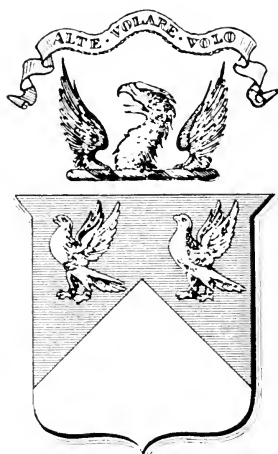




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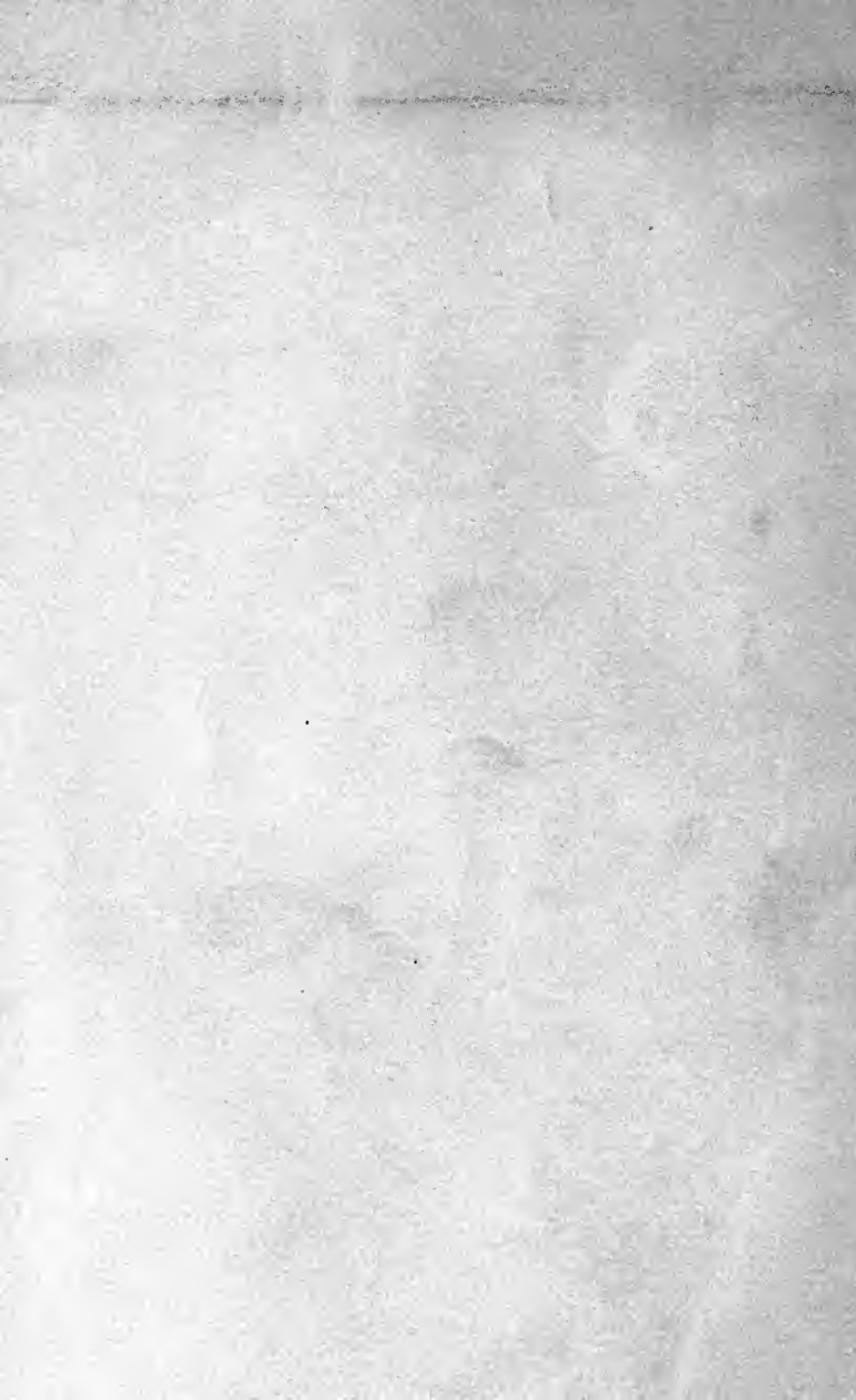
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NEW LIGHT ON MANUEL LISA AND THE SPANISH FUR TRADE

