

GLAMOROUS WERE THE OLDEN DAYS IN THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE

San Antonio Express
Sunday, August 20, 1936

by Albert Curties

Old documents, precious heirlooms in silver and diamonds, a gold-velvet-covered book tracing the genealogy of Governor Antonio Cordero y Bustamante, who ruled in San Antonio from 1806 to 1810, and letters from the former King of Spain, the Spanish ambassador, Thomas J. Rusk, brigadier-general commanding the Texan forces after the Battle of San Jacinto, and Spanish-written excerpts from the San Fernando archives, all these throw a new and interesting light on the Spanish Governor's Palace.

These documents, heirlooms and letters are in the possession of Miss Margaret Cassiano Smith and her brother, Charles Cassiano Smith, of 2717 North St. Mary's Street, who traces their lineage directly to the wife of Governor Cordero. This aristocratic lady, Dona Maria Gertrudis Perez, often called "La Brigaviella" (Mrs. Brigadier General), after the death of the governor, married Jose Cassiano, a Genoese of distinguished lineage. These are the great-grandparents of Miss Margaret Cassiano Smith and her brother, Charles Cassiano Smith. The wedding announcement of Lady Gertrudis' second marriage, refers to her as the widow of Governor Cordero, and reads in part as follows: "viuda en primeras nupcias del Governador D. Antonio Cordero y Bustamante." (in English it says: Widow from her first marriage to Governor Don Antonio Cordero y Bustamante.) This important document was found in the records of the archives by the Most Rev. J. M. Preciado, former rector of the San Fernando Cathedral, and now bishop of Colon, Panama.

Another historical point concerning the Spanish Governors' Palace is also cleared up by another document. Frequently San Antonians have heard stories of "barrels of silver" in the Palace. They have lifted questioning eyebrows and shrugged doubting shoulders. Nevertheless this statement is actually true. Governor Cordero left San Antonio in 1810 for Durango, Mexico, where he died and is buried. In 1826, his widow, the Dona Maria Gertrudis Perez Cordero married Jose Cassiano. One child, Jose Ignacio Cassiano was the result of this union. A few days before the fall of the Alamo, (Mrs. Perez Cassiano passed on in 1832) Cassiano and his son removed to his ranch at Calaveras, Texas, and later went to New Orleans, taking with him the family silver, household goods and servants. He was guaranteed safe passage by the Texans, whose cause Cassiano had so generously favored, as will be shown later. While in New Orleans, Mr.

Cassiano sold the family silver for \$1,500. As he himself noted in a court document of 1838, by which time he had returned to San Antonio, this was the Palace silver. It had been bequeathed to the son by the former governor's wife (Casiano's later wife), and in exchange for it, Mr. Cassiano deeded to this son two leagues of land in San Antonio. Part of that interesting court records filed in Bexar while it was still part of the Texas Republic, reads as follows: "In consideration of the value of a lot of silver plate, which formerly belonged to my deceased wife, Maria Gertrudis Perez, and at her death descended legally to our son Ignacio Cassiano, and which I sold in New Orleans for the sum of \$1,500, etc, etc..." One can easily infer that the value of this silver far surpassed the amount received for it, and can only hope that it might have remained in the palace where it rightly belongs.

The most precious heirloom now in possession of Margaret Smith and her brother, Charles Cassiano Smith is the 22-year old tome containing the genealogy of Governor Cordero. This is a handsome book, with cedar board covers over which has been sewn bright crimson velvet, which through the years has faded to a Roman gold color. All of the pages are of ivory-colored parchment, and a hand-written with a quill pen, in a clear, large and bold Spanish script, which has remained remarkably legible through the years. Each page is outlined in a double border of red ink, and many of the precious pages have illumination work illustrations, recording the various coat of arms of the Cordero and related families. A separate two-page drawing shows the family tree: Each of the various groups are linked together by the green branches of a tree, which adds to the beauty of the drawing. This book has silver clasps and was originally encased in a silver portfolio.

Cordero, according to Miss Margaret Smith, means lamb, and one of the coat-of-arms shows a silver lamb on the shield, which is beautified with fanciful curlicues in color and surmounted by a helmet of steel topped off with curling plumes. This coat-of-arms is beautifully colored in silver, green, gold and maroon.

The ancient tome is an invaluable addition to the Palace credentials, and it is to be hoped that some day it will find its way to the Palace, there to be preserved like the famous Book of Kelis, under glass, to add its enjoyment to the thousands who find in the Palace one of the greatest showplaces in Texas.

Miss Margaret Smith also is the owner of four silver spoons and four silver forks, which once graced the Palace rooms. The heavy solid silver heirlooms are genuine, and bear out the initial C, which might easily be interpreted as belonging to either the Cordero or Cassiano families, but the full name of Cordero, stamped on the back. This leaves no doubt as to their authenticity.

