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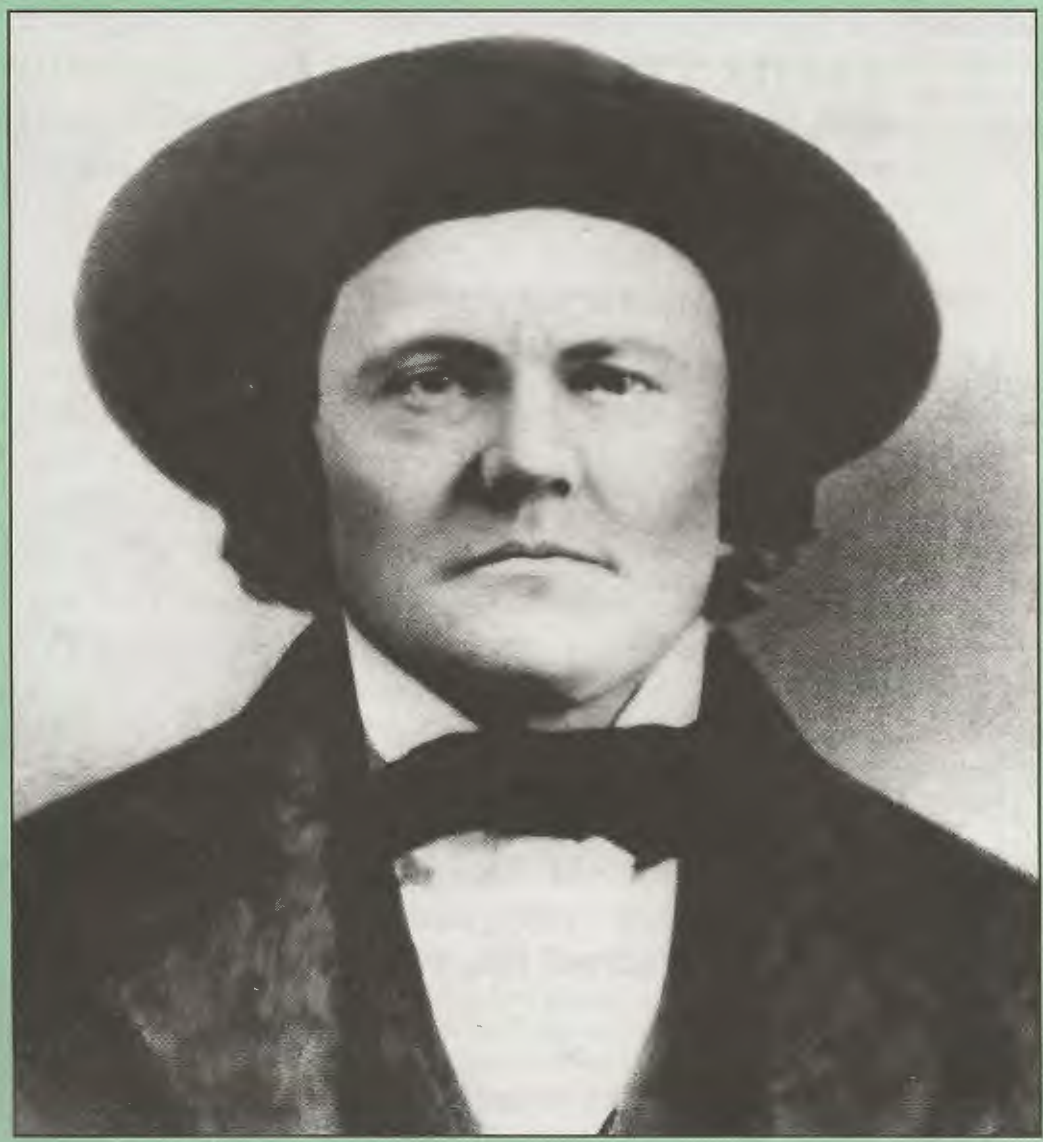
Private Feelings: Californians' View of the Civil War

By Dr. Robert J. Chandler

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Private Feelings: Californians View the Civil War

By Dr. Robert J. Chandler

In 1861, desert and ocean isolated California from Eastern battlefields. Yet in spite of distance and slow communication, the War of Southern Rebellion, or, depending on viewpoint, the War of Northern Aggression, captured the attention of all in the Golden State. These letters reveal wartime attitudes sent privately to family and friends.

