Most of us are aware that the Civil War in this nation was fought from 1861 to 1865 and began at Fort Sumter, S.C. April 12, 1861. But most do not know that California played a major role in the War Between the States.

As we know, California became a state in 1850. In 1859, the California legislature approved the division of California into two states, Upper and Lower California. With rumors of war, the decision was never acted upon, but there was definite social, economic and environmental differences between Upper and Lower California.

Interestingly enough, Southern California was part of the free Union, but it had strong Confederate sympathies in the Democratic Party. This was due to large numbers of Southerners migrating to California. Also, this became evident when the 1860 presidential election delivered only 25 percent of the voters for Abraham Lincoln in Southern California. Also, Los Angeles’ only newspaper, the Los Angeles Star, was fanatically hostile to California’s antislavery Sen. William Broderick, and the Republican movement represented an obvious minority.

With the outbreak of the war, 250 Angelenos went to fight for the Confederacy. Among them was future Mayor Cameron Thom and Albert Sidney Johnston, who had been appointed commander of the Western front and died at the battle of Shiloh at Pittsburg Landing, Tenn. On the other side, Capt. Winfield Scott Hancock went east to serve the Union forces.

In 1861, the federal War Department ordered Maj. James Henry Carlton and his first Dragoons (mounted infantrymen) from Fort Tejon to Los Angeles to protect a one-man quartermaster depot occupied by Capt. Winfield Scott Hancock, chief quartermaster for the District of Southern California. The Dragoons settled into a temporary tent encampment just south of the depot and called it Camp Fitzgerald. Within a short distance of the encampment were 36 camels that the Dragoons brought with them.

The camp did not last long and eventually was moved closer to the harbor. It was about one-half mile from the port. The location was named Camp Drum, which exists to this day. The camp became the new home for the newly promoted Col. Carlton and the California Column (a long row of militia and volunteers). They would move in April 1862 to assist in stopping the Confederate invasion of Arizona and New Mexico territories.

During that time, Winfield Scott Hancock had become good friends with Phineas Banning, a prominent Los Angeles merchant. Town guards stood along the old guard house at the Drum Barracks at the Los Angeles Harbor, used during the Civil War. (Undated)
Angeles citizen and Unionist. Both Hancock and Banning decided there was a need for a strong Union military presence in the area. So Banning called upon one of his friends, Don Benito Wilson, second Mayor of Los Angeles and a wealthy rancher and businessman. Both Wilson and Banning donated a tract of land to the United States government. After the war was over, the land was returned to both the men.

These facilities were about a mile from Camp Drum. It would be called Drum Barracks. This facility was built near an adjacent wheat farm owned by Banning, who had been promised military shipping contracts to supply military bases in the Southwest. This arrangement also helped Banning protect the future San Pedro and Los Angeles area from having Confederacy attacks.

But during the same time, the Union forces arrested some Confederate hod试点工作, including State Assem blyman Edward J.C. Kewen, who was thought to be plotting to take over the government. In 1863, the Democratic candidate for governor defeated the Union candidate. At that point, California Union volunteers passed through the San Pedro Channel to seize Santa Catalina Island from the Confederate sympathizers, who had taken over the island.

The Drum Barracks

The Drum Barracks Civil War Museum is housed in the last remaining wooden building of Drum Barracks, named after Adjutant General Richard Coulter Drum, head of the Department of the Pacific. The facility served as the Union Army headquarters Southwest (Southern California and the Arizona Territory) from 1861 to 1871.

The lumber used to construct the building was shipped from New York City. It came around the horn and arrived in late 1862. The facility being built with other buildings, was estimated to have cost $1 million. The facilities were completed in September 1863. From 1861 through 1865, approximately 17,000 Californians served in both volunteer regiments in the West and regiments fighting in the East. The facility was scheduled to be demolished, but due to efforts by community groups, it was saved and opened as a museum in 1967. This Civil War Museum can be found in Wilmington.

The Camels

The camels used by the military in Los Angeles came from Fort Tejon between 1860 and 1861, and left for Benicia at Santa Barbara in December 1863. They left Drum Barracks in February 1862 and went to Fort Latham in Culver City until they left the following year for San Antonio.

Capt. Cameron Thom

Cameron E. Thom was a southern gentleman born in Virginia in 1823. He arrived in Los Angeles in 1854. During the next decade he returned north to fight for the Confederacy during the Civil War and became a captain. Upon his return to Los Angeles and prior to becoming mayor, he was a City Attorney and Police Judge and sat on the Police Commission, then called the Board of Fireholders, to draft the first home rule charter for the City. Thom was also the County District Attorney for four terms. As mayor, Thom was determined that City government should have its own city hall built for such a purpose. The municipal facility was built in 1885, where it sat on Second Street between Spring and Fort (later Broadway) Streets. Within two years that City Hall became inadequate for all the services rendered by the municipal government.

Note: Also there are some reports that claim that after their Civil War innings, and I suppose tents, stationed on Main Street, remember between Fourth and Sixth Streets downtown, I was unable to find the station. If one of you readers, knows where I can find if, please contact me at hynrudedden@hotmail.com. Thank you.

—Hynda

*In some of the references used for this article, Camp Drum and Camp Banning appear to be the same place. Other texts state that the Drum Barracks, built later than about one mile away and before than, Camp Drum.