NUPTURING THE PEACE:
SPANISH AND COMANCHE COOPERATION
IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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If ever an alliance tested the mettle of all parties, it was that of Spaniards and Comanches. It was a monument to Spanish statecraft on the northern frontier of New Spain: boldly recommended in the 1760s by the Marqués de Rubí to Carlos III, who had the vision to adopt it; adroitly realized in New Mexico and Texas in the 1780s by governors Juan Bautista de Anza and Domingo Cabello; tenaciously pursued by their successors through the final decades of the viceroyalty.¹

But the delicate, often dangerous tasks of making the arrangement work fell largely to the people of the frontier, particularly those of New Mexico: paisanos, Pueblos, and, increasingly over time, genízaros. The complexity of the challenge that they faced, the enormity of the odds, and the extent of their nearly forgotten success, are dimensions of regional history worth pondering.

The formation of the alliance and its durability hinged upon Comanche no less than Spanish vision and enterprise. Chief Ecueracapa and his fellows labored heroically to bring the far-flung Comanches to consensus for peace in the 1780s. Their successors’ constant challenge was to keep their followers convinced of its usefulness. It was not enough that the principal chiefs agree that their nation’s interest lay in the Spanish connection. Since Comanche leaders had no power to coerce, their enforcement of treaty commitments among their tribesmen rested solely upon their powers of persuasion. Against their arguments stood an honored tradition of horse theft and even more powerful imperatives of tribal vengeance.

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Even worse for the prospects of the alliance, the Comanche nation had never functioned as a single entity. At the turn of the century it had two major divisions: Yamparicas, most of whom lived in the western Comancheria, and Cuchaneecs, many of whom lived in the eastern Comancheria, bordering upon New Mexico and Texas respectively. Each was comprised of many bands, which were essentially clusters of family groups, and connections among them were tenuous at best.

Fortunately, the difficulties were well understood by leaders on both sides and were approached with realism and with good will. Neither Spaniards nor Comanches ever imagined that a treaty could eliminate the passions that spark clashes among persons. Their purpose instead was to insure that offenses by those of one nation against those of the other invoke law enforcement rather than war. To achieve this goal, leaders pledged to report to each other such offenses: each society would curb its wrongdoers and make restitution for their crimes. Spain, understanding that such new procedures would require time and experience, would forbear so long as Comanche leaders strove faithfully to fulfill their commitments.

The alliance worked remarkably well from the beginning in New Mexico, where interchange between settled villagers and roving plainsfolk long antedated Spanish occupation. Western Comanches readily fitted into the mutually advantageous patterns of trade and friendship, as Hispanic settlers had done before them. Indeed, Comanches would ultimately loom so large in the commerce of the New Mexican frontier that traders to the roving peoples would be dubbed "comancheros," although they were called in this earlier time "los viageros."

Much less stable conditions confronted eastern Comanches on the Texas frontier. There distances were so vast, population so sparse, horses so numerous, and passage of Comanche war parties after Lipan Apaches so frequent as to invite mischief. Through the 1790s eastern Comanche leaders struggled to curb horse thefts, making restitution as fully as possible for crimes reported to them. Years of patient practice lay ahead, however, if Comanches were to match in Texas their reliability as allies and trading partners in New Mexico. Meanwhile, there was the hazard that an untoward
incident in Texas would spark a war that would inflame the Comanchería and undo the alliance in New Mexico. Western Comanche leaders understood that risk and sometimes intervened to help their eastern peers ward off catastrophe.

Despite all difficulties, the Comanche peace was an important condition of life in Texas at the beginning of the nineteenth century, just as it was in New Mexico. Tejanos traveled freely into the Comanchería to hunt and to trade; Comanche families came routinely to trade and visit at San Antonio de Béxar. There eastern Comanches received the crown’s annual treaty presents, and some Comanches formed personal friendships with San Antonians that proved useful in troubled times.

In autumn of 1801 issues of tribal vengeance nearly destroyed the peace in the eastern Comanchería. Unidentified Spaniards killed two young stragglers from a Yamparica party bound for San Antonio, one of whom was Chief Blanco’s son, and three more Comanche corpses turned up near Mission San José, possibly victims of Spaniards. When the bereaved chief and other kinsmen cried vengeance, Yamparicas of the upper Brazos and Red rivers sympathized.

Cuchanec leaders, however, rejected any tribal vendetta. Some swore that if Chief Blanco should declare war, they would move their much larger bands down the Brazos to fight beside the Spaniards. When Cuchanec youngsters seized the excuse to raid in Coahuila, their chief, Soxas, warned Spanish authorities, moved his own camp to the Llano River to monitor developments on the Texas-Comanche frontier, and volunteered to lead a delegation to Chihuahua to counsel with the commandant general of the Provincias Internas.

Yet another grievance flared. Lipan Apaches killed twenty-five of Chief Yzazat’s followers, asleep near the Rio Grande, and rumor had troops from Coahuila helping the Lipans. Yzazat, outraged, sent spokesmen to San Antonio to confront Governor Juan Bautista Elguezábal with the story. Confident that no troops had violated the standing order against involvement in fights among Indians, Elguezábal scrambled to squelch the rumor lest it spark Cuchanec vengeance.

Meanwhile, Chief Blanco gave permission to kill Spaniards in the same way that some had killed his son. As a result, in the spring
of 1802 on the Blanco River, forty Yamparica warriors executed the leader of a ten-man party of hunters from San Antonio. That act might have evened the score, but the fleeing huntsmen then met a lone Comanche riding a horse with a San Antonio brand, rejected his explanation that he had stolen it from the Apaches, and delivered his scalp and rifle to the governor with the disputed horse. Chiefs Soxas, Yzazat, and Socuina, then at San Antonio arranging for their mission to Chihuahua, disavowed responsibility for the execution of the hunter, on the grounds that those killings were Chief Blanco's private revenge. They forbore comment on the Comanche's death, but anger blazed within the Comanchería. A faction hitherto wavering between peace and war turned hostile and threatened to attack the camp where Soxas and Yzazat had left their families. The chiefs rushed home, vowing that if they should find nothing amiss, they would continue to Chief Chihuahua's camp to coordinate measures against dissidents. They would keep the governor informed, and, if necessary, they would bring their families to San Antonio for safety.

