

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL LANDMARKS SERIES

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DRUM BARRACKS

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DRUM BARRACKS

Drum Barracks remains one of the few landmarks of the Civil War in California. The Pacific Coast was far removed from the scene of hostilities, especially because trans-continental transportation facilities at that time were undeveloped and inadequate. Despite the isolation of the West, the Union leaders felt that the loyalty of the frontier was essential to their success. War fever was high in California after the firing upon Fort Sumter, and the trend of events in the East was watched eagerly. Sympathizers of both "the blue and the gray" were numerous; in many localities Southern feeling was in the ascendency and constituted a real menace to the Union cause. Hence, military posts were placed throughout the western frontier to keep the secessionist elements in leash.

Camp Drum was established in 1862 at Wilmington, California, as a garrison and base for supplies for the Department of Southern California, Arizona and New Mexico. Abandoned as a military establishment in 1866, at the close of the Civil War,¹ Drum Barracks' historic career was of

1. W. F. Edgar, "Historical notes of old landmarks in California," in Historical Society of Southern California, Publications, III, 50.

short duration, although none the less important. Its site, with the buildings which remain, constitute an intensely interesting landmark.

Quartermaster Winfield Scott Hancock went to Los Angeles in May, 1859, to secure a location for a military post for the Department of the West. The site of Drum Barracks was offered, with another strip of land, by Generals Phineas Banning and B. D. Wilson for a consideration of one dollar.² The garrison was named after Adjutant-general Richard Coulter Drum, who had been the head of the Department of the West for several years. The buildings comprising the military headquarters were erected at a cost of more than a million dollars.³ They were large and of a substantial character. They included a commanding officer's quarters, adjutant's office, two large barracks for soldiers, a hospital, guard-house, laundry, fire-proof stone magazine, and commissary. The barracks were built by Captain Swazey on an elevated location with a fine view of the sea and covered about thirty acres of ground. The depot buildings for commissary and quartermaster stores, stables and corrals

2. C. J. Prudhomme and T. F. Keaveney, "Early days in Los Angeles county, II - Phineas Banning and historic Wilmington," in Grizzly Bear, March, 1917, XX, 5:6.

3. J. M. Guinn, "Historic seaports of Los Angeles," in Historical Society of Southern California, Publications, V, 69.

were erected by Captain Morris in 1862. These buildings were complete, well built and of an elaborate style. They were located near the steamboat landing at Wilmington and covered seven acres. This part of Drum Barracks was in charge of Major Morton, 9th Infantry, who was formerly provost-marshal in San Francisco on General McDowell's staff.⁴ The materials used in constructing the buildings, except those for the powder magazine, were shipped around Cape Horn. The powder magazine was made from stone and cement of local origin; iron was used for the great doors.

At first the California Volunteers were located at Camp Drum. Later in the war, the post became a rendezvous of recruits for the troops in Arizona and served as a depot for their supplies, when only one company of regular troops comprised the permanent garrison.⁵ The number of soldiers at Camp Drum during the war years varied from 2,000 to 7,000. The officers stationed at the barracks at different intervals included many men important at that time, or, who later became well known in government service and California history. Some of these men were: General Winfield Scott Hancock, General Philip Henry Sheridan, General Phineas Banning, General

4. The Alta California, September 23, 1867.

5. W. F. Edgar, Historical notes, 29.

George Stoneman, Colonel Cave J. Coutts.⁶

The presence of numerous soldiers and officers stationed at Drum Barracks greatly increased the activity and prosperity of the town of Wilmington. The purchase of supplies created a lucrative trade for the merchants. All of the supplies for the troops in Southern California, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico passed enroute through Camp Drum and contributed to make it an important place.⁷

Drum Barracks, as the military headquarters for Southern California and Arizona, was expected to send immediate relief to any part of that territory, in the event of any needed assistance. Secessionist elements were prominent throughout the West. It was felt that Drum Barracks garrison was inadequately equipped to cope with marauders over such an extensive territory. Cavalry was required to pursue culprits through the desert and over mountains. Raids and depredations on the property and livestock of men who supported the government were so frequent that petitions were made to the commander of the Pacific military department to supply Drum Barracks with more troops. A raid was made in the Tehachapi Valley, during which Union sympathizers were robbed in broad daylight and the desperadoes es-

6. Prudhomme and Keaveney, Early days, 57.

7. Guinn, Historic seaports, 69.

caped unhindered. The same band, numbering 300, camped in the mountains near San Bernardino and were believed to have perpetrated a raid on that town. Arizona was similarly harassed; and marauding Indians endangered the pioneers on the frontiers.⁸

