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# **Los Angeles at the Civil War's Outbreak**

by John W. Robinson

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# Los Angeles at Civil War's Outbreak

By John W. Robinson

(This article is based on the writer's forthcoming, fully annotated *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, to be republished with a new Introduction by the University of Oklahoma Press in the spring of 2013.)

Los Angeles was an overwhelmingly Democratic town in the years leading up to the Civil War. Until the election of 1864, the Democratic 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 mid-1850s saw the majority of Los Angeles' Democrats side with the "Chivalry," as the Southern-leaning, pro-slavery element in the state called itself. The drift of the Southern states toward secession was greeted with sympathy, if not outright support, by a large part of the local citizenry.

These positive feelings toward the South were only natural. In the 1850s, emigrants from Texas, Missouri, and other slave states poured into Southern California, most of them settling in Los Angeles and the new community of El Monte. Many Los Angeles civic leaders were natives of slave states: former mayor Benjamin Wilson, Judge Benjamin Hayes, viniculturalist and citrus rancher William Wolfskill, Dr. John S. Griffin, Colonel Edward J.C. Kewen, Dr. James Winston, and attorney Joseph Lancaster Brent, to name the most influential. Southern California was linked directly with the South by the [Butterfield] Overland Stage Line, opened in 1858. Of no small importance in maintaining Southern California's ties with the South was Federal patronage: a succession of Democratic presidents had filled all Federal appointive positions with political partisans, chosen largely by the Chivalry wing of the party. The vast majority of Los Angeles' 4,000-plus citizens were

Spanish-speaking and, although not decidedly pro-Southern, were largely hostile toward the Federal government, which they blamed for past ills. The most influential Latino in the local community was Los Angeles County Sheriff Tomas Sanchez, who openly sympathized with the Southern Cause.

The secession of South Carolina and other states of the Deep South following the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 was viewed with distress and foreboding in Los Angeles. Although there appeared to be widespread regret at the break-up of the Union, many—probably a clear majority—in town sympathized with the South's course of action. Writing to his sister in February 1861, Judge Benjamin Hayes stated that

The tone of the people here is Southern to a greater extent than might be supposed in the present controversy.

Henry Hamilton's *Los Angeles Star*, the most influential newspaper in town and strongly pro-Southern in its sympathies, saw the Confederacy as a fixed fact, the separation of the Union as complete, and blamed the fanaticism of the North:

Much as we deplore the disruption of the Union, we cannot but admit that the South, if she could not have her rights in it, is justified in maintaining them out of it.

For a few short weeks, Hamilton backed a plan for a "Pacific Republic," a union of far western states and territories that would declare their independence from both the Union and the Confederacy.

Henry E. Huntington Library



Henry Hamilton (right) with Los Angeles businessman William McKee. Hamilton, editor of the *Los Angeles Star*, strongly supported the Confederate cause.

A number of volunteer military companies were organized in Los Angeles and surrounding areas during the spring of 1861, in keeping with Governor John Downey's call for 5,000 volunteer militia to preserve the public order. In February, the "Los Angeles Greys" were formed at a meeting in the court house. The following month saw the birth of the 80-strong "Los Angeles Mounted Rifles," presided over by George Gift and Alonzo Ridley. Both of these gentlemen had strong pro-Southern beliefs. Out in El Monte, 12 miles east, the "Monte Mounted Rifles" were organized, 70 vigilante-prone "Monte Boys" under the leadership of Frank Green and Andrew Jackson King. El Monte, peopled largely by transplanted Texans, was a hotbed of secessionist sentiment and a dangerous place for Lincoln supporters to venture.

Not all volunteers in these local militia units were Southern sympathizers, but enough were to worry Captain Winfield Scott Hancock. Since May 1859, he had been Quartermaster of the Army's Southern District of the Department of the Pacific, and the only regular army officer in Los Angeles at the time. From his office on Main Street near 3rd, he purchased and distributed

food, supplies, and livestock to military posts in Southern California and Arizona. Hancock was worried that Southern Sympathizers in some of these quasi-military units might attempt to seize his army stores—particularly the guns and ammunition. But for the moment, all he could do was remain vigilant.

The electrifying news of the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter required twelve days to reach San Francisco via Pony Express, then was relayed to Los Angeles by the new telegraph line, reaching here on the afternoon of April 24th. The news caused "the most profound sensation," according to the *Star*. The streets of Los Angeles were suddenly filled with excited, milling crowds. Uncertainty and doubt suddenly vanished in an orgy of popular excitement. Although 3,000 miles from the seat of conflict, the martial spirit in the minds and hearts of men surging through the streets was decidedly pro-Southern.

