

## THE TEXAS JOLA

By James Ehrardt C-59

In the December 1998, Vol. No. IV of the U.S. Mexican Numismatic Association Journal, Don Bailey wrote about "THE NUMISMATICS OF SPANISH COLONIAL MEXICO, PART IV, FINAL". I have wanted to write about a particular part of that era which I find to be of great importance to numismatic groups in both Mexican and United States numismatics.

I would like to take this time to thank the authors of all of the articles pertaining to this subject. With a special thanks to Frank W. Brown, A.N.A. 57265, the San Antonio Express newspaper, for their articles on the de la Garza family, and their contribution to early minting in what was then San Fernando de Bexar, (San Antonio, Texas). Thanks to Mike Dunigan, Richard Medina and Kirk Menczer for their input.

Geronimo de la Garza built the "Garza" house in 1734. A short time before that Geronimo had married Marla Cantu, who was one of the Canary Islanders sent to settle the portion of New Spain then known as San Fernando de Bexar. It was at this time a very substantial structure on Veramendi Street extending from Main Avenue almost to Soledad Street. The founder willed the property to his children, giving each child an equal undivided portion or interest in the estate. Through the years many changes in the streets were made. In 1824 don Jose Antonio de la Garcia purchased the entire premises, and subdivided the lot.

The War of Independence from 1810 through 1821 was a significant period of Mexican numismatic history. This article deals solely with this period, and what was then San Fernando de Bexar, the capital of Texas, and a province of New Spain. It was also headquarters for the military commander, and the Governor of the Province. In 1802 the population was about 2,500, but due to military uprisings and revolutions, the figure was reduced to about 1,800 by 1820.

Early records show that for many years there had been a shortage of minor coinage throughout New Spain. This was mainly caused by the mint's failure to coin a sufficient quantity, and most that were coined were shipped to Spain. The nearest treasurer's office was located some three hundred miles away. The only new money coming in was for the payroll for the military, and the government. This amounted to about 5 to 15 thousand pesos. In order for the military man to buy merchandise, or pay his bills the merchant would quite often not have the exact change, and gave him credit, or tokens of some type, which other merchants would not accept. This created a situation in which the buyer could not spend his money where desired, and he was unable to get full value. The shortage of small coins soon spread to the whole community, resulting in hardships for many, including the merchants. This also led to hoarding of small good money by many.

As a result of this shortage of small coins, the leaders and officials of the community prevailed upon the Governor to permit the coinage of a small copper coin. This was to be an attempt to end the circulation of tokens used by most stores throughout New Spain.

This led to the first money coined in what is now known as TEXAS. Lt. Col. Manuel Prado, then Military Commander, and Governor authorized Manuel Barrera, a merchant and jeweler to mint 8,000 copper coins with a value of ½ real. This authorization was signed March 29, 1817. The decree authorizing the minting was in the form of a "Notice to the public", of which a photostat copy, with translation on file was obtained from the Bexar Archives, Texas History Center, and University of Texas. No specimen or sketch of the Barrera, or "Jola" is known to exist. I have never heard of an example, or even seen any references pertaining to a Barrera coin, or "Jola".

In May 1817, the Viceroy of New Spain, Juan Apodaca appointed Antonio Martinez Governor and Military Commander of the Province of Texas, to succeed Lt. Colonel Manuel Prado, who had been in office only a short time. On November 30, 1818, Jose Antonio de la Garza, the Postmaster, made application to Governor Martinez for a permit to coin and circulate money in the town. He was awarded the monopoly by decree dated December 6, 1818, after he had complied with the requirements of the Governor. Photostat

copies of the application, the Governors decree, the writ of bond, and the public notice, along with copies of the translations, were obtained from the Bexar Archives and the transactions are:

APPLICATION FOR PERMIT  
TO COIN MONEY

This shall be the equivalent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stamp of the Senor don Fernando the 7<sup>th</sup>, year of 1818.

MARTINEZ  
(RUBRIC)

The interested (party) paid the royal amount (due) for the stamp in this office of which I am in charge. Bexar, 5<sup>th</sup> of December of 1818.

