

California Confederates

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When one looks in the local library, or even in historical journals, one will find very little concerning the War Between the States in California. The main exception is California in the War for Southern Independence (1998), by Dr. Larry Talbott. There are many gaps and untold tales, or half-truths, about action in California on the behalf of the Confederate States of America.

Where were the California Confederates, and are there marking, plaques, et cetera? How many of you knew that there is a mountain peak up in the gold country, east of Jackson, called Jefferson Davis Peak?

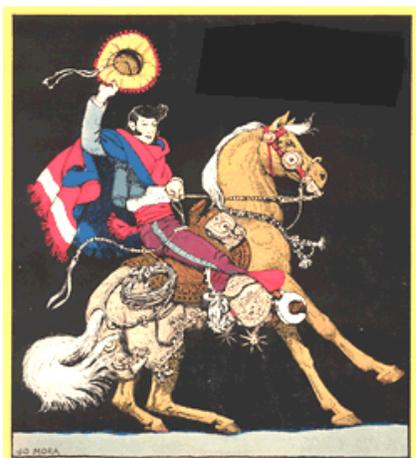
An Untold Story

Unfortunately, there few plaques other than those in cemeteries that even mention Confederates. The ones on the historic spots on California's roads and towns are almost entirely Yankee, and refer to our men as thieves, raiders, gang members, but never as Southern Partisan Rangers, Confederate Troops, or Confederate Navy personnel. This is certainly the fault of all of us SCV and UDC members in the state, as a few years ago lists were put together of CSA Historical Sites. Even though every camp and chapter were furnished with copies, and encouraged to go forth and put up plaques, nothing has come about.

Confederate Activity in the South

The primary Confederate support groups were in the Southern part of the State. They spilled up the coast to San Luis Obispo, and further up into the San Joaquin, as far north as Fresno. They were in the gold mining areas area up along Highway 49 and to the east.

More Confederate support was in San Jose and a hard core and very wealthy group in San Francisco was called the "Band of Thirty." In the Northern part of California they were more in the rural areas and towns. There was also a lot of positive contact with the Hispanic population, also known as *Californios*.



From Jo Mora's Californios' dust jacket



Californios at work

A Different Attitude

There was a different attitude overall in California and this included those who came from the Southern States. Let us go back to the California Constitutional Convention at Monterey in 1849: 20 delegates from Northern California; 17 from Southern California, 8 Native Californians and 3 of foreign birth who represented California from various parts of the United States. With this background, it was a surprise to many that the delegates voted unanimously for California to apply to the Union as a free state. You had a large block of delegates from the South, and an avid spokesman for the South in William Gwin. Slavery was not an issue in California, and since the vast majority of Southerners did not own slaves (contrary to modern mis-history), slavery was not an issue. Also they were anti-tariff.



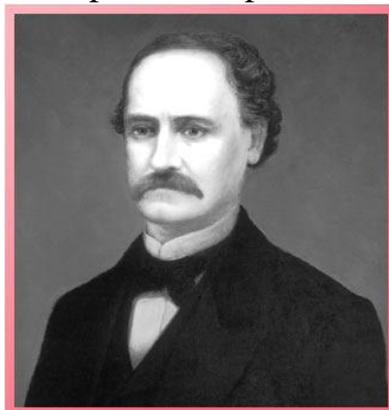
Senator Gwin

From the State Census in 1852 to that of 1860, the population of California grew 69%, mainly males. A different attitude is reflected by their song "What Was your Name in the States?" Besides the inference that many were fugitives from the law there is another message, an unspoken acknowledgment that those in California were not in the United States-- they were expatriates.

A Pacific Republic

By 1860, control of the state was in the hands of Democrats. There was at the time talk about creating a Pacific Republic from Canada to Mexico. We had a group of California governors and senators that did interesting things politically.

John Weller, Democrat, served as governor in 1858. He held strong conviction about the sectional conflict and believed that Californian should take no side, either with North or South, but ought to set herself up as an independent republic.



Governor John Weller

Weller had support for this view in both the legislature and in Congress. However, when Lincoln ran on the Republican ticket, Weller stated that if Lincoln were elected and the Southern States seceded, he would consider Californians less than men if they did not. Sharing his view were two United States Senators: William M. Gwin from California and Joseph Lane from Oregon.



Early California

New Governors and a Duel

To add to the confusion, on January 9, 1860 Milton S. Latham, a Lecompton Democrat, was sworn in as governor of California. But his interest was in the United States Senate, and after serving as governor for less than a week, he resigned and accepted an appointment to the Senate.