Robert J. Chandler

"Give love to your family at home whenever you write them. I often think of them and may sometime see them if we live few years longer and get an administration that will encourage some means of transportation less expensive than we now have--a thing [the Pacific Railroad] that will never be under a democratic administration."

Banking book-keeper William E. Chamberlain
Sacramento, October 14, 1860

"Every man has the right to his own opinion, but why a poor Man either North or South should vote for or favour the extension of Slavery is more than I can tell."

"Sir, the election is over and I have for once in My life, voted for the successful Candidate and now I am one of the Many that want an office."

Leonard W. Noyes
San Francisco, December 4, 7, 1860

"I wish you would take a trip out here. We are not afflicted with secession or any other Southern nuisance or

bugbear, but enjoy the largest liberty, the best climate, & best of every thing that is produced the world over."

Liquor merchant S. H. Meeker
San Francisco, December 31, 1860

"Really hope old "Abe" will turn the screws on the secessionists, & settle the subject for all time whether we have a Government or not."

Banker Henry Miller,
Sacramento, March 9, 1861

"It seems that the reports that we received, that they are having very excitent times in the States. I hope to God that they will get Jeff Davis & hang him by his feet for one hour & then take him & hang him by his neck & others of the same stamp, don't you? We had a Union Meeten here last night."

Miner Mathew Merchant
Long Bar, Yuba County, May 16, 1861



"While personally very popular here, I find I do not represent the Sentiments of my people. Sierra is like Sacramento and indeed this whole State--loudly for "Coercion and War." Under the pressure I see Southern dirt-eaters humbling their cringing Spirits at the Knees of their enemies and licking the hand that smites them. For one I shall keep erect and maintaining my opinions and pride at every cost.

"Besides, while Revolution is abroad in the land and Constitutional Freedom waging a great war of self defense--and glittering visions of military glory before the eye, and my native land [Alabama] in the great struggle, I cannot say that I feel settled and satisfied. You must write me of the views and plans of our Southern friends."

State Senator Harry I. Thornton, Jr.
Downieville, June 2, 1861

On July 1, Thornton sailed for the Southern army.

"I think, however, that California requires peace to bring out her resources. There is not so much excitement here as in the Eastern states. The people are mostly for the Union. We have a few strong secessionists, some conditional Union men, and many who *don't know* much about it."

Farmer Jesse Mason
Ione, June 9, 1861

About two weeks ago, I attended the Republican State Convention as a delegate from this County. We had a good time of it, and what is better, we nominated a ticket [headed by Leland Stanford] that will be elected in September next. My services as a stump speaker are in demand so I suppose I shall be rather busy for two months to come making speeches to the faithful and trying to convert some of the Secessionists to my way of thinking. It is rather unprofitable to spend so much time electioneering unless one can get an office, but as I am patriotic, I can afford the time and sometime I may get my reward. Out here, we are making grand preparations for the Fourth. Tomorrow, we raise the fine Liberty Pole in Rough & Ready, and this morning one was raised in the City of Grass Valley 160 feet high, and they have a splendid flag for it. None of the [South Carolina] Palmetto kind, but the genuine Stars and Stripes.

Charles Mason
Rough & Ready, Nevada County, July 2, 1861
[*Western Express*, 12 (July 1962) 11-12]

"Nothing new here, only your Excitement of War in the States. Well, good God let them fight till they are satisfied and if they feel any better, why good for them."

Miner William Witner
Nevada County, July 20, 1861

"The [Southern] Democracy of California... are in favor of the preservation of the Union upon Constitutional guarantees that will be acceptable to both sections of the Confederacy; but if that desirable consummation be impossible; then we are in favor of the recognition of the independence of the Confederate States...as the only alternative which will terminate the horrors of civil war."

