

3-1974

Documents Concerning Lemuel Dale Evans' Plan to Keep Texas in the Union in 1861

Thomas Schoonover

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Tell us how this article helped you.

Recommended Citation

Schoonover, Thomas (1974) "Documents Concerning Lemuel Dale Evans' Plan to Keep Texas in the Union in 1861," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 8.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol12/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Texas Historical Journal by an authorized administrator of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu.

DOCUMENTS CONCERNING LEMUEL DALE EVANS' PLAN
TO KEEP TEXAS IN THE UNION IN 1861.

by Thomas Schoonover

Several years ago Frank H. Smyrl in his excellent article, "Unionism in Texas, 1856-61," pointed out the scarcity of information about the life and career of that very important and active mid-nineteenth century Texas political figure, Lemuel Dale Evans.¹

The following five documents, from the William H. Seward Papers and the National Archives, will hopefully contribute toward a better understanding of Evans' role after secession and of his intense unionism. These letters reveal a plan for undermining the secessionist forces in Texas in order to regain that state, or at least the Mexican-Texas border area, for the Union. It is also possible that besides the unionist factor in the Evans plans, Secretary of State William H. Seward intended to use Evans' strength in Texas to extend the blockade of the Confederacy across the land and river area of the Rio Grande valley, thus almost totally isolating Texas and the Confederacy from the rest of the world.

Lemuel D. Evans to William H. Seward, National Hotel [Washington?], 18 April 1861.²

Dear Sir:

The revolutionary convention of Texas consummated the act of dissolution, by abolishing all State and Federal Authority—

The Legislature, the Lieut. Governor and other State and County officers abdicated their respective offices by the act of swearing allegiance to the Constitution and Government of the Confederate States.

There remains now no legitimate authority except the Governor — the Secretary of State — the Federal Judges, and perhaps a few State and County officers —

The citizens of the United States of Texas do now propose to re-organize their State Government, either under the general Law which prescribes the first Monday in August for the election of Members of Congress and of a Governor, Lieut. Governor and Members of the Legislature; and the first Monday in November for the assembling of Legislature —

On order the Authority vested in the Governor to order special elections and to convene the Legislature in special session [?], and if need be, under the law of self [preservation?] by the spontaneous action of the people [.] The plan of a peaceful election and organization must not be abandoned—

The crisis is upon us — Texas is now occupied by Confederate Troops — and I do not believe that the people can either hold an election or assemble their Legislature without the aid of the Federal Government —

I do therefore submit that the President place in the hands of Governor Houston the sum of thirty thousand dollars — to secure an election and reorganization of the State Government —

2 — The President call out one thousand volunteers in Texas — and have placed in hand of some agent, a sufficient sum to that end —

3 — Concentrate at Fort [Lawson?] and at Fort [Washington?] — and other [?] forts in the Indian Territory [say] ten thousand volunteers —

Thomas Schoonover is associated with the Department of History at the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

4. Prepare & have ready to the call of Texas a force sufficient to blockade the Ports of Galveston — Matagorda Bay and [Aransas?] — and if need be to seize and fortify points commanding these harbors —

Very Respectfully

William H. Seward to Lemuel D. Evans, Washington, 13 August 1861³

You have been appointed a special agent to watch and report upon the interests of the United States on the borders between Texas and Mexico. Your familiarity with them and especially with the region of country referred to render unnecessary any more specific instructions. To make yourself useful, great caution will be necessary in your intercourse with persons in that quarter. You will also be careful not to send any written communication to this Department except through the most trustworthy channel.

Your compensation will be at a rate of ten dollars a day from the time of your departure from this city. You will also be allowed your necessary travelling expenses, of which you will keep an account, which must be supported by vouchers when they can be obtained. It is to be understood, however, that the expense attending your abode in any one place for a longer period than one week is not to be considered a travelling expense.

The sum of five hundred dollars is now advanced to you on account of your expenses.

John C. Frémont to William H. Seward, Head Quarters, Western Department [St. Louis?], 4 September 1861⁴ (Personal)

My dear Sir,

Yours of the 19th was handed to me by the Hon. Mr. Evans, who was here with me at the same time with Judge Watts, of New Mexico. Agreeably to your desire I conferred fully with them and made such arrangements for cooperation and communication as is just now possible. They are undoubtedly both able to render efficient service and both seem to understand well the necessities of their respective States. Judge Watts I retained here for one day, without however retarding in any way his arrival in New Mexico. Judge Evans is so well known that it would be scarcely possible for him to reach Texas through the Mississippi Country. I endeavored to find a way for him through New Mexico, but his journey that way would be very laborious and almost equally unsafe. I therefore advised him to go by way of Tampico, whence he would have a good road of only five hundred miles and have an opportunity to ascertain what supplies and war munitions are being carried by the route to the Confederates.

In this Judge Evans agreed with me and accordingly left yesterday for Washington. All accounts from the South shew great activity and their recent movement indicate that the Confederates are now giving great attention to the Mississippi valley. At this moment I have just received a despatch from Cairo to the effect that gun boats clad with iron & better than ours have left Memphis and are making their way towards Cairo and that Cairo needs more guns. Their recent operation shew that better officers have recently been sent to the Memphis District. I would be glad to benefit sometimes by your leisure moments, if you can find any for a few lines, and am meantime yours truly,

Lemuel D. Evans to William H. Seward, Washington, 7 September 1861⁵

Sir

In execution of the trust confided to me, I proceeded to St. Louis, handed to General Fremont your letter, and explained to him the object of my mission.

