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DRUM BARRACKS
- San Pedro History

DRUM BEATS



Spring

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1987



A GRAND OLD LADY, AT 126, STARTING A NEW LIFE
AS THE DRUM BARRACKS CIVIL WAR MUSEUM

Published quarterly by the Drum Barracks
Civil War Museum, Wilmington, California

DRUM BEATS is published by the Drum Barracks Civil War Museum by authority of the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks for the purpose of encouraging cooperation and communication between individuals and organizations interested in the Civil War and in local history during that period. The accuracy of material published in DRUM BEATS is the responsibility of the author.

*** GENERAL INFORMATION ***

DRUM BARRACKS - 1053 Carey Ave., Wilmington, CA 90744 (Parking in rear on Banning Blvd.); hours 9 A.M.- 1 P.M. Mon - Fri and 2nd and 4th Sats of each month, 1-4 P.M. Marge O'Brien, Director, (213)548-7509.

THE DRUM BARRACKS SOCIETY (The Society for The Preservation of Drum Barracks), P.O. Box 444, Wilmington, CA 90744. Marga Jean Martin, President, (213)834-5541.

DRUM BEATS - 1923 Santa Cruz St., San Pedro, CA 90732. Contributions of stories and letters welcome. Don McDowell, Editor, (213)547-1234.

THE FIRST TWELVE YEARS

DRUM BARRACKS AS A MILITARY POST

EDITORIAL NOTE: This story about the twelve years that Camp Drum and Drum Barracks existed as a military installation seemed to belong in this first issue of DRUM BEATS. It cannot be dignified by calling it a history; history requires research, which cannot be hurried, and this article was thrown together in a few days, using old newspaper stories and copies of Army correspondence kindly furnished by Don Chaput, curator of history at the County Museum of Natural History, plus some fast checks in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Because of the tight time schedule, this story is admittedly incomplete and inaccurate in the way the limited information was interpreted in trying to understand those early years in the life of our 126 year old treasure, the Drum Barracks Civil War Museum. Comments, corrections and suggestions are solicited to flesh out the bare bones of this tale, and if there is a REAL historian out there who would like to rewrite this story with proper attention, bless you!

THE WAR STARTS - LOS ANGELES A SECESSIONIST HOTBED

As North-South tensions flared into open hostilities in early 1861, the Federal government decided to consolidate and strengthen the Union presence in Southern California by moving men and equipment from several widely dispersed military posts to the Los Angeles area, among them Fort Tejon and Fort Mojave. The purpose of this consolidation was twofold; first, to create a major staging area for California military personnel assigned to duties in the Southwest and to the major theaters of war in the East. Many career officers but only a relatively few California volunteers were sent to the East Coast, mostly enlistees in the California Hundred and the California Battalion, which totalled about 500 men. Troops headed east would go by ship to Panama, cross the isthmus, and board ship again for East Coast ports. Secondly, it was clear that a sufficient force should be available locally to act on short notice to insure that California and the New Mexico and Arizona Territories remained a part of the Union. Demonstrations in Los Angeles and other Southern California towns had shown that much of the local population, perhaps a majority, were Southern sympathizers, and a "secession company" was even holding public drills, deliberately displaying the Bear Flag instead of the Stars and Stripes. The military units ordered to the Los Angeles post were encamped first close to town at a site called Camp Fitzgerald after a recently deceased Ft. Tejon officer, then moved to the new Camp Latham, located eight miles southwest where Culver City is today.

THE MOVE TO THE HARBOR

Sometime before the end of 1861, a new camp was established at Wilmington, then called New San Pedro, on thirty acres of land made available by Phineas Banning, although formal conveyance of the title to the first of two pieces of land donated by Banning and the one by Banning and his partner B.D. Wilson was not recorded until October 31, 1863, almost two years later. Recording of the donation by Banning and Wilson was dated February 12, 1864, and Banning's second gift was recorded on February 28, 1865.

During the last half of 1861, regular troops from other posts and new recruits poured into Camp Latham, which was then under the command of Capt. Winfield Scott Hancock, who was assigned later that year to duty in the East, where he became one of Grant's favorite generals. On October 4, 1861, command was assumed by Col. George Wright, after his transfer from a post in Oregon.

