

Before well-known Battle of Glorieta Pass, Texans captured Santa Fe

Tom Sharpe | The New Mexican

The Confederates who briefly occupied Santa Fe 150 years ago this month found it an inhospitable city with Jewish merchants who refused their money, terrified nuns and a Hispanic majority neutral in the fight between Anglos.

Much has been written about the Battle of Glorieta Pass, known as the Gettysburg of the West, which took place from March 26 to 28, 1862. But less is known about Santa Fe's few weeks as a Confederate territory.

That is partly because just about anyone who openly sided with the Union had left Santa Fe -- heading either to Fort Craig, south of Socorro, where New Mexico's Union troops had hoped but failed to stop the advancing Rebels, or to Fort Union, north of Las Vegas, N.M., where the Union contingency awaited reinforcements from Colorado.

One rare local perspective comes from the Santa Fe Weekly Gazette of April 26, 1862 -- the first edition the newspaper had published since being shut down by the Rebels. The issue is preserved on microfilm at the Museum of New Mexico's Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, but the original could be not located.

According to the Gazette:

On March 3, 188 wagons of supplies -- food, winter clothes and ammunition -- left Santa Fe.

On March 8, the Gazette announced it would suspend publication due to "the disturbed condition of public affairs."

On March 10, "eleven Texans made their appearance in the city."

On March 13, Union supporters were offered amnesty.

The newspaper reported 70 more Texans arrived March 14, followed by 200 Texans on March 20.

"They were Texans in name but in reality they were men who had formerly lived here and had gone to Mesilla to join the enemy," explained the Gazette.

Rebel Texans depicted as savage

Union-leaning New Mexicans, hungry for statehood, often painted Southern

sympathizers as disreputable characters, calling them "Texas Rangers," "Santa Fe Gamblers" or "Brigands" -- a now archaic term for thieves or bandits.

John Lossing's 1868 Pictorial History of the Civil War depicts "one of [Gen. Henry H.] Sibley's Texas Rangers" with long, scraggly hair and a beard, a wide-brimmed hat, rifle, knives and sabers -- far from the modern image of that state's elite law-enforcement squad or the professional baseball team.

"These Rangers who went into the rebellion were described as being, many of them, a desperate set of fellows, having no higher motive than plunder and adventure," a footnote says. "They were half savage, and each was mounted on a mustang horse. Each man carried a rifle, a tomahawk, a bowie knife, a pair of Colt's revolvers, and a lasso for catching and throwing the horses of a flying foe."

But these "Texans" were a trusted advance guard for the 2,500 Confederate troops advancing to Santa Fe. Most of them were Texas residents who had marched up the Rio Grande, defeated New Mexico's Union volunteers at the Battle of Valverde on Feb. 21 and were now encamped near Albuquerque, awaiting orders to take Santa Fe.

"The company of Santa Fe Gamblers ... fought gallantly," a Confederate lieutenant wrote in his journal. "They call themselves brigands and know everything about Santa Fe."

Texas' earliest maps, upon independence from Mexico in 1836, had included within the new republic's boundaries parts of today's Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, Wyoming and New Mexico, including Santa Fe.

Twenty-six years later, Texas seemed poised to make good on its imperial dreams of capturing the terminus of the Santa Fe Trail, and the gold and silver mines of Colorado, and giving the Confederacy a window to the Pacific ports of California.

Indeed, Capt. John G. Phillips, commander of the 11 Texans who entered Santa Fe on March 10, sounded a bit arrogant in his first communiqué to the Union commander of Fort Union.

"As commander of the troops of the Confederate States of America now occupying Santa Fe, N.M., I have the honor to inform you that I have taken as prisoners of war Sergeant Wall and privates James Kessler and George Hogg, USA," he wrote. "I desire to exchange these prisoners for the same number taken by the U.S. troops [presumably in the Battle of Valverde] and if it be in conformity to the rules of civilized warfare as contended by the United States Government, I propose [to exchange them for] ... Long, William Perryman, [and] William Cappers, privates of the CSA."

Rebels closed down newspapers

The Santa Fe New Mexican is often the primary source on Santa Fe history, having been published for more than 162 years. But no copies are extant from 1862. Except for the prospectus from 1849, and two possible copies from 1850, the newspaper's files begin in 1863.

The 14 years of missing issues could have been destroyed by the Confederates, who were known to attack Union-friendly publications. CSA Lt. Col. John Baylor (for whom the Southern Baptist university in Waco, Texas, is named) had shot an editor in Mesilla after taking over Southern New Mexico and Arizona in 1861.

According to the Gazette, Confederate Maj. Charles Pyron ordered Gazette editor John Russell to relinquish the keys to the newspaper on March 22, 1862. But it's not clear if Russell was still in town. One account puts him at Fort Union. "The same day, the proprietor of the Fonda was arrested and placed in confinement," the Gazette reported.