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Captain Winfield Scott Hancock was the lone Union officer in Los Angeles at war's outbreak. He was quartermaster of the Army's Los Angeles Depot. Two years later, Major General Hancock fought at Gettysburg, thwarting the Confederate attack on Cemetery Ridge.

John W. Robinson Collection



The Bella Union Hotel on Main Street between Commercial and Arcadia, was a hotbed of secessionist activity in Civil War Los Angeles.

The Bella Union Hotel, a two-story brick structure on the east side of Main Street between Commercial and Arcadia, was the nerve center of secessionist outrage. Flushed faces, wild eyes, and screaming voices filled the Bella Union Saloon and the Montgomery Saloon across the street. Emotion-packed Southern sympathizers shouted hurrahs for Jeff Davis and the Confederacy and hurled insults at President Lincoln and Unionists. A few days after news of Fort Sumter, a huge portrait of the Confederate commander who led the assault on the fort, General P.G.T. Beauregard, was hung in the hotel saloon. Barroom songs, hurriedly composed for the occasion and often sung to the tune of popular ballads, reverberated through the halls and onto the streets. Two of the favorite ditties were "We'll hang Abe Lincoln to a tree" and "We'll drive the bloody tyrant from our dear native soil"

A correspondent of the *San Francisco Journal* spent a night at the Main Street hostelry and described it as

The most noted Secessionist rendezvous in the whole city . . . I have proposed to the landlord to call it the 'Belly Union,' as most of the patrons get pot-gutted the moment an expression of sympathy is made for Uncle Sam. All my surroundings are 'Dixies.' Dogs bark

it, asses and mules bray it, and bilious bipeds whistle it. The whole air is full of it . . . I am not going to get myself in any more messes by endeavoring to prove to these semi-insane people that to hoist the Stars and Stripes is not treason against Secession.

From his Army Quartermaster's office on Main Street, only two short blocks from the Bella Union, Captain Hancock was deeply concerned. After receiving a warning that Southern sympathizers planned to raid his quartermaster stores, Hancock concealed the arms and ammunition under bags of grain and improvised a barricade of wagons and boxes. He assembled a small arsenal of 20 Derringers for his own use, armed his wife, and recruited Union sympathizers to help defend the government property. He was fully prepared to fight it out until help arrived. For a few days it was touch and go. "Probably all that saved the faraway section of Southern California for the Union at this critical moment was Hancock's care in seeing that his precious guns, ammunition and supplies were adequately protected," writes Hancock's biographer. Although this assessment is almost certainly an exaggeration, Hancock's prompt action in guarding his stores from secessionist mobs saved the Army a great deal of trouble in the ensuing months.

In San Francisco, Brigadier General Edwin Sumner, who replaced Albert Sidney Johnston as commanding officer of the Army's Department of the Pacific on April 25, made a quick survey of the war situation in California and was distressed with what he found. In his first report to Washington, he painted a grim picture:

There is a strong Union feeling with the majority of the people of the state, but the secessionists are much the most active and zealous party, which gives them more influence than they ought to have from their numbers. I have no doubt there is some deep scheming to draw California into

the secession movement.

A few days later Sumner narrowed his sight on Southern California:

I have found it necessary to withdraw troops from Fort Mojave and place them in Los Angeles. There is more danger of disaffection at this place than any other in the state. There are a number of influential men there who are decided Secessionists, and if we have difficulty it will commence there.

That a display of force was urgently needed in Los Angeles to counter secessionist threats was clearly revealed in a message Captain Hancock sent to General Sumner. On May 4th, Hancock indicated that the situation in Los Angeles was critical, but that he might be able to muster sufficient local citizens to counter an expected attack from "a number of reckless people who have nothing to lose." Three days later Hancock wrote,

The Bear Flag was paraded through the streets of El Monte on the 4th instant, and was escorted by a number of horsemen, varying (according to reports) from forty to seventy . . . . The Bear Flag is being painted here, and I think it will be paraded soon, possibly next Sunday, or some other day when the company known as the Secession Company drills.

(The Bear Flag, symbol for the 1846 California Republic, was briefly utilized by Confederate sympathizers in California.) Hancock was also concerned about discontent among Los Angeles' Spanish-speaking citizens:

When once a revolution commences, the masses of the native population will act, and they are worthy of a good deal of consideration. If they act it will be most likely against the Government.

