

GENERAL SANTA ANNA IN SAINT THOMAS

by Aimery Caron

Antonio López de Santa Anna

Antonio López de Santa Anna was born in 1794 in Xalapa, an important town about 70 miles north of the major port of Veracruz, some 200 miles from Mexico City. His parents, Antonio López Santa Anna and Manuela Pérez Lebrón, were middle-class Spanish Creoles, his father being a mid-rank functionary. His youth was spent in three neighboring towns: Xalapa, Tezuitlán and Veracruz. In 1810, at the age of 16, he joined the royal infantry regiment of Veracruz as a cadet. He then participated in many counter-insurgency expeditions, earning several promotions up to lieutenant of grenadiers in 1820. He had become a dashing army officer, successful at love and war, with a penchant for extravagance, and cock fighting.

Founder of the Federal Republic of Mexico

In 1821, Santa Anna defected to join the Army of the Three Guarantees to fight for independence from Spain. After a number of successful battles, he became the political head and military commander of the province of Veracruz with the rank of brigadier general. Subsequently, in 1823, he revolted against Emperor Agustín I to proclaim a republican government with a federal constitution. In 1825, Santa Anna married the fourteen year-old María Inés de la Paz García whose large dowry enabled him to buy an expansive cattle-raising *hacienda* near Veracruz, Manga de Clavo, which he used as his favorite retreat from political activities and administrative responsibilities. From 1825 to 1827, he retired at his new *hacienda*; then, in 1827, he was appointed Vice-Governor of Veracruz; in 1829, Governor of the province of Veracruz; and, in 1833, he was elected President of Mexico. However, in what became an established pattern, he

was largely absent, leaving others in charge, while retiring at Manga de Clavo or leading military actions to quell revolts.

Successes, Defeats and First Exile

In 1835, under the new centralist government, Santa Anna came out of retirement to put down revolts, including the Texas revolt at the Alamo in 1836. However, he lost the next two battles, Goliad and San Jacinto, was taken prisoner and was forced to sign the Treaty of Velasco, giving Texas its independence. In 1837, after visiting President Andrew Johnson at the White House, he returned to Veracruz in disgrace and retired again at Manga de Clavo.

In 1838, during the French Pastry War, Santa Anna came out of retirement to defeat the French in Veracruz at the cost of his leg. In 1839, with his popularity regained, he was made interim president, defeated another revolt and retired at Manga de Clavo. In 1841, after several coups d'état, Santa Anna was given near absolute powers as president, but again he retired at Manga Clavo. In 1843, he came out of retirement to be elected president and again he left someone else in power, and retired, this time at a newly purchased *hacienda*, El Encero, in the mountains near Xalapa. In June 1844, Santa Anna was sworn in as constitutional president and, two months later, his wife, Maria Inès de la Paz Garcia, died. Subsequently, he retired at El Encero and, within two months, married his second wife, Dolores Tosta, only 15 years old. At the end of the year, the Revolution of the Three Hours overthrew Santa Anna's regime, and, in early 1845, he was defeated militarily, taken prisoner, incarcerated, and stripped of his properties. Finally, in June, he was sent to Havana, Cuba, on his first exile.

Loss of Half of Mexico's Territory

The war with the U.S. started in 1846 and Santa Anna was brought back from Cuba to defend Mexico. After a long series of defeats at the hands of General Winfield Scott, on 2 February 1848, General Santa Anna surrendered and signed the disastrous treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, granting half of Mexico's territory to the U.S. He then left disgraced in exile for the second time, going first to Kingston, Jamaica (1848-1850), and later to Turbaco near Cartagena in Columbia (1850-1853), where he acquired another large *hacienda*, La Rosita, to raise cattle, sugar cane and tobacco.

In April 1853, Santa Anna's political supporters brought him back to Mexico City to be proclaimed dictator. Then, in December, in order to clear some national debts, he signed away another 110,000 km² of Mexican territory, in southern Arizona, to the U.S. – the Treaty of La Mesilla – for 10 million pesos, of which he claimed 600,000 pesos in compensation for personal expenses and losses incurred during the war with the United States.

While in power, in July 1854, Santa Anna contacted various European monarchs offering the Mexican throne to any willing and capable European prince. Also, to underscore the seriousness of his quest, Santa Anna sent as his representative José María Gutiérrez Estrada to Europe to help with the search of a suitable monarch. One year later, in August 1855, unable to repress the Revolution of Ayutla, he abdicated and went into exile for the third time. The New York Times of 10 September 1855, reported that, on 26 August, two Mexican warships, the “Iturbe” and the “Guerrero”, arrived in Havana, Cuba. On board were General Santa Anna, his wife, his daughter, a number of personages, and “\$2 million in currency for his living expenses.” Meanwhile, the revolutionary liberal government of Ignacio Comonfort seized all of Santa Anna’s properties and stopped payments of his pension to recoup the evaporated moneys from the sale of La Mesilla. Subsequently, Santa Anna and suite sailed to Cartagena to reach his *hacienda* La Rosita at Turbaco, where he was said to have been seeking “the calm of private life.” At this point in life, Santa Anna was reputed to be “a master of intrigue; brave but treacherous; chivalrous in action, crafty in council, ready to risk his all in a bold adventure, yet sordid, avaricious, and corrupt where plunder was to be had.”

Arrival at Saint Thomas

Two and a half years later, in February 1858, Santa Anna announced publicly his departure to the people of Turbaco: “Circumstances of a most extraordinary nature have caused me to change [my] determination. My country, rent in pieces by the most continual and scandalous anarchy, requires my services, and I go with alacrity to her assistance, as I neither will not nor cannot be indifferent to her destiny. ----- It is for this motive alone that I separate myself from you, as I have for this town [Turbaco] and all its environs the strongest sympathies.” Conservative forces had engineered the coup d'état of Tacubaya of 17 December 1857, which toppled President Ignacio Comonfort, head of the liberal party, and, on 11 January 1858, had replaced him with conservative Félix Zuloaga in Mexico City. Thus,

conservative Santa Anna felt that this was a propitious time for his return to Mexico.

