



Pioneer Printer: Samuel Bangs in Mexico and Texas

Lota M. Spell

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Samuel Bangs, the first printer in the territory that is now Texas, once owed his life to his printing press. One of the few survivors of the Mina Expedition to Mexico in 1817, Bangs wrote to Servando de Mier, "I had the good fortune, through the will of God, to have my life saved, as I was a printer."

Bangs was not always so fortunate. Losses and disappointments plagued him throughout his career, and he spent many miserable months in Mexican jails. But his ingenuity in the face of adversity, his courage and charm, stamped him not only as a storybook hero but as a man whose virtues were large enough to be their own reward.

Lota Spell's fine biography of Samuel Bangs is at the same time a fascinating history of northern Mexico (including Texas) in the first half of the nineteenth century. Through the successes and failures of an individual it presents the facts about the operation of a business during a time of important political and economic change.

Even more important is its contribution to our knowledge of printing and of the contemporary periodical press. Although first of all a printer, Samuel Bangs was also involved in the production of newspapers, making this book a detailed history of journalism in the Mexico and Texas of his day. His printing office also functioned as a typographer's school, through which he instituted the apprentice system in the Southwest; and as a result of his interest in presses as a commodity of trade, the first business for merchandising and servicing printing presses in the area was developed.

This narrative, combining the story of a man's life, the history of his times, and the development of his profession, fills a gap in our knowledge of Mexico and Texas, and does it with perception and charm.

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