

Part Two:

RAVAGED NATION

*¡Cuánto gusto en un tiempo sentía
Al mirar esta rada espumosa,
¡Oh Granada! con cuanta alegría
Yo arribaba a tu playa arenosa!*

.

*Mas ahora . . . ¡qué miran mis ojos
A las faldas de aquellas colinas?
¡Un sarcófago inmenso ... ¡despojos ...
¡Un montón de cenizas y ruinas ...*

Juan Iribarren. *Al volver a Granada.*

7. "Good For Nothing Nicaraguenses"

The treaty of reconciliation signed at León on September 12, 1856, by General Máximo Jerez and Rev. Apolonio Orozco on the democratic side, and General Tomás Martínez and Don Fernando Guzmán for the legitimists, stipulated that Don Patricio Rivas would continue as Provisional President during the war against Walker. At the end of the war, elections would be held in accordance with the 1838 Constitution. The electoral process would begin eight days after the filibusters were expelled from Nicaragua.¹

President Rivas set in motion the electoral process as soon as Walker left the country. His May 6, 1857 decree called for primary elections on the third Sunday in June, the district elections on the second Sunday in July, and the departmental elections on the last Sunday of the same month. The Legislative Chambers would meet at Managua on August 15th, and thereupon the constitutionally elected President (called *Director Supremo*) would take office.

Complications disrupted the process from the onset. On May 5, Salvadoran General Gerardo Barrios arrived in León at the head of an army of 1,800 men, too late to fight Walker in Rivas, though just in time to influence the ensuing power struggle in Nicaragua. Simultaneous with President Rivas's electoral decree, the Salvadoran general issued a Proclamation and invited prominent Nicaraguans to meet with him at León

¹See Book 4, p. 114.

on May 15th in order to unite all political parties and to nominate one single "fusion" candidate for the forthcoming elections.²

Barrios was an old friend of the Leonese *Calle Real* radicals, a faction whose popularity had waned for having brought Walker into the country. Legitimist leaders saw the Salvadoran general's intervention as an attempt to wrest power from Granada and to install a government friendly to the *Calle Real* party. However, when on May 17 the Barrios meeting nominated Juan Bautista Sacasa, a moderate Leonese, for President, legitimist General Fernando Chamorro went along with the rest in the interests of peace, expressing his personal (though not his party's) support for Sacasa.

With his successor thus chosen in a smoke filled room in the city of León, President Rivas, on May 19, issued another decree, accelerating the mechanics of a canvass that seemed superfluous: primary elections would be held on the first Sunday in June, the district elections on the third Sunday, and the departmental elections on the fourth Sunday of the same month. Don Juan Bautista Sacasa's inaugural would take place on July 1st.

Don Fernando Guzmán, Don Fulgencio Vega and fellow legitimist bigwigs, assembled amid the ruins of their homes in Granada, and adamantly rejected the nomination of Sacasa. Faced with the large Salvadoran army in León, they preferred incorporation into Costa Rica rather than subservience to their irreconcilable *Calle Real* enemies. On May 21st, they addressed a letter to General José María Cañas, in Rivas, asking him whether he was empowered to accept the annexation of the Meridional and Oriental departments of Nicaragua or whether the approval of the government at San José was

²"Proclama del General Barrios," *Boletín Oficial* [León], 5/6/1857, p.3, c.3.

needed.³

Cañas answered on May 26 that the approval of his government was required; however, by the time his letter arrived in Granada, the situation had changed in León and the legitimist leaders were no longer thinking of annexation to Costa Rica.

At noon on May 23d, General Víctor Zavala, the commander of the Guatemalan forces in Nicaragua, violently entered the Government House in León, fully armed and accompanied by his staff, smacking the sentry with his sword. He then proceeded to insult President Rivas and his Ministers, even going so far as to offer threats of hanging everyone.⁴

Zavala and his forces left immediately for Chinandega, on their way to Guatemala. The Salvadoran army unexpectedly left León a few days later: Barrios hurried back home when the authorities at Cojutepeque discovered that he was plotting to overthrow President Rafael Campos. As Barrios departed, the Sacasa candidacy collapsed. Consequently, on May 28 President Rivas issued another decree, postponing the elections to the original dates prescribed on May 6.

