



# DOG TOWN TERRITORIAL QUARTERLY

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## Special Fort Tejon Issue

IN THIS ISSUE:

Fort Tejon State Historic Park  
A California Copperhead, Henry Hamilton  
Political Skirmishing Jose Chico

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# A California Copperhead

## Henry Hamilton and the Los Angeles *Star*

By John W. Robinson

Los Angeles in the late 1850s was a small frontier town with dusty streets and buildings mostly of adobe, leftovers from its Spanish and Mexican heritage. The community, then as it is today, was multi-cultural. The 1860 census counted 4,399 people, slightly more than half of them Spanish-speaking Californios. A little less than half were white U. S. citizens, most of whom had arrived since 1849.

The Anglos, along with a few wealthy Californios, were the town's power elite. A score or so of French immigrants were already making a name for themselves as wine makers. At the bottom of the social scale were several hundred Chinese and destitute Indians,

victims of severe discrimination who performed mostly menial tasks.

The center of town had long been *La Plaza*, a vacant square surrounded by the Plaza Church and single-story adobe buildings. In the Plaza's center was a recently-built brick reservoir that stored the town's water, brought from the nearby Los Angeles River by means of a waterwheel and wood-lined *zanja* (water ditch). Immediately north of the Plaza was Sonoratown, a cluster of adobe shacks housing most of the community's Spanish speaking citizens.

By the end of the 1850s, the center of Los Angeles

Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library



Old center of Los Angeles. La Plaza on right; Plaza Church to left. Brick structure in Plaza at far right was city water tank. Behind is Sonoratown, where most of the Californios lived.



Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library



New center of Los Angeles in early 1860s. Temple Block, brick building on left, was city's commercial center. On right is court house with clock tower; bottom floor used as market for a while. Both buildings built by John Temple, leading Anglo merchant.

had moved several blocks south, to a cluster of two-story brick buildings recently erected by the Anglo business leaders.

The Temple Block was the commercial hub of town.

Across the street was the County Courthouse with its tall clock tower. Nearby were the Bella Union, the Lafayette and the United States hotels and the Montgomery Saloon. Just two blocks from these elegant es-

### Who Were the Copperheads?

*"Copperhead" was the term given to anti-war, anti-Lincoln Democrats by Unionists in the Midwest, particularly in the states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. They were called this because some of them wore copper pennies as identifying badges. Clement L. Vallandigham of Ohio was the leading "Copperhead" throughout most of the Civil War. In California, Unionists used the same term to brand anti-war Democrats. In the State Legislature elected in 1863, five of the forty elected senators and eight of the eighty assemblymen were known as "Copperheads".*

*According to the December 5, 1863 edition of the Sacramento Union the following legislative members of the Fifteenth Session (December 7, 1863-April 4, 1864) "are understood to be Peace Democrats or Copperheads":*

*Senate, 40 members, five of whom were "Copperheads": J.W. Freeman, Fresno and Tulare [Assembly 1863 session; Senate 1864, 1866, 1868 sessions]; Henry Hamilton, Los Angeles [1864 Session]; Warren S. Montgomery, Mariposa, Merced and Stanislaus [1864, 1866 sessions]; George Pearce, Sonoma [1864, 1866, 1868 sessions; 1871 narrowly defeated for Congress]; John A. Rush, Colusa [1864, 1866 sessions].*

*Assembly, 80 members, eight of whom were "Copperheads": Esteven Castro, Monterey [1857, 1864 sessions]; William L. Dickenson, Merced and Stanislaus [1864 Session]; Obadiah H. Hoag, Sonoma [1864, 1866 sessions]; Edward J.C. Kewen, Los Angeles [Attorney General, 1849-1850; Assembly, 1863, 1864 sessions]; Ygnacio Sepulveda, Los Angeles [1864 Session; With Emperor Maximilian in Mexico; District/Superior Court Judge 1873-1884]; Jacob Smith, Sonoma [1864 Session]; James N. Walker, Fresno [1863, 1864, 1872 sessions]; Murray Whallon, Sonoma [1864 Session].*



tablishments (by Los Angeles standards) was "Nigger Alley", a den of iniquity that housed low-brow groceries and cribs. Crime and violence were commonplace and justice was often administered vigilante style, with frequent lynchings. The premier economic enterprise was still cattle raising, followed closely by wine making. In furthering these enterprises, the town was surrounded by vineyards and livestock ranchos, most of the latter in the form of Mexican land grants.

One might reason that Los Angeles, so far from the national population centers, both in distance and in notoriously slow communication, would be too involved in its own affairs to take notice of national issues. But such was far from the truth. Political interest in state and national affairs was acute, as evidenced by the space given these matters in the local press. The national schism over the extension of slavery, which manifested itself in 1859 in the fight over the admission of Kansas as a slave or free state, was followed with keen interest in Los Angeles.

President James Buchanan and his administration favored admitting the strife-torn territory under the so-called Lecompton Constitution, drafted by a small pro-slavery faction in the would-be state. Democrats who opposed the admission of Kansas as a slave state found their champion in Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. In California, this Kansas debate was echoed in the intense rivalry between the state's two senators, William M. Gwin and David C. Broderick. Gwin and his "Chivalry" followers, as the pro-Southern element of the California Democratic Party called itself, supported the President, while Broderick and his Democratic supporters who opposed slavery extension backed the Douglas faction. The vociferous argument over whether the institution of slavery should be confined to the Southern states or be allowed to expand into the Western territories shattered the political alignment in California and in the nation as a whole. During the 1850s the Democratic Party split itself asunder into two warring camps. The Whig Party dissolved in acrimony and the Republican Party, born in 1854 to oppose the expansion of slavery, quickly became a force in the free states but an anathema to the South.

Los Angeles was an overwhelmingly Democratic town in the years preceding the Civil War. The party was a runaway winner in every local contest with

Whigs, Know-Nothings and later, Republicans. The break in Democratic ranks that developed in the late 1850s saw the majority of Los Angeles Democrats side with the "Chivalry" wing. The drift of the Southern states toward secession was viewed with reluctance but also with sympathy and understanding by a large part of the local citizenry, many of whom were recent immigrants from Texas and border slave states such as Missouri and Kentucky.<sup>1</sup>

Of no small importance in perpetuating the Southern Democratic persuasion of Los Angeles in the years leading up to the Civil War was Henry Hamilton, outspoken editor of the Los Angeles *Star*. The *Star*, Los Angeles' first newspaper, was founded in 1851 and run by a succession of mediocre editors until Hamilton took over in 1856. The new editor was a Democratic Party stalwart and a strong supporter of Southern principles such as state sovereignty and white supremacy. In the ensuing four years, Hamilton transformed the *Star* into a sound and thriving journal that strongly espoused Democratic principles.