Luis Gortari  
(Rubric)

Senor Governor:

(I) don Jose Antonio de la Garza, Postmaster of this city, appear before your lordship and state that the extreme scarcity of small change which we are experiencing in this land results in a notable harm to the public. Inasmuch as I wish to provide for this lack is so far as my means will permit. I have decided to make up to the quantity of five hundred pesos of small change in copper coins called jolas, which shall circulate only through the town with values of one half of a real each. These shall be engraved with first letters of my name and surname and the year of this date. For this purpose I shall give the necessary bonds on the terms your Lordship should order. I entreat Your Lordship to be pleased to grant me the necessary permission, if there should be no just cause to hinder it, so that this may be carried out, and this money may circulate as soon as possible.

San Fernando de Bexar, November thirtieth of one thousand eight hundred and eighteen.

Jose Antonio de la Garza

GOVERNOR'S DECREE

Bexar 30<sup>th</sup> of November of 1818

The petitioner shall present the bond he offers and the justices shall, in due form, make the corresponding certified copy of it which will be delivered to this government so that it may be protocolled in the government archive along with this request.

Under this condition, and that of collecting the jolas which, by concession of my predecessor, the citizen don Manuel Barrera, I permit the petitioner don Jose Antonio de la Garza to coin the five hundred pesos he wishes to mint in jolas with the name and surname of the expressed don JOSE DE LA Garza.

The bondsmen shall give security, in addition, for the jolas which should appear minted in addition to the five hundred pesos, under which condition, and that of depositing in the Town hall the die which the indicated coinage of jolas with the value of half a real, and absolutely no others, has been carried out, shall this permit have value.

Martinez

WRIT OF BOND

In the city of San Fernando de Bexar, capital of the province of Texas, on the fifth day of the month of December of the year one thousand eight hundred and eighteen, before me, don Jose Marie Sambrano,

senior ordinary alcalde, who am accompanied by the junior alcalde don Felipe Enrique Neri, Baron de Bastrop, for we act as receptoria with attesting witnesses for lack of a notary public within the boundary of the law, appeared in his own person don Manuel Turre Castillo, a merchant in this city, whom we certify we know.

He stated that by means of the present instrument he obligates and constitutes himself as bondsman, plain simple, laical and creditable, for the person of don Jose Antonio de la Garza, citizen of this above mentioned city, so that in virtue to it (de la Garza) may be permitted to circulate in this land the sum of five hundred pesos which he has minted in copper coin called jolas with the value of half a real each and the letters of his name and surname and the year of this date engraved upon them.

He guarantees that the said don Jose Antonio de la Garza shall gather them at his own expense when it should be deemed proper to suspend this concession, surrendering the value of said jolas in silver coin to whoever should present them when this should occur and to whatever other person (should present them) by reason of departure or transfer to another destination. In like matter, he guarantees that if some other quantity of the jola money should turn up in addition to the above mentioned five hundred pesos, (de la Garza) shall surrender its vale in the same manner, and that in order to prevent this fraud he shall surrender the seal or die with which it is engraved so that it may be deposited wherever it may be convenient. He added that for the fulfillment and security of all that has been stated he obligates his person and property both immediate and future, renouncing all of the laws, rights and exemptions which in such a case might favor him. He renounces the laws and jurisdiction of his Majesty's senior justices in this or in whatever other place they may be, so that they may compel, oblige and make him do all that has been stated as if it were a judgment passed, complied with and not appealed. He renounced his own rights and the SIT CUMBENEERIT DE JURISDICTIONE OMNIUM JUDICIUM,

On such terms he granted and signed (this instrument) with us, the above mentioned justices, and the attesting witnesses with whom we act in the manner stated, we certify:

Gasper Flores  
Witness  
Salvador Carrasco  
Witness

Jose Marie Sambrano  
El Baron de Bastrop  
Manuel Iturri Castillo

Agrees with the originals which are in the municipal archives of this city, from which this certified copy was made on the three used pages of which it is composed in order to deliver it to the senior Governor of the province. It is faithful and legal, corrected and adjusted. Present to see it made, corrected and adjusted were don Jose Manuel de la Garza, don Pedro Arevalo and don Jose Antonio Navarro, of this community. We certify and sign it with the above-cited attesting (witnesses). In witness whereof we certify:

Jph. Maria Sambrano  
(Rubric)  
Gasper Flores  
Witness  
(Rubric)

El Baron de Bastrop  
(Rubric)  
Salvador Carrasco  
(Rubric)

