

Fall 11-21-2022

## **SIMEON HART, THE "MILMO AFFAIR," AND THE CONFEDERATE COTTON TRADE ON THE RIO GRANDE, 1861-65**

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SIMEON HART, THE “MILMO AFFAIR,” AND THE CONFEDERATE COTTON TRADE  
ON THE RIO GRANDE, 1861-65

A Thesis

by

LEONEL RODRIGUEZ

Submitted to Texas A&M International University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2022

Major Subject: History & Political Thought

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## ABSTRACT

Simeon Hart, the “Milmo Affair,” and the Confederate Cotton Trade on the Rio Grande, 1861-65

(December 2022)

Leonel Rodriguez, B.A., Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Jerry Thompson

The cotton trade on the Rio Grande played a crucial role in the transnational history of Confederate-Mexican diplomacy as well as the history of the American Civil War and the Second French Intervention in Mexico. The renowned merchant from El Paso, Simeon Hart, was an important figure in the cotton trade since he helped facilitate diplomatic and commercial relations between Mexico and the Confederacy. Due to his reputation as an emissary and supplier for the Confederate Army of New Mexico, Hart was appointed quartermaster of the Trans-Mississippi Department. During the winter of 1863-64, the son-in-law of the Governor of Nuevo León and Coahuila, Patricio Milmo, seized \$16 million Confederate dollars which were held as ransom until the Confederates could pay their debts to Milmo. The confiscation of these Confederate funds led to a major diplomatic confrontation between Gov. Santiago Vidaurri and the Confederate government, including Hart, who was responsible for paying the Milmo debt. As a result, the cotton trade was shut down for nearly two months and all shipments of armaments and other supplies bound for the Confederacy were halted. The breakdown of trade relations with Mexico threatened to weaken the Confederate war effort in the Trans-Mississippi Department.

This thesis is a study of Hart's participation in the cotton trade and the diplomatic mission to establish good relations with both the Conservative and Liberal governments in Mexico.

Essentially, the thesis will explain how Hart became involved in the "Milmo Affair" which demonstrates his contribution and significance to the history of the Civil War cotton trade, and the economic and political development of the Texas-Mexico borderlands.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE MAN FROM EL PASO; A LITERATURE REVIEW

Simeon Hart was born on March 28, 1816, in the hamlet of Highland, New York. He was a Mexican War veteran who settled in El Paso, Texas in 1849 and established his flour mill and hacienda, “El Molino,” for trade on the Rio Grande. His success as a merchant earned him great esteem among the local population on both sides of the river. In 1861, Hart’s fervent support for secession led to his appointment as the Confederate purchasing agent of the Army of New Mexico. Following the retreat of Rebel forces from El Paso, Hart moved east to San Antonio, Texas where he became the quartermaster of the Trans-Mississippi Department in 1862. His role in the Civil War cotton trade led to a major diplomatic incident between the Confederacy and Mexico which halted international commerce on the Rio Grande. This event, known as the “Milmo Affair,” was detrimental to the Confederate war effort and Hart would prove essential in restoring Confederate-Mexican relations and re-opening the cotton trade. Hart’s diplomatic efforts during the “Milmo Affair” deserve a thorough evaluation to better understand the political significance of the Confederate cotton trade and its impact on the economy of northern Mexico and the southern Confederacy.

Southwestern Historian Rex W. Strickland’s book, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, focuses on Hart’s biography from his birth in Highland, New York to his family and flour industry at El Paso, as well as his military service in the Confederate Army. This book is significant to any study of prominent Texans who fought in the Civil War. Strickland addresses Hart’s military career as an adjutant in the Mexican War and the contributions of his flour milling operation at

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This thesis follows the model of *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*.

El Paso which not only gave him reputation in the community, but also among the Confederate ranks.<sup>1</sup> Hart was contracted by the Confederate government to supply foodstuffs to Gen. Henry Hopkins Sibley's troops in West Texas and New Mexico. This book briefly mentions the accomplishments and trials of Hart's life including the legal battle to regain his confiscated property after the war. Strickland evaluates the six pioneers who made El Paso into the richest commercial center in West Texas.<sup>2</sup> Strickland used both primary and secondary sources to author this book, which has served as a guide for future historians who have published studies on El Paso and Civil War history. Besides the historical investigation, Strickland's 1963 volume for the Southwestern Studies also includes his personal views, which may require further research and critical analysis for authentication. Strickland has published and edited other historical works such as W.W. Mills's book, *Forty Years at El Paso*.

In James L. Nichols's book, *The Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi*, the author describes the history and operations of the office of Confederate quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi Department. The book focuses on the western theatre of the Civil War and the supply services provided by general purchasing agents throughout Texas. It highlights the achievements of the Confederate Cotton Bureau and the struggles of individual quartermasters who helped facilitate its success by keeping a steady supply of cotton for international trade.<sup>3</sup> These Confederate quartermasters were responsible for purchasing food, clothing, and weapons through trade with Mexico and Europe. The author has several pages on the duties of Major Hart

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<sup>1</sup> Rex W. Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso: Pioneers of the 1840's* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1963), 37-41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 29-41.

<sup>3</sup> James L. Nichols, *The Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 53-79.



who was appointed as the general purchasing agent for the Confederate War Department.<sup>4</sup> This book is relevant to any research on the subject because it provides statistics and letters from the Texas Cotton Bureau, and how these relate to the experiences of Major Hart and his dealings with the cotton trade. The author has a lengthy bibliography of primary sources which includes letters from *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. The book analyzes the economics of the Confederate war effort and the effectiveness of the cotton trade, but it does not have much information about the diplomatic or political intrigue surrounding Major Hart's trade deals with Mexican merchants.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Leland Sonnichsen was an American historian and professor who taught for many years at the University of Texas at El Paso before moving to Tucson, Arizona where he taught at the University of Arizona. He is renowned for authoring many books on the history of the Southwest including the *Pass of the North: Four Centuries on the Rio Grande*. This book has additional information on Hart's life prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Sonnichsen addresses Hart's experience as an adjutant during the American occupation of Chihuahua in 1848.<sup>6</sup> He also discusses the social impact that the Secession crisis had on El Paso, as well as the rivalry between Hart and W.W. Mills and Anson Mills. Sonnichsen's book is relevant to any study of the Civil War and the Southwest. This book contains several pages on Hart, his family, and the events surrounding Sibley's campaign in West Texas and New Mexico.<sup>7</sup> Similar to Strickland, Sonnichsen's bibliography is quite extensive, and he makes good use of *The War of the*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Nichols, *The Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi*, 53-79.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Leland Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North: Four Centuries on the Rio Grande* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1968), 122-23.

<sup>7</sup> Leland, *Pass of the North*, 122-72.

*Rebellion Records* and other primary sources like Anson Mill's book, *My Story*. These sources have been vital to the research on Simeon Hart and his dealings with the cotton trade.

Sonnichsen's study on El Paso has helped historians discover details about Hart's diplomatic and military significance during the Civil War.

Ronnie C. Tyler's book, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, is one of the earliest studies of the cotton trade during the Civil War. It analyzes the diplomatic and commercial relationship between the Confederacy and Mexico. This study which was originally a Ph.D. dissertation at Texas Christian University, is essential not only for understanding Southern victories on the battlefield, but also the economic development of the Texas-Mexico borderlands.<sup>8</sup> The Texas cotton trade brought enormous revenues and opportunity for Texas and Mexico merchants who had contracts to procure military aid for the South. Tyler's book focuses on the diplomatic mission of Cuban-born Confederate agent, José Augustin Quintero, who sought to expand Southern influence in Mexico which was in the midst of its own civil war. Tyler writes about the guerrilla warfare and banditry on both sides of the Rio Grande which affected the cotton trade and the diplomacy between Confederate and Mexican officials. Using Santiago Vidaurri's correspondence from the state archives in Monterrey, Tyler highlights the actions and communiques of the governor who was one of the most powerful allies that the Confederates had in northern Mexico. Vidaurri was the military commander and governor of the border states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ronnie C. Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1973), 61-129.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-129.

Crossing the Rio Grande at Laredo and Eagle Pass was the only effective way that the Confederates could bypass the Union Blockade and trade with foreign markets in Mexico and Europe. Vidaurri granted safe passage to Confederate merchants and their valuable cargo of cotton. The book is analytical and biographical in terms of the experiences of Vidaurri who played a significant role in facilitating the cotton trade and assisting Confederate forces in Texas. This book is relevant because it discusses Hart's role in securing resources from Mexico and dealing with diplomatic affairs concerning Vidaurri and his son-in-law, Patricio Milmo, who confiscated seven cases of Confederate funds. This event caused a major halt of commercial activity on the border that threatened Vidaurri's economic enterprise and the maintenance of power in Monterrey.<sup>10</sup> Tyler explains the events that led to the Milmo incident and how it was resolved, but the story moves away from the perspective of Major Hart whose actions provoked Milmo to confiscate the \$16 million dollars. Although the account of the "Milmo Affair" is brief and vague with respect to Hart's handling of his debts to Milmo and how the debts factored into the crucial diplomatic talks. The book skips to the end with the commission of Confederate negotiators who accomplished a peace agreement with Vidaurri.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis will elaborate on Tyler's claims regarding the "Milmo Affair" and concentrate more on the perspective of Major Hart who deserves credit for his part in the cotton trade and the diplomatic mission in Mexico. Major Hart's role in the "Milmo Affair" is not thoroughly studied by historians who have overlooked the history of the Confederate quartermaster in Texas and the diplomats that were sent to negotiate a resolution. Due to his intensive historical research, Tyler

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<sup>10</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 61-129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-153.

is one of the main authorities on the Civil War cotton trade. This book has proven fundamental to the study of Hart and his business deals with Mexican merchants and politicians.

Historian James A. Irby's book, *Backdoor at Bagdad: The Civil War on the Rio Grande*, is a detailed account of the Confederate cotton trade and the Mexican port of Bagdad that facilitated the importation of foodstuffs and armaments to the Confederacy. Irby emphasizes the strategic importance of Bagdad and its survival during the War of the Reform and the Second French Intervention which politically destabilized the Mexico-Texas frontier.<sup>12</sup> This book is relevant to any study of the cotton trade during the Civil War, as well as the politics and diplomacy of Mexican officials who supported the Confederate cause. Irby highlights the major geopolitical and military events that affected both the Confederacy and Mexico in terms of foreign aid, diplomatic recognition, the Union blockade, and how Bagdad overcame one crisis after another.<sup>13</sup> Irby's book compliments Tyler's study of the cotton trade by illustrating evidence of diplomatic letters that were exchanged between Confederate, Union, and Mexican authorities. Irby uses plenty of primary sources from Confederate merchants and military personnel and explains how their contributions to the Matamoros trade impacted the course of the Civil War in South Texas.

In James W. Daddysman's book, *The Matamoros Trade*, the author discusses the strategic importance of Matamoros for the Confederacy and its contribution to the economic growth of the Texas-Mexico borderlands that prospered during the cotton trade. Specifically, the book details the history of the Matamoros trade and the Confederate plan to secure military supplies through diplomatic and commercial agreements with Mexico and other countries. It

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<sup>12</sup> James A. Irby, *Backdoor at Bagdad* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1977), 5-45.

<sup>13</sup> Irby, *Backdoor at Bagdad*, 5-53.

explains how Confederate forces in Texas managed to overcome the economic pressures of the Union blockade, especially after the Federal Army captured the vital river port of Brownsville in November 1863.<sup>14</sup> The book is focused on the diplomatic events following the Confederate retreat from Brownsville and its impact on the cotton trade, which continued to operate until the end of the Civil War. The author has several pages on the “Milmo Affair” that brought commercial relations between the South and Mexico to a standstill. The book is significant because it addresses more fully Milmo’s involvement in the cotton trade and the diplomatic incident he caused at the risk of putting his father-in-law, Santiago Vidaurri, at an economic disadvantage. The book, however, does not fully explain however, the trade dispute between Hart and Milmo who was attempting to reclaim debts that the Confederacy initially failed to pay. The book leaves Major Hart out of the diplomatic process that resolved the “Milmo Affair.” There is only one sentence in which Milmo notifies Major Hart of his confiscation of \$16 million Confederate dollars.<sup>15</sup>

Wilbert H. Timmons’s book, *El Paso: A Borderland History*, is a superbly detailed and comprehensive history of El Paso and the first Anglo-Americans who settled in West Texas. The book talks about the different time periods that have transformed the culture and politics of the area we know today as the county and city of El Paso. This book is relevant to this research because it tells the story of why and how Major Hart came to El Paso and how he became not only a flour merchant, but one of the most important pioneers who helped the community flourish. The author even writes about Hart’s military service during the United States-Mexico

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<sup>14</sup> James W. Daddysman, *The Matamoros Trade: Confederate Commerce, Diplomacy, and Intrigue* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984), 130-38.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-38.

War and the American Civil War that followed. He includes information regarding Hart's role in the Secession crisis of 1860-61 and the reasons why he joined the Confederacy.<sup>16</sup> The book has valuable information on Sibley's campaign in New Mexico and Hart's economic support of the Confederate conquest of the Southwest. There is a lot of biographical information on Hart in the book. Timmons's book mostly deals with El Paso and its historical contributions to Texas and the United States; however it does not discuss the Confederate cotton trade nor Hart's life after the Union Army occupied El Paso in the Summer of 1862. The book skips several years of his life when he served as purchasing agent of the Trans-Mississippi Department in Texas.<sup>17</sup>

Timmons has a second book titled, *James Wiley Magoffin: Don Santiago - El Paso Pioneer*, in which he writes about the initial stages of Hart's involvement in the Civil War and his efforts to secure supplies for the Confederate Army in Texas and New Mexico. The book is primarily about the life of James Wiley Magoffin who, like Hart, was a pioneer and Confederate sympathizer from El Paso, Texas. This book is relevant because it provides background knowledge of Major Hart's military services during the Civil War and how he became a prominent member of the El Paso community.<sup>18</sup> The book briefly mentions Hart and the events surrounding the secession crisis and Sibley's New Mexico Campaign. These few pages give valuable information about Hart's motivations for supporting the Confederate cause and his attempt to help Sibley acquire supplies for his ill-equipped and ill-fated army. The book focuses on the Hart's cooperation with Magoffin and their experience dealing with not only Confederate supply problems, but also the defeat of General Sibley in New Mexico which led to the re -

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<sup>16</sup> Wilbert H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderland History* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1990), 135-47.