This vacancy came about because of a stupid duel between the then Senator Broderick and Judge David Terry-- State Supreme Court Justice, in which the lesser-skilled marksman Terry killed Broderick. So: Latham went to the U.S. Senate, and John Downey, another Lecompton Democrat and lieutenant governor, was sworn in as governor, but the Democrats split up nationally-- and that split Californians.

A Split Vote and Lincoln Wins California

We had Democrats in California going all different directions for all the different presidential candidates except for Lincoln. Henry Hamilton of the LA Star warned Californians of the folly of this split and warned them what the results might be.

Henry Hamilton was right. Lincoln got only 32% of California's vote, in spite of only seven of the 53 newspapers in California supporting him. But he won the election, with Douglas, Breckenridge and others splitting the vote.

Southern Resolutions Defeated

What followed was a series of resolutions in the California Assembly in early 1861 that put the blame for the nation's woes squarely on the Black Republicans. These resolutions were introduced by representatives from Southern California counties. They were defeated on a consistent vote of 28 to 41 by Northern California representatives.

Finally, on May 17, 1861, a resolution was proposed that backed the Constitution and the Union against foreign and domestic foes. This was 'cached' under very awkward rules—no debate and no explanation of your vote, which really bothered the pro-Southern assemblymen, as it sanctioned the Republican administration's aggression against the Southern States.

Another Duel Dashes Southern Hopes

This led to uproar and bitter words between normally congenial members. Daniel Showalter, a pro-Southern, Douglas Democrat from Mariposa, was challenged by Charles Piercy, another Douglas Democrat. The result was an insult to his gentleman's honor and a duel (not unusual) was called for.

Showalter killed Piercy who had never thought he would become an instant martyr for the Union! Warrants were issued for Showalter's arrest even though Piercy had brought it on himself. However, this destroyed the fair legislative debate and one was now a 'traitor' if he wasn't pro-Union.

Asbury Harpending

Let us switch the scene to San Francisco, where early in 1861 one of the South's best hopes for a outstanding General was still in charge of the U.S. Department of the Pacific.

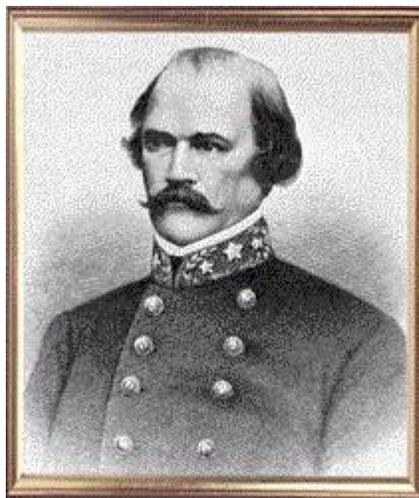
At that time there was also in San Francisco a strong, very well financed group of Southern Patriots- - enter-- Asbury Harpending, a young self-made Kentuckian who was wealthy from a Mexican gold mine, and other Mexican and Central American enterprises. He came into San Francisco just as Lincoln was squeezing out his narrow victory in 1860.

Asbury was a strong state's rights advocate and with his exaggerated wealth he soon fell in with a strong group of Southern patriots in San Francisco. One afternoon he was asked to come to a house of a well known Southern sympathizer where he found most of the "Band of 30" leading men of San Francisco gathered around a large table. He took an oath to take part in an affair of 'Great Peril' upon which the future of the South might depend. He was eager to help and contributed \$100,000 to the Cause.

The Uprising Planned

The plan was to take over California for the South. Each member was responsible for the organization of a fighting force of say a hundred men under a selected Southern captain. This was not difficult, as California abounded with ex-veterans of the Mexican War, ex-Indian fighters, etc. The plan was to scatter these groups around the Bay Area and to make a simultaneous attack on all organized resistance in the area. The Federal Army was little more than a shadow with 200 men at Fort Point; fewer than 100 at Alcatraz; and a handful at Mare Island and Benicia where 30,000 stands of arms were stored. A night attack was planned. Following it was proposed to organize an army of Southerners sufficient to beat down any unarmed resistance. We intended to organize as a preliminary "Republic of the Pacific," which already had much backing. By the middle of January 1861, everything was in readiness. It only remained to strike the blow!

What happened? The gentleman's code of the Southern (U.S. General at the time) Albert S. Johnston, whom the "Band of 30" had counted on, now told a group of those including Asbury Harpending that he had heard a foolish rumor that there would be an attempt to seize strongholds under his charge and that he would defend them to his last drop of blood. This was a deathblow, as the group knew one of their own was ethically against them at this time. A bad mistake as their research was correct. A short time later the band or committee voted to disband.



