

7-1-1946

## Materials in the National Archives for the History of New Mexico before 1848

Ralph G. Lounsbury

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Lounsbury, Ralph G.. "Materials in the National Archives for the History of New Mexico before 1848." *New Mexico Historical Review* 21, 3 (1946). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol21/iss3/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu), [lsloane@salud.unm.edu](mailto:lsloane@salud.unm.edu), [sarahrk@unm.edu](mailto:sarahrk@unm.edu).

# MATERIALS IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES FOR THE HISTORY OF NEW MEXICO BEFORE 1848

By \*RALPH G. LOUNSBURY

**D**URING the Spanish period, contact between the United States and the New Mexican region was infrequent.<sup>1</sup> This was partly because of the remoteness of the province from American settlements and partly because of Spanish restrictions on foreign commerce. Foreigners were prohibited from residing or engaging in trade in New Spain. The severity of this exclusive policy was relaxed somewhat just before and during the war of Mexican independence, and overland trade from Missouri to Santa Fe was established by 1821. Frequent and continuous intercourse did not begin until the Mexican War brought about the American conquest.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, official records of the Government of the United States which contain information about New Mexico before 1846 are not extensive. Even records of American military operations, 1846-1848, are relatively few in number.

Generally, records in The National Archives which are of value to students of New Mexican history relate to exploration, boundaries, consular representation, claims, communications, and military affairs. Materials are interspersed as single documents or small groups of papers among the records of the Department of State, the War Department, and the Senate of the United States. Of particular interest are the records of the American Embassy and Consulate General at Mexico City which were trans-

---

\* Ralph G. Lounsbury was formerly employed in The National Archives. This paper was written about 1940. Mr. Lounsbury now states that additional information on New Mexico might be found in later additions to the Archives, as follows: records of the General Land Office and of the Department of Justice. Ed.

1. For purposes of this report the New Mexico region comprises the province of New Mexico within the limits established to the north and east by the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, and includes the adjacent Pecos River country of West Texas, and the neighboring regions now embraced in Arizona and the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora.

2. William R. Manning, *Early Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Mexico* (Baltimore, 1916), 166-189, cited hereafter as Manning, *Early Relations*.

ferred recently to The National Archives. These two collections have not heretofore been readily accessible to scholars in the United States, although they were consulted by searchers prior to their removal to Washington.

The first officer of the United States to enter New Mexico was Lieutenant Zebulon Pike, while on his expedition of 1806-1807. The story of his arrest and detention in New Spain constitutes a well known chapter of South-western history. There are two special collections of Pike papers in the records of the War Department in The National Archives. A group of twenty-one items comprises papers confiscated at the time of Pike's arrest by the Spaniards. They were returned to the United States by the Mexican Government in 1910 and now form a special collection in the files of The Adjutant General's Office. Most of the documents relate to Pike's previous activities. Several, however, concern the expedition. Pertinent to New Mexican history is the fragmentary "Diary of Progress", written about March, 1807, a brief chronicle of Pike's journey under guard from Santa Fe to Chihuahua. The possibility of encountering Spaniards on the upper Arkansas was discussed in two of Pike's letters, written en route, to General James Wilkinson. These also told of Spanish trade from New Mexico among the Plains Indians. There is a map of the territory near the border of New Mexico explored by the Pike party. A book of meteorological observations contains entries made along the Arkansas. In several letters dated 1806, Governor Jahiel Kinson of Louisiana Territory commented to Pike on the effect of European events and of Miranda's Venezuelan expedition on Spanish policy.<sup>3</sup>

The second group of Pike papers, 1805-1813, is a special collection brought together from the files of letters received by The Adjutant General, to which has been added some incoming correspondence from records of the office of the Secretary of War. Pike's efforts to find traces of Spaniards on the Plains, and rumors of Spanish attempts to influence

---

3. These and other records of the War Department deposited in The National Archives and cited herein cannot be used except by authority of that Department.

the Indians, are recounted by him in a letter to General Wilkinson from the upper Arkansas country. After his return to the United States in 1807, Pike discussed his release, detention of his men, and treatment accorded the party by Spanish authorities in several letters. Wilkinson communicated his impressions of the effect of the expedition on Spain in a letter to the Secretary of War, which inclosed a translation of a protest received from Governor Salcedo. A statement drawn up in 1808 showed the sums advanced to Pike by Spanish officials for his return home. Among these papers is also to be found a letter concerning services of Ensign Vásquez, interpreter on the expedition.

