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Exhibition

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Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Volume 120, Number 2, October 2016,
pp. 162-187 (Article)

Published by Texas State Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/swh.2016.0062>



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This chromolithograph shows a bird's-eye view of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*

Representative Men: The Post-Civil War Political Struggle over Texas's Commissioners to the 1876 Centennial Exhibition

BY JACK NOE*

"There are thousands of Democrats up North who are first rate fellows and if they desire to see Texas at the Centennial we would like to gratify them . . . [but] it is not to be expected that a respectable lady like Texas would enter the festivities on the arm of a satyr like Parsons."—*The Brenham Banner*, Sept. 17, 1875

THIS WAS THE ACERBIC REACTION OF ONE DEMOCRATIC TEXAS NEWSPAPER, *The Brenham Banner*, to the presence of a Republican politician, William Henry Parsons, on the National Centennial Commission, the body responsible for planning and organizing the International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine, more commonly referred to simply as "The Centennial," a grand world's fair and hundredth birthday party for the United States of America planned for May through November of 1876 in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park. The commission comprised one commissioner and one alternate from each state or territory, who were appointed by the president upon the nomination of each state's or territory's governor.

A central theme of the festivities was post-Civil War sectional amity; as the *United States Centennial Almanac* (1874) put it, the aim was to make the Centennial "a work of pride, of patriotism, and reconciliation."¹ There has been valuable work in recent years on white southern attitudes towards reunion by scholars such as Anne Sarah Rubin, David Blight, and Caroline Janney, but the little that has been written on the Centennial exhibition

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¹ *United States Centennial Almanac* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1874), 31.

has not yet analyzed what the event meant to Americans. Historian John Hepp has recently pointed out the “numerous opportunities” that the celebrations of 1876 hold for scholarship.² This article engages one of those opportunities through using the controversy over Texan representation on the National Centennial Commission as a case study of white southern engagement with the Centennial exhibition and the ways in which this was tied in with questions of politics and power at the state level.

While planning for the Centennial was in its early stages, William Henry Parsons, who would serve as a Texas Centennial commissioner, addressed an open letter to Texans that reflected the desire of the exhibition’s organizers that the celebration be a national one, designed to help heal sectional wounds:

We assume that the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of American Independence is neither a sectional nor a party question, but one that should enlist the sympathy, excite the patriotism and ensure the cooperation of all sections and all parties of our common country. It has been with this view, evidently, that the Governor of Texas nominated, and the President of the United States appointed, the Commissioners for Texas—selecting one from each of the two political parties in the State.³

Parsons’s hopes were unfulfilled: Texas, along with all but two other southern states (Arkansas and Mississippi), failed to appropriate any funds to mount an exhibit at Fairmount Park and, uniquely, ended up with two competing sets of National Centennial Commissioners, nominated by consecutive governors who were bitter political rivals. The furor over the commissionerships provided the impetus for widespread public discussion of the Centennial and the part, if any, that Texas should play in it. The Republican “satyr,” William Parsons, was appointed by Republican Texas governor Edmund Davis, along with Democrat John Chew, to represent the state on the National Centennial Commission. After Davis was defeated by Democrat Richard Coke in December 1873, the new governor attempted to replace Parsons and Chew with two Democrats, Alfred Hobby and J. W. Jennings. Parsons and Chew fought a months-long battle to retain their positions, and this struggle provides not only a trenchant vignette of the partisan divide around an ostensibly national and reconciliatory commemoration but of the ways in which the language of “representative men” was used to shore up the political supremacy of white ex-Confederates in Texas.

² John Hepp, “Centennial Celebrations” in *A Companion to the Reconstruction Presidents*, ed. Edward O. Frantz (Malden, Mass.: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 534.

³ William Henry Parsons to Texans, undated circular, State Correspondence: Letters, Box A-1493, United States Centennial Commission Papers (Philadelphia City Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; hereafter cited as USCCP).

The central figure in this story, Republican appointee William Henry Parsons, was born in New Jersey and raised in Alabama, but settled in Texas in his mid-twenties after seeing service in the war with Mexico. At that time still affiliated with the Democratic Party, he published a secessionist newspaper, *The Southwest*, in Waco and then when the Civil War broke out led a variety of Texas units over the course of the conflict, most notably the Twelfth Texas Cavalry, also known as Parsons's Brigade.⁴ Parsons was named an acting brigadier general in 1862 and, though the promotion was never made permanent, was known as General Parsons from that point on.⁵ Historian Anne Bailey has highlighted the history of atrocities committed by Parsons's Brigade against both black Union combatants and contraband slaves, quoting a Union general describing several slaves burned alive in a barn by Parsons's men because they were too ill to get out themselves.⁶ There are also contemporary references to claims by Parsons that "negroes [were] to be classed with apes and monkeys rather than with human beings."⁷ This could indicate either that Parsons's later Republican affiliation was not inspired by sympathy with the interests of the freedmen of Texas or that it represented a truly remarkable change in attitude. In 1865, joining those diehard Confederates who preferred exile to surrender, he fled to British Honduras in a futile attempt to set up a Confederate colony there.⁸

Back in Texas a few years later, January 1868 saw Parsons, in company with other prominent Lone Star Democrats, including future governor Richard Coke, as a delegate to a "Conservative State Convention," which based its platform around opposition to the Republican Party and what it called the "Africanization of the state."⁹ In the late 1860s and early 1870s, Texas was under the control of a Republican Party whose Radical wing, headed by Edmund J. Davis, gained ascendancy. Elected governor in 1869, Davis was a former Southern Unionist, and had commanded the First Texas Cavalry, U.S.A.¹⁰ Davis's particular brand of "Radical" Republicanism promoted publicly funded education, black citizenship rights, and commercial development. White Democrats, as elsewhere in the South,

⁴ Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 460.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Anne J. Bailey, "A Texas Cavalry Raid," in *Black Flag over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War*, ed. Gregory Urwin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 26.

⁷ "Gov. Davis and the Slave Trade" *The Galveston News*, Sept. 22, 1873.

⁸ The claim that Parsons left for British Honduras can be found in Anne J. Bailey, "William Henry Parsons," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fpa43>> [Accessed June 8, 2016]. Some contemporary sources, however, state the Parsons went to Brazil, as can be seen elsewhere in this article.

⁹ Ernest William Winkler (ed.), *Platforms of Political Parties in Texas* (1916; reprint: London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 106.

¹⁰ Carl H. Moneyhon, "Edmund Jackson Davis," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fda37>> [Accessed May 12, 2013].

generally opposed these aims, and throughout the early 1870s the Democratic Party in Texas put all its efforts into “redeeming” the state and reversing Republican policies. Historian Carl Moneyhon has related how, at an Austin political meeting in July 1870, Democrats attacked Davis “in almost hysterical tones . . . for assuming despotic powers.” These men, according to Moneyhon, felt that things had been turned upside down: “they saw their world in turmoil and viewed Republicans as radicals who had betrayed their community and the white race.”¹¹ The central unifying feature of Texas Democracy was abhorrence of the Radicals and all they stood for, and Democrats were determined to undo Reconstruction: the centralization, the taxation and most especially the racial upending that characterized it.