<sup>17</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 150-51.

<sup>18</sup> Wilbert H. Timmons, *James Wiley Magoffin: Don Santiago-El Paso Pioneer* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1999), 1-3.

occupation of El Paso by Union forces in August 1862. The book ends with the Confederate retreat from Fort Bliss and the confiscation of Hart's property including his grist mill at Franklin (El Paso). Hart's fortunes would change drastically after enlisting in the Confederate Army in 1862.<sup>19</sup>

In Charles M. Hubbard's book, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy*, the author discusses the diplomatic mistakes of the Confederate government and the impact this had on the southern war economy which depended on the cotton trade. The book analyzes the Confederate strategy to use the cotton trade as a bargaining tool and compel foreign powers to diplomatically recognize the Confederacy. The book is important since it includes major political events in Mexico and Europe that hindered Southern efforts to gain international support for their cause. It also addresses the success of the cotton trade on the Rio Grande and how it brought economic growth to the border communities in Texas and Mexico.<sup>20</sup>

Border towns such as Matamoros, Rio Grande City, Laredo, and Eagle Pass proved to be significant supply depots for Confederate cotton which was exchanged for food, clothing, and military equipment. The cotton trade was the backbone of the Confederate economy, and this book emphasizes the diplomatic policies and events behind its success and failure. However, the author does not focus on the specific political crisis on the Texas-Mexico border regarding the lawlessness and corruption that disrupted the cotton trade between Confederate and Mexican officials. The book briefly mentions Confederate diplomat José Quintero and his mission to establish a trade agreement with Governor Vidaurri who was a powerful trade partner and ally

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<sup>19</sup> Timmons, *James Wiley Magoffin*, 75-83.

<sup>20</sup> Charles M. Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 17-161.

for the Confederacy. The book does not discuss the details of this profitable, but uneasy relationship between Mexican and Confederate authorities. The book is mostly a comprehensive lecture on the problems and operations of Confederate politics and diplomacy.<sup>21</sup>

In Martin Hardwick Hall's book, *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign*, the Civil War historian presents substantial research on the military and commercial service of Major Hart who was one of the most influential figures in the history of El Paso. Hart had served in the U.S. Army during the Mexican War, and he took part in the American occupation of Chihuahua, Mexico. The war gave him the opportunity to learn the customs and language of the Mexican people with whom he would later trade with as a flour merchant. After the war ended, he and his wife raised a family in El Paso where they built their home and flour mill.<sup>22</sup> As a merchant, he produced enough flour to supply the regional towns and villages of West Texas and New Mexico. The author briefly describes Hart's personal life in El Paso and his secession views. This book is valuable because it shares particular details that were not revealed in previous readings of Hart's biography. The author has included primary sources that show the extent and impact of Hart's participation in the 1861 secession convention in Texas. Hall further discusses Hart's public service and its effect on Sibley's campaign to expand the borders of the Confederacy and gain access to the gold mines of Colorado and California. The book is focused on the campaign in New Mexico and briefly discusses Hart's experience in the first two years of the Civil War.<sup>23</sup>

Civil War historians, Jerry Thompson and John P. Wilson, co-wrote an introduction to *The Civil War in West Texas and New Mexico: The Lost Letterbook of Brigadier General Henry*

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<sup>21</sup> Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy*, 47-161.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Hardwick Hall, *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-39.



*Hopkins Sibley*. They edited all the letters pertaining to Sibley's campaign and the people who helped him organize his army and supply lines. This information is significant because it includes Hart who was a county judge and civilian contractor that supplied the Confederate Army in West Texas and New Mexico.<sup>24</sup> The letters reveal the strategic mistakes of Sibley and his overreliance on Hart's capabilities to acquire enough foodstuffs from Chihuahua and Sonora. The lack of supplies and Sibley's disconnect with the regional politics of the Southwest led to his defeat at Glorieta Pass in the Spring of 1862.<sup>25</sup>

In Phillip Thomas Tucker's book, *Cubans in the Confederacy*, the author writes about the origins of José Agustine Quintero and his contribution to the Confederate diplomatic mission in Mexico during the Civil War and the cotton trade. Quintero helped organize the Matamoros trade between the Confederacy and the government of Santiago Vidaurri who dominated the borderlands of northeastern Mexico. The book has plenty of biographical information about Quintero, but is focused on his career as a Confederate diplomat.<sup>26</sup> It also highlights the momentous events that impacted the cotton trade on the Rio Grande and how Quintero managed to secure trade concessions from Governor Vidaurri and maintain Confederate interests in Mexico. The book is valuable to any research because it has several chapters dedicated to the Civil War and Quintero's strategic role in supervising the cotton trade from Monterrey to Matamoros, which was a major supply depots for the Confederates Army. It also dedicates a few pages to the "Milmo Affair," but it lacks information on the diplomatic operation to resolve the

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<sup>24</sup> Jerry Thompson and John P. Wilson eds., *The Civil War in West Texas & New Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2001), 9-16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 69-174.

<sup>26</sup> Phillip Thomas Tucker, *Cubans in the Confederacy: Jose Agustin Quintero, Ambrosio Jose Gonzales, and Loreta Janeta Velazquez* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2002), 9-143.

crisis. Major Hart is briefly mentioned in a couple of pages and the “Milmo Affair” requires additional investigation to answer further questions about all the people involved, the diplomatic meetings, and the circumstances that led to the crisis in the first place.<sup>27</sup>

Civil War historians have written a series of essays about Confederate Texas and the military operations on the border with Mexico. These essays are found in the book, *The Civil War on the Rio Grande, 1846-1876*, which emphasizes the strategic importance of the Rio Grande Valley and its influence on the multiple fronts of the war, as well as its legacy after the surrender of Gen. Robert E. Lee in 1865. The book is not an achievement of one author but of many historians who have contributed to the study of Confederate administration in Texas and the root causes that prompted the state to secede.<sup>28</sup> This book is significant to any study of the cotton trade and the diplomatic mission to maintain good relations between the Confederacy and the warring factions that fought over control of Mexico during the French Intervention (1862-1867). One chapter contains an essay that describes the major political and military events connected to the cotton trade by Karen and Tom Fort.<sup>29</sup>

In Miguel Ángel González-Quiroga’s recently published book, *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880*, the author summarizes the history of the Rio Grande borderlands and the major events that transformed the culture, politics, and economics of the region. The author has a lengthy account of regional wars that have shaped the geopolitical map of the American Southwest and northern Mexico.<sup>30</sup> This is important to any research on the “Milmo

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Roseann Bacha-Garza, Christopher L. Miller, and Russell K. Skowronek eds., *The Civil War on the Rio Grande, 1846-1876* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2019), 159-96.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 159-96.

<sup>30</sup> Miguel Ángel González-Quiroga, *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020), 91-211.

Affair” because González-Quiroga dedicates a substantial portion of one chapter to Milmo and his business ventures in Monterrey leading to the American Civil War. The book talks briefly about Milmo’s origins and his early success as a commercial agent before meeting Vidaurri. Milmo had a long-lasting business partnership with his father-in-law who engaged in diplomatic and commercial relations with the Confederate States.<sup>31</sup>

Walter E. Wilson’s book, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade*, features all the important people and events that shaped the profitable and clandestine cotton trade during the Civil War. Specifically, the book deals with Confederate swindler Harris Hoyt who ran a blockade running operation in Texas.<sup>32</sup> Wilson’s book is professionally written and detailed in terms of analyzing the secret trade deals between Confederate officials and businessmen whose mission was to acquire military supplies for the Confederacy. Wilson is a veteran of the U.S. Navy, and he discusses many of the strategic river and inland ports, as well as towns and locations on the Texas coast. His book is relevant to this study because he chronicles the diplomatic troubles between Mexico and the Confederate States and the Rebel struggle to keep the cotton trade active during the Union blockade. He also addresses the corruption within the Confederate War Department. However, Wilson’s book does not have details on the Milmo incident which caused a major diplomatic crisis that jeopardized the cotton trade and the movement of supplies for Confederate forces in Texas. Wilson dedicates several pages to Major Hart who was responsible for securing cotton and supplies for the Confederate War Department.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 162-83.

<sup>32</sup> Walter E. Wilson, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2020), 79-113.

As stated, Major Hart played a significant role in the cotton trade and Wilson's book acknowledges his efforts in keeping the Rio Grande open and the Texas economy operational.<sup>33</sup>

After the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson and the capture of the Mississippi River by Union troops in July 1863, Texas was economically cut off from the eastern Confederacy. The fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson prompted Confederate officials to create a cotton bureau that would regulate trade with Mexico and prevent further attacks on their supply lines west of the Mississippi. According to Wilson, "The Confederate armies and citizens of this region were now on their own and had to manage their own affairs with no expectation of assistance from Richmond."<sup>34</sup> In other words, individuals such as Simeon Hart, Harris Hoyt, and Charles Russell had to rely on their own diplomatic and commercial skills to survive the Union blockade. Wilson describes the events that stopped the North from controlling the Rio Grande and undermining the Confederate war effort in Texas.

For any study of the American Civil War, the 128 volume *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* is invaluable. This is especially true of the Confederate cotton trade with Mexico and the diplomatic missions that made its success possible. Several volumes provide eyewitness accounts of a diplomatic incident that endangered the cotton trade between the Confederacy and Mexico.<sup>35</sup> This incident caught the attention of the Confederate government in Richmond which temporarily lost \$16 million dollars due to unpaid debts to Mexican officials in Monterrey, Nuevo León. These funds were

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 106-11.

<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade*, 106.

<sup>35</sup> United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), 870-71. These records will henceforth be referred to as OR by volume and part.

meant to alleviate the money shortage in the Trans-Mississippi Confederacy. The incident became known in some circles as the “Milmo Affair.” This incident was named after Patricio Milmo, son-in-law of Santiago Vidaurri, governor of Nuevo León and Coahuila. It was Milmo who was responsible for the confiscation of these Confederate funds.<sup>36</sup>

On the Confederate side, Maj. Simeon Hart was appointed as the purchasing agent for the Trans-Mississippi Department. It was Major Hart who oversaw the purchase of imported foodstuffs and armaments from Mexico which were paid for in Confederate dollars and with cotton. In late 1863, the Confederates failed to pay their debts to Milmo’s company, which had agreed to safely transport cotton across northern Mexico where the Confederates could then be supplied through the Mexican inland port of Piedras Negras, Coahuila. By early November 1863, the Lower Rio Grande had been occupied by Federal forces.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, the Confederates managed to maintain control of Laredo and Eagle Pass upriver from the Union occupied border towns. As the quartermaster at San Antonio, Texas, Major Hart bought the supplies arriving from Mexico, and paid Milmo with devalued Confederate currency. This caused a great deal of monetary loss and consternation to Milmo.<sup>38</sup> This thesis will explain and analyze the events that led to this affair and how Major Hart contributed to the diplomatic mission to resolve the crisis. Specifically, this thesis will examine the “Milmo Affair” in greater detail and re-evaluate its impact on the Texas-Mexico cotton trade.

*Confederate Victories in the Southwest: Prelude to Defeat* is a collection of letters and documents that pertain to Gen. Henry Hopkins Sibley and other prominent Confederate leaders who contributed to the Southern conquests of West Texas and New Mexico Territory in 1861 -62.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 870-71.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Fitzpatrick to Judah P. Benjamin, November 17, 1863, *OR*, 34, 2: 828.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Fitzpatrick to Judah P. Benjamin, March 8, 1864, *OR*, 34, 2: 1030-1032.

These documents were sourced from *The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*.

*Confederate Victories in the Southwest* is solely dedicated to the southwestern campaigns of the Civil War. It includes letters from Simeon Hart who served at El Paso as purchasing agent for the Confederate Army of New Mexico.<sup>39</sup> The letters contain information regarding Hart's involvement with Sibley and the planning to secure vital military supplies and foodstuffs from the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora. These letters demonstrate how committed Hart was to the Southern cause and how he struggled to obtain supplies due to the military and political disadvantages the Confederates had in New Mexico.

Further data about Simeon Hart such as information from the census records will be sought in the digital archives of Heritage Quest, Fold 3, and Ancestry.com. These websites contain the birth, family, and military service records of Major Hart. The online sources are essential to any study regarding Civil War veterans. They include dozens of documents and letters pertaining to Hart's occupation as a flour miller and Confederate purchasing agent. This information provides details about Hart's wife and children, his residence in El Paso, and the supplies he produced for Sibley's army of New Mexico.

Information regarding Confederate and Union Army operations on the Rio Grande can be found in the *Matamoros Ranchero* and *Brownsville Daily Ranchero*, as well as the *San Antonio Herald* and the *New Orleans Times Picayune*. Newspapers are also important to any study of Major Hart and the "Milmo Affair" and the cotton trade on the Rio Grande. For example, the *El Paso Herald Post* has information about Major Hart and his legacy following the Civil War. These newspapers highlight his military services to the United States and Confederate

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<sup>39</sup>Calvin Horn and William S. Wallace, Compilers, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest: Prelude to Defeat* (Albuquerque: Horn and Wallace Publishers, 1961), 113.

governments. There is information on Hart's family and his historic contribution to the people and "institution" of El Paso.

