Union Loyalty of California Governors

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Originally published in the December 1965 issue of the California Historical Society Quarterly

This article was digitized by the History Office, Installation Support Unit, Camp San Luis Obispo

28 April 2016

Union Loyalty of California's Civil War Governors

By LEO P. KIBBY

INTRODUCTION

ONE HUNDRED years ago the United States was at war with itself, and California was one of the participants in that struggle. Unfortunately, only minor attention has been given to the contributions the state made to the Union cause. Even as the war ended in April, 1865, the Russian chargé d'affaires, Baron de Stoeckl, had not been impressed with California's efforts: On April 14 he informed the Russian Foreign Office that California had "remained only half loyal to the Union," had "made only small financial contributions," and "did not supply a single man during the entire war."[1] There is reason to believe later historians have been content to accept de Stoeckl's evaluation, for they have been negligent not only in giving proper credit to California's role in the war, but few of them, as Ray C. Colton has written, "have dealt with the full significance . . . the Far West played in the mighty conflict."[2]

Abundant proof exists to nullify de Stoeckl's claim on the one hand, and to right the wrong of historical negligence on the other. Actually, the state was predominantly loyal, and it contributed heavily in both manpower and money. Again and again the state legislature, by joint resolution, pledged support to the Union, and by legislation appropriated money for the war effort.[3] The Civil War governors were loyal and co-operative.[4] Approximately sixteen thousand volunteers served in a variety of worthwhile functions: relieving United States Army Regulars; serving in areas like Arizona and New Mexico, and thus preventing the Confederacy either from establishing a direct route to California or in gaining a foothold on the Pacific Coast.[5] Approximately

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$185,000,000 in gold was shipped from the port of San Francisco alone between 1861-1864.[6] When Congress imposed a direct tax in 1861, California paid her proportion in the amount of about $250,000 immediately;[7] and the people of the State raised by voluntary contribution a total of $1,250,000 for the United States Sanitary Commission, an amount which represented one-fourth of the total collected for that organization throughout the United States.[8]

There were also certain leading citizens in California who made outstanding contributions to the Union cause, among whom were two who deserve special reference: Edwin D. Baker[9] and Thomas Starr King.[10] Baker was a friend of Lincoln, a reputable attorney in San Francisco, and later a United States Senator from Oregon. He often gave patriotic addresses in California, and once the war broke forth resigned his Senate seat, accepted a commission as colonel in the Union Army and was to be killed in action at Ball's Bluff on October 21, 1861, in an opening battle of the Civil War. Thomas Starr King, an outstanding Unitarian minister in San Francisco, combined his ministerial responsibilities with patriotic effort in order to enlist support for the Union and raise funds for the United States Sanitary Commission.

ANTE BELLUM CALIFORNIA[11]

By the terms of the Treaty with Mexico in 1848 a large land area was ceded to the United States. Included in this cession was California, an area soon to experience a mad gold rush and a rapid growth in population. Both developments gave rise to an urgent need for civil government marked by an accompanying sentiment for statehood. The end result was the convening of a state convention in Monterey in September of 1849, the formation of a state constitution, and the presentation of a petition for statehood to Congress. On September 9, 1850, after eight months of one of the most spirited and grueling congressional debates in the annals of this country, California was admitted to the Union as a free state.

Events to follow, as every student of American history knows, were to offer conclusive proof that California had entered upon her new statehood rôle at a time when sectional disturbances were erupting with marked regularity. Common as they were during the 1850's, these conflicts had by 1860 become more pronounced and of keen importance to

all those who would be guiding the affairs of state in California. Despite the critical problems which would follow the disturbances, significant transformations would take place in California within the decade: her population would increase over 300 per cent to nearly three hundred eighty thousand people; the Overland Mail Route from St. Louis to San Francisco would open in 1857, and a contract for both letter and passenger service be given to John Butterfield. The route would be southerly, approximately twenty-seven hundred miles in length, and would require about twenty-five days to cover. In 1860 the Pony Express would be operating between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California, by a northerly route. And by October, 1861, New York and San Francisco would be connected with telegraph, and Governor-elect Leland Stanford would wire President Lincoln the message that California, like her sister states, "holds civil liberty and union above all price."

