Soldiers Under Stephan Watts Kearny

by Dwight L. Clarke

Originally published in the June 1966 issue of *The California Historical Society Quarterly.*
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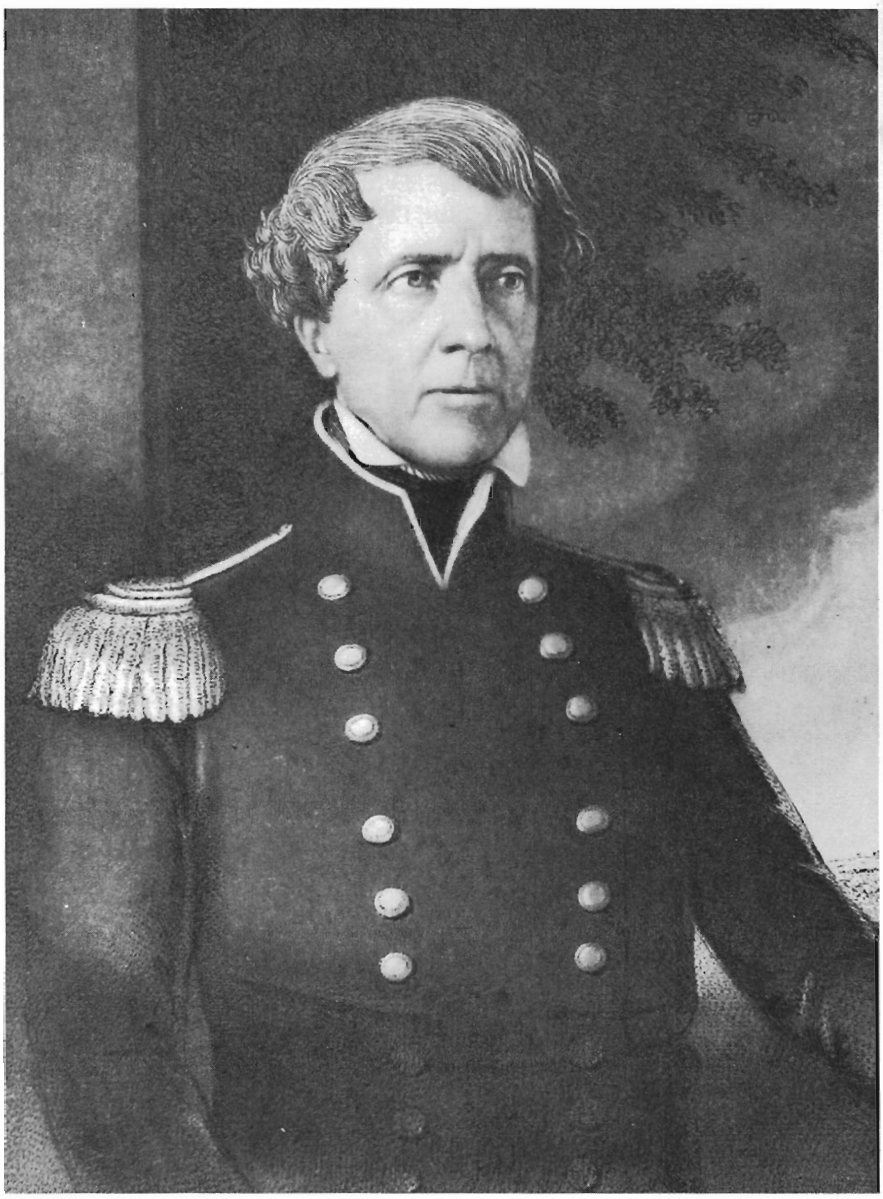
3 May 2016



Courtesy UCLA Photographic Department

MAJOR GENERAL STEPHEN WATTS KEARNY
During the period of the Mexican War

From a mezzotint engraving in the Library of Congress. Taken from an original daguerreotype engraved by J. B. Welch for *Graham's Magazine*.

