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in the Healdsburg Squatter War**

Michael Bret Davis
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Abstract

Although California was relatively unaffected by the destruction of the Civil War, California's new statehood and Gold Rush brought thousands of migrants from the war-torn areas. These migrants brought with them their ideologies—and sometimes their slaves. In northern California's Sonoma County, the battle of civil war ideologies was fought over land rights. Southern Squatters settled in Sonoma County, voted for the proslavery Democratic Party, sang Dixie, and after the start of the Civil War, fought off sheriffs and residents trying to remove them and their politics. In northern California, the rhetoric of the Civil War was played out in the "Healdsburg Squatter War." Opportunistic landowners used the Civil War as a political, moral, and ideological weapon to eject Southern squatters from profitable Sonoma County lands.

The War of Words: Confederate Rhetoric in the Healdsburg Squatter War

Michael Bret Davis
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As the sound of footsteps carried through the warm summer's night breeze, the moonlight bounced off the fields of swaying golden barley and guided the marching men. The eerie tranquility contrasted with what was to come. Rumors were rampant that squatters were rising in arms to defend their land against the state.¹ These marching "patriots" were ready to defend "their country's rights."² In the early hours of June 12, 1862, under the command of the Sonoma County Sheriff J. M Bowles, 300 men from Petaluma, Santa Rosa, and surrounding Sonoma County cities set out to remove a group of squatters from a 160 acre encampment on the privately owned Fitch land grant in Healdsburg, California.³ Sixty squatters, armed with rifles, met the sheriff's men at the gate. Alexander Skaggs, the "Captain" of the squatters, warned the sheriff that if he and his men went through his gate they would be shot.⁴ The sheriff backed down, and the squatters won the battle without firing a shot.

California played a minimal role in fighting the Civil War, but voting records indicate the state was far from the solid Union stronghold it is often assumed to have been. Southern California overwhelmingly voted for the Southern Democrat candidate John C. Breckinridge in the 1860 presidential election. Northern Californian votes saved the state from becoming a Southern Democratic majority and potentially leaving the Union.⁵ Rural northern Californian cities and counties, however, had Southern Democrat majorities and many northern Californian citizens and politicians feared secessionists were living in their communities.⁶ For the sheriff's men, the Civil War had just reached California. In their eyes, the removal of the squatters was a victory for the Union.

The armed rising of Sonoma County residents against the squatters suggests the war, or at least the rhetoric of the war, had indeed reached California. Prior to South Carolina's secession, the squatter riots or demonstrations, as they were referred to, were mainly legal and only occasionally violent clashes between landowners and illegally settled tenants. The squatters lived relatively peacefully and unaffected by the residents of Healdsburg.

¹ "Later from the Squatter War at Healdsburg," *Daily Alta California*, July 21, 1862, 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ "Healdsburg Settlers' Difficulties," *Sacramento Daily Union*, July 21, 1862, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Royce Delmatie, *The Rumble of California Politics* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1970), 51.

⁶ "Congressional Districts," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, February 6, 1864, 5.

With America going through one of the most divisive times in her history, however, local newspapers began printing articles depicting the squatters as Southern Democratic secessionists. In fact, in rural, agricultural towns and counties of California, the vote typically favored the Southern Democratic secessionist candidates. Unlike the homogeneity of southern California, the north was more diverse in environment, people, and votes. This diversity closed the space between Union and Southern Democratic ideologies. Miles of land, mountains, and rivers separated the loyalties of South Carolina and New York. In California, sidewalks and streets were often all that stood between the disparate ideologues.

In northern California, the ideological tension gave a particular character to land disputes. Following the battle of Fort Sumter, political differences became violent and rhetorical labels such as Confederate and Southern or Breckinridge Democrat became explosive words. In rural, Southern Democratic majority counties that were ideologically split, the rhetoric of war played on the fears of Union citizens and, in some cases, led to violent clashes.

In Healdsburg, armed citizens banded together under the pretense of patriotism and preserving the Union and worked to remove perceived secessionist squatters from their town. The rhetoric of the Civil War crossed ideological and literal borders into northern California and stoked the fears of its Unionist citizens. To understand the role the Civil War played in northern California land disputes, I will first look at the Democratic Party and California squatters in the mid-19th century. I will then examine the political voting of California's agricultural counties in the 1860 presidential election. To demonstrate how close California was to becoming a Southern Democratic stronghold, I will analyze the same counties and in particular Sonoma County during the 1861 California gubernatorial election.

The next section of this paper will deal with the Healdsburg squatters, the land grant they settled on, and their land disputes prior to the Civil War. The subsequent section will then examine the squatter land disputes during the time of the Civil War. Looking at pre- and post-Civil War interactions between squatters, landowners, and the county citizens will shed light on the role the Civil War played in the removal of the squatters. Before concluding, I will examine Solano County's squatter dispute during the Civil War and demonstrate that using rhetorical tools during the Civil War to remove squatters was not unique to Sonoma County.

Mexican Grants and California's Squatters.

In 1848, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo transferred California to the United States. California landowners were promised that their property titles would be "inviolably respected," and to a great extent they were.⁷ To handle the confirmation of these Mexican land grants in the new US territory, Congress passed Democratic Senator William Gwin's California Land Act of 1851. This act required property titles to be confirmed by a three-member land commission.⁸ If the property titles were rejected, the land became part of the public domain and open to squatters—settlers on a piece of land not owned by the settlers. Those with knowledge of Mexican and US law, and a paper trail to ownership of land grants were most successful at confirming property

⁷ For treaty see: Paul Gates, "The California Land Act of 1841," *California Historical Society*, vol. 50, no. 4 (1971): 396, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25157352>> (accessed December 20, 2014). For land grants being recognized see: David Vaught, *After the Gold Rush: Tarnished Dreams in the Sacramento Valley* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 50.

⁸ David Vaught, *After the Gold Rush*, 45.

rights.⁹ Many times, however, titles were lost, forged, or standard requirements to meet residency were not met.¹⁰ For example, in anticipation of the treaty, more than two million acres of land grants were rush approved.¹¹ Much of which were the most desirable lands.¹² Many of these Mexican land grants were invalid under Mexican law because they did not follow the proper procedures of transfer.¹³ Since Mexican land grants were interpreted under Mexican, not US law, this led to mass litigation, which was painfully slow in settling land disputes. Under the California Land Act, either side of the dispute could appeal. Between 1852 and 1856, more than 800 cases were heard, and the average wait for titles to be confirmed was 17 years.¹⁴ In forgery cases, the quality of the ink and paper was even examined.¹⁵ For squatters coming to California, this new process of confirmation cut through their ideals of land rights.

