
The Politics of a Lost Cause: “Seceshers” and Democrats in Southern California During the Civil War

by Ronald C. Woolsey

The Civil War era presents an opportunity to view the southern California frontier in broad perspective. The national conflict interrupted a period of gradual settlement there. The locale mirrored national and regional concerns, reflected sectional tensions, and affirmed the nexus between pioneer and country. The conduct of the war also highlighted the strong link between East and West, and with the fortunes of war went the fate of local party politics. Thus, as the Confederate military presence faded in the southwest, the effectiveness of disunion rhetoric correspondingly declined.

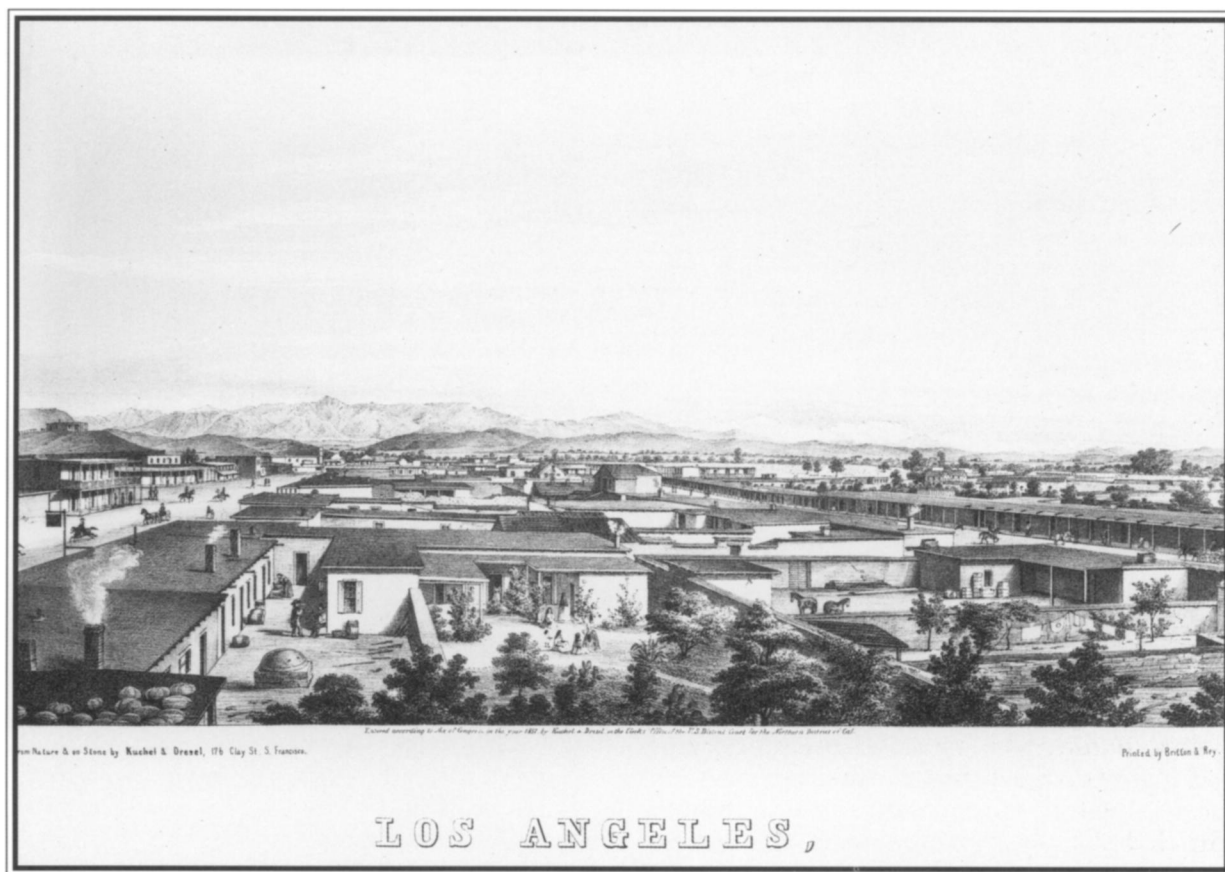
This essay centers on pro-southern sentiment in relation to the war's progress. Southern Californians divided sharply, as party rhetoric reflected the dynamic tensions of the national debate. Democrats and Republicans debated emancipation and the legality of secession. Disagreement over these issues represented a pioneer spirit and the varied background of people with strong individual attitudes. Many southern Californians supported past roots even if it meant a disruption of their newly established lifestyles. Patriotic fervor left many with no choice but to enlist in the eastern campaigns. Regional political rivalry led to contested elections and a shift from 'disunion' to 'fairness' as a central theme. Democrats and Confederate sympathizers found themselves on the defensive as the war progressed. They indignantly demanded fair play, an end to harassment, and the right to the personal liberties of speech and press.

The 1860 presidential election crystalized the volatile circumstances and key issues that had preceded the conflict. The sudden emergence of the Republican Party since its founding in 1854 and the corresponding breakdown of the Democrats mirrored the widening rift between the

North and the South. Although geographically separated from the sectional debate, California held a symbolic value greater than its four electoral votes. For Republicans, success at the polls would enhance the party's national stature and discredit the allegation that Lincoln represented only narrow regional interests. To Democrats, victory in California extended the prospect of slavery expansion in the West and the hope of acquiring a future ally to southern interests.