By then, such electoral decrees seemed irrelevant, because with León no longer protected by the Salvadoran army, the Nicaraguan power struggle was rapidly being decided by bullets rather than ballots. Early in June, the legitimist high command in Granada ordered its forces under General Tomás Martínez to advance and occupy Managua, while the Leonese

³Guerra 4754, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica; Paul Woodbridge, *Los Contratos Webster-Mora*, (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Costa Rica, 1967), p. 71.

⁴Zavala demanded the immediate return of 130 muskets and other weapons that he had lent to the Nicaraguans, but his extraordinary conduct was attributed to pre-existent ill-feeling towards President Rivas and his Ministers, and to the influence of liquor (Pérez, *Obras*, p. 338; *Boletín Oficial* [León], 5/28/1857, pp. 5-8; "Interesting from Central America," *New York Herald*, 7/28/1857, p.1, c.1.

under General Jerez geared up for a recrudescent civil war.

But neither Martínez nor Jerez wanted war, and both arranged for peace talks to start before spilling any blood. Legitimist and Leonese commissioners met at the Martínez camp in Managua for several days, without reaching an agreement. The talks broke down on June 11 in the evening, when a legitimist ultimatum was rejected by the Leonese.

At sunrise, next morning, Jerez called on Martínez. An eyewitness, Jerónimo Pérez, recorded the scene:

. . . At 6 o'clock next morning, the León and Granada commissioners were getting ready to depart for home. Don Ignacio Padilla and myself were with Martínez in his room. Suddenly, Jerez came in with Don Evaristo Carazo, who explained to Martínez that the Leonese general had a proposal for him. Jerez was very excited, and turning to Martínez, said:

- "General, Do you have confidence in your party?"

- "Yes, I have."

- "Well, then, Would you like to assume power with me so that we may govern the Republic as joint dictators until we reorganize the country?"

- "Yes," answered Martínez, without hesitation, and immediately an agreement was drawn up in a few words, and signed by both generals.⁵

The June 12 Martínez-Jerez agreement was approved by the Rivas government on June 15, and Don Patricio Rivas stepped down from office on the 24th. As the dual dictators took power, foreign observers unanimously disapproved and forecast an unending civil war. A *New York Herald's* Nicaragua correspondent commented: "It is evident that these good for nothing Nicaraguenses are again quarrelling among

⁵Pérez, *Obras*, p. 592.

themselves, not heeding the warning of Walker's last visit, nor dreading another one. If Nicaragua could be blotted out from the map, with her worthless population, the world would be the gainer, especially if an interoceanic channel was left in the place she now so discredibly fills."⁶

The government press in Costa Rica was equally harsh, plainly portraying the end of Nicaragua as an independent nation:

Nicaragua cannot exist if left to herself, for in her bosom the deleterious social forces have made such ravages that her existence is impossible without a vigorous element to insure peace and order, repressing with a strong arm implacable passions, and mending the errors which have covered with mortiferous ulcers that disjointed and heterogeneous body which has already begun to gangrene.

To believe that by proclamations, discourses, diplomatic notes, juntas and interregnums, unrealizable conventions and governments incapable of governing, in consequence of their vicious constitutions, and their fundamental instability—a body which has arrived at this extremity may be reorganized and inspired with new life, is the same as to be credulous enough to believe that a quasi-corpse can be recalled to life by cold lenitives, or that the weak voice of a mortal may have the divine power of the Savior who resuscitated Lazarus.⁷

In fact, a *New York Herald* correspondent had previously reported from San José that arrangements were in the making

⁶"Interesting from Central America," *NY Herald*, 7/28/1857, p.1, c.1.

