

Los Angeles During the Civil War

By Jennifer Hill



California 100 Guidon, 2nd Regiment of Cavalry, Massachusetts Volunteers, c. 1862.

Los Angeles is generally not part of the discussion when it comes to the Civil War. The Civil War took place on the east coast, thousands of miles from this frontier town, but the people living in Los Angeles still considered themselves as part of the dialogue, especially those who felt strongly about the Confederate cause. In Los Angeles the Confederate Sympathizers were considered the minority; they had strong voices that carried from the Plaza in Los Angeles up to the state department in Sacramento. They may not have been a large force, but they were definitely one that needed to be kept at bay.

California as a whole was tied to the Union. Although there was a louder voice in Southern California that supported the Southern states, most supported the Union in Northern California. Even though California had only been accepted

to statehood ten years prior to the war, it felt a strong connection to the North, and they aided the war effort by supplying gold, troops, and high ranking generals. In regards to the gold that California sent, Ulysses S. Grant had said, "I do not know what we would do in this great national emergency if it were not for the gold sent from California."^[1] California paid for about one-fourth of the war for the North by the gold it had contributed. Many high ranking generals had also been stationed in California prior to the onset of the war. Many of these generals, including Winfield S. Hancock would go on to participate in major battles on the east coast. The major battles on the east coast also included citizens that lived in California. The California 100, the name given to the 100 cavalry men that traveled to Massachusetts, participated in one of the largest cavalry battles during the Civil War, the Third Battle of Winchester.

Despite the fact the California supported the Union, it was a large state that petitioned several times to split up. Since California's statehood in 1850, they wanted to divide the state of California into two, since there were 15 free states and 15 slave states at the time of statehood. The overwhelming number of people coming to California due to the gold rush pushed California to be entered as a free state, but this did not stop pro-slavery southerners within legislative to continue to push for a portion of California to be entered into Southern statehood. The legislative argued that many pro-slavery advocates had moved to Southern California and that creating another Southern state would restore the balance within the Senate. Jefferson Hunt, an assemblyman from San Bernardino, proposed a similar agenda when he, "introduced a bill to create and establish out of territory embraced within the limits off the state of California a new state to be called the State of Columbia."^[2] This new state would include the frontier town of Los Angeles as well as the city Jefferson Hunt represented, San Bernardino. This bill, Assembly Bill No. 262, wanted to create three separate states out of California and was met with little opposition. Although it had been a very popular bill, it did not pass due to the separation of the Know Nothing Party and the American Party.^[3]

The legislature in 1859 brought the topic up again on dividing California into smaller sections. Daniel Rodgers wanted to create the "Territory of Colorado", in which the people of that proposed territory would be able to vote to secede from the rest of California. The votes came in favor of creating the new "Territory of Colorado". The overwhelming major in Los Angeles, voted 1,407 to 441 for the creation of a new territory.^[4] The separation of California into the "Territory of Colorado" had been addressed several times in the *Los Angeles Star*, Los Angeles's local newspaper. Several of the articles published in 1859 discussed the details of the separation, including the creation of a new

state government and what cities would be included.^[5] In articles published later that year, it was to be concluded that the “Territory of Colorado” would enter as a slave state, which is what many southerners had wanted.^[6] However, California never did become separate entities due to the onset of the Civil War, though the overwhelming majority of California’s northern and southern population felt that the split was necessary.

When the split was refused at the start of the Civil War, some citizens began to support the theory of the Pacific Republic. The Pacific Republic, which would include Oregon and California, would separate from the United States to form its own republic on the west coast. The idea of the Pacific Republic had been looming in the shadows since before California’s statehood and included Texas in the original dialogue. At the start of the war, journals in Sacramento and in Los Angeles supported the idea of creating a separate republic.