GOVERNOR'S PROCLAMATION  
AND PUBLIC NOTICE

Inasmuch as the citizens of this city don Jose Antonio de la Garza has requested that he be permitted to mint the quantity of 500 pesos in copper coin, and inasmuch as I am acquainted with the harm caused to the consumers by the lack of small change or coins, the reason for which they either stop buying what they need, have to pledge a (whole) peso, or have to spend all of it without needing to do so, I have permitted the above mentioned don Jose Antonio the manufacture and minting of the 500 pesos in jolas with the value of half of a silver real each and marked with the initials of his name and surname. These coins shall circulate in the town for the purposes of it businesses, the circulation of the (coins) which circulated in the town before, minted at the expense of don Manuel Barrera, ceasing as of today. In order that those who have some of the said jolas (belonging) to the indicated Barrera shall not lose them, they may present them to don Jose Antonio (de) la Garza. Who is obligated to gather them within the period of 12 days and give a equal quantity of newly minted ones (a fact) of which the public is notified. For this purpose, I command that it be proclaimed and affixed in the accustomed place for the information of everyone.

(Presidio de) Bexar, 6<sup>th</sup> December of 1818.

This ends the translation that was required by don Jose Antonio de la Garza. On the obverse of the jola are the initials "J.A.G.", in the middle lying horizontally is "1/2" going one way on some jolas and "1/2" laying the other way, and at the bottom is the date "1818" on all coins. The reverse has a five-pointed incuse star (the first use of the Lone Star). I have never heard any reason for why the symbol of Texas, the Lone Star was used.

The coins were cut from copper sheets thick enough so the impression on obverse or reverse would not show through. In my research of these coins it looks like these were at least four dies for the obverse, but only one for the reverse (the lone star).

All indications are the jolas were in use from December 1818 until Mexico's independence in 1821. At this time it is believed that don Jose Antonio de la Garza redeemed as many of the 8,000 jolas that would have been minted. In fear of having to redeem the jolas twice, all previous articles and the beliefs of all, are that de la Garza bagged and buried the jolas in the San Antonio river where they laid until 1959, when a small hoard of about 60 were found after some excavation work that was done in the river. Records of the time show that the de la Garza's had holdings north and east of what is now known as San Antonio, Texas. After research, and the knowledge of where a few were found, it supports the theory and leads me to concur that they were buried north of downtown. I also believe that it would be a virtual miracle for de la Garza to redeem all 8,000 jolas, so we have only the figures that several writers have betted around as to actually how many are in existence. I personally believe the figure to be 100 or less.

In 1892 a brief reference to the coinage in San Antonio was published, but the persistence about the coinage still persisted without any further documentary reports to substantiate the stories. The publication of 1892 even showed an illustration of the de la Garza.

I would like to take this opportunity to clear up one issue that still shows up in various coin publications, and that is these coins (jolas) are and have always been 1/2 real pieces, not 1/8 real as they have been described. The one book that I have found to correctly show the value is "Walter Breen's" Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins". I am sure there must be other numismatic publications that correctly show the value, but this writer has only referenced my personal library of publications..

It is clear that this coinage is of GREAT importance, especially to collectors of both U.S. and Mexican colonial coinage, as this coin is the only coin to have been minted by a foreign country in what is now part of the United States of America. Of all of the Spanish Colonial issues, the jola represents the only known Spanish Colonial coinage struck in North America, north of Mexico.

Since the find in 1959, several articles have been written about the jola. The interest in this coin has been around for about 40 years, but it has only been the past 5 years that this writer has been involved with trying to find out all the history that surrounds the jola, don Antonio de la Garza, and the mint, (the de la Garza house). It is sad that the de la Garza house, the mint of this coin, was torn down in 1912, and the Rand building was built over the site of this historical place. The Wolff & Marx store occupied the building, and on the Soledad Street side a bronze plaque on the side of the building told of the history of this site. Unfortunately around 1980 the plaque disappeared, and has never been recovered. In a very recent conversation with Richard Medina, a local San Antonio coin dealer and historian, pertaining to the jola, it looks like Frost National Bank, one of San Antonio's oldest banks will pay for the replacement of the missing plaque. The main branch of the Frost Bank has a wall dedicated to numismatics. It is commonly referred to "The Wall of Money Museum". At the beginning of the wall are two of de la Garza's jolas. It is my understanding they were part of the small hoard of about 60 jolas found on the banks of the San Antonio River in 1959. The legend with the jolas tells of the minter and a brief history. If you are visiting the San Antonio area, this "Wall of Money Museum" is worth visiting.