Only the barest facts about Henry Hamilton's background are known. He was born in Londonderry, Ireland, probably in 1826, and emigrated to the United States in 1848. He worked briefly as a printer's apprentice in New Orleans and then journeyed to California late in 1849 to try his hand at gold mining. The strenuous life in the gold fields apparently was too much for him, and in 1850 he drifted into San Francisco, where he became a reporter for the *Public Balance*, one of the Bay City's short-lived gold rush journals. Following the *Public Balance's* demise in 1851, Hamilton and two associates returned to the Mother Lode country and founded the *Calaveras Journal* at Mokelumne Hill. Five years later he sold his interest in the *Journal* and moved to Los Angeles, where he commenced his twelve year editorship of the *Star*.<sup>2</sup>

Hamilton had more than a mere journalistic attitude toward the newspapers he published. He possessed a cosmopolitan interest in things literary. In addition to news reports, he printed essays, short stories and poetry. His most valued contributor in the early days of the *Star* was Ina Donna Coolbrith, who later became California's poet laureate. The *Star* carried advertisements for such learned Eastern journals as *The Atlantic Monthly* and often reprinted articles from these magazines. Hamilton's interests were



Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library



**Henry Hamilton (on right) with William McKee. Hamilton, editor of the *Los Angeles Star* from 1856 to 1864, turned his newspaper into a Southern Democratic Lincoln-hating, white supremacist mouthpiece.**

worldwide, as he editorialized on affairs in England, France, Naples, and even China and Japan. There was little in the cultural or scientific world that escaped his scrutiny.

But Hamilton's foremost passion was politics. William S. Rice, in his history of the *Star*, described Hamilton as "a far western outpost" of the Democratic Party and noted that "he and others like him made California into a Democratic pocket borough." Hamilton, according to Rice, "paid little attention to

local events: his eye was on the horizon, and he stood Jovialike . . . hurling his bolts at apostate Democrats and Black Republicans." Each issue of the *Star* was a political tract, and "each editorial a party argument."<sup>3</sup>

Hamilton was ambitious and anxious for advancement. He involved himself deeply in local political affairs, always on the side of the Chivalry wing of the Democratic Party. He was selected secretary of the Los Angeles County Democratic Central Committee in 1859 and was a delegate to the party's state conventions in 1860, 1861, 1862 and 1864.

Being a loyal Democrat and, through the *Star*, the mouthpiece of the party in Southern California, Hamilton secured regular funding for his newspaper. Funds were especially lucrative at election time, when the *Star* promoted party candidates for local, state and federal offices. Since the Democratic Party regularly won all local offices and controlled the patronage, the *Star* was awarded city and county printing contracts without competitive bidding.<sup>4</sup>

There is little in Hamilton's background to indicate why he became such a strong supporter of the South or so ardent a negrophobe. His direct association with the Southern white supremacy cause was limited to a few months as a printer's apprentice in New Orleans, yet historians of the pre-Civil War period would be hard put to find anywhere a more vociferous advocate of slavery. Hamilton had been at the helm of the *Star* for only a few weeks when his negrophobia became evident. The new Republican party, with its alleged abolitionist beliefs, was anathema to Hamilton. Upon discovering that several members of the Los Angeles Common Council were Republican sympathizers, he promptly labeled the council "nigger-worshippers" who had unfurled "the abolition flag." He went on to denounce the Republicans as "the most dangerous threat to American institutions since George III."<sup>5</sup>

The growing national schism over slavery, the breakup of the Democratic Party and the rise of the Republicans put Hamilton's political enthusiasm to a severe test. Each week, as the crucial 1860 presidential election neared, he filled the columns of the *Star* with thunderous editorials, urging Democrats to unite behind the candidacy of John C. Breckinridge, abandon the "Judas Democrat" Stephen Douglas and turn back the "Black Republican" tide. A week before election



day, with news that the preliminary vote in several Eastern states had gone to Lincoln, Hamilton pleaded: "Now, when the black waters of Republicanism are surging over the land, threatening to engulf the sacred ark of our rights and liberty, let the Democracy stand forward and present a solid barrier to its further progress."<sup>6</sup>

The election of Abraham Lincoln was a severe blow to Hamilton. After lamenting the turn of events, the *Star* remained strangely silent on political issues until year's end. As winter drew to a close, Hamilton expressed dismay and regret at telegraphic news of the national crisis and Southern secession. In March of 1861, he recognized the Confederacy as a fixed fact, viewed the separation of the Union as complete and blamed the breakup on Northern fanaticism. "Much as we deplore the disruption of the Union," he declared, "we cannot but admit that the South, if she could not have her rights in it, is justified in maintaining them out of it." The same issue of the paper also carried the complete text of Jefferson Davis' inaugural address.<sup>7</sup>

With the Union divided, Hamilton expended much effort advocating that California and the Western territories form an independent Pacific Republic. The idea had been first proposed a year earlier, when the *Star* had approved Governor John B. Weller's suggestion that, in the event of disunion, California "not go with the South or the North, but here upon the shores of the Pacific found a mighty republic, which may in the end be the greatest of all." Hamilton now became the proposal's foremost champion. In his opinion, California's interests were not involved in the quarrel between North and South and neutrality would preserve the state from internal disorder. "Peace is unquestionably our policy," Hamilton argued, adding that "if any are indisposed to abide thereby, they had better transport themselves to the scenes of war and blood."<sup>8</sup>

The electrifying news of the attack on Fort Sumter required ten days to reach San Francisco via Pony Express. It was then relayed by telegraph to Los Angeles, where it arrived on the afternoon of April 24, 1861. According to the *Star*, the announcement caused "the most profound sensation." The streets of Los Angeles were suddenly filled with excited, milling crowds, expressing mingled feelings of elation and sorrow. The

war which many had talked about, but which few had believed would happen, was now starkly real, and its effect on emotions was dramatic. Although separated 3,000 miles from the seat of conflict, Los Angeles shared deeply in the martial spirit; and the spirit in the minds and hearts of men surging through the streets was decidedly pro-Southern.<sup>9</sup>

President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers and a naval blockade to subdue the South unleashed a torrent of abuse from Hamilton. "In the clash of arms, the American Constitution has perished," he railed. "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."<sup>10</sup>