The idea of the Pacific Republic started with California feeling misrepresented and ended with loyal ties to the native country. California felt that it was simply too far to be governed correctly. Plus many of the citizens within California came from both Northern and Southern territories making it difficult at the onset of the war. Even though citizens felt loyal ties to their hometowns, they believed it was not a fight California should be involved in. There was more pressure put on the idea of the Pacific Republic, with people like Governor Weller, an Ohio native who moved to California, pushing for the Pacific Republic. In the 1860 California legislative, Governor Weller predicted that if the Union dissolved, California would become its own republic.^[7] Many people shared the same the view as Governor Weller, including United States Senator Latham, who believed that California would be able to support themselves as a free and independent nation due to the resources that would be able to sustain California.^[8] The Pacific Republic did not materialize due to the fall of Fort Sumner, which drastically changed the dialogue for secession in California. When the South had taken over Fort Sumner, Sacramento expressed sentiment to the Union and concluded that California, “has not seceded, and will not secede.”^[9] The true end to the idea of the Pacific Republic came in 1861 when Republicans took over the office in California.

The separation California felt toward the United States, resembled some of the disconnect between Northern and Southern California. Northern California had different economy and population. The gold rush had brought a diverse population to Sacramento and also brought a thriving industrial economy. Los Angeles, during that time was still in its infancy, and it’s economy relied heavily on cows. The population in Los Angeles was mostly

Californios and indigenous peoples, with some relocating in order to pursue a better life. The population and the economy were not the only disconnect between Northern California and Southern California.

Southern California felt cut off from Northern California due to the lack of communication. Roads and ports were still be constructed in Los Angeles, which made travel difficult. It took twelve days for information to reach Los Angeles from Sacramento by horseback. Letters took even longer to reach citizens in Los Angeles. Almira Hancock, General Hancock's wife, was from the South and often wrote letters. In her memoir about her husbands life, she commented that it took awhile for her to receive mail to where they were stationed in Fort Tejon.^[10] Some people within Los Angeles had to wait six weeks to receive a letter. It wasn't until the telegraph was installed in the late 1850's that communication took a shorter amount of time. The disconnect between Northern and Southern California were not the only issue in Southern California.

Vigilantism

Vigilantism was a frequent phenomenon in early Los Angeles history and continued through the 1870's. It can be attributed to the high masculinity rate, mixing of races, drifters, and lack of police force and courts. Tracing Los Angeles newspaper back, there was about a murder reported every day with the exception of when political news or elections had become more relevant.^[11] The lack of police force eventually lead citizens to create citizens vigilante groups, which would go after other citizens who had committed crimes. Some of these groups would chase individuals out of town for helping African Americans or murder someone because of a crime they had committed. These group would even storm the jail to apprehend a culprit. Community leaders like Judge Benjamin Hayes, a traveling judge who reported in Los Angeles, and Sheriff Tomas Sanchez, the sheriff for Los Angeles, tried to get real justice for the criminals, but in some cases mobs took the job in their own lands.

Henry Hamilton and Colonel Edward John Cagewen

These vigilante and crime reports were printed in the *Los Angeles Star*, a newspaper that became popular after Henry Hamilton became the editor in 1856. The *Los Angeles Star* began its career in 1851, but had mediocre editors until Hamilton came along. Hamilton moved to New Orleans from Ireland in 1848, where he worked as a printer's apprentice. He later moved to San Francisco where he became a reporter for the *Public Balance*, a gold rush

magazine. In 1856, he moved to Los Angeles and became the editor of the *Los Angeles Star* for the next twelve years. In the newspaper, he included news from around the world, even news from China and Japan, but his true interest was in politics. Henry Hamilton was a Confederate sympathizer who also supported the institution of slavery. He insulted others in Los Angeles who were part of the Republican party, and called them “the most dangerous threat to American institutions since George III.”^[12] Hamilton was definitely one of the most outspoken Democrats on the west coast.

Hamilton spent much of his time analyzing the government and criticizing Lincoln’s presidency. Although the election of Lincoln was a temporary blow to his Democrat feeling, he still chose to insult Lincoln in later issues of the newspaper. One of Hamilton’s critiques was that Lincoln was more of a dictator than a president. Hamilton stated that “instead of a Federal Government composed of a Legislative, Judicial, and an Executive Department, we find the whole power of government seized by *one man*, and exercised as irresponsibly as by the czar of Russia.”^[13] It is important to note this is not his only critique of Lincoln, he often called contested his honesty and referred to him as “majesty”^[14] Other people living within Los Angeles read this newspaper and may have felt the same way Hamilton had about the President. His critiques of the government and Lincoln’s presidency continued throughout the war despite attempts to stop him.

