

The Bandera PROPHEET

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A Walk Down History Lane with the Bandera Natural History Museum
How Juan de O'Donojú y O'Ryan helped end the Mexican War for Independence

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The Bandera Prophet

In the early 1800s, what would become Mexico was still New Spain, part of the Spanish crown. After Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztec Empire in 1521, he claimed the territory New Spain. The colonization included what is now Mexico, Southwestern North America, Central America, northern South America and several archipelagos in the Pacific Ocean, including the Philippines.

About 290 years later, the movement toward Mexican independence took shape. On Sept. 16, 1810, at 2:30 a.m., Roman Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla rang his church bells and gathered his congregation in the small town of Dolores. He addressed the people, urging them to revolt, in a speech now known as the “grito de Dolores” (Cry of Dolores).

Mexico's independence from Spain took a decade of war. None expected a Spanish general of Irish descent to play an integral role in achieving peace.

Juan de O'Donojú y O'Ryan was born in Seville in July 30, 1762, the son of Irish parents Richard Dunphy O'Donnohue and Alicia O'Ryan, who emigrated to Spain to escape anti-Catholic penal laws in Ireland. An established soldier and politician with a gift for diplomacy, O'Donojú participated in the war of independence against the French, before becoming one of the paramount chiefs of the Spanish masons.

In 1821, O'Donojú, ranked lieutenant general, was appointed captain general and jefe politico superior, granting him the authority of a New

Spain viceroy, though not the official title. He was sworn into his new offices when he arrived in Veracruz on July 21, 1821, while the Mexican War of Independence continued to rage on.

On Aug. 3 1821, O'Donojú issued a proclamation of his liberal principles to the people of Mexico. He wrote to rebel general Agustín de Iturbide, inviting him to confer. Iturbide chose the city of Córdoba as their meeting place.

O'Donojú, accompanied by Colonel Antonio López de Santa Anna, arrived in Córdoba on Aug. 23, and the meeting occurred the following day. O'Donojú used his influence to withdraw Spanish troops from the country with a minimum of bloodshed through reasonable surrender terms. The men signed an accord, the Treaty of Córdoba.

The Declaration of Independence of the Mexican Empire was affirmed Sept. 28, 1821.

Shortly after, O'Donojú died of pleurisy in Mexico City on Oct. 8, 1821; some historians suspect he was poisoned by Iturbide, as O'Donojú was well-liked in Mexico and threatened Iturbide's rise in power. O'Donojú's remains were interred with the honors of a viceroy in the vault of the Altar of Kings in the Cathedral of Mexico.

After his death, O'Donojú was renounced by the Madrid government, and on Feb. 13, 1822, all treaties were rejected. Though he was unaware of the reproach, O'Donojú's wife Josefa Sánchez-Barriga Blanco paid the price and was unable to return to her home country. She died in 1842, in Ciudad de Mexico.

See the painting of O'Donojú, along with his wife Josefa, on display in the Bandera Natural History Museum New Spain Art Hall.