⁷"La venida del vapor," *Crónica de Costa Rica*, 7/4/1857, p.1, c.1.

for the partition of Nicaragua among its neighbors.⁸ Other advices from León and Greytown, and from the *London Post* and *New York Tribune* correspondents, transmitted the same news. The latter went on to explain how Nicaragua was to be carved up and extinguished:

To Costa Rica will be annexed the territory on both sides of the San Juan River, and the territory between the Lake Nicaragua and the Pacific, as far north as Masaya; Chontales will be assigned to Honduras, to which country, by its situation and geographical peculiarities, it naturally belongs; and the remainder will be given to San Salvador, which, more than either of the other States, needs territory, on account of the comparatively dense population and limited extent of soil, being, as she is, by far the smallest of the Central American Republics.⁹

Those dire predictions proved to be wrong. To begin with, neither El Salvador nor Honduras were out to acquire territory, and the Costa Rican expansionist designs did not extend beyond the Transit/Canal region. Moreover, after Martínez and Jerez took power in June, peace reigned in Nicaragua; and as the specter of civil war rapidly receded, the "good for nothing Nicaraguenses" pretext for dismembering the country likewise disappeared.

⁸"Additional Intelligence," *New York Herald*, 4/30/1857, p.4, c.4.

⁹"The question so long pending," *N.Y. Tribune*, 3/30/1857, p.4, c.2.

8. Covetous Hermaniticos

On December 4, 1856, Costa Rican President Juan Rafael Mora (and co-signer Foreign Minister Lorenzo Montúfar), granted W.R.C. Webster a concession for 75 years of the Nicaragua Transit route.¹

On January 12, 1857, Montúfar notified the Rivas government at León that Costa Rica had made an agreement with Webster, and asked Nicaragua to adhere to it. Should Nicaragua refuse to sign, "Costa Rica would be forced to uphold it by force, for which she would not abandon her advantages in the river and lake." Montúfar pointed out that, by becoming a partner, Nicaragua would share in the profits, after discounting the one million dollar war loan that Costa Rica contracted with Webster. Finally, Gen. José María Cañas (President Mora's brother-in-law) was appointed "Special Commissioner to deal with this matter with the Cabinet at León."²

Cañas, however, did not deal with the matter with the Rivas government, and when the war ended, in May, Nicaragua had not adhered to the Webster contract.

¹See Book 4, p. 205; also pp. 201-204, 214, 286. A copy of the contract, held in a Costa Rican "private archive," appeared in Paul Woodbridge, *Los Contratos Webster-Mora*, (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Costa Rica, 1967), p. 45.

²Guerra 4654, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

Webster and his secretary, Anderson, arrived in New York on January 28th, 1857. They pretended to be commissioners duly empowered by Presidents Mora and Rivas, and proceeded to sell Mora's grant to the highest bidder. They had many applicants: there was "a clique headed by Simeon Draper, one headed by Moses Taylor, one by Vanderbilt, another by Morgan & Garrison, and one by George Law, and we believe about half a dozen others, all bidding against each other for the coveted prize."³

The only problem was that nobody offered cash for the grant. Vanderbilt would pay for it in the claims of the old Accessory Transit Company against Nicaragua, and the services of Spencer to Costa Rica. Morgan & Garrison would pay for it with their claim against Costa Rica for breaking up their property held under the Walker grant to Randolph. Draper and others offered to pay for it out of the prospective profits. Consequently, weeks went by in which Webster failed to raise a single dollar for President Mora in Wall street.

In the process, Anderson learned that his fellow commissioner was a crook and broke up with him. And when Spencer arrived in New York, on March 28, from Costa Rica, he too broke up with Webster when the latter couldn't pay him his reward for capturing the steamers. The three agents then went back to Mora, each on a separate mission.

Spencer was Vanderbilt's agent. He traveled from New York on May 5, via Aspinwall, Greytown and the Sarapiquí river, and arrived at San José at the end of May. Vanderbilt wanted Costa Rica to give him possession of the Nicaragua Transit Company steamers, but since he offered no cash, Mora refused to do it and Spencer returned empty-handed to New York.

Webster had become the agent of Morgan & Garrison. He

³"Money Market," *New York Herald*, 3/2/1857, p.5, c.3.

went to Costa Rica in June, in company with Israel Chapman Harris (Charles Morgan's son-in-law). He traveled via Panama and Puntarenas. When he arrived at San José, on June 29, his grant had lapsed for having failed to give Mora the initial installment of the loan in the time prescribed.