This year, 1999 marks the 181st birthday of the "Texas Jola". As a numismatist, collector and a member of the U.S. Mexican Numismatic Association I wonder if don Jose Antonio de la Garza had any idea how important his coin would be to the numismatic world? I doubt it. The jola served its purpose to the merchants, and the persons who lived in San Fernando De Bexar (San Antonio, Texas). When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, de la Garza redeemed his jolas in silver. History and stories of the jolas lead this writer, and many others to follow the belief that de la Garza buried the jolas to avoid the possibility of having to redeem them twice. In 1892, in the numismatic publication is a brief article on the Texas jola with a sketch of the actual coin. In 1959, after some excavation on the San Antonio River, a find of about 60 Jolas lumped together. This was 141 years after they were minted. Records show that nobody at that time knew what they were, where they came from, what they were used for, and who minted them. Over the past 40 years many of these questions were answered. This writer has spent only five years trying to find out everything I could. Many before me found what there has been to find, the rest never will be found out, such as how many did de la Garza bury, how many bags, if he used bags, actual location where buried, and most important, how many did he actually redeem?

When one looks at the various mints during the War of Independence, the quantity of coins minted is not stated. In coin books, such as the Krause Standard Catalog of World Coins, a widely used and popular book for numismatists, the Texas jola shows a quantity thanks to the records that Spain required. The actual records and their translations are available at the University of Texas at Austin. Also, to better understand the survival rate of this important coinage, one must take a look at the San Antonio River. As with most rivers it is dirty and polluted, not the place one would pick to preserve copper coinage. It is incredible that any of these coins survived, but some did. The picture that will be with this article is of one such piece that survived 179 years in this river, if one believes they were buried in the river in 1821. This particular jola was found in a very hard clay type soil, which actually preserved the coin quite nicely. Of the several jolas I have seen, most are heavily pitted, and in some cases they can not be attributed due to the harsh environment the coins were subjected to. I am aware just recently of a "jola" found in or around the town of Goliad, Texas, and not in a river. This highly sought after coin of this period can be found, the Goliad coin has proven to me that not all are around San Antonio, the birthplace of this highly sought after coin.

I would be remiss if I did not refer to Walter Breen, a brilliant numismatist. Mr. Breen has one of the most respected books available on the market, and Mr. Breen must have thought well of this coinage from San Fernando de Bexar, as he devoted an entire chapter to this one piece. Even though this chapter is only one page long, it is still a chapter, and the space given for this coin can only be due to what little information besides the Spanish records that are available. I would like to take a portion, and quote what he felt about this coin. I am referring to the book, "Walter Breen's Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins", copyright 1988. The chapter is located under chapter 8, Post Revolutionary Private Issues, subchapter VIII. and I quote "The coins are rare enough, and crudely enough made, that grading is all but impossible, and hardly relevant.

In closing, I can hardly stress how important this coinage was to the persons who used it between 1818 and 1821. It is an important coinage to both the U.S. and Mexican numismatics. The link is there, San

Fernando de Bexar, and San Antonio, Texas in the county of Bexar. Examples of this coinage are located in various places, both in the U.S. and Mexico. Several of the coins have been donated, and are on display at University of Texas, Austin, Frost National Bank, main branch, downtown San Antonio, and it is my understanding that several were donated to various Mexican banks, and or Museums. As for articles pertaining to the minter, don Jose Antonio de la Garza, this writer has several of these articles that were done over the years, and upon request I would be happy to send any of the members of USMexNA copies. My address is shown below. I hope you find this helpful, and I have enjoyed writing my first, and hopefully not the last article. Thank you.

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The plates of the two Texas Jolas shown below are from two sources. The one on the right is from the author, Jim Ehrardt, the one on the left was purchased in the Bowers & Merena Rarity auction, in January by Henry Garrett and Tony Terranova for \$11,500, and has since changed hands. This was the plate coin in the Red Book. We want to thank Mr. Garrett and Terranova for sharing this rare piece with us. You will note that both have the same planchet defect, except in different positions.