In the midst of this bitterly divided political landscape, William Henry Parsons proceeded to do the unthinkable: in a rather startling metamorphosis in 1869 he earned the lasting enmity of white Democratic Texans by running successfully for the Texas Senate as a Radical Republican.¹² In the words of one disgruntled Texan, “He was a rampant, unreconstructed rebel . . . but all at once, in a twinkling of an eye, (he) flopped over. Without notice to or conference with any old friend, he suddenly became the radial candidate for the state senate and by the niggers was duly elected.”¹³ Looking back on Parsons’s switch during the Centennial controversy, the *Waco Register* claimed that “While in the foreign city of Rio de Janeiro, alone, sick and a stranger, he saw a power to befriend and protect in the United States flag borne over the seas . . . the scales fell from his eyes and he resolved to return and labor henceforth for a united rather than a divided country.”¹⁴ Carl Moneyhon has characterized Parsons’s conversion to Republicanism as being based on the belief that the Republican economic plan was better for Texas than that of the Democrats, writing that Parsons “was convinced that the Democratic Party offered no hope for the successful reconstruction of the state and particularly for its future development.”¹⁵ Parsons himself described the switch as being designed to enable him to “act upon convictions of individual duty to self, family and State.”¹⁶ It may be relevant in considering Parsons’s “flip” that in 1867 his much younger brother, Albert, who like Parsons had served in the Confederate army, began publishing a Radical Republican newspaper,

¹¹ Carl H. Moneyhon, *Republicanism in Reconstruction Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), xiii, xiv.

¹² Bailey, “William Henry Parsons.”

¹³ White River, “Mr. William H. Parsons,” *The Dallas Daily Herald*, Sept. 1, 1875.

¹⁴ “Gen W. H. Parsons,” *The Waco Register*, Aug. 7, 1876.

¹⁵ Carl Moneyhon, *Texas After the Civil War: The Struggle of Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 127

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Spectator, in Waco.¹⁷ He became involved in socialist, and later anarchist, politics and was hanged for his involvement in the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago. William Parsons remained close to and supportive of his brother over the years and described Albert's wife Lucy Parsons, a mixed-race woman who had likely been born a slave and who fought for Albert's radical agenda into the 1940s, as a woman of "youth, beauty and genius."¹⁸ Historian Paul Avrich has posited that Albert was influenced by William Parsons's renunciation of secession and support for the rights of freedmen.¹⁹ Given that Albert launched *The Spectator* more than a year before William's switch, it seems more plausible to suggest that the older brother's views were influenced by the younger's.

The former Confederate general was a key figure in Reconstruction Texas: one contemporary report stated that a "Parsons clique filled every position of honor under Davis' administration."²⁰ In June 1870 Parsons reinforced his new political identity and exacerbated Democratic resentment with his involvement in the Texas Senate debate over a militia bill introduced by Governor Davis. The bill was designed to maintain order, on the supposition that some local officials might be reluctant to enforce all laws with respect to the rights of freedmen. It was also intended to help curb the violence that was endemic throughout the South in the late 1860s; a "slow Civil War," in Edmund Davis's words, that saw white Texans' "resist[ance] to the political, social, and economic consequences of emancipation and black enfranchisement."²¹ Unsurprisingly, Democrats viewed the bill as an oppressive measure, with the *Dallas Herald* warning that the proposed integrated force would "leer upon your wives and daughters, steal your poultry, burn your rails, invade your cornfields . . . and demoralize and debauch your Negro servants."²² *The Galveston Tri-Weekly News* reported that, in arguing for the Militia Bill, Parsons referred to the white people of Texas as "murderers, assassins and desperadoes."²³ Secretary of State James P. Newcomb drafted a letter, published in the *Tri-Weekly News*, denying that Parsons had made the statement, and the Senate voted (along party lines) to expel the paper's reporter. *The Tri-Weekly News* published the denial but maintained that Parsons did "charge lawlessness, murder, assassination and crime upon the people of Texas." Referring to Parsons's claims of being misquoted, the paper concluded

¹⁷ Avrich, *The Haymarket Riot*, 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ "Grand Army of the Republic in Texas," *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, Mar. 8, 1872.

²¹ Patrick Williams, *Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007) Kindle edition, location 255.

²² "The Militia Bill," *Dallas Herald*, July 2, 1870.

²³ "Telegraphic From Austin," *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, June 25, 1870.

that he “seemed to have learned the Radical trick of crying ‘martyrdom’ and the inference is that he wants something, even if it is nothing better than notoriety.”²⁴ Parsons resigned his legislative seat in December 1871, when Governor Davis appointed him to serve as an immigration agent, based in New York City, for the State of Texas.²⁵

Sharing office space with Parsons in New York was the man who would be Governor Davis’s second appointment to the National Centennial Commission: Democrat, Confederate veteran, Mississippi native, and former slave owner John Calhoun Chew. John Chew was resident in New York City as an agent and correspondent for several Texas newspapers. In April 1873, Chew wrote to James Newcomb, a close associate of Governor Davis, seeking his assistance in obtaining an appointment from Davis to succeed Parsons as the state’s immigration agent. Chew stressed his bipartisanship: “I have written to two or three of my Democratic friends and two or three of my Republican friends . . . they speak very encouragingly . . . the press of the whole state is friendly to me and I believe my appointment would give general satisfaction, both to the Democrats and the Republicans.”²⁶ In an interesting foreshadowing of what was to come, Chew related that Parsons was resigning the immigration position “for the highest and most unselfish motives,” in acknowledgement of the fact that the Democratic legislature would not appropriate the funds necessary for the immigration office while it was headed by the unpopular Republican. Chew frankly admitted the immigration position would ‘assist me very materially in increasing my already considerable [advertising business] with Texas journals.’²⁷ Chew was successful in obtaining the immigration post, and at some point in mid-1873, Davis nominated him to join Parsons as alternate commissioner.

Chew, rather disingenuously considering his earlier lobbying for the immigration post, recounted that the appointment, “coming from a political opponent, quite bewildered me.”²⁸ He continued that he had never held public office but accepted the appointment and “with my Commission in my pocket bearing the broad seal . . . of the United States, a device I had good reason to hate, coupled with the straggling signature of the great Captain [President Grant]” who, he explained, had “helped to deprive me of a fine farm on the Brazos and 20 slaves, I walked forth a full-fledged representative of the ‘greatest nation on the planet.’”²⁹ Chew,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John Chew to James P. Newcomb, April 28, 1873, Box 2F107, James P. Newcomb Papers (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; cited hereafter as DBCAH)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ J. C. Chew, “Texas and the Centennial,” *The Galveston News*, May 24, 1876.

²⁹ Ibid.

adept at tailoring his words for a specific readership, here made clear his Confederate credentials and his use of quotation marks around the phrase “greatest nation on the planet” emphasized to his Texan readers a cautious, even sarcastic, approach to American nationalism.

Parsons’s resignation of his Senate seat had been well-timed: the first stage of Democratic “redemption” of the state came with that party’s assumption of legislative control after the 1872 elections.³⁰ Then in the gubernatorial contest of December 1873, E. J. Davis faced Democrat Richard Coke. Coke, a native Virginian, had been in Texas since 1850, voted for disunion in the state’s secession convention, and served in the Confederate Fifteenth Texas Infantry throughout the Civil War.³¹ Coke defeated Davis by a margin of two to one in an election that was rife with fraud and intimidation on both sides. *The Dallas Herald’s* response was jubilant, proclaiming that: “The tyrant’s chains have fallen from [our] limbs!”³² But a farcical imbroglio ensued when the state’s Supreme Court ruled the election results invalid: Davis refused to vacate his office and barricaded the state capitol; Coke’s supporters used ladders to access the building’s second floor. In defiance of the Court’s ruling, Coke was sworn in as governor after President Grant declined to intervene with military support for Davis. When Davis left he took the key to the locked governor’s office with him and Coke’s supporters used axes to gain admittance.³³ Before leaving, Davis’s wife put her “shapely foot” through a portrait of the president who had failed to back up her husband, and after arriving at the governor’s residence Coke is said to have trampled the flower beds that the Davises had planted.³⁴ Historian James Marten has remarked that, with Coke’s assumption of the gubernatorial chair, “Reconstruction in Texas finally ended.”³⁵ This is arguable: the state continued to be governed under the Reconstruction constitution of 1869 until a new document was drafted in 1875–76, largely by Democrats with Confederate backgrounds who, in the words of historian Alwyn Barr, “saw their task as basically the prevention of any repetition of what they believed to be administrative and financial excesses by the Republican administration of 1870–1874.”³⁶ It is also evi-

³⁰ Nancy Beck Young, “Democratic Party,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/wado15>> [Accessed Jan. 22, 2015].

