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Polk Plot to End War

Secret Buchanan Letter Now Here

Troubles in working out peace with Mexico over a century ago, bearing some resemblance to the current hemisphere situation involving Cuba, are recalled in a secret James Buchanan letter which is now in Lancaster.

The letter was written by Buchanan when he as Secretary of State in 1847, as part of a plot to end the Mexican War Approved by President Polk, in which the local man took part reluctantly.

Donated by Oliver J. Keller, a former editor of the Lancaster New Era who now operated a radio station in Springfield, Ill., the letter is now in the permanent collection of the Lancaster County Historical Society.

BIRTHDAY TODAY

Announcement of the gift was appropriately made today, the 172nd birthday anniversary of the Lancastrian who later became President.

The letter, dated Jan. 19, 1847, and marked "private and confidential," was dispatched to John Black, who then U. S. consul to Mexico. It said in part the "Colonel A. J. Atocha who will deliver you this letter is the bearer of an important dispatch from myself to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Mexican Republic". [sic]

It also referred to a letter to Moses Y. Beach, of New York, who was on his way to Mexico, which was apparently enclosed with the letter to Black. It requested Black: "You will please deliver the enclosed letter to Mr. Beach without letting any person know anything of the matter."

Prof. Philip S. Klein, of Pennsylvania State University, author of the definitive biography on Buchanan, said today that the letter is known to historians, and that it dealt with a secret attempt to deal with Santa Anna, who was then trying to regain the presidency of Mexico.

Atacha [sic] was a "screwball" who said he was Santa Anna's representative and saw Polk, Prof. Klein said. He wanted Polk to break the blockage of Veracruz so that Santa Anna could regain his position in Mexico.

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FOUGHT BY BUCHANAN

Buchanan fought this in cabinet, Klein said, but Polk overruled him. This letter was part of a “peace feeler,” in which Polk sought to get Santa Anna back to power and so open the way for end of the war.

Beach was an agent hired by the U. S. State Department, Prof. Klein said.

Buchanan said in part in the letter: “We are as we have ever been sincerely desirous of peace with Mexico. It is both our interest and desire that she should become a great, a prosperous and a free Republic bound to the United States by the ties of mutual commerce and friendship.

READY TO MAKE PEACE

“Whilst the war will be conducted with increased vigor, we shall ever be ready to make peace upon fair and liberal terms.”

Keller presented the letter to Samuel C. Slaymaker, a friend from boyhood, and Slaymaker presented it on Keller’s behalf to John M. Gibson, president of the Historical Society.

Keller served as editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette after his service with the New Era. He was in Lancaster this past weekend en route to Atlantic City, N. J. There he received a Headliners award honoring the editorial content and public service of radio programs originating from his radio station in 1962.