Los Angeles narrowly averted bloodshed a few days later. A company of 50 or 60 mounted secessionists from El Monte—probably the same ones who raised the Bear Flag in that Southern-sympathizing community—planned a ride into Los Angeles to raise their flag over the courthouse. Union men in town got wind of the plan and went to Sheriff Tomas Sanchez, warning him that such an attempt would be forcefully resisted and that bloodshed might develop. Sanchez, although himself sympathetic to the Confederate cause, had the good sense to realize that such a confrontation would have dire consequences. The sheriff, at the last minute, sent a messenger to El Monte to ask the Bear Flaggers to abandon, or at least delay, their plan. The messenger, according to one account, intercepted the mounted "Monte Boys" already enroute to Los Angeles and handed them the sheriff's warning that fighting would ensue if they proceeded to raise the Bear Flag. He also assured them that the national flag no longer waved over the County Courthouse. With this assurance, the Monte Boys turned back.

Realizing the urgent need for federal troops in Los Angeles, General Sumner ordered a

Photo by Athony, *Harper's Weekly*, June 28, 1862



Brigadier General Edwin Sumner

company of Army dragoons (mounted troops) stationed at Fort Tejon to proceed to the threatened city at once. On May 15, 1861 Major James H. Carleton led 80 troopers of Company K, 1st U.S. Army Dragoons into Los Angeles, to the immense relief of Captain Hancock and Union sympathizers in town. A few days later they were joined by cavalry units from Fort Mojave, and the perceived danger of an armed insurrection in Los Angeles was over. Guards were posted around the county courthouse, and camp was set up adjacent to Main Street, several blocks south of the city center. The temporary post was named Camp Fitzgerald in honor of Major E.F. Fitzgerald, late of Fort Tejon, who had died the previous year. This initial Army camp in Los Angeles changed location three times, and was never more than a temporary facility.

With soldiers in blue patrolling the streets of Los Angeles, citizens loyal to the Union were finally able to express themselves. A Union Club was organized; Columbus Sims was elected president and J. J. Warner vice president. The Club passed a resolution stating, in part,

We, the citizens of Los Angeles, declare our devotion to the Union and to the Government; sustain and support the Constitution; and will to the extent of our lives and means resist treasonable forces.

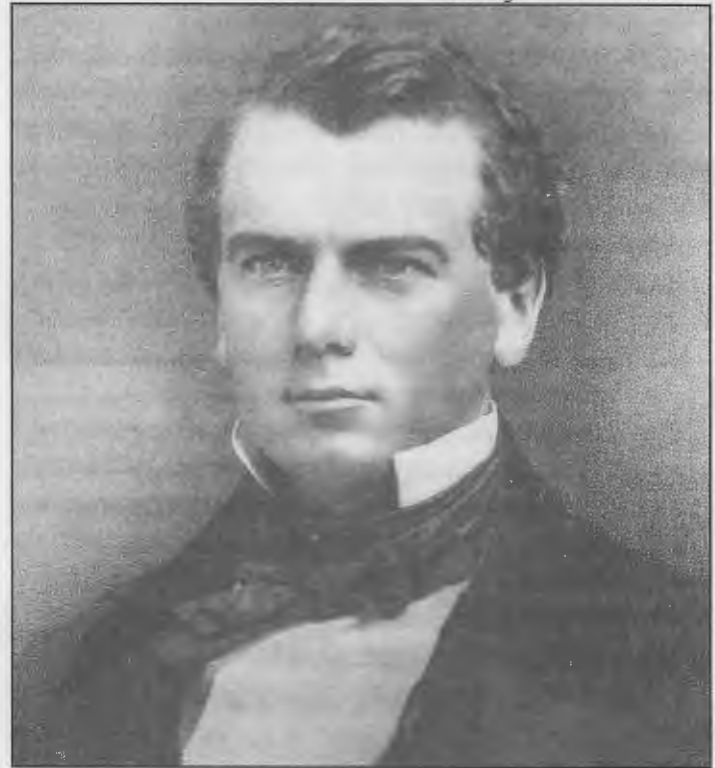
Later, the Club became associated with the Union League of California.

The Los Angeles Unionists, with the full support of Major Carleton and his 1st Dragoons, boldly made plans for a "Grand Union Demonstration" to be held May 25th. There would be parade and speeches, climaxed by the hoisting of the Stars and Stripes over the Court House. This was a direct challenge to secessionists in town. A few days before the demonstration, a warning was posted in front of the Bella Union that anyone raising the national flag would be shot dead, while on the morning of the 25th, a rumor circulated that a party of armed secessionists would physically prevent the flag rais-

ing. But neither of these intimidations came to pass.