Discussions with Phineas Banning regarding a move of the camp to

New San Pedro were probably under way late in 1861. Banning appears to have established rapport with the military at Camp Latham, as indicated by a November 2, 1861 story in the Los Angeles Star about a "dinner, ball and supper" given for officers of the army "who are about to leave our shores". These officers were attached to nine companies of regulars and four companies of volunteers then stationed at Camp Latham. On the same day, the Star reported that the telegraph line between Los Angeles and New San Pedro (Wilmington) would be in operation within a week, and that this important event "has been brought about principally by the efforts of the house of Banning & Hinchman." It was undoubtedly a further inducement by Banning to encourage the Government to establish a camp near the harbor where he had a major interest. Aside from Banning's personal interests, of course, there were real advantages in locating near the major shipping terminus on free land.

CAMP DRUM AT NEW SAN PEDRO

A letter dated January 13, 1862, from Lt. Col. J.R. West of the First Infantry California Volunteers, Headquarters District of Southern California, New San Pedro, Cal. is the first indication of the move of the military command from Camp Latham. On the same day, General Order No. 4 from Camp Drum, near New San Pedro said "In accordance with instructions from the colonel commanding the Southern District of California, this camp is hereby named and shall hereafter be known as Camp Drum." The order was signed by Lieut. Col. George S. Evans, Second Cavalry Cal. Vols., Commanding Detachment. The name, of course, honored Lieut. Col. Richard Coulter Drum, then Assistant Adjutant General, Department of the Pacific at San Francisco. There is no record that Col. Drum commanded or even visited Camp Drum.

During this time, Banning continued to serve the military establishment in important ways. His small steamer, the "Ada Hancock", had handled most of the lighterage at New San Pedro, the transport of troops and supplies from ships anchored offshore to the wharf. A second steam lighter, the "Comet", was launched in February, 1862, to help with the rapidly increasing activity in the harbor, and a third lighter was planned. Also in February, work was started on a large warehouse near the wharf, to be used as a depot for Government supplies.

By March, 1862, all of the troops at Camp Latham had been transferred to Camp Drum except for one company to keep an eye on the still active secessionist elements and to generally maintain order and provide a military presence in the area's largest community.

CONDITIONS IN CAMP-BAD!

Lieut. Col. Harvey Lee assumed command of Camp Drum on October 7, 1862, and only ten days later addressed a long letter to Col. Drum at San Francisco complaining about conditions at the camp. Among his comments were, "...the soil is sandy, but mixes into mud after rains until the roads are nearly or quite impassable...there is nothing to shelter us from the sea winds, which at times are very severe...tents are often blown down and the atmosphere filled with sand; desks, tables and papers are constantly covered." Col. Lee goes on, "...The tents are old, and leak very badly. Indeed, they are totally unfit, even in a better locality." He ended his letter, "If it is the intention to keep troops at the present locality, temporary quarters should be at once constructed....I will find it difficult to keep this command in proper discipline unless quarters are built or a more comfortable location selected."

Col. Lee was clearly upset, and it is easy to understand why, when conditions at that place at that time are visualized. The camp was situated in the middle of a large, bare sandy field without trees or growth of any kind except for the native brush and cactus. Both officers and men were housed in the old, leaky tents, which were also used for cooking, supplies and for a hospital. Col. Lee did not mention sand in the food, but it must have been there on windy days. The only buildings were around the wharf almost a mile away. There were probably a few scattered ranch buildings, but no substantial residences closer than San Pedro. Construction of the stately Banning mansion, which probably sparked other residential building close by, was two years off.

Most of the exciting and dramatic events associated with the staging of Union troops on their way to battle during the first two years of the war had taken place in tents or in open bivouac at Camp Latham or Camp Drum. The picturesque buildings we think of as Drum Barracks and the remaining junior officers quarters were not even a concept until Col. Lee had his say. He must have been a dedicated officer who "told it like it was!"

THE NEW "DRUM BARRACKS"

Col. Lee's letter was apparently well received at the highest military levels, because eleven months later, on September 20, 1863, Lieut. Col. James F. Curtis, then commander at Camp Drum, reported as follows in a letter to the Hon. Secretary of War, Washington, D.C., "Sir: I have the honor to state that this station has been built upon thirty acres of ground donated and deeded to the United States

by Mr. Phineas Banning, of Wilmington, Cal." He goes on to describe the buildings and the situation of the camp relative to Los Angeles and the harbor. He also recommends that it be designated as Fort Drum, rather than Camp Drum, a suggestion that had been made a few months earlier by Major Bennett of the First Cavalry, California Volunteers in a letter to Col. Drum. These suggestions for a name change were not only ignored, but starting in March, 1864, Camp Drum became Drum Barracks in Government letters and reports and in the press. There must have been a general order effecting this change.