The issue of peace versus war raged in the eastern Comanchería until mid-summer of 1802, when western Comanche leaders intervened. They opposed any eastern war against Texas and Coahuila, lest it cost all Comanches the benefits of peace with the Spaniards. With such support, the peace faction won, and Texas suffered no Indian problems that summer. Governor Elguezábal learned the outcome from followers of Yzazat who stopped by San Antonio on their way to punish Lipans.

The vengeance party unfortunately found no Lipans, and as they turned homeward in September, some members consoled themselves with horses from Texas herds. Their young leader hurried to San Antonio to explain, pleading that the nation not be blamed. He speedily recovered and returned four of the stolen horses and informed the eastern Comanche leaders. A few weeks later in autumn council when the chiefs were discussing treaty enforcement, Chief Chihuahua volunteered to form a police force to curb wayward tribesmen. All agreed to spare no effort to identify and punish Comanche offenders. The chiefs sent the governor that news, promising to meet him at San Antonio the next spring.

Then Yzazat led 225 painted warriors southward to find Lipans.
Near the Frio River they met a Spanish pack train. The muleteer panicked and fled to San Antonio, crying that Comanches had seized his animals and merchandise. Naturally, the warriors wanted to grab the windfall, but their exasperated chiefs only let them devour the sugar. Although rounding up animals and loading stuff was women's work and onerous for warriors, within a week they presented at San Antonio six horses and a mule packing nearly all the goods. The muleteer confessed his lie, Governor Elguezábal apologized to the chiefs for the accusation of theft, and both sides parted cordially.¹⁰

However, worse troubles brewed northward, where men from the United States infiltrated villages whose intertribal connections reached the Comanchería. Although most Americans came as traders, Commandant General Nemesio Salcedo suspected that their real purpose was to undermine Spain's Indian alliances, and he especially feared that they would seduce the Comanches.¹¹

Comanche leaders also worried about Anglo-Americans frequenting the Wichita villages on Red River with inducements to steal Spanish horses for the insatiable American market. Twice that winter Comanche chiefs warned Elguezábal of Taovayas and Wichitas coming after horses. Even so, in February 1803, woodcutters from San Antonio lost their animals to such raiders. After Spanish troops overtook the culprits and killed nine, eight soldiers filed a complaint that their commanding officer had acted excessively against the thieves.¹² None doubted that Taovayas kinsmen would avenge their nine dead or, even more alarming, that their nation might take up their cause. Moreover, as old allies, Comanches would be pressed to join any Taovayas vendetta. Recognizing the dangers implicit in the situation, Elguezábal warned neighboring provinces that general Indian war hinged upon Comanche reaction.¹³

Actually, Comanches did think killing nine men an excessive response to the theft of a few horses, but their leaders upheld the Spanish alliance. Indeed, they had fresh proof of its usefulness: after Lipans had jumped a Comanche family departing San Antonio, seventeen soldiers fended off the Lipans and escorted the grateful Comanches back to sanctuary in San Antonio. The next week Chihuahua and Yzazat brought two hundred Comanches to council with Governor Elguezábal, and Chihuahua declared their desire
Women dressing robes and drying meat in a Comanche village, from *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians* by George Catlin, plate 164.
for solid peace. Naturally, they had been disgusted when Spaniards killed Chief Blanco’s son, but the chiefs had done everything possible to calm them, and they would not meddle in the Taovayas affair. At the council Chihuahua presented thirty warriors picked to police Comanche behavior and requested uniforms. To bolster treaty compliance, the chiefs also wanted soldiers stationed in the eastern Comanchehia. For their part, the Comanches would respect the detachment and gladly help build corrals and round up mustangs.

Since his warehouse was nearly bare, Elguezábal could only promise to supply uniforms when the next gift shipment arrived. The shipping delay also meant scanty presents at this council, but the Comanches understood and accepted the governor’s apology. More disappointing for the Comanches was Elguezábal’s lack of authority to grant troops; he could only forward their request, and to no avail. Commandant General Salcedo rejected the request on the grounds that he was short of troops and had misgivings about putting any soldiers at the mercy of the volatile Comanchehia. He also feared that other tribes would clamor for troops if the Comanches were so favored. Since Salcedo could not supply troops for every allied nation, the policy of even-handed treatment forbade that soldiers be stationed with any nation.

Nevertheless, friendship between Comanches and Texans flourished in the summer of 1803. When 130 San Antonians rode west for their May buffalo hunt, Comanches insisted that the hunters accept their hospitality. As honored guests, the San Antonians were fed and lodged throughout their hunt, and their horses were carefully tended by Comanche herders. Their hosts guided the Spaniards to herds where they took plenty of meat and tallow and finally escorted them home late in June.

Meanwhile, countless Comanche families visited San Antonio, and trade flourished at weekly fairs. By August, every important chief in the eastern Comanchehia had come to pay his respects and transact his business. Big war parties of Comanches and their allies continued southward and eastward, pursuing their Lipan vendetta.

