

Bernardo O'Higgins

The Chilean soldier and statesman Bernardo O'Higgins (1778-1842) became a leading figure in the movement for emancipation from Spain and the first head of an independent Chilean Republic.

Bernardo O'Higgins was born in Chillán, the illegitimate son of Isabel Riquelme, daughter of a Chilean landowner. He was known in early life by his mother's name. His father was the Irish-born Ambrosio O'Higgins, later viceroy of Peru. Not openly acknowledged by his father, Bernardo was brought up by foster parents in Chile, then educated at the San Carlos College, Lima, and finally sent to England, where he became imbued with liberal ideas and converted to Francisco de Miranda's projects for the independence of the Spanish colonies. After a couple of years in Spain, where he lived in poverty and the disfavor of his father (who, however, relented on his deathbed and left him an estate near Concepción), he returned to Chile in 1802. He then assumed the name of O'Higgins and made his home with his mother and half sister Rosita.

O'Higgins threw himself into the struggle for emancipation which was then beginning in Chile. Though he lacked outstanding gifts of generalship, he possessed great personal courage, energy, and tenacity. In 1814 he took over command of the patriot forces from the rival independence leader, José Miguel Carrera. Forced to retreat northward before the Spaniards, O'Higgins made a heroic stand at Rancagua and then withdrew with the remnants of the patriot army across the Andes into Argentina. There he joined the forces under the command of Gen. José de San Martín, returning to Chile with him in 1817 to win the battle of Chacabuco and to become the first head (*director supremo*) of an independent Chile.

Liberation of Chile and Peru

For the next 6 years O'Higgins was engaged in campaigns to clear the Spaniards out of Chile and in efforts to build up an expeditionary force and fleet for the invasion of Peru. Though O'Higgins worked hard to organize the country on liberal lines, public discontent increased as a result of the strain of the war, economic prostration, and the increasingly autocratic measures O'Higgins's government felt obliged to take. Realizing that the choice now lay between continuing to rule by force as a dictator or to resign office, O'Higgins chose the latter course and left for exile in Peru (1823). He lived there quietly with his mother and half sister, on the estate given him in recognition of his services for the liberation of Peru, until his death in 1842.

O'Higgins was a man of simple and upright character and liberal principles. Although he devoted his life to the overthrow of the Spanish rule which his father had served with such distinction, he revered his father's memory and strove to continue many of the viceroy's reforms. His valor and patriotism, and his decision to surrender power rather than use it dictatorially, have assured him the foremost place in his country's history.



Further Reading

There is a voluminous literature in Spanish on O'Higgins by Chilean historians and a full study in English by Stephen Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins and the Independence of Chile* (1969). For background see Simon Collier, *Ideas and Politics of Chilean Independence, 1808-1833* (1968). □

Georg Simon Ohm

The German physicist Georg Simon Ohm (1789-1854) was the discoverer of the law, named for him, which states the exact relationship of potential and current in electric conduction.

Georg Ohm was born on March 16, 1789, in Erlangen, Bavaria, the eldest of seven children. His father, Johann Wolfgang Ohm, was a master mechanic and an avid reader of books on philosophy and mathematics. He cultivated the obvious mathematical talents of Georg and his younger brother, Martin, and the two soon gained the reputation of being the latter-day version of the famed Bernoulli brothers. Due to financial difficulties, Georg left the University of Erlangen in 1806 after three semesters. For the next year and a half he earned his living as private tutor in Gottstadt, Switzerland, but by 1809 he settled in Neuchâtel to continue privately with his university