William Wallace Mills was a prominent citizen of El Paso and a Unionist during the Civil War. He was also an enemy of Major Hart who had him arrested for voting against secession and supporting the Union Army. Mills never forgave Hart for his efforts to drive him and his brother away from El Paso. Mills lost his property when the Confederates took over Texas and caught him spying for the Federals. In his book, *Forty Years at El Paso*, Mills addresses his personal confrontations with Hart who later became a Confederate soldier while he was fighting for the North.<sup>40</sup> Mills' book is significant because it is an eye-witness account of what happened at El Paso during the first crucial weeks after Texas separated from the United States. Furthermore, Mills highlights his attempt to enact punishment against Hart for his aid to Sibley's army of New Mexico. Mills had sought to prevent Hart from regaining his U.S. citizenship and property after the war.<sup>41</sup>

The eldest Mills brother, Anson Mills, also wrote an autobiography that has additional information on El Paso, the Secession crisis, and the military experience of the Mills brothers during the Civil War. Mills' book is titled *My Story* and it was published by the author in 1921. This book dedicates one chapter to W.W. Mills who witnessed the Confederate occupation of El Paso and the escalation of the war in the Southwest.<sup>42</sup> Mills shares further details regarding his brother's arrest by Confederate forces and his enlistment in the New Mexican Volunteers which fought against Sibley's army of New Mexico in 1862. Mill's book is crucial to any study of the

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<sup>40</sup> William Wallace Mills, *Forty Years at El Paso* (Carl Hertzog: El Paso, Texas, 1962), 12-63.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-136.

<sup>42</sup> Anson Mills, *My Story* (Washington, D.C: Press of Byron S. Adams, 1921), 59-73.

Civil War, as well as the local history of El Paso in the 1850s and 60s. It highlights the impact that the Civil War had on his brothers who suffered their own trials of political persecution and warfare.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to establishing the importance of Simeon Hart to the bi-national history of the Texas-Mexico borderlands, this thesis will answer the following questions: Why did Hart become the quartermaster of the Trans-Mississippi Department? Who were the key figures responsible for causing the “Milmo Affair”? Why did Hart become involved in the foreign affairs of the Confederacy and Santiago Vidaurri? How was the dispute between Hart and Milmo resolved and what terms were negotiated with Vidaurri? How significant was this diplomatic breakthrough for the cotton trade and the trajectory of the Civil War?

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 59-73.



## CHAPTER II

### SIMEON HART AND THE CONFEDERATE ARMY OF NEW MEXICO

Simeon Hart was born eighty-five miles up the Hudson River from New York City in the hamlet of Highland on March 28, 1816, and grew up in St. Louis, Missouri where he trained as an engineer.<sup>44</sup> During the Mexican-American War, Hart served as an adjutant under Col. John Ralls who commanded the Third Missouri Mounted Infantry.<sup>45</sup> This regiment followed Brig. Gen. Sterling Price down to the Rio Grande to confront Mexican forces that were rumored to be advancing on El Paso. On February 23, 1848, Price arrived in El Paso and prepared to invade Chihuahua, largely in a last attempt to gain reputation and fortune. Price was eager to fight since he had heard of Col. Alexander Doniphan's 1847 expedition into Chihuahua.<sup>46</sup> That same year in February, Doniphan won a victory against a numerically superior Mexican army at the battle of the Sacramento River, outside Ciudad Chihuahua. Doniphan and his army were the first Americans to occupy Chihuahua. The veterans of this campaign published books about their deeds in battle which impressed not only civilians at the time, but historians who studied the campaign and its impact on the war.<sup>47</sup> Doniphan had inspired Price to seek honor and fame for his own political and military prospects.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Gabrielle G Palmer, Stephen L Frosberg, Donna Carpio, and United States. Bureau of Land Management. New Mexico State Office. *El Camino Real De Tierra Adentro*. Ed. by June-el Piper. Vol. II Cultural Resources Series, No. 13. (Santa Fe, N.M.: Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Office, 1999), 256-59.

<sup>47</sup> Palmer, Gabrielle G, et. al, *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. Vol. II, 255-59.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 255-59.

Similar to Price, Hart sought to obtain prominence and create opportunities for his future career. From Missouri, he rode out with John Ralls' regiment to Santa Fe and Paso del Norte (present-day Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua).<sup>49</sup> When Price launched his invasion, he was unaware that the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo had been signed on February 2, 1848. Ángel Trías, the governor of Chihuahua, sent a delegation to meet with Price and inform him that hostilities between the U.S. and Mexico were officially over. However, Price did not trust the report and continued to march his army into Chihuahua.<sup>50</sup> Governor Trías withdrew his forces to the south while Price was determined to block his path and force him to surrender. Trías managed to evade Price's troops and entered the town of Santa Cruz de Rosales, which lies forty-four miles south of Ciudad Chihuahua.<sup>51</sup>

Trías fortified the town and waited for the American troops to arrive. Price used his artillery to bombard the Mexican fortifications and ordered his men to storm the town.<sup>52</sup> Ralls' Missouri volunteers, including Hart, made their approach from the southwest and encountered heavy resistance. The street which Ralls had run into was full of Mexican infantrymen who were armed with Brown Bess muskets, primitive hand grenades, and a "twenty-four-pound howitzer."<sup>53</sup> Trías's sharpshooters were positioned on rooftops and his artillery was aimed towards the streets. The fight lasted for eight hours, and Hart was wounded in the fighting. He was thirty-two years old at the time when he fought at the battle of Santa Cruz de Rosales on

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<sup>49</sup> Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North*, 122.

<sup>50</sup> William Gorenfeld. "The Cowpen Slaughter: Was There a Massacre of Mexican Soldiers at the Battle of Santa Cruz de Rosales?" *New Mexico Historical Review* 81, 4 (Fall 2006).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 417-18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 419-22.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 419-23.

March 16, 1848.<sup>54</sup> Although Trías surrendered and Price won a victory, the battle was part of an unjustifiable campaign that has been largely ignored by historians.

Once the Americans occupied Santa Cruz de Rosales, Hart stayed at the hacienda of a local flour mill entrepreneur named Leonardo Siqueiros. Hart became well acquainted with Leonardo and was introduced to his family. Leonardo had raised five daughters and Hart asked for his permission to marry the eldest daughter, Jesusita Siqueiros. Leonardo and his wife considered Hart's request, but refused since the war had barely ended and American troops would not leave Chihuahua until July of 1848.<sup>55</sup> Hart told Jesusita's parents that he would return in one year to marry their daughter. After the war ended, Anglo-American pioneers established five settlements near El Paso del Norte "along the left bank of the Rio Grande."<sup>56</sup> Hart was one of these pioneers who opened mercantile businesses on the newly formed U.S.-Mexico border for international trade.<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Franklin Coons was the founder of one of these "binational" communities, which was referred to as Franklin, Texas before the name was changed to El Paso in 1852.<sup>58</sup>

In 1849, Hart began constructing a flour mill near Franklin and made plans to move there with his future family. Due to Franklin's Hispanic heritage and proximity to Mexico, he assimilated into Mexican society and learned to speak Spanish.<sup>59</sup> In December 1849, Hart was

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<sup>54</sup> Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North*, 122.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 122-23.

<sup>56</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 37-38.

<sup>58</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 105-11.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 106-109.

thirty-four years old when he married Jesusita who was only seventeen.<sup>60</sup> They raised seven children whose names are Leonardo, Antonio, Juan, Clara, Corina, Carolina, and Paulina Hart. In 1850, Simeon Hart signed a one-year contract to supply the U.S. Army in West Texas and southern New Mexico with flour. Until his hacienda and gristmill (El Molino) were completed in 1854, Hart received most of the flour from his father-in-law in Chihuahua and delivered it to the “posts of Doña Ana, Coons’s Ranch, and San Elizario for eleven cents a pound.”<sup>61</sup>

Hart expanded his contract for three years and agreed to deliver foodstuffs to every army post in Texas “as far east as Eagle Pass.”<sup>62</sup> This is how he acquired the skills of a merchant that were exhibited in the cotton trade during the Civil War. Based on the 1860 census, Hart accumulated \$350,000 worth of real estate and other individual property.<sup>63</sup> Historian Wilbert H. Timmons mentions that Hart was a slave owner, and the census indicates that he had seven servants, but they are not explicitly listed as slaves.<sup>64</sup> According to birth records, two servants were Mexican-born Hispanics while the other five were black and mulatto slaves that were born in Missouri and Texas. Their names are Sally, Patsey, Rhoda, Antonio Bacas, Bartola Bacas, and there were two male servants named Charles.<sup>65</sup> Although the issue of slavery did not affect El Paso as much as the rest of the nation, the majority of the town’s population supported secession

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<sup>60</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 37-38.

<sup>61</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> Census (1860), El Paso County, TX., National Archives. [www.ancestrylibrary.com](http://www.ancestrylibrary.com) (Accessed October 8, 2022)

<sup>64</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 147.

<sup>65</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> Census (1860), El Paso County, TX, National Archives. [www.ancestrylibrary.com](http://www.ancestrylibrary.com) (Accessed October 11, 2022)

and Hart, a southern sympathizer, had been engaged in local politics since he became the county judge.<sup>66</sup> Hart possessed considerable economic and political influence alongside other El Paso pioneers such as James Magoffin, a renowned merchant, and Ben Dowell who was later elected mayor in 1873.<sup>67</sup>

After Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, seven southern states including Texas seceded from the Union. On February 23, 1861, El Paso held an election on the issue of secession and almost everyone in town was in favor of separation. The only pro-Union votes in El Paso were cast by Anson and William Wallace Mills. These men were brothers that came to El Paso in 1858 and like Hart and Magoffin, they became the town's pioneers. The voting took place at Ben Dowell's saloon which was "the favorite meeting place in town."<sup>68</sup> When W.W. Mills entered the saloon, Simeon Hart shouted out, "champagne for the secessionists" and "the noose for all Unionists."<sup>69</sup> Political animosity towards the Mills brothers ran high in El Paso and according to Anson, his mail was being opened by the postmaster, Ben Dowell, who formed a committee to burn it because it contained abolition articles from the *New York Tribune*.<sup>70</sup> Even though the Mills brothers were against slavery and secession, they were not necessarily abolitionists.<sup>71</sup> Still, Hart made an enemy of W.W. Mills on election day when he reportedly attempted to attack him, but was confronted by P.T. Herbert, a friend of Mills. Herbert had taken

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<sup>66</sup> Timmons, *James Wiley Magoffin*, 75-78.

<sup>67</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 143-61.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-47.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>70</sup> Mills, *My Story*, 57; Also see Mills, *Twenty Years at El Paso*.

<sup>71</sup> Mills, *My Story*, 57.

away Hart's cowhide and "lashed him with his own whip."<sup>72</sup> The reason this happened is because Hart told Herbert to expel Mills from the saloon, but he refused to do so, and Hart tried to banish Mills all by himself. Hart never forgot about Mills and the two men remained enemies for the rest of their lives.

On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces opened fire on Federal troops holding Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. This attack sparked the beginning of the American Civil War which would affect not only the eastern seaboard, but also the western Confederacy and parts of northern Mexico. When Confederate forces entered El Paso in July of 1861, Simeon Hart was an appointed agent of the Confederate state government of Texas and was responsible for receiving the surrender of Federal property at Fort Bliss.<sup>73</sup> The Mills brothers had remained loyal to the Union and decided to leave El Paso to serve in the Federal army. Anson Mills went to Washington D.C. to secure "enlistments" and came to participate in the major battles of Stone River, Shiloh, and Chickamauga.<sup>74</sup> W.W. Mills joined the Union troops that were at Fort Fillmore, on the east bank of the Rio Grande opposite Mesilla. Mills advised one of the Federal commanders, Maj. Isaac Lynde, to retake El Paso since Confederate troops numbered only three hundred while the Federal army had seven hundred and fifty men. However, Lynde was concerned that the Confederate army was much larger than anticipated and refused to attack the Rebels.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 39.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>74</sup> Mills, *My Story*, 62-90.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 70.

Instead of going on the offensive, Lynde told Mills that if he could travel to El Paso del Norte to spy on the Confederates and confirm that the enemy only had three hundred troops, he would then recapture Fort Bliss. Unfortunately, Mills was taken prisoner by a patrol of Confederate cavalymen who were stationed at Fort Bliss. He was charged with espionage and sentenced to death.<sup>76</sup> Mills blamed Hart for his imprisonment and never forgave him. According to Rex W. Strickland, Hart sent the sheriff of El Paso, Albert Kuhn, to cross into Mexico and arrest Mills.<sup>77</sup> Lt. Col. E.R.S. Canby, the Union commander in charge of the Department of New Mexico, sent a flag of truce to the Confederate commander at El Paso, Lt. Col. John R. Baylor. Canby warned Baylor that he would execute Gen. William Pelham, the first surveyor general of New Mexico and Confederate sympathizer, if he did not spare the life of Mills. Baylor quickly allowed Mills to go free.<sup>78</sup> The release of Mills would prove most consequential for Hart during and after the war.

In late July 1861, Lt. Col. John R. Baylor advanced up the Rio Grande from El Paso and conquered southern New Mexico after defeating Major Lynde at the Battle of Mesilla, and then forced Lynde to surrender at San Augustine Pass in the Organ Mountains. Baylor's victory had cleared the Mesilla Valley and West Texas of Union troops.<sup>79</sup> On August 2, 1861, Baylor proclaimed himself governor of the Territory of Arizona that included the southern part of Arizona and all New Mexico south of Socorro. Baylor chose the town of Mesilla as the Confederate capital of the new territory.<sup>80</sup> Hart and his flour mill operation in El Paso were part

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>77</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 40.

<sup>78</sup> Mills, *My Story*, 70.

<sup>79</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Horn and Wallace, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 10.

of the reason Baylor's campaign was successful. As Timmons explains, "he [Hart] said he had on hand 40,000 to 50,000 pounds stored across the river for safekeeping in El Paso del Norte."<sup>81</sup>

Hart's flour supplies kept the Confederate Army well supplied throughout the Summer and Fall of 1861. News of Baylor's occupation of southern New Mexico convinced the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, to launch another offensive that would not only pacify the rest of New Mexico, but also expand the borders of the Confederacy to the Pacific and seize the gold mines of California as well as the gold and silver mines of Colorado.<sup>82</sup> If these goals had been achieved, the history of the Civil War would have been radically different. According to Jerry Thompson, "possession of the California harbors of San Francisco, Monterey, and San Diego as well as the golden slopes of California's Sierra Nevada and Colorado's gold and silver-laden Rockies would have filled Rebel coffers and helped make the Confederate States of America a reality."<sup>83</sup> Brig. Gen. Henry Hopkins Sibley, in command of the Army of New Mexico, was to establish Confederate control of the Southwest and the Pacific coast. On December 14, 1861, Sibley settled in his "temporary headquarters" at Fort Bliss and assumed command of all Confederate troops in far West Texas and southern New Mexico.<sup>84</sup> Hart played a strategic role in Sibley's invasion of New Mexico by obtaining food supplies for the Confederate Army.