A few letters of General James Wilkinson, 1804-1807, in the files of The Adjutant General, concern New Mexico and Pike. One contains a proposal, made in 1805, for construction of a fort midway between Missouri and New Mexico to protect the frontier against Spanish encroachment. Wilkinson stated that New Mexican towns could turn out 1,200 fighting men. In the same letter, the General also remarked that a man named Morrison had recently equipped a friend for a trading venture to Santa Fe. A Spanish expedition to the Pawnee country on the Platte River was reported in another letter of 1805. There are two items for the year 1807 which refer to Pike's expedition: one concerning purchases of provisions, the other announcing that Lieutenant James Wilkinson's sketches of the Arkansas country were nearly completed.

Although the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 made the United States sovereign over a vast territory adjacent to New Mexico and other parts of New Spain, the international boundary was not formally defined for sixteen years. For the first time, the northern and northeastern confines of New Mexico were fixed by the Treaty of Amity, Settlement, and Limits of February 22, 1819. Record of negotiations, 1815-1819, is in the files of the Department of State.<sup>4</sup> Later, when the United States and Mexico defined their

---

4. See *Diplomatic Instructions*, vols. 7 and 8; *Diplomatic Despatches*, Spain, vols. 12-18; and *Notes to Foreign Legations*, vol. 2. The ms. text of the treaty, accompanied by documents concerning its ratification, is in *Treaty Series*, no. 327.

mutual boundary, the limits established by the Spanish treaty of 1819 were retained. Negotiations were initiated in 1823 and continued until Mexico and the United States finally ratified the agreement in 1832. Documentary evidence of the attempts of the two Governments to reach a satisfactory understanding is also found in the records of the Department of State.<sup>5</sup>

Before definitive treaties were concluded with Mexico, the Government of the United States surveyed the route from Missouri to the confines of New Mexico and attempted to negotiate with Mexico for mutual protection of travelers using the Santa Fe Trail. Records of the survey by the Sibley Commission, 1825-1827, are in the files of the Senate of the United States.<sup>6</sup> Diplomatic aspects of the question are recorded in the files of the Department of State.<sup>7</sup>

Efforts of the United States to establish consulates in northern Mexico before 1849 were unsuccessful, partly because early appointees for Chihuahua and Santa Fe, 1825-1833, declined to serve, but principally because the Mexican Government objected to having consular functions performed by men who were engaged privately in trade. As almost all of the consuls appointed for Santa Fe, Chihuahua and Saltillo were traders, Mexico persistently declined to grant them *exequaturs*. While many appointees were formally commissioned and actually performed some consular duties they remained unrecognized even after the conclusion of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation of 1831. Although this agreement provided for consuls, the status of American representatives was that of commercial agents.<sup>8</sup>

---

5. *Diplomatic Instructions*, vols. 10-12; *Diplomatic Despatches*, Mexico, vols. 1-4. The manuscript texts of the Treaty of Limits signed on Jan. 12, 1828, the Additional Article, Apr. 5, 1831, and documents concerning ratification are in *Treaty Series*, no. 202.

6. They are described in Buford Rowland, "Report of the Commissioners on the Road from Missouri to New Mexico, October 1827", *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XIV, 213-229.

7. *Diplomatic-Instructions*, vol. 10; *Diplomatic Despatches*, Mexico, vol. 1.

8. Manning, *Early Relations*, 169-170. The Commercial Treaty of 1831 provided for the subsequent negotiation of a consular convention, but no such agreement was concluded prior to the close of the Mexican War. The ms. text is in *Treaty Series*, no. 203.