From San Antonio chiefs Chihuahua, Yzazat, and Sargento rode on to Monclova, seeking a resident trader for their people. Such
service had long been enjoyed by village Indians in Texas and was much envied by Comanches who lived too far east to be served by los viageros of New Mexico. Now the eastern Comanche leaders urged that their need for trade be met within the Comancheria to forestall the pernicious influence of American traders on the Louisiana frontier. Acting on their request, Coahuila’s Governor Antonio Cordero helped obtain an experienced, literate trader.¹⁸ The experiment fizzled within a year, but briefly they knew the satisfaction and prestige of having their own trader.¹⁹

An unhappy surprise greeted the chiefs on their return to San Antonio: their younger associate, El Sordo, and twenty-seven of his followers were under arrest. The explanation was that Spanish soldiers, pursuing Taovayas raiders, had passed El Sordo’s party and noticed several horses from San Antonio. Worse, two men had pieces of the musket of a settler whom Indians had killed. At first, El Sordo cooperated with the soldiers, but then he balked at turning over one of those men. Consequently, their leaders found them all in Spanish custody, the two murder suspects manacled in the jail, and the rest under guard in the Casas Reales.²⁰ Joining in the interrogation, the chiefs discovered that the pair in jail had indeed stolen those horses. The rest had resisted arrest of the thieves, despite their chiefs’ pledge to hand over all wrongdoers. While Chihuahua attributed their lapse to his absence, he also scolded the prisoners, vowing to punish anyone who should repeat such crimes, even to kill them if necessary at the cost of his own life. Furthermore, he declared that in the future he would oust from the Comancheria anyone flouting his authority. In turn, Elguezábal released to Chief Chihuahua all of the prisoners except the two horse thieves, and the chiefs agreed that the guilty pair should serve the jail term for theft. Two months later, Elguezábal released both to their families. (Subsequent evidence showed that Taovayas had committed the murder.)²¹

The episode seemed to leave no resentment, and 1804 became a banner year for Comanches in Texas. They flocked to San Antonio, trading, visiting, meeting Indian allies, mounting campaigns. That summer Elguezábal’s warehouse bulged, so he was able to compensate handsomely for the previous year’s shortfall in treaty presents and also provide uniforms for Chief Chihuahua’s thirty policemen.²²
Of all the treaty nations, only the Taovayas and Wichitas held aloof that summer. Still torn over vengeance for their nine dead, they were easy objects of mischief in this year of momentous change in American impact among Indians of Texas. The United States took charge at Natchitoches in April 1804, four months after receiving Louisiana from France with boundaries undefined. The unfortunate Caddo peoples were left to wonder whether their homelands were subject to American or Spanish dominion. Even worse for Spaniards was the astonishing claim of the United States that Louisiana’s boundary was the Rio Grande.

No American was keener to grab Texas than Dr. John Sibley, a physician-entrepreneur appointed United States Indian agent at Natchitoches in December 1804. By spring of 1805, Sibley had on hand three thousand dollars’ worth of presents with which to woo Indians, regardless of international boundaries, and was promising them unlimited goods at cost from a planned government trading house. Thus Sibley sparked a decade of fierce competition: Americans versus Spaniards, vying for Indians crucial to the peace, prosperity, and ultimately the possession of New Spain’s northern borderlands.

To Sibley’s enticements Comanches responded cautiously, despite the deep involvement of their Taovayas and Wichita friends. Eastern Comanche leaders sustained their commitments to the Spanish crown, and they would have been astonished at Sibley’s official report that Comanches, although friendly to French or American visitors, were “generally at war with the Spaniards after committing depredations upon the inhabitants of Santa Fe and San Antonio.”

Comanche ties with San Antonio actually strengthened in 1805 when Governor Cordero was sent from Coahuila to Texas to relieve dying Governor Elguézabal and to sharpen defenses against the United States. To welcome him, Chiefs Chihuahua, Yzazat, and Sargento brought 353 Comanches to San Antonio for three days of intensive talks, reaffirming with Cordero their treaty of alliance. They assured him that no flag but the Spanish would fly over Comanche camps, and that they would trust in that flag to overcome the Osages, Pawnees, and other enemies whom they feared the Americans were inciting against Comanches. They also promised
not to deal with foreigners nor let them enter the Comanchería and to respect Spanish persons and property.\(^{27}\)

Cordero thought their four hundred horses—some of their own raising, some captured wild stock—were superb animals. Some bearing Spanish brands were cheerfully yielded for return to registered owners, with the chiefs agreeing to continue this practice. They also promised to accept punishment of any Comanche who should injure Spaniards, but they urged the Spaniards to avoid killing any offender, lest his relatives feel bound to avenge him.

Still, a crucial question remained: would Comanches rally to defend Spanish territory if needed? A test loomed in February 1806, when American troops forced Spanish detachments to fall back west of the Sabine, prompting Governor Cordero to brace his command for an attempt by the United States to push its boundary to the Rio Grande. Given the clash of troops in the Caddo heartland, movements of soldiers in Texas and Louisiana, and official harangues to Indian visitors at Nacogdoches and Natchitoches, news of the confrontation spread swiftly among Indians throughout the prospective theatre of war. Within a month, thirty-three loyal Comanche chiefs led two hundred warriors to San Antonio to offer their services in gratitude to the crown. For six days they discussed the current situation with Governor Cordero, promising to help any Spanish troops operating near the Comanchería.\(^{28}\)

Unfortunately, however, Comanche leaders had yet to resolve their own problems. In April, wayward tribesmen seized horses and mules from travelers on the Laredo Road, incidentally killing one Spaniard. While troops from San Antonio recovered sixteen animals, there was no sign of action by Chief Chihuahua’s thirty policemen. Chagrined at their unreliability, Governor Cordero dispatched Capt. Francisco Amangual as his spokesman to the Cuchanec leaders then encamped on the San Saba River. The message was plain: the chiefs’ duty was to pursue and punish Comanche marauders, the ineffectiveness of their uniformed police was deplorable, and improved control was essential. To effect that improvement, the eastern Comanche leaders would have to elect one of themselves to be responsible for all to the Spanish crown.\(^{29}\) Western Cuchanecys and Yamparicas had long done so in New Mexico, where the alliance flourished, and Governor Cordero now
required the same of eastern Comanches. They readily agreed, and in Amangual's presence chose for their "big chief" the wise and able Sargento. To show his esteem for Governor Cordero and to signify his own analogous importance in the Comanchería, Sargento took a new name: Cordero.