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<sup>81</sup>Timmons, *El Paso*, 148.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 148-49.

<sup>83</sup> Jerry Thompson ed., *Civil War in the Southwest: Recollections of the Sibley Brigade* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), xiii.

<sup>84</sup> Timmons, *James Wiley Magoffin*, 79.



Before General Sibley arrived in El Paso, Colonel Baylor had received information that the Union Army was organizing an offensive to take back the Mesilla Valley. According to a communique from October 24, 1861, Baylor was informed that Union general, Edwin Vose Sumner, was “on the way from Guaymas [Sonora] with 2,000 regular troops.”<sup>85</sup> It was said that Sumner was marching towards Mesilla to link up with Colonel Canby’s forces. With their combined strength, the Federals in New Mexico would have an army of two thousand five hundred men. Outnumbered and outgunned, Baylor contemplated retreating into West Texas where he could regroup and re-supply his army at Fort Quitman and Fort Davis.<sup>86</sup> On that same day, Baylor wrote a letter to Hart instructing him to “get all the transportation possible to move the stores at Fort Bliss to Quitman or Davis.”<sup>87</sup> Hart had followed Baylor’s orders and made plans to acquire supplies for the retreating Confederates. Hart and Baylor collaborated with Sibley to stockpile enough corn, meat, and breadstuffs for the Army of New Mexico. On October 25, 1861, Baylor wrote Sibley in regard to his tactical retreat and his intentions to salvage as many provisions as possible in West Texas. In this letter he states, “I can save most of my commissary and hospital supplies. I have ordered corn thrown into Davis in large quantities, for your use as well as mine.”<sup>88</sup> Basically, the Confederates needed to consolidate their forces in order to succeed in a counter offensive in New Mexico. Baylor was waiting for Sibley to reinforce him and collect the supplies at Quitman and Davis for the invasion.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>John R. Baylor to Commanding Officer C.S. Troops en route for Fort Bliss, October 24, 1861, Horn and Wallace, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 109.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Also see: John R. Baylor to Simeon Hart, October 24, 1861, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 109-10.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Also see: John R. Baylor to Henry Hopkins Sibley, October 25, 1861, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 110-12.

<sup>89</sup> John R. Baylor to Henry Hopkins Sibley, October 25, 1861, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 111.

In the letters addressed to Hart, Baylor also asked for strategic information about General Sumner's movements in northern Mexico. As Baylor writes, "cannot you [Simeon Hart] send pony to Chihuahua to ascertain if Sumner is coming across? I learn he is coming, and think it should be seen to by all means."<sup>90</sup> This is evidence that Hart was not simply a supplier, but also an emissary who dealt heavily with Confederate military affairs in the Southwest. Even though he had not yet enlisted in the Confederate Army, his reputation during Sibley's campaign would later qualify him for the position of quartermaster.

On October 27, 1861, Hart wrote Sibley with plans to purchase breadstuffs from Sonora since the people of Chihuahua were experiencing a food scarcity. Due to Hart's association with Baylor, his agent in Sonora received a military escort and "some thirty to forty wagons, to commence hauling supplies from the Sonora border to the Rio Grande."<sup>91</sup> Hart also informed Sibley of the necessity for currency, which would help the Confederates secure enough food supplies for their military operations in New Mexico. As Hart explains, "I can command here now from \$40,000 to \$50,000, all or most of which must go into Sonora immediately to pay for flour."<sup>92</sup> Because of the limited supply of cash and grain in El Paso, Hart could not procure a sufficient quantity of foodstuffs to support a long campaign, however, Hart even stated, "I have now some 40,000 to 50,000 pounds of flour, and will have 40,000 to 50,000 pounds more if the New Mexican troops do not succeed in forcing Colonel Baylor to fall back beyond this place [El Paso]."<sup>93</sup> Baylor's forces alone could not successfully defend New Mexico against Canby's army

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<sup>90</sup> John R. Baylor to Simeon Hart, October 24, 1861, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 109.

<sup>91</sup> Simeon Hart to Henry Hopkins Sibley, October 27, 1861, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 112-13.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

nor gain full access to its resources. Sibley did not understand the dire situation in Mexico, nor El Paso and he overestimated Hart's ability to furnish plenty of supplies for his army.<sup>94</sup>

Baylor told Sibley that the Mexican population in New Mexico was strongly in favor of the North. In addition, Baylor was notified that the Mexican government had given permission to U.S. troops to travel through the state of Sonora. Federal agents in that state were also purchasing corn and breadstuffs for the Union Army.<sup>95</sup> The economic and political circumstances in the Southwest were precarious for the Confederates, but Sibley insisted on a diplomatic solution that could draw Sonora and Chihuahua into making a deal or pact with the Confederacy.

On January 2, 1862, General Sibley sent Col. James Reily to the capital city of Chihuahua to negotiate with Gov. Luis Terrazas. Reily was the commander of the Fourth Texas Mounted Volunteers in the Army of New Mexico. Reily's mission was to secure economic and strategic interests in Mexico, which would help the ill-supplied Confederate forces under Sibley's command.<sup>96</sup> Governor Terrazas agreed to defend Confederate rights to buy food supplies in Chihuahua and even agreed to have the Chihuahuan custom-house dues "remitted." As James Reily stated, "the governor paid me the compliment to put in my hand the order to the collector at El Paso to have the duties remitted and the bondsman released."<sup>97</sup> This agreement not only gave the Confederacy economic relief, but also diplomatic recognition by a foreign state. In

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<sup>94</sup> John R. Baylor to Simeon Hart, October 24, 1861, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 109-10. Also see: John R. Baylor to Henry Hopkins Sibley, October 25, 1861, 111-12.

<sup>95</sup> John R. Baylor to Henry Hopkins Sibley, October 25, 1861, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 112. Also see: John R. Baylor to S.B. Davis, November 2, 1861, 116-17.

<sup>96</sup> Henry Hopkins Sibley to S. Cooper, January 3, 1862, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 118. Also see: A.M. Jackson to James Reily, December 31, 1861, 118-19.

<sup>97</sup> James Reily to Henry Hopkins Sibley, January 20, 1862, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 124-25.

his correspondence, Reily explains how Hart proved instrumental in his mission to establish friendly ties with the governor of Chihuahua. Since Hart had family and business relations in Chihuahua, he possessed considerable influence in the region that supplied his flour mills with grain. As Reily mentions, “He [Hart] is well known, and commands high respect and great credit in Chihuahua.”<sup>98</sup> Hart had written a letter of introduction for Colonel Reily and due to his reputation as the son-in-law of wealthy Chihuahua miller, Leonardo Siqueiros, Reily received “the most marked and attentive consideration” when he arrived to meet Governor Terrazas.<sup>99</sup>

Hart’s experience in dealing with Confederate-Mexican diplomacy would not go unnoticed and the Confederacy would once again require his diplomatic skills during the “Milmo Affair” of 1863-64. While diplomatic efforts in Chihuahua were productive, the governor of Sonora, Ignacio Pesqueira, declined to make any agreement with the Confederacy since he supported the Union.<sup>100</sup>

After Sibley organized his army and supplies, the Confederate Army of New Mexico crossed the Rio Grande near Mesilla and advanced upriver towards Fort Craig. Just north of the fort at Valverde, Sibley won a major victory against Union forces under the command of Colonel Canby. The Federal troops were pushed back to Fort Craig, but fearing heavy casualties Sibley refused to storm the fort.<sup>101</sup> Instead, he decided to continue his advance while leaving southern supply lines vulnerable to sabotage. The Confederates managed to capture Albuquerque and Santa Fe on their way to the Federal supply base of Fort Union near Las Vegas, but were

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<sup>98</sup>James Reily to Henry Hopkins Sibley, January 20, 1862, *Confederate Victories in the Southwest*, 123-25.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>100</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 149.

<sup>101</sup> Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 74-77.

decisively stopped at the battle of Glorieta Pass on March 26-29, 1862.<sup>102</sup> Sibley's strategic failure was placing his troops between two Union armies that were well armed and fortified. As a result, Canby was able to pursue Sibley and cut him off from his supply lines while leaving a "sufficient garrison" to defend Fort Craig.<sup>103</sup> Without Confederate reinforcements and adequate provisions to continue the campaign, Sibley was forced to fall back to Fort Bliss.<sup>104</sup> W.W. Mills, who fought alongside Canby at the Battle of Valverde, wrote an account about Sibley's disastrous retreat from New Mexico Territory. According to Mills, "Of the thirty-five hundred Texans who entered New Mexico only about eleven hundred returned to Texas. The others were dead, wounded, sick, prisoners or deserters."<sup>105</sup> Sibley's defeat was a major blow to Confederate efforts to enrich their war economy and gain diplomatic recognition from European powers. With the Union Army marching towards El Paso, Hart followed the retreating Confederates to San Antonio, Texas.<sup>106</sup>

On August 20, 1862, Federal troops entered El Paso and W.W. Mills was appointed as the town's collector of customs. Mills and the New Mexico courts were responsible for the confiscation of properties which were owned by Confederate sympathizers including Hart.<sup>107</sup> Despite leaving behind his mills and other valuable assets, Hart would find better prospects in South Texas as the future Confederate quartermaster of the Trans-Mississippi Department.

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<sup>102</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 148.

<sup>103</sup> Mills, *Forty Years at El Paso*, 62.

<sup>104</sup> Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North*, 156.

<sup>105</sup> Mills, *Forty Year at El Paso*, 63.

<sup>106</sup> Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North*, 156-58.

<sup>107</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 150-51.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE “MILMO AFFAIR”

On July 1, 1862, Simeon Hart at San Antonio, Texas, enlisted in the Confederate States Army and joined the Quartermaster’s Department. To understand how Major Hart and the Confederacy came to control the cotton trade on the Rio Grande, it is necessary to understand the political leaders of Texas during the Civil War. One of those who played a significant role in the Texas cotton trade was Francis Lubbock, the ninth Governor of Texas and the Chairman of the State Military Board. Lubbock and the state legislature established the Military Board to regulate investment in the Texas cotton trade and make enough money to arm their state militia. The state government issued cotton bonds that charged eight percent interest in hard currency.<sup>108</sup> Basically, cotton bonds promised future payment in cash since Confederate Texans did not have much gold or silver to back their depreciated currency and they “could pay no more than ten cents per pound for cotton, which was far less than the market rate.”<sup>109</sup> The Military Board was financially insufficient, and could not even afford to pay its own agents. As a result, the state of Texas was incapable of preventing the Confederate Army from seizing its resources (i.e., animals, wagons, and teamsters) and taking control of the cotton trade.<sup>110</sup>

Due to the Board’s mismanagement of the cotton trade, the Confederate War Department “decided to enter the competition for Texas cotton in the fall of 1862.”<sup>111</sup> Simeon Hart was bestowed the rank of major by the Confederate government for his service during the 1861-1862

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<sup>108</sup> Wilson, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

Sibley campaign, and he was commissioned as the purchasing agent for the Trans-Mississippi Department. He was given the “exclusive” authority to buy Texas cotton and “supply munitions and quartermaster’s stores” for Lt. Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith and his armies in the western Confederacy.<sup>112</sup> Essentially, Major Hart was responsible for facilitating the cotton trade through his purchasing power and maintaining commercial relations with Mexico, which was the only neutral country to border the Confederacy. The Confederates used Mexican ports such as Matamoros to smuggle their cotton across the Rio Grande and import armaments and breadstuffs. The Rio Grande served as the most effective avenue by which to evade the Union blockade that was patrolling the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>113</sup>

After the Union Army captured Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863, the Trans-Mississippi states of Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana were cut off from the eastern half of the Confederacy. This strategic and logistical disaster would make the Rio Grande the only reliable trade center in the western Confederacy since Union control of the Mississippi River had severed supply lines and communications between the Confederate east and west.<sup>114</sup> Without the support of Richmond, General Smith and the citizens of the Trans-Mississippi Department were left to take care of themselves.

Hart faced the daunting task of keeping the Confederate war effort in the west fully operational.<sup>115</sup> The Texas-Mexico cotton trade was the last hope of achieving this goal. In August 1863, General Smith, the overall commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, called

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<sup>112</sup> Wilson, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade*, 105-106.

<sup>113</sup> James W. Daddysman, *The Matamoros Trade*, 11-60.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 106. Also see: Phillip Thomas Tucker, *Cubans in the Confederacy*, 64.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 105-106.

for a conference that included the political leaders of the states within his jurisdiction. The conference was held in the northeast Texas town of Marshall in Harrison County.<sup>116</sup> The state government officials granted General Smith the authority to create a separate branch of the Confederate War Department west of the Mississippi.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, this enabled General Smith to establish the Cotton Bureau of the Trans-Mississippi Department. The objective of the Cotton Bureau was to administer “the purchase, collection, and other disposition of Government cotton.” As the Confederate quartermaster in Texas, Major Hart oversaw the purchase and transport of southern cotton that arrived at the inland-river ports of Brownsville, Rio Grande City, Roma, Laredo, and Eagle Pass. It was from these inland ports that cotton was moved downriver to Matamoros and Bagdad, Tamaulipas where it was shipped to Europe and other states in Mexico.<sup>118</sup>

The Union naval blockade could not stop European vessels from entering the Gulf of Mexico and landing in Matamoros or Bagdad since to intervene would violate the neutrality of Great Britain and France. It would also violate Article VII of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo which was signed between Mexico and the United States in 1848. The treaty proclaimed the Rio Grande was to be “neutral and open to the free use of citizens of both countries.”<sup>119</sup> The Confederates managed to avoid the Union blockade by bringing their cotton across the Rio Grande into Mexico and loading it onto Mexican or European ships. As a consequence, the

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<sup>116</sup> Wilson, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade*, 106.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>118</sup> Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 15-109.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 16.



cotton trade became the Confederacy's main source of wealth and countries like Mexico, Britain, and France benefitted from their commercial ties with the South.<sup>120</sup>

Throughout the Civil War, the South had to contend with the economic supremacy of the North, which had more natural resources and a larger army and navy. Despite the North having a clear advantage, both sides struggled to maintain economic stability while the cost of the war continued to rise. For instance, in 1862 the war cost the North about two million dollars per day and "troops and suppliers were not being paid."<sup>121</sup> As a result, the U.S. Congress passed the Legal Tender Act of 1862 which helped finance the war effort through national paper currency or greenback dollars as they were called at the time. According to American journalist and economist, Roger Lowenstein, "Business interests supported the bill [Legal Tender Act], reckoning that the new paper would stimulate commerce."<sup>122</sup>

Unfortunately for the Confederates and Major Hart, the South depended heavily on the "printing press" to produce paper money that was not appreciated by merchants who preferred cotton over devalued Confederate dollars. The excessive quantity of paper money also caused high inflation in the South making its currency unreliable in terms of purchasing power, but its cotton would prove a far more valuable asset to its trade partners in Mexico and Europe.<sup>123</sup> Besides strengthening the Confederate military presence in the Trans-Mississippi, the Matamoros trade also attracted opportunists from northern states like New York. More than one-

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<sup>120</sup>Daddysman, *Matamoros Trade*, 15-25.