Anderson was Simeon Draper's agent. Although he left New York before his rival, he traveled on a slower vessel to Puntarenas. When he arrived at San José, on July 5, Webster & Harris were already negotiating a new grant with Mora. Anderson entered his bid, but his good reputation and valuable connections in Costa Rica were no match for Webster's cunning. Consequently, on July 14 President Mora granted Webster & Harris a concession for 50 years of the Nicaragua Transit route. Among their obligations, the grantees promised to advance the Costa Rican government \$250,000 on or before September 25th, and additional installments thereafter for a total of \$500,000.⁴

Of course, President Mora had no authority from the owner, Nicaragua, to make any such grants. But, for the first time in history, in 1857 the Costa Rican flag waved sovereign over the coveted prize: at the Punta de Castilla (or Punta Arenas) spit of land that housed the transit terminal across the bay from San Juan del Norte, at Castillo, at Fort San Carlos, at Tortuga, and aboard the river and lake steamers. Having gained possession of the route, the President, his brother José Joaquín, and his brother-in-law José María Cañas, set to work to permanently incorporate the Nicaragua transit/canal territory into the Costa Rican domain. It then appeared that the "good for nothing Nicaraguenses" would make it easy for them.

During the final stages of the war, Cañas cultivated warm

⁴Caja Relaciones, 1857, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica; Paul Woodbridge, *Los Contratos Webster-Mora*, p. 59.

relations with Nicaraguan Generals Martínez and Jerez, both of whom (along with their countrymen) were very friendly and grateful to Costa Rica for its assistance against the filibusters. Cañas was thus able to reassure President Mora that he would arrange matters with Nicaragua to his convenience:

Evaristo [Carazo] . . . went to buy supplies at Granada and Masaya. He wrote to me about sending my Power [of Commissioner]. I promise you that I will arrange this matter to your convenience. The government, Jerez, and all influential Nicaraguans are so grateful to Costa Rica, that they will accept anything I may propose in order to please Costa Rica and to tighten bonds with her.⁵

Mora's aims, however, went beyond tightening bonds between neighbors, and Cañas didn't propose anything to the authorities at León. Rather, when the filibusters evacuated the country, "the existing Nicaraguan government was not taken into account, General Mora gave arms to Generals Martínez and Jerez, with insidious recommendations, and went home to Costa Rica leaving things in Nicaragua in a state of uncertainty." Cañas stayed in Rivas; his forces continued "in possession of the steamers and held on to Castillo, occupying it without any kind of understanding with Nicaragua, even after the war against the filibusters had ended."⁶

At the end of May, when Granada leaders spoke of annexation to their neighbor, and Nicaragua rushed towards

⁵ José María Cañas to Juan Rafael Mora (San Jorge, 2/16/1857), Guerra 9271, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

⁶ "Official Report to the Constituent Assembly on the Events leading to the Current Situation between Costa Rica and Nicaragua," *Gaceta de Nicaragua*, 1/9/1858, p.4, c.2.

a recrudescent civil war, Costa Rica appeared on the verge of crowning its expansionist drive. During the impending bloodbath between León and Granada, Costa Rica would have felt justified to officially annex the Transit/Canal route, at the Nicaraguans own request, as it had done with Guanacaste. Therefore, throughout May, Cañas simply waited, patiently watching the evolving scene from his post in Rivas.

Cañas finally went to Managua and opened negotiations with Nicaragua after the June 12 Martínez-Jerez agreement had dissolved the specter of civil war. In a goodwill gesture for the talks, he removed his Costa Rican garrison from Fort San Carlos and allowed a Nicaraguan resident Customs agent into Castillo. At Managua, he negotiated with Nicaraguan Commissioner Gregorio Juárez, appointed by the duumvirate.