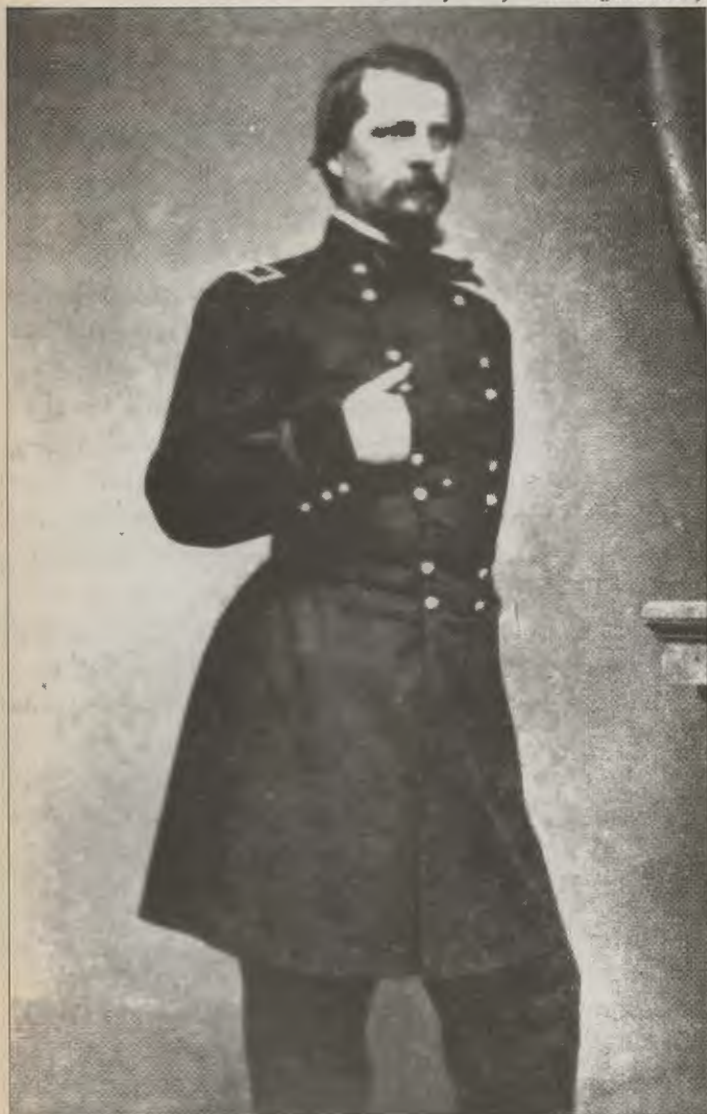
With civil war a reality, Hamilton dropped his idea of a Pacific Republic. Instead, he became a strong supporter of the Confederate cause, as well as a critic of the Lincoln Administration. Hamilton could not hide his elation upon learning of the Union defeat at Bull Run. In a lengthy editorial, he blamed the Northern disaster on Lincoln and the "New York abolition Press," who allegedly had forced Union General Winfield Scott's hand.<sup>11</sup>

These opening shots set the editorial tone of the Los Angeles *Star* for most of the war. Week after week, Hamilton defended the Confederacy while he hammered at President Lincoln, his administration and Republicans in general. He gave no quarter and obviously asked for none in return. His war against Lincoln was a holy war, waged in defense of the Constitution, states' rights, and above all, white supremacy.

Hamilton was particularly outraged by federal tax measures. He charged that the "war tax" enacted by Congress in August of 1861 would fuel "a wholesale butchery of the people of the Southern states, who have the temerity to ask to be let alone, and allowed to govern themselves." He raged at how the tax would affect local citizens. "Freemen!" he cried. "Read the foregoing section of the late Act of Congress, imposing a direct tax. Under it the Assessor, appointed by Mr. Lincoln, has the right to enter your house, to examine your wife's bedchamber, to open the drawers of your bureau, to go into your kitchen, to seize the key to your safe and open it and count your money, to take your book of accounts, your ledger, and extract the sum to



Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library



**Captain Winfield Scott Hancock, assistant quartermaster, was the only Army officer stationed in Los Angeles at the outbreak of the Civil War. He feared a Secessionist uprising and was relieved when the 1st U.S. Dragoons arrived from Fort Tejon on May 14, 1861. Hancock later fought at Gettysburg.**

tax you.... Great God!" Hamilton asked. "Was ever such a law devised? Woe to you who do not support 'Uncle Abe,' for he is invested with greater power than ever Caesar possessed over the Romans."<sup>12</sup>

Fears of a secessionist uprising in Los Angeles caused Brigadier General Edwin V. Sumner, new commanding officer of the Army's Department of the Pacific in San Francisco, to order troops to Los Angeles. In May 1861, Company K of the 1st U. S. Dragoons, 80

strong, left Fort Tejon and established Camp Fitzgerald in the supposedly threatened community. The new encampment was relocated four times and ended up just west of town. In June Company B of the 1st Dragoons, with 70 more men, arrived in Los Angeles. With 150 mounted dragoons now in town, any perceived danger of a secessionist revolt was quickly put to rest. Those few Southern sympathizers who opted to join the Confederate ranks, including a number of Army officers who resigned their commissions, left town and made their way to the Southern states either by the southern emigrant trail or via steamer and the Panama route.

Just before the regulars left for the eastern battlefronts, General Sumner ordered California Volunteers, who replaced regular Army troops in the West during the War, to Southern California. He justified his action on the ground that disaffection in the southern part of the state was "increasing and becoming dangerous." The rebels were organizing, Sumner warned, and added that "they have managed to seduce the native Californians by telling them they will be ruined by taxes to maintain the war" - an apparent reference to Hamilton's crusade against federal war taxes.<sup>13</sup> The California Volunteers garrisoned Camp Latham on Ballona Creek, near present-day Culver City, in September 1861. In early 1862 Drum Barracks in New San Pedro (soon to be renamed Wilmington) became the main Army post in Southern California. Despite Unionist fears at the time, secessionists and anti-war, anti-Lincoln Democrats never posed a real threat to take over the southern part of the state.

Early in 1862 Hamilton again levelled a blast at Lincoln's war tax. "Hundreds of millions of dollars have to be raised, to support waste and extravagance of maintaining half a million men as food for powder," he thundered. A clique of New York abolitionists was pulling the federal strings and Lincoln, through ignorance or design, was singing their tune. In Hamilton's opinion, the conflict raging in the East was an abolition war, "instigated, carried on, and to be consummated, by the degradation of the white race, and the elevation of the African family over them." He claimed that Lincoln's purpose in waging bloody war on the South was to abolish slavery and arm Negroes to rape and murder their white masters. Black Republican rule, he asserted, "has degenerated into



worse than oriental despotism."<sup>14</sup>

Such diatribes against the government quickly got the *Star* in trouble with the Union authorities. Brigadier General George Wright, who had replaced Sumner as departmental commander in October 1861, received numerous complaints from Los Angeles Unionists. United States Marshal Henry D. Barrows boldly demanded that the *Star* be suppressed. General Wright forwarded the complaints to Washington and on February 14, 1862, the Post Office Department informed Los Angeles postmaster W. G. Still that the *Star* was being used for the purpose of overthrowing the Government of the United States, and ordered that the paper "be excluded from all post offices and mails of the United States, until further notice."<sup>15</sup>

