

PREFACE

Our purpose in writing this volume is to provide the first complete and annotated publication of the reminiscences of nineteenth-century San Antonio native and San Jacinto veteran José Antonio Menchaca. The original manuscript for the first half of the reminiscences is no longer extant, though the material it contains has been published twice and is known to a number of historians and readers of Texas history. But to date many researchers are not even aware of the existence of the second half, as it has been available only in manuscript form at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. The somewhat deteriorated condition of that original manuscript, a recording of Menchaca's reminiscences toward the end of his seventy-nine years with the collaboration of an Anglo-American scribe, and the fact that variant versions of the first half of the reminiscences were published are just some of the challenges we faced in presenting Menchaca's testimony in a manner that is both as faithful as possible to his recollections while also helpful for modern readers. Thus a brief overview of the recording and publication history of Menchaca's reminiscences and the strategic choices we made in reproducing them is in order.

A portion of Menchaca's recollections was first published in serialized form in the San Antonio weekly the *Passing Show* in 1907 and was reprinted in 1937 by Frederick C. Chabot in a publication of the Yanaguana Society, a local history group of which Chabot was one of the founders. The latter edition has long been the only cited version of the known portion of Menchaca's text, which is usually referred to as his memoirs since the *Passing Show* titled the work "The Memoirs of Captain Menchaca" and Chabot followed suit in his Yanaguana Society edition by titling the book *Memoirs*. For the published first part of Menchaca's recollections, the title is not out of place, since the narrative focuses on events he relates covering the years from 1807 to 1836 in which he directly or indirectly participated. But the

second, previously unpublished part of the manuscript includes a number of observations and the recounting of legends that do not fit under the category of memoirs. Therefore, since the scope of Menchaca's narrative is broader than the people and events with which he was personally associated and covers a wide range of topics, it seems more appropriate to refer to the manuscript as his reminiscences.

The preparation of Menchaca's reminiscences for publication posed numerous challenges. First, there was the matter of the widely unknown version of the first half of the original manuscript. Until today the first half of Menchaca's work as it appeared in the version prepared by Chabot and published by the Yanaguana Society of San Antonio in 1937, *Memoirs*, was the only one widely available. It proved difficult to track down the version of this part first published in the *Passing Show*, in which the reminiscences were serialized between 22 June and 27 July 1907. Fortunately, we located a complete run in the Texana Collection of the San Antonio Public Library in clippings form. Second, there are differences between the *Passing Show* and Yanaguana Society versions, but no guidance exists as to which conforms more closely to the original document. Likewise, there is no guidance on the relationship between the unpublished second part, which begins mid-sentence, and the twice-published first part, since we do not know how much, if any, material may be missing. Third, there is the matter of how much Menchaca's collaborator, who actually wrote down his reminiscences, may have interjected himself. In particular, the reminiscences bounce between first- and third-person narrative. And, fourth, there is the matter of the draft nature of the document as a whole. Neither James P. Newcomb of the *Passing Show*, responsible for the first published version, nor Chabot, responsible for the Yanaguana Society version, attempted to produce a smooth edition that corrected the grammatical, orthographic, and factual problems in the original first half of the reminiscences, and the second-half manuscript is a very rough draft.

In the edited version of Menchaca's reminiscences presented here we attempt to give the modern reader a useable reconstruction that informs while preserving to the extent possible Menchaca's original intent. It is obvious on comparing the two available versions that Newcomb either was incapable of proofreading (he died a few months after the *Passing Show* version appeared) or lacked editorial control to proofread what appeared in the weekly installments. Chabot, however, appears to have gone beyond merely restoring what was missing in the *Passing Show* when he prepared the Yanaguana Society version. Thus for this volume we have selected the earlier, *Passing Show* version, which is presumably closer to the

original manuscript, as the governing document for the first part, but for this edition we have also restored a notable two-paragraph section from the Chabot version that appears to have been omitted from the *Passing Show* (along with a number of other phrases that appear to have been omitted from the *Passing Show* but that make the text more intelligible). We have marked these restorations by underlining the text and placing it within brackets in part 1 of the unedited version of the reminiscences; in the edited version we have simply made these editorial changes without explanatory notation.

Because the unpublished second part of the original, handwritten manuscript sustained some damage over the years, we have extrapolated the missing material as much as possible in the edited version, while using ellipses within brackets in the unedited version to indicate the gaps. Furthermore, while we have resolved grammatical, orthographic, and continuity issues in the edited version, we have presented the unedited narrative in a form that remains as close to the original as possible, including a number of underlined phrases. Therefore, we have forgone the use of *sic*, since the intent is to present the document as is. The result is that for the unedited version the first part is a literal transcription of the *Passing Show* version with the two paragraphs and other phrase insertions from the Chabot version added, while the second part is presented as a reproduction in type of the original handwritten manuscript, with the exception of the pagination and spacing.

Shifts from first- to third-person narrative in the reminiscences and sometimes-confusing references to the various parties involved in the action required standardization. Throughout the edited version of the reminiscences, wherever Menchaca refers to himself we have placed the reference in the first person to avoid confusion. As he employs the terms *American* and *Mexican* in a haphazard and sometimes anachronistic fashion, we have used the terms *republican* and *royalist* early in the first part to distinguish between those fighting for and against Mexican independence. Later in the edited reminiscences, where appropriate, we use the term *Tejanos* for the Hispanic population of Texas to distinguish them from Mexicans from elsewhere. We have retained the term *American* where it clearly refers to Anglo-American individuals, but we have changed it to *Texan* where the circumstances refer to both Anglo-Texans and Tejanos or to the pro-Texas independence forces and government.

We have checked Menchaca's statements of fact against the historical record, and in the edited version we have corrected names, places, and events either in the text or in the explanatory notes. To reduce the volume

of material in the citations, except where a note cites works in full for explanatory purposes, we have briefly cited references to works consulted and listed them in full in the bibliography. We refer in the notes to instances in which Menchaca's collaborator may have interjected himself. Consequently, we offer the reader a version that has been edited to make it readable and intelligible, with grammar and orthography made consistent according to current usage.

This project began with the call that Frank de la Teja put out to a group of colleagues and friends to assemble biographical essays on a number of Tejano leaders from the Mexican statehood and Texas War of Independence period for a conference to be held at Texas State University–San Marcos in October 2006. Among those responding to the call was Timothy Matovina, who wrote an essay on Antonio Menchaca that became part of the book that resulted from the conference, *Tejano Leadership in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas*. Subsequently we collaborated to compose a revised introductory essay that broadens the contribution on Menchaca that appeared in that book. We also prepared transcriptions for an edited version of Menchaca's reminiscences, a task for which Frank took on the leading role. Finally, we did additional investigative work to clear up numerous issues and undertook to edit the Menchaca manuscript into a seamless whole.

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RECOLLECTIONS OF A TEJANO LIFE

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