BY

HERBERT E. BOLTON

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HENRY MORSE STEPHENS

NEW LIGHT ON MANUEL LISA AND THE SPANISH FUR TRADE

HERBERT E. BOLTON

Below is printed what is believed to be a hitherto unpublished letter by Manuel Lisa, the best known of the early nineteenth century fur traders of St. Louis. It was written at Fuerte Manuel (Fort Manuel), on the Missouri, on September 8, 1812, evidently during the expedition begun by Lisa at St. Louis in May of that year.¹ It made its way to Chihuahua, where it was filed in the archives with a group of papers "concerning the introduction into the Province of New Mexico of four Frenchmen proceeding from Upper Louisiana," 1812-1813.² Just how it reached Chihuahua and by whose hands, the present writer has not ascertained, though it is possible that this could be learned from the documents with which it is preserved. Besides its merely curious interest as an additional autograph letter of the unique individual who wrote it, it is of importance on several counts.

In the first place, it throws new light on Lisa's fur trading operations during the years 1811 and 1812. It shows on the one hand that at this time his activities extended on a considerable scale to the Arapaho tribe, for we are told that he had sent to these people twenty-three men. It shows, also, that in 1812 he took steps to found a trading post at the mouth of the Little Big Horn, sending Sanguinet with ten men for this purpose. It establishes, finally, an attempt by Lisa in 1812 to open commerce with the Spaniards of New Mexico, an enterprise he is believed to have once essayed³ at an earlier date.

Of more striking interest and importance is the light which the document throws upon Spanish activities on the northern frontier at this time. It is well known that the Spaniards of New Mexico

¹Chittenden, H. M. *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, I, 126-127.

²The four Frenchmen were clearly not the ones mentioned in the letter, for the declaration of the four was taken in Santa Fé on July 30, 1812, before the letter here published was written. The four Frenchmen stated that they had left Louisiana because of dislike for American rule. They were sent to Chihuahua, and thence to Arispe, as prisoners, where they were still remaining in 1815.

³Coues, *Pike*, II, 574.

and Texas had not, before the taking possession of Louisiana by Spain, engaged extensively in the fur trade, though expeditions of which we have no notice may have been made, and a fair was more or less regularly held at Taos, to which the Indians of the plains took peltry to exchange for goods. But with the Louisiana cession, the fur trading system of the French was taken over by the Spanish government, and developed as the chief interest of the colony, the principal centers for its direction being St. Louis, Natchitoches, New Orleans, and the Arkansas Post. How much fur trading was done during this period from New Mexico as a base has not appeared, but we know that after 1780 considerable energy was spent in the establishment of communication between the new province of Louisiana and the older possession of New Mexico. We know, also, that after the purchase of Louisiana by the United States in 1803 the Spanish government made strenuous efforts to retain dominion over the Indians between New Mexico and the Missouri River by sending to them military and diplomatic expeditions in an endeavor to induce them to keep out the American traders and to turn their fur trade toward Santa Fé. In the interest of this policy were sent out the expeditions of Vial, Lucero, and Melgares, in the years 1804-1806.⁴ Now, from the present document, we learn that in 1812 the Spaniards had been going "every year to trade with the Arapahos," as far to the northeast as northern Colorado, and perhaps into Wyoming. Whether this enterprise was a new development, and part of the policy of resistance to American advance just adverted to, or the continuation of an established practice, we cannot at present say for certain, though the former seems to have been the case, judging from the evidence available.

