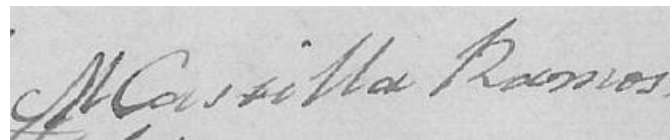


## Mariano Jose Ramos de Castilla - the earliest traceable Western Australian de Castilla ancestor and conspirator/emissary for the freedom of South America from Spanish rule



Mariano Jose Ramos de Castilla appears to have been born in Buenos Aires<sup>1</sup> on 8 December 1781<sup>2</sup>. His parents have not been found and little is known of his early life until he appears in publications about events relating to the freedom of South America from Spanish rule. An Editor's note in Aaron Burr's published papers<sup>3</sup> asserts he was the nephew of the Peruvian patriot Felipe Castilla. He is referred to in the literature in a variety of name forms, largely reflective of the country of publication or the ways in which English scribes have grappled with his Spanish name. However, with occasional departures, he seems to have referred to himself and signed *Mariano Castilla Ramos* while in England. Spanish language texts refer to him as Mariano Castilla y Ramos.



We first pick him up as spending a month in Mexico in 1801<sup>4</sup> before arriving in London about 1802 as an "emissary"<sup>5</sup> for the freedom of Spanish South America. As one of the earliest Latin American representatives in London, Mariano Castilla became an adviser to other agents who followed, receiving their mail and coordinating their meetings<sup>6</sup>.

Mariano Castilla was of course not alone in this regard, British intelligence on Spanish America came in part from a small group of emigrés and revolutionaries in London around 1802 and 1803. Including most notably, Francisco de Miranda from Venezuela. Some of these received government patronage while they were sounded out for information.<sup>7</sup>

Mariano Castilla's role is unclear with some references referring to him as a patriot of South America while Parra (2012)<sup>8</sup> believes he was actually working for the British Government. He cites as evidence British records of some letters by Castilla (1805) to

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<sup>1</sup> Honor and dishonour in our history, paper by Jose Luis Parra published on Bitacora margen website 2012

<sup>2</sup> Recorded on back of portrait

<sup>3</sup> Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr II

<sup>4</sup> The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Volume 7, January 1802 to December 1808

<sup>5</sup> Depending on which side is writing the history he is referred to as either a patriot or a traitor.

<sup>6</sup> Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr II

<sup>7</sup> British Policy and Spanish America, 1783-1808, by John Lynch

<sup>8</sup> Honor and dishonour in our history, paper by Jose Luis Parra published on Bitacora margen website 2012

Castlereagh the Minister of War asking to be reimbursed more than 5000 pounds in expenses for sending "agents" to River Plate.

A Captain James Florence Burke was to go undercover to the Rio de la Plata [River Plate and later Buenos Aires] to establish contacts for a possible future British intervention. These included the revolutionaries: brothers Nicolas and Saturnino Rodriguez Pena, Hipolito Vieytes, Juan José Castelli and Manuel Belgrano, who had been contacted by the emissary Mariano Ramos Castilla in 1803. Burke arrived in South America in mid 1804, but was arrested in Upper Peru and sent to Buenos Aires where he was held in jail until deported before Christmas 1805. The subsequent attempted British invasion of Buenos Aires by General William Carr Beresford failed in August 1806.<sup>9</sup>

Did Mariano Castilla return to Buenos Aires either leading up to this failed invasion or later? It seems more likely that Mariano Castilla went back later. According to Parra (2012), in a letter to Lord Castlereagh dated 10 July 1807 Castilla offers to travel to Buenos Aires to serve the cause and make closer contacts with native born Americans. Castilla was still associated with the Americans Saturnino Rodríguez Peña and Manuel Aniceto Padilla among others who were actively in favour of independence under British protection.<sup>10</sup> There has always been family folklore that says he "had to get out of South America quickly because he backed the wrong side". The best evidence available that he did return and probably had to leave urgently is firstly a reference in a letter he wrote from London dated 12 March 1808 to senor Saturnino Rodríguez Peña in which he refers to himself as having been "expatriated for the same cause"<sup>11</sup>. Secondly his Marriage licence (25 June 1815, London) includes the notation "having been already married according to rites and ceremonies of the Catholic Church of Buoneas Ayres." This suggests that Mariano Ramos Castilla married Rebecca Maria Josephine Cooke (1790 – 1861) sometime between 1807 – 1808. How did Rebecca, the daughter of a Norfolk merchant, come to be in South America at that time?