<sup>121</sup>Lowenstein, Roger. "How Paper Money Saved the Union," in *Ways and Means: Lincoln and His Cabinet and the Financing of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2022), 3.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

hundred and fifty-two ships from New York City made the journey to Mexico to exploit the lucrative cotton trade.<sup>124</sup>

The expanding popularity of the Matamoros trade worried the Union since Confederate influence and power in the West grew to the point of enticing foreign states to give the South diplomatic recognition. This posed a major threat to Union military efforts to bring the war to a swift end. The Confederacy's ability to wage war against the Union was resilient in spite of the military defeats at Vicksburg and Port Hudson. From 1862 to 1865, the Confederate cotton trade kept the Rebels well supplied and spared most of Texas from the devastation of war.

Nonetheless, the Union Army made numerous efforts to suppress the rebellion in the Trans-Mississippi Department where Major Hart took diplomatic action to protect the cotton trade and maintain the defense of the western Confederacy. On December 15, 1862, Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder wrote to Maj. S.S. Anderson, the Assistant Adjutant-General at Houston, Texas, "As Major Hart has great experience as a merchant, has the confidence of the President and War Department, and is more likely than any one I know to bring order out of the chaos I find the cotton trade in here, I respectfully recommend to the lieutenant-general commanding the department the publication of an order directing all agents for the purchase of cotton to report to him."<sup>125</sup> Because of General Magruder's support, Major Hart became the most influential quartermaster not just in Texas, but in Louisiana and Arkansas as well. His service proved invaluable to Confederate troops and merchants from both sides of the Rio Grande.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Tucker, *Cubans in the Confederacy*, 61.

<sup>125</sup> John Bankhead Magruder to S.S. Anderson, December 15, 1862, *OR*, I, 15, 900-901.

<sup>126</sup> Edmund Kirby Smith to Simeon Hart, June 24, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 80-81.

Due to the growing conflict in Mexico between Benito Juárez and the Conservative “Franco-Mexican party” that wanted to re-establish the Mexican Empire, Major Hart’s responsibilities in preserving the South’s economic and political interests extended beyond the Trans-Mississippi Department.<sup>127</sup> For example, on June 24, 1863, Gen. Kirby Smith wrote a letter to Major Hart in regard to purchasing supplies through foreign contractors and arranging delivery of cotton to Matamoros. General Smith wrote Hart: “Mr. S. Simpson, who represents himself as the agent for several large commercial associations in Great Britain, has said to me he is willing to buy cotton in this or other localities with sterling exchange, so as to enable you to pay for foreign cargoes. This will relieve you from the difficulty of transportation to Matamoros.”<sup>128</sup> To further reduce supply chain delays, both General Smith and Major Hart authorized a blockade running operation that would help deliver Confederate cotton to ports in Texas and Mexico.<sup>129</sup>

Major Hart purchased massive amounts of military supplies from his contractor in London, Nelsen Clements, who sent the English schooner *Love Bird* to Matamoros where the French fleet was patrolling the Mexican coast off the mouth of the Rio Grande. Without knowing that the ship’s cargo was intended for the Confederate States, the French Frigate *Magellan* captured the *Love Bird* and its consignment of “10,000 Enfield rifles, 156 revolvers, 2,000,000 cartridges, and 5,000,000 caps.”<sup>130</sup> On October 3, 1863, Brig. Gen. Hamilton P. Bee, who was responsible for unloading the *Love Bird* at Point Isabel, wrote a letter to Hart’s contractor,

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<sup>127</sup> Hamilton P. Bee to Edmund P. Turner, August 6, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 140.

<sup>128</sup> Edmund. Kirby Smith to Simeon Hart, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 80-81.

<sup>129</sup> Wilson, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade*, 85-105.

<sup>130</sup> I.I. Bruzon enclosure in Hamilton Bee to the Commander of the French Frigate *Magellan*, September 28, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 273-74.

Nelson Clements, which declared, “The 10,000 rifles might have won our country this winter, and made your name forever memorable in having done it, and to see it defeated by the course pursued in this case is terrible.”<sup>131</sup> Out of the ten thousand Enfield rifles, General Bee only received four thousand two hundred rifles while the French kept the rest. Major Hart’s efforts to deliver abundant supplies to the Confederacy were undermined by failed seamanship and corruption within the Confederate Cotton Bureau.

Since April 1861, the Union Navy had the strenuous task of blockading three thousand five hundred and forty-nine miles of Confederate coastline, from the Potomac River to the Rio Grande.<sup>132</sup> This attempt to starve the Trans-Mississippi Department into submission was ineffective at first until the Union Army invaded South Texas in the hopes of capturing all the Rebel held ports on the Rio Grande. Union Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks was given command of the Rio Grande Expedition which aimed to block the cotton trade by land and disrupt the Confederate war effort in the west.<sup>133</sup> In early November 1863, General Bank’s army of approximately six thousand Federal troops landed on Brazos Island near the mouth of the Rio Grande, twenty-three miles east of Brownsville. The Confederate commander in charge of Brownsville, General Bee, hastily evacuated the town while leaving half of it on fire. General Bee ordered his troops to “set fire to all the cotton and public property he could conveniently burn.”<sup>134</sup> The Confederates lost Brownsville without a fight and the Federal forces occupied the town.

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<sup>131</sup> Hamilton P. Bee to Nelson Clements, October 3, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 286-87.

<sup>132</sup> James D. Richardson, compiler. *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy: Including the Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*, 349. Also see: Abraham Lincoln Proclamation, February 22, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 2: 391.

<sup>133</sup> Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace*, 176-77.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Fitzpatrick to Judah P. Benjamin, November 17, 1863, *OR*, I, 34, 2: 828.

After the fall of Brownsville, General Bee wrote a letter to José Agustín Quintero, the Cuban Confederate agent at Monterrey, Nuevo León. The letter stated, “it is, therefore, on General Vidaurri that I [General Bee] rely in this emergency. If he will protect the trade to Eagle Pass through his territory, the trade will be as beneficial to his people as essential to ours. We can hold Eagle Pass for some time if there is safety for merchandise on the other.”<sup>135</sup> Since the Confederates were forced to move their supply lines upriver to Laredo and Eagle Pass, Major Hart’s mission became more difficult due to the lack of transportation and the greater distance between Matamoros and the inland Confederate ports.<sup>136</sup> From Brownsville, the Union Army continued its advance and captured the river ports of Rio Grande City and Roma in Starr County. The Federals were only one hundred and eighty-three miles from Eagle Pass and eighty-two miles from Laredo.

Because of the dire military situation in the Lower Valley, the Confederacy became more dependent on Santiago Vidaurri, influential governor of Nuevo León and Coahuila. The port of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, opposite of Eagle Pass, became the main trade hub for cotton which was enroute to Monterrey and Matamoros.<sup>137</sup> As indicated in General Bee’s letter, Vidaurri was a powerful caudillo that fought for control of much of northern Mexico including Nuevo León, Coahuila, and at times, Tamaulipas. Vidaurri produced great wealth for many of his people through the cotton trade. Diplomatic relations between the Confederacy and Vidaurri’s government were mutually beneficial in terms of protecting trade and keeping their armies well

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<sup>135</sup> Hamilton P. Bee to Jose Agustin Quintero, November 9, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 399-400.

<sup>136</sup> Gonzales-Quiroga, *War and Peace*, 188-89.

<sup>137</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 121.

equipped. Vidaurri sought to maintain the security and prosperity of his state as well as his own political power. According to historian Ron C. Tyler, “As he [Vidaurri] surveyed the situation from the peaceful confines of his palace in Monterrey, he saw several possibilities. He could wait for the French to present their demands, but he felt they would occupy all the important cities of the north; the only way he could maintain his power, therefore, would be under French domination.”<sup>138</sup> By the autumn of 1863, the Conservatives and their French allies took power in Mexico while President Juarez fled north to El Paso del Norte to re-consolidate his forces. Vidaurri’s power struggle with the central government of Juarez also contributed to his decision to promote diplomatic relations with the French and the Confederate States<sup>139</sup>

While the Confederate cotton trade helped Vidaurri retain power in Monterrey, the French and the Second Mexican Empire provided economic and military support to the Confederacy. Although France remained neutral during the Civil War, the French and the Mexican conservatives were eager to use the cotton trade on the Rio Grande to fuel their imperial ambitions in Mexico. After Maximilian of Habsburg accepted the Mexican crown, both Major Hart and Vidaurri planned to gain the support of the French-backed Conservative government which would help the Confederacy keep its bilateral trade relations with Mexico mutual<sup>140</sup>

In response to General Bee’s call for aid, Vidaurri deployed a large force to Piedras Negras to protect Confederate merchants while filling his coffers at a monthly rate of about “\$40,000 to \$50,000” worth of customs revenues.<sup>141</sup> The traffic of “cotton wagons” was nonstop

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 128-29.

<sup>140</sup> Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy*, 46-163.

<sup>141</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 121.

due to the cooperation between government and military authorities in Texas and Mexico. Despite moving the supply of cotton upriver and outside the reach of the Union Army, providing safe and efficient transportation of both exports and imports remained a difficult challenge for Major Hart.<sup>142</sup> In late 1863, much of Tamaulipas was still governed by the Liberals. However, owing to the political instability and infighting between Mexican officials in Tamaulipas, the notorious bandit and caudillo, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, seized power and received the endorsement of Juarez who appointed him military comandante of Tamaulipas. These events demonstrated that the Confederate trade routes into Mexico were far from secure.

On November 13, 1863, General Bee wrote to Maj. Andrew G. Dickinson, the Assistant Adjutant-General at San Antonio, Texas. Dickinson was entrusted with the defense of San Antonio and the cotton roads connecting to Eagle Pass and Laredo. As the letter declares, “the existing authorities of Tamaulipas have been overthrown, and Cortina is in power. He is known to be bitterly hostile to us, and possibly, through the Yankee influence, he may prohibit the transit of goods destined for Texas.”<sup>143</sup> In reaction to the threat of Cortina and General Banks’s troops in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, General Bee planned to go on the offensive by marching on Rio Grande City with two hundred men. This action was meant to contain the Union Army in Brownsville and buy time for the reinforcement of the garrisons defending the supply depots in San Antonio, Eagle Pass, and Laredo.<sup>144</sup> However, after reflecting on his military situation and the odds of defeating the Federals on open ground, General Bee changed his mind and decided

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 121-22.

<sup>143</sup> Hamilton P. Bee to A.G. Dickinson, November 13, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 413. Also see: Jerry D. Thompson, *Cortina: Defending the Mexican Name in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007),

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 413. Also see: Edmund P. Turner to Hamilton P. Bee, November 13, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 412.

“not to proceed to the Rio Grande.” Instead, General Bee organized a defensive line between Corpus Christi and Laredo to keep the last trade routes to Matamoros open.<sup>145</sup> Meanwhile, Major Hart’s cotton was “removed” from Corpus Christi which was vulnerable to adversaries who could attack from the coast or “from the direction of Brownsville.”<sup>146</sup> It was Maj. Gen. John B. Magruder’s idea to move the cotton further inland where it was better protected from raiders or saboteurs.

Fortunately for the Confederates, the mass movement of cotton from Corpus Christi was supported by “reliable troops,” cavalry, artillery, and teamsters.<sup>147</sup> This fact is proven by Assistant Adjutant-General, Edmund P. Turner, who wrote to General Bee saying, “It is reported that there is a good deal of Mexican transportation at Corpus [Christi], and you [General Bee] are authorized to make any arrangements with the teamsters, so as to secure the cotton and transport it into the interior.”<sup>148</sup> As a precaution, Major Hart’s cotton was moved first since it was government property that was intended for Vidaurri and other foreign contractors such as the Monterrey merchant, Patricio Milmo.

After removing all the cotton from Corpus Christi, the main trade routes to the Mexican border came through Major Hart’s quartermaster department in San Antonio, Texas<sup>149</sup> In spite of the general impressment of cotton by the Confederate government, Major Hart owed a

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<sup>145</sup> Hamilton P. Bee to Edmund P. Turner, November 16, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 419-20.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> John Bankhead Magruder to Hamilton P. Bee, November 17, 1863, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 423-24. Also see: Hamilton P. Bee to A.G. Dickinson, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 413.