Hamilton was furious. He flatly denied that he was trying to overthrow the government and argued that the Lincoln Administration's claims of upholding liberties of speech and press were "mere shams .... a weak effort by a strong government." Being banned from the mails, he boasted, would have little effect on the *Star's* circulation, since the paper would be carried by private conveyance in the southern counties and it had few subscribers elsewhere. Hamilton apparently was correct in his assessment of the Post Office Department ban. There was no noticeable disruption of the *Star's* local distribution, nor any change in its editorial policies.<sup>16</sup>

That Hamilton was not intimidated by the government's action was evident in the March 8 issue of the *Star*, which published a letter critical of the Lincoln Administration's attempt to suppress the paper. The correspondent, who signed himself "Jayhawk," noted that "His Majesty Abraham Lincoln has seen proper to proscribe your paper," and asked: "Why speak of the Constitution now at all? The tool of abolitionism who now disgraces the chair of Washington, under the pretense of trying to force others to the observance of the Constitution of the United States, has virtually set it aside himself . . . by his dictatorial decree putting down the liberty of the press."<sup>17</sup>

Less than a year later, in January of 1863, the United States mails were reopened to the *Star* and other secession-minded Western newspapers. Hamilton published an unrepentant diatribe to celebrate the occasion. It was humiliating, he said, to behold the ruler of a great nation prohibiting the circulation of a local

newspaper, fearful lest it should overturn his despotic regime. In suppressing the *Star* and other anti-administration papers, Lincoln had displayed "a timidity, most ludicrous, a terror most abject," and "a depotism most foul and hideous."<sup>18</sup>

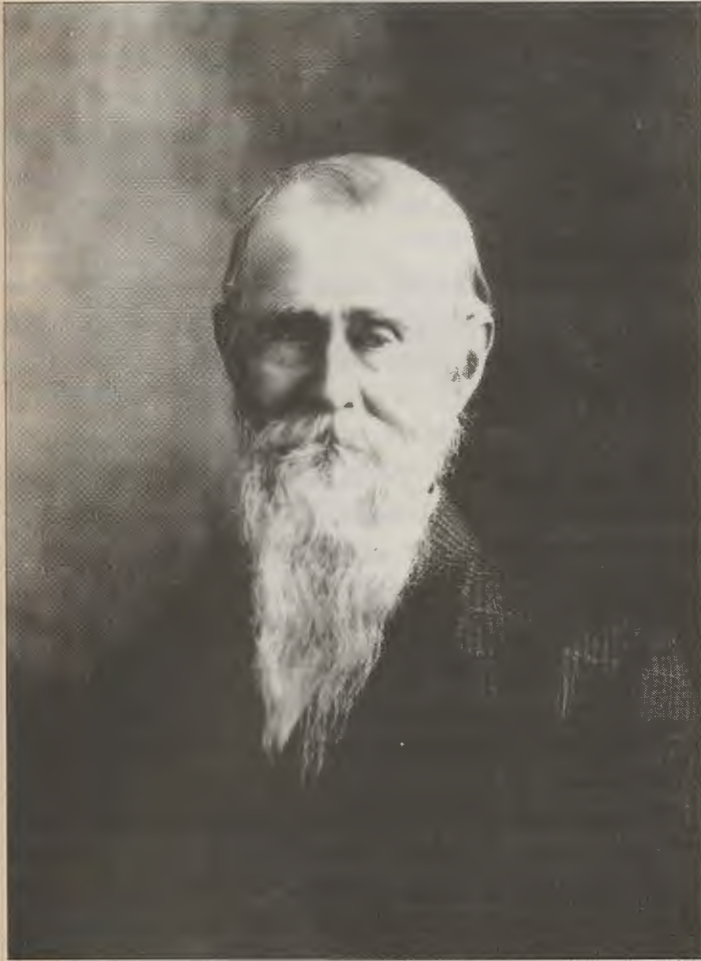
During most of the Civil War, the *Star's* local competitor, the Los Angeles *Semi-Weekly News* (later the *Tri-Weekly News*), carried on a running verbal battle with Hamilton. Although a Democrat himself, Editor Charles Conway of the *Semi-Weekly News* was also a strong Unionist who accused Hamilton of treason. "For more than a year," Conway charged, "a paper published in this city, conducted by an Irishman, has teemed with articles abusive of the Government and its officers, and misrepresenting the object and aim for which the war is waged." Conway called for the permanent suppression of the *Star*. "No other government in the world suffers itself to be misrepresented and maligned by its citizens," he complained, "and it is time our Government should prove no exception."<sup>19</sup>

Conway's desire to see Hamilton punished for his treasonable utterances, was realized a few months later. On August 8, 1862, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton authorized all United States marshals and chiefs of police to arrest any person "discouraging volunteer enlistments, . . . giving aid and comfort to the enemy," or engaged "in any other disloyal practice." Anyone so charged would be tried before a military commission. A second order, issued that same day, suspended the writ of habeas corpus in all such arrests.<sup>20</sup>

Stanton's instructions reached California on September 8, and General Wright quickly appointed a three-man military commission to try persons accused of disloyalty. Orders also were sent to local military commanders in California and Oregon to make arrests. Within a matter of weeks, a number of suspected Confederate sympathizers were taken into custody and sent to the hastily erected federal prison on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. The first person to be arrested in Southern California was Los Angeles Democratic assemblyman-elect Edward J. C. Kewen, who was taken into custody on October 8 and accused by Marshal Barrows of disloyal utterances on election day. A week later, Barrows ordered Hamilton's arrest, alleging that the *Star* editor "has persistently and publicly . . . sought to array the sympathies of the good



Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library



**Henry D. Barrows in old age. Barrows was appointed United States Marshall for the Southern District of California by Lincoln in 1861 and served in that office through the Civil War years. In 1862 he arrested Henry Hamilton for disloyalty to the Union.**

people of this Community against the Government." Hamilton was seized on October 17 and hustled off to the army's Southern California headquarters at Drum Barracks twenty miles south of Los Angeles.<sup>21</sup>

From Drum Barracks, Kewen and Hamilton were placed aboard a steamer bound for San Francisco, where they were confined on Alcatraz Island. Their imprisonment, however, was brief. On October 7, they were brought before the provost marshal in San Francisco and both took an oath of allegiance to the federal government. After posting a \$5,000 bond, they were released and allowed to return to Los Angeles. Upon their arrival two weeks later, Kewen and Hamilton were feted at a barbeque given by "the warm hearted

denizens of El Monte."<sup>22</sup>

If the Union authorities thought they had quieted Hamilton, they were sadly mistaken. The outspoken editor promptly stepped up his violent attacks upon the Lincoln Administration. Hamilton reserved his most bitter denunciation for Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which he labeled "the sorriest document which has ever emanated from an occupant of the eminent position [of President]." It was disgraceful that the American people had elected to the Presidential chair "a man so ill qualified for the lofty position as Mr. Lincoln"<sup>23</sup>