Commissioner Cañas had been instructed and empowered by his government to obtain three things: (1) Nicaragua's approval and ratification of the December 4, 1856 Mora-Webster Contract; (2) Nicaragua's permission for immediately establishing a temporary Mora-Webster transit route between Virgin Bay and San Juan del Sur, pending the opening of the permanent route to Salinas Bay; (3) agreement on a definitive boundary line between Nicaragua and Costa Rica.⁷

On examining the Mora-Webster contract presented by Cañas, Commissioner Juárez noticed that it began with Article 11. Commissioner Cañas was at a loss to explain why the first ten articles had been omitted in the copy sent by the Costa Rican government for Nicaragua's approval. Consequently, on July 6, both commissioners agreed to suspend negotiations on that point, pending receipt of "additional instructions"

⁷Guerra 4654, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

from their governments.⁸

Cañas and Juárez then elaborated and signed a "Treaty of Limits" and a "Treaty of Peace and Confederation" between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, both of which were subsequently ratified by the government at Managua. Such agreements, however, turned out to be a sham: at San José, Mora instantly rejected both treaties and didn't deign to send them to the Costa Rican Legislature for ratification. Instead, on August 5, he told Cañas to secure without delay Nicaragua's approval of his July 16th transit grant to Webster-Harris. Should Nicaragua refuse to comply, Cañas was to break up the talks and "depart, making a restrained but strong protest."⁹

Simultaneously, Mora and Cañas tried to lure Vanderbilt into helping them. Early in August, Cañas sent his aide-de-camp, W. P. Caycee, to New York, with a proposal to the Commodore.¹⁰ The scheme involved creating a new political organization embracing the districts of Rivas, Guanacaste, and the San Juan River, to be achieved with Vanderbilt's aid, who would in turn receive a lucrative Transit grant from the new nation. It goes without saying that the contemplated "Isthmus Nation" was an illusion, a transparent artifice designed to convert the Nicaraguan Transit/Canal route into the Costa Rican domain.

Vanderbilt rejected the Costa Rican scheme outright and sent a counterproposal to Cañas. According to Scroggs:

Vanderbilt advised against this plan on account of

⁸Copia de Acta firmada en duplicado por José María Cañas y Gregorio Juarez [sic] Comisionados especiales. Managua, 6 de julio de 1857. Caja de Relaciones, 1857, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

⁹Guerra 4654, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica.

¹⁰Col. W. P. Caycee served in the Legitimist army during the 1854-55 civil war; he joined Walker (see Book 4, pp. 104, 189, 235, 236); and he enrolled in the Costa Rican army after the capitulation at Rivas.

the sparse population in the region to be embraced within the new State, but urged Cañas to place the steamers in his (Vanderbilt's) possession and allow him to reopen the Transit, and assured him that he would meet with every encouragement in this step from the United States, as the administration at Washington had made known its intention to protect any government opening the Transit. After securing this object Cañas was to have himself designated as minister from both Nicaragua and Costa Rica and come to Washington to replace Irisarri, who had been made the tool of speculators.¹¹

But while Cañas was working out a deal with Vanderbilt, the "speculators" (that is to say, Joseph L. White), had already secured the support of the administration at Washington for a different arrangement which left both the Commodore and Costa Rica out in the cold. White schemed for control of the Nicaragua Transit in conjunction with H.G. Stebbins, a fellow New York capitalist.

Vanderbilt was the old Accessory Transit Company. At the election of officers during the annual meeting, early in May, some 60,000 shares of stock were voted for the ticket prepared by the Commodore. His son-in-law, James M. Cross, became President, another son-in-law, Daniel B. Allen, Senior Director; and the other directors were also Vanderbilt men. The old Accessory Transit Company had thus become "a complete consolidation of the house of Vanderbilt."¹²

Vanderbilt was in no hurry to reopen the Nicaragua route, for he was getting \$40,000 a month from the Pacific Steamship Company as long as Nicaragua remained closed. By May, 1857,

¹¹William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, p. 355.

¹²"Costa Rica and the House of Vanderbilt," *New York Herald*, 5/6/1857, p.4, c.3.

he had pocketed \$520,000 on that account, besides additional profits as co-owner of the Panama line.¹³ His main interest was to regain possession of the lake and river steamers in order to keep others from reopening the Nicaragua transit.