The question arises naturally as to just where the Arapaho referred to were at this time. In general it is held by scholars that the Arapaho were divided into two branches, one inhabiting the North Platte in Wyoming, and the other the South Platte, in northern Colorado.⁵ Chittenden, in his work on the western fur trade, maintains that "no such distinction was known to the traders and trappers, and no Indians of this name are ever spoken of as dwelling in the northern mountains. When the Arapahos are mentioned the tribe in the valley of the South Platte is always

⁴Cox, I. J., *The Exploration of Louisiana*, 65-74.

⁵Mooney, in Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, I, 72.

meant."⁶ Thwaites, on the other hand, referring to precisely the same period, states that "the Arapaho occupied the central mountainous region, roaming through Wyoming and southern Idaho."⁷

It has already been remarked⁸ that Lisa never acquired a ready use of either English or French. The present letter enables us to add Spanish to the list of tongues of which he was not complete master.

(TRANSLATION.)

Fort Manuel, Sept. 8, 1812.

To the Spaniards of New Mexico.

My Dear Sirs: Ever since my first journey among the forks⁹ of the Missouri, nine hundred leagues from my domicile, I have desired to find an opportunity to communicate with my [com]patriots, the Spaniards. I have had hunters to the number of twenty-three who have gone to the Arapaho nation. Last year they came to my Fort Mandanne, where I equipped them anew to return to the place whence they had come. They are the ones who informed me that the Spaniards of Mexico were coming every year to trade with the Arapahos. Therefore I gave to a certain Juan Bautista Champlin,¹⁰ an honorable young man,¹¹ and Juan Bautista Lafargue, some goods for the purpose of trading with you, admonishing them that it must not be to the prejudice of the government, nor contrary to its laws.

Since some of my hunters should come this year to meet me at this establishment on the Missouri, and since up to the present I have not had any news [of them], I have decided to send one of

⁶*The American Fur Trade*, II, 878.

⁷*Early Western Travels*, V, 225, note 120.

⁸Chittenden, I, 135.

⁹*Balzo* is a nautical term meaning "bend." Lisa seems to use the word *balzos* for *balsos*, which is a term applied to a bifurcated rope, used for raising weights. "Forks" is given as Lisa's probable meaning.

¹⁰Houck (*History of Missouri*, II, 96) lists Baptiste Champlain as one of the early settlers of the Cuivre settlement, on Buffalo River, which drains the western part of Lincoln County, Missouri.

¹¹*Mozo*, in the old sense, meant "strong young man," but the more usual modern meaning is "servant." As used here the former meaning seems to be intended.

my trusted servants, Don Carlos Sanguinet,¹² with two *engages*¹³ to let them know where they should come out with their peltry; and for the same purpose, with the same Sanguinet, I sent ten men to the Petite Corne,¹⁴ which empties into the Rio Amarillo,¹⁵ and this into the Missouri, the entry of the Petite Corne being two hundred and twenty-five leagues from this establishment, with orders to establish [a post at] that place, as nearer for my hunters.

I have especially instructed Don Carlos Sanguinet to arrange that this letter of mine should fall into the hands of some Spaniard who may be worthy¹⁶ to communicate with me on those honorable principles, and in no other manner, my desire being to engage in business and open up a new commerce, which might easily be done. With this in view, and as director of the Missouri Fur Company, I propose to you gentlemen that if you wish to trade and deal with me, for whatever quantity of goods it may be, I will obligate myself to fill each year any bill of goods which shall be given me, and all shall be delivered [as stipulated] both as to quality and as to quantity, at the place nearest and most convenient for both parties, to your satisfaction, after we shall have agreed on the chosen place.

