



**Petra's Legacy: The South Texas Ranching Empire
of Petra Vela and Mifflin Kenedy (Perspectives on
South Texas, sponsored by Texas A&M
University-Kingsville)**

Jane Clements Monday, Frances Brannen Vick

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The matriarch of one of the most important families in Texas history, Petra Vela Kenedy has remained a shadowy presence in the annals of South Texas. In this biography of Petra Vela Kenedy, the authors not only tell her story but also relate the history of South Texas through a woman's perspective. Utilizing previously unpublished letters, journals, photographs, and other primary materials, the authors reveal the intimate stories of the families who for years dominated governments, land acquisition, commerce, and border politics along the Rio Grande and across the Wild Horse Desert.

From Petra's early life in the landed ranchero society of northern Mexico, through her alliance with Luis Vidal—an officer in the Mexican army to whom she bore eight children—until her move to Brownsville after Vidal's death, Petra lived in Mexico. When she moved to Texas, having taken Vidal's name, she represented a link to the landed families of the region. Mifflin Kenedy, a steamboat captain who had first come to Texas during the Mexican War, married into her world, acquiring local respectability and stature when he took Petra as his wife.

The story of their life together encompasses war, the taming of a frontier, the blending of cultures, the origin of a ranching empire, and the establishment of a foundation and trust that still endure today, giving millions to Texas through charitable gifts. An attractive woman of business acumen, strong religious convictions, and intense family loyalty, Petra Vela Kenedy's influence through her husband and her children left a legacy whose exploration is long overdue.

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