With the failure of the second attempt to invade Buenos Aires on 7 July 1807, it appears the British on their return to England handed over documents to the British Government which were incriminating to the South Americans that had backed the invasion. Demarchi (2007)<sup>12</sup> states that Fifty-eight respectable inhabitants of Buenos Aires had affixed their signatures, expressing their loyalty and commitment to the British government. Was Mariano Castilla one of the "58 respectable inhabitants" and

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<sup>9</sup> Reference Wikipedia; URL [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Florence\\_Burke](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Florence_Burke)

<sup>10</sup> Honor and dishonour in our history, paper by Jose Luis Parra published on Bitacora margen website 2012

<sup>11</sup> ARCHIVO DEL GENERAL MIRANDA (vol.21), p.99 provided by K Racine, Guelph University Canada

<sup>12</sup> *Fifty-eight Patriots (traitors) and an enemy (friend)*, Ernesto Gustavo Demarchi, GRAGEAS historiographical (2007)

could this be the basis for the family folklore? According to Demarchi, these documents were lost so the list of 58 names was never revealed.

The Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808 put an end to any further thought of using the British to liberate the country from Spanish rule. Spain became an ally of England and Castilla was defined as an active English agent, who with his colleagues continued to agitate.<sup>13</sup>

As already mentioned, Mariano Castilla wrote to Saturnino [Rodriguez] Pena (London, 12 March 1808) quoted in part below:

*“Dear countryman:*

*having had the satisfaction of meeting the gentleman [Manuel Aniceto] Padilla here in London who has informed of your situation there [in Rio de Janeiro]; I can do nothing less than take the confidential step of bothering you with this [note], soliciting your friendship and correspondence; (assuring you that my object in this Capital, is none other than that of a true American who works for the independence of his country). No doubt Padilla will give you notice of my person, that which even though useless, I offer to you and your family with the greatest sincerity that I owe to a countryman who, like myself, has been exiled [despatriado] for the same cause.*

*Having no doubt that this letter will meet with the reception that I desire, I remain with the greatest veneration, your affectionate servant”<sup>14</sup>*

In November 1808 Jeremy Bentham wrote to John Mulford and mentioned that Don Castella (sic)<sup>15</sup> was to dine with him that day<sup>16</sup>. Bentham notes that he was “a gentleman born at Buenos Ayres, but who, in the year 1801, was, for about a month, at the capital of Mexico....Four years ago, he was sent over by the principle people of his country (South America) to offer to put it under the protection of this (England) country.”<sup>17</sup> About the same time, the North American political activist Aaron Burr<sup>18</sup> has several meetings with Don Mariano Castilla, an “Argentine agent”. During one of these meetings Castilla shared a “very interesting letter” that he had just received from Spain. There were at least four more meetings in November and December. Apparently, the association between Burr and Castilla is significant, as it marks Burr’s first direct contact with an agent of the Latin America revolutionary movement since his encounter with Francisco de Miranda almost three years earlier.

Burr and Castilla met on several occasions between December 1811 and March 1812. The two also met with Jeremy Bentham at this time. Castilla is also quoted as discussing “Mexican affairs” in the explanatory notes to Burr’s published papers. Burr

<sup>13</sup> Honor and dishonour in our history, paper by Jose Luis Parra published on Bitacora margen website 2012

<sup>14</sup> ARCHIVO DEL GENERAL MIRANDA (vol.21), p.99 provided by K Racine

<sup>15</sup> Castilla is often misspelt Castella in the literature; Mariano Castilla y Ramos also known as Mariano Castilla, Mariano Jose Ramos de Castilla

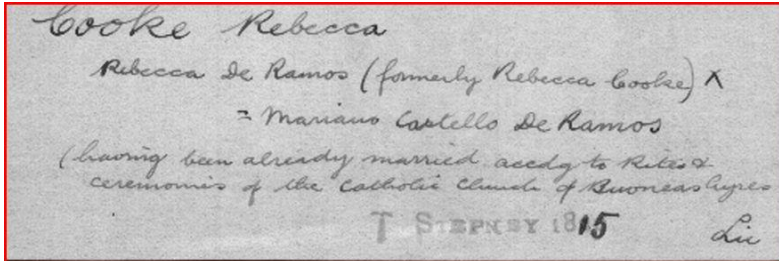
<sup>16</sup> Also referenced by K. Racine, in Francisco de Miranda, A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution

<sup>17</sup> The Correspondence of Jeremy Bentham, Volume 7, January 1802 to December 1808

<sup>18</sup> Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr II

wrote to Castilla on 22 March 1812 advising him to return to his native country as he was unlikely to gain anything for his country so long as the Treaty & Alliance exists between Great Britain and Spain. Burr returned to the United States soon after these meetings.

Another letter written by Mariano Castilla, who according to Lanata (2007)<sup>19</sup> “worked as a spy” for the Minister Canning, informed Canning that according to reports, Jose San Martin, Don Carlos de Alvear, Baron of Holmberg and others [were] headed to the Rio de la



Plata at the instigation of the [French]. His words were<sup>20</sup>: "I have been informed by stakeholders [that] are now in London that the passengers were sent and money provided by the French government. The negotiation was opened by Field Marshal Victor, [who was previously] a prisoner in Cadiz, but was freed and sent to France by secret instigation of the aforementioned gentlemen".

