

DEEP IN DIXIE



Louisiana's Lone Star Republic

FIRST CLAIM FOR RAISING a lone star in revolt doesn't go to Texas.

Louisianians beat their neighbors to the west by some 26 years in hoisting a banner bearing a single star over a home-grown militia.

The story starts 144 years ago, in September, 1810. Americans living in the Florida parishes heard reports that Vizente Folch, captain-general of the Floridas under the Spanish rule, was bringing a force to quiet rebellious noises being heard from the area east of Baton Rouge.

Quick action was in order. A band of 80 rebels, formed near Springfield in Livingston parish and near St. Francisville in West Feliciana parish, marched on the Spanish fort at Baton Rouge. Col. Philemon Thomas was in command.

Poorly manned—only 12 of the garrison of 20 men were fit for duty—and with its walls full of gaps, the fort would be a pushover, the rebels figured. They were right.

At about 2 a. m. Sept. 23 Col. Thomas led his small army through the dilapidated palisades. With shouts of "Hurrah for Washington" and a rain of shots, the Americans captured the outpost and, along with it, Don Carlos Duhalit de Lassus, Spanish governor of the Baton Rouge district.

The Spanish flag was replaced with the lone star flag—a blue banner with a single white star in the center.

Hardly had the smoke of the military coup settled when a convention at St. Francisville went into session to prepare a declaration of independence for the Republic of West Florida. A constitution copied after that of the United States was adopted. Col. Thomas was ordered to raise an army for campaigns against the Spanish in Mobile and Pensacola.

The first Legislature of West Florida went into session Sept. 26, 1810, and elected Fulwar Skipwith governor. A letter was

written to President James Madison asking for recognition and for annexation to the United States as a territory.

Somewhat upset by the prospect of more conflict with Spain, Madison decided the easiest way out was to issue a proclamation on Oct. 27, 1810, including the Florida parishes in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

Disappointed at not winning recognition as the Lone Star Republic, West Floridians comforted themselves with the fact that they had achieved their major aim—annexation to the United States—as they hauled down their blue banner with the single white star.

—Submitted by Hobart O. Pardue Jr.,
P. O. Box 4, Springfield, La.

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