Soldiers Under Stephen Watts Kearny

By DWIGHT L. CLARKE

The following is the text of an address given by Mr. Clarke at a dinner meeting of members of the Society, held at the Huntington-Sheraton Hotel in Pasadena on January 28, 1966. The title was originally announced as "The Men at San Pasqual," but Mr. Clarke has changed it to the above for publication.

TO SPEAK LITERALLY to the title—The Men at San Pasqual—would require far more time than has been allotted me. Kit Carson himself would be a good subject for a full evening's program, and some others who fought in the battle would each require nearly as much time. At two other members meetings my subject was General Stephen Watts Kearny and since some of you heard those talks, I want to save you the boredom of repetition.

A superficial roll call of the participants in the battle would not prove very interesting. I propose instead to sketch the lives and later careers of five men who served under Kearny. After suffering the hardships of the longest march in United States history and the perils of its battles, these men played important roles in the subsequent history of California and the West. By their sacrifices they changed the direction of the region's future, by their later activities they left indelible marks upon its society, its economy, and its government.

The coming of American rule to California was one of the most decisive events in our nation's history. The 1700 men who marched out of Fort Leavenworth in June, 1846, were called The Army of the West. That name still clung to the three hundred dragoons who left Santa Fé for California with General Kearny near the end of September. Even this remnant was reduced another two-thirds a few days later near Socorro, New Mexico because of Kearny's fateful encounter with Kit Carson. Carson was carrying despatches to Washington from Commo-

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dore Robert Stockton and Lieutenant Colonel John Charles Frémont to inform the government that these two officers had conquered California. Unfortunately the news was premature and inaccurate. At that very moment the native Californians were revolting, and all the province south of Monterey, except for San Diego, was recaptured by the insurgents.

Thereafter only an escort of one hundred dragoons went on to California with Kearny, still called somewhat absurdly now, The Army of the West. As you know, this diminutive army fought a bloody battle at San Pasqual. Nearly everything about that fight has provoked controversy. It took thirty-seven pages of the biography I wrote of General Stephen Watts Kearny to detail its many pros and cons.

When the battered survivors reached San Diego, they were reinforced by sailors and marines from Stockton's fleet and a few American volunteers. This combined force fought two more battles at the San Gabriel and at the Plains of the Mesa and occupied Los Angeles. There they were joined by Frémont and his California Battalion. They had just accepted the surrender of the insurgents at Cahuenga.

California was now American. What of that Army of the West? Did its members then fade out of California history? I believe that the careers of several of them provide very interesting answers.

Briefly as to General Kearny himself. He entered California on November 25, 1846. He started his return journey to the States from Monterey on May 31, 1847. In that six months, he completed the pacification of the country, appointed many local officials, checked the hostile Indians tribes, started surveys for the defense of San Francisco Bay and granted to the growing town of San Francisco the title to its beach and water lots. This made possible the development of its great harbor. He stopped several irregular seizures of property whose ownership was in dispute. He established the first regular United States mail service in California, and with Commodore Biddle set up the first American admiralty court on the Pacific Coast. These are only a few highlights of his brief administration.

The first man whom I would like to introduce is Captain Henry Smith Turner. This officer took temporary command when General Kearny was wounded at San Pasqual. He continued to serve as Kearny's aide and adjutant; and when the general returned to Fort Leavenworth,

Turner accompanied him. The confidential letters he wrote to his wife are one of our best sources about the hectic controversy between Kearny and Frémont.

During the research for the Kearny biography I learned of an unpublished journal Turner had written of the march from Fort Leavenworth to Warner's Ranch, California. The search covered several months. The original has been lost for many years, but I found a typewritten copy of the original made over fifty years ago. A second copy was found—in the handwriting of a daughter of Henry Turner. Although faded, the manuscript was quite legible, and it surely is authentic because the text is almost identical with the typewritten copy. This journal is a highly intimate and introspective narrative.

The University of Oklahoma Press agrees with me that this Turner journal deserves publication. I have edited it and expect it to be published in the next few months under the title of *Following my Destiny*. The same search unearthed another unpublished journal of Captain Turner, the official account of the return of General Kearny's party from California in the summer of 1847. This will be published with the earlier journal, together with a number of Turner's letters to his wife.