On the first of September, General Fremont formed and submitted to me a plan for the military occupation of Texas by the last of November or first of December next; and stated to me that he would ask for an increase of forces sufficient to insure success. He also expressed a decided opinion in favour of an expedition by sea to co-operate with the land forces.

The presence of the enemy in South Missouri and New Mexico induced Genl. Fremont to advise my return to Washington, and submit that I be sent to Tampico in a Government Vesel. He thought the objects to be obtained of sufficient importance to justify this course. If however this does not accord with the interests of the Government — I will return to Missouri and wait the withdrawal or expulsion of the enemy from that State, so that I can get to Arkansas, where I feel well assured that I can find facilities of getting to Texas by one of several routes known to him; or take such other course as you may direct

Most Respectfully

Your obt. servt.

Lemuel D. Evans to William H. Seward, Washington, 3 March 1862⁶

Sir

General Scott, to whom you refered me in your verbal response to my letter of the 7th on September last, stated that it was, for certain reasons, inexpedient, at that time, to place a military force on the coast of Texas; and advised me to return to the Military Department of the West, and act there as circumstances might justify.

Upon my arrival in Missouri, I found it impracticable, from the events there transpiring, to put myself in communication with the Commander of that Department, until Gen. Hunter assumed the temporary command, and returned from Springfield to St. Louis; when I learned from him that no advance could be made during the winter months, for the protection of Texas.

Learning that Gen. Halleck, who was assigned to the command of that Department, would soon arrive in St. Louis, I remained to ascertain his views, which I also found to be similar to those which had been expressed by Genl. Hunter.

I then proceeded to Cincinnati, and passed over to the Military Post at Covington Kentucky, then in command of an officer recently from the Military Department of Texas, to satisfy myself in regard to the best way of communicating with that State. The result of that interview decided me to return to Washington, and renew my solicitations, for a force, to be sent by Sea, as none could go by land during the winter months.

In my interview with you, on returning to this City, I stated verbally the substance of the present note; when you refered me for all future military operations towards Texas, to Genl. McClellan, to whom you kindly gave me a note.

I need not detail the result of the interviews with Genl. McClellan

Being now satisfied that I can no longer render adequate service, under the Special Commission from the Department of State, dated 13th August 1861 and by your leave granted me Saturday last, I do hereby return to you the same.

I also beg to enclose a Statement of my account with the Department of State.

I have the Honor to be

Your Obt. Servt.

NOTES

¹Frank H. Smyrl, "Unionism in Texas, 1856-1861," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXVIII (Oct., 1964), 181-182. Additional biographical information about Evans can be found in John H. Reagan, *Memoirs with Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War* (Austin 1968), 62-65; Jewitte Harbert Davenport, *The History of the Supreme Court of the State of Texas* (Austin, 1917), 95-97; James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Texas* (St. Louis, 1885), 110-113; Walter Prescott Webb (editor), *The Handbook of Texas* (2 vols.; Austin, 1952), I, 576; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961* (Washington, 1961), 869; and Marvin D. Evans (compiler), *Evans History: Family Records, Personal Sketches* (Fort Worth, 1952), 26 for Lemuel D. Evans, but this book includes information about the history of the Evans family. The best book on this middle period, containing considerable information on Evans and Texas unionism, is Ernest Wallace, *Texas in Turmoil: The Saga of Texas, 1849-1875* (Austin, 1965), 31, 36, 39, 43, 132-138, 201. For additional information about Unionism in Texas, see Claude Elliott, "Union Sentiment in Texas, 1861-1865," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, L (April, 1947), 449-477; Floyd F. Ewing, "Origins of Unionist Sentiment on the West Texas Frontier," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book*, XXXII (Oct., 1956), 21-29; and Floyd F. Ewing, *West Texas Historical Association Year Book*, XXXIII (Oct., 1957), 58-70. Ocie Speer, *Texas Jurists, 1836-1936* (n.p., 1936), 67 has a photograph of Evans in the last years of his life.

²Lemuel Dale Evans to William H. Seward, [Washington?], April 18, 1861, William Henry Seward Papers, Rush Rhees Library, The University of Rochester. Permission to publish the four letters from the Seward Papers has been graciously and willingly granted by Robert L. Volz, Head, Department of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Archives, The University of Rochester Library. Brackets are used in these letters to indicate a word which is illegible completely or in part. Spelling, punctuation and capitalization have been preserved as in the original with a few very minor exceptions made for sake of clarity.

³William H. Seward to Lemuel D. Evans, Wash., August 13, 1861, in Special Agents, Volume 21, Record Group 59, The National Archives.

⁴John Charles Frémont to William H. Seward [St. Louis?], September 4, 1861, Seward Papers.

⁵Lemuel D. Evans to William H. Seward, Wash., September 7, 1861, Seward Papers.

⁶Lemuel D. Evans to William H. Seward, Wash., March 3, 1861, Seward Papers.