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JOSÉ ALEJANDRO HUAU: A CUBAN PATRIOT IN JACKSONVILLE POLITICS

by GUSTAVO J. GODOY*

ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, April 9, 1905, the long funeral procession of José Alejandro Huau moved at a slow pace to the Old City Cemetery in East Jacksonville, Florida. United States Senator James P. Taliaferro, the former Jacksonville mayor, Judge Morris A. Dzialynski, and a large entourage of dignitaries, honorary pall bearers, and other mourners rode in the flag-draped carriages. Many people came on foot. The procession included a large Masonic honor guard. A huge array of floral wreaths surrounded the burial site, as Jacksonville lamented the loss of one of its most esteemed citizens.

Huau, the eldest of the four children of José Hipólito Huau, an American of French ancestry, and his Cuban wife, María Florencia Salaver, was born in Matanzas, district of Pueblo Nuevo, sixty-three miles east of Havana, on April 6, 1836.¹ There he spent the first eighteen years of his life. Then, in 1854, he left Cuba to visit the country of his father's birth. He stayed one year in Norwich, Connecticut, learning English, and four years

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1. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 6, 10, 1905. José Hipólito Huau was born in Baltimore, Maryland, December 19, 1809, the son of José Huau, a dentist of French descent, and of Catalina Cadoret. Act of marriage of José Hipólito Huau, Parish of San Juan Bautista de Pueblo Nuevo, Matanzas, Cuba, First Book of Marriages of Whites, p. 35. In 1810 the Huaus lived at 36 Water Street, Baltimore. William Fry, *The Baltimore Directory for 1810* (Baltimore, 1810), 98. The family moved to Havana in 1816. On April 21, 1835, in Matanzas, José Hipólito married María Florencia Salaver, a Cuban, the daughter of Luis Salaver and María del Pilar Núñez. In 1843 he graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Havana, and went to Paris to continue his studies for three years. Upon his return to Cuba he received an appointment as chief surgeon at the Matanzas Hospital. He became a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Havana. José Hipólito Huau died in Jacksonville on January 5, 1899, and is buried beside his son, José Alejandro. The author is grateful to Joseph Hall Capers of Jacksonville, Huau's grandson, for many biographical details incorporated in this article.

in New York, where he studied civil and mechanical engineering. Huau returned to Cuba at the age of twenty-three, and spent the next decade working for the Matanzas railroad. When his first wife, about whom little is known, died, Huau married Catalina Miralles. Their first son, Louie, was born on August 25, 1868.²

On October 10, 1868, when the first of Cuba's three wars for independence—the Ten-Year War—began, Huau became a member of the Matanzas Revolutionary Committee. Taken prisoner as a result of his activities, Huau was first confined in Havana's Morro Castle, and was then expelled in 1869 to the United States by the Spanish authorities. He was in Baltimore, his father's birthplace, a short while, and then went to Paterson, New Jersey, where he found employment for one year at the Roger Locomotive Works. In 1870 he moved to Jacksonville, and lived there the remainder of his life.

Other Cuban emigres were already in Jacksonville, and others moved in during the next several years, including members of Huau's immediate family. His brother Francisco remained in Cuba, but Matilde, the elder of his two sisters, and her husband, Henry M. Fritot, settled in Jacksonville. Enriqueta, Huau's younger sister, married Gabriel Hildalgo-Gato in Jacksonville on April 24, 1874. His father, a lung specialist, arrived in 1872, and practiced medicine for several years in his office on the second floor of the building at 31½ East Bay Street.

José Alejandro first found a job with the Florida Central Railway, but in 1874 he began operating a sawmill in the first block of Washington Street in East Jacksonville. Shortly afterwards, he established a tobacco factory in partnership with his brother-in-law Henry M. Fritot. This second business prospered, and after only a few months Huau sold the sawmill and concentrated all his time in the cigar factory.