Passed in 1841, the Preemption Act allowed squatters to legally acquire title on up to 160 acres of public land for a small filing fee.¹⁶ If requirements were met—14 months of residency and improvement to the land—the public land was transferred to the squatter.¹⁷ When the treaty transferred California to the US, migrants came in droves to settle on the land. Preemption had already been successfully utilized in the Kansas Territory and the Nebraska Territory where land was acquired for nominal fees, and many hoped preemption claims would be recognized in this newly acquired “public” land.¹⁸ What squatters realized, however, was that there was little California land to be had. Much of the California land was not public, but instead was owned by private citizens under Mexican land grants. Even worse for the largely Democratic-voting squatters, their own political party’s actions blocked or delayed their preemption claims.

Promising liberal land laws that would protect squatters’ rights, California Democrats won the squatters’ votes.¹⁹ In fact, “by 1853, California squatters held the balance of power between the Democratic, Whig, and Know-Nothing parties.”²⁰ While in power, the Democrats lowered the statute of limitations on trespassing claims against squatters, making preemption claims must easier to satisfy.²¹ Once the statute of limitations passed, the squatters could legally obtain title to the land.²² Supporting the Preemption Act, the Democratic Party helped break up large tracts of land in Louisiana and Florida, and open the land to small-farm settlers.²³ Squatters coming west

⁹ Paul Gates, “The California Land Act of 1841,” 398.

¹⁰ David Vaught, *After the Gold Rush*, 48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Paul Gates, “The California Land Act of 1841,” 396.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ David Vaught, *After the Gold Rush*, 45.

¹⁵ Paul Gates, “The California Land Act of 1841,” 396.

¹⁶ David Vaught, *After the Gold Rush*, 50.

¹⁷ Benjamin Horace Hibbard. *A History of the Public Land Policies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 168.

¹⁸ William Davis, *The American Frontier: Pioneers, Settlers, & Cowboys, 1800–1899* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 73.

¹⁹ Paul Gates, *Land and Law in California: Essays on Land Policies* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991), 163.

²⁰ Donald J. Pisani, *Water, Land, and Law in the West: The Limits of Public Policy, 1850–1920* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1996), 72.

²¹ Paul Gates, *Land and Law in California*, 163.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

hoped the same would happen in California, and voting for the Democratic Party would help ensure it would.

Under Gwin's Land Act, however, squatters' right to mortgage, sell, or confirm title to the settled land froze until the titles were confirmed or rejected under the Land Act, which was a slow and painful process. For the squatters, Gwin's plan conflicted with their antiland monopoly ideals.²⁴ Adhering to the Jeffersonian, small, independent farming ideal, land meant "opportunity, freedom, and independence" to squatters.²⁵ Despite this, in the late 1850s the Democratic Party was able to hold on to the squatter vote by ensuring more liberal preemption laws throughout California's publicly owned land.²⁶

In California, a squatter vote for Democrat did not necessitate a support of slavery, even though the Democratic Party was the proslavery party of the nation.²⁷ In fact, many squatters throughout the nation actually favored free labor, as opposed to slavery.²⁸ To Union-supporting Californians, however, the squatters' votes for a Jeffersonian agrarianism may have been lost in the shuffle of the slavery question—especially if they travelled west with their slaves. For opportunistic landowners, the perception of proslavery, Democratic squatters may have provided the perfect storm to finally eject squatters and solidify valuable land titles.

Agricultural Counties in the 1860 Presidential Election

Congressman T. J. Wright stood on the senate floor and argued for passage of the amendments. The original bill, introduced by Congressman Austin Wiley, would divide California into three congressional districts. Wright supported the amendments to move Marin, Solano, Napa, and Sonoma counties from the third district into the second.²⁹ By doing so, Marin County Republican, or Union, votes would offset Southern Democratic votes in the other three counties. Wright argued this would give the second and third districts a more equitable distribution of Union majorities.³⁰ Another congressman, refuting Wright's argument, said Wiley's original bill "secured the preponderance of Union majorities, and what more was wanted?"³¹

By a vote of 44 to 22 the amendments were defeated, and the original bill passed. The bill took power from rural agricultural counties and gave it to the mining and commercial counties, while accounting for the fluctuation of populations in mining areas. Reducing the political voice of the rural areas and keeping a majority of Union votes throughout the three districts seemed enough for the original bill to pass.

In early 1860s California, rural, agricultural areas nearly predictably voted for Southern Democratic candidates. The shuffling of counties in Wiley's original bill, ensuring stronger Union majorities, demonstrated the threat—perceived or actual—of California's rural county vote to

²⁴ Tamara Venit Shelton, "A More Loyal, Union Loving People Can Nowhere Be Found," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4 (2010): 488, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/westhistquar.41.4.473>> accessed December 10, 2014).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "News of the Morning," *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 25, 1857, 2.

²⁷ David Vaught, *After the Gold Rush*, 118.

²⁸ Tamara Venit Shelton, "A More Loyal, Union Loving People Can Nowhere Be Found," 484.

²⁹ "Letter from Sacramento," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, February 06, 1864, 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

the Union majority. An examination of the voting rolls confirms the perception that rural counties were Southern Democratic secessionist strongholds.

Since 1849, there had been talk of California dividing into two parts with the southern portion, under the 36° 30 line, becoming a slave state.³² In 1859, the California legislature voted to denote six of the southern California counties as a separate territorial government where slavery would be legal.³³ President James Buchanan and Congress received the bill, but “the intense national excitement over the questions which led to the Civil War delayed action.”³⁴ Following the war, the California legislature became vehemently antislavery and scrapped the bill altogether.³⁵ While northern California was diverse in industry and citizens, the southern California counterparts were more homogenous in character. Southern California had little industry outside of agriculture. In the 1860 presidential election, the rural, agricultural demography of southern California spurred voter sympathies to lie with the proslavery Southern Democratic John C. Breckinridge or slavery neutral Stephen A. Douglas. The large number of migrants from the southern states whose sympathies lay with their native states’ political leanings fashioned the state’s zealous Breckinridge minority.³⁶

The character of southern California’s rural counties invited speculation about the utility of slave labor, so it is understandable that regional loyalties lay with the party in favor of slavery. Southern California’s largest county, Los Angeles, gave only 20 percent of its vote to the antislavery Lincoln.³⁷ In northern California, the mix of industry facilitated by farmland, mines, water access, and ports created a more diverse atmosphere. Northern Californians had varying reasons for political affiliations, while the northern California counties that voted proslavery mirrored the rural, agricultural image of the proslavery southern California counties.