On 2 March 1858, the New York Times announced that as of 23 February the *Santanistas* in Havana were expecting Santa Anna to arrive on an English steamer from Saint Thomas, Danish West Indies, to then proceed on a Spanish warship to Veracruz to assume the Mexican presidency for “the last time.” The New York Times of 27 March then announced that Santa Anna and family embarked on the “Clyde” at Cartagena on 12 March for Saint Thomas and Havana, “doubtless en route to Mexico.” It was added that Santa Anna had been living at Turbaco, “a charming village 2,000 feet above the Bay of Cartagena.” “Santa Anna has a passionate indulgence for cock fighting which has not impaired his vast fortune. He is now sailing back to Mexico either to bring order out of chaos, after his conception of order, or to put matters quite beyond redemption.” On 20 March, it was announced in the Danish West Indian newspaper, the *Sanct Thomaæ Tidende*, that “General Santa Anna, ex-President of Mexico, and suite arrived here in the steamer ‘Clyde’ on the 17th from Cartagena and left on the 19th in the steamer ‘Dee’ for Havana.” However, on 24 March, four days later, the newspaper editor, Francis Armanie, published a retraction: “We were in error when we stated in our last issue that General Santa Anna and suite had proceeded in the ‘Dee’ to Havana. It would seem that the non-arrival of the ‘Solvent’ from the Gulf at the period of the ‘Dee’s’ departure, must have changed His Excellency’s views as he is yet sojourning in this Island.”

Santa Anna explains his change of mind later in a *manifesto* dated 12 April and published in the New York Times of 21 June 1858:

Fellow-Citizens: The clamor of my friends and fellow countrymen, because of these scenes of horror, which we represented in our country, reached even to my humble retirement, I could no longer remain a stranger to your sufferings. I abandoned that retirement in which I enjoyed health and tranquility, resolved to do all I possibly could to be at the side of those who grasped their arms and sought to break the ominous chains of the insufferable demagogical tyranny. But on arriving at this island [Saint Thomas] last month, I learned with satisfaction that the execrable little tyrant [Ignacio Comonfort], after perjuring himself, had been cast down from the post which he never ought to have occupied; and that although his faction made its last efforts, it could not again succeed in putting itself above the immense majority of the nation that despised it. I was much pleased, besides, to learn that an Administration had been formed, with which were connected the most honorable citizens, men of wisdom and true patriotism. I have blessed Heaven for this good, which has been bestowed upon the Mexican people; and as I have no doubt the illustrious citizens will know how to provide for the necessities of the country, I stopped here [Saint Thomas] to continue in my tranquil life; and I will be

gratified to know that the door has been closed to discord forever; that the nation is constituted to the satisfaction of all good citizens; and that it marches to its future without the need of my feeble aid. Oh happy day! I will congratulate the fortunate man who succeeds in bringing this great work to a successful termination, whoever he may be; and I will die contented knowing that Mexicans are at last happy, and that their sons shall have a country.

Was Santa Anna waiting to be formally invited by President Félix Zuloaga before returning to Mexico? The invitation never came because Félix Zuloaga was not willing to relinquish his seat to Santa Anna, nor was he able to guarantee his safety upon his landing in Veracruz. It is more probable that Santa Anna changed his mind because the Spanish naval escort he expected to receive to return to power never materialized. Landing in Veracruz without a military force would have been imprudent as proven later by the fact that, on 4 May 1858, the radical liberal Benito Júarez became president of the “legitimate” government centered in Veracruz. In future episodes, Santa Anna always sought the backing of another foreign nation—France and the U.S.—when attempting to return from exile.

The Sanct Thomæ Tidende of 3 April 1858 carries a petition or a letter of commendation, dated 17 February 1858, and signed by about 90 residents of Turbaco, Columbia, thanking the General for all the good he brought to Turbaco, its economy and the welfare of its people. The letter ends with a plea addressed to the General not to leave Turbaco. This letter was followed by an acknowledgment dated in February and written by Santa Anna, thanking the people of Turbaco for praising him, for expressing their gratitude to him, and for wanting him to remain at Turbaco. There can be no doubt that Santa Anna published these two documents both in Spanish and in English a few days after his arrival on Saint Thomas for the purpose of gaining the favor of the Danish authorities in order that they might grant him political asylum. As proven later, the Danish authorities were pleased to welcome the General and his suite as he was believed to be bringing a fortune in pesos, which would be of help to the Saint Thomas economy. As a *quid pro quo*, Santa Anna must have been requested not to involve Saint Thomas in Mexican politics, so as to maintain the lucrative neutrality of the Danish West Indies. This supposition is derived from the fact that, during his eight-year stay, he uncharacteristically never gave an interview to the Sanct Thomæ Tidende, nor did he publish locally his political views, plans, or *manifiestos*.

Santa Anna had good reasons for choosing Saint Thomas over Turbaco for a residence while in exile. Saint Thomas was the Caribbean maritime hub for all the steamship mail packet lines and, therefore, had

excellent communications with Europe, the U.S., South America, Central America, and the whole Caribbean Basin. Thus, from Saint Thomas, Santa Anna could better follow Mexican political developments and international news in a timely manner. Also, Saint Thomas had two well-established and well-known banks – the Colonial Bank and the Bank of Saint Thomas – both experienced in matters of international money transfers and investments.

It has been advanced that Santa Anna left Turbaco and sold La Rosita precipitously in fear that it might be seized by a Columbian liberal government, that was threatening to accede to power. However, there is some evidence that La Rosita was sold some ten years later when Santa Anna was in great need of funds.

General Santa Anna's Residences at Charlotte Amalia

The Saint Thomas community did not learn of Santa Anna's resettling plans until 8 May 1858 when the Sanct Thomæ Tidende announced that he had purchased "the very finest residence in Saint Thomas and, therefore, was making Saint Thomas his permanent abode." The editor added that the general sentiment of the community was that it hoped that General Santa Anna might "feel pleasure" living in Saint Thomas and that, judging from his Turbaco testimonial letter, he should be a great asset to the Island.