The strong secessionist elements in Los Angeles and its vicinity were kept down by the presence of the soldiers at Drum Barracks. During the entire war, there were evidences of ill feeling; and disturbances were often quelled by the troops from Camp Drum. When the news of the defeat of Lee's army at Gettysburg and the fall of Vicksburg was received, the supporters of the government were eager to demonstrate their joy. A clerk in the postoffice began a celebration of the victory by setting off a firecracker or torpedo. Several armed secessionist townsmen appeared, declaring they would not allow a celebration of the victory. At this point, the postmaster, William G. Steel, came out of the office by a side door. At his appearance, a revolver was discharged at him; the bullet passed close to him, but entered the wall beyond. The lights were at once extinguished, and the Union men attempted to defend themselves. A detachment of volunteers from Camp Drum, on their way to Owens River as an es-

8. Alta California, May 6, 1865.

cort to a supply train, rode up in front of the postoffice and restored law and order.⁹ The commanding officer told the citizens they would be protected from their assailants so that they might manifest their joy in celebrating the success of the Union armies.¹⁰ Because of demonstrations by the secessionists, Captain Hillyer and his infantry, with twenty-five additional men under Lieutenant McCann, were sent from Drum Barracks to take up a post near Los Angeles in a position to command the town.¹¹

Other activities assumed some importance at Drum Barracks. This was one of the army posts where the camels which the government imported for use in transportation in the Southwest were kept. During the Civil War camel freight trains made regular trips to and from Fort Tejon, Los Angeles and Camp Drum.¹² The experiment in camel transportation was a spectacular and often amusing one. It was tried out by the United States government in order to find an economical and rapid means of communication and transportation to the Pacific Coast and throughout the Southwest. Many persons thought the camel an admirable solution of the

9. Alta California, June 8, 1863.
 10. Ibid., July 29, 1863.
 11. Ibid., July 29, 1863.
 12. J. C. Layne, Annals of Los Angeles, 81.

problem because of its great endurance, ability to pack tremendous loads at a good pace, and at the same time to thrive on desert vegetation and brackish water. Jefferson Davis and Lieutenant Fitzgerald Beale were predominant among the camel advocates. They were well acquainted with the western country and thought the whole territory especially well adapted to the habits of the animal. Congress, in March, 1855, appropriated \$50,000 to be used by the War Department for the importation of dromedaries and other camels to be used for military purposes.¹³

Major G. Wayne and Lieutenant David D. Porter were commissioned to purchase the animals in Egypt and Arabia. They started out for their camel cargo in December, 1854. In Egypt they purchased thirty-five camels at an average price of \$250 each. They took the animals on board the ship Supply and landed them at Indianola, Texas. A second expedition to Egypt returned to Texas February 10, 1857, with forty-seven camels. Half of the herd were utilized in packing on the plains of Texas and in Southern Arizona. The other half were taken to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and from there by Lieutenant Fitzgerald Beale via the Mojave Desert

13. A. A. Gray, "Camels in California," in California Historical Society, Quarterly, December, 1930, IX, 4:299-302.

to Fort Tejon.¹⁴ It took the caravan five months to reach its destination. The trip would have been made more quickly if several of the imported Greek and Turkish drivers had not balked in Texas and refused to accompany Beale on his trip, declaring they had not received the pay due them since January.¹⁵

Beale's men did not understand how to pack the camels properly; many stops were necessary in order to pick up and repack the scattered items loosened by the swaying of the animals. Some of the Turkish and Greek drivers overtook Beale's party later; but they irked Beale by their escapades more than they assisted him. They continually quarreled with the male drivers and there was considerable difficulty in keeping them sober. The natives of a rancho gave the expedition party such a welcome that Beale said he was obliged to restrain the men from drinking Spanish wine by administering to several, especially the Greeks and Turks, a quantity of oil for boots.¹⁶ Another member of the expedition declared that "a good tough piece of wagon spoke, aimed tolerably high" was required to move a half-drunk Turk.¹⁷ Only about six of the foreign

14. T. M. Guinn, "Camel caravans of the American deserts," in Historical Society of Southern California, Publications, V, 148.

15. M. H. Stacey, Uncle Sam's camels, the journal of May Humphreys Stacey. Supplemented by the report of Edward Fitzgerald Beale (1857-1858), 45.

16. Gray, Camels in California, 374.

17. Ibid., 114.

drivers ever reached California. Three of these, Hiego Alli, Greek George and Hi Jolly, were employed by the government for a number of years.