The fog of war kept New Mexicans uncertain of what would happen next.

"From reliable sources, I am satisfied that the main body of the Texans are watching the movement of Col. [Edward R.S.] Canby [leader of the Union forces at Valverde and Glorieta] and that there is but about 400 between Albuquerque and Algodones ... [and] not one Texan in Santa Fe," Union Capt. G.W. Howland wrote to Fort Union from his advance surveillance post in Tecolote on March 9, the day before Phillips' squad arrived in Santa Fe.

On the other side of that message is a plea to Canby from J.A. Whitall, possibly Howland's source: "For God's sake, send your troops down. You can hold Santa Fe. The main body of the enemy are near Fort Craig. I am almost certain of it. Do come!"

The main Confederate force remained in Albuquerque, then began moving slowly east into Tijeras Canyon, across the eastern flank of Sandia Mountains and north through Galisteo in an effort to bypass Santa Fe and attack Fort Union first. By March 25, most of the 280 Rebels in Santa Fe began heading to Glorieta.

Southern perspective on Santa Fe

The Confederates had entered Santa Fe in early March as a conquering army, but returned later that month in virtual defeat. Although they technically won the Battle of Glorieta Pass, their supplies were burned, leaving the Texans with little food or winter clothing.

A.B. Peticolas, a Virginia native who practiced law in Victoria, Texas, and referred to the Union troops as "abs," for "abolitionists," kept a diary and made

sketches during the New Mexico campaign.

The lieutenant had been among the main body of Rebels who remained in Albuquerque and then marched directly to Glorieta. When he walked into Santa Fe from the east on March 30, he liked what he saw.

"I gazed down with feelings of curiosity and interest at this the oldest city in the territory, from the height of the hills on the south side of the city," Peticolas wrote. "The church spires glittered in the light of the morning sun, and the multitude of one-story adobe buildings looked neat and comfortable to us worn and footsore soldiers. ...

"Women in long shawls wrapped about their heads and faces were filling their water jugs at the little canal that we first crossed as we entered town. A few copper-colored citizens were lounging on the corners, and one old fellow with a cane and cloak was walking briskly up the street, but these were all the persons that we saw stirring."

Peticolas and his comrades were able to buy some bread, corn meal and whiskey. They "found quarters in a large old ruined building belonging to the government" [the Palace of the Governors], "slept in this house on hay from the Government Corralls [sic]," then moved to "a larger block of buildings belonging to the bishop, [Jean-Baptiste Lamy] who is very friendly to us."

He was less impressed with the church when he attended Sunday Mass on April 6: "There are quite a number of pictures hanging upon the walls representing the sufferings and death, crucifixion and interment of Christ, very poorly done," he wrote. "One or two of the pictures are pretty good oil paintings. The furniture of the altar is very neat indeed and costly, but the seats are indifferent and scarce."

Before departing Santa Fe on April 8 for the 1,000-mile walk back to Texas, Peticolas was able to obtain books and art supplies. But his dealings with Santa Fe's Jewish merchants -- the Seligman and Spiegelberg brothers were prominent at that time -- were tinged with anti-Semitism.

"There are ... smooth-faced Jews, that are our bitter enemies and will not open their stores or sell on confederate paper," he wrote. "These ought to have all their property confiscated and ought to be run off from town themselves."

Sibley seen as delusional drunk

If there's a bad guy in the story of the Confederate campaign in New Mexico, it is the leader of the Rebel forces, Brig. Gen. Henry Hopkins Sibley.

A native of Natchitoches, La., he graduated from the U.S. Military Academy and served in Florida, Mexico, Texas, Kansas, Utah and New Mexico. At the outbreak

of the Civil War, he resigned his commission, was recommissioned in the Confederate Army and proposed a plan to take over the Southwest.

Sibley's plan was accepted, and in late 1861, his forces left San Antonio, Texas, for New Mexico. He was initially successful, bypassing Fort Craig and enticing its defenders, led by Canby, his West Point classmate, to leave the fort to confront the Rebels a few miles away at Valverde.

The Confederates defeated Canby in the field. But Sibley himself did not participate in the battle. He remained with the wagons, claiming he was ill. Some accused him of being drunk, calling him a "walking whiskey keg." During the Battle of Glorieta Pass, Sibley remained in Albuquerque's southeast valley at the ranch of a Southern sympathizer, a local judge.

Sibley seemed to harbor delusions that New Mexicans might be persuaded to join the Confederacy if they understood how they had been deceived by the United States.

"The Ricos or wealthy citizens of New Mexico had been completely drained by the Federal Government, and adhered to it, and became absolute followers of the Army for dear life, and their invested dollars," he wrote. "Politically they have no distinct sentiment or opinion on the vital question at issue. Power and interest alone controls free expression of their sympathies. One noble, notable exception was found in the brothers Armijo, Manuel and Rafael, the wealthiest and most respectable merchants in New Mexico."