Efforts to establish a consulate at Santa Fe go back as early as 1825, for in that year instructions were issued by the Department of State to Augustus Storrs, consul. Unfortunately, however, there are no other records concerning him.<sup>9</sup> In 1830, James Davis of Tupelo, Alabama, was appointed but did not go to his post.<sup>10</sup> Céran St. Vrain represented the United States there from 1834 to 1838.<sup>11</sup> His activities are shown in the records of the Consulate General, Mexico City.<sup>12</sup>

Manuel Álvarez was appointed consul in 1839 and commissioned in the following year. He was reappointed again in 1845, but the Department of State withheld his commission pending recognition by the Mexican Government. Álvarez performed the duties of commercial agent until after the American occupation of Santa Fe in 1846. Although his instructions are routine, his communications and inclosures cover a variety of topics concerning overland trade and Mexican-American relations in the Southwest. He reported on damages wrought by Indians in Mexican territory, seizures of goods, land ownership by Americans in New Mexico, and questions of property and religion involved in mixed marriages. Álvarez also reported upon the Texan-Santa Fe expedition of 1841, and later gave account of his part in influencing Governor Armijo to surrender New Mexico to General Kearny in 1846.<sup>13</sup>

Consular records for Chihuahua date from 1825. Unfortunately, however, the early records of the office were

---

9. Storrs' instructions, Apr. 12, 1825, are in *Consular Instructions*, vol. 2, p. 351. See also *List of U. S. Consular Officers by Posts, 1789-1939*, vol. 17, records of the Department of State.

10. *Consular Instructions*, vol. 5; *Consular Letters, Santa Fe, Mexico*.

11. St. Vrain's instructions are in *Consular Instructions*, vols. 5 and 9 *passim*. There are no communications from him in *Consular Letters, Santa Fe*.

12. Records of the Mexico City Consulate General, *Letters Sent (Series C8.1)*, Letter Book 1.

13. Instructions to Álvarez are in *Consular Instructions*, vols. 6 and 11. Despatches and inclosures from him form the bulk of the documents bound in *Consular Letters, Santa Fe, Mexico*. His efforts to obtain Mexican recognition as consul are discussed in Powhatan Ellis to Álvarez, Mexico City, November 2, 1839, *Letters to Consuls, 1836-1838 (Series C8.13)*, American Embassy, Mexico City. A letter and petition of 1845, asking for the reappointment of Álvarez as consul or commercial agent are filed with *Papers of M. Alvarez, 1850, 1852*, State Department Records, Applications for Office.

destroyed by fire in 1922, and there are only six communications from it for the period previous to 1848 in the Washington files of the Department of State.<sup>14</sup> According to existing records, Joshua Pilcher was commissioned consul in 1825, and Charles Webber in 1827, but both declined. John Ward, appointed in 1829, actually went to his post, but the Department received only two despatches from him, dated November 27 and 30, 1830. From 1833 to 1848, John S. Langham, George C. Beeton, John J. Messervé (Messervey), Edward J. Glasgow, and James Semple served at Chihuahua, sometimes under consular commissions but frequently as commercial agents.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, other men appear to have represented the United States there, either temporarily or unofficially.<sup>16</sup>

Records of the Consulate General at Mexico City contain more items concerning Chihuahua than are to be found elsewhere. Correspondence passing between the two posts relates to letters of security for Americans trading to New Mexico, Indian depredations, restrictions on foreign retailers, detention of trades and confiscation of goods.<sup>17</sup>

Applications for letters of security (*cartas de seguridad*) should prove of historical interest. Communications concerning them form a large part of the correspondence carried on between Chihuahua and Mexico City. Requests usually described single persons and sometimes groups. Through them it is possible to identify individuals and parties in overland trade, as the occupations, citizenship, places of residence in the United States and physical characteristics of the applicants were set forth. The consul at Mexico City formally requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to issue the *cartas de seguridad*, but the applicants

---

14. Lee R. Blohm, Consul, to the Secretary of State, Chihuahua, Sept. 6, 1935 (Despatch no. 96), reports the destruction of the records. The six despatches are in *Consular Letters, Chihuahua*, vol. 1.

15. The names of the appointees at Chihuahua are in Records of the Department of State: *List of U. S. Consular Officers by Posts, 1789-1939*, vol. 5; and *Consular Officers of the United States, 1775-1893*, vol. 1. Beeton, Messervé and Semple are not included in the first citation.