Within this same decade California would be served by six governors, the first of whom was Peter H. Burnett who was to remain in office for only a year before resigning. His successor was Lieutenant Governor John McDougal of whom it was said that "there was not much in him outside whiskey" and whatever talent he had was drowned in whiskey.[12] Next came John Bigler, a fair and average governor, who served for two two-year terms.[13] Following Bigler was John Neely Johnson who came to be governor in 1855, and though clever, "lacked firmness" and was also to become a drunkard.[14] John B. Weller, having served a term in the United States Senate, was to become California's next governor. He was known to hold strong convictions about the sectional conflict and the relationship that California should have to the national problem. In the message to the legislature of California in 1860 Weller commented that California "will not go with the South or the North, but here upon the shores of the Pacific found a mighty republic which may in the end prove the greatest of all."[15] The sixth man to become governor of California served in the capacity for only one day before resigning to become United States Senator. His name was Milton S. Latham. Had he continued as governor it is only possible to speculate on what his position and influence would have been toward the Union and the Confederacy. In his first year as United States Senator he did support the Union cause and denounced seces-

sion, but in his second year "his southern sympathies assumed ascendancy."[16]

Just previous to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 there had been uncertainty concerning the stand California would take and the rôle she might likely play in the sectional argument: Only seven of the fifty-three newspapers in California had supported Lincoln in the election of 1860.[17] And though Lincoln won the state's four electoral votes, he received but 32 per cent of its popular vote.[18] Moreover, in 1861 "California's representatives in congress . . . appeared to be somewhat indifferent to the welfare of the Pacific states," and this neglect tended to make them disloyal.[19] Even in the state legislature at Sacramento there were divided views,[20] and the assembly speaker, George Barstow, had stated that California at the outbreak of the war abounded with traitors and malcontents.[21] It is known also that influential businessmen actually counselled a neutrality policy for the state.[22] But the Fort Sumter incident appeared to seal California's fate: Following this incident both parties in California professed utmost devotion to the Union,[23] a loyal demonstration was made by businessmen in San Francisco,[24] Senators Latham and McDougal and others spoke in favor of coercing the Southern States,[25] and on May 17, the following concurrent resolution was adopted by the California state legislature pledging support to the federal government:

> *Resolved by the Senate, the Assembly concurring*, That the people of California are devoted to the Constitution and Union of the United States, and will not fail in fidelity and fealty to that Constitution and Union now in the hour of trial and peril. That California is ready to maintain the rights and honor of the National Government at home and abroad, and at all times to respond to any requisition that may be made upon her to defend the republic against foreign or domestic foes.[26]

CIVIL WAR GOVERNORS

Future assurance of loyalty would be forthcoming in the efforts expended for the Union cause by three men who were to serve as governor of California during the war years: John G. Downey, Leland Stanford, and Frederick F. Low.

Downey was a native of Ireland, Stanford was born in New York, and Low came from Maine. Both Downey and Low arrived in California in 1849; Stanford came three years later. Each man was to gain

considerable fame and recognition because of his lifetime activities and public service. Downey arrived in California with only ten dollars in his pocket. But having learned how to compound drugs, he purchased a shipload of drugs at 20 per cent discount, opened a drugstore in Los Angeles, and within three years had succeeded in accumulating a considerable financial profit. In time, Downey became the owner of extensive estates comprising some seventy-five thousand acres of land in Southern California, and had a city named after him. Upon his death on March 1, 1894, he left an estate valued at one-half million dollars. Leland Stanford, a lawyer by profession, was in later life to become both a railroad magnate and a United States Senator. Entering the Senate in 1885 he was to serve in this office until death on June 21, 1893. Of special significance also is the fact that it was Stanford who founded the Leland Stanford Junior University in memory of his young son who died in Italy. Frederick F. Low gained a reputation in the banking business in both Marysville and San Francisco. Before becoming governor, he served in the House of Representatives, then as Collector of the Port of San Francisco, and after the Civil War was appointed by President Grant as Minister to China. Following his return from China to the United States in 1874, Low resumed his banking activities in San Francisco and continued in that business until his death on July 21, 1894. Like Stanford, Low's name is associated with a great university, for he was a major force in the founding of the University of California at Berkeley.[27]