In the morning of May 25, Union men from as far away as New San Pedro (Wilmington), guarded by armed dragoons, gathered at the Plaza, center of old Los Angeles. The 1st Dragoon band struck up a march and the procession of civilians and soldiers moved to the Court House. Phineas Banning, probably the most prominent and outspoken Union supporter in all of Southern California, gave a short but rousing speech, and presented a large national flag to Columbus Sims, president of the Union Club. Patriotic orations by Major Carleton, Captain Hancock, and Ezra Drown followed.

Banning Residence Museum



Phineas Banning was the most vocal civilian supporter of the Union, often giving orations to sometimes hostile audiences. He built Banning's Wharf in the upper portion of San Pedro Bay, developed the adjacent town of New San Pedro (Wilmington after May 1863), and gave, for a pittance, the land for the Army's New San Pedro Quartermaster warehouse and for Drum Barracks. Without Banning's loyalty and support, the Union would have faced a much more difficult effort to maintain order in Southern California.

The dragoons, with their glistening sabers and burnished carbines, added to the pomp of the occasion. To a hushed audience, the Stars and Stripes was slowly hoisted high over the building, the first time the flag had flown over Los Angeles since the news of Fort Sumter. The demonstration concluded with a salute of 34 guns—one for each state in the Union.

Only one incident marred the occasion. An overzealous Union supporter attempted to read a patriotic poem from an upstairs window of the Bella Union and rebel sympathizers promptly pitched him into the street.

On June 19th Captain John W. Davidson led 83 troopers of Company B, 1st U.S. Dragoons, into town. By July 4th there were some 200 Army Regulars in Los Angeles, enough to secure the city from any secessionist intrigue. Even the rabidly pro-Confederate Monte Boys would not dare to confront the well-armed federal troopers in Los Angeles.

The allegiance for or against the federal Union was sharply divided in communities outside Los Angeles. El Monte was strongly pro-secession as was, to a slightly lesser extent, San Bernardino. The large mining camp of Holcomb Valley in the San Bernardino Mountains was overwhelmingly secession-minded, and was rumored to be a center for the Knights of the Golden Circle, a semi-secret pro-Southern organization. On the other hand, Banning's New San Pedro (Wilmington) and Anaheim, founded by German colonists in 1857, were overwhelmingly loyal to the Union.

In no way intimidated by the Army presence was Henry Hamilton, fiery editor of the *Los Angeles Star*.

Hamilton's newspaper openly rejoiced at Confederate victories and crusaded against Lincoln's war:

We can look upon it as no other than 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.

Hamilton particularly lambasted President Lincoln:

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, has virtually set it aside himself.

Fortunately, the conflict between Union and Confederate sympathizers in Los Angeles was almost entirely vocal. No one was shot for his beliefs. Los Angeles businessman Harris Newmark recalled, years later, that

Men on both sides grew hotheaded and abused one another roundly, but few bones were broken and little blood was shed. A policy of leniency was adopted by the authorities, and sooner or later persons arrested for political offenses were discharged.

Henry Hamilton himself was arrested in October 1862, shipped to Alcatraz, took the loyalty oath, and was released a week later. His rantings in the *Star* continued unabated. Also taken into custody was attorney Edward J.C. Kewen, state assemblyman representing Los Angeles and outspoken Confederate sympathizer. Kewen was accused of treason and shipped to Alcatraz. After languishing there a few days, he also took the loyalty oath and returned home, loudly proclaimed as a hero by Chivalry Democrats.



In the late spring of 1861, with the North-South conflict turning to open warfare, a

Edward J.C. Kewen, state assemblyman representing Los Angeles and outspoken Confederate sympathizer, was accused of treason and shipped to Alcatraz.

National Archives



**Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston**

number of Army officers and enlisted personnel opted to leave California for the Confederacy. Foremost was Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston, unhappy about what he considered his abrupt, unjustified removal as commanding officer of the Army's Department of the Pacific. Johnston, an honorable man and highly respected officer, left San Francisco for Los Angeles on April 28, and spent close to a month with his father-in-law Dr. John S. Griffin. When his beloved Texas left the Union, Johnston made the decision to offer his services to the Confederacy. In mid-June, he joined a party of some 20 ex-soldiers and civilians led by Los Angeles County Undersheriff Alonzo Ridley. At Warner's Ranch they were joined by Major Lewis Armistead. The secessionist party, now grown to eight former army officers and 25 civilians, crossed the barren Colorado Desert to camp under the guns of Fort Yuma. The Union garrison at the fort refused to take any action against the Confederacy-bound men because they "had no orders to do so." Ridley and his men forded the Colorado River and followed the Southern Overland Trail through Arizona to Texas. Johnston and Armistead continued on to Richmond, Virginia, where they received com-

missions in the Confederate Army. Two other officers, Captains George Pickett and Richard Garnett, reached the Confederacy by ship, via the Panama route.