In 1860, Lincoln narrowly won California from a divided field of Democratic candidates. As had happened to the east, the party had divided on issues of popular sovereignty, whether Kansas would be free or slave, and northerner Stephen A. Douglas's nomination. In California, these topics were debated in the state convention and among the party newspapers. With the party unable to reach agreement, several candidates representing Democrat splinter groups were on the ballot in the state. The split, warned Governor John Downey, would place Republicans in control "for the next four years, or perhaps longer."¹ Republican solidarity in northern California offset anti-Lincoln sentiment in the southern counties, where Democrats were strong, but divided. Democrats captured legislative seats in Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Bernardino. Conversely, Lincoln received only 11 percent of the vote in El Monte, where many immigrants from Confederate regions had settled, indicative of a dismal 20 percent total for all of Los Angeles County. In sum, local residents preferred alternative candidates by a three-to-one margin, a definite sign of southern sympathy within the region.²

Several statewide trends also worked against Republicans in the 1860 election in southern California. Future construction of a transcontinental



During the Civil War, Los Angeles consisted largely of one-story adobe buildings, much as it did in this 1857 lithograph. *Courtesy California State Library.*

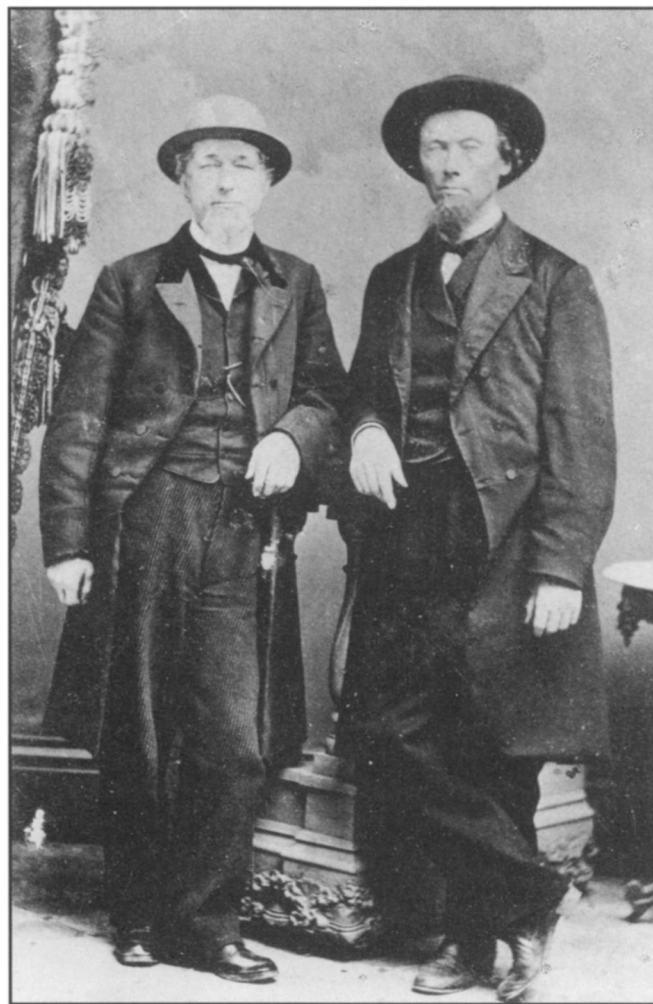
railroad became a major issue in state politics. Controversy existed over choice of routes: whether to build a central line beyond Utah to Missouri, or a southern route along the old Butterfield Stage line. Some prominent Republicans favored a northerly route, thus angering residents of southern California. Republicans also seemed outflanked on the state division issue. The lower counties, disenchanted with heavy, unequal taxation and minority representation, had toyed with the idea of state division throughout the previous decade. Many rancheros also favored a separate state out of desperation over their vanishing empires. "The gringos were getting everything," explained one

scholar, ". . . and the Californios knew it."³ By 1860, however, Republicans vigorously opposed any new attempt at separate statehood for southern California. Most party regulars felt the proposal would rekindle sectional tensions that had plagued the congressional debates over statehood. Southern California Republicans, caught between regional interests and political loyalty, passively supported the party line. "What is remarkable," noted one onlooker to the legislative debates, "the representation whose constituents are the most immediately interested, kept their lips closed, not one from the southern part of the state taking part in the debates."⁴

Nonetheless, in 1860 state issues remained secondary compared to the intensified debate on slavery. In 1856, for example, when the slavery issue was more subdued, the Republican Party's first presidential candidate was John C. Frémont, the state's hero and former U.S. senator. Frémont finished a respectable runner-up to James Buchanan in both Los Angeles and San Bernardino. The Republican nominee polled a sizeable 37 percent in the Democrat stronghold of Los Angeles. Francisco Ramirez, editor of *El Clamor Publico*, championed the Republican Party and became the first California editor to endorse Frémont.⁵ "Republicanism is steadily gaining ground in this part of California," enthused Lewis Granger.⁶

Frémont's success in southern California contrasted with Lincoln's dismal results and demonstrated the importance of slavery politics in the 1860 campaign. Lincoln conceded that residents of southern states would be mollified only if we "cease to call slavery wrong, and join them in calling it right."⁷ A Republican vote in 1860, therefore, represented a direct referendum on the future of the slaveholding states. Most southern Californians, many of whom hailed from Confederate states, favored the extreme, southern candidate, John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. Henry Hamilton, editor of the *Los Angeles Star*, and Edward J. C. Kewen, a political activist known for his oratory, both spearheaded the defense of southern rights and partisan attacks against Republicans.⁸

The sharp antagonisms over slavery held a special attraction for some locals. The maverick qualities inherent in the pioneer spirit shared a common trait with southern defiance. John S. Griffin, a Democrat supporter and well-known physician in Los Angeles, was portrayed in the press in the fading images of the pioneer West as "the American who is fast disappearing from the stage." His active defense of southern principles earned him a reputation of "aggressive manliness . . . outright, downright; uncompromising, implacable, if need were."⁹ In a few instances the link between the frontier and slaveholding interests would transcend birthplace and heritage. Joseph Lancaster Brent recalled that one resident from Maine had passed much of his life on the frontier and became thoroughly impressed with southern ideas. Brent