Party Platform, 1861, 1862

"Our platform might fairly be said to have but one plank in it--*Opposition to Lincoln and his war.*"

Delegate Pierson B. Reading
Sacramento, June 14, 1861
[California State Library, Sacramento]

"I received a long letter from Mary. She says Charlie has returned Major of the 20th regiment [after 90 days' service in West Virginia]. They passed considerable danger, and were in no regular engagements, but stationed at Long Bridge, a dangerous pass. The citizens of Lima, [Pennsylvania], when he returned, presented him with a sword and sash worth \$250. I am pretty sure he will go again, for this is only an inkling of the war fever."

Mrs. H. J. Shirley
Yankee Jim's, Placer County
September 1861

"War matters occupy the most attention here now. Government has called for one Regiment of Infantry and five hundred Cavalry to guard the overland Mail, and in addition to these, four Regiments of Infantry and one of Cavalry to go to Texas and Arkansas. Recruiting offices are open in all parts of the State and the Companies are fast filling up, and from appearances they will be ready for a march in a short time. The great mass of the people of California are loyal to the Union and will stand by it until the last Soldier is killed and the last Dollar spent."

Miner Timothy Bartlett
Beals Bar, Placer County, September 1, 1861

"We drove [Secessionists] away from the Polls here in a number of districts; I would neither allow them to peddle tickets, or vote.

"I think we have *secesh dogs rather on the hiss* in this State, and we are sending those [soldiers] down your way [to San Diego], who will keep the Element *below a simmer*."

Express messenger R.W. Laine
San Francisco, September 6, 16, 1861
[California State Library, Sacramento]

"We were much afraid of the Secessionists. They have been accumulating arms for some months. They do not exceed 10,000 in number, but until [the] election was over we could form no idea of their number though they made an immense noise."

Jesse Mason
Ione, September 11, 1861
[Courtesy Anson Reinhart]

"We have not had a letter from Arthur for some time. In his last he wrote he intended to enlist [in a Vermont regiment]. I should think it would be hard for you to give up your son, his life is so uncertain. But he is to be praised for going forth to fight for his country. Better that he should go and do what he can and have it to think of in his after life (if it be spared) than to think he might have gone and did not and be called a coward by a traitor."

Elizabeth Mason
Ione, September 11, 1861
[Courtesy Anson Reinhart]

"The five Regiments of volunteers called for from this State are not full yet. They don't like the service. They are employed at garrisoning Forts along the Coast and in the interior of Oregon and Washington Territory among the Indians."

Miner Timothy Bartlett
Beals Bar, December 1, 1861.

"There are quite a lot of Arkansas seceshers living in the hills near by and when we hear of a Union victory, we get out the anvils and give them a few guns. An Arkansas fool is the biggest fool out of jail. I never saw an anvil fired in the East at all. There is a cavity in the bottom of them all I believe. Then turn an anvil on

its face, fill this cavity with powder, scattering a few grains over the surface, then put a piece of paper or cloth over it and put another anvil on it face down, and touch it off with a hot iron long enough to be out of the way of the upper anvil, which will sometimes rise eight or ten feet. It makes a report which can be distinctly heard seven or eight miles. This is California Artillery."

Farmer Jesse Mason
Ione, April 6, 1862

"Yesterday we got the News of the Blowing up of the [ironclad] Merimac and the surrender of Norfolk [Virginia]. Very good News, and occasioned great rejoicing here. We look for the End of this unjust War soon but I hope not before the last Enemy of the country is concord [conquered]. There was one Whole Regiment of State Molitia out parading the streets last night Singing Old John Brown, and rejoicing over the Telegraph News."

Policeman Leonard W. Noyes
San Francisco, May 14, 1862

"Legal tender notes are plenty and no sale for them. We could only dispose of \$500 at 10% discount and the best offer for any large amount was 20% discount. Every effort will be made to retain Gold as our circulating medium. Bankers refuse to receive any thing else on deposit."

Hardware importers William Alvord & Co.
San Francisco, September 8, 1862

[To John Q. Jackson] "On receipt of your last, I sent you stacks of [Sacramento] Unions, chiefly filled with Exploits of Stonewall Jackson [Thomas J.] for whom all men and women seem to have a sincere respect. If the common report at Auburn, that he is your cousin, is true, you have big reason to be proud of the name and connection."