Chief Cordero acted promptly upon his new responsibilities, visiting all camps of eastern Cuchanecs and neighboring Yamparicas. He also recovered and returned the last five of the stolen mules, identified the source of the difficulties among followers of Visinampa, and brought that chief to Governor Cordero. Of the eastern Comanche chiefs, Visinampa was the only one who had not yet paid his respects to Governor Cordero. Reputedly very loyal to the Spaniards, he had long been ill and thus unable to ride to San Antonio or to watch his people properly. While many disorders had occurred, Visinampa assured the governor that he had now regained control. The culprits had fled northwest to the farthest Yamparica camps, but Visinampa had notified the principal chief in that area. The intent was that the offenders be punished anywhere they could be found. Governor Cordero accepted these explanations and chiefs Cordero and Visinampa left, pledging to help Spanish troops as needed.

Not only were Comanches poised to defend Texas against the Americans, but other Indians were rallying to the cause as well. Tonkawas assisted movements of troops and supplies to the eastern frontier. Tawakonis helped prepare defenses from the Brazos to the Red, and with Comanche help they persuaded most Wichitan peoples to vacate the Red temporarily in order to keep clear of any clash between Americans and Spaniards. Although Kichai and Caddo villagers of eastern Texas accepted Dr. Sibley's presents, they too retained primary allegiance to the Spanish crown. Caddo leaders of Louisiana also cooperated cordially with Spanish as well as American authorities. In addition, Orcoquisas, Coushattas, Alabamas, and Choctaws were pledged to help Spanish forces defend their areas of residence on the lower Sabine and Trinity rivers, Karankawas faithfully reported coastal events, and Lipans remained peaceful and cooperative in southern Texas.

Thus, in midsummer of 1806, Governor Cordero rode north-eastward to meet the border crisis, reasonably confident that Texas
Indians would help him repel the Americans. If only they could submerge their tribal enmities in the common cause! A hopeful precedent had occurred that spring on the New Mexican frontier, where contending Kiowas and Comanches had made a permanent peace. ³³

Before leaving for Nacogdoches, Governor Cordero discussed with some tribal leaders the desirability of settling their differences. Apparently he was persuasive, for they made remarkable progress in his absence. When five hundred Comanches, Lipans, and Tonkawas found themselves together at San Antonio in September, their leaders considered the governor's advice and found it good. They talked of making a treaty upon Governor Cordero's return, and in the meantime their followers treated each other cordially. ³⁴

Governor Cordero was back at year's end. The threat of war had ended, abruptly, peacefully, when the Spanish and American commanders sensibly agreed to pull back their troops and respect a neutral zone between the Sabine and the Arroyo Hondo until diplomats could draw the boundary. That arrangement boded ill for the Caddo peoples whose heartland would be left as a lawless haven for frontier rabble. But the immediate reaction among Indians was relief at being spared a general war and admiration for the wisdom of that Spanish-American accord.

When the nations went to San Antonio for treaty gifts in the spring of 1807, the principal Comanche, Lipan, and Tawakoni leaders gathered in their own tents. Agreeing that their old feuds were indeed harmful to their peoples' interests, they outlined peace terms. Since they regarded the governor as their arbiter and the axis of their relationships, they invited him to preside over their final council. ³⁵

On the day of the council, Indians of the three nations overflowed the governor's house. Chiefs alone filled the parlor, with Chief Cordero of the Comanches, Canoso and Morrongo of the Lipans, and Daguariscara of the Tawakonis sitting next to Governor Cordero. Each of the principal chiefs spoke cogently against the evils of war, displaying intellectual and moral insights that confirmed Governor Cordero's conviction that these were not mere savages. In fact, Daguariscara urged upon the council the example of the
Spaniards who had recently settled their difficulties with the Americans peacefully rather than loose war upon the land. This Indian treaty would borrow their concept of a buffer zone.

After their speeches, the chiefs asked Governor Cordero to mandate the mechanics of peace. He refrained, however, knowing that no externally imposed solutions could dissolve age-old tribal enmities. Apart from expressing sympathetic interest, the governor would only help them define the bounds where they should hunt without bothering one another and without venturing into areas of Spanish settlement. The Comanche boundary would be the Lomería de San Sabá (hills dividing the upper Colorado and Nueces river systems). Any Comanche found without a passport between the Rio Grande and Medina rivers would be brought to San Antonio for interrogation. This buffer zone would prevent clashes between Comanche and Lipan hunters and curtail Comanche activity among the settlements. All the chiefs pledged that their nations would respect the boundaries and would treat each other as children of one father, the king of Spain, regarding as enemies only those who were his recognized enemies. Remarkably enough, the arrangement worked—at least for two years.

Yet another extraordinary example of intertribal cooperation occurred just five months later, when Comanches and Tawakonis participated in a much broader council at Natchitoches. The occasion was inauspicious for President Thomas Jefferson's hope that western tribes would welcome emigrant eastern Indians.

In 1807, while all the Anadarko men were away on spring hunt, nine vagabond Choctaws destroyed their village on the Sabine River, killing two Anadarko women and wounding another in the process. That crime was the intolerable climax of a dozen years' harassment of Caddo peoples by Choctaw intruders, but since the culprits vanished back into the United States, Spanish authorities could do nothing. Clear duty lay with Dr. Sibley, who in 1804 had pressured Great Chief Dahahuit of the Caddohadachos to accept a treaty with the Choctaws, overriding Dahahuit's better judgment and the vehement objections of other Indians in the region. When Sibley proved unable to deliver the Choctaw criminals, the Anadarko chief called upon all indigenous tribes to march with him to Natchitoches to demand justice and, if two Choctaws were not
executed in their presence, to go to war against the Choctaws.\textsuperscript{39} Predictably enough, eight other Caddo groups responded to the Anadarko appeal, but the remarkable thing was that the Comanches from the bands of Chihuahua and Visinampa rode to Natchitoches together with Tawakonis and Kichais—all visiting American Natchitoches for the first time—to support the Caddo demand for treaty performance by the Choctaws and the United States.