Henry Hamilton (right), editor of the *Los Angeles Star* and leading Confederate sympathizer, poses with a local representative to the state legislature during the Civil War. Courtesy the Huntington Library.

developed a friendship with another northern neighbor, Winfield S. Hancock, a soldier stationed in Los Angeles. He felt they "were drawn closer together by the identical views we held upon the slavery question." Both men voted for Breckinridge in the election.¹⁰

By early 1861, Lincoln's election as president and deeply-felt sectional loyalties had polarized the citizenry and threatened to divide the nation. Southern Californians paralleled the national tenor as the secession movement gained momentum among the southern states. The focus shifted from

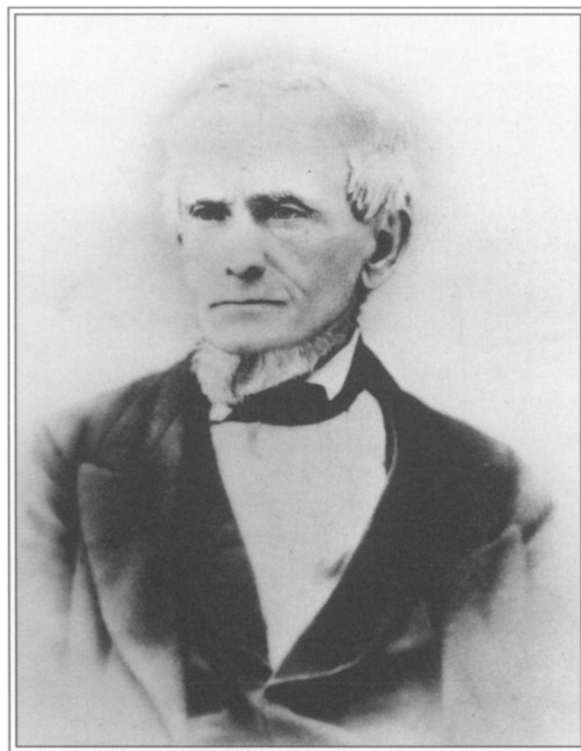
slavery politics to disunion after the bombardment of Fort Sumter by Confederates in April 1861. El Monte residents paraded through the downtown streets in support of the Confederacy. At the Bella Union Hotel in Los Angeles, rebel sympathizers hung portraits of southern generals who had led the siege of the Charleston fort. Reports circulated of Confederate enlistment camps organized at the San Bernardino Mountains mining communities in Holcomb Valley. The scheme included training and sending recruits to secession states through Arizona and Texas. "Temescal appears to be one of the most central points for secessionists," reported one correspondent, ". . . scarcely a day passes but what companies pass here going East sometimes in small squads from 15 to 20."¹¹ Judge Benjamin Hayes cautioned against the notion of western indifference toward rebellion, and he believed "they deceive themselves who suppose that California could stand aloof from the contest."¹²

Southern Californians affirmed Hayes's suspicions. The Lincoln administration issued a statewide appeal for volunteers in July 1861. The demand for Union enlistments acted as a scintilla and prompted an exodus to the Confederacy, but many southern sympathizers had left California before July. War had forced the issue. For Californians from secessionist states, the defense of the former homeland meant family loyalty took precedence over personal concerns, even a new life in a frontier land. For T. L. Roberts, a transplanted South Carolinian, he "would not like them to break up the government." Yet Roberts refused to take a loyalty oath, since he opposed "taking up arms against my people."¹³ William L. Sands, a native of Tennessee, felt secession a questionable idea but admitted "my sympathies are with my people."¹⁴ Joseph Lancaster Brent viewed the problem in terms of expedience. A revolt in the southern counties could initially succeed, but Brent theorized the Union "could send gunboats and troops . . . while we have no means of getting either . . . the Confederates would be overcome and the people of the state who had helped them would be ruined." He counseled sympathizers to "go South and join the Confederate army, where they would be of real service."¹⁵

A Missourian perhaps best typified the local

ambivalence. William Woods had journeyed to California in 1850, wandered the mining camps of Plumas and Sierra counties, then settled in Los Angeles in 1858. By 1861, at age thirty, single and unattached, Woods considered himself "born with the South," while if "obliged to take sides it is hard to say which side I would take." Apparently, he soon decided. Union troops captured Woods enroute to the Rio Grande in November 1861.¹⁶

Sectional hostilities hit a high-water mark early in the war. In El Monte, religion and politics proved a volatile mix, as harassed ministers reportedly carried weapons to the pulpit. The Northern Methodist Episcopal Church, victim of a statewide schism caused by the war, nearly vanished from the town by 1865. El Monte

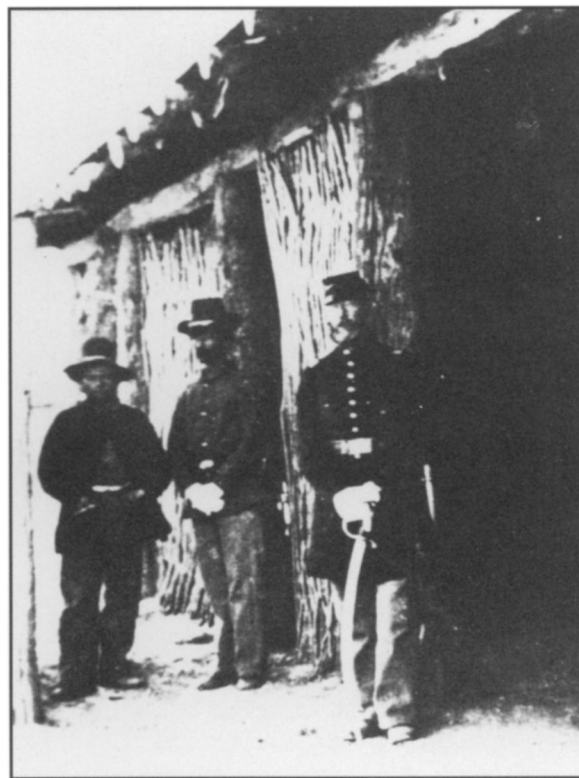


Judge Benjamin Hayes (1815-1877), ca. 1875. Hayes was a prominent Los Angeles jurist, attorney, and local historian. *Courtesy California State Library.*