An editor of a dead man's journals naturally becomes curious about their author. Turner is mentioned innumerable times by historical writers but always incidentally or in brief paragraphs. Research in Turner's case developed interesting material for a biographical chapter in the book the Oklahoma Press will soon publish.

Henry Smith Turner was born in Virginia in 1811. He was a near kinsman of Robert E. Lee and, like him, attended West Point, graduating in the class of 1834. In his early Army career Turner spent a year at Saumur, the famous military school in France. Two other young officers accompanied him; curiously Lieutenant Philip Kearny, nephew of Stephen Watts Kearny, was one of them. When he came back to America, Turner helped translate French cavalry tactics for the U.S. Army. His work was long a standard textbook at West Point.

Shortly afterwards Turner married and established a home on the outskirts of St. Louis. His wife bore him seventeen children, eleven of whom reached maturity.

Turner became a major soon after his return from California. The journals and letters written during his wanderings in the West are full

Courtesy of Philip St. George Cooke III of Santa Fé, New Mexico

PHILIP ST. GEORGE COOKE

of expressions of acute homesickness. He so dreaded the possibility of further assignments to remote places that he resigned his Army commission on July 1, 1848.

Soon afterwards he became associated with his wife's uncle, James H. Lucas, a wealthy St. Louis financier. The Gold Rush had created great interest in California and Lucas and some of his partners decided to start a branch of their banking house in San Francisco. Mr. Lucas induced Turner to open the branch bank. This seemed to involve another separation from his family, so Major Turner only accepted when he had persuaded an old army friend to follow him to California and take over the bank's management as soon as it was firmly established. This Army friend was a certain lieutenant of artillery whom Turner met in Monterey in 1847. His name was William Tecumseh Sherman. The friendship of these men grew out of a homely incident. After the rigors of the long march and several battles, Captain Turner was sorely in need of shirts and underwear. Sherman, having traveled by sea, was plentifully supplied and generously shared with Captain Turner. Their friendship endured for life, and the correspondence of these two strongly contrasted soldiers adds greatly to our knowledge. Captain Turner, nine years older than Sherman, was dignified and rather introverted. Sherman was restless, peppery and decidedly the extrovert.

The San Francisco banking house of Lucas, Turner & Company opened in temporary quarters in 1853, but soon moved into its own building at the northeast corner of Montgomery and Jackson streets. The lower story of this structure still remains, one of the few buildings that have survived from pioneer days.

After Turner went back to St. Louis, he and Sherman wrote each other by every mail steamer.

Banking in San Francisco in the 1850's was one long continuous excitement. There were runs on banks, failures, conflagrations, embezzlements, municipal corruption; and whenever business became too humdrum, there were distractions like the shooting of Editor James King of William, the resulting creation of the Second Vigilance Committee, and the public hanging by that committee of Cora and Casey.

All these events Sherman reported in scores of letters to Turner. Some of Turner's replies I found in the Missouri Historical Society. But by the sort of serendipity that sometimes makes dull research exciting, I finally

discovered over two hundred of *Sherman's* letters to Turner. None of these has ever been published. They are virtually a day-to-day account of the personal and business life of a San Francisco banker during the Gold Rush. As a one-time banker myself, whose career also began in San Francisco, I found these letters especially interesting. I hope to write a book on the subject.

In Turner's later life he was president of two St. Louis banks. During the stormy days of 1861 he struggled manfully to keep Missouri in the Union. While a moderate, he actually went to Washington to urge President Lincoln to commission his old friend Sherman a brigadier general. His advice was not immediately followed, but a little later Sherman was made a colonel. Quite probably Turner planted the seed from which grew one of the greatest military careers in American history.

The war was a keen personal tragedy to Turner. Two of his sons entered the Confederate Army. One was killed at Bull Run. Turner died in St. Louis, December 16, 1881.

The second of the five men was Lieutenant William Hemsley Emory. His "Notes" are the official report of the march of The Army of the West and a classic.