In the 1860 presidential election, the antislavery Republican Abraham Lincoln lost nearly every rural county of California. In the final state vote tally, Lincoln received 38,733 votes, the Northern Democrat Stephen Douglas received 37,999 votes, and the Southern Democratic candidate Breckinridge received 33,969 votes.³⁸ The Southern Democrats were less than 5,000 votes from earning California’s four electoral votes and becoming the Southern Democrats’ only free-state majority. Far from California being a Union stronghold, Lincoln enjoyed a plurality in only nine of California’s 43 counties, and all but one were in northern California.³⁹ The large populations of the eight northern Californian urban and coastal counties carried Lincoln to victory.⁴⁰

An examination of the 1860 Agricultural Census reveals the lack of Republican support in rural counties. Of the top-ten counties with the largest acreage of improved farmland—farmland cleared and used to cultivate crops—Breckinridge lost only one.⁴¹ That county, El Dorado, is last

³² Imogene Spaulding, “The Attitude of California to the Civil War,” *Historical Society of Southern California*. no. 1/2 (1912–1913): 106 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41168901>> accessed February 22, 2013.

³³ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁷ Royce Delmatier, *The Rumble of California Politics* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1970), 51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ US Government, “Agriculture of the United States” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 10.

Table 1. Counties with the Largest Acreage of Improved Farmland, 1860 Presidential Election

County	Acreage of Improved Farmland	Candidate majority
Sacramento	218,396	Breckinridge
San Joaquin	204,179	Breckinridge
Sonoma	198,764	Breckinridge
Solano	162,229	Breckinridge
Yolo	144,903	Breckinridge
Sutter	104,309	Breckinridge
Napa	101,683	Breckinridge
Mendocino	92,729	Breckinridge
Colusa	89,704	Breckinridge
El Dorado	86,223	Douglas

Source: US Government, “Agriculture of the United States,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 10.

on this list in terms of improved farmland acreage, and it was won not by Lincoln but by the popular sovereignty supporting Northern Democratic candidate Stephen A. Douglas. See Table 1.

An analysis of the 1860 U.S. Agricultural Census shows how the ratio of citizens-to-farms affected political affiliation. The rural, agricultural areas of California voted for Breckinridge and the urban counties were Lincoln strongholds. In the nine counties where Lincoln won majorities, there was an average of 158 citizens per farm.⁴² In the 18 counties that Breckinridge won, the ratio of citizens per farm was a much lower average of 23 citizens per farm.⁴³ See Table 2.

Sonoma County, the third most populous county that Breckinridge won, averaged only 16 citizens per farm. Indeed, Breckinridge counties outnumbered Lincoln counties with improved farmland of 100 acres or more by 2,334 farms.⁴⁴ Not only did counties with small farms vote against Lincoln, areas with high quantities of farms over 100 acres, like Sonoma County, tended to vote against Lincoln as well.

⁴² For populations by counties see: California Department of Finance, “Population Totals by Township and Place for California Counties: 1860 to 1950.” <http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/reports/census-surveys/totals_1860-1950/> accessed March 13, 2013. For the number of farms in Sonoma see: US Government, “Agriculture,” 194.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Table 2. Average Citizen-per-Farm Ratio of Counties Won by Candidate, 1860 Presidential Election

Lincoln	Breckinridge	Douglas
158	23	55

Source: US Government, “Agriculture of the United States,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 194.

In Sonoma County, 533 of the 756 total farms were 100 acres in size or more. Sonoma County was the prototypical agricultural northern California county, making it the prototypical pro-Breckinridge county as well. San Francisco, the main urban and Union county as well as the county that gave the largest plurality to Lincoln, had only 24 farms of 100 acres or more.⁴⁵

It is telling about the different makeup of the Lincoln and Breckinridge counties that their populations were roughly equal. The population of the eight pro-Lincoln counties was 117, 983, while the pro-Breckinridge counties had a combined population of 110, 297 citizens. Yet the Breckinridge counties had 4,871 more farms than Lincoln counties.⁴⁶ See Table 3. As Michael Johnson posited in his statistical analysis of 1860s Georgia, the higher a county’s agricultural production the more likely that county was to vote for proslavery Southern Democrats.⁴⁷

With Healdsburg’s large population of southern farmers, the case of Georgia may help to illuminate Healdsburg and California’s agricultural counties proclivity to vote Southern Democratic. Likewise, the urban character of the Union vote in northern California is apparent. These counties seemingly benefited more from the Union. Iron manufacturing and shipbuilding and repairs were important industries along the San Francisco Bay coasts, and a good relationship with the North was crucial in maintaining their commercial enterprises.⁴⁸

The rural areas could have been attracted to Breckinridge’s campaign to permit slavery and Douglas’s popular sovereignty, rather than to Lincoln and the Republican Party’s outright abolishment of slavery. Unlike the urban, commercial oriented counties that voted for Lincoln, farmers in northern California depended less on the other states of the Union for their welfare. Without a railroad system, northern California farmers depended more on local commerce for sustainability.

Using the campaign slogan “vote yourself a farm—vote yourself a tariff,” Lincoln’s support of homesteading and agricultural interests helped him win him the rural vote in the American

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Michael Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1977), 199.

⁴⁸ For the importance of manufacturing in San Francisco see: Rodman Paul, “After the Gold Rush: San Francisco and Portland,” *Pacific Historical Review*, no. 1 (1982): 13–14, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3639818>> accessed April 15, 2013. For the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the North see: Timothy G. Lynch, “Crucible of California Capitalism,” *Southern California Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (2012): 418–21, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/scq.2012.94.4.410>> accessed April 15, 2013.

Table 3. Total Number of Farms Larger than 3 Acres by Candidate-Won Counties, 1860 Presidential Election

Lincoln	Breckinridge	Douglas
2,777 farms	7,648 farms	3,138 farms

Source: US Government, “Agriculture of the United States,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 10.

Northeast.⁴⁹ Despite his support for agricultural interests, Lincoln lost nearly all of California’s agricultural counties. The farmers’ native states may explain this paradox. In southern California, the American South contributed the largest number of American-born settlers.⁵⁰ In 1861, about three-eighths of all California’s population hailed from the American South.⁵¹

In southern California they stuck to their agricultural background but “exchanged raising cotton for raising cattle.”⁵² In some rural northern California counties, southern migrants made up a significant percentage of the population. They “were naturally bitter against the Union, and were hot-headed secessionists” because of their southern roots.⁵³ The paradox of Lincoln’s defeat in California’s agricultural counties was best demonstrated in Healdsburg where sixty-four percent of those listing their occupation as farmers came from the American South⁵⁴ and 22 percent came from the Midwest, mainly the border states of Ohio and Indiana.⁵⁵

The Northeast contributed the smallest population of Healdsburg farmers, just 14 percent, 28 farmers.⁵⁶ Ideological differences over slavery contributed to the differing agricultural vote in the American South and North. After the Second Great Awakening, the Northeast’s “burned over districts” viewed slavery as a sin.⁵⁷ The farmers of the South, however, wanted to preserve the practice. We cannot say with absolute certainty that Healdsburg’s southern farmers voted for Southern Democratic candidates and thus for slavery and secession. But if Healdsburg’s southern farmers mirrored those of southern California and the American South, their votes went to pro-slavery candidates. Healdsburg’s agricultural population mainly being from slave-holding states, they favored the proslavery Southern Democratic party.