Charles T. H. Palmer
Folsom, October 8, 1862
[Wells Fargo Bank]

"The war news is favorable to the Union. The Proclamation of Emancipation seems to have united the North and to have terrified the Traitors. The course

Continued Next Page

and policy of the President is looked upon as altogether too mild and unworkmanlike and he must change."

Attorney Samuel J. Clark, Jr.

San Francisco, October 16, 1862

"We received a letter [on October 24] bearing date of September 25, and giving the names of thirteen [from West's Mills, Maine] who last went to the wars. That is drawing pretty hard on old industry, but the fighting has to be done. I am afraid that if the war continues much longer, we shall have warm work in this State. If anything of that does happen, you may look for bloody news from California."

Wheat farmer J. T. Manter

Yankee Slough, Yuba County

October 26, 1862.

"On January 1st all slaves of rebels are to be free!! You say this only adds fuel to the flame, but I don't: the Southern heart could [not] be fired more than it was. If the North had been Equally in Earnest and Equally united, the war would have been ended long ago."

Ned Tyler

Michigan Bluff, November 28, 1862

[Wells Fargo Bank]

"[John W.] Tucker [Jeweler, 505 Montgomery Street] has some beautiful Things, among others on exhibition. A Sword to be presented to Major-General [Fighting Joe] Hooker of California from his California friends. Hilt of pure Washoe Silver, banded with Gold & set with Diamonds. The handle is ornamented with the American Eagle of Gold, ornamented with Rubies, diamonds, also other appendages of War attached. The whole will not cost less than \$4,000 or \$5,000."

Mrs. Anna C. Crowell

San Francisco, December 24, 1862

"I suppose the war will soon close as the large & Strong addition to the army since the first [of January] will make a stench sufficient to overwhelm all concerned."

Bookseller N. D. Flum

Forbestown, January 6, 1863

"I am living right in the midst of Secessionists [yet] we are so far removed from the theater of war, that we feel, comparatively, none of its blighting effects. We try to live, and as [let] live, in harmony & peace."

Miner Edward

Hornitos, March 17, 1863

"What sort of 4th of July do you have? We had here the largest procession ever seen in San Francisco. The day was quite cold, and wind and dust blowed enough to put one's eyes out, but for all that, every body was out to see what might be seen. It seemed as if the foundation of the earth was shaken by the report of cannons that were firing all day. I was really glad when the day with its noise and confusion was over."

Olivia, a young mother

San Francisco, July 10, 1863

"If better generalship can't be displayed on the part of the Confederate States, they had better give up the contest. Lee repulsed [at Gettysburg], Vicksburg & Port Hudson [Mississippi] taken--Johnston defeated or at least incapable of doing anything--Bragg driven back--Charleston threatened. All this tells badly for the South. Unless the tide turns shortly she will be overcome. Now every man in the South will have to be called out."

Attorney Alexander P. Crittenden

Aurora, July 20, 1863

[Wells Fargo Bank]

"I see that our Supreme Court has decided that we must all take the [loyalty] oath. That throws me out of the profession.

"I can no longer practice law in California. I must either try it in Virginia [City, Nevada], or engage in some other business this fall."

Alexander P. Crittenden

Aurora, July 21, August 1, 1863

[In September, a boundary survey placed Aurora in Nevada]

[Wells Fargo Bank]

"Dear Brother [at Dutch Flat]. Several Mexico, [Missouri] boys are en route to this country, and will be here soon. The most of the Emigration is [from]

Missouri. Since writing you last, I have met a young man direct from home this season. His name is Beavers. He was under [Confederate General Sterling] Price, in company with our Brother William. Will and a few others enlisted for the war. William belongs to a corps of Sharp Shooters and holds a subordinate office. Beavers says Will is a shrewd young fellow, esteemed by all his comrades and his daring, courage and bravery frequently excited the admiration of both officers and men. Beavers says Will likes it. Brother Abe is about Mexico and does not seem to be of a beligerent nature. Write home. Leave out the war question and it will go. The Boys here from Mexico all get letters regularly."