"The very finest residence" is located at #2D Bjerge Gade. It was sold and had been occupied by a wealthy Curaçao merchant, Jacob Henriquez Moron. This residence had to be large since the Moron household included twelve children and six servants. According to the 1860 census, General Santa Anna's household on Saint Thomas, was almost as large, as it included an older married son, Angel, 29 years old, his wife, Gabriela Lugo, 19 years old, and their two young children, 12 and 6 months old (both born on Saint Thomas and their parents were married at the Catholic Church on 28 June 1858, about three months after their arrival); a second son, Manuel, 23 years old, unmarried; a French priest, Father Jean G. Pfanner, 57 years old; a major domo named Magnisilieno Carbajal, 29 years old; and eight servants from Columbia, Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, and Saint Thomas. Thus, although Santa Anna's young wife Dolorès remained in Mexico City throughout his stay on Saint Thomas, he and his household filled the large residence to capacity. Besides the size of the residence, there were other features which must have had a special appeal to a military man, such as General Santa Anna: the fortress-like thick retaining walls of the

property, and its strategic site on a spur of Denmark Hill overlooking the center of Charlotte Amalia and its harbor.

The main structure at #2D Bjerge Gade was a large rectangular (58 feet by 34.3 feet) one-story wooden building with a traditional high hip roof. There were also some smaller ancillary masonry buildings, such as a gatekeeper's house and a cookhouse. Within a month of the original purchase, Santa Anna added adjacent western plots (#2H, #2I, #2M, & #2N Bjerge Gade), all purchased from the Vice-Governor H. H. Berg, who owned a handsome mansion, Catherineberg, at the top of Denmark Hill. Subsequently, in May 1860, he purchased, again from Mr. J. H. Moron, three narrow plots (#2K, #2L, & #2O Bjerge Gade) bordering the southern boundary of the property. Finally, Santa Anna made one last purchase from Vice-Governor H. H. Berg in September 1863, plot #9 Nordsidevei at the northwestern end of his Bjerge Gade property.

It is assumed that, if the main structure was not modified, some ancillary buildings were probably enlarged and/or added by Santa Anna. This is particularly true of the unusually large cisterns, consistent with the needs of a fortress, and the roomy stables, which as a horse lover and breeder he would have wished to have. It is known that, while acquiring more plots of land, Santa Anna added retaining walls in an attempt to enlarge the main platform or *terre-plein* of the property. In fact, the Sanct Thomæ Tidende of 18 April 1860 reported the following:

The inhabitants of this town were thrown yesterday afternoon into considerable excitement by the falling of a wall, which, from its altitude on the hill, was visible almost everywhere. This wall was erected by General Santa Anna to serve as a breast wall, in order to level the declivity of the hill where he has been making further extensions to the residence he recently purchased. The wall, previous to its falling, was of considerable length and height and from the immense weight of earth it was intended to resist, ought to have been erected with due care and in the best possible manner. The recent rains we have had most naturally have saturated the new made earth, which stood behind, and consequently multiplied the weight in proportion, and although there appears to have been innumerable holes in the wall for the draining of the water, nevertheless the whole structure seems to have been insufficient for the purpose it was intended. Immediately below the wall there was a newly erected building which has received considerable injury, as well as the upper story being forced some ten feet beyond the basement on the front. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, although there are a few persons who have received bruises that were in and about the building at the time of the accident.

Most probably, the retaining wall in question was along the southern boundary of #2D Bjerge Gade shared with #2A Bjerge Gade (owned by I. H.

Moron and G. Da Costa) when the wall collapsed it dislocated the wooden upper floor of the house at #2A ten feet off its masonry lower floor.

During his stay on Saint Thomas, Santa Anna ceded two narrow pieces of land at the southern boundary of his property. The first one was a 16 foot wide and a 150 foot long strip of land between #2D and #2A which was ceded to Mr. G. Da Costa Gomez, a prominent merchant, in December 1863. This might have been a settlement for damages caused by the collapsed wall. The second piece was plots #2K, #2L, & #2O Bjerge Gade which was ceded in late September 1864 to Santa Anna's major domo, M. Perky de Corbalal, who might have wanted to build his own house close to the General.

Three and a half years after his arrival at Saint Thomas, in August 1861, General Santa Anna purchased from a Mr. S.B. Nonès two large contiguous townhouses at #6 Snegle Gade and #14 Norre Gade, situated near the center of town, below the first residence at #2D Bjerge Gade. It is not clear what was the purpose of these two purchases; however, the 1860 census reveals that #14 Norre Gade was occupied by the Rafael García's household: father, mother, four teenage daughters, one son and three servants, all from New Grenada (today's Columbia). It is very likely that this family was part of General Santa Anna's suite or retinue, as it came from the area of Carthagena, and that Rafael García, age 36, was the brother of Santa Anna's first wife Maria Inéz de La Paz García. Nonetheless, in May 1864, Santa Anna resold the townhouse to a Mrs. Adelaïde Taupier for the handsome sum of \$4,500, probably because Rafael García was needed in Veracruz to prepare the way for the General's return from exile.

On the other hand, he kept #6 Snegle Gade, the larger and more stylish townhouse. It is a three-story building with, on the southern façade and on the third floor, seven door/windows opening on a wide balcony with a cast iron railing and above with a flat roof surrounded by a distinctive ajouré parapet allowing a full view of the harbor. Perhaps, this townhouse might have served as the residence for Gabriela Lugo, her two children and her husband, Angel de Santa Anna, who had a retail store in town, in association with a Mr. B. Latour.