While Lincoln lost all but one southern Californian county, in northern California the proximity of rural Breckinridge and urban Lincoln voters created tension. Either water or Southern Democratic counties bordered the northern California pro-Lincoln counties; sometimes only a

⁴⁹ Heather Campbell, *The Britannica Guide to Political and Social Movements that Changed the World* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2010), 122.

⁵⁰ Helen B. Walters, “Confederates in Southern California,” *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1953): 43, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41168387>> accessed March 27, 2013.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Spaulding, Imogene, “Attitude of California,” 104–05.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

couple miles separated the most loyal Union voters from the staunchest Breckinridge supporters; furthermore, to add to this tension, some Breckinridge counties were divided in loyalties and won by very slim margins. Sonoma County was a perfect example this.

Bordered to its south by Lincoln-leaning Marin County, Sonoma County was divided between Union and Southern Democratic sympathies. Although Breckinridge won the county, it was far from a Southern Democratic stronghold. Of the county's 3,764 votes cast during the presidential election, only 230 separated the victor Breckinridge from Lincoln. In the Sonoma County town of Healdsburg, Breckinridge bested Lincoln by a mere 35 votes.⁵⁸ The ideologies of the candidates were so different and the votes so split in Healdsburg that it is safe to imagine a noticeable tension among the citizens. Again, in the 1861 California Gubernatorial Election, Sonoma County and the town of the Healdsburg were divided between the disparate political ideologies of the time. This time the rhetoric of what a looming defeat for urban, Union interests could mean to California spurred an even deeper sharper tension.

1861 Gubernatorial Election

Edmund Randolph raised his glass and eloquently toasted the man of the hour: "For God's sake speed the ball—may the lead go quick to his heart, and may our country be free from the despot usurper that now claims the name of President of the United States," and with that Randolph gave his endorsement to John C. McConnell for governor.⁵⁹ California may have been free from the mortars and guns of the war, but the fear of their reckoning percolated in the minds of its citizens. Witnessing how close California was to becoming a Southern Democratic state in the presidential election a year earlier, there was an increasing perception of threat that California could be governed by a "secession" man, and the threat was felt in the urban areas of California. The rural Southern Democratic neighbors that surrounded their Union borders would become the target of their fears.

In San Francisco's *Daily Evening Bulletin*, an article titled, "The Voter's Manual for Election Day," painted a picture of this perceived threat to California's status in the Union. The author wrote:

Tomorrow, the first Wednesday of September, a general election is to be held throughout the State. Far greater importance attaches to it than to any general election ever before held in California since she was reckoned a state . . . it is not simply who is to be Governor of our state, and who shall make and administer our laws, but whether we shall have any government longer.⁶⁰

The article later referred to McConnell as a "treasonable character," and the author noted Missouri's Governor Claiborne Jackson's secession plan for his state would be replicated in California if McConnell were elected.⁶¹ The hope for California to stay in the Union was now in the hands of the Union candidate Leland Stanford.

⁵⁸ For California's voting number totals see: "California State Elections," *Sacramento Daily Union*, Sept 4, 1862, 2. For Healdsburg's voting numbers see: "Letter from Healdsburg," *Daily Alta California*, morning edition, Nov 9, 1860, 1.

⁵⁹ "The Voter's Manual for Election Day," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 3, 1861, 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Stanford was nominated on the Republican ticket as the Union's attempt to vie for the governorship of California against the Breckinridge Democratic candidate John McConnell (post-1860 the moniker Breckinridge replaced Southern in Southern Democrat) and the Union Democrat John Conness. The author of this article in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* was clearly in favor of Stanford and preserving the Union:

The most careful canvass of the entire State leads to the conclusion that Conness is the weaker man of the two, and that if anybody can defeat McConnell it is Leland Stanford, the nominee of the party that stands by the Union at all hazards, and stands by the Administration because that is the only way to protect the Union.⁶²

The author goes on to further note that "the great peril of the day is that Union men may waste votes enough upon Conness to allow the Secession candidate to beat the Administration Union Candidate," and if there is not enough Union votes for Stanford, McConnell will be elected and the state will leave the Union.⁶³ The author goes on to further note how close the presidential election was, and he compares Conness to the 1860 presidential election's third-party candidate and future Confederate devotee John Bell, who took 6,800 California votes away from Breckinridge in the election. The author feared the third-party candidate Conness could do the same to Stanford; however, this time it would be to the detriment of the Union.⁶⁴

The perceived threat of California leaving the Union was real for the author. The *Daily Evening Bulletin* was well circulated at the time, but how many of the readers believed this threat to California's future, like the author did, unfortunately, cannot be known. What can be certain is that the author believed if "Stanford will be elected, California will be saved peacefully where she belongs, with the Union, and where, whether peace or in war, by ballots now or bullets hereafter, she always will belong." The rhetoric of the war had reached California's coast.

The election results indicate that many may have believed, as the journalists did, that California's future in the Union depended on Stanford being elected, and Stanford was overwhelmingly elected. With California's uncertainty in the Civil War, rhetorical labels such as Breckinridge or Southern Democrat and secessionist could create serious divisions throughout the counties of northern California and increase anxiety among her Union-leaning citizens. These labels, now more than just ideological political differences, could be perceived as sides of a war. As the labels were no longer just political differences, but carried violent undertones, they may have made some residents switch their allegiance.

In the year since the election of president, some of the rural areas that were held by Breckinridge did vote for McConnell. This time, however, with the Civil War underway, many counties flipped their allegiances to the Union ticket. Rural counties that voted for Breckinridge were now voting for the Union candidate Stanford, and many of the counties that voted for Breckinridge in the presidential election and voted for McConnell saw a slimmer majority for the "slavery" vote this time around.

Southern California was still a Southern Democratic and secessionist stronghold. In Los Angeles County, Stanford only received 25 percent of the votes and Conness received only 10 percent.⁶⁵ In northern California, of the 18 counties that voted for Breckinridge in the 1860 election,

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ "California State Elections," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

the Breckinridge Democrat candidate McConnell only retained a majority in half of these counties.⁶⁶ Two of the three largest northern California counties that voted for Breckinridge voted for Stanford this time. As counties switched allegiances and opted for the Union vote in 1861, Sonoma County, the third largest pro-Breckinridge county, was still a Southern Democratic majority. However, like the presidential election, Sonoma County's gubernatorial vote paints a picture of a divided county even more sharply divided.