White had parted ways with Vanderbilt by joining the Morgan-Garrison camp in 1853, and he did not collaborate with the Commodore in 1857. Instead, he devised a separate scheme utilizing his old Nicaragua Canal Rights shares which were then worthless and hence unsalable. But by teaming up with New York capitalist H.G. Stebbins, White quietly picked up additional stock at bargain prices in Wall street. By May 20th, he had bought all the available stock, paying as high as \$150 for shares which had originally sold for \$3,700 in 1852.¹⁴

White then befriended don Antonio José de Irisarri, a Guatemalan career diplomat whom President Patricio Rivas had appointed to replace Padre Vijil as Nicaragua's Minister in Washington. Irisarri as Minister Plenipotentiary representing Nicaragua, and Stebbins as President of the American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company, signed on June 19th, 1857 a Transit contract by which the company agreed to pay Nicaragua \$1.50 for every adult and \$0.75 for every child transported across the country. Sent to Managua, the contract was ratified by the Martínez-Jerez government on July 27th.

There were then four leading contenders for the Nicaragua Transit route: Vanderbilt's Accessory Transit Company, Stebbins & White's Canal Company, Webster & Harris (Morgan & Garrison) with their Costa Rican grant, and George Law without a grant but counting on a Walker victory. They all

¹³"Money Market," *New York Herald*, 6/10/1857, p.5, c.4; "Commercial Matters," *New York Tribune*, 5/29/1857, p.8, c.1; Book 3, pp. 272-274.

¹⁴"Commercial Matters," *New York Tribune*, 5/20/1857, p.8, c.3; Book 3, p. 97.

lobbied in Washington for the administration's support.

At first, Law seemed to have the upper hand at the capital. When "filibuster commissioners" Pierre Soulé and Col. Slatter showed up in Washington, early in May, "conferring with the government in regard to Nicaragua" in conjunction with George Law, the press reported that Soulé received "comforting assurances from high quarters of indirect aid in his filibustering movements."¹⁵ The *Delta* commented:

. . . "Shoot an arrow in the direction of the one that is lost," says the adage, "and you may recover both." George Law having more arrows left in his quiver than Messrs. Morgan, Garrison & Co., may be willing to make the venture--perhaps.

We are convinced that a partnership organised on right principles between the military, or filibuster element and commerce--that is between an army of liberation or regeneration and a strong and stable steamship or other commercial interest--would succeed in the conquest of our India in Central America. Such a partnership has not yet existed. We have had only rival steamship companies and rival speculators cutting each other's throats, and finally cutting the throat of Nicaragua--destroying the prize rather than see it pass into any hands but their own.

If the allies succeed, it is likely they too will quarrel over the spoils; the hour of victory may be the beginning of their weakness; and that is the hour, when they are most off their guard, that a blow could be most effectually struck to save Nicaragua from annihilation. A hint to the wise is sufficient.¹⁶

¹⁵"The Latest News," *NY Herald*, 5/13/1857, p.6, c.6; 5/15, p.6, c.6.

¹⁶"Nicaragua Movements," *New York Herald*, 5/14/1857, p.1, c.3.

The quarrel continued. Law's fortunes declined upon the return of the Fallen Hero. Garrison had an interview with President Buchanan early in June, seeking the administration's support of his transit line. The press reported that Buchanan was noncommittal. Vanderbilt then wrote to the President, "demanding to know what are his intentions," and visited Washington "to get the administration to intercede in his behalf in reference to Nicaraguan affairs." He failed: "The administration informed him that they at present have determined not to interfere with his quarrel with Walker or the New York Commodores."¹⁷

White also went to Washington to win the administration over to his side. In private conferences with Secretary of State Lewis Cass, White, with his usual tact and shrewdness, succeeded where the others had failed.¹⁸ From then on, the State Department collaborated to advance White's plans by specifically doing two things:

1. Cass opened negotiations with Irisarri for a U.S.-Nicaragua treaty protecting the Stebbins & White transit grant.¹⁹

¹⁷"The Latest News," *New York Herald*, 6/29/1857, p.4, c.6; "Commodore Vanderbilt and the Filibusters," *Ibid.*, 6/22/1857, p.5, c.1.

¹⁸On July 6, 1857, Cass confided to Costa Rican envoy Luis Molina that he had held several conferences with Joseph L. White on the Canal and Transit Company's claim, and had been favorably impressed by White's exposition and knowledge of the subject (Molina's account of his July 6, 1857 meeting with Cass, Caja Relaciones, Archivo Nacional, San José, Costa Rica).

