

How Food Caused Santa Anna to Lose His Leg (Twice)

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This week, we're bringing you an excerpt from our permanent exhibit on [Santa Anna's chair](#), located in the northwest corner of the library. In addition to his chair, Santa Anna left behind another relic - his wooden leg.

The story of Santa Anna's wooden leg begins in 1838 with the brief conflict between Mexico and France known as the "Pastry War." Angry about unpaid Mexican debts incurred during the Texas Revolution, French officials demanded compensation from the Mexican government, including 60,000 pesos for damage to a bakery owned by a French pastry chef. Mexico refused to respond to the ultimatum for payment, and the French navy answered with a blockade of key Mexican ports. The "Pastry War" was born.

When French marines raided Veracruz, Santa Anna had the opportunity to come out of his disgraced retirement caused by the loss of Texas. He rallied his troops and the French were forced out of the city. Unfortunately for Santa Anna, cannon fire took his horse out from under him and horribly wounded his leg. Doctors amputated the limb and Santa Anna buried it at his hacienda.

With his victory against the French, Santa Anna was able to rise again to prominence in Mexico - after all, he had sacrificed a limb for his country. In 1842, his countrymen elevated him to the presidency again. As if to remind his country of his sacrifice, the shriveled leg was exhumed, paraded to Mexico City in an ornate coach, and buried in an elegant state funeral.

Sadly, there was no eternal rest for his leg. In 1844, the popular sentiment turned against him again, and rioters dug up his leg and dragged it through the streets shouting, "Death to the cripple!"

Santa Anna's story still had several more acts. After another exile, he was called back to the military for service in the Mexican-American War. At the Battle of Cerro Gordo in 1847, Santa Anna was breaking for a lunch of roast chicken and had removed his artificial leg. Surprised by the 4th Regiment Illinois Volunteers, he escaped on a horse, leaving behind his lunch and his cork-and-wooden leg. The Illinois soldiers ate the chicken, gave the gold they found to their superiors, but kept the leg as a prize of war. Today the wooden leg is housed in the Illinois State Military Museum, despite [attempts to relocate it to Texas](#).

Images from "[Texas fighting for Santa Anna's leg](#)," Houston Chronicle, May 16, 2014.