<sup>148</sup> Edmund P. Turner to Hamilton P. Bee, *OR*, I, 26, 2: 412.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*



substantial debt to Milmo that amounted to “\$56,289.70” worth of cotton exports to Mexico.<sup>150</sup> This amount did not include the contract between Maj. G.T. Howard, General Bee’s commissary of subsistence, and Mr. A. Urbahan, Milmo’s agent in San Antonio. Based on the contract, Mr. Urbahan agreed to supply “1,000,000 pounds of flour for 850,000 pounds of cotton, or, in other words, 100 pounds of flour for 85 pounds of cotton.”<sup>151</sup> On November 18, 1863, Major Hart wrote a letter to the Confederate Secretary of War, James A. Seddon, and declared, “the changes necessitated by the occupation of the Lower Rio Grande by the enemy will occasion considerable delay in the introduction of supplies and the exportation of cotton by my service.”<sup>152</sup> To overcome supply chain disruptions, Major Hart “engaged” the impressed cotton as freight to Eagle Pass while the demand for cotton increased in San Antonio because of Major Howard’s contract with Urbahan, who was instructed by Milmo to accept cotton from no other place except San Antonio. Milmo was the one who “furnished the capital to procure the flour” for Urbahan and this is how Milmo became involved in Major Howard’s dealings, which also contributed to Major Hart’s debts.<sup>153</sup>

Major Hart struggled to pay his debts to Milmo as a result of the Cotton Bureau’s “disorganized method” of collecting and distributing cotton. Although Major Hart was not responsible for Major Howard’s purchase of flour, he decided to give him one hundred bales of cotton per month. This arrangement was meant to pay off the debt incurred upon Major Howard.

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<sup>150</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 24, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 933-35.

<sup>151</sup> George T. Howard to Simeon Hart, September 10, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 936-37. Also see: Patricio Milmo to Simeon Hart, December 11, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 936.

<sup>152</sup> Simeon Hart to James A. Seddon, November 18, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 913.

<sup>153</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 24, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 934. Also see: Patricio Milmo to Simeon Hart, December 11, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 936.

Initially, Major Hart did deliver one hundred bales of cotton to Urbahan at San Antonio during October and early November 1863. However, by the time that Urbahan applied for more cotton on November 27, Major Hart could no longer pay him in San Antonio since all the cotton was sent to Eagle Pass.<sup>154</sup> Major Hart was still committed to pay for his endorsement of Major Howard's contract and offered Urbahan an alternative solution. As Major Hart explains, "I offered him [Urbahan] an order on my agent at Alleyton, [Texas] on the Colorado River, for 100 bales, the amount then due under my indorsement."<sup>155</sup> Urbahan declined the offer to receive the cotton at Alleyton since he was unwilling to contravene Milmo's instructions.

Major Hart used "every possible exertion" to find efficient methods to obtain supplies from Matamoros where Milmo's company impatiently waited for his payment of cotton.<sup>156</sup> On November 9, 1863, Milmo wrote to Major Hart from Monterrey, "I have just received advice from my firm in Matamoros of the 4<sup>th</sup> instant, in which they advise me that they had received only fifty-seven bales of cotton for your account in payment of supplies given you months ago; that General Bee applied the cotton remitted by you to other purposes."<sup>157</sup> Milmo was not just referring to Major Hart's obligations to deliver "50,000 pounds of cotton" to Matamoros, but also to the flour purchase of Major Howard and his requisition for cotton, which was owed to Urbahan in San Antonio. The total balance that Major Hart owed to Milmo, in exchange for flour, was "498,984 pounds" of cotton.<sup>158</sup> Another reason why Major Hart could not pay his

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<sup>154</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 24, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 933-34.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 934.

<sup>156</sup> Simeon Hart to James A. Seddon, November 18, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 913. Also see: Patricio Milmo to Simeon Hart, December 11, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 936.

<sup>157</sup> Patricio Milmo to Simeon Hart, November 9, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 939. Also see: Simeon Hart to James A. Seddon, November 18, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 913.

<sup>158</sup> Patricio Milmo to Simeon Hart, November 9, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 939-40.

debts was because of Maj. Charles Russell, the Confederate quartermaster at Brownsville. As Ron C. Tyler explains, “when Hart was able to ship some cotton to the port [of Matamoros] in partial payment of his debts, the vessel was apparently seized by Major Russell and applied to debts that he himself had accumulated.”<sup>159</sup> The fact that many Confederate officers fell into debt worsened the consternation of Major Hart who was unable to “fulfill his contracts” due to the Union blockade and occupation of Brownsville, as well as the corruption of the Confederate Cotton Bureau.<sup>160</sup>

What became known as the “Milmo Affair” threatened to weaken the Confederacy’s purchasing power and credit in Mexico.<sup>161</sup> The Confederates could not afford to lose their advantage in the cotton trade, and neither could Milmo’s father-in-law, Santiago Vidaurri, who was just as dependent on the South as he was on the French for his economic and political survival.<sup>162</sup>

On October 12, 1863, Confederate Treasury Agent, Clarence C. Thayer, set sail from Wilmington, North Carolina to deliver “\$15,000,000” of public funds to San Antonio, Texas and Shreveport, Louisiana. On November 6, 1863, Thayer arrived in Matamoros with seven cases of Confederate treasury notes, which were originally intended for Col. Frank William Latham, “the officer of the Government at Brownsville.”<sup>163</sup> Thayer carried letters from the Secretary of the

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<sup>159</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 122.

<sup>160</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 28, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 944-946. Also see: Wilson, *Civil War Scoundrels and the Texas Cotton Trade*, 102-110.

<sup>161</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 24, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 933-35.

<sup>162</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 126-27.

<sup>163</sup> Clarence C. Thayer to Edmund Kirby Smith, December 20, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 931. Also see: Patricio Milmo to Simeon Hart, December 11, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 936.

Treasury, Charles G. Memminger, who wrote to Colonel Latham and José Quintero regarding the protection of the public funds. Unfortunately, Thayer was unable to reach Colonel Latham who evacuated Brownsville during the Union invasion of the Rio Grande Valley.<sup>164</sup> Thayer met Major Russell who was the only Confederate officer in Matamoros that could help him secure and transport the funds. According to Thayer's account of his meeting with Major Russell, "representing himself authorized to receive all communications addressed to Colonel Latham [and Quintero], I delivered my letter to him and from him received such counsel and aid as he deemed necessary to give."<sup>165</sup> By gaining Thayer's confidence, Major Russell recommended that the seven cases be placed in the care of Milmo & Co. for delivery from Matamoros to Eagle Pass, "via Monterrey." Thayer accepted Major Russell's advice since Milmo was related to Governor Vidaurri, a powerful ally of the Confederacy.<sup>166</sup>

Owing to the insecurity and "peculiar conditions" in Matamoros, Thayer thought it prudent not to appear connected with the cases while trying to keep his mission a secret. Nevertheless, he would still supervise the delivery of the funds by traveling to Monterrey.<sup>167</sup> On December 11, 1863, Milmo wrote to Major Hart, "I have sent an agent with my power of attorney to seize all Confederate cotton and goods on the road from, to, or at Piedras Negras. All property so seized, and also the contents of seven cases in charge of Mr. Thayer from Richmond, said to contain \$15,000,000 Confederate notes, and now in my possession."<sup>168</sup> Milmo acted out

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<sup>164</sup> Clarence C. Thayer to Simeon Hart, December 20, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 942.

<sup>165</sup> Clarence C. Thayer to Edmund Kirby Smith, December 20, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 931.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 931-32.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 931-32. Also see: Clarence C. Thayer to Simeon Hart, December 20, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 942-43.

<sup>168</sup> Patricio Milmo to Simeon Hart, December 11, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 936.

of desperation since the Confederate government owed him a large debt that not only went unpaid, but was increasing to the detriment of his business in Monterrey and Matamoros. Milmo told Major Hart that he would hold the seven cases as ransom until the Confederate debt was paid. News of the seizure of the funds reached Thayer six days later on December 17 at Monterrey.<sup>169</sup> Thayer and Quintero requested the release of the funds by appealing to Governor Vidaurri himself, but the governor's financial interests were aligned with Milmo. As to how Milmo became aware of the contents of the cases, Major Russell was the one responsible for telling the house of Milmo & Co. about Thayer's mission.<sup>170</sup>

On December 20, 1863, Quintero wrote to Major Hart explaining the plot to seize the seven cases as well as Major Russell's involvement in the affair. Quintero informed Major Hart that Russell traveled to Monterrey after Thayer deposited the sixteen million dollars at Milmo's company in Matamoros. Throughout his one-week stay at Monterrey, Russell did not inform Quintero about Thayer's arrival at Matamoros or the letters from the Secretary of the Treasury which were addressed to Colonel Latham and Quintero.<sup>171</sup> As Quintero explains, "I understand that Major Russell, during his stay here, had frequent interviews with Mr. Milmo, and received from him funds to pay freight for cotton to be forwarded from Laredo to this city [Monterrey]."<sup>172</sup> Major Russell acted without authorization from Quintero since he himself was an accomplice to Milmo's "coercive measures" to seize all Confederate property enroute to Monterrey or Matamoros.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Patricio Milmo to Clarence C. Thayer, December 17, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 933.

<sup>170</sup> Clarence C. Thayer to Simeon Hart, December 20, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 943.

<sup>171</sup> José Agustín Quintero to Simeon Hart, December 20, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 943-44.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 944.

<sup>173</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 28, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 944-45.

As to why Major Russell would betray the interests of the Confederacy, Major Hart provides the answer, “Major Russell is the agent of the Cotton Bureau in Mexico, a position which, of course, gives him great power over its cotton on that frontier, and which, according to my experience of his mode of doing business, he would regard as a sufficient warrant for assuming unlimited authority over that pertaining to my service or anyone else’s.”<sup>174</sup> Evidently, Major Russell was motivated by greed to seize Major Hart’s cotton and help Milmo in exchange for funds to pay for his business transactions or debts.<sup>175</sup> Major Russell even received great benefits from Governor Vidaurri who gave him a “military force” for his safety and “the protection of all public property” under his control. Because of the favorable business dealings with Milmo and Vidaurri, Major Russell overstepped his authority to maintain his influence in the Cotton Bureau in Mexico.<sup>176</sup> This was a conflict of interest and Major Russell would later be relieved of his duties as quartermaster by the Confederate government.<sup>177</sup>

Major Hart received many letters of complaint from Quintero and Thayer in regard to Major Russell’s deception during the “Milmo Affair.” These communications were forwarded to the headquarters of General Smith at Shreveport, Louisiana. The situation with Milmo escalated beyond just a business dispute among two men.<sup>178</sup> The seizure of Confederate funds forced the shutdown of the cotton trade between the Confederacy and Mexico. On December 28, 1863,

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<sup>174</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 28, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 945.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 945.

<sup>176</sup> Charles Russell to Benjamin Bloomfield, November 28, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 916-17. Also see: Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 28, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 945.

<sup>177</sup> Samuel Wickliffe Melton to Jefferson Davis, April 15, 1864, *OR*, I, 53, 931.

<sup>178</sup> Simeon Hart to José Agustín Quintero, December 28, 1863, *OR*, I, 53, 947.

Major Hart wrote to Maj. George Williamson, Assistant Adjutant General of the Trans-Mississippi Department, and stated, “the best thing to be done would be, in the first place, to put a stop at once to all exportations, public or private, to Mexico, detain all cotton belonging to Mexicans within our limits, and then make a demand on Governor Vidaurri for the release of the Government funds.”<sup>179</sup> On January 12, 1864, General Smith did exactly as Major Hart suggested and issued Special Order Number Eight which prohibited “the exportation of all government and private cotton from Texas.” Furthermore, no Mexican property was allowed to leave the South essentially “disregarding” any transfer of wealth or military supplies on the Rio Grande. General John B. Magruder was sent to the Texas-Mexico border to enforce General Smith’s orders while a diplomatic solution could be found.<sup>180</sup>

As the cotton trade with Mexico was suspended, General Smith appointed a commission to negotiate with Governor Vidaurri at Monterrey. The members of the commission were Judge Thomas Jefferson Devine, Colonel Thomas F. McKinney, Captain Felix Ducayet, and reportedly Maj. Simeon Hart according to Maj. Gen. Francis Jay Herron of the U.S. Army.<sup>181</sup> In early January 1864, General Smith wrote to one of his commissioners, likely Judge Devine who was the head diplomat, and he instructed him to inform Vidaurri of the legal violations caused by Milmo’s seizure of the Confederate funds as well as the economic consequences of his actions. As General Smith declared, “this action taken by Messrs. P. Milmo & Co. in detaining the Government funds, while in transit through the territory of a friendly neutral power, is a breach

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<sup>179</sup> Simeon Hart to George Williamson, December 28, 1863, *OR*, 1, 53, 945.

<sup>180</sup> Inclosure in Edmund Kirby Smith to Santiago Vidaurri, January 12, 1864, *OR*, I, 53, 950-51.

<sup>181</sup> Francis Jay Herron to Charles Pomeroy Stone, March 9, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 535-36. Also see: Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 125.

of that right of passage of goods and persons which is now guaranteed by the well-established principles of the laws of nations.”<sup>182</sup> By applying economic and diplomatic pressure on Vidaurri, General Smith hoped to secure the immediate release of the sixteen million Confederate dollars which Milmo, with the support of Vidaurri, refused to give back to Thayer. In addition, General Smith told Devine to assure Vidaurri that “arrangements” would be made to determine what debts were “justly due” from the Confederate government to Mexican merchants. In other words, Devine was authorized by General Smith to “ascertain” all demands or expenditures in order to pay the debt and preserve the Confederate government’s credit in Mexico.<sup>183</sup>

General Smith advised Devine to “confer with Major Hart at San Antonio” so that he could receive information about how much debt was accumulated by Hart and other Confederate officers. Furthermore, General Smith suggested to Devine that he talk with Quintero and Ducayet to learn of the intentions and motives of Milmo and Vidaurri.<sup>184</sup> According to Ron C. Tyler, “with the cessation of cotton shipments, Quintero estimated that he [Vidaurri] would lose from \$50,000 to \$60,000 per month in customs revenue, his only income.”<sup>185</sup> Besides the financial and diplomatic pressure, Vidaurri also had to confront President Juárez who, at the time of the “Milmo Affair,” was marching his army towards Monterrey. To prevent the French from conquering northeastern Mexico, Juárez demanded that Vidaurri surrender “regional power” by “turning over the customs revenues from Piedras Negras” and the other strategic ports on the Rio Grande. Governor Vidaurri refused to submit to Juárez’s authority and would later engage in

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<sup>182</sup> Edmund Kirby Smith to the Confederate Delegation, January 1864, *OR*, I, 53, 949-50.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 126.



armed conflict with the Liberals. Vidaurri needed the cotton trade with the South to stay open in order to collect custom revenues which helped him finance his army.<sup>186</sup> Because of the political and military developments in northern Mexico, Major Hart and the other commissioners expected that Vidaurri also wanted to resolve the crisis “peacefully” and without further delay. Once the inquiry into the “Milmo debt” was complete, Devine and the Confederate delegation were able to arrange equitable terms for their negotiations with Vidaurri.<sup>187</sup>

The “Milmo Affair” played a vital role in the military campaigns of the Trans-Mississippi Department since Louisiana and Arkansas also depended on the Rio Grande trade for their supplies and protection. The Confederates too were under considerable pressure to re-open trade with Mexico because of the recent Union conquest of Little Rock, Arkansas, which was used as a staging area for the impending Red River Campaign that took place in the Spring of 1864.<sup>188</sup> The Union Army planned to capture Shreveport, Louisiana, the headquarters of the Trans-Mississippi Department, and effectively cut off the Confederate armies in southern Arkansas from their communications and supply lines. On January 15, 1864, General Smith wrote to Robert Ward Johnson, the Confederate States senator from Arkansas, “I am sorry that the funds intended by the Secretary of the Treasury for this department had not been rapidly pushed across the river [Red River] before the water rose; the difficulty of crossing is now great, and will increase as the season advances. We are now embarrassed for the want of funds [sixteen million dollars].”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Gonzalez-Quiroga, *War and Peace*, 196.