Free passage of Confederate-bound soldiers and civilians abruptly ended when Brigadier General Sumner learned of it. Sumner ordered an increase in the garrison at Fort Yuma and the establishment of a new camp at Warner's Ranch (later moved to Oak Grove, a former Butterfield stage station, 16 miles north). Strict orders were issued to halt and arrest anyone suspected of heading for the Confederacy. Dan Showalter, a northern California state assemblyman who had gained brief notoriety when he killed C.W. Piercy, assemblyman from San Bernardino in a duel, tried this overland route in November 1861. However, thanks to J.J. Warner and other Union informers in Los Angeles, the Army gained knowledge of Showalter's planned flight. On November 28, a patrol of California Volunteers under Lieutenant Chauncey Wellman apprehended Showalter and fifteen others near Warner's Ranch. Showalter loudly protested that they were peaceful miners enroute to Sonora, but to no avail. In December Showalter and his men were escorted under heavy guard to Fort Yuma, where they were held for several months. Finally, in April 1862, the prisoners, still insisting they were miners, were directed to sign a loyalty oath, which they did, and were released. They all made their way to Texas to join the Confederate Army. All in all, Southern California was said to have provided more than 250 men who joined the Confederate forces, most of them traveling via the Southern Overland Trail.

Also leaving Los Angeles to offer his services to the Confederacy was lawyer Joseph Lancaster Brent. Maryland-born Brent had arrived in Los Angeles in 1850 and quickly became the community's leading and most highly respected attorney and a local Democratic Party stalwart. With the Southern states now declaring their independence, Brent made the painful decision to abandon his profitable Los Angeles law practice and offer his services to the Confederacy. Reaching New Orleans via

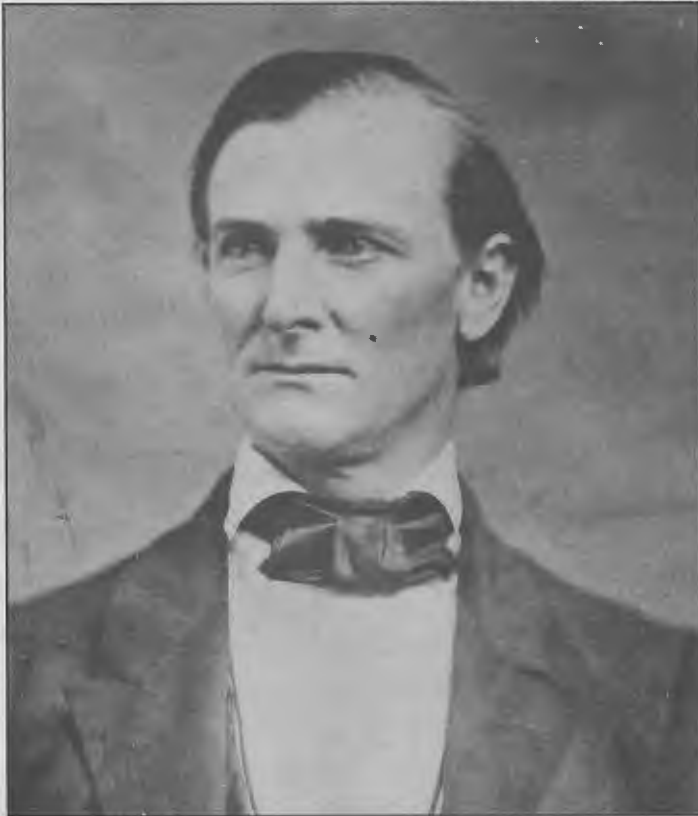


the Panama route, he joined the Confederate Army, eventually reaching the rank of Brigadier General. Brent survived the war and settled in New Orleans, never returning to Los Angeles.

There is a story, related years later by Captain Hancock's wife Almira, that the departing secessionist officers—George Pickett, Lewis Armistead, and Richard Garnett—participated in a candle-light dinner and farewell party at Hancock's Los Angeles home shortly before leaving for the Confederacy. It was a cordial get-together of old 6th infantry friends, saddened that the Union they had served loyally for many years was breaking in two. The Confederacy-bound officers urged Hancock to join them, but Hancock replied,

I shall not fight upon the principle of state-rights, but for the Union, whole and undivided.