residents sympathetic to the secessionist cause also demonstrated around the home of a prominent Republican, Jonathan Tibbets. One confidant warned Abel Stearns of a potential raid on his stock "the very moment an occasion of government hostilities would warrant their doing it under the cloak of war."¹⁷ With news of the Confederate victory at Bull Run in early summer, sympathizers in Los Angeles held a public rally and openly insulted the Union army. "I told you so I knew we would whip the d-d ass," one citizen remembered, "and even worse remarks were made in a tumult of passion by those opposed to our government."¹⁸ Upstate, the Marysville *Daily Appeal* summarized northern concern over a potential revolt in the southern counties. The paper advocated a strong military presence in southern California since "secession is strong there, and must be united against."¹⁹

Indeed, potential violence led to an immediate federal military presence in the southern locales. Army camps and guard barracks were established at San Pedro, Baldwin Hills, and Los Angeles. Union strategists also increased reserves at the border forts in the Mohave and Yuma deserts, while troops received orders to detain any suspicious caravans. Hence, the persistent stream of émigrés slowed to a trickle within a year. In 1861, an estimated two hundred men left southern California to join the Confederacy. Southward migration, however, nearly stopped by 1862, since most of the disaffected had already left, or the threat of internment proved a sufficient deterrent.²⁰

Although a defection to the Confederacy proved troublesome, insurrection in southern counties remained the paramount concern of federal authorities during the early stages of the war. The military feared that covert activity and sabotage would be a prelude to future Confederate liberation. "Dissatisfaction in the southern part of the state is increasing," declared General E. V. Sumner. "The rebels are organizing, collecting supplies and evidently preparing to receive a force from Texas."²¹ One onlooker reported that "since the 'Seceshers' left here, . . . we have all sort of rumors that they were going to return here again."²² Union troops intercepted several letters from former residents living in Texas that added credence to a



A Union soldier (far right) poses at Fort Mojave. Border guards were stationed here and at Fort Yuma to prevent Confederate sympathizers from traveling to the South. *Courtesy Special Collections Library, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.*

potential liberation movement. Joseph Lancaster Brent recalled the schemers "proposed to organize an expedition to cross the desert and come into southern California, and accomplish what . . . [they] could for the Confederate cause." Sumner personally interviewed Brent and John Griffin, recipients of these letters, and felt assured the men had no involvement in any plot.²³

Nevertheless, federal troop movements into southern California cannot fully measure the extent of resistance there. The potential for insurrection in the region was greatly exaggerated. Certainly, sectional loyalties prodded many residents to emigrate eastward. Despite rumors, covert operations, however, were scattered, unorganized, and failed to produce any widespread revolt. The difficulty in any evaluation of actual Confederate resistance in southern California arises from the unreliability of information the government had access to during

the war. Rumors of dangerous cabals seemed a logical extension of the "worst case scenario," common to military planning. Thus, some zealots left and the locale remained "to some extent, proslavery, but not secessionist."²⁴

The threat of a Confederate invasion only exacerbated matters for the Union strategists. How could the South ignore the state's vast mineral reserves, while the North tapped those same resources for their own war effort? This consideration seemed to encourage a Confederate military stab into the Southwest. The discovery of gold at Holcomb Valley in 1860 provided an added incentive. The discovery was "a scheme," one Union soldier recalled, "to furnish the Confederacy with the gold of western mines and prestige to win recognition from European countries."²⁵ More important, the southern California expanse seemed to provide additional inducements to the Confederacy—vast grasslands, unguarded deserts, and a sparse population.

Hence, a Confederate invasion of southern California seemed plausible in view of the region's isolation and manpower shortage, coupled with a vocal anti-Union minority there. The scenario gained credence when a Confederate regiment advanced into northern Arizona during the summer of 1861. Approximately one hundred troops from Texas intercepted the overland trails, halted stagelines, and destroyed supplies at Union storage centers. The Confederate movements seemed a menacing threat despite their limited strategy of harassment and observation. Northern California newspapers, however, duly reported enemy advances. As the Confederate detail moved closer to the Colorado River, the Sacramento *Daily Union* warned of potential rebellion along the southern border.²⁶ By September, in the aftermath of symbolic victories at Fort Sumter and Manassas Junction, Confederate emotion had carried their Texas recruits past the Pima villages to within fifty miles of Fort Yuma.²⁷

The most active troop movements of the war in the Southwest occurred over the next ten months. Throughout the fall of 1861, the northern military reinforced supply points and built new encampments. Union officials stationed sentinels at Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and El Monte. One Union

officer recalled a hostile reception in southern California, and the troops "encountered very grim looks because of our presence as we passed through country."²⁸ By October, Union reinforcements reached Warner's Ranch east of San Diego and Camp Wright along the southern route to Fort Yuma. An advance guard halted all travel across the Colorado River. The regiment seized one ferry located near Fort Yuma and destroyed a Sonoran vessel thirty miles south within Mexico. One officer boasted that "there is scarcely an available ford anywhere on the river." Meanwhile, Indian scouts guarded the mining camps of Sonora and southern California.²⁹