¹⁹President Pierce recognized President Patricio Rivas in May, 1856, when he received Padre Vijil as his Minister in Washington. But during Walker's spurious presidency at Granada, Pierce unjustifiably withdrew his recognition of President Rivas and refused to accept Irisarri, appointed by Rivas as the Padre's successor. The situation remained unchanged under President Buchanan, who refused to recognize the Rivas administration or the Martínez-Jerez government after Walker had been expelled from Nicaragua. Nonetheless, Irisarri had diplomatic contacts with Cass because he was the accredited Guatemala and El Salvador Minister at Washington.

2. Cass notified Costa Rica that it was the opinion of the United States that the jurisdiction of the entire transit route belonged to Nicaragua and ought to remain undivided; that Costa Rica was precluded by her previous declarations from converting the war against Walker into a war of conquest; and that the Costa Rica-Nicaragua boundary ought to be restored to the condition in which it was before that war, that is, leaving the Republic of Nicaragua in the exclusive possession and jurisdiction of the transit route.

Besides notifying Don Luis Molina in Washington, on July 30th Cass instructed U.S. Special Agent William Carey Jones to personally convey that message to both the Costa Rican government at San José and the Nicaraguan government at Managua, where Jones had been sent by President Buchanan on a fact-finding mission in May.²⁰

Molina went to work, actively laboring in Washington for recognition of the Costa Rican pretensions to the Nicaragua transit line. His attitude was so hostile, that, on October 30th, Irisarri apprised the Managua Foreign Office, as follows:

Mr. Molina has revealed himself on every occasion extremely hostile to Nicaragua, as if Nicaraguan independence were contrary to Costa Rican interests and as if those interests could not be reconciled with those of Nicaragua. For Mr. Molina, Nicaragua has no men capable of governing the country, and Nicaraguans ought to be governed by Costa Ricans. This gentleman could very well serve Costa Rica, without showing such great hostility against Nicaragua; and it pains me that I have been obliged to counter in this country the efforts of an agent of a Central American republic, in a manner that

²⁰ Lewis Cass to William Carey Jones, Washington, July 30, 1857 (William R. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, vol. 4, p. 95).

must be countered those of an agent of our bitterest enemy.²¹

Molina labored in vain, for he could not prevail over White at the State Department. On the other hand, U.S. Special Agent Jones could not prevail over President Mora at San José. He couldn't even personally convey to Mora or his Foreign Minister the message from Cass and was forced to do it through an intermediary, the Costa Rican Minister of War, Rafael G. Escalante.²²

Jones appeared to be qualified for his mission to Central America: he had figured as a prominent member in the ranks of the democratic party; he was a lawyer, fluent in Spanish; he had translated into English the Mexican Colonization Laws, and had successfully defended John C. Frémont's extensive Mariposa claim in the California courts; he, like Frémont, was the son-in-law of Senator Thomas Hart Benton. But Jones was also famous for excessive drinking, and the press attributed the failure of his mission to his intemperance.²³

When Cañas learned that the government at Managua had ratified the Irisarri-Stebbins transit contract, he directed an

²¹ José Dolores Gámez, *Historia de Nicaragua*, (Managua: Tipografía de "El País," 1889), p. 705.

²² William Carey Jones to Lewis Cass, Puntarenas, Costa Rica, September 5, 1857 (William Carey Jones Correspondence, Special Agents 1855-1858, National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

²³ For example, two items:

"Our Panama Correspondence. Panama, June 18, 1857. The *Decatur*, Captain Thatcher, left on the 7th for Punta Arenas, with an agent from the United States to the Costa Rican government. Merchants here are trembling for the probable rise in the liquor market of that spunky little republic." *New York Herald*, 6/29/1857, p.1, c.1.

"Wm. Carey Jones, secret agent of Mr. Buchanan to Central America was at Granada. His mission can not be any great secret now, however, as Tom Edwards, who roomed with him, at San José, kept the keys to his trunks, and is babbling his instructions in every bar-room in Costa Rica." *San Francisco Bulletin*, 11/5/1857, p.1, c.2.

angry protest on August 15th, to the Nicaraguan Minister of Foreign Affairs, accusing Nicaragua of bad faith, and left for San José. Having failed to secure the owner's signature on the Mora grant to Webster, Costa Rica then decided to seize the whole transit line by force, at any cost.

