

April 23, 1963
325 S/ Garner Street
State College, Pennsylvania

Samuel C. Slaymaker
1024 Marietta Avenue
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Dear Sam:

Here is a brief narrative of the events relating to the substance of the Buchanan letter Oliver Keller gave you:

Before the United States declared war on Mexico on May 14, 1846, it tried to settle the mounting difficulties between the two nations by negotiation. Secretary of State Buchanan dispatched Senator John Slidell as a special agent to Mexico to attempt a peaceful settlement, but Slidell failed. Shortly after the Cabinet got this word, Col. A. J. Atocha, a Spanish-born naturalized U. S. citizen who had spent many years in Mexico, called on Polk with the weird proposal that if Polk would help the exiled dictator of Mexico, now a resident of Cuba, to return home, Santa Anna would give the U. S. all that Slidell has been asked to demand. That is, Santa Anna would sell California, New Mexico, recognize Texas, etc. Buchanan thought this a hare-brained scheme, but Polk put it into effect. In the spring of 1846, war was declared on Mexico, and in the fall of that year, after the war was underway, Santa Anna returned to Mexico, being passed through the U.S. Naval blockade by Polk's directions. Santa Anna promptly took over Mexico in a revolution, and set himself at the head of the Mexican army against the U. S. He was a much more formidable military opponent than the man he overthrew.

By January, 1847, General Taylor had seized most of northern Mexico, while other Americans had taken California. American troops now possessed all the territory that the country had sought from the beginning. Hoping to spare life and to shorten the war, the Polk administration thought it wise, at this point, to "proffer [sic] the olive branch." Col. Atocha was again summoned to carry a peace proposal to Santa Anna. It is to the specific enterprise that the Buchanan letter of Jan. 17, 1847, refers. The draft of the proposed peace accompanied the letter, and was conveyed to the Mexicans. The Mexicans refused to consider peace negotiations. Their reply reached Polk on May 18, 1847. Polk now determined that only the conquest of all Mexico could terminate the war, and ordered General Scott to move from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Buchanan disapproved of this decision because he felt it would unnecessarily cost men and money, it would greatly complicate later peacemaking, it would put a Whig general in the presidency (which it did), and would gain nothing that had not already been gained. Buchanan favored keeping the territory Taylor and others had won, and sitting tight on it. But this goes beyond your letter, which I have now tried to put, briefly, into perspective. Justin Smith's book: the War with Mexico, [sic] will give you all the details.

Hastily, and with best regards, I am,

Sincerely,
Phil Klein

[Letter accompanying the reproduced letter]

MG46_Folder009_Insert 3_1963042



LancasterHistory