The first noted attempt was in 1862, when citizens in Los Angeles grew tired of his attacks on the government and the Lincoln administration. United States Marshal Henry D. Barrows, a resident in Los Angeles, stated the *Los Angeles Star* needed to be suppressed.^[15] He took action and in February 1862, the Post Office Department told W. G. Still, the postmaster in Los Angeles, “that the paper be excluded form all post offices and mails of the United States.”^[16] Despite this being a bold action in an attempt to silence the paper it had little effect on the distribution of the paper. It did however have an effect on Henry Hamilton, who only grew angrier at the ban the United States tried to impose on his paper. It wasn’t until 1863, with the suspension of habeas corpus, that Marshal Barrows was able to have Henry Hamilton arrested and sent to Alcatraz for disloyal practices. While at Alcatraz, Hamilton was forced to take a loyalty oath and pay a fine before he could return back to Los Angeles. His return to Los Angeles ushered no change in his political dialogue, as the town of Los Angeles had expected.

Hamilton, surprisingly, was elected into the state senate. Sacramento tried to have him removed by stating that he was a traitor and not a natural born citizen of the United States, but all attempts to have him removed were shut

down. Two local justices investigated the case on Henry Hamilton, but they only proved that Los Angeles was actually in favor of him.^[17] Nothing substantial happened while Hamilton served for six months, but after his term, he returned to the *Los Angeles Star* for only a short period of time. The tide had changed in favor of the Union, and Hamilton could feel the atmosphere changing. In 1864, Hamilton sold the newspaper to another Democrat from Sacramento. It was only a few months later that the newspaper had lost its popularity and eventually had to shut down to due lack of funds.

Henry Hamilton had a great effect on the Los Angeles. Despite attempts to shut him down, Hamilton was still able to express his sentiment toward the government and to Lincoln. He was able to make his voice heard through his paper and through his election by the people for a state senate seat in California. Hamilton was the voice for a community within Los Angeles who may have felt the same way about the war and toward their government. This voice was loud until the tide began to turn for the Union, and the outlook for a win for the South looked bleak.

Hamilton was not the only vocal citizen in Los Angeles to support the southern cause. Colonel Edward John Cage Kewen, a lawyer for Los Angeles, demonstrated his southern hospitality and defended his southern honor on numerous occasions. He was born and raised in Mississippi with his three brothers. Kewen lost his parents at a young age and was forced to support his younger brothers after someone had abused their inheritance. He worked by day as a merchant and studied at night. Much like Abraham Lincoln, he studied law books and was fascinated by politics. While discovering his love of politics, he realized he was a great orator.

It wasn't until 1857 that Kewen had moved to Los Angeles after trying to avenge the death of his brother. His decision to move to Los Angeles was because his wife had moved there with her father, who had recently opened up a medical practice. Kewen became a very popular orator in Los Angeles and always championed for the Confederate cause. Prior to the election of Lincoln, Kewen would give a speech every Tuesday evening at the Montgomery Salon supporting the democratic nomination for John Breckenridge, a Southern Democrat. Democrats would stand in awe of his speeches, and he always received the praise of Henry Hamilton. The Unionist however felt very differently about Kewen and eventually had him arrested under the writ of habeas corpus, where he too was sent to Alcatraz.

His loyalty truly came out in support of the Confederacy during his time in the California State Assembly in 1862. He tried to resolve the “unconstitutional measure and arbitrary acts”^[18] of the Lincoln Administration. He stated that the federal government had taken illegal actions including Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, the suspension of habeas corpus, the illegal arrest and confinement of citizens, and the suppression of freedom of speech and press.^[19] Kewen expressed that he had a solution to these issues, but the Union majorities refused to hear them. Although he maintained his seat on the Assembly, he was a very unpopular man to work with among his Republican colleagues. He continued his law practice in Los Angeles, and his political views remained unchanged after the defeat of the Confederacy.

Kewen is another example of the Confederate minority in Los Angeles with a very large voice. He spoke to the Los Angeles citizens every Tuesday in front of the saloon about political nominations and rallied the citizens of Los Angeles toward the Confederate cause. It is also important to note that he was elected to the State Assembly despite the attempt to rig the ballots from army officials, which means the population in Los Angeles might have voted for him to become their representative.