Emory was born in Maryland on September 7, 1811. He graduated from West Point in 1831; when The Army of the West was organized, Emory, a first lieutenant of topographical engineers, became its senior engineering officer. He did much more than map, survey, and write notes. He scouted, charged and fought when necessary. At San Pasqual he undoubtedly saved General Kearny's life. While Kearny was fencing with a lancer in front of him, another attacked him in the rear, but Emory with flashing saber routed the assailant.

Emory fought at the San Gabriel and the Mesa. After Los Angeles was occupied, he selected the site for Fort Moore above the Plaza and probably chose its name in memory of his dead comrade, Captain Benjamin Moore, killed at San Pasqual.

After returning to San Diego with General Kearny, the latter sent him east with despatches to the War Department. En route he apparently wrote some letters later published under a pen name. These were strongly critical of Frémont's conduct in California. That put Emory on the black books of Senator Benton, Frémont's father-in-law, and

Benton vigorously attacked him in the Senate. Nevertheless he was soon afterwards brevetted a captain for gallantry at San Pasqual and a major for San Gabriel and the Mesa.

Soon after the Mexican War, Emory became the astronomer for the United States boundary commission established to survey the new boundary line between the United States and Mexico.

That first boundary commission was a fine example of bureaucratic snafu. Congress wrangled over appropriating money to pay for the survey. The commissioners wrangled with each other. The employees in the field were working hard, but it is amazing to find that our government let months go by without paying either wages or the expense of subsistence.

Emory threatened to resign and made one trip to Washington just to secure fair treatment for the neglected employees. It was nearly one year-and-one-half before any money was forthcoming from the government for either pay or expenses.

Emory finished his work on the western end of the boundary in September, 1851. The balance was finished in July, 1852. Scarcely was this survey completed when the Gadsen Purchase of 1853 called for an entirely new boundary from the Colorado River to El Paso on the Rio Grande.

That brought about the secondary boundary commission. This time Major Emory was made both astronomer and commissioner. Happily the work of this second survey proceeded smoothly. When its labors were completed in 1857, Emory was brevetted a lieutenant colonel for his fine services.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Lieutenant Colonel Emory was placed in command of the Federal Troops in the Indian Territory. When he found all the country around him in a state of insurrection, he withdrew his entire command to Fort Leavenworth without losing a single soldier. The force Emory thus saved formed the nucleus for a badly needed Union army in Missouri that helped prevent the secession of the state.

Emory was brevetted four times for gallant conduct in battle. He finished the war as a major general in March, 1865. He died December 1, 1887.

Our third subject is John Mix Stanley, the artist of The Army of the

West. Lieutenant Emory employed him while Kearny's forces were in Santa Fé. This man had some very strange brushes with fate.

Born in Canandaigua, New York, in 1814, he was left an orphan while in his teens, and apprenticed to a wagon maker. When he was twenty, he went to Detroit and began his career as a painter. He soon became attracted to the American Indian and his picturesque costumes, weapons, and implements. He visited the frontier in Minnesota, Arkansas, and New Mexico, drawing and sketching the redman wherever he went. Keokuk and Black Hawk were some of the more famous subjects whose portraits he painted. In 1846 he exhibited over eighty of his pictures in Louisville and Cincinnati. His work soon attracted favorable comment and began to reward the artist financially. Stanley's work definitely heightened public interest in the American aborigines.

The story of this artist is one of a peculiar series of minor tragedies and narrow escapes. En route to San Diego with The Army of the West, he lost all his personal belongings but saved his sketches and paintings.

Most of the drawings that illustrate Emory's Notes are the work of Stanley. One picture entitled "Kearny's March" that has been gathering dust in the National Archives in Washington is a spirited drawing of the dragoons painfully descending the rugged Gila River canyons. Apparently it has never been reproduced. I plan to have it used as one of the illustrations of Turner's journals.

At the close of hostilities, the government requested Stanley to make a collection of articles of dress, implements, and utensils of the California Indian tribes. When he had completed this rather difficult task, he shipped the collection to Washington. The vessel carrying it was lost at sea.