Sonoma County cast 4,103 votes in the 1861 gubernatorial election, a nine-percent increase over the previous year's presidential election.⁶⁷ The Breckinridge candidate received 1,616 of these votes, the Union candidate, Stanford 1,608.⁶⁸ Only eight votes separated the vote in Sonoma County. Meanwhile, Conness received 869 votes; this would give Sonoma County a Union sentiment majority, but as the author of the *Daily Evening Bulletin* article predicted, Conness would steal away votes from Stanford, depriving Stanford of a large percent of votes and a majority in Sonoma County.⁶⁹ As noted, county lines separated rural from urban and Republican from Southern Democratic, but in Sonoma County and Healdsburg, picket fences divided political loyalties.

As split as Sonoma County was, it was still perceived in urban newspapers as a Southern Democrat and secession majority, and thus, a source of Union fear. With the Civil War underway, it was apparent that California wasn't a threat to leave the Union. If the 1861 gubernatorial election was indeed an accurate depiction of loyalties, the 163,695 Union votes to the 56,036 Breckinridge Democrat votes in California painted California as a loyal Union state.⁷⁰ In individual cities and counties, however, the fear of secessionists living in good Union citizens' backyards was never far off. In fact, as the Breckinridge-McConnell vote indicated, there was indeed a strong faction of proslavery and perhaps secessionist votes in Sonoma County, and in local urban newspapers, Sonoma County's factional political divide was played out and sensationalized in print.⁷¹

In both the San Francisco *Daily Alta California* and the *Sacramento Daily Union*, articles detailed pro-Confederacy and secessionist barbecues held in Healdsburg, putting on display to the northern California Unionists that Healdsburg was a Southern Democratic county. In September of 1861 when a festival was held in Healdsburg to raise money to support the Union cause, *The Daily Alta California* concluded that the festival was a success, "when we consider the fact that Sonoma is denominated a Secesh county."⁷² Furthermore, at the outbreak of the war, following a sermon on staying loyal to the Union, a Healdsburg Baptist preacher was attacked with stones while walking home.⁷³

With nearly a third of the Healdsburg citizens affiliated with the Methodist Church, South—the faction of the Methodist church that split in favor of slavery—Healdsburg was a microcosm of the national question and the political war that gripped the nation.⁷⁴ So divided was the county during these times that a bill was (unsuccessfully) proposed to divide the county in two parts

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ "Sanitary Fair at Healdsburg," *Daily Alta California*, Sept. 18, 1864, 2.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ "Copperhead Outrages at Healdsburg," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 16, 1864, 3.

⁷⁴ "God Getting a 'Great Name' about Healdsburg," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1857, 2.

separated by the Russian River; the northern portion of the Russian River, where the squatters lived, would be called Sotoyome County, while the southern portion would retain the name Sonoma.⁷⁵

If the voting rolls did not make it evident that there was a large faction of Southern Democrats in Healdsburg, the Union papers of northern California would. Sonoma County became emblazoned in war rhetoric. So when a decade-long land dispute over the legality of a group of southern squatters living on a tract of land in Healdsburg was underway, the rhetoric of the war and Confederate fears provided a chance environment to accomplish what years of legal battles couldn't—evicting the squatters.

The Land and the Squatters

The trip was long and arduous. Typically leaving around April or May to beat the harsh Nevada weather, you could expect to traverse between 10 to 15 miles a day.⁷⁶ Traveling along Kansas's Blue River and following the Sweetwater River in Wyoming to ensure an adequate supply of water for your livestock, you would eventually arrive in the Golden State.⁷⁷ We can imagine Alexander Skaggs's route was similar to this. In 1853, the native Kentuckian later known as the "Captain Skaggs" for his role in the Squatter Wars, took his wife, their children, and their African slaves overland from Missouri to the Sotoyome Rancho.⁷⁸

Although the Compromise of 1850 ensured California would be a free state, this did not stop many slave owners, like Skaggs, from settling there with their slaves.⁷⁹ In the 1850s, upwards of 2,000 enslaved and free black residents lived in California.⁸⁰ The slaves that came to California, legally free, were subjected to California's Fugitive Slave Act, and many were still subjected to virtual slavery in California.⁸¹ Slave owners came to California and "extended familiar practices and relationships that sustained slavery in the American South to the American West."⁸²

Five hundred to six hundred slaves worked in mines alone.⁸³ It wasn't until national emancipation that many were finally freed from involuntary servitude.⁸⁴ At the time, many slave owners hoped that California "would side with the South over the great slavery question," and they would be legally allowed to own slaves there.⁸⁵ Arriving in California, slave owners "successfully transplanted the labor practices that underpinned slavery in the American South to Califor-

⁷⁵ "Division of Sonoma County." *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Jan 25, 1872,. 1.

⁷⁶ Greg MacGregor, "Traces of the Pioneers: Photographing the Overland Trails," *California History* 70, no. 4 (1991): 339, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25158588>> accessed March 8, 2013.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Hannah Clayborn, "A Promised Land: Grantees, Squatters, and Speculators in the Healdsburg Land Wars," MA thesis, Sonoma State University, 1990, 145–46.

⁷⁹ Glenna Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 68.

⁸⁰ Stacey Smith, "Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historical Review*, 80, no. 1 (2011): 57, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2011.80.1.28>> accessed May 1, 2013.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸² Stacey Smith, "Remaking Slavery in a Free State," 30.

⁸³ Glenna Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War*, 33.

⁸⁴ Spaulding, "Attitude of California," 105.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

nia.”⁸⁶ In California there was “a continuation of familiar practices of slaveholding rather than a radical break from them.”⁸⁷ With the antislavery Republican Party’s roots in California, slave owners feared that “mean Yankeys [sic]” would work to free their slaves.⁸⁸ During the Civil War, a southerner squatting on Union land with his slaves was easy to target as a Confederate.

Captain Skaggs’s southern roots weren’t unique to his band of squatters. Of the squatter families in Skaggs’s retinue on the Sotoyome Rancho, the 11 men deemed as the central figures by local newspapers were all from southern slave states.⁸⁹ Among the few who sued over the legality of the land, Cornelius Bice, like Skaggs, was a native Kentuckian; George Clark was from Missouri; James Miller was from North Carolina, and Robert Nelly was from Tennessee. Along with their wives, all southerners, the squatters gave the Sotoyome Rancho a distinctly southern tinge.

Settling in 1851, the southern land grabbers contributed to the complexity of the Sotoyome Rancho.⁹⁰ Before their arrival, the Sotoyome Rancho grant itself was under dispute. In 1841, Henry D. Fitch obtained a land grant from the Mexican government for eight leagues of land on the Sotoyome Rancho. In September of 1844, Fitch hired Jasper O’Farrell to survey eight leagues of land, and in November 1845 the Mexican government’s Departmental Assembly approved Fitch’s grant on over 48,000 acres of the Sotoyome Rancho.⁹¹ Fitch was now the legal owner of eight leagues of land (just over 35,400 acres) in what would become Sonoma County.