Albert Sidney Johnston (1803-1862)

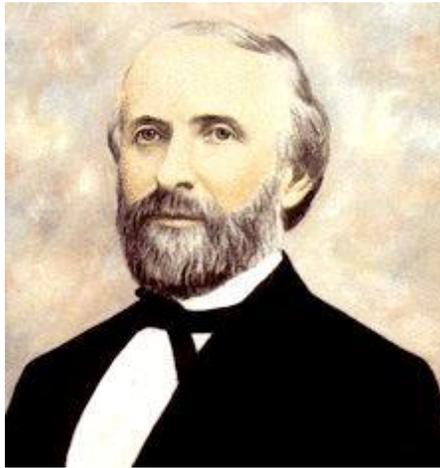
Fort Alcatraz

Let us take a brief look at Fort Alcatraz in the middle of San Francisco Bay, and the role it played. Also Fort Point with notation about guns pointed inwardly.

Texas secedes from the Union and General A.S. Johnston puts in his resignation even though Lincoln has already replaced him secretly. Even though he did the "right," ethical from his code of honor, he has cost the South, Northern California, and he heads south for Los Angeles and for his father-in-law's place, Dr. Griffin.

The Los Angeles area was in a growth mode at the time, but not like San Francisco. It was still an adobe town, but southward along Main and Los Angeles streets is the business district with many brick buildings being built. Northwest is Sonora-town the main residential

section. A short black southeast is the infamous Calle de Los Negros-- "Nigger Alley"- a real-life den of iniquity made up of cheap saloons, gambling den and bawdy houses. . A short distance away we have El Monte--A Southern Town and a hotbed of Southern Support, which finally had Yankee troops from Drum barracks (camping-out)



John Gately Downey

The Los Angeles Mounted Rifles

Enter California's Confederate Militia--The Los Angeles Mounted Rifles. California Governor John Downey issued a call for the formation of militia units and in mid-February 1861, seven prominent Angelinos petitioned LA County Judge Dryden to "open a book" to enroll militia members.

Among those men were J. Lancaster Brent, an attorney and former state legislator; Jose Sanchez a baker and leader of the City's Mexican community; and Alonzo Ridley, Under Sheriff for LA County. Some interesting things about the muster roll of some 70+ names:

- 1) There were a lot of people from the L.A. County Sheriff's Office, including A.J. King, a leader in El Monte's pro Confederate stance;
- 2) Ten percent were Spanish surnames, and had been born citizens of Mexico.

Alonzo Ridley

Captain Ridley was appointed commander, and immediately did a splendid job of acquiring weapons from the state. The unit was pro-Confederate from the start and represented a cross section of the community. In April with the forced firing on Ft. Sumter, the L.A. Rifles knew that they would have to head east to help the Confederacy and planned accordingly to go overland to Texas rather than by sea at the end of June. This timetable changed when Capt. Ridley ran into Dr. Griffin and offered their assistance in getting General Johnston to the Confederacy. Randolph Hughes, a Negro, Johnston's servant and bodyguard made most of the arrangements and went with them.

The L.A. Rifles Depart

Upon hearing that Johnston and he were about to be arrested for treason, Captain Ridley moved up the date of departure to June 16th and he, Johnston and Hughes left for Chino

Rancho. Captain Ridley then turned back himself to put out the call for the rest of the Rifles to meet at Warner Ranch.

Some men including Brent could not make it in time. The Rifles then proceeded southeast to Yuma, camped in view of Fort Yuma for three days-- strange. This resulted in Lew Armistead being approached while on picket duty by a U.S. Sergeant and some men from the Fort. They proposed that a group from the Fort would desert; join the Rifles and then would burn the Fort (all the Fort's officers were ill at the time). Most of the Rifles wanted to do it, but Johnston (again on ethics--they had not been sworn into the Confederate Army yet, and it would be akin to piracy) talked them out of it.

Through Tucson and 800 miles later they reached the Confederate Arizona Territory Capitol of Mesilla, where they were warmly received by John Baylor and his Texas Troops.

Pro-Confederate El Monte

Next we switch to the pro-Southern town of El Monte just east of Los Angeles. California legislator Daniel Showalter contacted CSA General Sibley in July 1861. Sibley had recently captured Albuquerque and Santa Fe.