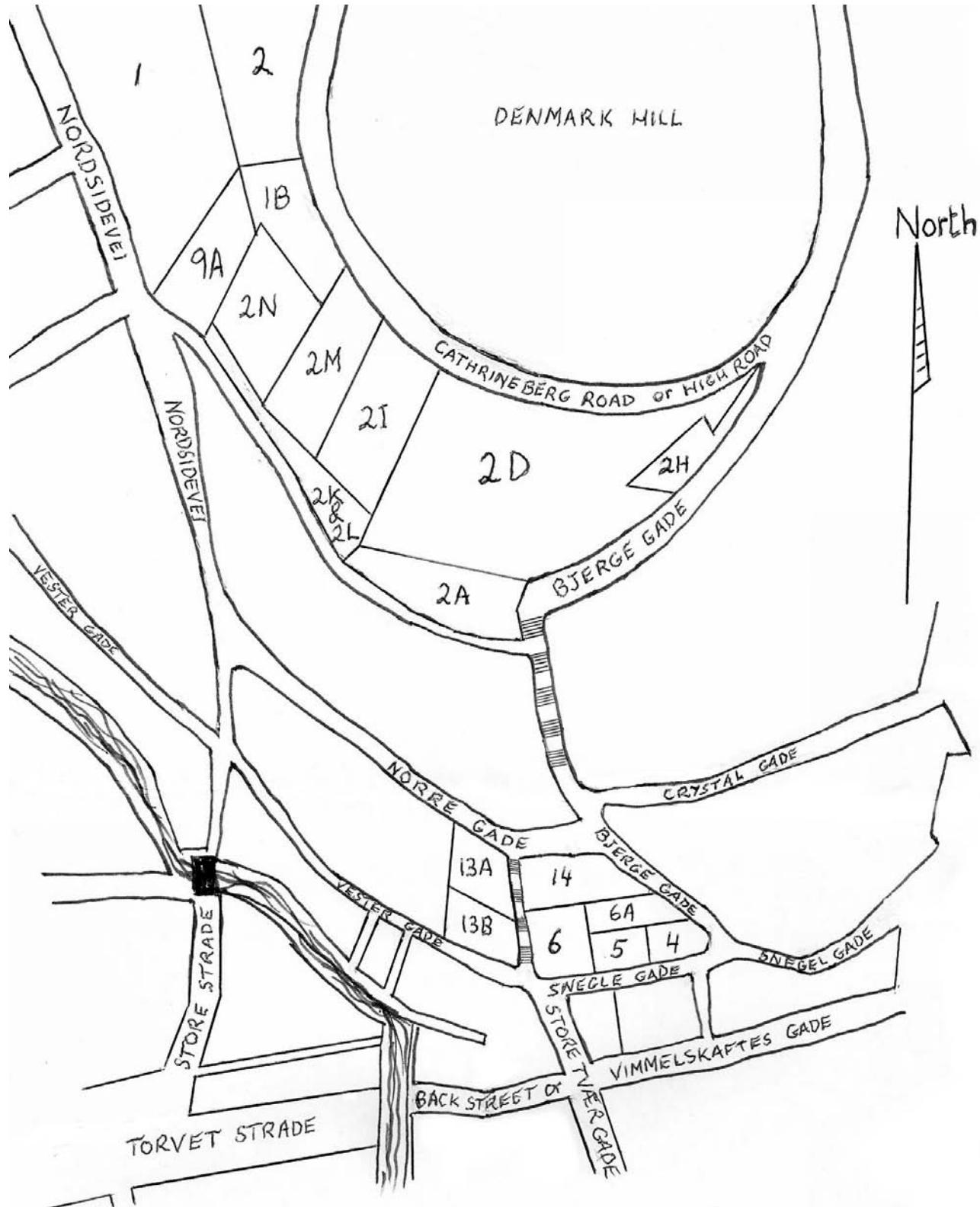
According to the same 1860 census, next to #14 Norre Gade, at #13A, was a comfortable townhouse belonging to the widow of Jérôme Elles, rented out to a Srta. Emilia Trabuc, 19 years old, unmarried, with no profession, from Carthagena, who had a 7-month-old daughter, Guadalupe Francina, born on Saint Thomas, and three servants from Curaçao and Saint Thomas. Obviously, Srta. Trabuc was supported by someone of means, probably the father of her child, who might have been the 23-year-old