In reality, the Confederacy posed little danger to southern California. While the South might have mounted a military offensive early in the war, the nature of events and progress of the campaign reduced the likelihood of any serious Confederate invasion of southern California. By 1862, Confederates were on the defensive in the Midwest, and their strategy centered on gaining control of the Mississippi River and overcoming the Union blockade in the Gulf of Mexico. The Southwest therefore, held importance only for tactical purposes—observation of Union troop activity. The Arizona forces were "a cord of observation," noted the Los Angeles *Star*, "to watch and report any movements made from California upon New Mexico and Texas."³⁰ By late summer of 1862, Union forces seemed more concerned with Navajo Indian uprisings than with a Confederate campaign in the Southwest. The tables had turned. Any encounters with southern forces provided an opportunity for Union harassment of the secessionist enemy. "If a force of rebels comes," ordered General James H. Carleton, "you know how to annoy it; how to stir up their camps and stock by night; how to lay waste to prairies by fire; how to make the country very warm for them and the road a difficult one."³¹

Although southern California did not experience direct military involvement, the Civil War did affect the more abstract arena of party politics. Opposing interpretations of federal authority were at the crux of the debate, along with profound differences in approach toward individual freedoms and national allegiance. Party politics had sparked the secession movement in the first place,

and sectional rhetoric dominated local contests throughout the war years. In southern California, political tensions punctuated the struggle over local control, pitted Democrats against Republicans, and southerners versus northerners. "Politics," as one writer summarized, "were fought out on the North against South line."³²

Campaign tactics initially worked better for Democratic candidates. The local 1861 election returned to office most Breckinridge supporters such as John A. Watson and Murray Morrison, who had supported the Lecompton Constitution and peaceful secession, and had defended slavery where it already existed.³³ In contrast, the election signified a repudiation of Republicans as both responsible for "an abolition war" and as corrupt beneficiaries of federal patronage. Even popular Republican candidates such as Abel Stearns and Juan Sepulveda took a beating. Stearns finished a distant second to J. R. Vineyard in the state senate contest, while Sepulveda ran fourth in a five man field for the assembly. The gubernatorial campaign also exposed Republican weakness in southern California. Republican Leland Stanford lost by nearly twice his opponents' margin in Los Angeles County, and of the ten county precincts he captured only Anaheim and San Pedro.³⁴

Yet the Democrats' political success in southern California proved illusory within the context of the statewide campaign. Republicans gained a majority of assembly seats in the northern counties, particularly in San Francisco. Stanford won the gubernatorial race—a pivotal election since control of state political machinery translated into advantages at the local level. "But the times are changed, and we have to change with them," reported a chagrined Henry Hamilton.³⁵ Some Democrats gloomily forecasted military repression under the guise of patriotism. Benjamin Hayes complained that any criticism of Union policy would be interpreted as subversive behavior. Augustus Ensworth characterized the era as "tough times," since "it appears *dangerous* for one to try and defend himself in his right according to the civil law of the land."³⁶ The Los Angeles *Star* pleaded for an end to "sensational humbug about Secession and treason" after the conclusion of the 1861

campaign. "It has had the effect intended—to influence the election."³⁷

Local circumstances provided Democrats with additional ammunition to use against their opponents. A sensitive economy with sharp down-cycles characterized the southern California frontier. Between 1861 and 1863 the area suffered a protracted severe drought, alternately severe flood, and widespread smallpox infestation. "We have had to resort to arms," wrote one witness regarding the panic over the 1863 epidemic.³⁸ Henry Hamilton found time in his busy agenda at the state legislature to write and console a local constituent. He pledged to "do what I can to lessen the burdens our friends will be called upon to bear."³⁹ In turn, these hardships devastated the cattle ranching interests and affected agriculture and citrus concerns. "We poor rancheros have had a damned bad string of luck," exclaimed one desperate soul, "and if it is going to continue I don't know what will become of us."⁴⁰

A locally unpopular war and difficult times translated into sharp criticism of Union policies and resentment of upstate domination. Southern California's powerlessness to control events raised doubts about the value of the political process. Political practices under Republican rule generated controversy. Allegations of voter fraud by Unionists and intimidation at polling booths by Union soldiers tarnished the legitimacy of a Republican mandate. For Democrats, attacks on repressive Union policies also served to galvanize party loyalty. "We hold, there can be no disunion among Democrats," intoned the Los Angeles *Star*.⁴¹ Legal challenges of election returns provided a courtroom forum to influence public sentiment. Democrat Edward J. C. Kewen expressed disappointment with one of his party's candidates who "did not contest" his defeat. Kewen felt the next legislative session would provide "an opportunity however, . . . of ventilating that and other matters," while party members "will have to stand from under."⁴²

Still, local opinion in southern California moved toward a wartime mentality as the national conflict progressed. The military campaigns of 1861 and

1862 erased the misconception that the war would be brief. Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg in 1863 improved the northern military image, and the Emancipation Proclamation reinforced the Union aim of a just war.⁴³ More importantly, southern Californians lacked an indigenous past and thus drew a national identity from the context of the westward movement. The Civil War brought local economic development and population growth to a halt, and critics of the apparently successful Union military policy only threatened to prolong that retardation. By the close of 1863, local Democrats were on the defensive as much as the Confederate cause was nationally. Republicans



Col. E. J. C. Kewen, California's first attorney general, and a leading activist in Democratic politics during the Civil War years. *Courtesy The Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.*

demanded a unified front in the war effort, while Democrats suffered the pressures of conformity. John Forster cautioned a fellow resident against criticism of taxation policy since "too free use of words" could lead to arrest.⁴⁴ "Damned black souls (or republicans) however they may be called," wrote José Estudillo, exasperated over his arrest for failure to register for the draft with local authorities.⁴⁵ The bitter electoral campaigns of Democrats Henry Hamilton and E. J. C. Kewen led to their arrests on charges of subversive activity. "Disloyalty to the Union cause," recalled one observer, "had become about as perilous as had been the expression of abolition sentiment but a few years before."⁴⁶