Henry E. Huntington Library



Attorney Joseph Lancaster Brent was the most prominent Los Angeles civilian who defected to the Confederate Army, eventually reached the rank of Brigadier General. He survived the war but never returned to Los Angeles.

The meeting ended on a cordial note, with the hope they would meet again in more favorable times.

They did meet again two years later, at a small crossroads town in Pennsylvania named Gettysburg, under circumstances none could have foreseen. There, in early July 1863, Major General Hancock and his 2nd Corps repulsed a determined Confederate attack on Cemetery Ridge that saved the Union Army from envelopment and defeat. Next day Major General George Pickett's Confederate divisions made the most famous charge in American history. Leading the charge was Brigadier General Lewis Armistead, supported on one flank by Brigadier General Richard Garnett. Both lost their lives in the disastrous charge that historians call the high-water mark of the Confederacy. The previous year, Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston lost his life in the bloody Battle of Shiloh. Fate sometimes plays strange tricks.

Back in Los Angeles, Captain Hancock petitioned to be sent east to the battlefronts. His request was granted in early August 1861, and he was succeeded by Lieutenant Samuel McKee as the Army's Los Angeles quartermaster on August 8. Hancock traveled to San Francisco where he briefly was assigned to the Quartermaster Depot there. Within a month he took ship for New York via the Panama route, and soon thereafter received his general's stars.

Army supplies for Southern California and Arizona arrived by ship into outer San Pedro Bay, where they were off-loaded onto lighters

National Archives



General Armistead



General Garnett

for the short trip through shallow waters to Banning's Wharf in New San Pedro. Then the supplies were moved by wagon to the Los Angeles quartermaster depot for distribution.

According to Banning's account, he suggested to Colonel Carleton, now temporary commander of the Army's Southern California District, that the Quartermaster Depot be moved from Los Angeles to New San Pedro, a small community Union to the core, where the military supplies would be safe. Specifically, Banning offered the Army, for a nominal fee, a warehouse he built adjacent to his wharf. Army sources give credit for the suggestion to Lieutenant Samuel McKee, Hancock's successor as Los Angeles quartermaster. In any event, the New San Pedro Quartermaster Depot was open for business by early October, 1861. Supplies were now landed at Banning's Wharf, stored in the nearby warehouse built by Banning, and often transported to Los Angeles and other locations by Banning's freight wagons.

Phineas Banning was a hard-driving, highly successful entrepreneur, probably unequalled

by anyone else in mid-19th century Southern California. Leaving his home town of Wilmington, Delaware at the age of 20, he stepped ashore in San Pedro in 1850. Within a few years he was hailed as the "transportation king" of Southern California. Banning and Company stages and freight wagons, "with accustomed promptness" as he advertised, traveled to most of the towns and mining camps in the Southland. Banning was unhappy with San Pedro, with its difficult bluffs and shoals. To improve and monopolize local port facilities, he decided to build a wharf at the far northern end of San Pedro Bay. By 1858 Banning's Wharf was completed, Banning's fleet of lighters were in heavy use to bring travelers and freight from ocean-going ships to the landing, and Banning's stages and wagons whisked both to Los Angeles. And less than a half mile from his wharf, Banning developed the small community of New San Pedro (changed to Wilmington after his home town in May 1863).

Banning's relationship with the Army was close—and highly profitable. First of all, he was a strong supporter of the Union, often called

Drum Barracks Museum



Banning's Wilmington Exchange Building, 1863. Banning's offices downstairs; hotel upstairs. In front is a Banning and Co. four-horse stage about to leave for Los Angeles.

upon to speak to audiences sometimes hostile. His New San Pedro wharf was heavily used to embark and disembark military provisions and troops. He developed a close relationship with Captain Hancock, later naming one of his sons Hancock Banning. He worked closely with Colonel Carleton, particularly to develop Army facilities in and around New San Pedro. At various times Banning secured contracts to deliver freight to distant Army posts such as Fort Tejon and Fort Mojave.

The stay of Regular Army troops in Southern California was short-lived. The Army needed them on the eastern battlefronts. Almost all of them shipped out in October and November 1861, replaced by armed California Volunteers, who were hastily recruited, mostly in northern California. The first call for California troops

was issued by Secretary of War Simon Cameron in July 1861. On August 12 California Governor John G. Downey issued the order for volunteers. Two days later the War Department called upon Governor Downey to organize, equip, and muster into service as soon as possible four regiments of infantry and one of cavalry. Initially, the Secretary of War wanted the volunteer troops to garrison Salt Lake, as he had doubts about the loyalties of Brigham Young and his Mormons. But almost immediately, the threat to Union control of Southern California, with the regulars leaving, assumed equal importance.