Sibley did not visit Santa Fe until April 3 -- nearly a week after the Battle of Glorieta Pass -- to congratulate his soldiers. He seemed pleased with the conditions in Santa Fe, even though within days the Confederates would begin their retreat back to Texas.

"I found the whole exultant army assembled," he wrote. "The sick and wounded had been comfortably quartered and provided [for]. The loss of clothing and transportation had been made up from the enemy's stores and confiscation, and, indeed, everything done which should have been done. Many friends were found in Santa Fe. ..."

"My chief regret in making this retrograde movement was the necessity of leaving Hospitals in Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Socorro."

Sibley continued drinking on the way back to San Antonio. He took minor assignments for the final years of the war, struggled with alcoholism, was court-martialed and censured, but acquitted of cowardice. After the Civil War, he was a military adviser to the Turkish viceroy to Egypt.

Gathering supplies for retreat

In the aftermath of Glorieta, the desperate Texans terrified many in Santa Fe.

At Loretto Academy, Mother Magdalen Hayden began to hear men walking into town from the east late on March 29, "but we did not know to which side they belonged until morning when we saw by their clothes that they were Texans," she wrote. "All were in a most needy and destitute condition in regard to the commonest necessities of life."

Several Texans got onto the roof of the girls school, and one climbed inside through a window facing the street. "He opened another window which opens on the courtyard, but as soon as he saw some Sisters he went out the street window," Hayden wrote. "I sent for the Bishop and he notified the commander and so they ceased to molest us."

The Gazette recalled that Sibley had initially promised New Mexicans that "such forage and supplies as my army shall require will be purchased on the open market and paid for at fair prices." Yet, Sibley had seized the funds of the territorial treasury -- a "palpable violation of the rules of war," the newspaper contended.

Public funds weren't the only things seized. The hungry, dirty, cold Texans scoured Santa Fe for supplies without much success until they found a warehouse of goods owned by Felipe B. Delgado, a prominent Santa Fe merchant. The Rebels had no money, so their quartermaster signed three notes acknowledging receipt of \$2,336 worth of goods -- 25 boxes of candles, 25 boxes of soap, 103 coats, 100 pairs of pants, 640 pounds of coffee and 845 pounds of sugar.

Those promissory notes were never redeemed and are now the possessions of Delgado's great-grandson, 81-year-old Joseph Valdes, mayor of Santa Fe from 1972 to 1976 and owner of Valdes Paint & Glass.

In comparison with modern warfare, the Civil War seems remarkable in that civilians were seldom targeted. The wives of Union officers remained in Santa Fe during its Confederate occupation. Louise Hawkins Canby, the wife of the Union commander, visited both wounded Confederate and Union soldiers in the hospital. Even Peticolas noted the kindness of Mrs. Canby, known as "the Angel of Santa Fe."

"In health the invalids were regarded as enemies; in sickness and suffering they were administered to with a kindness that might have been shown to friends," wrote the Gazette. "In the midst of the horrors attendant upon the war it is refreshing to have the bright feature like this to refer to."

The Gazette ended its reportage by noting that the only things the Rebels left behind in the Palace of the Governors were "Sibley's proclamations and empty champagne bottles."

Promissory notes issued to Felipe B. Delgado

Received Santa Fe New Mexico Apr
 1st 1846 of Felipe Delgado the following
 Quarter Master Stores for the use of the troops
 stationed at this Post.

1846	April 3	25 Bys candles 1000 th @ 27.9	375 00
	3 11	" " Soap 1200 th @ 25.9	310 00
			\$685 00

I certify on honor that the above Account is
 correct and just and necessary for the public service
 and will be accounted for in my next Quarterly
 returns.

Santa Fe N. M.
 April 1st 1846

V. F. Battaille
 Acting Asst. Q. Master
 U. S. of America

Duplicate

Received Santa Fe: New Mexico
 March 29' 1842, of Mr. Felipe Delgado the
 following articles of Subsistence Stores

545	Pounds of Sugar	@ 40 cts per pound	588
440	"	of Coffee @ 30 " "	14
			\$602

I Certify that the above is correct & just, and that the
 articles of Subsistence Stores were purchased at the
 lowest market price for the use of the Confederate
 Army;

Santa Fe: N. Mex
 March 29' 1842

J. F. Battelle
 Acty Capt Com: Sur.

Received Santa Fe N. Mexico
 April 7th 1862 of Mr Felipe Delgado
 the following Q. Master's Fees, for the
 use of the troops stationed at this Post

		Dolls	Cents
1862	April 3	113	Crats 7 ⁰⁰
		111	Crats 4 ⁰⁰
		\$113	110

I certify on honor that the above account
 is correct and just, and necessary for the
 publick Service and will be accounted
 for in my quarterly returns

Santa Fe. N. M.
 April 7th 1862
 Duplicate

V. F. Battelle
 Acting Asst. Q. Master
 Confederate States of America