Miner George W. Cassidy
Empire City, Nevada, August 18, 1863.

"The Democracy of California...denounce and unqualifiedly condemn the Emancipation Proclamation of the President of the United States as tending to protract indefinitely civil war, incite servile insurrection, and inevitably close the door forever to a restoration of the Union of these States."

Party Platform, 1863, 1864

"Albanus [B. Rowley] is captain of a military company organised in Alviso for home protection against Rebels and Copperheads. He is President of a Union League, delegate to the Union State convention, and altogether a most decided and positive Union man, as well as myself, and cannot from the nature of the thing associate with anything or anybody that approaches toward disunion and secession. Our motto is, 'The Union must and shall be preserved,' and 'Death to all Traitors.' Amen."

R.L. Rowley
Alviso, September 14, 1863

"We arrived here [September] 15, well and happy, making the passage from New York in 159 days. I do not care about coming home now and going for a Soldier, and I see they are taking everybody. One ship sailed from New York the same day we did was burned by the [Confederate commerce raider] *Alabama*. We could not have been a great way from her."

Sailor Horace Clark, Ship *New Hampshire*
San Francisco, September 20, 1863

"Brother Jim is down in the mouth, since the [loyalty] oath question busted him out from the practice of the law. You ought to hear him dam, & cuss the Blacks" [Republicans.] [Jim shortly left for Arizona]

Attorney George L. Anderson
Auburn, November 1, 1863
[Wells Fargo Bank]

"[To New York Agent]: I also forwarded you notes for delivery in a letter per Wells, Fargo & Co., which I was obliged to entrust to a Policeman to deliver to the Express Messenger, as they [the Provost Guard] would not let any one go on board the Steamer [*Golden City*] on the morning she sailed [March 3] except passengers, they fearing that there was some concerted plan to take this Steamer by certain [Southern] parties, she having a large amount of Treasure on board, over two million it is said."

Merchant Henry W. Corbett
San Francisco, March 4, 1864

"[To Mrs. James W. Denver, Ohio] The General, I see has resigned his position in the army. You must be glad to have him with you. It must be a terrible life of anxiety to have a Husband away from you in Active Service. I often think of my poor Sister; the last I heard from [Cavalry] General [Samuel D.] Sturgis, he was in Tennessee."

Mrs. S. M. Clark
Sacramento, March 18, 1864

"Dear Son. Yours of February 23 has relieved me of nearly a year's painful anxiety. The last account was from Jefferson Hospital, Memphis, by Newman, who directed me to send my answers to the old home, but knowing the danger & deceitful tediousness of gun-shot wounds & shattered bones, I gave him time to write again, which, perhaps, might be after suffering amputation of his arm. But in all this time, I heard nothing from you or Henry; nor could I know how often you had been shot at & missed. On first hearing of your enlistment, I bursted out in defiance of rebel fools to kill my wild boy Henry, for I did not consider him fit to die, & my hope & trust in a kind Providence--& that he may consider & duly appreciate the mercy shown him in the numerous battles in

which he has been engaged & exposed."

Dr. Palee John, 70

Beals Bar, Placer County, April 22, 1864

"We all went to Church this morning and listened to a very good discourse from Dr. [Henry] Bellows. How I wish you could hear him you would like him very much. His sermons are deeper than Mr. [Thomas Starr] King's but will not fill one with half the enthusiasm. We do not expect Dr. Bellows will devote much of his time to the pulpit as his chief object in visiting our State was to stir up the people in regard to the Sanitary Commission, but Mr. King had so effectually established the Cause before his death they will not be likely to let it die out from amongst us.

"I am glad they have freed the poor wretches if it will cripple the South any in so doing, but I do not go a cent in teaching them to read. I think they had better clothe the body before they try to clothe the mind. But you know (to use a vulgar expression), the North always have run Slavery and the Negroes into the ground, but now they have liberated them I suppose the next best thing they can do is to take care of them.