Rather than feeling alarmed by the visitation, Sibley rejoiced to see eighty-odd Comanches with four chiefs. Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike, whom Spanish authorities had lately released on the Natchitoches frontier, had explained to Sibley the special importance that the United States attached to Comanches. Since Pike had failed to find any Comanches, their coming to Natchitoches would commence official American contact with their nation. Sibley singled out the Comanches for special hospitality and tried, unsuccessfully, to protect their horses from local thieves. While Sibley had no interpreter of Comanche, he understood their leader to prefer the American over the Spanish flag and grandly presented him one.\textsuperscript{40}

The general council on 18 August yielded only guarded response to Sibley's exhortation on peace and the joys of trade with Americans. The Comanches, Tawakonis, and Kichais indicated that they would welcome traders and would perhaps visit Natchitoches again if experience should prove Sibley's talk to be true. Dahahuit rose to remind Sibley of his responsibility for the treaty of 1804 with the Choctaws and demanded redress for the murdered Anadarkos. Sibley explained his negotiations with Choctaw leaders and urged the delegates to be patient. Although Dahahuit doubted the adequacy of either Choctaw or American efforts, he and his associates grudgingly promised to postpone vengeance another three months.

Soon more Comanches came to investigate the possibilities of the American marketplace. The four Yamparicas from upper Red River who came that autumn had heard of the other Comanches' visit, but they knew little of those southerly bands. These Yamparicas had ridden to Natchitoches with their Taovayas and Wichita neighbors to secure guns for defense against the Osages, only to find that few were available. The trip proved so onerous and the
outcome so disappointing that they would not plan to come again, although they would welcome American traders in their camps.

The ebullient Sibley never realized how discouraging was the effect of these early Comanche experiences in Natchitoches. Of course he knew that the theft of their horses and the scarcity of guns upset them, but he did not comprehend how appalling they found the prevalent drunkenness, or how niggardly his hospitality seemed in comparison with Indian and Spanish practices. Probably the doctor never learned how many Comanches contracted disease at Natchitoches and died on the way home. Chief Cordero, who disapproved of the Americans, thought these disappointments providential. While Governor Cordero fretted, the chief saw little likelihood that the Americans of Natchitoches would make the Comanches forget that they were Spaniards.

Certainly no sign of disaffection appeared among Comanches in the spring of 1808 when Captain Amangual led two hundred men from San Antonio across the Comanchería to Santa Fe, visiting every Comanche band along the way. Indeed, Comanche hunters helped the expedition procure meat; Comanche guides took them safely across the rugged, arid expanse to Pecos; and, finally, in December, Chief Cordero furnished fresh horses to soldiers whose mounts were too exhausted to continue home to San Antonio.

But even if Comanches considered themselves Spaniards, they needed trade goods, and San Antonio let them down in 1808. The shipment of gifts came late and included none of the small caliber guns that Indians liked. In fact, wrong-sized guns shipped in 1806 already lay rusting in the warehouse because Indians would accept no substitute. No private vendor in San Antonio was able to supply their needs, even though Comanches brought plenty of hides and tallow to trade. These shortages in San Antonio virtually guaranteed the success of the Natchitoches traders who ventured into the Comanchería that fall. Dr. Sibley had not forgotten the promise of his Comanche visitors to welcome American traders, nor had he forgotten Yamparica hints of silver ore in their country. Therefore, in the summer of 1808 he licensed Anthony Glass to lead ten men up the Red River with merchandise to swap for horses and for ore if he could find any.

After trading for two months at the Wichitan villages on Red
River, Glass moved southward to the Colorado and Brazos. Hundreds of Comanches welcomed him, although a few who had visited Natchitoches the year before took horses away from Glass to recoup their losses at the American settlement. Some Comanches traded with Glass on their way back from San Antonio, where Governor Cordero had exhorted them not to do business with foreigners. But these eastern Comanches saw no need to choose between Spaniards and Americans; they were glad to be friends with both, and they would trade wherever the goods and the prices were right.

Could Comanches remain faithful Spanish allies and still get plenty of horses for the American market? Perhaps, but Apache herds would suffer. While eastern Comanches had forsworn raids against Lipans in their San Antonio treaty of 1807, other Apaches remained fair game. Indeed, in 1809, the governor of New Mexico invited eastern Comanches to campaign against Mescalero Apache raiders based in the Sacramento Mountains, promising them assistance and, more enticing, the right to keep all the horses they could capture.45

In response to the New Mexican invitation, Chief Cordero led 258 Cuchanec warriors against Mescaleros in the spring of 1810. While he was away, the tenuous order within the eastern Comanchería faltered. Lipans suffered most, but Comanches also stole horses from Spaniards at San Marcos and Laredo. Although most of the raiders were Yamparicas, spurred by Chief Visinampa’s deepening involvement with American traders, some were Cuchanecs; most were easterners, but some came from the west. Casualties on both sides raised the specter of general war.

Unable to contact the principal chief, Texas authorities informed the governor of New Mexico, who in turn told Chief Cordero.46 He rushed to San Antonio with forty warriors to meet the emergency and there found new, divided Spanish leadership. Antonio Cordero had returned to his regular post as governor of Coahuila, and the young, untried governor of Texas, Manuel María de Salcedo, was militarily subordinate to the very senior assistant commandant, Bernardo Bonavia. Fortunately, in this instance both proved cooperative and sympathetic.

Chief Cordero proposed to convene all eastern Comanches, to
recovery and return all the booty he could find, and to turn in any ringleaders whom he could apprehend. To back his effort he requested ninety Spanish troops, but Bonavía furnished 150. Moreover, Governor Salcedo uniformed Cordero's forty warriors to underscore the official import of their mission. 47

Chief Cordero soon accomplished his purpose. Most eastern Comanche leaders came to his council and cooperated in identifying marauders and recovering stolen stock. Cordero also conferred with western leaders, who meanwhile curbed their offenders and reaffirmed with the governor of New Mexico their loyalty to Spain. Eastern and western leaders pledged to work henceforth as brothers to ensure treaty compliance, and to strengthen their connection, Cordero gave a daughter to the principal western Yamparica chief, Oso Ballo. 48

Next, in October, the eastern Comanche leaders rode to San Antonio to explain the breaches and to reaffirm their treaty. 49 They promised not to strike the Lipans beyond the Lomería de San Sabá and to avoid dealing with Americans. Furthermore, they would apprehend Comanche marauders and return stolen property; the nation would not avenge any member killed or injured while fleeing the scene of a crime nor resist deportation of persistent offenders.