On September 8th, Capt. George F. Cauty, Costa Rican Army commander of the lake and river steamers, arrived at San José, summoned from the river for precise briefing by Mora and Cañas. On the 17th he received instructions to lay siege and capture Fort San Carlos. He then returned to Castillo to command military operations on the river and lake against Nicaragua.

On September 18th, Costa Rican Foreign Minister Joaquín Bernardo Calvo wrote a letter peremptorily notifying Nicaragua that Col. Cauty had been ordered to take possession of Fort San Carlos for Costa Rica. Cañas left San José that day, on an "urgent, special mission" to Managua.²⁴ He sailed from Puntarenas, for San Juan del Sur, on the steamer *Columbus*, on September 22d. William Carey Jones was a fellow passenger.

Nicaragua was in the midst of an election. The balloting for presidential electors was scheduled for September 27, and the electors would meet on October 11 to choose the new President. Martínez was favored to win easily, but Mora's mouthpiece in San José confidently predicted that civil war would soon break out in Nicaragua, "whether there is an election or not."²⁵ Mora's newspaper also proclaimed that there was no longer any filibuster threat: Walker was finished, for he had failed to gather needed resources in the

²⁴"Ayer á las seis," *Crónica de Costa-Rica*, 9/19/1857, p.2, c.1.

²⁵*Ibid.*

South, and "Central America is now free from Walker."²⁶

Under those circumstances, it seemed quite safe for Costa Rica to make war on its neighbor.

Cañas' visit to Nicaragua was short. From Rivas he went to Granada and then to Masaya, which was the temporary seat of the government, but nothing transpired about his "special mission." The only thing Jones could learn is that Cañas bought large amounts of provisions and supplies for Castillo, loaded them on the *San Carlos*, and sent them to Cauty. Cañas then retraced his steps and returned home on the *Columbus*, landing at Puntarenas on October 6th.

Cauty left Castillo on the *Ogden* on September 28 and cruised upriver. He waited on board, off Fort San Carlos, for the provisions and supplies from Cañas which arrived on October 6th. Thereupon, without a declaration of war or preliminaries of any kind, he started hostilities.

First, Cauty expelled the Nicaraguan Customs agent at Castillo. Next, on October 15th he laid siege to Fort San Carlos, demanding its surrender to Costa Rica. Sixty Nicaraguan soldiers under Col. Segundo Cuaresma held the fort; Cauty's steamers controlled river and lake, in effect blockading Chontales, Rivas, and Granada. The government at Managua reacted with the following decree on October 19th:

The Supreme Government of the Republic of Nicaragua to its inhabitants,

Considering that the deference observed by the Government of the Republic has been insufficient to restrain the designs of the Government of Costa Rica and the hostile operations which, with a view of accomplishing the expropriation of the river San Juan, the lake, and the isthmus between San Juan del Sur and La

²⁶"Pocos son los periódicos," *Ibid.*, 9/23/1857, p.2, c.1.

Virgen, that Government has put in execution, in order that the whole transit line may be under its authority, . . .

Has determined to decree and does decree:

Art. 1. Nicaragua accepts the war which the Government of Costa Rica makes against her, and will vindicate her rights outraged perfidiously by the course of that Government. . . .²⁷

Meanwhile, elections had been held on schedule throughout the country just before the breaking of hostilities with Costa Rica, and Nicaragua soon had its first constitutional government since 1854: the Constitutional Assembly convened at Managua on November 9th, 1857; Tomás Martínez, the virtually unanimous choice of the electors, was inaugurated President of the Republic on November 15th.

And this time there was no civil war, as Martínez and Jerez led the army together to defend the transit line at Rivas.

²⁷ Decree No. 139. English translation in William Carey Jones' November 2, 1857 dispatch to Lewis Cass (William Carey Jones Correspondence, Special Agents 1855-1858, National Archives, Washington, D.C.).



General Tomás Martínez



General Máximo Jerez