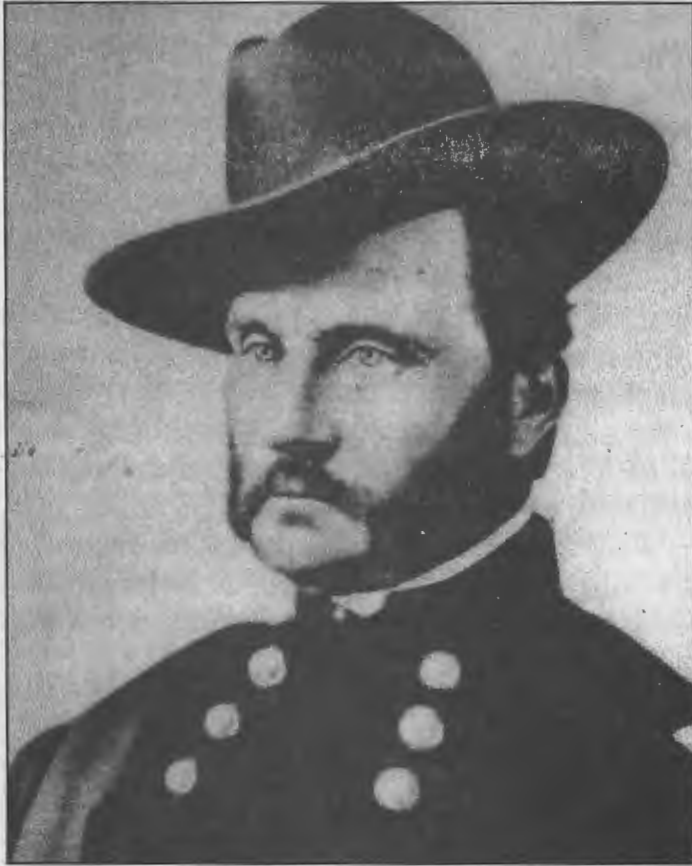
Colonel Carleton was ordered to San Francisco to assume command of the 1st Regiment, California Volunteers. After training in Oak-

California Historical Society



California Volunteers who replaced the Regular Army in Civil War California. Here they drill in San Francisco on July 4, 1862. The 1st Regiment of California Volunteers, under Colonel James Henry Carleton, maintained order in Southern California after the Regulars left for the eastern battlefronts.

John W. Robinson Collection



Colonel James Henry Carleton led Company K of the 1st U.S. Dragoons into Los Angeles on May 15, 1861, thwarting a possible secessionist uprising. Later he commanded the 1st Regiment of the California Volunteers, who took over from the Regular Army in Southern California. Carleton was an efficient officer and a strict disciplinarian.

Drum Barracks Museum



Drum Barracks Civil War Museum  
Wilmington California

The Officer's Quarters at Drum Barracks remains today the only tangible edifice of Civil War Los Angeles. It is open to the public five days a week. Call 310-548-7509.

land near today's Lake Merritt, Carlton's 1st Regiment was shipped south to New San Pedro, arriving September 19th. There was no time to lose, with the regulars about to depart.

Carleton opted for more open space to mold his untested volunteers into an efficient garrison and fighting force. In early October he closed down Camp Fitzgerald and relocated his troops 15 miles southwest of Los Angeles, to a field adjacent to Ballona Creek (today's Culver City). The new post was named Camp Latham, after ex-Governor Milton Latham.

Camp Latham, however, was too far from Banning's Wharf and the New San Pedro Quartermaster Depot. Again, Banning suggested a camp site much closer to his facilities. Early in 1862 Banning and partner Benjamin Wilson sold thirty acres of their property, 3/4th a mile northwest of the depot, to the U. S. Army for one dollar. The Army agreed to locate a major military facility here and awarded Banning the contract to build it. So was born Drum Barracks, named for Richard C. Drum, adjutant-general of the Department of the Pacific.

The part Benjamin Wilson played in selling these thirty acres to the Army remains an enigma. Tennessee-born "Don Benito" Wilson, former mayor of Los Angeles, was a strong Chivalry Democrat with pro-Southern leanings. Why he would willingly donate (for one dollar) land for the Union Army's major facility in Southern California is a mystery. Of course, Wilson was a shrewd businessman and may have figured he might come out ahead in future dealings with Banning or the federal government.