Fears of secessionist plots and subversion ultimately stifled partisan politics in southern California. Military detainments served to discredit Democrat activists and intimidate moderate opposition. At the same time, critics of Union policies sounded provincial and mean-spirited against a backdrop of patriotic fervor. When they characterized the Emancipation Proclamation as a simple theft of "private property," Democrats were on the unpopular side of events. To satirize the northern military in 1862 as "paralyzed" lost credibility with Union victories in the West during the following year and by clear Union supremacy in 1864. A few partisans merely ignored obvious trends, or misinterpreted battlefield news because of unreliable information and delays in communication. John G. Downey desperately wanted more news than "our little Democratic papers," since "they are soon read and leave the mind only more anxious for news."⁴⁷ One local Democrat felt confused by the Confederate defeat at Vicksburg and Lee's daring advance into Pennsylvania. Still, he dismissed any negative speculation about Confederate military weakness. "What all these matters portend it is hard to conjecture. I suppose they know what they are about. Quien sabe."⁴⁸

Union policies and the conduct of the war partially explained the steady decline in opposition strength. Early in the war, unimaginative Democrat strategies provided few alternatives to the military stalemate. The prospect of state division lost credibility early in the war when opponents equated the idea of a Pacific Republic to southern secession. "Our State's local issue will be Pacific Republic, or

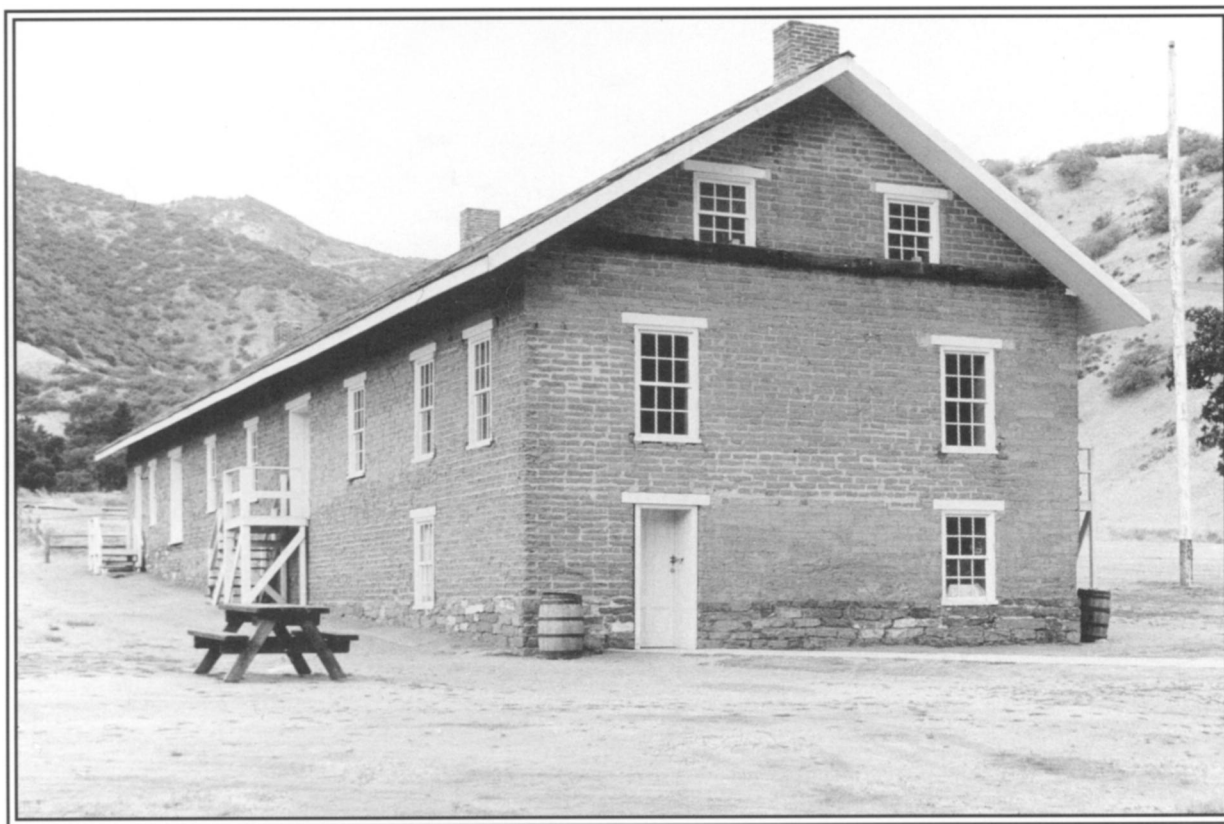
no Pacific Republic. We are for the Union, and no Pacific Republic," asserted the Oroville *Weekly Butte Record*.⁴⁹ "One experiment is left," declared Edward J. C. Kewen. "It is Peace—peace to a distracted country—peace to a nation drunk with horrors."⁵⁰ Kewen's remarks to the state legislature evoked a standing ovation—but only from one side of the chamber. In reality, an end to the war at the expense of the Union offered no solution at all, and criticism by Democrats without a viable military stratagem only reinforced suspicions that they were disloyal.