On November 23, 1875, Huau became a naturalized American citizen. His naturalization certificate described him as being

2. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 6, 1905; Wanton S. Webb, ed., *Webb's Historical, Industrial and Biographical Florida* (New York, 1885), 151. José Alejandro Huau's first wife died while still a young woman and there were no children. Catalina Miralles was born in Camaguey, Cuba, March 9, 1848, and died in Jacksonville on January 20, 1930. Joseph Hall Capers; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, January 21, 1930.

short-five feet five inches in height— with brown eyes, full-faced straight profile, dark complexion and hair, and a short double-chin.³ Ralph D. Paine, a native of Jacksonville, who as a boy frequented the soda fountain Huau had set up adjacent to his tobacco shop on the corner of West Bay and Main streets, remembered him as a gentle, benevolent, and mild-mannered man with a very quick mind.⁴

The partnership between Huau and his brother-in-law lasted two years. Then Fritot sold his share to Huau, who conducted the business under the name, “Huau & Co.” Later Huau changed the firm’s name to “C. M. de Huau and Co.,” using his wife’s initials – Catalina Miralles— and the Spanish appellation “de.” He chose “El Esmero” for the Huau cigar brand name.

The company was first located in the Holmes Block, but expansion forced it to move in 1880 to the Abell Block, 32-40 West Bay Street, and to utilize also an annex on the corner of West Bay and Pine (now Main) streets. The second floor of the three-story building contained the office and box and storage rooms. The third floor housed all manufacturing, with separate departments for stripping, sorting, and packing. Stores, including a tobacco shop, were on the ground floor. The factory employed 125-150 persons and produced 6,000,000 to 8,000,000 cigars annually. Huau’s stock and fixtures were valued at about \$100,000, and it was estimated that the company’s annual sales reached \$200,000. Huau’s well-stocked cigar store was one of the finest in the city. It employed two clerks and did an annual business of \$20,000. Joseph F. Forns, formerly of Baltimore, served as Huau’s Jacksonville manager.⁵

In 1882 Huau established a branch in Key West, but he closed it three years later to concentrate all his efforts in Jacksonville. The city in 1884 contained fourteen cigar factories. El

3. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 6, 1905; Webb, *Webb’s Historical, Industrial and Biographical Florida*, 151; Joseph Hall Capers; U. S. Department of State, certificate of naturalization, no. 48080, November 23, 1875, in possession of Mr. Capers.

4. Ralph D. Paine, *Roads of Adventure* (New York, 1922), 64, 65, 154, 173, 175.

5. Joseph Hall Capers; Webb, *Webb’s Historical, Industrial and Biographical Florida*, 151. Ten years later, the factory was located in the Fairfield section of the city, northeast of the Old City Cemetery, at 81 Palmetto Street. George T. Belding, comp., *Florida Railroad Gazetteer and State Business Directory, 1895* (Atlanta, 1895), 147.

Modelo, the largest in Florida and managed by Huau's brother-in-law Gabriel Hidalgo-Gato, employed 225 people.⁶ By the 1880s Jacksonville's Cuban community consisted of several hundred persons, most of whom worked in the cigar factories. Wages ranged from \$9.00 to \$35.00 per week, depending upon the skill of the worker.⁷

Besides his business activities, Huau also became involved in Jacksonville politics. On April 5, 1881, he was elected to the city council for a two-year term by a margin of 557 votes.⁸ He won reelection for three more terms— in 1883, 1885, and 1893— each time receiving the largest number of votes of any candidate in the race. While a councilman, Huau served as a member of several important standing committees and played a leadership role in city affairs. On April 3, 1883, Councilman George DeCottes nominated him for the position of temporary president of the council, but Huau declined, suggesting instead that DeCottes be named.⁹

Although defeated in the April 1887 election, the strong friendships Huau had formed with local and county politicians would prove very helpful in his support of the Cuban revolutionary cause which became so important in the next few years. Among his closest friends and associates were Napoleon B. Broward, later governor of Florida; John M. Barrs, Jacksonville city attorney; and George A. DeCottes, fellow councilman and prominent businessman.