For the first time, the eastern Comanche leaders repudiated certain individuals. El Sordo had broken his Comanche ties that year, moving down the Brazos to live near the Tawakonis, and a few dissidents from Cordero's band had joined him. Since El Sordo's camp had also become a rallying place for Taovayas, Tawakoni, and Skidi Pawnee horse thieves, Comanche elders indicated that they would not be sorry to see those incorrigibles killed.

However conciliatory the Comanche leadership, Governor Salcedo understood full well the limitations of this treaty. Chief Cordero and his peers had admitted that they could not control all misguided youngsters, but such internal problems were hardly unique to Indian societies. Salcedo also knew that New Spain had yet to quell the rebellion that had erupted six weeks earlier at Dolores, in the viceroyalty's heartland, with Father Miguel Hidalgo's cry for independence. Furthermore, Americans inciting Indians to steal were largely beyond the control of the United
States, even if it wished to curb their abuses. In such a world, who could expect Comanche leaders to maintain perfect control?

In fact, the Comanche dilemma paled beside that of New Spain in January when revolutionaries staged a bloodless coup at San Antonio and shipped Governor Salcedo off in irons. Two months later a royalist junta seized control. All across the northern provinces royalists and insurgents were actively seeking Indian help. Royalists fared better because tribesmen were loyal to the king and because many had personal friends among his officers. Consequently, in March of 1811, warriors from the southernmost Comancheería, as well as Lipans, helped royalists crush the insurgents in Coahuila.

Meanwhile, Texas lay conspicuously vulnerable. Although much-dreaded Indian wars did not occur, horse thefts multiplied. Comanche and perhaps other Indian leaders tried in vain to reaffirm their old friendship with the San Antonio junta, but Texas had no authority with whom they could deal until Lt. Col. Simón de Herrera came in July as acting governor. Chiefs Cordero and Yzachá promptly reported to him recent events within the Comanchería and requested a formal council, to which Governor Herrera gladly agreed. The extraordinarily encouraging aspect was that Oso Ballo was coming from the western Comanchería to help his eastern brothers bring their treaty compliance up to the high standard long enjoyed in New Mexico.

The council that convened at San Antonio in mid-August reaffirmed the usual treaty terms. Then, after the eastern Comanche leaders acknowledged their inability to enforce the terms uniformly, Oso Ballo proposed a new system of accountability, a mirror of the system by which the Spaniards controlled their frontier populace.

Under the proposed system, the chiefs, like Spanish commandants, would issue a form of passport to tribesmen who had valid reason to travel into areas of Spanish settlement. Comanches crossing their boundary without such token should be treated as enemies and disruptors of the peace, subject to deportation as incorrigible. Since such a drastic proposal could only signify resolute commitment to their Spanish alliance, Spain had ample reason to appreciate Oso Ballo and his eastern confreres.
Oso Ballo’s good offices did not end there. He also apprehended Taovayas and Comanches from El Sordo’s camp and made them return to Governor Herrera horses they had stolen at San Antonio. Subsequent events suggest also that Oso Ballo reasoned with El Sordo and perhaps moved him to reform. When horse thefts recurred in mid-autumn, Oso Ballo notified Governor Herrera that the culprits were Tawakonis and Taovayas who planned a season of raiding around San Antonio, and soon thereafter El Sordo came to report that Taovayas and Tawakonis had targeted Texas ranches and that Taovayas had killed a muleteer.

Given El Sordo’s wicked reputation, Governor Herrera suspected the man’s motives. But since El Sordo had come unarmed, with just one other man, two women, and a small child, and had brought hides to trade, Herrera hugged him and provided the usual hospitality at the government lodge. Unhappily, the next day a San Antonian claimed a horse brought by El Sordo. When Herrera sent the interpreter with five soldiers to fetch El Sordo, he reacted badly, thinking they had come to kill him, and his party landed in jail. Knowing that the incident could spark war, Herrera convened military and civilian leaders to share the responsibility for decision. The junta quickly concluded that El Sordo’s entire party constituted a threat to the province, and the five were immediately shipped in irons to the La Bahía jail, thence in March to a more secure prison in Coahuila.

On 19 December 1811, just four days after the El Sordo incident, Manuel de Salcedo resumed the governorship of Texas and thus fell heir to a surge of Comanche indignation. When Oso Ballo proclaimed that El Sordo, having come unarmed, in good faith, was wrongfully arrested and deported, his cry for vengeance stirred many Comanches, Taovayas, and Tawakonis. However, the more temperate Chief Cordero sent Visinampa to San Antonio to ask about El Sordo and would not go to war pending the governor’s response.

Worried Comanches warned friends at San Antonio that Oso Ballo was gathering a great force on the Colorado to demand El Sordo and that to refuse would mean war. El Olloso rode to Monclova to tell Governor Cordero of Oso Ballo’s intent and declared that he and five other Cuchanec leaders would support the
Spaniards if war erupted. Responding gratefully, Governor Cordero told him to lead his warriors to Presidio Rio Grande to join troops marching to San Antonio, then alerted Governor Salcedo to expect Comanche volunteers. But confrontation came before El Olloso's Comanches could join the troops. On 8 April 1812, Oso Ballo, Cordero, Visinampa, and Yzacha appeared at San Antonio with countless warriors. Governor Salcedo rode out to meet them with 675 men. Once more the leaders talked; once more they preferred their imperfect peace to the alternative of war. Still, confidence between Comanches and Spaniards was not fully repaired. Memory of El Sordo's little group jailed in Coahuila would rankle for years, fomenting ill will against Spanish authority in Texas and Coahuila and eroding the power of chiefs faithful to the alliance.