³¹ John W. Payne Jr., “Richard Coke,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fco15>> [Accessed Dec. 12, 2013].

³² James Marten, *Texas Divided: Loyalty and Dissent in the Lone Star State, 1856–1874* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 145.

³³ Curtis Bishop, “Coke-Davis Controversy,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mqco15>> [Accessed May 12, 2013].

³⁴ Carl H. Moneyhon, *Edmund Davis of Texas: Civil War General, Reconstruction Leader, Republican Governor* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2010), 223.

³⁵ Marten, *Texas Divided*, 145.

³⁶ Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876–1906* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 9.

dent through the discourse that would surround William Henry Parsons and his place on the National Centennial Commission that the divisive politics of Reconstruction did not end with “Redemption.”

William Henry Parsons and John Chew served on the National Centennial Commission for a few years without much notice in the press beyond remarks in the *Grand Army Journal*, a Union veteran publication, that referred to Parsons’s career in the “late so-called Confederate Army” and declared that a “great wrong” would be committed if “those who served the country in its days of danger . . . [are made] to give way that the fortunes of rebels may be pushed.”³⁷ In 1875, however, as the Centennial drew nearer, Parsons began to attract opposition from the other side of the political and sectional fence. In August, *The Galveston Daily News* declared that, “The appointment of Parsons is neither creditable nor satisfactory to the people of the Commonwealth . . . It is not at all improbable that [Coke] could secure the removal of Gen. Parsons and the appointment of a representative man by a simple request and presentation of the facts in the proper quarter.”³⁸

The idea that Parsons was somehow not “representative” would crop up repeatedly throughout 1875 and 1876, highlighting the exclusivity with which many white Texans defined themselves, and tensions around the question of who could be a true Texan. At a July 1875 meeting in Houston to discuss plans for the Centennial, one man suggested that the fact that Parsons was, “to all practical intents and purposes not a citizen of Texas,” might furnish grounds for the governor to ask President Grant to replace him.³⁹ Gideon Strother, a Texan who was himself resident, interestingly enough, in New York, wrote to President Grant about the inappropriateness of his state being represented by someone living outside its borders: “The present commissioner, a resident of N.Y., is obnoxious to the people of our State and our legislature will never appropriate one dollar while he remains in that position as he is a non-resident . . . I understand that should your excellency commission another, our legislature will make an appropriation from thirty to forty thousand dollars.”⁴⁰

Writing to a Dallas newspaper in 1875, a correspondent known only as “White River” reminded Texans of Parsons’s recent past:

As a senator in the infamous 12th legislature . . . with its unholy outrages on the people of Texas . . . its villainous registration and election laws, its bribed subsi-

³⁷ “Grand Army of the Republic in Texas,” *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, Mar. 8, 1872.

³⁸ “Our Centennial Commissioner,” *The Galveston Daily News*, Aug. 5, 1875.

³⁹ “Houston Local Items,” *The Galveston Daily News*, July 24, 1875.

⁴⁰ John Y. Simon (ed.), *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (32 vols.; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967; cited hereafter as *USG Papers*), XXVI, 44.

dies to railroads and a multitude of other infamies, the people of Texas honestly believed and yet believe that Mr. Parsons was a master spirit, and these are the reasons that Texans have for refusing to join in the Centennial, while he is a chief commissioner from the state.⁴¹

At the July meeting in Houston, charges of corruption had also been made, with one speaker insistent that it was Parsons's corruption, and not his political affiliation, that was the real issue. This was also the main theme of 'White River's' letter to the *Dallas Herald*: "Where did this man, poor to penury all his life, get the money to, as he now boasts, pay his own expenses for three years in Philadelphia? As he has been in no business since his somersault in 1869 . . . the question in the mind of every Texan who knows his antecedents, is 'where did the money come from?'"⁴² But some critics were frank that it was Parsons's Republicanism that was the stumbling block to Texans' acceptance of him as their Centennial commissioner:

Several prominent gentlemen addressed the meeting and all agreed on one point, viz., that not one dollar could be raised by subscription or appropriation to have the state represented at the Centennial as long as Gen. William H. Parsons remained the Centennial Commissioner for Texas, he having been appointed by Gov. Davis to that position and being a block in the way whom it was desirable to remove before Texas would take any stock in the exhibition.⁴³

The widespread reluctance to allow Parsons to be seen as representative of the state was manifested repeatedly in the state's Democratic press. *The Dallas Herald* conceded that while Parsons was not, technically, a carpetbagger, he was so "utterly base and contemptible" that Texans could not muster any enthusiasm for the Centennial under his commissionership and implied a connection between this and the fact that he had been nominated by the "Radical governor" and not Governor Coke.⁴⁴ Another newspaper, appropriating the mantle of patriotism for those who objected to Parsons's representation of Texas, and implicitly linking patriotic feeling with state rather than nation, recommended that "the application of a number seventeen boot to the part [of Parsons's anatomy] where it will do the most good . . . the boot should be well-filled with foot and be made to swing rapidly from a patriotic leg."⁴⁵

The reaction to Parsons in Texas soon caused concern with the National Centennial Commission in Philadelphia. On August 4, 1875, John Welsh,

⁴¹ White River, "Mr William H. Parsons," *The Dallas Daily Herald*, Sept. 1, 1875.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Houston Local Items," *The Galveston Daily News*, July 24, 1875.

⁴⁴ *The Dallas Weekly Herald*, July 17, 1875.

⁴⁵ *The Brenham Banner*, Oct. 8, 1875.

chairman of the Centennial board of finance, wrote to prominent Texas Democrat Ashbel Smith expressing fears that, because Parsons was “not agreeable to the people of Texas,” the state would be boycotting the exhibition. Welsh pointed out that while concern over Parsons’s character might be “a proper subject for criticism” it should not “retard . . . a great national movement . . . in which the honor of the Country is involved.”⁴⁶ The letter concluded with a plea that summed up the conciliatory aims of the Centennial: “I am very anxious that the men of the South should show as much interest in our great work as the men of the North, the east, and the west and it would be a great misfortune for the Country, if when all the rest of the world is here our whole people are not here to meet them.”⁴⁷

Some efforts towards securing representation at Philadelphia were made in Texas; in May 1875 newspapers across the state carried an appeal from a Mrs. M. J. Young, who had been authorized by the National Women’s Centennial Committee in Philadelphia to “hold . . . tea parties, international assemblies and other entertainments” in order to raise money for the construction of a Women’s Pavilion at Fairmount Park.⁴⁸ Mrs. Young reported that she was “authorized to form sub-committees” and listed the names of appointed ladies in various Texas towns. She concluded, in a call for Centennial commemoration that was both reconciliatory and distinctly Texan, that “the children of the Alamo . . . should do honor to their revolutionary sires and crossing the ugly chasm that yawns between the two place our flag of rejoicing upon the old [Bunker] hill and say ‘this is also my heritage.’”⁴⁹ Meanwhile, in September 1875, the *Galveston Daily News* reported on a Centennial planning meeting: “The attendance at the meeting, though not large, comprised some of [*sic*] Galveston’s influential and energetic citizens and the determination was freely expressed not to be second in their results to any similar organization in the country.”⁵⁰

On May 8, 1875, the *Dallas Weekly Herald* reported that Governor Coke had appointed W. J. Hutchins, W. F. Fort, and S. J. Adams to constitute a state “Board of Centennial Managers.” The *Herald* also published a letter from Parsons and Chew to Adams requesting that he arrange a meeting with Hutchins, and informing him that “we have mailed you documents containing information of value and shall continue to do so . . . trusting that your efforts to secure the complete representation of the Industries of Texas in the World’s Fair of 1876 may be crowned with success.”⁵¹ The

⁴⁶ John Welsh to Ashbel Smith, Aug. 4, 1875, Box 2G225, Ashbel Smith Papers, DBCAH.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Smith’s reply is as yet unknown, but he did write to former Tennessee governor John Brown, then a vice president of the Texas & Pacific Railroad, requesting a free ticket to Philadelphia for the exhibition. Ashbel Smith to John C. Brown, Aug. 14, 1876, Smith Papers, DBCAH.