Stanley next went to Oregon. While on his way to visit Marcus Whitman at his Waiilatpu Mission, some Indian children he met on the way delayed him under some pretext. Evidently they knew of the massacre that was about to occur. Had Stanley not been thus detained, he undoubtedly would have arrived at the mission just in time to be murdered.

The artist returned to San Francisco where he planned to embark for New York, but he arrived shortly after the vessel had sailed. A few days later this steamship was lost at sea with all of the crew and passengers.

Stanley then visited the Hawaiian Islands where he painted large portraits of King Kamehameha III and his queen. The pictures are hanging in the throne room of Iolani Palace in Honolulu.

Stanley was one of several veterans of The Army of the West who were employed in the Pacific Railroad surveys. Many of his sketches of the area from St. Paul to Puget Sound were reproduced in colored lithographs in the survey reports. Stanley took with him a daguerreotype apparatus, probably the first one operated west of the Mississippi River. He was the first man to photograph the American Indian.

Through the fifties and sixties Stanley painted assiduously until he had amassed a collection of a hundred and thirty-one paintings and drawings. The Smithsonian Institution had recently become established in Washington, and Stanley actively supported its work. The large halls of the institution seemed most appropriate for a public exhibition of his art; therefore in 1865 the entire collection was placed there on loan. A short time afterwards a fire destroyed most of the Smithsonian's building, and all but five of Stanley's pictures were burned with it. One large canvas that was saved from the flames is called "The Trial of Red Jacket."

Stanley returned to Detroit in 1863 and died there in 1872.

He is almost forgotten today, quite probably because of the Smithsonian fire, but it was said of Stanley at his death: "[His] knowledge of nearly all existing tribes ranks him as one of the highest authorities concerning Indian life and characteristics."

A number of years ago your society performed a very useful service in publishing the diary of Dr. John Strother Griffin, the surgeon of The Army of the West with the rank of captain. It is a very personal and uninhibited commentary on everything the good doctor did, saw, and heard. It is an invaluable source of information about the long march and the battles fought. Its author was undoubtedly the most colorful as well as rollicking personality that accompanied Kearny. Later our own City of the Angels claimed him, and for many years he was one of its leading citizens.

Dr. Griffin was born in Virginia in 1816, orphaned at an early age, and reared by an uncle in Louisville. At twenty-one he graduated as a Doctor of Medicine from the University of Pennsylvania. After a few years of private practice he became an Army surgeon.

Just thirty years of age at the time of the march west, Griffin was described by an associate as "vigorous, handsome, gregarious and delightfully profane." This addiction to swearing seems to have impressed more than one commentator. Another man wrote: "He was jolly, high-tempered and peppery and the best, most unctuous swearer I ever heard. His swearing was mellow and emphatic, strong adjectives not profane." I must confess I do not quite follow the distinction here made between swearing and profanity!

He was the all but indispensable man for the wounded at San Pasqual and later at Mule Hill. After arriving in California he ran military hospitals in San Diego and Los Angeles. Most of the next three years he spent at Army headquarters at Sonoma and Benicia.