16. Mexico City Consulate General. *Letters Sent (Series C8.1)*, Letter Books 1-4.

17. Mexico City Consulate General, *Miscellaneous Incoming Letters (Series C8.2)*, vols. 1-3; and *Letters Sent (Series C8.1)*, Letter Books 1-4.

received them directly from the officials of the Department of Chihuahua.<sup>18</sup>

Alleged confiscations of goods by the authorities led several Americans at Santa Fe and Chihuahua to file claims against the Mexican Government. Initial complaints, often accompanied by statements of the type and value of the goods seized, were transmitted to the consulate at Mexico City.<sup>19</sup> Declarations by claimants with inventories and affidavits are in the records of both the Embassy and Consulate general.<sup>20</sup> Some of the cases were adjudicated under the Convention of 1839 by the Claims Commission which sat during 1841-1842.<sup>21</sup> Others were not settled until after the Mexican War in accordance with claims provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, February 2, 1848. The later cases were decided by the Commission of 1849-1851.<sup>22</sup>

Misfortunes of the members of the ill-fated Texan-Santa Fe expedition of 1841, and efforts of the United States to procure release of the captives, are set forth not only in the files of the Washington office of the Department of State, but also in the records of the American Embassy and Consulate General at Mexico City. Besides official communications on the subject, the latter contain appeals from relatives and friends asking aid for the prisoners.<sup>23</sup> The issues raised by Texan attacks on Santa Fe traders along the Trail in 1843 are also covered in the same series of records.

---

18. Mexico City Consulate General, *Miscellaneous Incoming Letters* as cited in Note 17 *supra*.

19. Mexico City Consulate General, *Miscellaneous Incoming Letters (Series C8.2)*, vols. 1-3.

20. Embassy, *Letters Sent (Series C8.1)*, Mar. 25, 1837-Feb. 8, 1839; Mexico City Consulate General, *Miscellaneous Record Books*, 1-4 (1834-1839).

21. Certified copies of Awards, a Letter Book of the Commission, and three Day Books, 1841-1842, are in the files of the Department of State.

22. Records of the Claims Commission, 1849-1851, in the files of the Department of State, consist of *Awards*, 2 vols.; *Opinions*, 3 vols.; and *Letter Books*, 3 vols.

23. *Diplomatic Instructions*, Texas, vol. 1; *Diplomatic Despatches*, Texas, vol. 1; *Notes from Texas*, vol. 1; *Notes to Texas*, vol. 6; *Consular Letters*, Texas, vol. 1; *Special Agents*, vol. 13; *Diplomatic Instructions*, Mexico, vol. 15; *Diplomatic Despatches*, Mexico, vols. 10 and 11; *Consular Letters*, Santa Fe; Embassy, *Letters to Consuls (Series C8.13)*, May 15, 1836-Sept. 25, 1858; Mexico City Consulate General, *Miscellaneous Incoming Letters (Series C8.2)*, Feb. 4, 1842-Dec. 26, 1844. See also mss. of President Tyler's Message, June 15, 1842, and accompanying correspondence in the files of the Senate. This was published in 27th Cong., 2d Sess., Senate Doc. 325.

Materials concerning the American conquest and occupation of New Mexico, 1846-1848, the advance to California from Santa Fe, and the expedition to Chihuahua and Durango are in the records of the War Department, principally in the files of The Adjutant General's office. A card index of Mexican War records assists the searcher in finding documents. References are classified under several headings: Army of the West, Santa Fe Expedition, Santa Fe Post, Santa Fe Route, New Mexico, and Chihuahua. Papers may be located also by consulting the cards for Stephen W. Kearny, Alexander W. Doniphan, Philip St. George Cooke, Sterling Price, Charles Bent, Christopher Carson, and others. This index refers to letters received and sent. Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary of War also contains some materials for the history of New Mexico.<sup>24</sup> However, the files of The Adjutant General are more prolific in Southwestern items than those of the Secretary's Office.