⁴⁸ “Centennial,” *Dallas Weekly Herald*, May 29, 1875.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Centennial Association,” *The Galveston Daily News*, Sept. 4, 1875.

⁵¹ “The Centennial,” *The Dallas Weekly Herald*, May 8, 1875.

Texas Board of Centennial Managers was the body charged with actually arranging for Texan exhibits in Philadelphia, but with no state funding it never really had a chance of accomplishing anything. Chew reported in September 1875 that he and Parsons had not received replies from two of the four members of the state board, and that after a “tedious delay,” Hutchins had informed them that because no state funding was likely to be forthcoming he had tendered his resignation to Governor Coke.⁵² Chew continued that the “road to Texan representation seemed entirely blocked, but as a citizen of the state, proud of her past and hopeful of her future,” he had written to Coke urging him to appoint a replacement board: “Did he do it? Not at all. From that day to this he has never favored me with a line.”⁵³ A month later, Chew again made reference to Governor Coke’s “sudden suspension of correspondence with this office.”⁵⁴ In fact, Coke had, more than a full year after becoming governor, decided to remove both Parsons and Chew and replace them with Democrats of his own choosing. On August 31, 1875, Coke wrote to Alfred Goshorn, the director-general of the Centennial exhibition:

Representative men of the State shall have charge of her interests there. Messrs. Chew and Parsons, heretofore appointed Commissioners on recommendation of my predecessor, Governor Davis, are not such men. If the State must be represented by them or not at all, the latter alternative will be preferred, and no appropriation will be made by the Legislature for the purpose.⁵⁵

He continued that Chew and Parsons had left Texas and moved to New York and thus, as far as he was concerned, were no longer citizens, thereby annulling their appointment and creating vacancies.

Coke’s claim that Parsons and Chew were not “representative” of the state was more than an obfuscation of a desire to have his state represented at the Centennial by politically congenial Democrats of his own choosing. It also signaled a concern with “representation” that was echoed repeatedly throughout the mid-1870s. The Marshall *Tri-Weekly Herald*, for instance, editorialized against Democratic Congressman John Hancock’s election to the Senate on the grounds of his wartime Unionism and lack of Confederate service. The *Herald*’s argument that “a representative man, as we understand the term, is one who reflects the position, politically and morally, of the people he represents” indicates that one definition of “representative” in this context was Confederate, as well as Democratic,

⁵² “Texas and the Centennial,” *The San Antonio Daily Express*, Sept. 21, 1875.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ John Chew, “The International Exhibition,” *The Galveston Daily News*, Oct. 14, 1875.

⁵⁵ Richard Coke to Alfred Goshorn, Aug. 31, 1875, Box 301-97, Coke Gubernatorial Papers (Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas; hereafter cited as TSL).

credentials. The *Herald* continued that it wished to see such a “representative” man sent to the Senate, where “the Democratic statesmen of the North . . . can clasp fraternal hands with him as a representative man.” The newspaper went on to insist, rather unconvincingly considering their definition of “representative” and their restriction of fraternal sentiment to Democratic northerners, that the “prejudices and hates of the past have no existence in Texas since the close of the war.”⁵⁶ The *Austin Evening News* unpacked what was meant when Parsons was called “unrepresentative:”

We make an objection . . . not on the ground that he is an appointee of Gov. Davis, or that he is not a true Southerner . . . our objection is that he is a man whose interests are not closely enough allied to Texas so that he can be said to represent this state in every sense. He has spent too much time away . . . He cannot know every foot of the soil, or her capacity as a man should. The . . . commissioner should know Texas thoroughly and we believe sincerely that Gen. Parsons does not possess these qualifications.⁵⁷

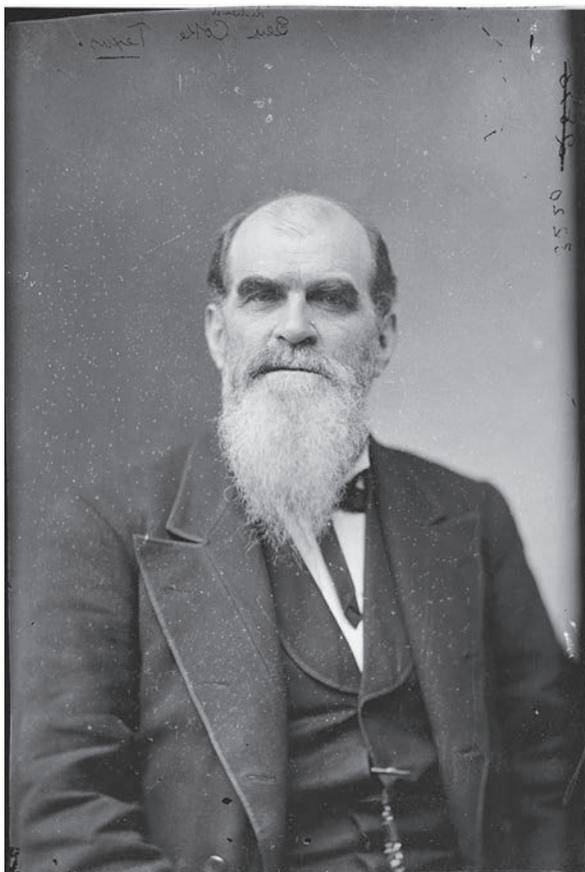
Despite the attestation of “sincere” belief that a representative man should be familiar with every square foot of Texan soil, the salient point here appears to be the requirement for “allied interests,” meaning an interest in restoring and maintaining the power of the white, property-owning, and conservative elements served by the Democratic Party.

Coke’s vow that Texas would have nothing to do with the Centennial unless the “unrepresentative” Parsons and Chew were replaced was reiterated frequently through the state’s Democratic press, and indicates that the Centennial served as much as an arena for political point-scoring as of a national celebration or commemoration. The Republican *San Antonio Express* found fault with some Democratic papers’ resistance to the Centennial, singling out both the *San Antonio Herald* and the *Dallas Herald* with a telling analogy: “The day will come when such conduct will be ranked with the toryism of the Revolution of Independence . . . and when the descendants of the opponents of national glory will be ashamed of the memory of their fathers. Who next on the roll of aspirants for a place in this list of those who hate their own country while all the world honors it?”⁵⁸ This linkage of Centennial opponents with those colonists who remained loyal to the British crown a century earlier, and the assumption of a shame that would linger for generations, highlighted the exposition’s importance as an expression of national identity and implicitly underscores its value as a partisan weapon. (The same paper rather half-heartedly defended Parsons: making no claims for general’s virtue, it merely

⁵⁶ “The ‘Bloody Shirt’ in the South,” *Tri-Weekly Herald* (Marshall, Texas), Apr. 20, 1876.

⁵⁷ “Gen. Parsons and the Centennial,” *The Evening News* (Austin), Aug. 11, 1875.

⁵⁸ “The Centennial,” *The San Antonio Daily Express*, Sept. 16, 1875.