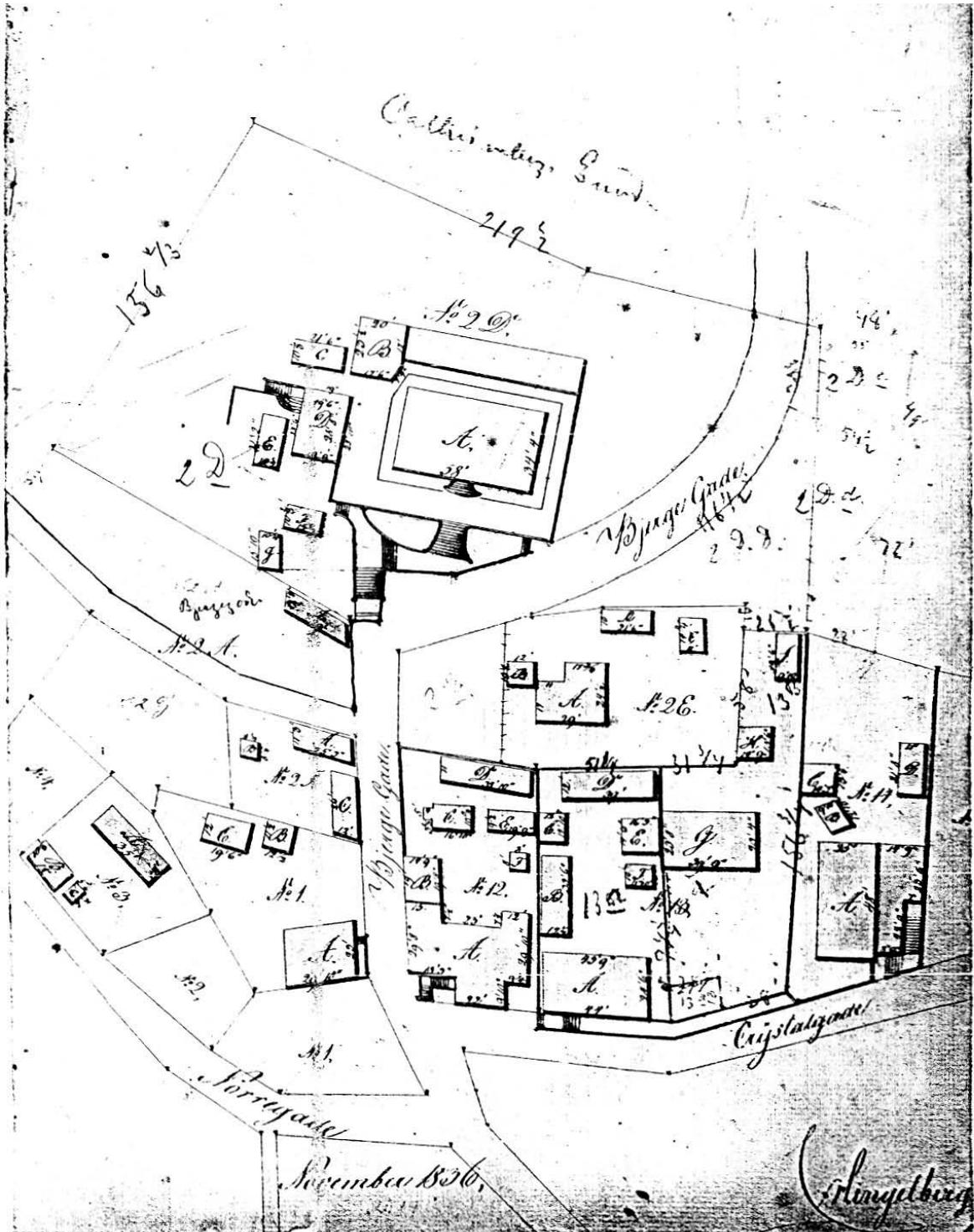
General Santa Anna



VILLA SANTA ANNA CIRCA 1850
(Top right, next to the Catherineberg Road)

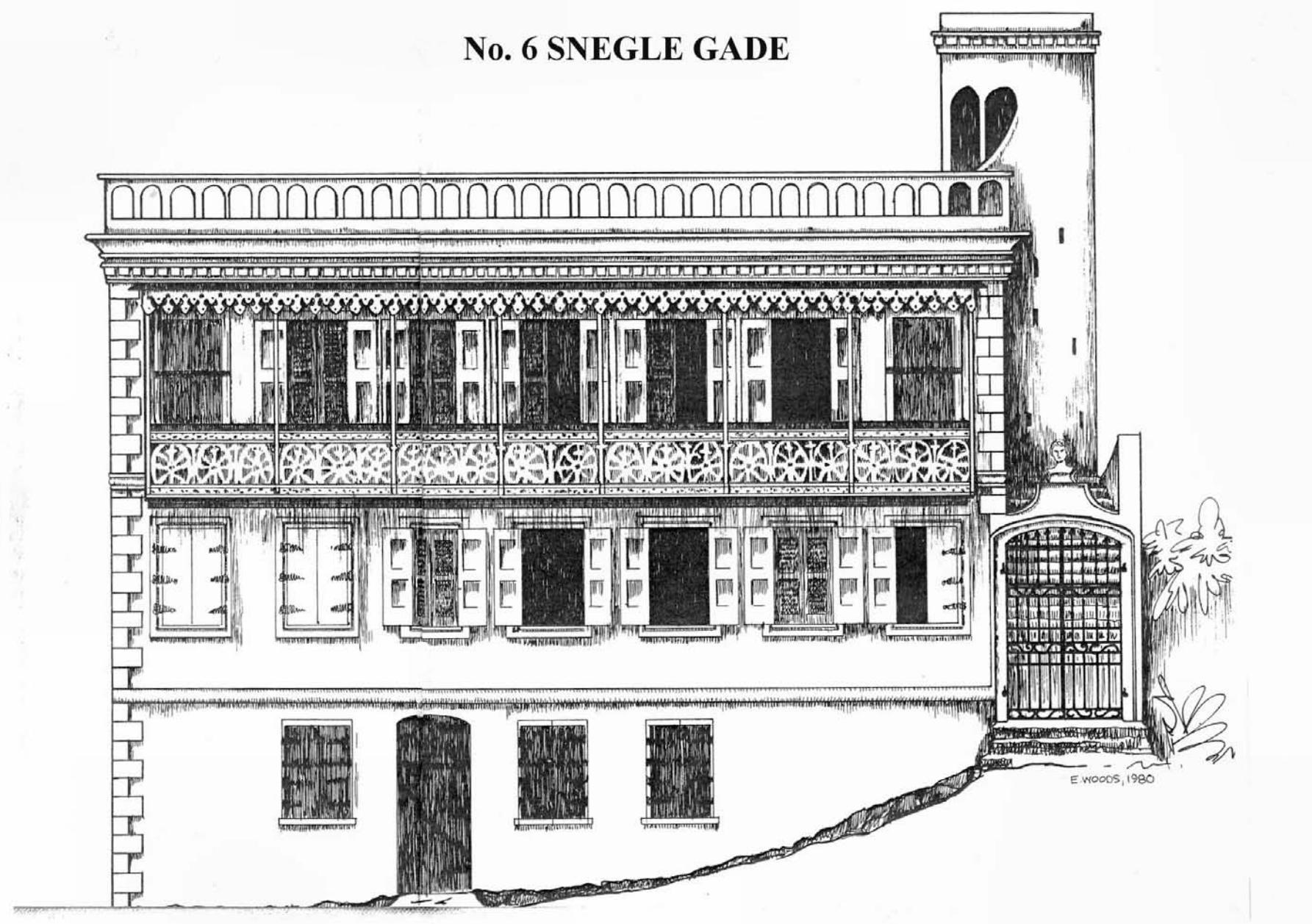


PROPERTIES PURCHASED BY GENERAL SANTA ANNA
IN QUEEN'S QUARTER, CHARLOTTE AMALIA



**PROPERTIES PURCHASED BY GENERAL SANTA ANNA
IN QUEEN'S QUARTER, CHARLOTTE AMALIA
(SHOWING BUILDINGS)**

No. 6 SNEGLE GADE



unmarried son, Manuel de Santa Anna, or even General Santa Anna himself, who, in his mid-sixties, had left several young broken hearts at Turbaco and Carthagena.

Political Activities While at Saint Thomas

While in exile at Saint Thomas, General Santa Anna remained discretely but heavily involved in Mexican politics. He circulated *manifiestos* and pamphlets in Mexico, but not on Saint Thomas. He also kept a busy correspondence with a number of conservative political figures; in particular José María Gutiérrez Estrada, who, as early as 1840, proposed that the establishment of a monarchy in Mexico was the ultimate solution to the political instability that had prevailed ever since 1821, when independence had been wrested from Spain.

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in 1848, and the Treaty of La Mesilla, in 1853, had stripped Mexico of half of its former territory, Santa Anna argued that an added advantage of having a European monarch at the head of the Mexican government was that he could more effectively stop any further U.S. expansion at Mexico's expense. For these two reasons, in 1854, President Santa Anna ordered a search be made for a suitable European prince.