Council minutes reveal Huau's many interests in the affairs and needs of the community. He supported a variety of social welfare programs: ordinances making it unlawful to treat

6. The factory building stood on the northeast corner of West Bay and Clay streets.

7. This situation changed after 1902 when Cuba obtained its independence and many Cubans living in the United States decided to return to the island. In 1905 only forty-two Cuban men and twenty-five women resided in Duval County. Thus, Jacksonville's Cuban population ranked behind those of both Tampa (4,888 persons) and Key West (817 persons). Jacksonville had eleven cigar manufacturing establishments in 1905. Those employed sixty-six men, fourteen women, and seventeen children below the age of sixteen. Florida Department of Agriculture, *Third Census of the State of Florida, Taken in the Year 1905* (Tallahassee, 1906), 112, 113, table no. 4.

8. Minutes of the Jacksonville City Council, April 5, 1881, Book DD, no. 3, 300, 302, City Hall, Jacksonville.

9. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1883, Book DD, no. 3, 536-37.

animals cruelly; quarantine measures to check yellow fever epidemics; building a public hospital and a public market; repairing, paving, and lighting streets: improving sanitary conditions, fire protection, water and gas supplies, ferry services, and telephone communications; and cleaning up and beautifying the city's cemetery and parks.¹⁰ In December 1887 he was named to the election committee presided over by Jaquelin Daniel which had the responsibility of organizing the machinery for the election of new city officers.¹¹ Huau's participation in Duval County politics pushed him to the forefront as one of Florida's most prominent Cubans.

Even as Huau and other members of the Cuban colony in Jacksonville solidified their positions in the community, events had begun in Cuba which would lead to the island's third war for independence and its final emergence as a nation. On December 23, 1891, José Martí, apostle of Cuba's freedom movement, came to Jacksonville.¹² This constituted the first of eight visits to the community for the purpose of stirring up enthusiasm and of securing financial support. Although the records are not explicit, it seems likely that Huau played a major role in arranging Martí's appearances in Jacksonville. Perhaps he entertained Martí in his home, located at 147 Main Street near the corner of Union. In 1892 Martí founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party for which Huau would later act as sub-agent in Jacksonville. The two men were good friends.

Martí returned to Jacksonville July 23, 1892, and the following night he spoke at a mass meeting in L'Engle Hall. Approximately 1,500 Cubans, many Spaniards, and numerous Americans enthusiastically applauded his passionate appeal. One

10. *Ibid.*, Book DD, no. 3, 313, 340, 349, 378, 461, 463, 632, 659, 662, 676, 680, 691, 694-95, 710, 712, 723, 725, 727, 729, 738, 754; Book EE, no. 4, 18, 38, 90-91, 124, 128, 129, 131, 133, 134, 135, 138, 141, 153, 195-97, 211-14, 228-29, 235, 238, 241, 279, 281, 282, 307-08, 330-31, 336, 349-59, 370, 375, 376, 396.

11. Richard A. Martin, *The City Makers* (Jacksonville, 1972), 189.

12. José Martí (1853-1895) spent his short life attempting to free his homeland from Spain. Patriot, poet, essayist, orator, Martí lived in exile in New York for fifteen years. His voluminous literary works make him one of the most original stylists of the Spanish language. Founder of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, his extraordinary personality was able to unite the Cubans and to launch the War of Independence (1895-1898) against Spain, at the beginning of which he was killed in action.

prominent Cuban living in Jacksonville reported at this rally that the Cuban patriotic movement in the city was very strong and that its social club was flourishing. September 1892 witnessed the organization of a "Cuban Political Club" in Jacksonville in which Huau played an active part.