It would seem from all this that Mariano had been sent to London by native born South Americans in Buenos Aires to engage with the British Government to intervene in South American affairs. The British in turn paid Mariano Castilla a stipend in return for information. The revolutionaries appear to be playing the British off against the French but Mariano was clearly siding with the British to achieve these ends, presumably in order not to bite the hand that was feeding him and as his wife was English.

As already mentioned, Mariano Castilla and Rebecca (nee Cooke) Castilla remarried in London on 25 June 1815. Presumably this was to ensure that their marriage was legal under British law as they now had five children, four of which we know were born in England. Given the circumstances brought about by the British – Spanish alliance against Napoleon, we assume that Mariano’s activities in lobbying for British intervention in South America had become of lesser importance to the British Government. However, there is some evidence that sometime later his interests (and perhaps those of the British Government) turned to Peru. It is reasonable to assume this family remained in London until about 1820.

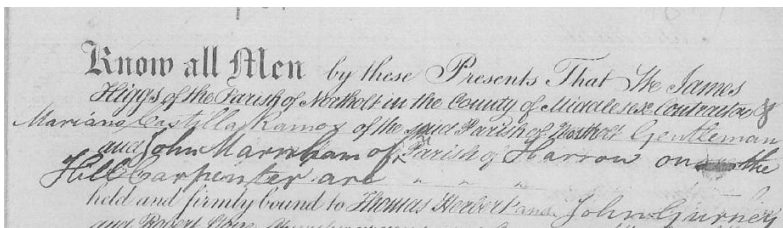
<sup>19</sup> Jorge Lanata: [http://argentina.indymedia.org/uploads/2007/02/lanata\\_\\_jorge\\_-\\_argentinios\\_-\\_tomo\\_i.rtf](http://argentina.indymedia.org/uploads/2007/02/lanata__jorge_-_argentinios_-_tomo_i.rtf)

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.canalsocial.net/ger/ficha\\_GER.asp?id=13111&cat=biografiasuelta](http://www.canalsocial.net/ger/ficha_GER.asp?id=13111&cat=biografiasuelta) (Rialp, S.A., 1991, Great Encyclopedia Rialp.)

In June 1817 Mariano Castilla Ramos is recorded as a signatory in his capacity as a church warden from Northolt to a bond for a contractor carrying out work for a workhouse. Birth records for three of the four children born in this period were registered in Middlesex. We have evidence that Mariano and his family moved to Norwich in Norfolk by 1821. Their son Henry Mariano Castilla's birth in 1821 is recorded in Norwich Norfolk and Mariano's name appears in a list of signatories to a Loyal Address to his Majesty published in the Norfolk Chronicle newspaper on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1821. Their last child Georgina was born in Norwich in 1827. One could surmise that Mariano's income had become somewhat "thin" if his value to the British Government as an informant had diminished. Norwich was probably a cheaper place to live than London and Rebecca's family came from Norwich.

Mariano clearly was not out of the political scene however. His daughter Constantia's (born 1808 in England) marriage notice published in the Bury & Norwich Post newspaper on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1829 records her father as Mariano Ramos-Castilla, Esq. of Lima, S. America. We can only speculate as to how he came to be in Lima and what his business there was. So far we only have these two snippets that give some indication that it was again in the same vain as his previous interests in Buenos Aires. The Brisbane Courier newspaper published an article on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1898 about his granddaughter Dr Amy Castilla's death which mentioned that her grandfather was "sent on a diplomatic mission to one of the South American republics. While there he

contracted fever and died, leaving his widow and child Fred Castilla [Amy's father], in London." Jorge Basadre in his document The



Fights Politicas<sup>21</sup> includes this reference to Mariano Castilla in 1832 "Iguaín barely had time to flee his house as it was attacked by a mob. Iguaín fled to Guayaquil [Ecuador]. The foreigners Fabián Gómez, Domingo Ballarino and Mariano Castilla were obliged to leave the country [Peru?]".

We have little further information. The marriage notices for daughter Eliza on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1837 records her father as of Lima and that of daughter Rebecca in 1841 as the daughter of the late Don Mariano Castilla of Lima. The notation on the back of his portrait which gives his death as Lima Peru on 11 September 1837.

<sup>21</sup> The Fights Politicas From 1831 to 1832, Jorge Basadre:  
[http://sisbib.unmsm.edu.pe/bibvirtual/libros/historia/iniciacion\\_republica/tomo1/lib2\\_cap4\\_2.htm](http://sisbib.unmsm.edu.pe/bibvirtual/libros/historia/iniciacion_republica/tomo1/lib2_cap4_2.htm)