REVERSION TO CIVILIAN USE

Drum Barracks was essentially deactivated by the end of 1870. After a brief consideration for turning it into a Soldiers Home, the decision was made to abandon it and dispose of the property, which, according to a December 5, 1870, report by Army Surgeon W.F. Edgar, had fallen into disrepair, except for the hospital and senior officers' quarters. Only ninety men were left at the Barracks for guard and fatigue duty by this time.

The Los Angeles Star reported on October 28, 1871, that General Schofield had ordered that all Q.M. and commercial supplies be shipped to Fort Yuma, and that all troops at Drum Barracks go to Fort Yuma on the same steamer. "By these orders", said the Star, "...our county loses some of the bravest of the brave and fairest of the fair."

On March 22, 1873, General Order No. 45 from the War Department in Washington directed that two pieces of land donated by Phineas Banning and one piece donated by Banning and his partner, B.D. Wilson, be returned to them after all buildings had been sold or otherwise disposed of. The buildings were sold at auction on July 31, 1873, with Banning buying five of them for \$2917, Wilson buying one for \$200 and two "government corrals" going to a Mr. Downing for \$510.

THE PRESERVATION STORY

The saga of Drum Barracks after it reverted to private ownership is another long story which will be told in a future issue of DRUM BEATS. However, the chapter covering the last 24 years is pertinent to this issue. It starts in 1963, when reports that the only remaining building was up for sale and probable demolition came to the attention of Walter Holstein, a dedicated historian and principal of the adult education department at Banning High School. Mr. Holstein had no difficulty in enlisting the aid of Oliver Vickery, Curator Emeritus of the Banning Residence Museum, and Mrs. Fred (Joan) Lorenzen, a long time Wilmington resident well known for her many years of dedicated volunteer work for civic and patriotic causes, Mrs. Lorenzen became

the prime mover behind the formation of The Society for The Preservation of Drum Barracks, which purchased the property before the end of the year 1963.

An energetic lobbying effort by Mrs. Lorenzen and Mr. Vickery over the next three years with many public officials including then-governor Ronald Reagan, resulted in purchase of the property by the State of California in 1967, with the Society retaining responsibility for maintenance and operation of the Barracks as an historical site open to the public.

In September, 1986, the State turned custody over to the City of Los Angeles on condition that the building become the Drum Barracks Civil War Museum under the authority of the Department of Recreation and Parks. With hiring of a salaried director, the way is now open to the creation of a unique historical attraction, with the help of dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers, and anyone interested in supporting this worthwhile cause are invited to contact the director.

COMING IN THE JULY ISSUE OF DRUM BEATS

PHINEAS BANNING- GODFATHER OF DRUM BARRACKS

WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND TOWN

DRUM BARRACKS SOCIETY

Open house and mixer at the Barracks for the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce on Thursday, May 10th, 5:30 to 7:30; public welcome. Light buffet and refreshments courtesy of Price Transfer, Inc., Frederick and Joan Lorenzen, owners.

GENERAL PHINEAS BANNING RESIDENCE MUSEUM

401 East M Street, Wilmington, CA 90748.....(213)548-7777
Tours Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday at 12:30, 1:30, 2:30 and 3:30. Group tours by appointment.

CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF LONG BEACH

P.O. Box 33-337, Long Beach, CA 90801.....(213)596-0334
Civil War related talks and demonstrations at 7:30 P.M. on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at the Golden Sails Hotel, 6285 East Pacific Coast Highway, Long Beach. Upcoming April 21, "Andersonville"; May 19, "A Southern Boy's Recollection"; June 16, "Custer and Stuart".



FT. TEJON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

267 Corona Ave., Apt.II, Long Beach, CA 90803.....(213)433-5972
Monthly Civil War era camping and battle reenactments on April 19,
May 17 and June 21, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. at Ft. Tejon State Historic
Park, a restored 1854 U.S. Army post on Interstate 5 at Lebec, 77 mi.
no. of Los Angeles.

SAN PEDRO BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 1568, San Pedro, CA 90733.....(213)548-3208
Open meetings at 7:30 P.M. on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the
Cabrillo Marine Museum, 3720 Stephen M. White Dr., San Pedro.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF LONG BEACH

P.O. Box 1869, Long Beach, CA 90801.....(213)435-7511
Open meetings at 7 P.M. on the 3rd Monday of each month at the
Senior Center, 1150 East 4th St., Long Beach.

NOTICE: If your group is not represented here and you would
like to be, contact Director O'Brien or Editor McDowell at
the address or phone number shown on page 2.