Richard Coke, photographed between 1870 and 1880. *Brady-Handy Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.*

professed not to understand “why Gen. Parsons should be singled out in this manner.”⁵⁹) The Republican *Galveston Argus*, in a similarly lukewarm defense of Parsons, reminded readers that he had been a “last-ditch, black flag and re-open the African slave trade” Confederate. Professing to “not quite under[stand]” Parsons’s flip, the *Argus* allowed that it would violate the “spirit and intent” of the Centennial to yield to “Democratic clamor against Commissioner Parsons because he is a Republican.”⁶⁰ Another Republican paper, the *Waco Register*, was more stalwart in Parsons’s defense, declaring that “Gen Parsons is one of the ablest and most popular men ever within the Democratic ranks of Texas. The only objection the party has to him is that . . . he has become reconstructed, and for

⁵⁹ “Gen. Wm. H. Parsons,” *The San Antonio Daily Express*, Sept. 2, 1875.

⁶⁰ “Commissioner Parsons,” *The Galveston Argus*, Aug. 8, 1875.

that offense they would lose no opportunity to punish him.”⁶¹ The Democratic *Telegraph* of Houston retorted that it was to be expected that Radical papers would come to the “rescue” of Parsons, but that whether Parsons had “turned his political coat” or “sold his birthright” or rendered himself “odious in other ways” he held his commission against the wishes of the majority of Texans and should be removed from office.⁶²

Three days after Coke’s letter to Goshorn, on September 2, 1875, *The Galveston Daily News* reported that Democrat and “eminent Galvestonian” Colonel Alfred Marmaduke Hobby had been appointed to the National Centennial Commission by Governor Coke. The *News* repeated the by-now familiar mantra that “no state [had] more to gain from presence at the Exhibition than Texas,” and no city more than Galveston, and exhorted its readers to attend a meeting at which “we could all unite in requesting Col. Hobby to accept the position.”⁶³ Hobby was a native Georgian who had been in Texas since the 1850s, served in the Confederate army and authored such patriotic Confederate-themed poetry as “The Sentinel’s Dream of Home.”⁶⁴ Coke selected J. W. Jennings, a Missouri Democrat resident in Texas since only 1872, as alternate commissioner.

Although Parsons’s absence from the state in the 1870s was attributable to his position as the state’s immigration agent in New York City and then to his appointment as Centennial commissioner and Chew’s to his work as a newspaper correspondent and immigration agent, Coke stuck to non-residence in Texas as his ostensible reason for replacing them. Judge James Hall Bell, a Republican, though not Radical, Texas jurist wrote to President Grant in defense of Parsons and Chew in August 1875, stating that the law “in reference to the Centennial Exhibition . . . did not intend that Your Excellency should be made the instrument of injustice or political prejudice” on the part of Governor Coke and requesting an interview with Grant to provide him with the “full facts” of the case.⁶⁵ Whether or not he received an audience with the president, the matter dragged on a further eight months. U.S. Secretary of State Hamilton Fish recorded his own conversation with Grant about the issue in March 1876, noting that he informed the president that:

Parsons . . . had been a Confederate who at the close of the war went to Brazil and was subsequently brought home in one of our public vessels; that he was a member of a disloyal and disreputable organization . . . had made a considerable amount

⁶¹ “Gen. W. H. Parsons,” *The Waco Register*, Aug. 7, 1875.

⁶² “Centennial Commissioner,” *The Daily Telegraph* (Houston), Aug. 10, 1875.

⁶³ “Centennial,” *Galveston Daily News*, Sept. 2, 1875.

⁶⁴ Hobart Huson, “Alfred Marmaduke Hobby,” *The Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fh002>> [Accessed Feb. 15, 2014].

⁶⁵ Simon (ed.), *USG Papers*, XXVI, 44.

of money in some very questionable operations and . . . had not resided [in Texas] for several years.⁶⁶

Despite all the uncertainty and animosity, Davis appointee John Chew nevertheless appears to have made a valiant effort to drum up interest and funding for a Texan presence at Philadelphia, and there were frequent letters from him in the state's press stressing the advantages of Centennial participation. In November 1875, he had reported to the *Galveston Daily News* that it was a "great misfortune" that the Texas Legislature had voted down any appropriation for the state's representation, and urged Texans to make a "full and creditable display" even without a building of its own at Philadelphia.⁶⁷ Chew had apparently been unaware that the role of commissioner was unpaid and described himself as "green in honor, but empty in stomach," making clear that the post of commissioner was not a lucrative sinecure.⁶⁸

In March 1876, Richard Coke complained to Texas Democratic congressman Roger Q. Mills that he was "in a scrape over this Centennial Commission business."⁶⁹ Coke told Mills that the whole scheme had been the idea of J. W. Jennings: "[he] came to my office and put me on track of a method of getting rid of Parsons and Chew and requested one of the appointments."⁷⁰ Coke related that Jennings had suggested he "show by correspondence" with Director-General Goshorn that Parsons and Chew were no longer citizens of Texas. The "scrape" that Coke referred to was not the controversy over attempting to oust the original commissioners, but the fact that while Mills had recently suggested a mutual friend and associate, Sam Upshaw, for the role of commissioner, Coke felt obliged to honor his commitment to Jennings: "You see my situation? . . . I don't well see how I can justly pass [over] Jennings as the matter stands." Coke told Mills that he would prefer their "friend Upshaw" but that he felt honor bound to stick with Jennings and Hobby. The governor also offered to try to arrange "special privileges" for Upshaw at the exhibition as a consolation. Perhaps the most interesting and pertinent thing about Coke's letter is the fact that it was simply a given between Coke and Mills that Parsons and Chew should be replaced. Coke apparently saw no need to offer justification or explanation for the maneuver.⁷¹

Coke did seem interested in seeing that Texas was in a position to

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Texas and the Exposition of 1876," *The Galveston Daily News*, Nov. 6, 1875.

⁶⁸ "Texas and the Centennial: Letter from Commissioner Chew," *The Galveston Daily News*, Sept. 23, 1875.

⁶⁹ Richard Coke to R. Q. Mills, Mar. 15, 1876, Box 301-96, Coke Gubernatorial Papers, TSL.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

mount an exhibit in Philadelphia, but in a letter to Hobby on April 1 he doubted the power of the Texas legislature to appropriate any funding for the Centennial under the stringent terms of the state's new, rigidly conservative constitution. Coke related that he had "written to several legal friends" on the matter and could "only say that if the power exists in the legislature would be pleased to see it exercised to the extent of a small appropriation to pay the expenses of the Commissioners and the freight on such products as may be sent."⁷² The governor also devoted a section of his annual address to the legislature to the Centennial:

the two sections of the country lately estranged will find revealed there . . . much to heal dissension, remove acrimony . . . it is . . . the suggestion of policy, no less that of sincere honest patriotism that the people of the South . . . being joint heirs by inheritance . . . with their brethren from other sections, having equal right and title with them in the glory and greatness of our whole country . . . and participate to the extent that they are able.⁷³

Having adhered to the standard template by affirming and commending the noble conciliatory goal of the Centennial, Coke also followed the standard southern rhetorical route of establishing southern distinctiveness, and laying claim to a distinct revolutionary heritage with his reference to being "joint heirs" of 1776, instead of merely "heirs." Coke's statement went on to incorporate the same caveats about state funding that he had discussed with Hobby, and ended by announcing, "A few weeks since, Hon. A. M. Hobby . . . and J. W. Jennings . . . public spirited and energetic gentlemen, were appointed by his Excellency, the President, to represent the State of Texas on the board of Centennial Commissioners."⁷⁴

Coke's nominated commissioners, Hobby and Jennings, set off for Philadelphia in April 1876, to present their credentials to the National Centennial Commission and see what progress had been made by the "former commissioners," as the *Galveston News* called them, though Parsons and Chew were still in place.⁷⁵ Hobby courted the press upon his arrival in the Centennial city. *The New York Graphic* ran a glowing piece, reprinted widely throughout Texas, which called him one of the "great men of the state he represents . . . a man of culture with an understanding singularly comprehensive . . . esteemed for virtues of courage, generosity and public spirit . . . conspicuous for social qualities, he is abstemiously temperate, having never tasted or touched tobacco, wine or cards."⁷⁶ Ten days later the *News*

⁷² Richard Coke to A. M. Hobby, Apr 1, 1876, Box 301-96, Coke Gubernatorial Papers, TSL.