In December of 1862, the *Star* gave considerable attention to the Union defeat at Fredericksburg. "We give up our entire space to the details of the great battle of Fredericksburg," Hamilton announced, adding that "we say battle, but it was rather a massacre." He described how the "Abolition force put forth its mightiest energies, and it was defeated, totally routed, 'horse, foot, and dragoons!'" Who could conceive "the bereavements, the mourning, the wailing, the heart-breakings, in thousands of families, at the loss of their most valued members--and all this for no purpose, absolutely for no purpose under God's heaven." It seemed plain that the rule of "this abolition faction will not be forever. It is doomed. The handwriting is discernable on the wall."<sup>24</sup>

Hamilton was particularly sensitive to every infringement of freedom of the press. He was especially disturbed by an incident at Visalia in central California in March of 1863, which he felt posed a threat to all newspapers that expressed minority views. For some months the Visalia *Equal Rights Expositor* had bitterly denounced the Lincoln Administration. The paper had been particularly caustic in its remarks about the President, branding him "a narrow-minded bigot;" "an unprincipled demagogue;" and "a drivelling idiotic, imbecile creature" who would die "universally execrated." In October 1862, the army established Camp Babbitt near Visalia to control secessionist activities in the area. Immediately, the *Expositor* insulted the soldiers stationed there, calling them "hirelings" who wore "Abe Lincoln's livery." On March 5, 1863, the *Expositor* printed an article entitled "California Cosacks," which further abused the volunteers. In response, infuriated soldiers and Union men took matters into their own hands. In just fifteen minutes



that evening, a mob of seventy or eighty volunteers and loyal townsmen completely demolished the newspaper office, smashing the presses and tossing type, paper and ink into the street.<sup>25</sup>

Obviously concerned about his own paper's safety, Hamilton criticized the Unionist mob as "blinded by fanaticism and bigotry," and asked: "Do these dirty minions of a tyrannical power imagine that by the simple demolition [of a newspaper] . . . they are combatting error?" Although fears were expressed that similar mob action might take place in Los Angeles, no Southern California newspaper was assaulted during the war.<sup>26</sup>

As the summer of 1863 approached momentous news from the war fronts engaged Hamilton's attention. General U. S. Grant laid siege to Vicksburg, but the Confederate defenders gave every indication of holding out indefinitely. Meanwhile, the Union disaster at Chancellorsville received front-page coverage in the *Star*, as did rumors of peace. As an example of Northern disaffection, the *Star* printed a long speech by Richard O'Gorman of New York, entitled "The Folly of Civil War." By the end of June, Hamilton announced "Glorious News!" General Robert E. Lee had crossed the Potomac and was marching north. The editor of the *Star* thought the report "highly encouraging."<sup>27</sup>

Los Angeles observed July 4, 1863 in a subdued fashion. Sectional feeling was too bitter for an open celebration by the small cadre of Union faithful. Hamilton voiced no objections to Los Angeles' quiet commemoration of the fourth but he was highly critical of the festivities in San Francisco, denouncing the celebration there as "a petty party triumph . . . wanting in patriotism." Instead of celebrating the glorious event, the Declaration of Independence, "there was the vile wretch Swett, of infamous amalgamation notoriety, reading Lincoln's abolition proclamation." John Swett was the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and his crime in Hamilton's eyes was not only that he was a Union supporter, but--far worse--he favored educating Negro children.<sup>28</sup>

As war news filtered into Los Angeles via telegraph, the loyal Union minority at last found something to cheer about. The *Star* at first adopted a wait-and-see stance regarding "sensational rumors" of Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg. But in a few days all but the most partisan Southern support-

ers realized that the Confederacy had suffered grievous defeats. Hamilton, however, hardly commented on the dramatic turn of events. For the time being, he was more interested in local politics. As a reward for long and steadfast service to the Democratic Party of Los Angeles, he had been nominated for the state senate.<sup>29</sup>

The September 1863 election in Los Angeles was hotly contested. Although the Democrats won again in Los Angeles County, their margin of victory was narrow--a fact the *Star* attributed to the unscrupulous methods of the military. "At a public meeting held here on Sunday evening prior to the election," Hamilton reported, "the principal speakers were military-officers, who were coarse and malignant in their denunciations of the various Democratic candidates." Soldiers were stationed at some precincts in the county, or else rode up to the polling places while votes were being cast. A dragoon detachment had taken station in front of the polls, "whilst the military band paraded the town all day, informing us, in the most insinuating manner, that John Brown's soul was still marching on." Hamilton blamed the statewide victory of Frederick Low and the Union party on demagogery, threats, intimidation, misrepresentation and pilfering. "On no former occasion was the weight of civil and military, of State and Federal influence, so authoritatively exercised, or so shamelessly abused," he observed.<sup>30</sup>

Despite this alleged abuse of federal authority, Hamilton won election to the California senate. But before taking his seat at Sacramento, he stepped up his attacks on President Lincoln. Hamilton was incensed to hear constantly from "those misguided men who believe in God and Abraham Lincoln that, "Old Abe is honest." No greater fallacy, he stated "ever found lodgment in the brains of sensible men." Hamilton exclaimed: "Why, his every act, from the hour of his departure from Springfield to Washington to begin his saturnalia of blood, till the present day, has been replete with gross and palpable deception. If a single honest action has characterized his administrative policy since he assumed the reins of power, we confess to an entire ignorance of it."<sup>31</sup>

In late November of 1863, Hamilton departed Los Angeles on the northbound stage for Sacramento. Before leaving, he appointed F. G. J. Margetson to man-



Los Angeles Star.

VOL. XIII.

LOS ANGELES, CAL., SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1863.

NO. 25.

Los Angeles Star: Published every Saturday... Subscription price...

DR. J. C. WELSH, PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON... Office hours...

S. & A. LAZARD, Importers... Wholesale and Retail Dealers...

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F. P. RAMIREZ, NOTARY PUBLIC... Office at No. 101 South Main Street.

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W. M. HUFFMAN, Importer and Retail Dealer... WINE AND LIQUORS, STRONG BROS. CARROLL.

UNITED STATES HOTEL, MAIN STREET, LOS ANGELES... The Hotel is a large and comfortable building.