Although both Kewen and Hamilton both expressed their sympathies toward the Confederacy and may have continued the sentiment toward the Confederacy, they are not entirely to blame. Some people living within Los Angeles and the towns around it felt strongly about the Confederate cause because they had ties to their home states. The exact number of Southerners living within Los Angeles at the time is unknown. Benjamin Filbert, a historian who wrote for the California Historical Society, stated that the number of Southerners was exaggerated and only about seven percent of California’s population had come from Southern states.^[20] Helen Walters, a historian who wrote for the Historical Society of Southern California, concluded that many Southerners were traveling to Los Angeles by caravan from the South through a path that went through Fort Tejon.^[21] In an effort to solve the issue of how many citizens in Los Angeles could have come from Southern territories, I examined the United States census records in Los Angeles in 1850 and 1860.

The 1860’s census records proved to be inconclusive due to the fact that it is only a partial record. The record only displays less than a fifth of the population in Los Angeles and none of the citizens listed indicated that they were from a slave state. The 1850’s census record, which actually took place between January 15 and March 13, 1851, concluded that there was about three thousand five hundred and thirty people living in Los Angeles at the time the

census was conducted. Out of those three thousand people, about four percent of them indicated that they had come from a slave-holding state. The majority of the population indicated that they were from California or Mexico, which makes sense considering California had achieved statehood only a year prior to the census record being taken and only a few years after the Mexican-American war had taken place in the late 1840's. Only one percent more of the population had come from non-slave holding states, and New Mexico was not considered in calculating either the slave-holding states or non slave-holding states due to the fact that it was still a territory in 1850.

Though population changes could have drastically changed over the period of ten years through travel by steamboat or caravan, the 1850's census records proved that even though southerners were the minority, they were only one percent behind the people who immigrated from the North. Combining the number of people who moved from the north and the south, they could both be considered the minority groups when compared to the Mexicans and native Californians who lived there. Taking that into consideration, it is ironic how a minority population living in Los Angeles could cause such an uproar.

Los Angeles

Despite the population numbers in Los Angeles, the secessionist party, and Confederate sympathizers had the Department of the Pacific worried. General Sumner took over the department in March 1861 after Albert Johnston resigned to become a general for the Confederate Army. Shortly after taking office General Sumner commented on Southern California, stating that the "dissatisfaction in the southern part of the State is increasing and becoming dangerous and it is necessary to throw reinforcement into that section immediately."^[22] It wasn't long after he noticed the dissatisfaction in the state that he sent troops to Southern California from Fort Mohave, Arizona. On the topic of moving troops, General Sumner wrote in April 1861 that, "I have found it necessary to withdraw troops from Fort Mohave and place them at Los Angeles. There is more danger of dissatisfaction at that place than any other in the state."^[23] The troops that were sent from Fort Mohave would be accompanied by troops from Fort Tejon. Both the troops from Fort Tejon and Fort Mohave would come to set up Camp Fitzgerald near Los Angeles in May of 1861.

During the movement of troops to Los Angeles, only one officer was present in the surrounding area, Winfield Scott Hancock. Hancock had been stationed in Fort Tejon in the late 1850's to defend against the indigenous population that lived in the surrounding areas. Almira Hancock, General Hancock's

wife, noted their time in Los Angeles in the book regarding her husband's life called *Reminiscences of Winfield S. Hancock*. She wrote that Hancock knew that there would be great dissatisfaction in the surrounding territories if Lincoln was elected president.^[24] As the dissatisfaction grew Hancock prepared for the worst and felt it was necessary to protect government property especially after he received word that people were trying to possess it. Hancock hid arms and ammunition as well as created a barricade using the wagons he had. He also armed himself and Mrs. Hancock in the event that someone tried to capture him, which Hancock felt was a real possibility considering he was the only United States official within a hundred miles of Los Angeles. Although a takeover never occurred, he was prepared for the worst.