<sup>187</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 126-27. Also see: Edmund Kirby Smith to Santiago Vidaurri, January 12, 1864, *OR*, I, 53, 950-51.

<sup>188</sup> Edmund Kirby Smith to Robert Ward Johnson, January 15, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 868-70. Also see: Edmund Kirby Smith to Jefferson Davis, January 20, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 895-96.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 870.

The possibility and fear of losing control of Arkansas and Louisiana was made worse by the “Milmo Affair” and the massive disruption of the cotton trade. According to General Smith’s letter, Arkansas received thousands of rifles that had “landed at the mouth of the Rio Grande” and were destined to be delivered “at points on the Mississippi.”<sup>190</sup>

To further highlight the seriousness of the seizure of funds, General Smith reported the incident to the president of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis. On January 28, 1864, General Smith wrote to the president, “Sixteen million [worth over three hundred million dollars today] have been seized by the parties in Matamoros, with the tacit approval of the authorities there, leaving me still in a great state of embarrassment for the current expenditures; besides, the Government [is] in debt to the amount of \$30,000,000 [worth over five hundred million today].”<sup>191</sup> Because of the declining economy and military operations in Louisiana and Arkansas, significant responsibility was placed on Major Hart and the other Confederate commissioners at Monterrey. It was urgent that both Vidaurri and General Smith resume diplomatic relations for their survival.

On February 24, 1864, the Confederate commissioners reached an agreement with Vidaurri and Milmo who later released the sixteen million Confederate dollars that were destined for Texas and Louisiana. In return, Major Hart was to deliver five hundred bales of cotton to Milmo at Eagle Pass and two hundred more at San Antonio as recompense for the “liquidation” of the debt including “all items, damages, and interest from his [Milmo’s] claim.”<sup>192</sup> As a result,

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<sup>190</sup> Edmund Kirby Smith to Robert Ward Johnson, January 15, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 869.

<sup>191</sup> Edmund Kirby Smith to Jefferson Davis, January 28, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 920-21.

<sup>192</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 126-27. Also see: Tucker, *Cubans in the Confederacy*, 72.

commercial relations with Mexico were restored and Mexican officials emphasized that they would supply the South with “any amount of specie” in exchange for cotton or the “white gold” which was the main commodity that Mexico imported.<sup>193</sup> On March 9, 1864, news of the trade agreement with Vidaurri reached the Union commander at Brownsville, Texas, Francis Jay Herron. On that same day, General Herron wrote to Brig. Gen. and Chief of Staff, Charles Pomeroy Stone, “Vidaurri is heart and soul with the rebels and French, and that he has been controlled entirely in his late action by Maj. Simeon Hart, Judge Devine, and Mr. McKinney, the commissioners of General Kirby Smith to protect the crossing of cotton and goods at Eagle Pass.”<sup>194</sup> After the successful negotiations, there was greater economic cooperation between Vidaurri and the Confederate Army since both sides were on the defensive. Vidaurri tried to defend Monterrey against the Juaristas while General Smith was fighting on multiple fronts in Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas.<sup>195</sup> Major Hart’s diplomatic efforts helped the western Confederacy obtain the supplies and war materials necessary to repel the last Union offensives of the war.

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<sup>193</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 127-51.

<sup>194</sup> Francis Jay Herron to Charles Pomeroy Stone, March 9, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 535-36.

<sup>195</sup> Francis Jay Herron to Charles Pomeroy Stone, March 11, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 565. Also see: James Edwin Slaughter to Santos Benavides, March 24, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 1079.

## CHAPTER IV

## SIMEON HART'S LEGACY AND THE LAST BATTLE FOR TEXAS

Throughout 1864 and early 1865, Maj. Simeon Hart continued to serve as cotton agent and quartermaster at San Antonio, Texas. Major Hart's involvement in the "Milmo Affair" and the restoration of diplomatic relations between Santiago Vidaurri and the Confederacy proved significant to the history of the cotton trade and French intervention in Mexico. The reason being, the South supported not just the Conservatives or French, but also the Liberals who depended on the custom revenues from the cotton trade for their war effort against the French and the Mexican empire. On March 11, 1864, Gen. Francis J. Herron wrote to the Chief of Staff, Gen. Charles Stone, regarding the political turmoil in northern Mexico. As General Herron declared, "It is understood that Vidaurri will turn over to the French at the proper time the States of Nuevo León and Coahuila, and that the French commander will then make him governor of Tamaulipas. Juarez has appointed General [Miguel] Negrete military governor of Nuevo León and Coahuila, and he is now marching against Monterrey."<sup>196</sup> In reaction to the Liberal advance towards Monterrey, José Quintero, the Confederate agent, communicated with President Juarez hoping to facilitate trade relations on the Rio Grande between the Confederacy and the Mexican rebels that were poised to overthrow Governor Vidaurri.<sup>197</sup>

Following the "Milmo Affair," Hart and Quintero successfully avoided confrontations with Mexican officials from both the Liberal and Conservative factions. As a contingency plan, the Confederates decided to change the route of the cotton going into Mexico. On March 2, 1864, Gen. James Edwin Slaughter, the Confederate Chief of Staff at Houston Texas, wrote to

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<sup>196</sup> Francis Jay Herron to Charles Pomeroy Stone, March 11, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 565.

<sup>197</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 140-41.

Col. Santos Benavides, “Major-General Magruder directs me to say to you that he desires to change the route of the cotton going to Mexico; that he wishes it to go by way of Laredo instead of Eagle Pass.”<sup>198</sup> Slaughter briefly mentions the economic crisis caused by the “Milmo Affair” and instructed Colonel Benavides to “make arrangements with the Governor of Tamaulipas” in order to facilitate the exportation of cotton into Mexico.<sup>199</sup> The Confederates could no longer rely on Vidaurri for the protection of the cotton trade since Juárez was on his way to conquer Nuevo León and Coahuila.

On April 2, 1864, Gen. Miguel Negrete captured Monterrey which was selected as the new capital or headquarters for the Liberal government. As a consequence, Patricio Milmo was arrested for his loyalty to Vidaurri, and Juárez decreed that Nuevo León and Coahuila, which were united as one state under Vidaurri, should be separated. The municipality or custom house of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, declared its allegiance to the Juárez government.<sup>200</sup> Despite the political instability on the Rio Grande, Hart and Quintero thrived economically as a result of the new trade agreement with the Liberals. Gen. Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, who supported Juárez, also promoted commercial relations with the Confederacy. On May 25, 1864, Col. John S. Ford wrote to Brig. Gen. James Edwin Slaughter, “I have the honor to report that our relations with the Mexican authorities and people are becoming daily more amicable. Col. José Maria Cortina [brother of Juan Cortina] has disarmed and dismounted various renegades.”<sup>201</sup> Colonel Ford was protecting the cotton trade at Rio Grande City where he established his headquarters at Ringgold

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<sup>198</sup> James Edwin Slaughter to Santos Benavides, March 2, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 1,013.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 140-42.

<sup>201</sup> John S. Ford to James Edwin Slaughter, May 25, 1864, *OR*, I, 53, 994.

Barracks which still stands as a historic site today. By establishing diplomatic relations with Cortina, who was governor of Tamaulipas at the time, Colonel Ford tried persuading Tejanos to desert the Union and sell arms to the Confederates.<sup>202</sup> Colonel Ford's aim was to gather enough men and supplies to retake Brownsville from the retreating Federals who recently lost an attempt to seize Laredo in March 1864.<sup>203</sup>

Even though Vidaurri was deposed, he never lost the friendship of the Confederates who gave him sanctuary in Texas while the Liberals occupied Monterrey for nearly four months before they retreated to Chihuahua. Milmo was released from prison after paying "between \$45,000 and \$60,000" in fines.<sup>204</sup> While in exile, Vidaurri still had many supporters who fought against the Juarez government in Monterrey. As Mexican imperial forces and French troops made their way through Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, Juárez was chased out of Monterrey by Vidaurri's followers.<sup>205</sup> On August 16, 1864, the French Army, under the command of Gen. Armand Alexandre Castagny, entered Monterrey. After Vidaurri returned from exile on September 7, he met with General Castagny at Salinas Victoria, twenty-one miles north of Monterrey. Vidaurri pledged his support for Maximilian and was later appointed as an advisor to the emperor. However, General Castagny did not allow Vidaurri to remain as governor of Nuevo León fearing that he might re-consolidate power in the north and use it for his own purposes.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> John Bankhead Magruder to William Robertson Boggs, March 30, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 1099. Also see: John S. Ford to E.P Turner, March 31, 1864, *OR*, I, 34, 1,106.

<sup>204</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 142-43.

<sup>205</sup> Ryle, Walter Harrington. "The Political Career of Don Santiago Vidaurri" Ph.D. Disst, Northeast Missouri State Teachers College, (1956), 110.

<sup>206</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 147-53 Also see: Ryle. "The Political Career of Santiago Vidaurri," 111-12.

Hart and Quintero paid close attention to the situation on the Rio Grande where the commander of the Mexican imperial army, Gen. Tomas Mejia, occupied Matamoros.<sup>207</sup> The fortunes of Hart, Quintero, and Vidaurri depended on not just the cotton trade or the Confederate government, but also on the imperial ambitions of Napoleon III and Maximilian.<sup>208</sup>

As the Conservatives and their French allies conquered Tamaulipas, the Confederate Army retook control of Brownsville on July 30, 1864, and established trade relations with the French and Mexican empires.<sup>209</sup> Although Hart did not personally profit from the cotton trade, he was still responsible for exporting cotton in exchange for armaments which traveled as far as Arkansas where the Confederates defeated the 1864 Camden Expedition, the last Union campaign in that state. According to Ron Tyler, “General John S. Marmaduke, in Little Rock, received a load of 4,000 Enfield rifles that had been purchased in England, then shipped through Bagdad, Matamoros, and Brownsville, before reaching Little Rock.”<sup>210</sup> In early 1864, Major Hart purchased approximately “15,997” bales of cotton, which were distributed to multiple foreign merchants such as Milmo who built a “financial empire” that was worth “between \$10,000,000 and \$15,000,000.”<sup>211</sup> Hart’s contributions to the cotton trade not only helped the Trans-Mississippi Department stay militarily operational, but also impacted the economic development of Monterrey in terms of his exchange with Vidaurri and Milmo. Between 1861 and 1864, Vidaurri’s “mercantile” partnership with Milmo and the Confederacy brought great wealth to

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>209</sup> Gonzales-Quiroga, *War and Peace*, 197.

<sup>210</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 149-50.

<sup>211</sup> James L. Nichols, *The Confederate Quartermaster in the Trans-Mississippi* (University of Texas Press, 1964), 59-105. Also see: Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 150-52.

Monterrey which was transformed into the industrial and commercial center of northern Mexico. Vidaurri used the cotton trade revenues to fund multiple projects such as the construction of the alameda, Monterrey's central park, as well as the Plaza de la Llave and the Mercado Colón, a "popular tourist market."<sup>212</sup>

Vidaurri's dealings with Major Hart and his overall experience in the Confederate cotton trade elevated him to the position of finance minister in the imperial government at Mexico City. When the Second Mexican Empire was on the brink of collapse, Vidaurri tried to rescue Emperor Maximilian's army which was besieged at Querétaro, Mexico. He planned to collect funds and supplies for the Mexican Imperial Army in order to lift the siege and continue the war against the Liberals.<sup>213</sup> Unfortunately for the Conservatives, no military aid was able to reach Querétaro on time and soon the city's defenders, including Maximilian, surrendered to Gen. Mariano Escobedo, the commander of the Mexican Republican forces. On June 19, 1867, Maximilian was executed alongside his generals, Tomás Mejía and Miguel Miramón on the Hill of the Bells in Querétaro. As a result, Vidaurri decided to go into hiding in Mexico City until he could find a way out of the country.<sup>214</sup> He found refuge in the home of a Mr. Wright, an American citizen, who later betrayed Vidaurri for money. On July 8, 1867, Vidaurri was arrested and executed by Liberal troops since Juárez declared him a traitor. Vidaurri is buried in a private chapel on the Mesa de Cartujanos near Candela, Coahuila. Today, Vidaurri is still considered a controversial figure in Mexican history.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 128.

<sup>213</sup> Ryle, "The Political Career of Don Santiago Vidaurri," 115-16.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 115-19.

<sup>215</sup> Ryle, "The Political Career of Don Santiago Vidaurri," 120-24.