W. M. HUFFMAN, Importer and Retail Dealer... WINE AND LIQUORS, STRONG BROS. CARROLL.

W. M. HUFFMAN, Importer and Retail Dealer... WINE AND LIQUORS, STRONG BROS. CARROLL.

W. M. HUFFMAN, Importer and Retail Dealer... WINE AND LIQUORS, STRONG BROS. CARROLL.

W. M. HUFFMAN, Importer and Retail Dealer... WINE AND LIQUORS, STRONG BROS. CARROLL.

Dickson & Wolf Co. WHISKIES: VERY PURE AND SELECTED... BLENDED WITH THE BEST OF GRAIN.

W. M. HUFFMAN, Importer and Retail Dealer... WINE AND LIQUORS, STRONG BROS. CARROLL.

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W. M. HUFFMAN, Importer and Retail Dealer... WINE AND LIQUORS, STRONG BROS. CARROLL.

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tice with the clerk of the district court that he intended to contest the returns. Ramirez argued that Hamilton was disloyal to the United States and that he was not a citizen. The defeated candidate also charged corruption at the polls. Conway of the News supported Ramirez's claims and suggested that Hamilton deserved a seat at Alcatraz instead of at Sacramento. Where, the newspaper inquired, were the Irishman's naturalization papers? Hamilton's disloyalty was a "proven fact." He had tried to provoke rebellion in Los Angeles by printing incendiary articles which in any other country would have resulted in his incarceration or execution. The Unionist editor decried the timidity and indecisiveness of military commander "Granny Wright" for not cracking down on traitors in California.

The court appointed two local justices of the peace as commissioners to investigate Ramirez's charges. The results of the investigation were presented to the senate committee on elections. Evidently most of the testimony collected in Los Angeles was favorable to Hamilton. The senate committee failed to establish proof of the editor's disloyalty, found no conclusive evidence of election irregularities which Ramirez's claims were not established. The committee did not investigate whether or not Hamilton was a citizen of the United States. It was later proved, however, that he had been naturalized in 1856. The committee report was submitted to the state senate, which concurred in the opinion and dismissed Ramirez's petition. Hamilton was allowed to take his seat.

age the Star during his absence. The new editor, an anti-administration Democrat whose views differed little from Hamilton's own, continued the paper's attacks on Lincoln and on Unionists in general. In the meantime, Francisco P. Ramirez, Hamilton's Republican opponent in the recent election, filed no-

He served on several standing committees, including those dealing with public printing,



commerce and navigation. He submitted a few minor bills, mostly concerned with local issues and he voted routinely on the rest. Because of his anti-administration stand, Hamilton was known as one of the "five Copperheads" in the California senate and was usually at odds with the majority of his colleagues.<sup>34</sup>

In the early summer of 1864, the Civil War entered its most terrible phase. Week after week, both the *Star* and *News* hammered home on their pages the grim realities of human carnage. The armies of Grant and Lee were locked in a relentless slugging match and casualties mounted fearfully on both sides. Even staunch Union supporters wondered if the slaughter would ever end and whether victory was possible.

Having resumed the editorship of the *Star*, Hamilton expressed horror at the bloodbath and placed the blame squarely on the shoulder of Abraham Lincoln, whom he denounced as "an imbecile tyrant." In his eyes, America's political and social institutions had been revolutionized "to vindicate the irrational and divinely refuted theory of the equality of races, and to invest the African--stamped by the hand of Omnipotence with the irradicable brand of servility with the perfect political and social equality with the Caucasian." For this, Hamilton lamented, "has our national unity been destroyed; for this, the Constitution has been obliterated; for this, our liberties subverted; for this, the Continent has been plunged into war, and baptized in blood; and for this, and this alone, must untold thousands of brave men lay down their lives."<sup>35</sup>

Hamilton increased his attack on Lincoln, the Union administration and particularly, the Negro. When news arrived of the Fort Pillow Massacre, where Confederates under General Nathan Bedford Forrest executed all Negro soldiers being held as prisoners, the *Star* approved. "It is all very well for negro troops to cut the throats of helpless women and children of the South," Hamilton commented, "But if they happen to be caught in the act of thus 'serving their country's cause' and get their brains blown out or their carcasses pinned down with avenging bayonets, they are called victims of Southern brutality." Hamilton suggested to his "loyal" friends that "if they cannot endure to have their colored brethren killed, they had better keep them out of the army."<sup>36</sup>

Lincoln was renominated in June of 1864 for the

presidency. As summer wore on, Los Angeles showed little enthusiasm for the election contest. The *Star* was apparently resigned to Democratic defeat and called the president's reelection a "foregone conclusion." For once, Conway and the *News* agreed with Hamilton. The Confederacy, Conway stated, had come into existence with the election of Lincoln, and it was only fitting that it should expire with the same man in the White House.<sup>37</sup>

The president's fortunes ebbed and Democratic hopes brightened, however, when Grant's army became bogged down in the tangled thickets of Virginia, victory apparently still beyond its grasp. The *Star* exuded optimism, as Hamilton watched the prospect of Lincoln's election "become more clouded every week." The president's incompetency seemed to be "forcing itself painfully upon the mere casual observer." As Northerners became discouraged with the prolonged bloodshed, Hamilton thought that they might "turn the funny old joker out of office."<sup>38</sup>

Hamilton was deeply worried about the upcoming Democratic National Convention in Chicago. There were rumors that General George B. McClellan would be the party's standard-bearer. McClellan's nomination would be a fatal mistake, Hamilton insisted. Peace Democrats would not support the general. Furthermore, the term "War Democrat" was a contradiction, "an absurdity--a monstrosity."<sup>39</sup>

When news reached Los Angeles that the Democrats had chosen McClellan as their presidential candidate, the *Star* reluctantly accepted the nomination. "It is not necessary," Hamilton wrote, "that we should conceal our repugnance to . . . McClellan, or affect an enthusiasm we do not feel. . . . But the war must cease and McClellan has accepted the Party's peace platform." Hamilton urged Democrats--"in the name of God and humanity"--to rally behind the candidate and work to dethrone "the corrupt, usurping, bloody-handed despot" now in the White House.<sup>40</sup>

By September, Los Angeles was swept into the political whirlwind. Local Democrats joined in a huge rally described in the *Star* as the largest meeting ever held in the city. Torchlight parades occurred nightly around the Plaza and Temple Block.<sup>41</sup>

Although the *Star* entered the political arena with its usual relish, the newspaper did not finish the campaign. In the September 3 issue Hamilton announced



that he was transferring his interest in the paper to A. C. Russell, "who will hereafter be the Editor and Publisher of this paper, and be alone responsible for any debts contracted." Russell was a Democrat who shared Hamilton's political views and had previously written for newspapers in San Francisco and Sacramento.