In 1849, Fitch died and, under an order of the Probate Court of Sonoma, the land grant that was still pending review by the United States Courts—stipulated by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo—was divided into small tracts and sold.⁹² Josephine Bailhache, in the name of her father Henry Fitch’s estate, purchased 14,000 acres of this land.⁹³ The grant was still ordered under the old Mexican government, and there was no guarantee the US government would recognize it.

In 1858, nearly 10 years after Fitch’s death, the United States government approved the grants on the Sotoyome Rancho; but in the interim, Fitch’s sons claimed the land rightfully should have been distributed to them and their sister’s claim was illegal.⁹⁴ The Fitch brothers sued for legal recognition of ownership. When this failed, they told squatters not to purchase any of the property because Bailhache was not the true owner.⁹⁵ Once the grant was approved, Bailhache acted quickly to remove the squatters and sell the land.

On March 25, 1858 Bailhache brought suit to evict Bice, Neely, and Miller from the land,⁹⁶ and divide their plots for sale as quickly as possible. In October of the same year, she was granted judgment for restitution of the premises.⁹⁷ No records indicate the exact beginning dates of interaction between Bailhache and the squatters, but we can assume from the near immediate le-

⁸⁶ Stacey Smith, “Remaking Slavery in a Free State,” 40.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁹ United States Bureau of the Census, Healdsburg, California, 59–99.

⁹⁰ Hannah Clayborn, “A Promised Land,” 34–39.

⁹¹ “The Squatter Riots in Sonoma,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, Aug. 2, 1862, 2.

⁹² “Squatter Troubles,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, Aug. 2, 1862, 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ “News of the Morning,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, July 21, 1862, 2.

⁹⁵ “Healdsburg Settlers’ Difficulties,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

⁹⁶ “Squatter Troubles in Sonoma County,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 23, 1862, 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

gal actions taken by Bailhache after the United States Government's recognition of the grant, that there were struggles over the land since she purchased the grant.

In 1860, she was granted permission to deliver writs of restitution of the land from the remaining occupants.⁹⁸ The writs would be to no avail, but in early 1860, Bailhache and the squatters agreed that they would leave the Fitch grant by December 1.⁹⁹ When December came and they did not leave, Bailhache turned to the county for help. In January 1861 she gave a writ of restitution to Sheriff Bowles for the removal of C. C Clark from her land.¹⁰⁰ The sheriff was successful and Clark left. But the victory was short lived, and Clark returned the following day.¹⁰¹ Bailhache, the courts, and law officers failed to remove the squatters. Like Clark, they would simply move back after initially leaving and, as in Clark's case, they would remain there until after the start of the Civil War.

Bailhache was not the only owner of a grant on the Sotoyome Ranch who had difficulty with squatters. In May 1858, the US Surveyor General ordered a survey of Lugo Pena and Dr. John B. Frisbie's Healdsburg lands.¹⁰² Hostile squatters met the US Surveyor, ripped the field notes from his hand, destroyed them, and ordered him to leave their land or be shot dead.¹⁰³ Then the squatters rode into town looking for vengeance against Pena and Dr. Frisbie.¹⁰⁴ They rode to Pena's house "with the avowed purpose of hanging him, and were only prevented from executing their threat by Lugo signing an article of release, and giving them a written promise to never be seen again in the county."¹⁰⁵

From Pena's home the mob split up, but they couldn't find Dr. Frisbie. A small portion of the mob encountered a few Healdsburg citizens who told them, "No mob would be permitted to take any persons out of town without provocation."¹⁰⁶ The squatters left, but not without first threatening to burn the town down for resisting.¹⁰⁷ The squatters rode victoriously into the hills. They seemed to be in total control of the situation, and there was little the landowners could do.

The squatters' primary weapons were intimidation and violence. The landowners countered by trying to sell their plots and replace the squatters with new tenants—at a much higher price than the Preemption Act called for. But the squatters' retaliated by threatening potential buyers.¹⁰⁸ Removed from his home on Bailhache's land, native Virginian Daniel Prouse was accused of burning the new tenant Charles Peacock's hay stock, and Prouse was charged with brutally hacking Peacock with a butcher's cleaver.¹⁰⁹ When another owner tried to remove the squatters from his piece of the Sotoyome Rancho, they burned down his barn and killed the trees and vines in his orchard.¹¹⁰ In 1853, Healdsburg squatters killed an owner of the Pena grant.¹¹¹ Law offic-

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² "The Healdsburg Outrages." *Daily Alta California*, May 10, 1858, 2.

¹⁰³ "Summary of the Fortnight's News." *Daily Alta California*, Apr. 20, 1858, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ "Squatter Riot at Healdsburg." *Sacramento Daily Union*, Apr. 15, 1858, 2.

¹⁰⁶ "Summary of the Fortnight's News," *Daily Alta California*, 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ "Singular Proceedings." *Sacramento Daily Union*, Jan. 1, 1862, 5.

¹⁰⁹ L. A Norton, *Life and Adventures of Col. L. A. Norton* (Oakland: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1887), 349.

¹¹⁰ "Trouble about Land Titles in Russian River Valley," *Daily Alta California*, Jan. 29, 1859, 1.

¹¹¹ "Violent Death," *Daily Alta California*, Apr. 20, 1853, 2.

ers fared little better. When the sheriff and constable of Mendocino Township attempted to deliver writs of restitution to a squatter on Bailhache's land, they were narrowly missed by shotgun fire from the squatter's wife.¹¹²

Despite the small group of Healdsburg citizens standing up to them, the squatters seemed in control. Through intimidation and violence they continued to live unfettered on their Healdsburg lands. New tenants, sheriffs, constables, and writs were futile. All of these stories played out in the theatre of local newspapers. When a US Marshall tried to talk with the squatters, the local newspapers printed the squatter's response: they were "unwilling to trust themselves to United States laws."¹¹³

With the start of the Civil War, this outlaw power would shift. What was once a debate about slavery and state's rights became civil unrest and the "lawless ruffians" living in the backyards of law-abiding Union citizens became a community problem.¹¹⁴ The rhetoric of the Civil War transformed a decade-long land battle. Citizens and the state would band together to remove these people from their illegal homesteads. Landowners like Bailhache could not predict the Civil War coming, but they would be beneficiaries of the war. Aided by wartime rhetoric, the sheriff's calls for citizen help would be answered in droves, and the tide quickly turned.¹¹⁵

After the Start of the Civil War

Surrounded by 60 armed men and women, Skaggs stood on the 160-acre settlement—the maximum acreage allowed under the Preemption Act—and delivered his message to the sheriff, "I warn you, Sheriff, if you or your men come through our gate, we will fire."¹¹⁶ Sonoma County Sheriff Bowles, called for support from Sonoma County citizens in delivering writs of restitution to the squatters on behalf of Josephine Bailhache, and he asked for the men to be "armed and equipped as the law directs."¹¹⁷ Three hundred men from Petaluma, Santa Rosa, and surrounding cities answered the call, and on June 12, 1862, in the early morning hours, the sheriff and these "patriots" marched to the Sotoyome Rancho.¹¹⁸ Skaggs's harsh warning met the sheriff and his men at the gate of the squatter's settlement. Sheriff Bowles decided it was best to turn the men around and avoid bloodshed. It was a victory for the squatters, but a temporary one.