A grim year lay ahead for Governor Salcedo and a discouraging one for Comanches who cherished their Spanish alliance. In August 1812, Texas suffered the long-dreaded invasion from Louisiana, and by April 1813, the oddly assorted Magee-Gutiérrez band of American filibusters and Spanish insurrectionists destroyed the crown's authority in Texas. During these chaotic circumstances, disaffected Comanches, Tawakonis, and Taovayas seized the opportunity to raid in Texas and Coahuila, but none of these Indians responded to the invaders' urgent appeals for help in ousting the royalists.

Some Comanches supported the crown—in fact, two died in November 1812 while helping Governor Salcedo against the Magee-Gutiérrez force then entrenched at La Bahía. Such faithful friends as Chief Cordero must have deplored the insurrectionists' slaughter of the captured Governor Salcedo and Commandant Herrera near San Antonio in April 1813. But Comanches did not rally to the Spanish cause in the numbers that they would surely have fielded in the time of Governor Cordero. Clearly, their summary deportation of El Sordo cost Salcedo and Herrera very heavily indeed.

There is no record of Comanche involvement at San Antonio while the insurrectionists held that capital from April to August 1813. Probably there was none, given the settlement's total disarray under that occupation. Some two hundred Lipans did join the insurrectionists, however, probably because their long-time friends
the Menchacas espoused the cause. If Comanches needed further reason to hold aloof, the large Lipan presence would have sufficed.

When the royalists recaptured San Antonio in August 1813 and drove back the invaders to Louisiana, some Tejano insurgents sought refuge among Indians, often in Comanche camps. Over the next seven years many Indian warriors would help those fugitives wage a deliberate war of attrition, meant by the insurgents to make Texas and Coahuila untenable for the Spanish crown. Still, as the war for independence wore to a close, Spanish and Comanche leaders were groping towards a new accord, and Mexico’s new national government promptly pursued that aim. In fact, the Mexicans would revive their colonial legacy: an imperfect peace, mutually useful to Comanches and Spaniards, infinitely preferable to war, and never comprehensible to the United States. Indeed, Anglo-American perceptions of Indians, radically different from those rooted in Hispanic tradition, would be acted upon so precipitously in the succeeding era as to destroy even the memory of peaceful coexistence.

Why exhume this record now? For students of Comanche history and of political anthropology it affords rare glimpses of the relationships between eastern and western Comanches, details of their efforts to develop structures of authority, specifics of their migrations and their economy, and their intra- and intertribal relationships in an era of competing pressures from Spaniards and Anglo-Americans.

Those primarily concerned with the history of the Hispanic Borderlands will recognize a freshly constructed segment of the obscure closing decades of the viceroyalty. Students of the westward movement should find here a case study of worlds speedily destroyed in that relentless surge over “empty” lands. But the greater contemporary value may lie in pondering the intricacies of communication and accommodation among radically unlike peoples seeking mutual survival in a common arena. However greatly theatres and casts of characters change over time, human dilemmas remain strikingly constant.

Lastly, there is a lesson for those who would separate the histories of New Mexico and Texas. This analysis derives largely from the archives of Spanish Texas, partly because many more documents
survive in that venue, partly because Texas, as the arena of most crises, generated more reports in this era. But the story of Comanche relations with Texas would be unintelligible without reference to the stable base of the alliance in New Mexico. Conversely, the New Mexican experience cannot be properly understood apart from the precarious situation eastward. The rich uniqueness of each notwithstanding, the histories of New Mexico and Texas intertwine.

NOTES

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2. Miguel Múquiz to Juan Bautista Elguézabal, Nacogdoches, 8 November 1801; Elguézabal to Antonio Cordero, Béxar, 6 January 1802; Pedro de Nava to Elguézabal, Chihuahua, 19 January 1802, Béxar Archives, University of Texas Archives, Barker Texas History Center, Austin, Tex. (unless noted otherwise, all citations are to the Béxar Archives).


4. Elguézabal to Nava, Béxar, 3 March 1802; Nava to Elguézabal, 29 March 1802.

5. Elguézabal to Nava, Béxar, 14 April 1802.

6. Elguézabal to Nava, Béxar, 28, 29 April 1802.

7. Francisco Xavier de Uranga to Nava, Béxar, 21 July 1802; Elguézabal to Nava, Béxar, 4, 18 August, 1 September 1802.

8. Uranga to Nava, Béxar, 29 September 1802 (Cuaderno Borrador).

9. Uranga to Nava, 13, 27 October 1802; Nemesio Salcedo to Elguézabal, Chihuahua, 20 December 1802.

10. Elguézabal to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 8, 22 December 1802.

11. N. Salcedo to Elguézabal, Chihuahua, 12 November 1802.

12. Elguézabal to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 15 February 1803; Juan Ignacio Arrambide to Elguézabal, Béxar, 13 February 1803; N. Salcedo to Elguézabal, Chihuahua, 30 August 1803.

13. Elguézabal to Governors of Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Nuevo Santander, Béxar, 15 February 1803.