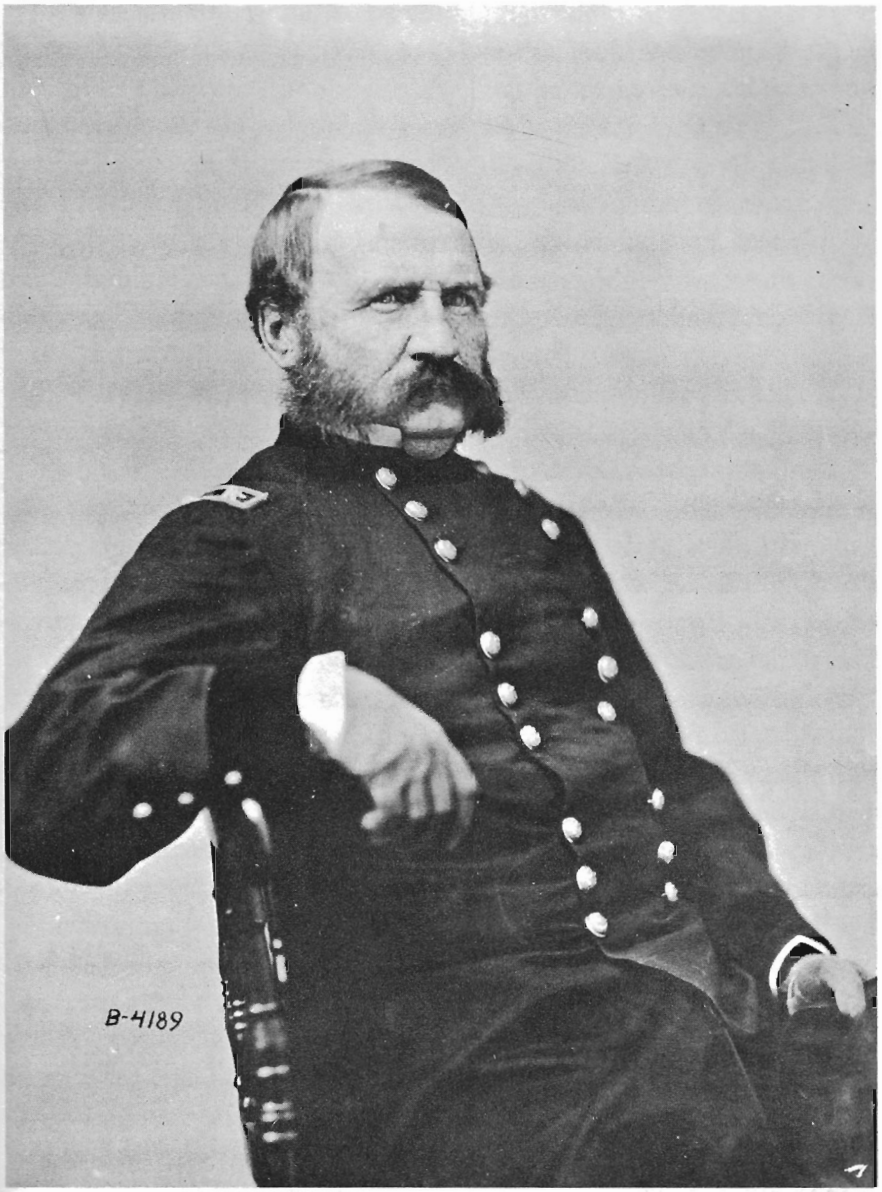
His widespread investment in California real estate eventually made him a wealthy man. While at Benicia, the doctor became acquainted with General Mariano Vallejo and his son-in-law Captain John Frisbie. The three men became partners in an investment in Napa Valley acreage.

In 1854 Dr. Griffin resigned his Army commission and returned to Los Angeles. It was almost a case of love at first sight, for in 1848 he had written, with more enthusiasm than good rhetoric: "Taking everything into consideration I think Los Angeles is decidedly one of the most desirable places I have ever been at." He immediately began to practice medicine here. It was said of Dr. Griffin some years later: "A *good* doctor for his times, aware of his own limitations and always seeking new treatments and discarding old methods. Always concerned for his patient's welfare."

In Los Angeles, Dr. Griffin became a leader in civic, business, and educational affairs. In June, 1856, he was elected superintendent of the city's schools. The same year he married Miss Louisa Hayes, the first woman school teacher in Los Angeles.

He became Los Angeles County's Physician in 1856. He helped organize the first hospital, the first water company, the first railroad line to San Pedro, and the Pioneer Oil Company. When the Los Angeles County Medical Association was organized in January, 1871, Dr. Griffin was elected its first president.

At an early date he acquired a large tract of land at Lincoln Heights and another of two thousand acres in East Los Angeles for which he paid fifty cents an acre. Probably his most important realty investment



Courtesy of the National Archives

WILLIAM HELMSLEY EMORY
In uniform of Civil War General

was his purchase in 1860 from Don Benito Wilson of one-half interest in the Rancho San Pascual for $4,000. Various parcels were sold off until in 1873 the remaining land was partitioned between Griffin and Wilson. The doctor took 3,962 acres which was the original site of Pasadena. Dr. Griffin later sold this holding for $25,000.