⁷³ Richard Coke, *Message from the Governor of Texas to Fifteenth Legislature, First Session* (Houston: A. C. Gray, 1876), 66-67.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "Texas and the Centennial," *The Galveston Daily News*, Apr. 6, 1876.

⁷⁶ "Alfred M. Hobby," *The New York Graphic*, Apr. 12, 1876.

published a gushing report that described Hobby's welcome by his new colleagues and his "intelligent answers to questions about the resources of Texas and the sentiments of her people."⁷⁷ Hobby told the *Galveston Daily News* that he was received with "distinguished courtesy" by the rest of the commission, and, appealing to state pride, noted that the word "Texas" was "the open *sesame* to every door" in Philadelphia. He went on to stress the economic advantages of representation at the Centennial, and the apparently well primed reporter then asked, "if Texas is represented, will it not aid us in obtaining appropriations from the national government?" Hobby responded that "the impression is that it will place Texas in a more graceful attitude to ask favors by thus manifesting her appreciation and interest in the exhibition in which the other states have taken so lively an interest."⁷⁸ It is perhaps significant that Hobby made no reference to patriotism or the Revolution of 1776 in his interview. Indeed, the only references to reunion were in the context of emphasizing outsiders' high regard for his state. This was likely designed to neutralize any Texan touchiness about the Civil War's outcome that might detract from his argument that the state would benefit economically from a presence at Philadelphia. Stressing the welcome he received in Philadelphia also served to bolster his own credentials in the face of controversy surrounding his appointment.

J. W. Jennings wrote to Centennial Director-General Alfred Goshorn on April 10. In a missive in which he identified himself as "Commissioner, State of Texas," Jennings inquired about the "actions" of the "former commissioners," as he referred to them, and requested information as to "what . . . [had] been done for the state of Texas."⁷⁹ Goshorn's reply did not reflect well on Parsons and Chew and, not surprisingly, was released to the press. In it, Goshorn stated that: "the former commissioners have not, so far as I have been advised, taken any steps towards securing a representation at the Exhibition. No application for space has been made . . . indeed, we have had no information or requests of any kind . . . from the former commissioners. The time is now so limited that I am embarrassed to know what advice to give you."⁸⁰ Hobby reported to the press that he hurried to the exhibition grounds where he met Centennial officials and discussed the situation. A dedicated building would cost the state around \$15,000, while renting space in an existing building would amount to half that figure. Hobby urged formal support, reiterating the point he had already made to the *Galveston Daily News* about the linkage between Cen-

⁷⁷ "Texas and the Centennial," *The Galveston Daily News*, Apr. 16, 1876.

⁷⁸ "Texas Centennial: State Commissioner A. M. Hobby Interviewed." *The Galveston Daily News*, Apr. 20, 1876.

⁷⁹ J. W. Jennings to Alfred Goshorn, Apr. 10, 1876, Box A-1489, USSCP.

⁸⁰ "Texas and the Centennial," *The Galveston Daily News*, May 7, 1876.

ennial participation and Federal largesse, "The non-appearance of Texas may appear ungenerous and operate prejudicially when appropriations are hereafter asked for her benefit."⁸¹

John Chew, meanwhile, responded vigorously to criticisms of his performance through the pages of the *Galveston Daily News*. He explained at length that commissioners were not state employees and did not serve at the governor's discretion. He also refuted Goshorn's claim that he and Parsons had not applied for space by pointing out Goshorn's own circular to the commission setting out that applications for space were to be made directly to the director-general by commissions or boards organized on the state level, bypassing the national commissioners. Chew pointed out that he had been diligent in making Texans aware of this protocol through his frequent letters to the press.⁸² There was some private correspondence between Chew and Goshorn over this exchange, and upon receiving an apparently satisfactory explanation from Goshorn for the comments, Chew attempted to stop publication of his letter in the *Daily News*. When publication went ahead, Chew apologized to Goshorn.⁸³

William Parsons also spoke out. In the summer of 1875, as Coke schemed to replace him, he had written to the *New York Herald* in a spirit of reunification: "the most august spectacle of . . . the century, will be the complete and voluntary extinguishment of the embers of war during the Centennial celebrations . . . the men of the blue and the gray will renew the olden bonds of amity and re-consecrate the original spirit of liberty and union."⁸⁴ Parsons managed to integrate this statement of the key Centennial theme of reconciliation with an apparently calculated appeal to Confederate sensibilities. Writing to the *Herald* to refute their claim that Robert E. Lee had done nothing to encourage sectional reunion in the years after Appomattox, Parsons quoted from a letter in which Lee pointed out the wisdom of "submission to authority" and proceeded to claim that he carried a copy of Lee's letter "in a memorandum book on my person, as I have treasured it in my heart."⁸⁵ In August 1875, the *Waco Register* published a letter from Parsons in which he decried the "cormorants" who were trying to drive him from office and pointed out that he had been working on the National Centennial Commission for three years without pay, had been a proud Texan for thirty years, and plainly pointed out in response to charges that he was no longer Texan: "my work is here

⁸¹ "Texas Centennial: State Commissioner A. M. Hobby Interviewed," *The Galveston Daily News*, Apr. 20, 1876.

⁸² John C. Chew, "Texas and the Centennial," *The Galveston Daily News*, May 24, 1876.

⁸³ John Chew to Alfred Goshorn, June 12, 1876, Box A-1489, USSCP.

⁸⁴ "The South at Philadelphia," reprinted in *Nashville Union and American*, May 21, 1875.

⁸⁵ W. H. Parsons, "The Councils of Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis," *The Memphis Appeal*, May 23, 1875.

and not in Texas.”⁸⁶ Two months later, the Republican and pro-Centennial *San Antonio Express* reported on a ten-page letter that Parsons, obviously stung by the abuse he had been receiving, had released to the press. The *Express* described the letter as being “conceived in a temper and couched in a style” that would do Parsons no favors were they to publish it in full.⁸⁷ Parsons’s main point was that his role was as a national commissioner from Texas, and not a Texas commissioner, and that, as paraphrased by the *Express*: “ever since his appointment . . . he [had] ignored party politics” and worked to make the Centennial a success. The *Express* backed Parsons, arguing for his “legal and moral right” to retain his position.

Statements from J. W. Jennings in the Texas media were scarcer than those of his fellow commissioners but he did contribute to the public dialogue. Addressing the readers of the Waco *Daily Examiner*, Jennings stressed the shortcomings of Parsons and Chew even as he reiterated their message concerning the potential benefits of the Centennial to the state:

[Parsons and Chew] have done nothing towards securing our state even space enough to show a pair of longhorns . . . The importance of the Centennial Exhibition to the future of our state cannot be estimated in dollars and cents . . . we must be prepared to surprise even the most skeptical of our greatness by exhibiting the fertility of our soil . . . the capitalists of the old world and the Eastern states are looking for some point to invest this surplus wealth.⁸⁸

It is interesting to note that the rhetoric of Chew, Hobby, and Jennings on the importance to Texas of Centennial engagement is virtually indistinguishable. All three men urged participation for the same reason: the benefit of Texas. With no discernible differences in their approach to the exhibition, it seems clear that the rancor was all about politics, and that service on the National Centennial Commission in Texas’s name was symbolic of much more than the planning of a fair. The only Texas commissioner who had much to say about the importance of the Centennial in furthering sectional reconciliation was the widely detested Republican, Gen. William Henry Parsons.