In southern California, complaints of repressive Union conduct lost their impact as the war unfolded. The Democrat press, for example, remained vigilant against potential military intervention into the southern California mining camps. "Our miners will wake up some fine morning," warned the Los Angeles *Star*, "and find a military guard prospecting their claims for and on account of Uncle Abe."⁵¹ The *Star's* admonitions never materialized. The mines thrived as a haven for entrepreneurs: refugees, pacifists, and opportunists looking for fortune rather than conflict. One traveler to Walker's Ranch in late 1863 conceded that "everyone gives a good account of the mines."⁵² In general, the military kept a low profile during the war years. The government made little effort to enforce draft laws, though such enforcement was common in northern California. Fear of the draft, however, was briefly exploited by local Democrats. By 1863, the Union presence had assumed a supportive role to the troop movements in the Southwest, rather than as an intimidating force poised against threats of unrest. In sum, the lack of open hostility between military and local citizens further reduced fears of reprisals against Confederate sympathizers.⁵³

By 1864, southern California Democrats still controlled state offices and most local affairs. However, party dominance showed signs of weakening. Edward J. C. Kewen and Henry Hamilton chose not to run for re-election to the legislature, although they remained active in local politics. Meanwhile, a Republican won the Los Angeles city marshal contest in 1863, an influential position coveted during vigilante times. The Republican gubernatorial candidate, Frederick F. Low, won the election statewide and finished a close runner-up in the

lower counties to hometown favorite John G. Downey. Ironically, Downey had forecasted an end to Democratic control over local patronage with Lincoln's victory in 1860.⁵⁴ The ex-governor was not the only casualty of that prediction. The state legislature repeatedly ignored proposals to appropriate money for railroad construction in Los Angeles, a favorite Democrat issue throughout the previous decade. Seeking to muzzle a major Democratic critic of the war effort, Union officials had denied Henry Hamilton's Los Angeles *Star* use of the mails in 1862. After Hamilton transformed the paper into the *Wilmington Journal*, authorities suspended its publication in 1864. As a consequence, the decline in subscriptions to Hamilton's publications precurred a more serious erosion in party rank and file.⁵⁵

Local activists used a variety of tactics to counter adverse trends. Democrats recognized the lessons of a divided party from the 1860 presidential campaign. "It is of the highest importance," stressed Edward J. C. Kewen, "that the State should be fully represented in order to give encouragement to our party organization."⁵⁶ Yet voter participation in the region declined between 1862 and 1864. The Los Angeles *Star* decried public apathy and "men pretending to be Democrats who absented themselves from the polls."⁵⁷ The Democrats' concerns suggested that emigration of southern loyalists, intimidation, and public disinterest in war politics had all affected voter turnout. A few candidates downplayed the war in their campaigns to counter these adverse patterns. Benjamin Hayes stressed his independence, impartiality, and integrity. "The office of *Judge* should be maintained free forever from any influence of mere party politics," declared Hayes.⁵⁸ A large Republican turnout in Santa Barbara contributed to a close election, however, and ended Hayes's tenure as district judge. Even the most ardent southern supporters muted their rhetoric to avert reprisals for their beliefs. "I cannot favor the mad schemers for disunion," Kewen stated evenly in demanding an immediate truce.⁵⁹ Disgruntled over the prospect of having no Democrat nominee but George McClellan for president, Henry Hamilton eventually supported a "peace platform" as the only feasible option to Lincoln in 1864.⁶⁰



Restored soldiers' barracks at Fort Tejon State Historical Park. Fifteen officers who served at the fort became generals during the Civil War. Eight generals led Union forces, while seven served the Confederacy. *Courtesy Ronald C. Woolsey, photographer.*

The Democrats' political difficulties translated into an uphill battle in the 1864 campaign. Internal problems in party organization hampered local efforts to win votes. In October, Hamilton's financial hardships eventually forced his newspaper into bankruptcy. The newspaper's closure left Democrats without a major political organ in southern California, a crucial loss in the weeks before the election.⁶¹ At San Juan Capistrano, the party failed to inspire local membership or deliver on a promised newspaper. In contrast, an improved Union military outlook nationally under Grant and Sherman, coupled with the powers of incumbency, energized Republicans at the precinct level. "Every effort will be made to carry the election in this County against us," feared one Democrat regular.⁶² John Forster called the election "very warm" and "Don Abel is running about . . . stumping everywhere that they can get an audience to understand English."⁶³

Local Republican momentum peaked at the election. Andrés Pico, Abel Stearns, and J. A. Sanchez staged a Republican gala at Los Angeles during the

closing days of the campaign. Phineas Banning hosted a similar rally and grand barbecue at Wilmington. One bitter partisan felt that if Republicans publicly flaunted this rally as the "beginning of the feast in anticipation of the Election . . . the majority will hide snakes in their boots."⁶⁴ These remarks expressed frustration rather than reality. Lincoln carried the state by 30,000 votes. In southern California, Republicans captured Wilmington and Anaheim to offset Democrat strength in El Monte, San Gabriel, and Azusa. As one historian has noted, "The initial return indicated a stunning upset. . . . There was jubilation among Union men in Los Angeles, and artillery boomed at Drum Barracks."⁶⁵

Once the Confederacy surrendered in the spring of 1865, however, the bitterness associated with wartime politics eased. The reduction of military forces in California mitigated tensions, returned