Charles Cassiano Smith also owns a Palace heirloom. This is one of the diamond earrings once worn by the Lady Maria Gertrudis Perez Cordero, when she ruled as first lady of San Antonio. He has fashioned this precious heirloom into a ring, which he wears at the present time. The other earring is owned by his aunt, Mrs. Pauline Habner Cassiano. The Smiths are also in possession of the large topaz once owned by Governor Cordero. This topaz is as large as a silver dollar, and is heart-shaped, set in a frame of gold arrows. It is a family tradition that this topaz was worn by Governor Cordero in the hilt of his sword, together with other precious jewels, and it is also a further family tradition that this beautiful topaz was captured from the hilt of a Saracen's sword during the war with the Moors, many centuries ago.

It is authentically reported that Mrs. Cordero owned priceless jewelry, such as necklaces, earrings, brooches, bracelets, all set with precious stones. Her clothes, too, were of the latest mode of her day, imported from Spain. Even after much of the silver plate which once graced the Palace was sold, a document in 1842, recorded in the property of Jose Cassiano, reveals in his possession, besides a vast array of property holdings, such items as 4,000 silver dollars, one gold medallion, one set earrings with diamond stones, one pin with diamonds, one sentillo with diamonds, one rosary filled with gold, one chain with 13 gold links, two pairs of pearl bracelets, one fine string of pearls, two silver plates, 12 silver spoons, knives and forks, 22 silver coffee spoons, silver salt cellar and other costly items. Ignacio Cassiano, the son of Cassiano and Gertrudis Perez Cordero Cassiano, was also left large inheritance by his mother. This Ignacio Cassiano is the grandfather of the Smiths.

These items relative to jewels and property reveal clearly the richness and majesty of the Spanish Governor's Palace. In fact, Governor Cordero instituted what might be called the golden age in San Antonio, of which an ample record has been left by a contemporary. Lieutenant Zebulon Pike, wrote, ruled with such social grace and courtly polish that San Antonio was the most attractive place he had met in all of New Spain. (Pike's Peak in the state of Colorado is named after him.)

As described by Lieutenant Pike, Governor Cordero was one of the most popular of the Spanish governors. He was generous, diplomatic, gallant, courteous and sincerely attached to the service of his Spanish king. He spoke Latin and French, in addition to the musical syllables of Spain. He was a man of much reading, and had added much to the culture and charm of the San Antonio of his period. He was five feet 10 inches in height, possessed a military bearing, and was considered a strikingly handsome man. He had a fair complexion, blue eyes, and wore his hair turned back for "he was every inch the soldier."

At one of the dinner parties given in the Palace for Lieutenant Pike, Governor Cordero toasted the President of the United States, to which Lieutenant Pike, not to be outdone by the suave gallantries of the day, raised his wine-glass and toasted His Majesty the King of Spain. At another dinner party, the visiting guest-governor of De Leon, Mexico was toasted. This Don Simon de Herrera had once visited the United States, and had been presented to George Washington, of whom he now spoke in terms of highest veneration. Both governors, as Lieutenant Pike noted in his diary, were remarkably well-informed of political conditions in the United States. At that time, Spain was very suspicious of the United States, suspecting her of reaching out for the Spanish dominions, and that was why the borders were being so closely watched, and why Governor Cordero, an experienced soldier, was placed in command, ready for any eventuality.

Stories of the brilliancy, beauty and modernity of the Lady Maria Gertrudis Perez Cordero have come down to the present day. It is said that when Governor Cordero was absent on business, his wife took his place, conducted affairs of state in grand style, and reviewed the troops as expertly as Queen Isabela. Old-timers tell of her sitting on the side saddle on a beautiful horse, dressed in her green velvet riding habit with long train, and gold-braid-decorated military coat and plumed hat, reviewing the troops, receiving the military salutes and military honors.

This military review was a picturesque sight on Military Plaza, in front of the Palace, for these royalists. Spanish troops were dressed in military uniforms of short blue coat, blue velvet small-clothes open at the knee, red capes and cuffs, and broad-brimmed Spanish hats decorated with ribbons and plumes, the latter often bestowed on them by some fair señorita. These dashing officers and soldiers added much to the gayety and charm of the social life in the glamorous San Antonio of more than 100 years ago.

Madame Candelaria, who died some years ago and who is credited with seeing the fall of the Alamo, and according to some stories, of having waited on Colonel Bowie, as he lay sick in the Alamo, always told that she was brought when quite young, to "La Brigaviella," meaning by that term, "Mrs. Brigadier-General," and was accepted by her for the special post of making chocolate. Madame Candelaria always referred to "La Brigaviella," as being kind, lovable, distinguished and beautiful. It was also said by other old-timers who personally knew Miss Smith's great-grandmother, that she was loved by all and being rich in her own right she was very charitable to the poorer classes, and on one selected day of the week, Saturdays, she regularly dispensed alms and favors to them.