14. Elguézabal to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 30 March 1803.
15. N. Salcedo to Elguezábal, Chihuahua, 26 April, 24 May 1803.
16. Elguezábal to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 20 July 1803; N. Salcedo to Elguezábal, Chihuahua, 16 August 1803.
17. Elguezábal, Monthly Report, Bézar, 1 July, 1, 31 August 1803; Elguezábal to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 3 August 1803.
18. N. Salcedo to Elguezábal, Chihuahua, 13 September 1803.
19. N. Salcedo to Elguezábal, Chihuahua, 13 September 1803, 30 July 1804; Elguezábal to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 4 January, 4 July, 1804; Elguezábal, Passport to Manuel de León, Bézar, 26 December 1803; Juan de Ugarte to Elguezábal, Nacogdoches, 6 May 1804.
20. Elguezábal to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 31 August, 14 September 1803.
21. N. Salcedo to Elguezábal, Chihuahua, 11 October 1803; Elguezábal to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 12 October 1803; Elguezábal, Monthly Report, Bézar, 1 September 1804; N. Salcedo to Governor of Texas, Chihuahua, 13 June 1805.
22. Elguezábal to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 18 July, 15 August, 12 September 1804; Elguezábal, Monthly Report, Bézar, 1 September 1804; N. Salcedo to Governor of Texas, Chihuahua, 13 June 1805.
24. Dionisio Valle to Elguezábal, Nacogdoches, 23 May 1805.
26. N. Salcedo to Elguezábal, Chihuahua, 29 July 1805; Cordero to Elguezábal, Monclova, 10 August 1805.
27. Cordero to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 11 September, 5 October 1805; N. Salcedo to Cordero, Chihuahua, 4 November 1805.
28. Cordero to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 12 March 1806.
29. Military report of the province of Texas, Bézar, 16 April 1806; Pedro López Prieto, List of horses and mules recovered from the Comanches, Bézar, 19 April 1806; N. Salcedo to Cordero, Chihuahua, 6, 19 May 1806.
30. Salcedo to Cordero, Chihuahua, 3 June 1806.
31. Cordero to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 16 June 1806.
32. Cordero to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 16 June 1806; Juan Ygnacio Ramón to Francisco Viana, Arroyo de Nasada, 20 June 1806.
33. Joaquin Real Alencaster to N. Salcedo, Santa Fe, 20 November 1805, 30 August 1806, in Spanish Archives of New Mexico, New Mexico State Records Center, Santa Fe; N. Salcedo to Cordero, Chihuahua, 1 June 1807. The development of the Comanche-Kiowa alliance is traced in Elizabeth A. H. John, “Kiowa History: An Earlier Chapter,” in Kiowa, ed. John R. Wunder (Native Peoples of Arid Lands Series, vol. 2), forthcoming.
34. José Joaquin Ugarte to Cordero, Bézar, 13 October 1806.
35. Cordero to N. Salcedo, Bézar, 31 March 1807; N. Salcedo to Cordero, Chihuahua, 4 May 1807.
36. Bernardo Bonavia to José Ramón Díaz de Bustamente, Béxar, 11 April 1810.
38. Sibley to Secretary of War, Natchitoches, 3 April, 3 July 1807, in Julia Kathryn Garrett, “Dr. John Sibley and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 45 (January 1942): 297, 380–81; Sibley, 1807 Abstract, National Archives Record Service (NARS), M271, roll 1, frame 409.
41. Viana to Cordero, Nacogdoches, 15 October 1807; Cordero to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 1 February, 30 July 1808.
42. N. Salcedo to Cordero, Chihuahua, 12 January 1808; Cordero to Salcedo, Béxar, 5 February 1808; Orders to Amangual, Béxar, 24 March 1808; Francisco Amangual, Diary . . . expedition from . . . Texas to New Mexico, 30 March—23 December 1808. (A translation appears in Noel M. Loomis and Abraham P. Nasatir, Pedro Vial and the Roads to Santa Fe [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967], pp. 462–534.)
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45. N. Salcedo to Cordero, Chihuahua, 27 August 1810: Extracto deducido de la correspondencia del Governor Ynterino de la Provincia del Nuevo Mexico Don José Manrique relativo al tratado con la Nacion Comanche.
46. Manrique, Affidavit of meeting with chiefs Quegue and Cordero, Santa Fe, 16 June 1810.
47. Conference with the Gran Capitan Comanche called Cordero, Béxar, 31 July 1810; Bernardo Bonavia to Cordero, Béxar, 1 August 1810; Bonavia to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 8 August 1810; Bonavia to Manrique, Béxar, 8 August 1810.
48. José Ignacio de Arrambide to Bonavia, Paraje de los Balcones, 19 October 1810; Antonio Griego to Mariano Varela, Rio Grande, 23 October 1810; Declarations by Comanche Chiefs Cordero, et al, Béxar, 25 October 1810. (Oso Ballo was known in New Mexico as Oso Amarillo [Manrique to Comandant General, Santa Fe, 20 November 1810].)
49. Bonavia to Manuel de Salcedo, Béxar, 27 October 1810; Ugarte to Bonavia, Béxar, 20 October 1810; M. Salcedo to Cordero, Béxar, 19 November 1810; M. Salcedo to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 27 October 1810.
50. Claudio de Luna to José Menchaca, San Fernando, 23 February 1811; Pedro
Aranda to Menchaca, Monclova, 16 February 1811; N. Salcedo to M. Salcedo, Chihuahua, 17 April 1812.

51. Junta to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 8 May 1811.
52. Simón de Herrera to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 24 July 1811.
53. Herrera to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 7, 21 August 1811; N. Salcedo to Herrera, Chihuahua, 17 September 1811.
54. Herrera to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 29 August 1811; N. Salcedo to Herrera, Chihuahua, 14 September 1811.
55. Herrera to N. Salcedo, Béxar, 27 November 1811.
56. Proceedings on the capture of Chief Sordo and his followers, Béxar, 15 December 1811 to 3 May 1812.
57. M. Salcedo to Comandants of Guadalupe, San Marcos, Colorado, and Brazos, Béxar, 19 December 1811; Interrogation of José Antonio Castillo by M. Salcedo, Béxar, 6 March 1812; Declaration of José Antonio Villalpando, Béxar, 9 March 1812; N. Salcedo to M. Salcedo, Chihuahua, 25 March 1812; M. Salcedo to Inhabitants of this Capital, Béxar, 8 March 1812.
58. José Salinas to M. Salcedo, Béxar, 31 March 1812; Ygnacio Peres to M. Salcedo, Béxar, 3 April 1812.
59. N. Salcedo to M. Salcedo, Chihuahua, 27 April 1812; Cristóbal Domínguez to M. Salcedo, Río Grande, 6 April 1812.
60. Domínguez to Salcedo, Río Grande, 15, 29 April 1812; Cordero to M. Salcedo, Monclova, 25 April 1812.