In case any of you should wish to come with Don Carlos Sanguinet to this my establishment to communicate and trade with me, you will be received and treated with great pleasure and satisfaction, and assured of a sufficient escort, agreeable to you, up to the time you return to your country. I commend Don Carlos Sanguinet to you as a trustworthy and honorable man, and, if you are agreed, you may confide in him without any fear whatever; and in case you do not come in person, I shall be obliged to you if you will write to me. Meanwhile, awaiting you, I beg God to spare you many years.

Your most attentive and faithful servant,

MANUEL LISA (Rubric).

Triplicate.

¹²For notes on Sanguinet, see Houck, *The Spanish Régime in Missouri*, and *The History of Missouri*, indexes.

¹³It is one of the shortcomings of our language that it is often necessary to translate a term from one foreign tongue in terms of another foreign tongue. This is an instance.

¹⁴Obviously the Little Big Horn.

¹⁵The Yellowstone River.

¹⁶Possibly he means "who may deign" to communicate with him.

(SPANISH TEXT OF THE LETTER.)

Fuerte Manuel 8 de 7bre. de 1812.

A los Españoles del Nuevo Mexico,

Muy Señores míos. Desde mi primer viage en los balzos del Missouri, nuevecientas leguas de mi Domicilio, deseaba el hallar oportunidad, para Comunicar con mis [com]Patriotes los Españoles, he tenido Caza[d]ores en Nombre de veinte y tres que fueron á la Nacion Arapaos. El Año pasado vinieron á mi Fuerte Mandanne, de donde los Reequipe de nuevo, para volverse de donde havian Salido; ellos fueron que me han Ynstruido que los Mexicanos Españoles benian todos los Años Tratar con los Arapaos. Entonces di á un Tal Juan Bte. Champlin, mozo Honrado, y á Juan Bte. Lafargue, álgunos Efectos en Mercancías, para Tratar con vms, con la Recomendacion, que no fuera en perjuicio del Gobierno, y contrario á sus Leyes.

Como álgunos de mis Cazaores devian de venir este Año, el hallarse con migo sobre el Missouri, á este Establecimto., y ásta Esta Epoca no teniendo novedad, me determiné el expedir uno de mis Mozos de Confianza Dn. Carlos Sanguinet, con dos Enganchados, á fin de hazerles Saber donde, y en que parage deven de Salir con sus peleterias, y á este mismo Efecto, con el mismo Sanguinet Exdy diez hombres á la (petite Corne) que caé en el Rio Amarillo, y este en el Missouri á 225 Leguas la Entrada de la (Petite Corne) á este Establecimto. con orden de Establecer ésse Lugar como mas proximo para mis Cazaores.

He Recomendado con particular á Dn. Carlos Sanguinet de hazer modo que esta mi carta llegue en manos de álgun Español que sea digno de comunicar con migo, en áquellos principios de honradez, y no de ótra manera, mis deseos siendo el de hazer negocios, y havrir un nuevo comercio, que con facilidad se puede hazer, á este Efecto propongo á vmds. como Director de la Compañia de los Pielas del Missouri, si quieren Tratar, y contractar con migo, per qualquiera cantidad que sea en Mercancias, yo me obligaré cada Año, el llenar el Estado que se me dará, y el todo será librado, Tanto por la calidad, como por la cantidad ál Lugar mas proximo, y mas aventajoso, por las dos partes, á su Satisfaccion, despues que havremos Caído de ácuero del Lugar Escogido.

En caso que álguno de vmds. quisiera el venir con Dn. Carlos Sanguinet á Este mi Establecimto., el comunicar y Tratar con

migo sera con mho Gusto, y satisfaccion que será recevido y Tratado, Asegurandole Escorta suficiente, y á su satisfaccion hasta que vuelva á su Patria. Recomiendo á vmds Dn. Carlos Sanguinet, como hombre de confianza y Honrado, y si se encuentran juntos, pueden el havrirse con el sin Temor alguno, estimaré a vmds el Escribirme, en caso que no vengan en persona, ynterin esperando por vms, quedo Rogando á Dios le Gue su vida mhos años.