Historian Ron Tyler speculated that the cotton trade, which provided abundant military supplies to the Confederate Army, might have allowed the Confederacy to “survive, had it been able to endure militarily [against the Union].”<sup>216</sup> However, the war in the eastern Confederacy crippled the South’s manufacturing economy after the fall of Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia. The loss of these strategic cities was a major setback to the Confederacy’s last hope of maintaining the war effort. By 1865, the supply demand of the Confederate War Department was difficult to overcome due to the weakened economy and military defeats in the east. Texas, however, would remain well supplied and defended as a result of Hart’s diplomatic efforts in Mexico. Even though Hart was not directly involved in the last campaigns or battles of the war, his mission to secure supplies and equipment made the difference between victory and defeat, at least in the Trans-Mississippi Department. Since the Confederacy was split in two, Confederate victories in the west could not prevent the surrender of Gen. Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. After Lee surrendered to Gen Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865, General Kirby Smith refused to accept defeat and decided to transfer all remaining Confederate forces to Texas and hold out until better peace terms could be obtained.<sup>217</sup> On April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by a southern sympathizer, John Wilkes Booth. Lincoln was succeeded by his vice president, Andrew Johnson, who became the seventeenth president of the United States.

Despite hearing the news of Lee’s surrender, many Confederate soldiers in South Texas were determined to fight and protect the cotton trade on the Rio Grande. On May 13, 1865, the

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<sup>216</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 151.

<sup>217</sup> Joseph Howard Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, C.S.A* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954), 301-470.

last battle of the Civil War was fought at Palmito Ranch, thirteen miles east of Brownsville. The Union Army stationed at Brazos Island moved inland to commandeer food supplies and re-occupy Brownsville to sabotage Confederate supply lines.<sup>218</sup> The Confederates, numbering about two-hundred troops, won the Battle of Palmito Ranch and forced the Federals to retreat.

Although the battle was a Southern victory, it did not change the course of the war which was almost over.<sup>219</sup> On May 30, 1865, General Smith gave his last address to the soldiers of the Trans-Mississippi Department and declared, “Return to your families. Resume the occupations of peace. Yield obedience to the laws, Labor to restore order. Strive both by counsel and example to give security to life and property. And may God, in his mercy, direct you aright, and heal the wounds of our distracted country.”<sup>220</sup> General Smith had formally surrendered and went into exile in Mexico and then Cuba.<sup>221</sup>

The war may have ended, but Hart’s worries and tribulations did not. From 1865 to 1873, Hart paid for the consequences of his involvement in the rebellion. He once again came into conflict with his old rival, W.W. Mills, with whom he fought a long legal battle to reclaim his home and property in El Paso, Texas that had been seized by Federal authorities. On November 6, 1865, Hart was pardoned by President Andrew Johnson who wanted the former Confederacy to easily re-join the Union.<sup>222</sup> The charges against Hart included cotton speculation as well as insurrection since he enlisted in the Confederate army. Regardless of the pardon, Hart struggled

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<sup>218</sup> Jeffrey Hunt, *The Last Battle of the Civil War: Palmito Ranch* (University of Texas Press, 2010), 51-104.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith*, 475.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 482-83.

<sup>222</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 40.

to re-build his life at El Paso where, before the Civil War, he had raised a family and established his hacienda and grist mill. Rather than fight for greed or revenge, protecting the family heritage was Hart's motivation to defeat his opponents in court.<sup>223</sup>

In 1866, Hart and his lawyers challenged a lawsuit that was filed against him by the El Paso District Court on behalf of Mills. Mills claimed "a judgment for \$50,000" as compensation for his arrest by Confederate authorities in 1861.<sup>224</sup> Mills saw Hart as the instigator behind his imprisonment and never forgave Hart. In addition, Hart's participation in the Sibley campaign also cost him years of court battles and deliberations regarding amnesty and the return of his property. During the Civil War, the Federal District Court of New Mexico Territory claimed the right to confiscate the real estate of citizens that supported the rebellion against the U.S. government.<sup>225</sup> The District Court followed an Act of Congress which was passed on March 3, 1863, that allowed the court to expand its authority to West Texas. Confederate sympathizers from El Paso County were subject to have their property seized by the Union. After Federal troops re-took El Paso in August 1862, Mills was appointed as the collector of custom in the town. He was given authority to "condemn and sell goods smuggled into El Paso County." Hart's property was taken over by Mills who purchased it through the "sheriff's sale" or public auctions.<sup>226</sup> According to historian Rex W. Strickland, "in time the sequestration sales were nullified by superior courts, both state and federal" and Mills' was "unable to collect the award for damages growing out of his imprisonment."<sup>227</sup> Hart eventually recovered his property after

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>224</sup> W.W. Mills, *Forty Years at El Paso*, 128-29.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 134-35.

<sup>227</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 41-42.

the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in his favor in 1868. During the legal battle, Hart and his family lived at St. Louis, Missouri, on the west bank of the Mississippi River. According to the 1870 federal census, Hart resumed his occupation as a miller while his wife, Jesusita Siqueiros Hart, worked as a house keeper. Hart's children attended school in St. Louis. On December 20, 1870, Jesusita passed away at the age of thirty-eight and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery at El Paso, Texas.<sup>228</sup>

On May 5, 1873, the Mills brothers renounced their rights to the "land they had claimed." However, the anxiety and "labor" of the court battle, as well as the recent passing of Jesusita, took a toll on Hart's health. He died on January 19, 1874, at the age of fifty-seven. Hart was buried at El Molino, also known as Hart's Mill, in El Paso. His son, Juan Hart, "erected" a mausoleum or "columned tomb" to commemorate him.<sup>229</sup> Unfortunately, the tomb was demolished in the 1950s to make way for the construction of the interstate highway. Hart's remains were reburied in the Catholic section of Concordia Cemetery at El Paso.<sup>230</sup> Hart's final victory was passing on his legacy and fortune to his children who helped preserve the history of the El Paso merchant and pioneer.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Simeon Hart, in 1870 United States Federal Census - AncestryLibrary.com (Accessed October 11, 2022). Also see: Jesusita Hart, in U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current - AncestryLibrary.com (Accessed October 11, 2022).

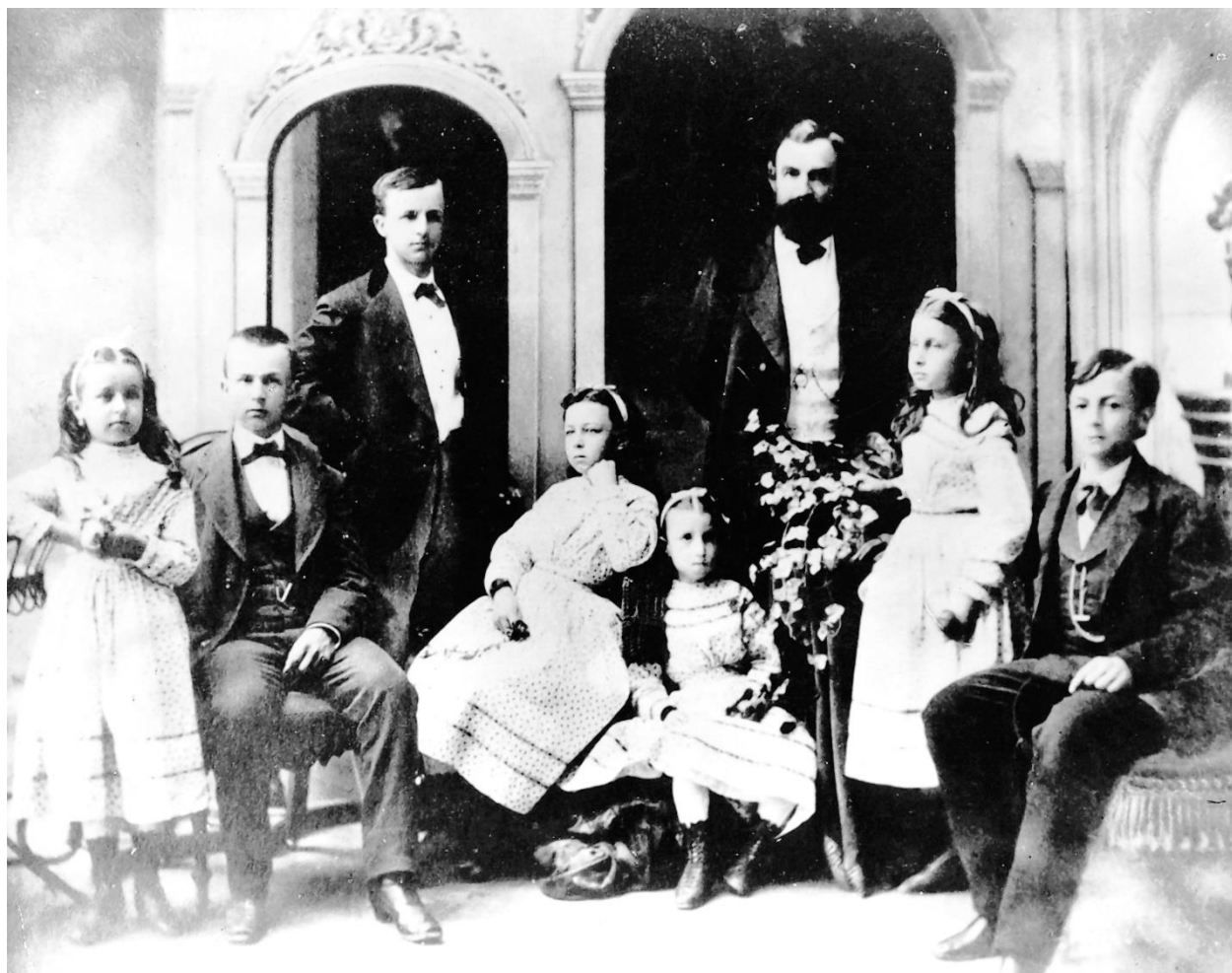
<sup>229</sup> Ibid., Also see: Wilbert H. Timmons, "Simeon Hart," *Handbook of Texas History* Website (Accessed October 8, 2022).

<sup>230</sup> Col. Simeon Hart, in U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current - AncestryLibrary.com (Accessed October 8, 2022) Also see: *El Paso Herald Post*, October 21, 1947.

<sup>231</sup> Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North*, 123.



Simeon Hart, [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) (Accessed October 8, 2022)



Simeon Hart and his children, [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) (Accessed October 11, 2022)

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

Based on the “Milmo Affair,” Simeon Hart played a significant role in the history of Texas and the Civil War, as well as northern Mexico in terms of establishing commercial relations between the Confederate States and Santiago Vidaurri. Hart’s involvement in the cotton trade facilitated the importation of foreign supplies from Mexico, Great Britain, and France, which helped keep the economy and military of the Trans-Mississippi Department operational. In other words, Hart’s abilities as a diplomat and quartermaster increased the profitability of the cotton trade on the Rio Grande by alleviating the economic setbacks of devalued currency, the Union blockade, and the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson. Hart was given the sole authority to purchase Texas cotton and secure trade deals with foreign contractors who supplied the Confederate army through the neutral ports of Bagdad and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, which were beyond the jurisdiction of the Union. Owing to the blockade and the Union conquest of Brownsville, Texas, Hart was under considerable pressure to find transportation and safe passage for the cotton trains that traveled from Eagle Pass and Laredo to Matamoros.<sup>232</sup>

In exchange for Hart’s cotton supplies, the South received weapons, ammunition, gun powder, lead, copper, clothing, and food. Foreign contractors such as Patricio Milmo made a fortune out of the cotton trade by supplying the Confederate Army with flour. Milmo’s participation in the cotton trade also helped Governor Vidaurri finance his army and economic projects in Monterrey.<sup>233</sup> As a result of Hart’s dealings with Vidaurri and Milmo, the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila experienced greater economic development, which

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<sup>232</sup> Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 126-29.

<sup>233</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 128-50.

served the interests of both the Conservative and Liberal parties of Mexico. When Gen. Kirby Smith appointed Hart as a commissioner in January 1864, Vidaurri was not yet committed to either party, but he was leaning towards the Conservatives who were victorious at that time. Hart's mission to restore trade relations with Mexico was important to the financial and military goals of the Confederacy and Vidaurri's government.<sup>234</sup>

Hart may have been on the wrong side of the Civil War, but his commercial and diplomatic skills were used for other purposes besides serving the Confederacy. Before the rebellion, Hart volunteered to fight in the Mexican American War and fought valiantly at the Battle of Santa Cruz de Rosales. After returning from Mexico, Hart became a prominent figure at Franklin, Texas (El Paso) where he established his famous grist mill that supplied the U.S. army outposts on the frontier. He also engaged in trade relations with Mexican merchants from Chihuahua and contributed to the economic growth of West Texas while facing the instability of the new boundary between Mexico and the U.S. following the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. As a result, Hart earned the respect of his community by promoting a bi-national culture in which Mexicans and Anglos could do business and co-exist.<sup>235</sup>

Hart married into a wealthy Mexican family from Santa Cruz de Rosales, Chihuahua and received economic support from his father-in-law, Leonardo Siqueiros, who was also a renowned flour miller. In the early 1850s, Hart and his wife, Jesusita Siqueiros, moved to their hacienda in Franklin, Texas.<sup>236</sup> To overcome the dangers of the frontier, protecting international trade was essential for the survival of Franklin and other settlements on the Rio Grande. Hart's experience

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<sup>234</sup> Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, 125-28.

<sup>235</sup> Strickland, *Six Who Came to El Paso*, 37.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.,



with the Mexican trade was invaluable not just to the Confederate cause, but also to the regional economic needs of South Texas and northern Mexico. Specifically, the Texas border communities of Eagle Pass, Laredo, Roma, Rio Grande City, and Brownsville benefitted from the war-time cotton trade. Prior scholarship has not given Hart much credit for resolving the “Milmo Affair” and keeping the trade profitable for both sides of the Rio Grande. Hart is a controversial figure in Texas history, but his achievements were significant to the cotton trade and the political battles for Confederate Texas and Mexico. His legacy remains an essential part of the history of the American Southwest and the Civil War in particular. Today, travelers can visit Hart’s Mill which is a “narrow track between West Paisano and the border [Rio Grande].”<sup>237</sup> The area has been designated as a historic site by the city of El Paso. Hart’s inheritance was preserved by his family members such as Juan Hart who also contributed to the history of El Paso and the Texas-Mexico borderlands.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Maria Cortes Gonzalez. “County Takes First Step Toward Preserving Hart’s Mill, Related Historic Places,” *El Paso Times*, August 21, 2017.

<sup>238</sup> Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North*, 123-399.

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