Following their arrival in Los Angeles, the camels were driven to Fort Tejon. The first excursions and public appearance of the animals occasioned great excitement and curiosity. For more than a year they were kept at Fort Tejon, Drum Barracks, and other places in the southern part of California, and were used to transport supplies from one post to another. Various experiments to use camels, including an express line connecting with points in Arizona and New Mexico, another from Los Angeles to Fort Mojave called the "Desertary Line" as well as freight and passenger lines to the east, ended in failure. In 1861, the camp at Fort Tejon was broken up, the camels were scattered about Southern California and remained idle and neglected at military posts because the army officers preferred mules. The camel experiment was generally recognized as a failure and in September, 1863, Secretary of War Stanton ordered all the government camels sold at public auction. Thirty-five camels were herded to Benicia where they were sold at auction to Samuel McLeneghan. He disposed of all of them to various parties except ten choice animals with which he expected to establish a camel freight express from Sacramento to Nevada. However, later he sold them in Nevada where they were used

to carry supplies to the mines and pack salt to the silver mines. The camels left in California following the auction at Benicia were sold to private individuals, circuses and zoological parks, and some to Lieutenant Beale.¹⁸

The failure of the camel experiment was not due so much to the fault of the animals themselves as to inability or unwillingness of the men who drove them to get along with them. "Every attempt to organize a caravan resulted in mutiny among troopers and teamsters" who preferred the old army mules, which would exchange kicks for cuffs and profane outbursts, rather than the sneering looks of disdain affected by the camels.¹⁹ In 1862, when a transcontinental railroad was assured, as well as shorter roads, the principal reason for experiments in camel transportation was removed. Lieutenant Beale retained several camels at his ranch in the vicinity of Fort Tejon, but all of the camels were removed from Drum Barracks with those sent to Benicia.²⁰

18. Gray, Camels in California, 306-310.

19. Guinn, Camel caravans, 150.

20. The experiment of the government with camels from Arabia and Egypt in California was an impetus for private companies to import camels. Otto Esche, a San Francisco merchant, imported camels from the Amur region in Mongolia in the 1860's. This experiment also met with little success. See Gray, "Camels in California," in the California Historical Society, Quarterly, vol. IX, No. 4. December, 1930.

In 1866, Drum Barracks was abandoned by the government. That was a catastrophe for the town of Wilmington, whose importance and prosperity were dependent on the military post. In 1875, the camp was offered by the government at public auction, and was purchased at less than ten thousand dollars by B. D. Wilson.²¹ The buildings were sold at auction; some of them removed; several were destroyed by fire, and others remained intact on the premises. About ten acres of the land and two buildings were given by B. D. Wilson to the Los Angeles Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, to establish Wilson College. This project was abandoned because of hard times created by droughts and floods. The buildings and grounds were sold later for \$800. The hospitals and soldiers' barracks were destroyed by fire. A large flagpole, which stood in front of the fort for many years, was finally used for fence posts and firewood. The old guard-house, with its barred windows and cells secured by immense bolts, was used for a long time by a Japanese gardener as a stable. The powder magazine and officers' quarters survived the years in the best condition. A Mr. Kolhorst purchased the land on which the powder magazine was located in order to save the old building from destruction.

21. H. Newmark, Sixty years in Southern California, 451.

The officers' quarters were preserved by Thomas F. Keaveney and made into a charming residence. It is a large white building, of colonial design, surrounded by tall palm and cypress trees. There are sixteen large rooms, twenty feet square, with many windows. Four huge old-fashioned fireplaces, mahogany balustrades, high-ceilinged halls and four large porches contribute to the attractiveness of the house. Shingles of split cypress, with cut nails and the old paint of the building are still in good condition.²² In the rear of the building, a patio contains ferns and many interesting and rare plants, an old stone fountain, and a well with an oaken bucket. On the front veranda is the old ship's lantern which hung at the entrance of the fort. The chandelier from which each person lifted a lighted candle to take to his room at night is in the front hall of the house. The Native Daughters placed a bronze tablet at Drum Barracks on which was inscribed:²³

Officers Quarters 1862 Drum Barracks
1868, Supply Department of the U. S.
Army. In Memory of the Importance of
its Association with Early American
History of California. Ruficinda Parlor
No. 230 N. D. G. W. Placed this tablet
October 2, 1927.

22. Prudhomme and Keaveney, Early days, 6-7.
23. H. K. P. Forbes, Drum Barracks, 2.

The citizens of Southern California have thus designated Camp Drum as a landmark which enacted an influential part in the military history of the West. Indeed, this post is commemorable for its most active part in helping to maintain California's loyalty during that time of internal strife, the Civil War.

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