By 1859, a suitable candidate had been found: he was Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, brother of Emperor Francis-Joseph I of Austria. Besides his sterling qualifications, Maximilian had the full backing of Napoleon III, who pledged military assistance to place him on the throne. Napoleon had two motives: the first one was his need to collect a substantial Mexican debt; and his second was to realize his uncle's dream of having a strong Catholic Franco-Hispanic empire in the New World able to keep in check the increasingly powerful North-American Protestant Anglo-Saxons. Santa Anna was fully aware of these plans and, despairing over the political turmoil during the Mexican Civil War of the Reform (1858-1860), he fully endorsed them.

In Saint Thomas, on 23 July 1859, the French Vice-Consul Achille de Courthial, as ordered by Paris, published an appeal to the French community for donations to benefit the wounded soldiers and the families of dead soldiers, all casualties at the costly Battle of Solferino in Italy. Some seven months later, on 17 March 1860, the French Vice-Consul expressed publicly his gratitude to three large donors: Vice-Governor H. H. Berg, who subsequently received the French medal of Chevalier of the Legion of

Honor; Mr. Sosthènes Lucchetti, future French consul and agent for the Compagnie Général Transatlantique representing his uncle's important firm, Vincent Piccioni & Co.; and none other than General Santa Anna. This is a clear indication that Santa Anna wished to convey to Napoleon III his approval of a French intervention for the establishment of Maximilian as Emperor of Mexico. Thus, on 30 November 1861, these sentiments were conveyed in writing to his political friend Gutiérrez Estrada; however, to be safe, he requested that his letter be kept secret. Nonetheless, on 22 December 1861, he wrote to Maximilian, the future emperor, to offer him his services and full support.

French Interdiction

On 7 January 1862, the French, British and Spanish combined naval forces landed in Veracruz to collect Mexican debts that the new ultra-radical President Benito Juárez had suspended for two years six months earlier. However, in April 1862, President Abraham Lincoln invoked the Monroe Doctrine and demanded that the European powers not interfere in Mexican affairs. As a result, both the British and the Spanish forces withdrew; but France persisted with its plan to defeat militarily President Benito Juárez and clear the way for Maximilian. Napoleon did not fear retaliation from the U.S., as President Lincoln was too busy at home coping with the Civil War.

In early 1863, as the French military force was finally making headway toward Mexico City, Santa Anna became convinced of its ultimate success and saw it as an opportunity to return to Mexico. With that in mind, on 25 March 1863, he wrote to Gutiérrez Estrada to express his desire to return to Mexico and be part of the interim regency council that was to prepare for the advent of Maximilian. He also expressed the wish to be given the title of Duke of Veracruz and Tampico, so as to be Maximilian's official greeter in Veracruz and his escort to Mexico City. Not receiving encouraging news from Gutiérrez Estrada and to be on the safe side, in June 1863, he requested that his son José Lopez de Santa Anna, residing in Havana, publish in a leading newspaper a denial of the rumor that he was returning to Veracruz to join the French expeditionary force. Instead, Santa Anna wanted everyone to believe that he was returning to Veracruz to take care of his own business interests, rather than political or military matters.

Santa Anna's hopes for a triumphant return to Veracruz were dashed by a leading *imperialista*, a personal enemy and rival, Juan Nepomuceno Almonte, who also was vying for a seat on the interim regency council. He

succeeded in that endeavor and secretly enlisted the French to keep Santa Anna out of Mexican politics. The French help was easy to secure as they viewed Santa Anna as a has-been who had changed political camps too often to be reliable or trustworthy. (Besides, had he not dishonored the French armed forces in 1838 during the French Pastry War?) For good measure, Almonte warned all *Santanistas* not to give a special ovation to their hero upon his arrival in Veracruz,

In spite of such unfavorable conditions, General Santa Anna returned to Veracruz on 27 February 1864, deluding himself into believing that he would be able to talk his way back into Mexican politics. However, before he could disembark, the French General Achille Bazaine, head of the French expeditionary forces, made him sign a statement in French that he would adhere to the French intervention and recognize Emperor Maximilian as the legitimate head of the Mexican government. Additionally, he was not to be involved in any political activities. Nevertheless, in a clear breach of his signed agreement, as soon as he landed, he chose to publish a *manifiesto*, which was nothing less than a bid to have an important role in the new government.

Upon Almonte's prompting, on 12 March, General Bazaine was quick to order Santa Anna expelled from Veracruz and Mexico, although he vainly argued that not knowing French, he was unaware that he had agreed to stay out of Mexican politics. In his fourth exile, he first spent three months in Havana, where son José resided. Finally, on Sunday 12 June 1864, aboard the Spanish steamship "Pajaro del Oceano", a dejected aging seventy-year-old Santa Anna was back in Charlotte Amalia.

Victim of a Confidence Game

Meanwhile, that same month, June 1864, Maximilian arrived in Mexico City to take over the reins of government, while President Juarez and his government fled north to the U.S. border. A few months later, from Saint Thomas, Santa Anna was proclaiming that he had never been a supporter of the French or even in favor of a monarchy and Maximilian. He then hired Dario Mazuera to help him write an edited biography to bolster his new interpretation of the history of his political life. Obviously, Dario Mazuera quickly gained Santa Anna's confidence by willingly covering up the inconvenient truth; and also by encouraging him to seek U.S. assistance to return him once more as the president and savior of the Mexican Republic.

The American Civil War having ended in April 1865, the U.S. could now bring its full attention to the Mexican situation, invoke with credibility the Monroe Doctrine and apply pressure on Napoleon III to remove his troops from Mexico. Additionally, the majority of the French people were opposed to the Mexican intervention because of its financial and human costs: thousands of French soldiers lost their life due to yellow fever, malaria and Benito Juárez' army. Napoleon III was therefore forced to order the phased withdrawal of the French expeditionary forces. Knowing full well that Maximilian would not be able to remain in power without French military assistance, Santa Anna started planning for his return to power after the fall of Maximilian. Thus, in December 1865, Santa Anna gave Dario Mazuera a power-of-attorney to represent him in Washington to obtain a loan and political backing from President Andrew Johnson and the U.S. Congress.