Just why Hamilton abruptly left the *Star* is a matter of dispute. William Rice, in his history of the newspaper, believes that Hamilton had financial troubles, and urgent pleas for debt payment that appeared in the *Star* appear to bear this out. Robert Chandler, historian of Civil War California, asserts that there was a political cause: "As a peace man, Hamilton could not stomach McClellan!" Hamilton was caught in an impossible dilemma. As a Democratic Party regular he was obliged to support the party's standard bearer at election time. But as a fervid supporter of Southern principles there was no way he could back a candidate who had led armies against the Confederacy, one he considered a wolf in sheep's clothing. The honorable course, Hamilton may have felt, was to bow out of the arena.<sup>42</sup>

In mid-September, the *Star* sent out an agent to collect old debts and solicit subscriptions. The new editor appealed for support from Democrats throughout the southern counties. "Let every man who desires the overthrow of the usurping despot who sits like a hideous demon upon the breast of his country," Russell pleaded, "aid in the great work by contributing to the support of Democratic newspapers." But his frantic cry for assistance came too late. The last issue of the *Star* appeared on October 1, 1864—a single sheet announcing the suspension and sale of the paper. Russell explained that he had only leased the *Star*, and that Hamilton had reserved the right to sell it. So ended abruptly the only Southern Democratic newspaper in Los Angeles, a victim of economic hardtimes and possibly the declining fortunes of the secessionist cause.<sup>43</sup>

The *Star's* demise may have hurt the Democrats at the polls. Early returns in the November election revealed for the first time an apparent Democratic defeat in Los Angeles. In the county as a whole, Lincoln garnered 872 votes to McClellan's 593—a stunning upset. Conway was in ecstasy that this Southern bastion had at last fallen to the Union. "We have met the enemy and they are ours," the *News* exclaimed. "Los Angeles County has atoned in part for its former politi-

cal sins by repudiating the bogus Democracy .... We have come, Father Abraham!"<sup>44</sup>

But Union jubilation in Los Angeles County was premature. On November 17, the county board of canvassers threw out the returns from four Republican precincts and this gave McClellan a county majority of 191 votes. The board cited "irregularities" in counting the ballots as the reason for its action. Unionists suggested different motives—county officials were either "intensely McClellan or Secessionists." The *News* complained that "Nearly one quarter of the voters of the county have been disenfranchised."<sup>45</sup>

Hamilton left Los Angeles in December of 1864 and moved to Tucson, Arizona Territory. Little is known of his career in Tucson, except that he ran for recorder of Pima County in 1865. Unsuccessful in his stab at Arizona politics, he traveled to San Francisco. James J. Ayers had just sold his interest in the San Francisco *Morning Call* and gone to Hawaii to start the Island's first daily newspaper. Hamilton followed him and arrived on July 1, 1866 on the bark *Cambridge*. Working for Ayres apparently did not suit him and he departed Hawaii on October 6, 1866 on the bark *Comet* bound for San Francisco. He showed up again in Southern California in November of 1866, arriving from San Francisco on the steamer *Orizaba*. He brought with him a printing press and the stock to start another newspaper.<sup>46</sup>

Early in 1867, Hamilton began publication of the San Bernardino *Guardian*. His political partisanship apparently a thing of the past, Hamilton notified his readers: "We are not nor do we intend to be the mouth-piece of any party." Nevertheless, the once-fiery editor still showed occasional flashes of his old beliefs, as when he castigated Radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens as "that great heresiarch whose word is law and gospel to all radicalism."<sup>47</sup>

San Bernardino evidently did not suit Hamilton, for after a year he sold the *Guardian* to F. G. J. Margetson and Sidney Waite and returned to Los Angeles. On May 16, 1868, he resumed publication of the *Star*. The "late unpleasantness," as he termed it, was behind him. No longer a burning partisan, Hamilton molded the new *Star* into a "model" newspaper. He not only covered state, national and international news in a generally evenhanded manner, he also devoted a great deal of attention to local issues.<sup>48</sup>



About this time, Hamilton developed an interest in citrus growing and purchased a small orange and lemon grove near Mission San Gabriel. In order to devote more time to his new interest, in 1870 he took on George W. Barker as partner and editor of the *Star*. Two years later Barker leased the *Star* from Hamilton, who retired to San Gabriel and his citrus trees. Hamilton's retirement, however, was short-lived. In less than a year--"long enough for him to take all the twinkle out of it"--Barker brought the paper to near bankruptcy and Hamilton was forced to resume the editorship late in 1872. After guiding the newspaper back to solvency, Hamilton sold it in July of 1873 to Benjamin C. Truman, a colorful former aide to President Andrew Johnson, post office official, newspaper correspondent and author. Truman published the *Star* until 1877, giving way to a succession of less able editors. In 1879, the *Star* ceased publication for good when the sheriff attached its materials and sold them at auction. The major mouthpiece of Los Angeles' Civil War interlude faded into a colorful and rather unpleasant memory of a bygone era.<sup>49</sup>

With the final demise of the *Star*, Henry Hamilton almost disappeared from public view. He left journalism for good and retired to his ten-acre San Gabriel citrus ranch where he apparently enjoyed modest success as an agriculturalist. An 1880 report on the citrus industry in the San Gabriel Valley credited Hamilton with 500 orange and 100 lemon trees, yielding for that year 117 boxes of oranges and seventy-one boxes of lemons which he marketed under the "Fair Oaks" brand. He entered local politics, serving as justice of the peace of Mission San Gabriel for several years and added the appellation of "Judge" to his name. In 1882, he was elected to the board of directors of the San Gabriel Water Company. "Judge" Hamilton died of asthma at the Alhambra Hotel in Alhambra, California, on March 6, 1891. Having faded from public view years before, his obituary rated but two lines on page seven of the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>50</sup>

California journalism in the late 1850s and early 1860s was robust, rough-edged and highly partisan. Henry Hamilton's tenure with the *Los Angeles Star* mirrored these traits. A relentless critic of the Lincoln administration, a negrophobe and a vocal supporter of the Confederacy, Hamilton openly rallied local

Southern Democrats, gloated over Union defeats on the battlefield, survived arrest and even won election to the California Senate. To a large degree his journalistic career closely gauged the varying intensity of pro-Southern feeling in Southern California during the war. Cast in a larger light, Hamilton's passions and pronouncements were highly visible growth pains of a young frontier society in transition.