During Hancock's last months in Los Angeles before being restationed on the east coast, several southern officers stationed in California paid a farewell visit to his home before departing for the South to fight for the Confederacy. In one of the conversations he had with a Southern officer that night in regards to whether that officer should fight for the Union or the Confederacy Hancock stated, "I can give you no advice, as I shall not fight upon the principle of State-rights, but for the Union, whole and undivided, as I do not and will not belong to a country formed of principalities."^[25] He understood that his loyalty lied with the Union, but he warned his fellow officer to make the right choice. That choice of loyalty was hard for the officers visiting General Hancock that night, because not fighting for the Confederate army would label "renegades"^[26] by their friends and relatives back home. Some of the officers at his home last night including, Johnson, Armistead, Garnett, and Pickett, would go on to fight major battles on the east coast. Before the night was over, General Armistead, gave Mrs. Hancock a Bible, and presented General Hancock with a new Major's uniform, stating that "he might need it sometime".^[27] The men left shortly after this farewell, and did not meet General Hancock again until fighting on the opposite side of General Hancock in the Battle of Gettysburg.

The generals who later fought for the Confederacy were not the only ones in Los Angeles who traveled through the desert to fight for the Confederate Army. Helen Walters, in her article discussing Confederates in Southern California, estimated that Los Angeles County alone provided the Confederate Army with over two hundred and fifty men.^[28] The soldiers traveling to the south had to pass through Fort Yuma on their way to Texas. She stated that in Fort Yuma's reports the number of people passing through varied from twelve to one hundred and eighty five people.^[29] The number of people passing through seems to be a high number, but when taking into consideration the

Confederate strongholds in El Monte and San Bernardino it may not seem like such a high number.

El Monte and San Bernardino were both considered Confederate strongholds. El Monte was a secessionist town due to a number of Texan residents riding in that area. On May 4, 1861, the residents in El Monte in an effort to show their support of the South, carried the Bear State Flag and shouted Jefferson Davis's name through the streets.^[30] They also showed their support by recruiting and training troops for the Confederate army. San Bernardino resembled El Monte because they also were a Confederate post. Many Southern's stayed within the hills of San Bernardino looking for ways to aid the Confederate army, one of which was by recruiting.

Besides recruitment, Los Angeles supported the Confederacy by taking to the streets. The Fall of Fort Sumter by the Confederate Army in April 1861 caused quite the excitement in Los Angeles. The news from San Francisco took twelve days to reach the coast and the message was finally received on April 24, 1861. Harris Newmark, a resident in Los Angeles, described the event in his remembrance of his sixty years in Los Angeles. He stated there was an excited population that took to the streets, but the overall feel of the news was mingled with "elation and sorrow".^[31] His description clearly stated the mixed feelings within Los Angeles. After years of debating on whether to be a separate state or a separate nation, Los Angeles finally felt emerged in the war. A few days after the fall of Fort Sumner, Confederate Sympathizers hung General Beauregard's picture in the Bella Union Hotel in Los Angeles, one of the main places where Southerners gathered. While taking to the streets, Confederate Sympathizers sang songs like "We'll Hang Abe Lincoln to a Tree" and "We'll Drive the Bloody Tyrant from Our Dear Native Soil".^[32] The Fall of Fort Sumner was not the only instance where Confederate Sympathizers shouted their support for the Confederacy.

One sympathizer who took to the streets was Peter Briggs, the first African American barber in Los Angeles also supported the Confederacy, despite being an ex-slave. He became a free man at the end of the Mexican American war after having being sold to an officer. Harris Newmark, a resident in Los Angeles, remembered Briggs as a "black-haired, good-natured man, who was about forty years old."^[33] Briggs was also known for his Confederacy tendency, and Newmark recalls a time in his book when Briggs was arrested for his devotion to the South. In 1864, Briggs took to the streets and proclaimed his support for the South. This proclamation got him in arrested and sent to the Drum Barracks. As a punishment, Briggs was forced to wear a ball and chain from Los Angeles to the Drum Barracks while being accompanied by about six

cavalry men on his journey. As the story goes, on the way to the Drum Barracks, he took off his hat and threw it into the air and gave three cheers for Jefferson Davis.^[34] Not much else is known about Peter Briggs except sometime after the war had ended he was stabbed to death.^[35]

Drum Barracks

Although there was clearly a Confederate presence in Los Angeles, the forts surrounding Los Angeles kept the Confederates at bay. One of the most important events in the Civil War in Los Angeles was the building of the Drum Barracks in Wilmington. The land to build the Drum Barracks was sold to the government by Phineas Banning and B. D. Wilson. The total amount the government paid was one dollar for what later became a million dollar barracks. These barracks never had any intention of being a defense post only a military training, supply, and staging base.^[36] Its job was to supply to the surrounding military bases. Although that was the main intention of the Drum Barracks, putting a million dollar barracks close to a town surrounded by secessionist and Confederates sends a message that the government still has a presence, despite being miles away.