General Henry Hopkins Sibley, 1816-1886

General Sibley Orders Californians to Train

Sibley instructed him to raise a force of cavalry; train them; and join him in New Mexico. The California Volunteers, El Monte Battalion, Confederate States Army, was formed in El Monte and trained there from July to November 1861. They left well trained and heavily armed--each man had a high-powered rifle, 2 revolvers and a large knife, plus an excellent mount.

However, they were ambushed by Major Rigg near Warner's Ranch, and surrendered much to the dismay of Showalter without a fight, because they believed they would be released. Instead, they were taken to Camp Wright, but when Rigg learned that a part of 75 men were forming in El Monte to force their release they were quickly taken to Fort Yuma (which

unfortunately had not been burned by the Rifles). They were held there until April of 1862 and then paroled. Showalter vanished and made it to the Confederacy where he later fought in the Battle of Sabine Pass. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel, in command of a cavalry regiment in Arkansas.



Fort Yuma Area



Fort Yuma on the Colorado. Circa 1860

Joseph Lancaster Brent

Joseph Lancaster Brent, first President of the L.A. School Board, known as "Don Jose" to the Californios whom he served as a land title expert and lawyer, missed the urgent departure of the L.A. Rifles. He had to wait until he and two others, U.S. Senator Gwin and U.S. Attorney Calhoun Beham, were able to leave on the steamship Orazaba in October 1861. Unfortunately this was the same ship that U.S. General Summer took, and who made them prisoners illegally, being freed by Lincoln as I earlier mentioned. Brent served as an artillery and ordnance officer in the Peninsular Campaign; captured the U.S.S. Indianola in the Vicksburg Campaign, and commanded the artillery at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill in the Red River Campaign. He was promoted to brigadier general for his sterling efforts at Mansfield.

California Gold Country

Now let us go up to the 'Gold Country' along and about Highway 49. Volcano is up in the gold country east of Jackson a few miles. More than 90 million dollars in gold was taken from there during its heyday. Gold was important to both sides during the War Between the States, and both sides were represented in this town. The Southerners were in an organization called the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secret society of statewide significance. The Union men formed a group called the Volcano Blues. Both sides were well armed with small arms. The Blues decided they needed an "edge," and secretly purchased a six-pound shot cannon, which weighed 800 pounds. They got it in San Francisco, and it made its final journey to Volcano in a hearse.

The Southerners (Knights) decided to challenge the Blues and formed a skirmish line outside of the armory. The Blues packed the cannon with black powder and small stones and ran "Old Abe" out to meet the Southerners. Upon seeing the cannon the Knights retreated, and that was that. However, the Blues had overloaded "Old Abe," and if they had fired it, they would have blown themselves to bits.

As time progressed fears of the cannon subsided and doubt spread as to if it could even be fired. The Blues knew that most of the big stores on Main Street belonged to Southerners, and a secret firing was arranged by which all the Union shopkeepers would close the iron doors on their windows at a signal. This was done and the cannon fired. All windows not covered were broken by the blast.

Captain Rufus Henry Ingram's Partisan Rangers

Next: Partisan Ranger military groups operating behind enemy lines. The Confederate Congress authorized these in 1862. Captain Rufus Henry Ingram formed one such unit in San Jose in early 1864. Ingram met with the Knights of the Golden Circle and presented his commission and stated his desire to organize such a group. They approved, and a Group of Confederate Partisan Rangers that would leave their mark was organized. They trained at the Hodges ranch, and then in June went northeast to the Somerton and its Inn. On June 30th they hit the Pioneer Stage line about 2 1/2 miles above Sportsman's Hill to gain a Wells Fargo's treasure box.

Captain Ingram gave the driver the following receipt: "This is to certify that I have received from Wells Fargo Co. the sum of \$ cash for the purpose of outfitting recruits enlisted in California for the Confederate States Army. Signed R. Henry Ingram, Capt. Commanding Co. CSA June 1864.

They came back to the Inn, where a posse attacked them. They made their escape, killing one officer of the posse.

The Most Western Confederate Combat

Another raid was attempted on July 15th, one mile from San Jose near the New Almaden mines for the mine payroll. A loose remark to a rancher brought authorities and a minor battle occurred with forty shots exchanged. The Union military recognized them as soldiers and pursued them. Ingram was one who escaped. Again it was a trial for "treason" for those caught. This ended the saga of the most western combat involving a Confederate military unit.

Unfortunately, all these sites (if they are labeled at all) are labeled favoring the Union and call our men nothing but gang members, or outlaws! We need to get some sites labeled as C.S.A. Historical sites!