Little more than a year earlier, on April 12, 1861, Confederate troops had opened fired on Fort Sumter starting the Civil War; shortly thereafter, states began seceding from the Union. The events of April 12 would have implications in northern California land disputes. What was once before a battle between landowners and squatters was now a battle between Union citizens and Southern rebels. By this time, it was evident, through voting records and sensationalized newspaper publications that Sonoma County and particularly northern Sonoma County was home to Southern Democratic, secessionist sympathizers.¹¹⁹

For the sheriff this shift in rhetoric made it easier to summon armed citizens from surrounding Union cities. In little time, 300 men answered the sheriff's call. The reason for such a quick

¹¹² "Letter From Washoe," *Sacramento Daily Union*, Jan. 21, 1861, 2.

¹¹³ "Healdsburg Outrages," *Daily Alta California*, 2.

¹¹⁴ "Law and Order Pensions," *Sacramento Daily Union*, Apr. 15, 1858, 2.

¹¹⁵ "Settler's Troubles Settled," *Sacramento Daily Union*, Oct. 4, 1862, 2.

¹¹⁶ "Healdsburg Settlers' Difficulties," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ "Sanitary Fair," *Daily Alta California*, 2.

response to the squatters after years of citizen dormancy was clear. With the onset of Civil War, the Sotoyome Rancho squatters became lawless anti-Unionists and Southern Democratic secessionists.

One of the best determinants of whether a city or county supported secession was if they voted for Southern Democratic candidates.¹²⁰ After the events on April 12, in many cases, Southern Democratic and Breckinridge supporters were assumed to be secessionist supporters.¹²¹ Thanks to this newspaper rhetoric, energized patriotism replaced indifference. Following the failure to remove C. C. Clark from the grant, San Francisco's *Daily Evening Bulletin* said the governor would "send a commissioner to reason [the squatters] out of their absurd stand against the whole state."¹²² The commissioner would deliver the squatters a message of "secession abridged."¹²³ The press now painted a darker image of sinister Confederate squatters, "Unwilling to trust themselves to the United States laws."¹²⁴

A citizen "well acquainted with the nature of the cause" of the Squatter Wars sent a letter to the *Sacramento Daily Union*.¹²⁵ Writing to the editors of the *Daily Union*, he questioned the motives of squatters fighting to stay on the Fitch grant. He noted the squatters' aggression toward a government surveyor and the disputed owners of the land seem to occur only around election times and insisted this was no coincidence.¹²⁶ He said corrupt Southern Democrats, in an attempt to tarnish the Union name in Sonoma County, created the conflicts.¹²⁷ Referring to the June 12, 1862 events, he wrote, "It is the disloyal party [Southern Democrats] in Sonoma County who have brought about this squatter demonstration at Healdsburg. . . . The same party is now trying to practice a political fraud on Union democrats."¹²⁸

He said the squatters may be successful in using their ploy of land-rights battles to shame the Union cause, and he concluded his letter saying, "I hope the settlers in Sonoma [County] are wide awake," and that they will "stand by the flag of their fathers," in the next election.¹²⁹ It is interesting that the citizen used the term "wide awake." During the 1860 presidential election, the Wide Awakes—a paramilitary organization—aligned themselves with the Republican Party.¹³⁰ The organization formed to "defend his [the Republican candidate's] inauguration from the violent slave power" of the South.¹³¹ The citizen's rhetoric may have been an attempt to evoke a Wide Awake, paramilitary sentiment in Sonoma County.

Perhaps the best summation of the citizens' attitude was the first-hand account of one of the sheriff's 300 patriots tasked with the job of removing the squatters.¹³² "Had one of the rebel bombshells thrown from New Orleans landed in our midst, and exploded, it could not have created a greater sensation and excitement than did the summons." For Union citizens, the summons

¹²⁰ Michael Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*, 203.

¹²¹ "Sanitary Fair," *Daily Alta California*, 2.

¹²² "Settlers' Trouble in Sonoma County." *Daily Evening Bulletin*, June 17, 1862, 2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ "Healdsburg Outrages," *Daily Alta California*, 2.

¹²⁵ "Squatter Riots in Sonoma," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Reynolds Nelson Scott, and Sheriff Carols, *A People at War: Civilians and Soldiers in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³² "Later from the Squatter War," *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

to assist the sheriff at removing the squatters was as close as many would get to the Civil War and defending the Union.

The letter notes the citizens were hurrying to make “the necessary preparations for the defence [sic] of their country’s rights—that country for whose weal they would shed the last drop of their blood.” These citizens armed themselves against a purported thousand squatters. As the letter notes, instead of 1,000 armed squatters, it was closer to 60 armed men and women, but still the sheriff and his “posse” retreated nearly immediately.¹³³ For Sonoma County citizens the threat of a Civil War outbreak in their community was real, and apparently the threat was real enough for California’s government as well.

Following this incident, Governor Stanford ordered military support for the removal of the squatters. On September 22, 1862, two Union militia home guards, the Petaluma Guards and the Emmitt Rifles, with the sheriff and 35 citizens set out to remove the squatters.¹³⁴ Beside a few slaps from squatter women to the citizens and militias, the writs of restitution were executed peacefully.¹³⁵ Bailhache’s writs were delivered to Skaggs and his band of squatters, and they all left peacefully.¹³⁶ Perhaps tired of resisting and realizing the state, as well as local landowners, was against them, they decided it was better to leave peacefully than fight. After this event, the papers proclaimed the Squatter War officially ended.¹³⁷

For the rest of the Sotoyome Rancho squatters, Dr. Frisbie hired L. A. Norton, a Mexican-American War veteran—known for tearing down Rebel flags in Sonoma—to remove them.¹³⁸ After it was locally proclaimed that “no recruits to join the Federal army would ever live to cross Russian River,” Norton secretly trained “Union forces, and was at all times ready to meet the threatened outbreak” from the remaining squatters.¹³⁹ The papers were basically correct in their assertion that the Squatter War had ended with “Captain” Skaggs and his squatters being removed from Bailhache’s land. However, over the next few years, small outbreaks of violence did occur. For instance, when Norton attempted to remove a small group of squatters with his Union force, they were fired upon from the brush, and one of Norton’s men was fatally injured.¹⁴⁰

In the fall of 1864, Norton successful removed the final squatter from the Sotoyome Rancho, thus ending 13 years of squatter occupation.¹⁴¹ One of the most telling aspects to the range of the Squatter Wars was Norton’s next career. Following his stint as an evictor, Norton was elected as colonel of the Union’s Illinois Regiment.¹⁴² At the meeting for his election the speaker noted, “when it was said that no Union flag should ever float in Healdsburg, [Norton] went immediately to Petaluma, purchased one, placed it on the top of his carriage, carried it through the country to Healdsburg, and nailed it to his balcony, where it continued to wave.”¹⁴³ The speaker further noted, “the northern part of Sonoma County is much indebted to the firmness and energy of the

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ For the militia involvement see: “Settler’s Troubles Settled,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2. For the citizen involvement see: “The Healdsburg Settler Troubles,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 26, 1862, 1.