Martí's third and fourth trips to Jacksonville came September 16 and December 23, 1893. On the latter visit he made a speech at El Modelo, the factory owned by Huau's brother-in-law, Gabriel Hidalgo-Gato.¹³ Martí described this event in *Patria*, the official organ of the Cuban Revolutionary Party which he published periodically in New York: "The Club could not assemble on that busy Saturday, but the Cubans from 'El Modelo', Gato's cigar factory, rewarded with applauses of unaccustomed warmth, the Delegate who spoke to them about those things that irritate selfish men but please generous souls."¹⁴

Three times during 1894 Martí came again to Jacksonville: May 14, May 27, when he spoke at a rally in L'Engle Hall, and October 8. Huau was involved in the planning and arrangements. He had become increasingly active in the Cuban revolutionary movement, and was now considered one of its leaders in Florida. In the rear of his cigar store, Cubans gathered from time to time.¹⁵ These sometimes included General Emilio Núñez, who headed the Department of Expeditions during the Cuban War for Independence, and Alfonso W. Fritot, Huau's nephew and his most enthusiastic collaborator. The purpose was to raise funds and to organize secret expeditions for Cuba. Since the United States was still resolved to maintain its role of neutrality, these meetings were illegal and had to be clandestine. Others who were often present were Napoleon B. Broward and his brother Montcalm, owners along with George DeCottes of the sea-going tug *Three Friends*; attorney John M. Barrs; W. A. Bisbee, owner of the *Dauntless*, and John "Dynamite" O'Brien, its daring captain.

Jacksonville was one of the major centers of Cuban revolutionary activity in Florida. After much effort and long prepara-

13. Luis García Pascual, "Por la senda del Apóstol," *Anuario Martiano*, III (1971), 294.

14. Author's translation, from Carlos Ripoll, ed., *Escritos Desconocidos de José Martí* (New York, 1971), 112.

15. Samuel Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, Florida's Fighting Democrat* (Gainesville, 1950), 99.

tions by José Martí, Huau, and others, a three-ship flotilla was prepared to leave Fernandina, thirty-six miles north of Jacksonville, on January 18, 1895, for Cuba. The vessels, which would carry Martí, his top military chiefs, a detachment of soldiers, 800 rifles, and 600,000 rounds of ammunition, never left port.¹⁶ When a United States Treasury agent learned of the plans, he prevented the departure. The news of the aborted expedition spread quickly, and in Jacksonville the disappointed Cubans poured into the streets shouting: "The traitor of Fernandina! May a thunderbolt strike him!" Fortunately, Huau managed to intercede with Colonel James Buchanan Anderson, inspector general of state troops in Florida, who prevented the confiscation of the rifles and ammunition.¹⁷ To assess the situation and to confer with his advisors, Martí returned to Jacksonville for his eighth and last visit on January 13, 1895. He stayed in a modest room in the Travelers Hotel, at the northwest corner of Bay and Cedar streets.¹⁸

Huau's cigar manufacturing business and his cigar store continued to prosper. He had a good manager, and this allowed him the time to organize expeditions, charter boats, and purchase arms, ammunition, food, and medicine for the beleaguered Cubans fighting for their independence. Camouflaged cases containing arms arrived at Jacksonville consigned to Huau, and he and his nephew, Alfonso W. Fritot, supervised their transit to the chartered boats, where they were quickly loaded aboard.¹⁹ The houses and places of business of both Huau and Fritot were under constant surveillance, thanks to the efforts of Spanish spies and as many as nineteen Pinkerton detectives hired by the Spanish ambassador. Enrique de Mariátegui, and later Juan Potous, successively Spanish vice-consuls in Jacksonville, had been ordered to watch carefully the activities of all revolutionaries, but particularly Huau and Fritot.

16. Walter Millis, *The Martial Spirit: A Study of Our War with Spain* (Boston, 1931), 25.

17. Manuel Deulofeu Leonart, *Martí, Cayo Hueso y Tampa; la emigración, notas históricas* (Cienfuegos, Cuba, 1905), 277.

18. The Travelers Hotel, built in 1889-1890, stood at 407-409 West Bay Street. In 1895 its owner was Dorsey C. Andress, who had purchased it two years earlier from Burton K. Barrs, a brother of Huau's friend John M. Barrs. The Greyhound Bus Terminal is now (1975) located on this site.