It is also reported that the Lady Maria Gertrudis Perez Cordero was a grand hostess at the levees and grand balls celebrated in the Palace, for the Palace was the heart of San Antonio in the those days. Here the society of many nations were feted, wined and dined. Here governors, alcaldes, impresarios, diplomats and ecclesiastics met, shaped the destinies of the city and state, and made history.

Other documents in possession of the Smiths reveal the active and patriotic part taken at the time of the fall of the Alamo by Don Jose Cassiano, the second husband of Dona Maria Gertrudis Perez Cordero. One of these letter reads as follows: "This is to certify that I have known Joseph Cassiano for four years and he has always been friendly disposed towards the Americans and in particular when many Americans were sick in 1836 after the storming of Bexar, he, Cassiano gave them whatever he had they wanted, and offered to Colonel Commandant Travis in my presence anything or all he might have that would be of service to the Texian cause," Samuel Williams.

Thomas J. Rusk also wrote several letters, attesting Texian friendship with Cassiano, favoring him with protection, and free importation of materials and goods into Texas.

Just before the fall of the Alamo, when the town was captured by the Texians late in 1835, all of the noted figures of that day used the Spanish Governors Palace as headquarters. Francis Johnson, who was then in command of the troops stationed in San Antonio was there. Captain Andrew Briscoe who was in command of a company at the Battle of San Jacinto and the First Chief Justice of Harris County, lived at the Palace for a time. F. M. Williams (three-legged Willie) and also Sam Highsmith, both noted and famous border men, who also participated in the battles around San Antonio and San Jacinto, also occupied the Palace. General Sam Houston, Moses Austin, Stephen Fuller Austin, Brigadier-General Thomas J. Rusk, R. W. Finly, R. A. Irich, Secretary of State; Sam Williams, Smith and Jones were also constant visitors to the Palace at one time or another. Later Travis and the Alamo Immortals visited here. At the time of the capture of San Antonio, the Palace was stormed; at the time it was used as an annex to the military barracks, located at approximately the site of the present city Hall on Military Plaza. The capture of the barracks helped to break the morale of the Mexicans, and led to the surrender of the town by General Cos.

Tracing the ancestry of the present-day Smith family in San Antonio, the genealogy records show that the only son of the Perez-Cassiano marriage, that is, Jose Ignacio Cassiano, married a Margarita Rodriguez, whose marriage was solemnized in this city. These were the grandparents of Margaret and Charles C. Smith. In this family, nine children were born, one of whom was

Gertrude Perez Cassiano, who married Captain Charles Phillips Smith. These last-named were the parents of the Smiths' and to this union seven children were born, of whom Miss Margaret and Charles Cassiano Smith are the only two remaining at the present time.

The marriage of Gertrudis Perez Cassiano and Captain Charles Phillips Smith was a brilliant event in the San Antonio calendar of 1867. The groomsmen were Lieutenants Dempsey, Plummer, Rafferty and Crosson, three of whom were 1865 West Point Academy graduate classmates of Captain Smith. The bridesmaids were Miss Mary Hewitt, who afterwards became the wife of Major Whittemore, Miss Margaret Castonal, who became Mrs. Charles Maruchau, Miss Romana Rodriguez, who was related to the wife of General Bullis, and Miss Margaret Perez Cassiano, the sister of the bride. The high noon banquet following the noon wedding at the St. Mary's Church, solemnized by Rev. Neraz, was a brilliant social event. At night, the bridal party celebrated with a splendid grand ball at the Menger Hotel, which enjoyed particularly a military flavor, for many of the San Antonio military were present.

The San Antonio Express carried a report of this important wedding, in its issue of November 27th, 1867, as follows: "In this city, on the morning of the 26th instant, at St. Mary's Church, Lieutenant Charles P. Smith, U. S. A., to Gertrude Cassiano, eldest daughter of Ignacio Cassiano, Esquire.

The happy couple left on the day of the marriage for the home of the Lieutenant in Pennsylvania. The Lieutenant has been for a long time Adjutant of the 35th Infantry, and is known by all who came in contact with him, as an urbane gentleman. His beautiful bride is a native of our city, and comes from pure Castillian stock, and one of the oldest and wealthiest families. We wish them a happy journey."

At one time, this Lieutenant Charles P. Smith was in command of the Arsenal in San Antonio. His commission as Lieutenant, signed by order of the President (1865) carries the signature of Andrew Johnson, while the appointment to captaincy was signed by U. S. Grant. Among the prized possessions of the present Smith children is a large album which contains all the photographs of the graduating class of West Point, 1865, showing Captain Smith among them with his fellow cadets, all dressed in picturesque uniforms with triple rows of brass buttons and ornamental braid. At the end of the book are contemporary (1865) photos of West Point. Charles Cassiano Smith also highly prized his father's West Point class ring. It is a heavy gold, set with a large bloodstone, and decorated on the sides with drawn bow and arrows, with the words: "The country draws the bow." The bow is supposed to represent the nation, while the arrows represent the graduate cadets.