A few months earlier, at the same time that Abraham Lincoln was shot to death, Secretary of State William H. Seward and his son were seriously wounded by stabbings. While Mazuera was supposed to be in Washington, the Seward (father and son) were ending their recovery with a Caribbean cruise aboard the Navy steamship "De Soto". On 9 January 1866, it anchored in the harbor of Charlotte Amalia. The same day at 3:00 P.M., Secretary Seward held a reception on board for the Saint Thomas Vice-Governor L. Rothe, his top officers, and the consular corps. The press believed that the "De Soto" cruise had no other purpose but rest, recreation, and spreading goodwill. However, during the Civil War, the U.S. Navy, in its effort to capture Confederacy pirate ships that had eluded the blockade, found itself badly in need of a Caribbean coaling station. After the War, the need for a coaling station in the Caribbean still existed to enforce the Monroe Doctrine. Since Charlotte Amalia was the busiest Caribbean coaling port, there can be no doubt that Secretary Seward wanted to use the opportunity of his visit to determine the suitability and availability of Saint Thomas for the U.S. Navy. As a matter of fact, negotiations for the purchase of Saint Thomas started only a year later in Copenhagen.

Secretary Seward had another serious reason for visiting Saint Thomas. It was ostensibly to pay a brief courtesy call to General Santa Anna but in reality it was to learn about his future political plans, now that Napoleon III had ordered a phased withdrawal of the French troops from Mexico: Was he still supporting Maximilian? Was he going to join forces with Benito Juárez and his liberal party to defeat Maximilian's regime? Or, was he wishing to replace Maximilian at the head of a conservative republican government? Somehow, perhaps because of a lack of familiarity

with the English language, or because of an inflated idea of his importance in Mexican history, or because of the onset of senility, Santa Anna misconstrued Secretary Seward's courtesy call as an encouragement to return to Mexico to head a new conservative republican government in preference to Benito Juárez and his liberal government.

Three months later, in April 1866, Dario Mazuera was back on Saint Thomas with wonderful news. He had secured a 30 millions pesos loan from "various parties in the U.S. government" ready to be drawn upon at some New York bank. This loan could be increased to 50 million pesos if necessary, as long as it was used for the benefit of the Mexican people. Mazuera then produced a confidential memorandum from Secretary Seward urging Santa Anna to come to New York to receive the financial aid he needed to liberate Mexico from the French occupation and Emperor Maximilian.

While in New York, Mazuera had taken another initiative. He had met Abraham Báiz, a Caribbean businessman, owner of a steamship "Georgia", which Mazuera purchased on credit for \$250,000 in Santa Anna's name. The "Georgia" was to be armed and manned in New York to bring Santa Anna to Veracruz for a triumphant return to the Mexican presidency. Presently, the "Georgia" was being freighted in New York to come shortly to Saint Thomas, where Santa Anna was to come on board for the return trip to New York. Santa Anna agreed to the plan but insisted that the ship be paid for out of the U.S. loan. Abraham Báiz agreed but he insisted that Santa Anna pay a cash-deposit of \$40,000 in gold. Santa Anna could only produce \$35,260 in currency, but fortunately, Báiz was willing to compromise and thus the sale of the "Georgia" was consummated. Coincidentally, Abraham Báiz had been a previous owner of both townhouses at #6 Snegle Gade and #14 Norre Gade from 1845 until 1855, when he sold both to S.B. Nonès. Therefore, it is quite probable that Santa Anna knew Báiz socially and this may be why he trusted him in this business transaction.

So it was that in early May 1866, Mazuera, Báiz, and Santa Anna, full of hope, boarded the "Georgia" in Saint Thomas to reach New York some eight days later. Upon arrival, Santa Anna published a new *manifesto* proclaiming that he was a true republican and was coming home to liberate his people from foreign domination. After spending three weeks at Báiz' residence in Elizabeth Port, at the cost of \$5,000, Santa Anna requested to live on his own. They found a splendid mansion, fit to entertain President Andrew Johnson, in New York City, with an exorbitant rent of \$2,400 for

four months. Subsequently, both Mazuera and Báiz disappeared and were never heard of since.

It took Santa Anna only a few days to realize that he was the victim of an elaborate confidence game. There was no 30 million pesos in his name in a New York bank. Báiz had never owned the “Georgia”, he had only chartered it from Messrs Williams and Guion, the true ship owners. Secretary Seward had never met Mazuera and his confidential memorandum was a fake. Furthermore, the *Juarista* Club in New York loudly denounced Santa Anna as a tyrant, a traitor and an untrustworthy turncoat who should not get the support of the U.S. government. Finally, President Andrew Johnson refused to see him. In desperation, Santa Anna filed a suit against the two swindlers but they could not be found and his lawyers wanted \$30,000 up front to represent him in court. This was more than Santa Anna could afford, now that he had been swindled out of his savings.

American Interdiction and Trial for Treason

Although ruined by a pair of swindlers and abandoned by many of his supporters, Santa Anna did not give up returning to Mexico as he made one last attempt to raise funds to finance his return. While in New York, he decided to float 1,500 bonds worth \$500 each with a seven percent interest and terms of three to five years. As security, he pledged three properties: Manga de Clavo near Veracruz, La Rosita at Turbaco, and his Saint Thomas villa. He was able to sell less than ten percent of his bonds while in New York. In desperation, he gave a power-of-attorney to a notorious big scale confidence man, Dr. Gabor Nephegyi, to authorize him to negotiate the sale of up to \$10 million worth of Mexican territory to the U.S. government. Of course, nothing came out of that scheme.

Unable to raise substantial funds in one year, Santa Anna was reduced to sailing back to Veracruz as a civilian, on a passenger steamship, the “Virginia”, without a military escort. He arrived on 3 June 1867, three months after the final departure of the French expeditionary force and a few days before Maximilian’s capture and execution. He seems to have believed that this time of confusion was most propitious for his political rebirth and that he might be able to talk his way back into a leadership role. However, a U.S warship, the “Tacony”, in Veracruz on patrol to enforce the Monroe Doctrine refused to allow Santa Anna to disembark. The U.S. government was firmly committed to support Benito Juárez and Commander F.A. Roe of the “Tacony” had been warned of his arrival and given orders not to allow

him to land. Still determined to return to his native land, he sailed south on the “Virginia” to Sisal in Yucatan, where he was able to land unopposed on 30 June. He, then, promptly published a *manifesto* offering his services as the leader for peace and reconciliation. Unfortunately for him, he had lost his popularity and credibility. Further, the *Juaristas* were determined to put him away. Santa Anna was quickly arrested, brought back to Veracruz and, on 30 July 1867, he was thrown in a dungeon at the notorious fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, in the Bay of Veracruz, where he suffered for two months for lack of food and medical care. President Juárez then ordered that he stand trial for treason as the initiator and planner of the Maximilian affair. The public trial took place from the 7th to the 10th of October in the elegant Veracruz theatre. He was found guilty, but against Juárez’ orders, instead of the firing squad, the judges took pity on this 73 year-old man and condemned him to eight years of exile. (Juárez was so displeased by this mild sentence that he later imprisoned the judges).