I have earlier noted his hot temper. When we add the fact that he was a Virginian by birth, it is not surprising to learn that he held very pronounced, we might even say violently Secessionist views during the Civil War. In addition, his sister Eliza was the wife of the great Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston.

His Southern sentiments did not end with Lee's surrender. When he and Benito Wilson sold their Pasadena holdings to the Indiana Colony of Immigrants from north of the Mason and Dixon Line, the doctor, feeling they had made a shrewd bargain, told Wilson, "Now we'll get even with the Damyankees." Dr. Griffin was one of those who spelled this epithet as one word. Looking back nearly a century at that sale of the heart of Pasadena for about $7.00 an acre, one feels that perhaps the Damyankees had the last laugh.

Another instance of Griffin's temper has a tinge of sardonic humor. He had been one of the organizers and directors of the Farmers and Merchants National Bank in 1871. That brought him in close and friendly association with the bank's founder and president, Isaias W. Hellman. At that time Los Angeles had no rail connection with the outside world. A little later a movement was started to bring the Southern Pacific Railroad into the city. The railroad demanded a subsidy. The community split violently on the issue. Banker Hellman was one of the leaders of the Pro-Railroad Party. Dr. Griffin was a leader in the Anti-Railroad camp that bitterly opposed the subsidy.

On the day of the election, Dr. Griffin got into a violent argument with banker Hellman and became so infuriated that he struck Hellman over the head with his cane. The blow made a long scalp wound that bled freely. Hellman was taken home by his friends. His wife was horror stricken at his appearance and tearfully insisted that a physician be called at once. Her husband at last consented, and she asked whom she should summon; he answered, "O send for old Doc Griffin."

The doctor continued the practice of medicine in Los Angeles until 1885. He passed away in this city on August 23, 1898. I am looking for-

ward with much interest to the biography of Dr. Griffin, which I understand Viola Lockhart Warren is now writing.

So much for the men who actually marched west with Kearny.

Before considering our fifth and last subject, Philip St. George Cooke, I must devote a little time to the Mormon Battalion which he led. We must remember that General Kearny had given the order that created the battalion and had appointed its commanders. Therefore the battalion should definitely be included among those who served under Kearny. On learning of the death of the original commander, Kearny in one of his wisest decisions named Cooke to replace him.

I will not attempt an account of the epic march of these three hundred and sixty men—one of the most arduous in military annals. As a subordinate of General Kearny, Cooke became a critically important figure in the history of the American West. Not only did he successfully surmount all the obstacles of mountain and desert, but he transformed a raw and fractious aggregation into a highly disciplined and efficient military unit.

Cooke was also an author of no mean ability. His books add much to our knowledge of Southwestern history.

John C. Frémont on January 16, 1847, had bluntly refused to obey the orders of his superior officer, General Kearny. Kearny at the moment had only a few dragoons in his command. They were inferior in number and equipment to Frémont's own California Battalion, even without the sailors and marines of his sponsor, Commodore Stockton. Fourteen days later Cooke's arrival at San Luis Rey with his tough and seasoned Mormon Battalion completely changed the balance of power. Kearny now had the military strength to enforce his commands. Henceforth Frémont would rant, strut, and portray himself as a badly persecuted martyr, but he no longer could determine the course of history in California. Cooke's presence on the scene during that spring of 1847 was vital, pivotal. In its farthest implications it had its influence on later events in our nation's history.

Much of Cooke's importance was due to his personality and professional capacity. Not just any commander of the Mormon Battalion would have measured up to the challenge. Cooke was not a Mormon. He was a stranger to these men when chance placed them under his command. But in the months of incredible obstacles and hardships through

which he led them, he won not only their obedience but devoted respect. Later one said of him: "He had a good, generous heart. He entertained great respect for the Mormon Battalion and he always spoke kindly of them before the government and all men." When they arrived in California, one of their officers told Cooke: "They will follow where you dare to lead. They will obey only God, Brigham Young and Philip St. George Cooke."