Miss Margaret Cassiano Smith also prizes an old-time family souvenir. This is a large pink-feathered fan set in pure ivory sticks to which is attached a long chain of gold, so that the fan can be carried around the neck. The feathers are hand-painted with birds and flowers. This fan was a wedding gift to Miss Smith's grandmother, Mrs. Margarita Rodriguez Cassiano, and was given to the bride by her mother, Doña Dolores Seguin Ruiz.

This Doña Dolores Seguin Ruiz was a member of the well-known Erasmo and Juan Seguin family, and it is a family tradition that after the Fall of the Alamo, the bones and ashes of the Alamo heroes were gathered by Juan Seguin and carried to the Spanish Governor's Palace for military honors and eulogy.

In connection with the marriage of Charles Phillips Smith and his bride, it is curious to learn that they left on their honeymoon in a six-mule ambulance, furnished them by courtesy of General J. G. C. Lee, of the United States Army. The honeymooners proceeded to Galveston, and from there to New Orleans by water, and from there to Pennsylvania for a three months' visit to the family of the bridegroom. This marriage united two prominent families of the North and South. Returning to San Antonio, the newlyweds made their home of the site of the former McAllister Building at College and Navarro Streets. This was back of St. Mary's College, and adjoined the old Witte home. Here Charles Cassiano Smith was born.

Charles Cassiano Smith was educated by private tutors and also in St. Mary's College. He has traveled to many parts of the United States and Canada. He was associated with his father, Captain Charles Phillips Smith, (who in later life became city engineer in San Antonio) in the real estate, mortgage and loan business.

After the death of his father in 1923, and after the death of his youngest brother, Charles C. Smith continued the established business firm of Charles C. Smith & Sons.

At one time Charles C. Smith served in the capacity of alderman. This was during the administration of Bryan Callaghan, in the years 1907 to 1911. He was made chairman of the sidewalks committee, and was instrumental in getting enterprising property owners to build 200 miles of cement walks, and 80 miles of curbing at an approximate cost of \$700,000. This was all voluntary work, and marks his contribution to the city.

Margaret Cassiano Smith is a talented elocutionist, having charmed many groups with her excellent recitals. At one of the reunions of President Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders, Miss Margaret Smith recited an original poem by Henry Ryder Taylor, the poet laureate of the Southwest. So pleased was the

President, Miss Smith was made an honorary member of the Rough Riders, and later at a banquet at the Menger Hotel, was presented with a medal sent to her by President Roosevelt.

At present there are eight persons to whom the Palace of the Spanish Governors have more than ordinary historical meaning; to them it possesses the substance of a family homestead in which their ancestors lived, loved, and died, furthering the glamour and romance of San Antonio and Texas. These eight living persons are Albert Cassiano, Charles Cassiano Smith, Margaret Cassiano Smith, Mrs. Concepcion Linn Walsh, Miss Margarite Carillo, all of San Antonio, and Manuel, Oliver and Robert Steele, residents in Mexico City. These trace their lineal descent directly to Governor Cordero's wife the Lady Gertrudis, and even further back, through Gertrude Perez's to her father, Colonel Ignacio Perez, who was born in San Antonio in 1756, the son of Jose Perez and Paula Granados, original Canary Islander families. The Perez family also intermarried with other Canary Islander families, the Hernandez, Montes, Cortinas and de la Cerdas.

Colonel Ignacio Perez, who bought the Spanish Governors Palace in 1804, has a quaintly worded birth record, which says that he was baptized Juan Ignacio Perez de la Trinidad, and the records further continues that he was baptized in the parish church, "en la iglesia parroquial de la villa de San Fernando Real Presidio de San Antonio de Bejar, jurisdiccion de la Provincia de Texas y Nuevas Filipinas."

Margaret and Charles Cassiano Smith are also related through their father's side to the original founders of the Penn colony in Pennsylvania.

The Smiths have donated to the Governor's Palace a large stone bench bearing the Spanish-Austrian coat-of-arms, duplicating the royal crest as found above the keystone of the Palace. This bench as well as five large stone flower jars which the Smiths have also donated to the Palace, were designed by Jose Arpa, a noted Spanish artist once a resident in San Antonio. These flower jars and stone bench gifts to the Palace in which their forebears once lived, are in wine color and natural color, and all help to carry out that note of grandeur and elegance which makes the Spanish Governors Palace one of the attractive show places of San Antonio and Texas.