Records of the Army of the West cover the entire military activity in New Mexico and adjoining regions. Early items describe the organization of the expedition at Fort Leavenworth, arrival of the Mormon volunteers, election of field officers, appointments to Kearny's staff, instructions to the commander of the artillery, and the raising of Shawnee and Delaware scouts.<sup>25</sup> Progress of the army across the plains and into New Mexico is recorded in a series of despatches and a journal sent in from places along the route or after Kearny's arrival at Santa Fe.<sup>26</sup> The advance down the Rio Grande into southern New Mexico is also recounted in two reports submitted in 1846.<sup>27</sup> Departure of Kearny's forces for the Pacific, their march thither, and

---

24. War Office, *Military Books*, 26-29. There are indexes to persons in the forepart of each. The Secretary's letters received may be located by referring to the *Register of Letters Received* for the proper year.

25. The Adjutant General's Office, 1846, File nos. 79-K, 80-K, 83-K, 84-K, 86-K, 88-K, 97-K, 98-K, 104-K, 105-K, 106-K, 111-K, 112-K, 216-C, 185-S, 206-S; and *Letters Sent*, vol. 22, p. 379.

26. AGO, 1846, nos. 114-K, 127-K, 131-K, 163-K, 164-K, 165-K, and 438-W. The *Journal* is no. 128-J.

27. AGO, 1846, nos. 173-K and 177-K.

their subsequent conquest of California, recorded voluminously in the files of The Adjutant Generals office.<sup>28</sup>

A copy of the Organic Law of New Mexico, the so-called "Kearny Code", September 22, 1846, as well as a number of reports from the military commander, concern the establishment of territorial government and the appointment of civil officers.<sup>29</sup> The uprising in the Rio Arriba country resulting in the murders of Governor Charles Bent and others, and the engagements at Cañada, Moro, Embudo, and Taos, which crushed the revolt, were recounted in four despatches transmitted in 1847.<sup>30</sup> Materials concerning Indian affairs, notably about Doniphan's operations against the Utes and Navahos, and Indian depredations along the Santa Fe Trail, are in reports for the years 1846-1848.<sup>31</sup> In the files of The Adjutant Generals Office there are despatches from Doniphan and Price describing the expedition from New Mexico to Chihuahua and Durango, and others written during the occupation of Chihuahua, as well as numerous reports from General John E. Wool on his intended expedition thither in 1842.<sup>32</sup>

The Santa Fe trade continued during the Mexican War. In July, 1846, Robert J. Walker, Secretary of the Treasury, authorized the Surveyor of Customs at St. Louis to permit goods purchased at Pittsburgh before the declaration of war, May 13, 1846, and destined for Santa Fe, to be exported through Independence, Missouri.<sup>33</sup>

New Mexico and California were ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, February 2, 1848. Negotiation and ratification of the treaty are re-

---

28. Kearny's departure is in AGO, 1846, no. 190-K. For other documents one should consult the index.

29. The Kearny Code, is AGO, 1846, no. 187-K. See also nos. 173-K, 177-K, 188-K, and 254-R. Additional items on civil affairs are listed in the index under New Mexico.

30. AGO, 1847, nos. 150-P, 99-F, 132-G, and 272-W.

31. AGO, 1846, no. 295-D; 1847, nos. 132-D, 174-D, 342-L, 448-L; 1848, no. 211-H.

32. AGO, 1848, nos. 132-D, 174-D, 176-P, 365-P, 565-P. See also Chihuahua, and John E. Wool, in the index.

33. Files of the Secretary of the Treasury, Letters to Collectors of Customs, Small Ports, Series G, vol. 10 (Feb. 1, 1846-Nov. 10, 1846), 309-310.

corded in the files of the Washington office of the Department of State.<sup>34</sup>

Much of the foregoing material relating to New Mexican history before 1848 has been generally known and used by scholars for many years. However, most of these records were consulted at a time when they were widely dispersed and accessible only after the expenditure of considerable time and money. Since 1935, they have been gradually acquired, together with other important records, by The National Archives, which now makes them readily available for examination and comparison.

---

34. *Diplomatic Instructions*, Mexico, vol. 16; *Diplomatic Despatches*, Mexico, vol. 14. The ms. text of the treaty is in *Treaty Series*, no. 207. Accompanying it are documents concerning ratification, notably the protocol of exchange of Querétaro, May 30, 1848, two articles of which concern land grants in the ceded territory.