Six months into the Parsons/Chew controversy, an editorial from an Austin paper neatly exhibited the interconnectedness of partisan politics and the Centennial, as well as the way these politics were personalized to the extent that the people of Texas—or at least the ones for whom this writer claimed to speak—could not abide participation in the fair because of the involvement of one man. The expressed other themes, including the idea that the fair was a northern fraud, although one that held out

⁸⁶ “Letter from Gen. Parsons,” *The Waco Register*, Aug. 21, 1875.

⁸⁷ “Our Centennial Commissioners,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, Oct. 5, 1875.

⁸⁸ “From Our Centennial Commissioner,” *The Waco Daily Examiner*, Apr. 23, 1876.

economic potential for its participants (but only if the fair was untainted by Parsons):

The appointment of A. M. Hobby and J. W. Jennings . . . gives perfect satisfaction to the people . . . and since we may now have proper agents the people should evince a share of practical interest in having the products and industry of Texas properly presented. The wonders of nature in the vegetable and animal kingdom should be gathered as rapidly as possible. The legislature's . . . first action will have reference to the ways and means for the perfect illustration in Philadelphia of the riches and resources of this commonwealth. The world will be there to see . . . even though selfish spoilsmen make personal profit the aim of the Centennial . . . if Messrs Hobby and Jennings accept the position[s] . . . then the aversion of the people to participation in the great Philadelphia Exposition will be remedied.⁸⁹

As the controversy raged, Chew remarked, with some justification, that the "idea that the avenue to Texan representation [at the Centennial] should be permitted to be blocked by [opposition to] General Parsons struck me as . . . supremely ridiculous."⁹⁰ Determined to retain his position, he argued that it was not within the governor's power to fire commissioners and vowed that "You may rest assured that having labored over two years on the great work in hand, I shall not abandon it . . . until the flags are furled and the doors closed in Fairmount Park on the 10th day of November AD 1876."⁹¹ To the oft-repeated claim that he was no longer a Texan, Chew stated:

Of all the compound fluid extracts of villainy that has flowed from a scribbler's pen, that which emanated from some devil who objected to me as a representative Texan on the ground of non-citizenship, certainly deserves a premium. If he will come to Philadelphia next year I will see to it that he is decked with a crimson rosette and labelled the champion slanderer of the Lone Star State!⁹²

In an ironic echo of the charges against Parsons, the *Austin Weekly Statesman* now questioned *Jennings's* qualifications, with a correspondent claiming that while Hobby was universally admired, Jennings was in "no sense a resident of Texas." *The Denison News* retorted that Jennings was a solid citizen of that town, having been resident there since 1872, and being assistant doorkeeper of the U.S. House of Representatives, was naturally required to be frequently out of state. After some back and forth between the two papers, the *Statesman* concluded: "Mr Jennings is welcome to all

⁸⁹ *The Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin), Mar. 23, 1876.

⁹⁰ John C. Chew, "The International Exhibition," *The Galveston Daily News*, Oct. 14, 1875.

⁹¹ "Texas and the Centennial: Letter from Commissioner Chew," *The Galveston Daily News*, Sept. 23, 1875.

⁹² John C. Chew, "Texas and the Centennial," *The Galveston Daily News*, May 24, 1876.

the honors and profit that he can get, but it is a pity that some *bona fide* citizen, well-identified with our state and its interests, was not appointed to represent us . . . in place of Mr. Jennings, who labors under the disadvantage of being suspected as a carpetbagger."⁹³ Lone Star residents seem to have placed a rather strict construction on their definition of just who was and who was not a true Texan. It seems plausible to suggest that some would have found fault with anyone chosen to represent their state on the National Centennial Commission, and that this always had more to do with resentment of Republicans and the Union, thereby illustrating the shaky state of reconciliation and reunion in 1870s Texas, and the South as a whole.

The conditionality of post-war nationalism in the white South and the extent to which post-war American nationalism in the South was contingent upon hopes of Democratic Party primacy can be gleaned from a report of the Centennial Independence Day celebrations in Brenham, Texas. The local newspaper described processions, speeches and "streets thronged with people in holiday attire" and pronounced the commemoration a success, concluding that "everyone was perfectly satisfied and reconstructed. We are now fairly launched on the second century of the Republic, with flattering prospects for an honest Democratic administration of national affairs."⁹⁴ Further, the story implicitly highlighted the way Republican rule was seen by many Texans and underscored the feelings behind Texan reluctance to be represented at the national Centennial commemoration by a Republican appointee of a Republican governor.

On March 27, 1876, after having vigorously defended their positions in the press, Parsons and Chew wrote to President Grant explaining the practical reasons behind their out-of-state residences. "We state the question fairly when we say that the allegations of our removal from our state was only a pretext made to subserve the purposes of partisans who wished to accomplish our removal because we were the nominees of a Republican governor."⁹⁵ The Washington *National Republican* concurred, declaring that "Gov. Coke and the Texas Bourbons were determined to remove [Parsons]."⁹⁶

At a meeting on April 26, the National Centennial Commission decided not to recognize the credentials of Hobby and Jennings. Secretary of State Fish had concluded that commissioners could be removed only with their own consent and so Parsons and Chew remained in their posts, despite Coke's crowing, prematurely, in a letter to Hobby that "Parsons and Chew

⁹³ "Editorial Notes," *The Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin), Apr. 6, 1876.

⁹⁴ "The Celebration: A Complete Success," *The Weekly Banner* (Brenham, Texas), July 7, 1876.

⁹⁵ Simon (ed.), *USG Papers*, XXVI, 45.

⁹⁶ "Pettiness," *The National Republican* (Washington, D.C.), May 2, 1876.

have been superseded. I am much gratified that I have succeeded in prying them out."⁹⁷

The political motivation behind Governor Coke's attempted reshuffle of the Centennial Commission seems clear. The *National Republican's* description of it as "the most petty display of Bourbonism that has yet been made by him or any of that set" may be suggestive of a Bourbon/New Departure split within the Democratic Party that affected attitudes towards the Centennial.⁹⁸ Such a partisan reading is, though, too simplistic. The evidence indicates that the postbellum political landscape in Texas was too fractured and fluid to be able to discern any such overarching pattern in Democratic Centennial discourse during 1875–76. Because some counties were more overwhelmingly white than others, local Democrats had differing priorities at the local level, making it difficult for Democrats to exercise control at the state level. Because of these differing priorities, as historian Patrick Williams has stated, "the sides Texans took in one debate didn't necessarily carry over to the next." Williams has described a pattern of shifting coalitions rather than enduring alliances, which means that it is difficult to differentiate between an agrarian/Bourbon or Whiggish New South faction.⁹⁹ This is demonstrated by the way that the Centennial was used as a cudgel against Governor Coke by a Democratic paper, the *Denison Daily News*:

Gov. Coke claims credit for prying Parsons and Chew out of their positions as Centennial Commissioners for Texas. We happen to know that he had no influence whatever on that transaction. The truth of the matter is that Centennial Commissioners [were] almost unanimous by asking the President to make the change for reasons satisfactory to themselves. It is stated on good authority that Gen. Parsons had become very obnoxious to his brother commissioners.¹⁰⁰

(This piece of gossip notwithstanding, Parsons was at least popular enough with his fellow commissioners to have been elected to the National Centennial Commission's Executive Committee during its second session in 1873 and then three years later to a three-man committee overseeing the exhibition's closing ceremonies.¹⁰¹)

As the fair opened in May 1876, Chew was still utilizing the press to air his side of the story. He disavowed any animosity towards his rivals, saying he had found his counterpart J. W. Jennings an agreeable man. Chew

⁹⁷ Coke to Hobby, Mar. 14, 1876, in "Texas Centennial Commissioners," *The Galveston Daily News*, Mar. 17, 1876.