Downey, a LeCompton Democrat, was elected in 1859 to the office of lieutenant governor on the same ticket that Milton S. Latham was elected governor. On the day following the inauguration as governor, Latham resigned and accepted the United States Senate vacancy created by the death of United States Senator David C. Broderick who had been killed in a duel by Judge David S. Terry. Downey served as governor for the two-year term and then retired from politics. But again, in a later election, he sought unsuccessfully the governorship. Stanford was a Republican and a strong supporter of Lincoln and the Union cause. He served a two-year term and was not a candidate for re-election. In 1862 Union Democrats joined forces with the Republican Party, and a strong Union Party arose. It was this party that nominated Frederick F. Low for governor in 1863. Though Low won the

election, it is of special interest that the office seeker who opposed him was former Governor John G. Downey.[28] It should also be added that this was the first time a governor in California was elected to a four-year-term.

Of the three governors, Downey was the only one to be charged with a degree of disloyalty to the Union cause, though upon leaving office he was to receive commendation for his loyalty. The extreme Union patriotism of both Stanford and Low was never questioned. Strangely, perhaps, is the fact that their names appear in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, whereas the name of Downey is lacking.

One charge against Downey was made because he made appointments which revealed "his entire sympathy and cooperation with those plotting to sever California from her allegiance to the Union."[29] He was also criticized for a very friendly letter he wrote to the Reverend William A. Scott, of the Calvary Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, whose congregation had forced him to resign because of his sympathetic prayers for President Jefferson Davis.[30] And after Downey returned to private life, a statement he made in a letter to the May 1863 meeting of his party group in San Francisco also aroused comment and criticism. In this letter he indicated he had never favored waging an aggressive war upon any section of the Confederacy and that he did not believe the Union could be preserved by a coercive policy.[31] It might be noted, however, that with Downey's proclamation[32] calling out the required military forces of the state, and with his appointment of Colonel James H. Carleton to command the state's First Infantry and First Cavalry units,[33] he was contributing overtly and effectively to the Union war effort.

In a more favorable atmosphere, Downey stressed in his annual message to the state legislature in January, 1862, that the questions at issue between the North and South "were neither in their nature nor importance such as could not by any means have been settled by an honorable and peaceful adjustment."[34] Now the nation was committed to the policy of war, he continued, and whether or not war was the best policy to preserve the Union, the states remaining in the Union were committed and every citizen in the loyal States were obligated to aid Congress, and, if called out, to fight for law enforcement.[35] Downey also made it clear that his official acts as governor had conformed to the

sentiments expressed in the joint resolution the legislature adopted on May 17, 1861.[36] Admitting further that he stood for the perpetuity of the Union, was loyal to the flag, and had complied with every legal requisition of the federal government made upon California, it was still Downey's conviction that the conflict might have been avoided by compromise.[37] Moreover, he pointed out that the original policy of the war which included such things as repelling aggression and blockade was not being pursued and that there were men in Congress and the Cabinet who would make the war a system of social change and political convulsion marked by instant emancipation of four million slaves. Thus, the inevitable result of such action would be "the subjugation and impoverishment of the white race, and the political elevation over them of the negro race."[38]

Upon the eve of his retirement from the governor's chair it must have been of considerable satisfaction to Downey to receive from Brigadier General George Wright, Commander of the Department of the Pacific, warm thanks for the "active cooperation and assistance which Your Excellency has afforded the commander of this department in organizing the volunteer force in this State."[39]

With Stanford at the helm of state for California "the people breathed more freely, for now their Executive was unequivocally and without any reservations, for the Union,"[40] and the state government would give hearty support to President Lincoln. And such assurance was well founded in the efforts of Stanford, even as the Sacramento *Union* had said of him that he received thousands of votes "not because he was a Republican but because he was a Union man."[41] In his inaugural address, Stanford emphasized that California was loyal to the Union and that "everyone of us should feel that we are but guardians, holding our lives and our fortunes in trust, for the protection of the Government, around which cluster the anxious hopes and fears of millions who have grown with its growth and strengthened with its strength."[42] Continuing, Stanford voiced the emphasis his administration would give to the Union cause: California has "nobly and wisely" pronounced in favor of the people's cause; and the state should now "prove her devotion to the Union and to Civil liberty, by doing all in her power to maintain both."[43] Stanford recommended too that California's part of the national tax "be cheerfully assumed, and provision

be made for its payment out of the State Treasury."[44] The total, amounting to $254,538, was authorized in a senate concurrent resolution and was paid into the United States Treasury later in the year.[45] Much to Stanford's disgust, and also to that of the assembly's which adopted a resolution censuring the state treasurer and controller, the payment was not in gold but in depreciated legal tender notes.[46]