Banning and his hired crews set to work at once. Lumber was shipped from Northern California, buildings were hurriedly constructed, a start was made on a three mile conduit to bring water from the Los Angeles river, a parade ground was laid out, and enough was completed for the California Volunteers to occupy the new well-designed military post in February 1862. Camp Drum, soon to be renamed Drum Barracks, was the largest military facility in the Southwest. Within its 30 acres was an elegant officers' quarters, five barracks for enlisted men, quartermaster office, hospital, commissary, blacksmith



The Army's Quartermaster Depot, adjacent to Banning's Wharf, supplied provisions for Union military activities all over the Southwest. Notice the lone camel in front of the warehouse. Many writers and a few historians confuse this with Drum Barracks, although they were separate entities 3/4 of a mile apart.

shop, guardhouse, stables, and other buildings, all surrounded by a picket fence.

Drum Barracks became the major headquarters for military activities in the Southwest, a way station for troops heading for Arizona and New Mexico, as well as a deterrent to local secessionist activities. (Today, the Officers' Quarters has been restored as a visitor attraction, the sole tangible memento of the Civil War period in Los Angeles.)

On June 17, 1861, a strange procession of 31 camels reached Los Angeles from Fort Tejon. The strange beasts were turned over to Captain Hancock, who ordered them to the Los Angeles Quartermaster Corral, then on south Main Street. Here they joined three camels already

at the depot. They remained in Los Angeles while the Army questioned what to do with them, tended by Hadji Alli (Hi Jolly to the Americans), and George Caralambo (Greek George).

The Army's experiment for a "Camel Corps" to transport supplies in the Southwestern deserts began in 1856, when Secretary of War Jefferson Davis authorized the purchase of 75 of the beasts from the Levant (Ottoman Empire) and their shipment to Camp Verde, Texas. Edward F. Beale escorted 25 of the humped animals for use in building the 35th Parallel wagon road across New Mexico and Arizona. They eventually were pastured near Fort Tejon before being herded to Los Angeles.

Hancock tried using the beasts to transport

Army supplies, but this only proved that Army mules were better for the job. A projected "Camel Express" to tote provisions across the desert to Fort Mojave proved unsuccessful, largely because the animals could not be hurried and their hoofs, accustomed to traveling over sand, could little tolerate the rocky Mojave Desert terrain. An attempt to harness the camels to wagons ended up a fiasco, as the animals would either refuse to move or lie down, upsetting the wagon. The ensuing two years were pure frustration, and proved to be the end of the Army's ill-fated camel experiment. The beasts were moved from Los Angeles to Ballona Creek, then to the New San Pedro Quartermaster Depot. The Army had no use for them. Finally, Brigadier General George Wright, commanding officer of the Department of the Pacific in San Francisco, ordered that the animals be marched north for public auction at the Army's Benicia Arsenal. The ungainly beasts, now numbering 36, left Wilmington in December 1863. Upon reaching Benicia in early 1864 they were auctioned off.

Los Angeles remained relatively calm after

the initial excitement of the war's beginning. The California Volunteers—those who didn't join Colonel Carleton and his "California Column" that marched through Arizona to the Rio Grande in New Mexico—patrolled the city, provided security for the occasional pro-Union courthouse orations and flag raisings, and guarded polling places and ballot boxes in election times. While the citizens of Los Angeles continued to vote solidly Democratic, never were the Confederate sympathizers in town allowed to make any move that would threaten Union control of Southern California.

#### About the Author:

John Robinson is a native Californian born in Long Beach. He received his B.A. in history from the University of Southern California, and his M.A. from California State University, Long Beach. Prior to his retirement he taught school for 35 years, his last 32 in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District of Orange County.

Henry E. Huntington Library



Los Angeles in 1857, looking north with Main Street (Calle Principal) on the left. The town of about 4,000 inhabitants mostly consisted of one-story adobe dwellings, with several two-story wooden buildings, seen on the far left, near the center of town.

John has long been a Civil War buff, with particular interest in the conflict in the Far West. His "Los Angeles in Civil War Days" was published in a limited edition by Dawson's Book Shop of Los Angeles in 1978. Long out of print, the University of Oklahoma Press is reprinting it with a new Introduction, scheduled for release in late Spring, 2013.

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Henry E. Huntington Library



The center of Los Angeles in the 1860s. Two-story brick Temple Block is on the left, the commercial heart of the city. To the right is the County Courthouse with its clock tower. At the courthouse, on May 25, 1861, was the "Grand Union Demonstration" and the hoisting of the flag ceremony, the first time the Stars and Stripes were raised over Los Angeles since the news of Fort Sumter.