The battalion's term of enlistment expired in that spring of 1847. Brief as was their stay in California as a military unit, they not only exerted strong influence on subsequent events but left an indelible mark on early California. Although many started east to rejoin their fellow Mormons in Utah, many others scattered through California; and you will find Mormon gulches, Mormon bars, the Mormon Trail where they labored here. The four white men who helped John Marshall build the mill at Coloma were former members of the Mormon Battalion. Other Mormon veterans discovered the second rich placer in the earliest days of the Gold Rush—at Mormon Island, fifteen miles east of Sutter's Fort. They appear, too, in the early records of Alpine, Amador, Inyo, El Dorado, Mono, and Tuolumne counties.

Here in Los Angeles they finished the construction of Fort Moore started by Emory. In San Diego they worked on Fort Stockton and at an early attempt at coal mining at Point Loma. Their most enduring record in Southern California was probably their founding of San Bernardino.

In the life of their commander, Philip St. George Cooke, there was much tragedy. He, too, was a native of Virginia, born in 1809. When his father died, kindly neighbors helped him obtain an appointment to West Point. He graduated from the academy at the age of eighteen.

He was something of a romantic in the mold of a knight errant. His personal code compelled him to adopt the harder alternative if conscience pronounced it the right course to follow.

The outbreak of the Civil War found him in command of a remote frontier post in Utah. When his native state of Virginia seceded, a great many other army and navy officers from the Old Dominion promptly resigned their commissions and offered their services to the Confederacy. Philip St. George Cooke was under the greatest pressure to do likewise. He was the father of one son and three daughters. His son who

was also an officer in the United States Army resigned his commission and cast his lot with the South. Two of his daughters were married to officers who followed the same course. One of these sons-in-law was the famous Confederate cavalry leader, J. E. B. Stuart. These desertions by his son and sons-in-law filled him with anger and despair. He believed that he could have prevented their occurrence had he been near his family.

In striking contrast to what seems to be the waning patriotism of our own times consider the letter that Cooke had published in a Washington newspaper early in 1861. I quote it in part: "The National Government gave me an education and a profession. . . . I made a solemn oath to bear true allegiance to the United States of America. This oath and honor alike forbid me to abandon their standard. . . . I shall remain under her flag so long as it waves. . . ."

Notwithstanding this forthright declaration, Cooke's Virginia origin and the Southern defection of most of his family made him an object of suspicion. He was not only humiliated and passed over when desirable appointments were made but assigned tasks without the requisite men and means to perform them. When failure or defeat followed, his superiors tried to make him a scapegoat. On one occasion when he was outnumbered four to one, the Confederate commander who escaped Cooke's attempt to catch him was his own son-in-law, J. E. B. Stuart.

Finally Cooke was relieved of command in the field and relegated to desk work, retirement boards, courts-martial, and recruiting service. Even so, he was brevetted a major-general when the war ended. For eight years he served at various frontier posts, but even there bad luck pursued him. He retired in 1873.

Undoubtedly this man's greatest tragedy was his estrangement from most of his children. His son John Rogers Cooke had become a Confederate general and was seriously wounded at Gettysburg. J. E. B. Stuart had been killed in battle in 1864. It is very sad to learn that Philip St. George Cooke and his son remained unreconciled for twenty-six years. This gloomy record is lightened when we find that, even before the reconciliation, the son had named one of his own sons Philip St. George Cooke. Only four years after father and son made their peace, the son died. His father lived until 1895 when he died in Detroit.

These were the varied and colorful lives of a few of the military

pioneers of California who served under General Kearny. They were not drawn here by the lure of gold or the restlessness of the adventurer. Every one who came West in those days knew he was risking his life because of Indians, wild beasts, the burning scourge of waterless deserts. But these men of the Army of the West and the Mormon Battalion ran the added hazard of death or wounds at the hands of their country's enemies. They came in simple old-fashioned obedience to orders.

Therefore let us hail them for their major role in laying the first American foundations of our commonwealth of California.