The Drum Barracks soldiers didn't really see much action. There were some minor skirmishes in different states that the soldiers stationed at the Drum Barracks had to travel to, but no real action was seen within California. Occasionally, troops from the Drum Barracks were sent to protect the Unionist in Los Angeles. On one occasion, when the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg became official, Unionist in Los Angeles began to celebrate. When the mood turned sour after several people in the celebration were threatened, a troop of one hundred men was sent to Los Angeles. They set up camp on the east bank of the Los Angeles river and stayed from the end of July to mid September. A newspaper in the area commented on the event by stating, "They will be stationed in this vicinity for some time, and it will be well for 'unruly persons' to be a little quiet, especially when the Union rejoicing takes place".^[37] The soldiers at the Drum Barracks had a duty to protect the citizens of Los Angeles, and by staying in the close vicinity the local newspaper took notice and warned others to be on their best behavior while they were in town. This was not the only instance in which the soldiers came to aid the residents of Los Angeles.

In conclusion, the Civil War had a great effect on the frontier town of Los Angeles. In the beginning, the people of California felt a strong disconnection between their government and wanted to vote on what the end result would be with the state of California. Many called for the state to be separate several

times throughout its infancy, though no law or bill was passed to start the process for separation. When separation was not achieved within the state level, people within California went for a much larger separation between the state and the United States. They called for the creation of the Pacific Republic, which was backed by state officials who realized that California could sustain itself on its own nature resources. The Pacific Republic did not take effect either, and California was to remain within the Union.

Despite the fact that California remained loyal to the Union as a whole, Southern California expressed Confederate leanings within a minority group of people. This minority group, while the exact number of people is still unknown, included Henry Hamilton and Colonel Edward Kewen. Henry Hamilton and Colonel Edward Kewen expressed their loyalty to the Confederacy through what they said and what they wrote. They both served for the United States government as one of the few remaining Copperheads. These two were not the only ones that expressed their loyalty to the South. Other unknown individuals took to the streets while chanting and singing songs about the Confederacy and the Union. They also volunteered themselves to travel through the desert to fight as soldiers for the Confederate army, much like the army officials had done after saying their last goodbyes to General Hancock and his wife Almira.

The one way the government was able to keep these Confederate sentiments at bay, was by sending troops to Los Angeles. Troops from Fort Tejon and Fort Mojave traveled to Los Angeles prior to the Drum Barracks being built in Wilmington to protect the people. It was later decided that a Drum Barracks needed to be built to supply the surrounding forts, and Phineas Banning sold his land to the government in order for them to build a million dollar Drum Barracks. The Drum Barracks protected the people of Los Angeles as well as trained new military forces.

Even though Los Angeles played a small part in the dialogue of the Civil War, it is important to note the history around it. The Drum Barracks still stands in Wilmington as a testament to those who were stationed there. The Plaza in Los Angeles, where many of the protests and declarations to Jefferson Douglas took place, still stands as a testament to those who lived in Los Angeles during that time. Although Los Angeles has documented history of the event through newspapers and articles, it begs the question of how many other frontier towns were effected by this event that were located on the west coast. How did the Civil War effect these towns and the people that resided in them?

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Footnotes

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^[23] Ibid, 146.

^[24] Hancock, Almira Russell, *Reminiscences of Winfield Scott Hancock*. New York: C.L. Webster &, 1887, 58.

^[25] Ibid, 66.

^[26] Ibid.

^[27] Ibid, 70.

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^[29] Ibid, 51-52.

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^[33] Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California*, 137.

^[34] *Ibid*, 331.

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