Coinciding with his annual message of January, 1863, was Lincoln's implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation. Referring to the proclamation in his message, Stanford spoke of it as the day when four millions of people were assured of their freedom and that it was an event "which will make it memorable as the commencement of a new era in human progress."[47]

In evaluating Stanford as a governor, it was Low's belief that on the whole he did well. However, many opposed Stanford, continued Low, because he went to the legislature and lobbied for the Pacific Railroad, and actually "went upon the floor of the Senate and cajoled and bullyragged and got this bill [Railroad Appropriation Bill] through."[48] But as governor, according to another's view, Stanford "did everything possible to maintain California as a loyal state and he gave freely of his money and time to the Union cause."[49] Ten years later he was praised by the press and the people.[50]

As stated earlier, it was in 1862 that the Republicans and Union Democrats joined forces, became the strong Union Party, and the following year nominated Frederick F. Low for governor. In winning the election Low received nearly 64,000 votes or 20,000 more than Downey.[51] Jubilant over the state's total election returns, Low wired President Lincoln on September 3 that "loyal California sends greeting," and "the Union, State and Congressional tickets are elected by a majority of 25,000 to 30,000."[52] On the same day Low also wired Secretary of War Stanton that "we have moved on the enemy's works and they are ours" and "California by her votes bids you and the Army Godspeed in your arduous yet glorious work."[53]

Even Brigadier General George Wright was impressed with the election results and wired Stanton that the "Union State ticket carried by large majority" and there was also a large contribution made to the sanitary fund.[54]

The War Department indicated its delight with the California elec-

tion results when Stanton responded to Low by sending a congratulatory message to him and then adding that "while our armies are thus moving on the enemy's works rejoice that California has put in such a big lick at rebellion."[55]

In his inaugural address in December, 1863, Governor Low revealed the position his own administration would likely take when he commended his fellow citizens for their decision "to stand firmly by the National cause."[56] Two years later, with the war having ended, and in a Biennial message, he submitted to the state legislature the proposed Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, and recommended that such measure be approved.[57] And in the same message the governor was to note "it is a proud reflection that we have cordially fulfilled every obligation to the National Government."[58] Finally, Governor Low made use of the occasion to heap high praise upon the California Volunteers for the highest honor they had won for themselves in their varied military assignments, and which had occasioned "encomiums from all their officers."[59]

NOTES

1. Baron de Stoeckl to Prince Gortchakov, April 14, 1865, as quoted by Albert A. Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), pp. 236-38.

2. Ray C. Colton, *The Civil War in the Western Territories* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), Foreword.

3. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, XXIV (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1888), pp. 279, 297-98.

See also Franklin Tuthill, *The History of California* (San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft & Co., 1866), p. 592.

4. The purpose of the present paper.

5. For contributions by the military, please see the following articles by the author: "Some Aspects of California's Military Problems During the Civil War," *Civil War History*, V (September 1959), 251-262; "California Soldiers in the Civil War," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XXXL (December 1961), 343-350; "With Colonel Carleton and the California Column," *The Historical Society of Southern California* Quarterly, XLI (December 1959), 337-344.

6. Tuthill, *History of California*, p. 601.

See also George T. Clark, *Leland Stanford War Governor of California Railroad Builder and Founder of Stanford University* (Stanford: University Press, 1931), p. 125.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 594. Although the collection was in gold, the amount was paid in greenbacks.

8. Clark, *Leland Stanford*, p. 125.

9. Harry C. Blair and Rebecca Tarshis, *Colonel Edward D. Baker: Lincoln's Constant Ally* (Salem: Oregon Historical Society, 1960).