19. Scrapbook belonging to Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, III, Fort George Island, Florida.

On April 5, 1895, the day before his fifty-ninth birthday, Huau attended a large Cuban rally at Metropolitan Hall in Jacksonville. The 800 persons present included Jacksonville Mayor Duncan U. Fletcher, United States District Attorney Frank Clark, Postmaster Harrison W. Clark, City Attorney John M. Barrs, and Judge H. Cromwell Gibbons. The meeting adopted a resolution calling for aid for the Cubans under arms and for the federal government to grant belligerent status to the revolutionaries.²⁰ Through Huau's influence, the Jacksonville Board of Trade on September 11, 1895, unanimously passed a resolution likewise urging belligerent recognition.²¹

A few days later, on October 1, Huau became sub-agent in Jacksonville for the Cuban Revolutionary Party, and thus became its official representative in the city.²² At a February 1896 meeting in Huau's cigar factory the Cuban patriots arranged to charter the *Three Friends* from Napoleon Broward and his associates to carry filibustering expeditions to Cuba. Those present at that meeting, besides Huau and Broward, included C. P. Barnard of Tampa, John M. Barrs, and two Cubans named Hernández and Freeman.²³ For \$10,000 the owners of the *Three Friends* agreed to transport a company of patriots under the command of General Enrique Collazo, and to tow war supplies, which had been loaded aboard the schooner *Stephen R. Mallory* of Cedar Key, to Cuba.²⁴ The voyage, as it turned out, proved perilous but successful, and it encouraged Broward and his associates to continue their filibustering operations.

Gonzalo de Quesada, secretary, and Benjamin Guerra, treasurer, of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, arrived in Jacksonville on Thursday, July 30, 1896, to confer with Huau and other influential Cubans. On August 10, at a reception attended by 150 persons at the former Metropolitan Light Infantry

20. *New York Times*, April 5, 1895; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 5, 1895.

21. For a discussion of belligerent status, the Cleveland administration, the Cuban revolutionaries, and their Florida sympathizers, see Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 96-137.

22. León Primelles, ed., *La Revolución del 95, Según la Correspondencia de la Delegación Cubana en Nueva York* (Havana, 1932), II, 78.

23. Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 100.

24. *Ibid.*, 100-01.

Armory, Huau's nephew, William Hidalgo-Gato, was elected as one of the directors of the new Cuban Circle of Jacksonville.²⁵

These revolutionary activities in the city were obvious to the Spanish authorities. Little effort was made to keep them secret. Juan Potous, vice-consul in Jacksonville, notified Pedro Solis, Spanish consul for Florida with headquarters in Tampa, of all that was happening. Enrique Dupuy de Lome, Spanish minister in Washington, made a formal protest to the American government, and the treasury department in September 1896 instructed United States District Attorney Frank Clark to proceed at once against Huau, Broward, Barrs, and Captain William T. Lewis on grounds that the *Three Friends* had violated the neutrality laws of the United States. Papers were served, but nothing very serious ever emerged from these proceedings.

Huau and Napoleon Broward signed a second contract, December 9, 1896, authorizing the *Three Friends* to carry forty men and thirty-five tons of arms and ammunition to Cuba.²⁶ This agreement had been authorized the previous day by Tomás Estrada Palma, the Cuban Revolutionary Party's representative in New York who would later become first president of the Cuban republic. Also in 1896, Huau took part in the delivery of a gem-encrusted sword presented by the American publisher William Randolph Hearst to Generalissimo Máximo Gómez, commander-in-chief of the Liberator Army. Hearst commissioned Ralph D. Paine, who was now a war correspondent for the *New York American*, to deliver the sword. Paine tried to reach Cuba aboard the *Three Friends*, only to be thwarted when a Spanish gunboat intercepted the vessel and he was forced to return to Jacksonville. Paine turned the sword for safe keeping over to Huau, who he had known since childhood. Huau sent it to Señora Gómez in Santo Domingo.²⁷ After the successful conclusion of the war, she carried the sword to her husband in Cuba.²⁸

25. The Cuban Circle was established mainly as a social counterpart to the Cuban Political Club of Jacksonville.

26. Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 125-27, 334-35n.