#### About the Author:

**John Robinson is a retired educator living in Fullerton, California. He has a deep interest in both southern California and Civil War history and has written extensively on both subjects. John also serves as a Historical Advisor to the Dogtown Territorial Quarterly.**

#### End Notes

1. For descriptions of Los Angeles in the late 1850s and early '60s, see Harris Newmark, *Sixty Years In Southern California, 1853-1913*, 4th Edition, ed. by W.W. Robinson (Los Angeles: Zeitlin and Ver Brugge, 1970); W.W. Robinson, "Los Angeles in the Roistering Fifties", *Brand Book*, Westerners, Los Angeles Corral, 1950; J. Gregg Layne, *Annals of Los Angeles* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1935); Albert L. Lewis, "Los Angeles in the Civil War Decades, 1850-1868", (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1970); John W. Robinson *Los Angeles in Civil War Days* (Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1977); and an excellent new work, Ronald C. Woolsey, *Migrants West: Toward the Southern California Frontier* (Sebastopol: Grizzly Bear Publishing Company, 1996).

2. William B. Rice, *The Los Angeles Star, 1851-1864: The Beginnings of Journalism in Southern California* (U. of California Press, 1947), 121; J. M. Guinn, "La Estrella: The Pioneer Newspaper of Los Angeles," *Historical Society of Southern California [HSSC] Annual Publications*, V (1900), *passim*.

3. Rice, *The Los Angeles Star*, 126-27.

4. Robert J. Chandler, "The Press and Civil Liberties in California during the Civil War, 1861-1865 (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1978), pp.13-16; *Los Angeles Star*, May 19, December 22, 1860; *Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*, May 2, 1862; January 8, 13, 1864.

5. *Los Angeles Star*, August 16, 30, November 1, 1856. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are to California newspapers.

6. *Ibid.*, October 27, 1860.

7. *Ibid.*, March 16, 1861.



8. *Ibid.*, February 25, 1860; January 5, May 11, 1861.
9. *Ibid.*, April 27, May 4, 1861. Maurice H. Newmark, Marco R. Newmark & W. W. Robinson (eds.), *Sixty Years in Southern California 1853-1913 [Harris Newmark]* (4th ed., Los Angeles, California: Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, 1970), 294; Marjorie Wolcott (ed.), *Pioneer Notes from the Diaries Judge Benjamin Hayes* (Los Angeles, California: Privately printed, 1929), 256.
10. *Los Angeles Star*, May 11, 1861.
11. *Ibid.*, August 17, 24, 1861.
12. *Ibid.*, August 31, 1861.
13. E. V. Sumner to E. D. Townsend, September 17, 1861, in *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [OR]* (128 vols. Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series I, Volume L, Part 1, 623. Aurora Hunt, *The Army of the Pacific, 1860-1866* (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1950), 40-41; Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 79.
14. *Los Angeles Star*, January 11, August 23, 1862.
15. Chandler, "The Press and Civil Liberties . . .", p.104; Chandler, "Crushing Dissent: The Pacific Coast Tests Lincoln's Policy of Suppression, 1862", *Civil War History*, XXX, 3 September 1984, p. 237; *Los Angeles Star*, March 1, 1862; *Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*, February 28, April 9, 1862.
16. *Los Angeles Star*, March 1, 1862. Rice, *The Los Angeles Star*, 233.
17. *Los Angeles Star*, March 8, 1862.
18. *Ibid.*, January 17, 1863.
19. *Los Angeles Semi-Weekly Southern News*, July 30, 1862.
20. Chandler, "Crushing Dissent . . .", p. 235; "Order Authorizing Arrests of Persons Discouraging Enlistments," War Department, August 8, 1862, in OR, Series III, Vol. II, 321-22; "Order to Prevent Evasion of Military Duty and for the Suppression of Disloyal Practices," War Department, August 8, 1862, in *ibid.*, Series II, Vol. IV, 358-59.
21. *Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*, October 22, 1862; Chandler, "Crushing Dissent . . .", p. 245; Chandler, "The Press and Civil Liberties", pp. 112, 117-119. For United States Marshal Henry D. Barrows part in the arrests, see Michael F. Konig, "Henry D. Barrows: California Renaissance Man", *Brand Book*, Number Six, San Diego Corral of the Westerners, 1979.
22. *Los Angeles Star*, November 15, 1862.
23. *Ibid.*, December 13, 1862.
24. *Ibid.*, December 27, 1862.
25. Chandler, "Crushing Dissent . . .", pp. 250-251; Benjamin Franklin Gilbert, "The Confederate Minority in California", *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XX, June 1941, pp. 154-170.
26. *Los Angeles Star*, March 28, 1863.
27. *Ibid.*, May 23, June 13, 27, 1863.
28. *Ibid.*, July 4, 11, 18, 1863.
29. *Ibid.*, July 18, August 8, 1863.
30. *Ibid.*, September 5, 12, 1863.
31. *Ibid.*, November 7, 1863.
32. *Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, September 25, 28, November 18, December 4, 23, 1863.
33. Rice, *The Los Angeles Star*, 248-9.
34. *Ibid.*, 250.
35. *Los Angeles Star*, January 16, 1864.
36. *Ibid.*, April 23, 1864.
37. *Ibid.*, June 11, 1864; *Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, June 14, 1864.
38. *Los Angeles Star*, August 27, 1864.
39. *Ibid.*, September 3, 1864.
40. *Ibid.*, September 10, 17, 1864.
41. *Ibid.*, September 24, 1864.
42. Rice, *The Los Angeles Star*, pp. 253-254; Robert J. Chandler, "The Press and Civil Liberties . . .", pp. 325-326.
43. *Los Angeles Star*, September 17, October 1, 1864. Phineas Banning, Unionist from Wilmington, purchased the *Star's* press and materials and moved the newspaper to the seaport community twenty miles south of Los Angeles. The paper now filled its columns with praise for Lincoln and the Union, a turnabout that must have galled Henry Hamilton. After only six issues the title of the newspaper was changed to the *Wilmington Journal*, allegedly to remove the aura of treason associated with the former name. Rice, *The Los Angeles Star*, 253-54.
44. *Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*, November 12, 1864.
45. *Ibid.*, November 19, 1864; *San Francisco Alta California*, November 23, December 6, 1864.
46. Prescott *Arizona Miner*, August 9, 1865, cited in *Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, August 19, 1865; *Wilmington Journal*, November 17, December 29, 1866, cited in Lewis, "Los Angeles in the Civil War Decades," 286-87.
47. *San Bernardino Guardian*; July 27, December 21, 1867; March 7, 1868.
48. *Los Angeles Star*, March 16, 1868. Guinn, "La Estrella," *HSSC Annual Publications*, V, 76.
49. Guinn, "La Estrella," 76-77; Rice, *The Los Angeles Star*, 255-60.
50. J. Albert Wilson, *History of Los Angeles County, California* (Reprint, Berkeley, California: Howell-North, 1959), 131. *Los Angeles Star*, March 14, 1878; *Pasadena Evening Star*, March 16, 1891; *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1882, March 19, 1891.

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