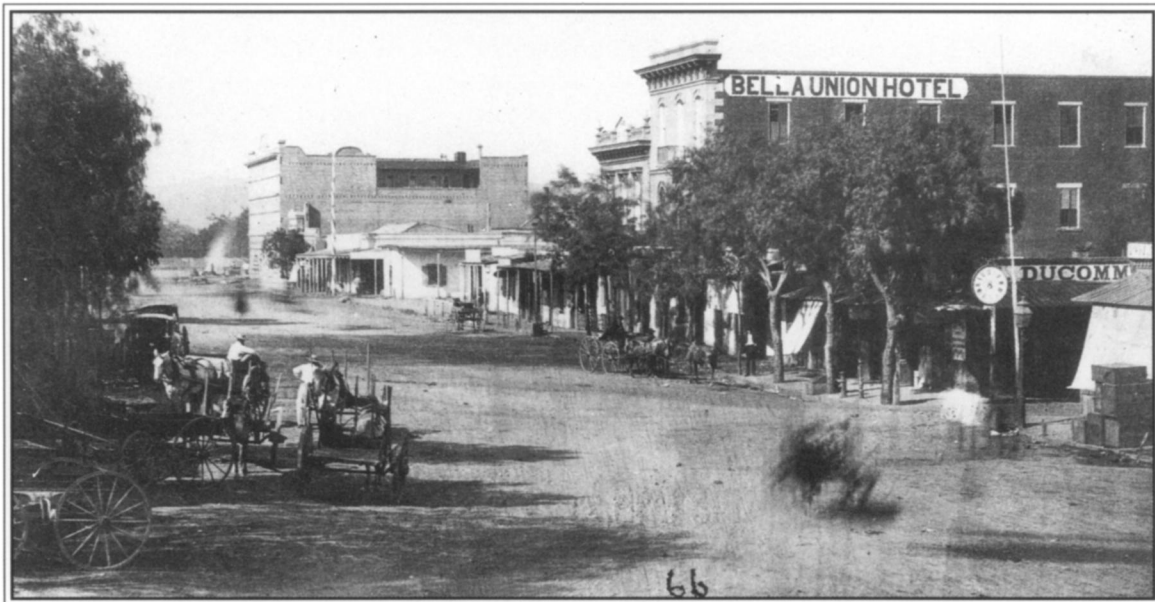
southern communities to an atmosphere of civilian control, and began an era of reconciliation. "The war is over, the government has been vindicated, and all issues will now be settled peaceably," pronounced the *Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*.⁶⁶ Hence, a frontier agenda of commercial expansion reemerged as a civic priority. Benjamin Wilson, for example, encouraged one Confederate expatriate to return to Los Angeles after the war. Wilson believed post-war restrictions on the political rights of former Confederate soldiers would be repealed, and "we are in hopes of brighter times."⁶⁷ Old themes came to the forefront: railroad construction, law and order, education, and social progress. The future offered renewed vitality in commerce, with increased speculation in petroleum and mining. "There are riches in store for Los Angeles," promised the *News*, "yet that item depends upon the return of liberality on the part of her citizens, in the way of aiding in the progressive work."⁶⁸

Regional issues dominated local 1865 campaigns, as Democrats and Republicans fought to a standoff

in the election. The Union party captured the senate race, but lost both assembly contests. Phineas Banning, the Republican senatorial candidate, avoided Reconstruction topics in deference to a theme of party unity and commercial prosperity. He supported railroad construction between San Pedro and Los Angeles as a long-term initiative for improved harbor transit. The award of federal monies for the project led to charges of cronyism, divided Republicans, and contributed to election defeats at San Bernardino and Los Angeles. "The Union party of this county is helplessly divided," confessed the *News*.⁶⁹ Republicans, however, won the mayoral race in Los Angeles—a first. In turn, Democrats of many stripes shared the political stage, compared to the dominance of the pro-slavery Chivalry faction during the pre-war years. Ultimately, the 1865 election proved a victory for southern Californians. Both parties reasserted a progressive view of future expansion and sought a government responsive to the provincial needs of settlement and growth.⁷⁰

Bella Union Hotel, Main Street, Los Angeles, 1870. The hotel was a popular meeting place for Confederate sympathizers during the war. *Courtesy The Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.*

The Civil War, in retrospect, had a pervasive effect on southern California regardless of the remoteness of battle. War issues, personalities, and campaigns dominated headlines





throughout the era. The sectional tensions connected with slavery influenced local politics, and secession rhetoric found a responsive local audience when fighting erupted between the states. During 1861 and 1862, a potential Confederate offensive in the southwest accentuated the strategic importance of southern California. A backdrop of southern sympathy in the region compounded this threat of insurrection and invasion. Thus, an uncertain military situation led to a repressive Union policy and intimidating troop presence in the lower counties.

Political campaigns, too, reflected the harsh polemics of wartime opponents. Voter fraud, detentions, and contested elections symbolized a different type of battleground. Republican charges of disunion kept Democrats at a disadvantage, particularly when military events favored the Union. The party's fortunes eventually went the way of the Confederacy's. Lincoln's 1864 reelection and success in southern California proved a harbinger of the South's demise.

Finally, the Civil War's impact on southern California underscored the link between East and West, an inseparable bond between frontier and nation. Once the war ended, however, southern Californians looked to the business of settlement as a measure of restored tranquility. Perhaps, like most Americans, their future provided hope, and a return to local concerns proved a necessary ingredient of that healing process. Such was the case of Mary Rhodes, a Confederate nurse who won Robert E.

Federal military headquarters for southern California during the Civil War was Camp Drum, constructed early in 1862 near the port of Wilmington. Popularly known as "Drum Barracks," it was home to the California Volunteers sent to the region to control secessionist sympathizers, and it served as supply depot for the California Column bound for Arizona. The experimental Camel Corps was stationed there for a year. One of the camels stands in the foreground. Today Drum Barracks is operated as a museum by the city of Los Angeles, the only major Civil War historic site in southern California. *Courtesy Security Pacific Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.*

Lee's admiration. After the war, she found herself emotionally drained and in poor health. For Mrs. Rhodes, resettling in California offered a renewal of spirit and healing. "I hope the journey may improve your health," Lee wrote to her, "and . . . [bring] new scenes and new cares, for wherever you go, you will always feel the cares which benevolence and religion inspire in the human heart."⁷¹ Lee's words may just as well have been for all southern Californians, since their "new cares" offered the same inspiration for reconciliation. CHS

See notes beginning on page 407.

Ronald C. Woolsey is a reader at the Huntington Library and a level coordinator in the social studies department at Bishop Amat High School. Mr. Woolsey has written articles and book reviews on southern California and the West.