27. Paine, *Roads of Adventure*, 175.

28. *Ibid.*, Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, 335-36n; Ruby Leach Carson, "Florida, Promoter of Cuban Liberty," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XIX (January 1941), 286-87; Benigno Souza, *Máximo Gómez, El Generalísimo* (Havana, 1936), 219.

With the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in February 1898, and the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, Cuban residents of Jacksonville supported even more actively the cause which so much involved their homeland and their countrymen. They organized a Cuban fair, April 11-13, 1898, in the John Clark Building. Huau's wife, Catalina Miralles, together with her daughter Catalina and her niece Theresa Fritot, were in charge of the principal table at the affair. Later the same week, the Cubans organized another fair, under the auspices of the Florida Light Infantry Battalion, at the Armory Building. At this event they raised \$250.

For all of these activities associated with the Cuban cause, Huau spent much of his personal fortune.²⁹ His enthusiasm and dedication, however, never wavered. With the end of the war and the evacuation of Spanish troops, he decided to return to Cuba, his newly-liberated native land, where he had lived the first half of his life. Lacking sufficient funds, Huau had to cash in a small life insurance policy, but he was ready to sail in 1900 for the island and the moment he had awaited so long.³⁰ He stayed a few months in Havana, long enough to reestablish contacts with family and friends. Somehow while on the island he secured the capital to set up a branch of his cigar business. By February 1901 he had returned to Jacksonville, and devoted himself again to his family and business. With the inauguration of the Republic of Cuba, May 20, 1902, Huau wanted to be named director of the *Official Gazette*, the only position he had ever sought. The Cuban congress, however, had passed a law requiring that official posts should go only to Cuban citizens. Huau was not willing to renounce his American citizenship.³¹ He did receive some recognition for his services to Cuba; on April 7, 1903, President Estrada Palma appointed him honorary

29. Horatio S. Rubens, *Liberty: The Story of Cuba* (New York, 1932), 280; Mr. Joseph Hall Capers.

30. In 1901 Huau's policy with the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York (no. 280777-A) had a value of only \$400. Since he had two minor children, he could not cash in the insurance without prior judicial authorization. On August 18, 1899, a Duval County judge granted him the necessary permission. Guardianship records, file no. 1105, Duval County Courthouse, Jacksonville.

31. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 6, 1905.

consul of the Republic of Cuba in Jacksonville, and the Cuban senate approved the nomination on May 9, 1903.³²

In spite of his financial problems and ill-health which had begun to plague him, Cuba continued to attract Huau. He was ill when he visited Havana again early in 1905. He returned to Jacksonville around the middle of March, just three weeks before his death. He died April 4, a victim of "cardiac dropsy," at his home at 1649 Laura Street.³³ His passing came just two days before the sixty-ninth anniversary of his birth.³⁴ On the afternoon of April 9, his many friends and admirers attended a funeral service in the Chapel of St. John's Episcopal Church. It was later revealed that Huau had indeed expended virtually his entire fortune in the cause of Cuban freedom from Spain. The talented and successful businessman and patriot left an estate appraised at only \$500, but he left behind a reputation for loyalty and dedication that has not diminished over the years.³⁵

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32. Republic of Cuba, *Official Gazette*, May 22, 1903, I, 3073; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 16, 1903.
 33. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 6, 8, 9, 10, 1905. He is buried in lot 76, section 5, near the Hebrew section of the Old City Cemetery bordering Washington Street.
 34. Huau had six children: Louie (who died when only ten years old); Flora (who married David M. de Moya, and later Guarino Landa); Henry (who died at the age of twenty-one); Catalina (who married Hall K. Lorraine); José Hipólito or "Polly" (who married Always McGavock); and Estela (who married Charles B. Capers). Estela's sons, Joseph Hall Capers and Henry Huau Capers, still reside in Jacksonville. Huau's step-mother, Eliza M. Huau, survived him.
 35. Jacksonville Estate Records, file no. 3455, Duval County Courthouse, Jacksonville.