"I wish we had about a thousand or fifteen hun-

dred of the women out here. They would make such excellent servants and would also serve to decrease the demand for Irish help and the exorbitant wages which they exact. An Irish girl will not do work in the smallest families for less than twenty five dollars per Month, and therefore half the Ladies in the State who have never been accustomed to doing anything at home are obliged to work beyond their strength because they cannot afford to pay such enormous wages and therefore do not live out half their days."

Emma Libby

San Francisco, June 19, 1864

[Full text, *Californians* Jan. 1989]

"The Union party of California...are opposed to human slavery, as an institution condemned by God and abhorrent to humanity, a stain upon the nation's honor and a clog to its material progress."

Party Platform, 1864

"Last night after we had gone to bed, we were awakened by music from the Band and went to the window to see a procession of "Copper Heads" pass by, some with torches, but most of them carrying splint brooms on their shoulders. I don't know for the life of me, where they got so many. It took them ten or fifteen minutes to pass and I don't know but longer."

Florence [about 18]

San Francisco, October 7, 1864

"Tuesday, November 8th, 1864: The great election day. I am for peace. I do not believe in fighting unless in self defense. I think this is a very wicked war. No one can convince me that fighting to liberate Slaves is Christianity."

Diary, Mrs. Sarah M. Dean, Quincy
[Plumas County Historical Society]

[Published source: "Diary of Sarah M. Dean," Plumas County Museum Association, Inc. 4 (May 1992), 2.]

"I love to tell my Comrades how, that I have a young Brother that had a hand in killing the Rebel [General John Hunt] Morgan, and again I am glad that [the] election is over, and that we have again Succeeded in electing that Great, that noble and good Patriot Abraham Lincoln to be our President for four more

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See page 29 for a list of the topics in each issue

years. I am firmly of the opinion that the Country is now Saved, and that the war will soon be no more."

Miner William F. Heydlauff
You Bet, December 5, 1864

"How little we know of the war. Still we get all the telegrams as soon as a New Yorker gets it. At the same time the terrors of war we escape. Well, I thank God it is so. It's terrible to dwell upon & more terrible as a reality."

Auctioneer J. O. Eldridge
San Francisco, December 31, 1864

"I have no objections whatever to you giving to the Southern prisoners all that you feel inclined to give. It is a duty to give all we can afford & more."

"I happened in at [Bernhard] Franz' [bookstore] a day or two ago & looking over his cartes [de visite] saw some of Confederate Generals of whom we have no photographs. I picked out 4 which I send you to put in your album."

Alexander P. Crittenden
Virginia City, March 7, 10, 1865,
to wife in San Francisco
[Wells Fargo Bank]

"Once more I say, "Hurrah for Grant, Sherman, & Sheridan." We sing now instead of "Down with the Traitors and up with the Stars,"--"Up with the Traitors and down with the Bars." [All] are well, so am I as a matter of course, for you know "Richmond is taken" & "Lee has Surrendered." Hurrah."

R. L. Rowley
Alviso, April 10, 1865

"Glory Hallelujah! Grant (under God) triumphant. The people are free. A glorious future before us & our posterity. Let all the Earth keep silence while we shape the destinies of nations."

Commission Merchant, Andrew Jackson Chase
San Francisco, April 10), 1865
[California State Library, Sacramento]

"The whole town was wild yesterday with excitement and drink. The bells were ringing, church bells

& all steam engines whistling, music sounding & cannon firing all day. The courts adjourned. All business was suspended and the mass of the people got roaring drunk.

"I went to my room at noon and staid there all day. I need not tell you how I feel at this destruction of all hope. The dreadful sacrafices that have been made have been in vain. The South I fear is conquered, and without means of further resistance. Her people are henceforth slaves. I shall wait anxiously now to hear from those who are near & dear to us [including a son in the Southern army]."

Alexander P. Crittenden
Virginia City, April 11, 1865
[Wells Fargo Bank]


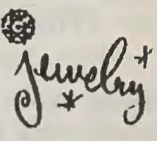
"If there is one thing I am glad of More than Another, it is that I am no traitor to My government."

Farmer James K. Chandler
Elk Grove, April 23, 1865

"Traitors are looking blue, bluer, bluest."

Commission merchant Andrew Jackson Chase
San Francisco, May 20, 1865
[California State Library, Sacramento]

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