1845, Area Files, A-11; printed in this *QUARTERLY*, XVIII (September 1939), 219.