General Santa Anna left Veracruz on his fifth exile on 1 November 1867 for Havana, Cuba. There, he must have learned of the hurricane that devastated Saint Thomas just three days prior to his departure from Veracruz. The news was that eighty percent of the Saint Thomas buildings had suffered major damage. Since Santa Anna’s main building was a wooden structure exposed on a spur of Denmark Hill it is very likely to have suffered some damage. Santa Anna was ruined and unable to afford costly repairs, nor could he afford to support five children and grandchildren and a staff of ten. He needed to sell his fine villa and move into more modest quarters. Theoretically, he could have found inexpensive housing in Charlotte Amalia but as the proud man that he was, he chose to relocate elsewhere rather than expose his plight to a community that had been told that he was a man of unlimited means. (To this day, the lore is that Santa Anna came to Saint Thomas with the whole Mexican treasury amounting to at least 10 million pesos).

There was most likely another reason for not wanting to return to Saint Thomas. Five days before the hurricane struck Saint Thomas, on 24 October 1867, Secretary Seward and his Danish counterpart signed a treaty for the sale of Saint Thomas for the sum of \$7.5 million. The perspective of living under a U.S. administration must have seemed rather distasteful to Santa Anna, who just came out of a year-long ruinous, humiliating and perfidious experience in New York and, more recently, in the hands of the U.S. Navy in Veracruz. It cannot be too surprising if he chose to resettle elsewhere, namely Nassau, Bahamas, after spending a year or two at Puerto Plata, Santo Domingo.

Liquidation of the Saint Thomas Assets

The first confirmation of Santa Anna's permanent departure from Saint Thomas came on 7 and 18 March 1868, in the Sanct Thomæ Tidende where was announced the closing-out sale of Havana cigars at a "very moderate price" on consignment for his son Angel at the establishment of B. Latour & Co. and that his villa furniture was to be auctioned. Also, on 1 April 1868, son Angel placed an ad to rent out a house at 16 Commandant Gade in Charlotte Amalia. Later, on 3 July, Angel announced in Spanish the dissolution of his partnership with B. Latour, a Santo Domingo merchant.

Additionally, in May 1868, the deed to #6 Snegle Gade was transferred from General Santa Anna to his son Angel. A year later, in August 1869, Angel sold the townhouse to a well-to-do French merchant, Lucien Nunès, for a relatively low price of \$3,500, considering that #14 Norre Gade had been sold for \$4,500 in 1864.

General Santa Anna sold his Charlotte Amalia villa without any advertising or announcement. The main portion of the property, Bjerge Gade #2D, 2H, 2I, 2M, & 2N, was sold from Puerto Plata, Santo Domingo, for \$6,000 on 14 November 1868 (recorded at Saint Thomas on 7 June 1869) to Jean-Joseph Clitus Délinois, a wealthy Haitian merchant on Main Street. M. Délinois purchased Santa Anna's property free and clear of any lien or mortgage at fair market value, since the more handsome Catherineberg property of Vice-Governor H. H. Berg was advertised for sale only three years earlier at a price of \$12,000. The contract of sale of Santa Anna's property does note that, in June 1866, Mrs. Henry Morton and Mr. Virgil Vitcomb had purchased \$40,000 worth of bonds mortgaging the Veracruz and Turbaco properties and "erroneously" the Saint Thomas property.

Later, on 6 February 1869, the deed to #9 Nordsidevei, at the far north-west end of the Bjerge Gade property, was ceded to P.H.B. Latour, possibly as a settlement for sums owed by Angel de Santa Anna at the time of the dissolution of their partnership. Why else would M. Latour resell the property only eight months later to M. Délinois? However, M. Latour couldn't have been fully satisfied with that settlement since, in October 1869, he sued his ex-partner Angel de Santa Anna and, in November, the court ordered that the defendant give a full account of the assets of the partnership at the time of the dissolution, July 1869, and turn over to the plaintiff his fair share.

General Santa Anna owed at least \$50,000 in 1868, and he could not have realized much more than \$12,000 from the liquidation of his Saint

Thomas assets. Since President Juárez had seized his Mexican properties and stopped payments of his retirement pension, and since his wife Dolores refused to give him a pension, Santa Anna had no means of support, except through the sale of his non-Mexican assets. Therefore, it must be deduced that Santa Anna was able to sell La Rosita at this desperate time in order to survive for the remaining eight years of his life.

Final Years

President Juárez died on 9 July 1872 and was succeeded by President Sebastian Lerda de Tejarda, who finally relented and allowed Santa Anna to return; however, his properties and his pension were not to be restored. Thus, on 27 February 1874, a moribund, broken and destitute, 80-year-old Santa Anna landed in Veracruz. He was greeted by only one friend and a few family members, including his young wife, Dolores, who sheltered him and cared for him at her mansion in Mexico City. He died a disgraced pauper two years later, on 21 June 1876, forgotten by most, despised by many, and hated by a few. He had one consolation: he had outlived, by four years, Benito Juárez—his nemesis, his *bête noire*, his mortal enemy, the one responsible for his ruin and disgrace.

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Most of the information for this work was gathered from the 1860 Census for Charlotte Amalia, the Sanct Thomæ Tidende, the New York Times and a book titled “Santa Anna of Mexico” by Will Fowler, published by the University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London, 2007, pp. 501.

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- Page 13, N° 6 Snegle Gade, from “The 3 Quarters of the Town of Charlotte Amalie” by Edith deJongh Woods (Mapes Monde, Editor & Publisher, 1989)