⁹⁸ "Pettiness," *The National Republican* (Washington, D.C.), May 2, 1876.

⁹⁹ Williams, *Beyond Redemption*, Kindle edition, location 196.

¹⁰⁰ *Denison Daily News*, Apr. 9, 1876.

¹⁰¹ "Centennial Commission," *The Richmond Whig*, May 13, 1872; "Centennial Correspondence," *The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1876.

related that Jennings had offered to resign his position if Parsons would do the same, leaving Hobby and Chew as the state's Commissioners, but that Jennings had not been appreciative of Chew's response to this proposal. As Chew described it, "[I] quietly answered that I was not aware that he (Jennings) had anything to resign."¹⁰²

The Centennial turned out to be a huge success, attracting more than ten million visitors in the six months it was open, or nearly one in five Americans. In the month of October alone, 2.5 million people paid the fifty cent admission and passed through the turnstiles. The fair introduced Americans to both popcorn and the ice cream sundae, and Alexander Graham Bell was on hand to provide curious crowds with demonstrations of his new invention, the telephone.¹⁰³ A contemporary chronicler declared that the Centennial was

impossible to describe. Nothing but seeing it with your own eyes can give you any conception of its magnitude. Suffice it to say that everything that was grand, beautiful, useful and ludicrous was there, not only from our own beloved land but from every nation I have ever heard of and some I have not heard of!¹⁰⁴

In the end, Texas had no official presence at the Centennial Exhibition. John Chew laid the blame for the state's absence squarely with "Gov. Coke, Mr. R. Q. Mills [Coke's congressional correspondent] and their coadjutors. It was their pleasure to pursue the 'rule or ruin' policy and they did it with a persistence and a venom rarely equalled."¹⁰⁵ Although Coke, as has been shown, did evince some interest in Texas being represented at Philadelphia, it is clear that for him, as for many others, having what he saw as "representative" Texans as the state's commissioners trumped any desire to use the exhibition as either commemoration or platform for economic boosterism.

Richard Hubbard, who became governor when Coke was elected to the Senate in 1876, delivered a platitude-laden speech at the fair in September 1876 in which he declared that "the Southern heart is throbbing for peace and yearns for the old and faithful love between the states . . . let us bury the feuds of that stormy hour."¹⁰⁶ But back in Texas, things were still stormy. *The Titus County Patron* reiterated the resistance to Parsons, making clear once again the conditionality of Texan engagement with the "national celebration":

¹⁰² "Texas and the Centennial," *The Galveston Daily News*, May 24, 1876.

¹⁰³ Lally Weymouth, *America in 1876: The Way We Were* (New York: Random House, 1976), 12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Richard Hubbard, *Centennial Oration of Gov. R.B. Hubbard, of Texas, delivered at the National Exposition, Philadelphia, September 11, 1876* (St. Louis: The Texas Land & Immigration Company, 1876), 15.

Parsons and Chew are determined to hang around Philadelphia and dead beat their way as commissioners, notwithstanding the 14th Legislature refused to make an appropriation for Centennial purposes because they were not the choice of the people. These men recently made oath that they were citizens of Texas to show there was no vacancy which . . . annuls the commission of Messrs Hobby and Jennings and extinguishes the last hope of Texas participation in the national celebration.¹⁰⁷

In February 1876, a North Carolina congressman delivered a speech from the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on the hoped-for sectional healing to be brought about by the Centennial Exhibition: "I would go to Philadelphia and shake by the hand the brave men I used to meet on the field . . . We hope to see such a greeting of the patriots of the North and the South as will show to the whole Union that the flood tide of sectional hatred has ebbed forever."¹⁰⁸ The speech was reprinted, approvingly, in the Austin *Weekly Democratic Statesman*, the same newspaper that just a few weeks earlier had sneeringly referred to the Centennial as a "money-catching device for the City of Brotherly Love."¹⁰⁹ In Texas, reunion rhetoric, when indulged in at all, appears to have been just that, rhetoric. The Democratic *San Antonio Herald*, reporting on the exhibition's opening, remarked that "Once more in the Union, we are with them heart and hand and in this Centennial year and its appropriate celebration, we are with them." They were with them to the extent that, in the same article, the *Herald's* editor had commented, "The great Centennial about which there has been so much gas . . . opens today . . . one pretext or another, they [Centennial organizers] have got their hands into the Nation's treasury."¹¹⁰

William Parsons's 1873 message to his fellow Texans had been based on the assumption that the Centennial would be "neither a sectional nor a party question." At that early stage, Parsons had still been able to portray his Republican affiliation as a virtue in promoting the Centennial, emblematic of a bipartisan approach to celebrating a reconstructed and reunified United States. Parsons's outlook, however, proved optimistic, if not naïve, given the tumultuous state of Texas politics in the 1870s. By 1876, it was also clear that Parsons was wrong.

The Centennial exhibition in Philadelphia provided an opportunity for Americans to commemorate the anniversary of their founding, and a space in which to declare and display a new post-war identity. But it was more than a physical space. The Centennial served as a rhetorical arena

¹⁰⁷ "State Press," *The Galveston Daily News*, May 28, 1876.

¹⁰⁸ "The Centennial—The Speeches in Congress," *The Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin), Feb. 24, 1876.

¹⁰⁹ "The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition," *The Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin), Feb. 3, 1876.

¹¹⁰ "The Centennial Exposition," *The San Antonio Daily Herald*, May 10, 1876.

as well. Texans' obsession with selecting "representative men" to represent their state underscored the determination of white ex-Confederates to exercise power in what they saw as *their* state. The white Texans opposed to Parsons were also concerned with degradation, humiliation, and emasculation. Already dealing with these feelings as a result of military defeat and a loss of political control, the Centennial was seen as an arena in which southern manhood and honor could be further damaged.

The Austin *Weekly Statesman* complained in 1875 that Republican rule left white Texan men in a state of "degradation" and that submission to Radical control was at the cost of loss of self-respect and personal dignity, exacerbated by the negation of white votes by those of "apes."¹¹¹ This statement was not made in reference to Parsons or the Centennial but a connection can be made. William Parsons personified Radical rule and hence, to many white Texans, it would seem, their own lack of control during the years of Reconstruction. The Republican Centennial commissioner thus served as a convenient proxy for the anger, humiliation, and resentment that still festered after both "Redemption" and a decade of "peace." Discourse around the Centennial provided a platform for Texans to express these feelings as well as their determination that Texas was a white, Democratic state and could not be legitimately represented by one such as Parsons. The Centennial was not, for Texans, something that transcended politics or sectionalism. For them the Centennial *was* politics: something to be shunned if associated in any way with appointees of a Republican governor, something to be considered alongside ratification of a new constitution. It was a blank slate, a vessel to serve as rhetorical proxy for a wide array of political and social discussions.

After avowing their Texas citizenship and retaining their commissioner-ships, neither Parsons nor Chew ever resided in the Lone Star state again. When, however, William Parsons was buried at Mount Hope Cemetery in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, in 1907, his tombstone was inscribed: "Maj. Gen. W. H. Parsons of Texas."¹¹²

¹¹¹ "The Country's Worst Enemies," *The Weekly Democratic Statesman* (Austin), May 13, 1875.

¹¹² "Gen William Henry Parsons," <<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSl=parsons&GSfn=william&GSmn=henry&GSbyrel=all&GSdy=1907&GSdyrel=in&GSob=n&GRid=9726140&df=all>> [Accessed July 7, 2015].