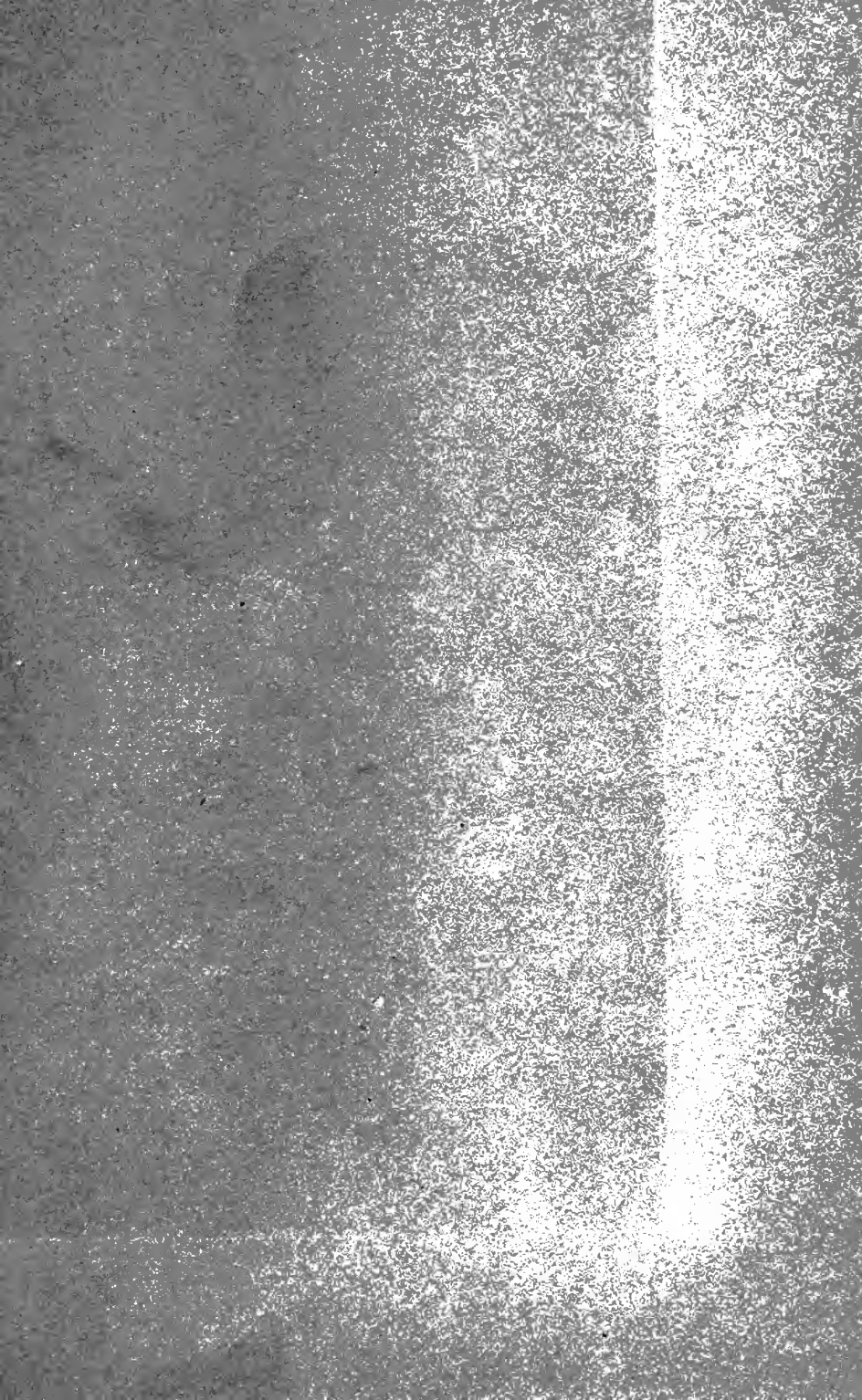
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MANUEL LISA (Rubric).

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