See also Elijah R. Kennedy, *The Contest for California in 1861: How Colonel E. D. Baker Saved the Pacific States to the Union* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912).

10. Arnold Crompton, *Apostle of Liberty Starr King in California* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950).

11. While it is the purpose of this paper to give attention to the Union loyalty demonstrated by California's Civil War governors, it must be remembered that by 1861 the state had had but a single decade of experience in statehood and federal activities. Hence, a brief glance at that antebellum period provides excellent perspective, and is, therefore, included herewith.

12. Robert H. Becker, ed., *Some Reflections of an Early California Governor contained in a short Dictated Memoir by Frederick F. Low, Ninth Governor of California . . . in 1883* (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1959), p. 29. This work is a rare account of an interview between Governor Low and Hubert H. Bancroft.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

14. *Loc. cit.*

15. John B. Weller, "Annual Message," *Journal of the Assembly*, Eleventh Session, California Legislature, 1860, p. 64.

16. Bancroft, *Works*, XXIV, 274.

17. Crompton, *Apostle of Liberty*, p. 34.

18. George H. Tinkham, *California Men and Events* (Stockton: Record Publishing Co., 1915), p. 186.

19. Bancroft, *Works*, XXIV, 275.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 277, n. 2.

21. Speaker George Barstow, "Valedictory Address, May 15, 1862," *Journal of the Assembly*, Thirteenth Session, 1862, p. 760.

22. Bancroft, *Works*, XXIV, 276.

23. *Ibid.*, XXIV, 278.

24. *Ibid.*, XXIV, 279.

25. *Loc. cit.*

26. Richard H. Orton, comp., *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1867* (Sacramento: State Office, 1890), p. 2.

27. Becker, *Reflections*, Foreword. In Foreword, Eli T. Sheppard's *University of California Chronicle*, April 1917, is quoted.

See also *Dictionary of American Biography*, XI, 445.

28. *Journal of the Assembly*, Fifteenth Session, 1863-64, p. 43.

29. Orton, *Records*, pp. 27-28.

30. Downey to Scott, October 1, 1861, *The Pacific Expositor*, III (November 1861), 201.

31. Tuthill, *History of California*, p. 588.

32. Proclamation of Governor Downey, August 12, 1861, Orton, *Records*, pp. 12-13.

33. Downey to Lincoln, September 2, 1861, *Ibid.*, p.322.

34. John G. Downey, "Annual Message, January 8, 1862," *Journal of the Senate*, Thirteenth Session, 1862, p. 49.

35. *Loc. cit.*

36. *Supra.*

37. Downey, "Annual Message," *Ibid.*, p. 52.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

39. Wright to Downey, January 9, 1862, *War of the Rebellion: A Compliation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, I, 50, Pt 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), p. 799.

40. Tuthill, *History of California*, p. 589.

41. Sacramento *Union*, September 6, 1861, quoted in Clark, *Leland Stanford*, p. 112.

42. Leland Stanford, "Inaugural address, January 10, 1862," *Journal of the Senate*, Thirteenth Session, p. 102.

43. *Loc. cit.*

44. *Loc. cit.*

45. Clark, *Leland Stanford*, p. 122.

46. *Loc. cit.*

47. Leland Stanford, "Annual Message, January 7, 1863," *Journal of the Senate*, Fourteenth Session, p. 46.

48. Becker, *Reflections*, p. 36.

49. Tinkham, *California Men*, p. 209.

50. *Loc. cit.*

51. *Journal of the Assembly*, Fifteenth Session, 1863-64, p. 43.

52. Low to Lincoln, September 3, 1863, *Official Records*, I, 50, Pt. 2, p. 602.

53. Low to Stanton, September 3, 1863, *Official Records*, I, 50, Pt. 2, p. 602.

54. Wright to Stanton, September 3, 1863, *Official Records*, I, 50, Pt. 2, p. 605.

55. Stanton to Low, September 4, 1863, *Official Records*, I, 50, Pt. 2, p. 605.

56. Frederick F. Low, "Inaugural Address, December 10, 1863," *Journal of the Senate*, Fifteenth Session, p. 74.

57. Frederick F. Low, Biennial Message, December 4, 1865, *Journal of the Senate*, Sixteenth Session, p. 54.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 49.