¹³⁵ “Settler’s Troubles Settled,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

¹³⁶ “Ordered Out,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, Sept. 22, 1862, 4.

¹³⁷ “Settler’s Troubles Settled,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

¹³⁸ L. A. Norton, *Life and Adventures of Col. L. A. Norton*, 358.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 358.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

colonel in keeping down an outbreak, as that portion of the county boasted a strong secession element.”¹⁴⁴ Norton was able to parlay his role of removing the “secessionist” squatters to a role as colonel of a Union outfit. Secessionists or not, the outbreak of the Civil War, ensured these southern squatters would be perceived as such, and the response by the citizens, the sheriff, and the state presume that they believed the perception as well.

The Rhetoric of the War in Solano County

The rhetoric used to mobilize popular will against squatters would be deployed outside of Healdsburg. Dr. Frisbie, who owned a part of the Sotoyome Rancho, was also the owner of a grant on the Suscol Ranch in Solano County, 60 miles to the southeast of Healdsburg. Squatters had illegally settled on his land there too. Politically and environmentally, Solano County was similar to Sonoma County. In the 1860 presidential election, Breckinridge narrowly won Solano County.¹⁴⁵ Of the 2,322 votes cast there, only 66 votes separated Breckinridge from Lincoln.¹⁴⁶ Unlike Sonoma County, however, in the 1861 gubernatorial election the Southern Democratic candidate McConnell only took 27 percent of Solano’s votes.

In 1860, Solano mirrored Sonoma in its agricultural and rural makeup as well. Solano County averaged the typical pro-Breckinridge county citizens-to-farms ratio with 23 citizens per farm; however, the Civil War surely affected the voting of Solano County more so than Sonoma County, for Vallejo, where Frisbie’s Suscol Ranch was located, was home to Mare Island, a Union Naval shipyard. Opening in 1854, Mare Island could have been enough to secure a Stanford and Union vote during war times; and perhaps due to the sharp divisiveness facilitated by the rural environment on one side and the Naval Yard on the other, the rhetoric of the war was even more sensationalized in Vallejo.

In an article headlined, “Doings of the Suscol Ranch Settlers—Are Secessions to Be Their Leaders?” the press was again questioning if the squatters in a divided county had anti-Union, secessionist proclivities. This prompted an immediate response by the Suscol Ranch squatter leader, William Aspenall who questioned the Secessionist label:

It appears that all persons who dare to exercise the right of an American freeman, in locating land, are in the same category as myself, although they never voted a Democratic ticket in their lives. I am no Republican nor Secessionist, but a Union-loving, law-abiding citizen.¹⁴⁷

Aspenall’s words fell on deaf ears. Two weeks later, an article in the same paper incriminated his band of squatters as Confederate secessionists.¹⁴⁸ A first-hand witness stated he heard the Suscol Ranch “Rebels” after a squatter’s meeting “hurrah for Jeff Davis.”¹⁴⁹ So concerned was this citizen for his neighbors’ and his own safety that he asked for the “young men of [Solano] to enlist and organize a Home Guard, under the glorious old flag of our county, whose stars are beacon lights to our friends, and whose stripes are terror to our foes.” Soon enough, the author’s hopes would be fulfilled.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ “California State Elections,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ “Suscol Ranch Land Troubles,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*. May 13, 1862, 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

As the case was in Healdsburg, the sheriff called on citizens to help remove the squatters. Along with the local Union militia the Vallejo Rifle Company, 160 men answered the sheriff's call.¹⁵⁰ Previous attempts to deliver writs of restitution were futile, so the sheriff hoped to gather enough men to intimidate the squatters into leaving peacefully.¹⁵¹ The men marched from Vallejo to the Suscol Ranch and assisted in delivering the writs. The sheriff's plan worked. Seeing the large group of armed men, the squatters agreed to leave. Once again the county "patriots" won, and newspaper rhetoric was successful in closing the distance of the Civil War to northern California's backyards.

It could be the case that Dr. Frisbie, a well-regarded citizen, was able to influence the papers to use the war as a rhetorical tool to curry citizen favor during a divisive time. If this is true, it begs the question as to why the *Daily Evening Bulletin* would publish Aspenall's response to the secessionist label. Perhaps newspapers simply labeled these outside-the-law citizens of Southern Democratic counties as secessionists to create interesting local stories. Whatever editors' motives, citizens of these divided counties seemed to believe what they read and, concerned about the threat of violence and war, they were more than willing to assist in removing them.

In northern California at this time, citizens were still rising in arms against the old perceived threat to their way of life—Native Americans.¹⁵² With local Union papers sensationalizing local disputes and perhaps looking to localize national stories, they presented southern squatters as lawless, dangerous, anti-union Confederates, and the citizens of these counties were willing to answer the call to remove them. The war rhetoric made citizens fear that there were actual Confederate secessionists in their backyards. Perhaps anxious because of California's distance, politically and geographically, from the war spurred the response of citizens under the pretense of Union patriotism to defend their country and flag. This compounded with the excitement of violence that California was built on may help explain the citizen response. This keenness for violence can be best summed up by a Petaluma citizen's letter to the editor of the *Daily Alta California*: "A posse from forty to fifty men . . . left here at 2 o'clock this morning, summoned by the Sheriff to proceed to Healdsburg, to assist in disposing the squatters there. An exciting time is to be expected."¹⁵³

Conclusion

Today, rolling rows of vineyards and estates lay where squatter shacks once stood. There are no markers, plaques, or statues on the old Sotoyome Rancho to commemorate the land's captivating past. Situated 70 miles northwest of San Francisco, this small wine country town attracts thousands of tourists a year, but the land that they come to see has a hidden past. Much like northern California's own Civil War history, the history of Healdsburg's tumultuous past is relatively unknown or understated. Healdsburg and Vallejo land disputes are forgotten flashpoints in California's Civil War. The response by citizens and the calls for home militias demonstrate the threat of the war was prevalent in the minds of northern California residents, even a thousand miles removed from Gettysburg, Roanoke Island, and the Shenandoah Valley.

The rural makeup of the land contributed to a tense environment in northern California's Southern Democrat held counties. The lower a county's citizen-to-farm ratio the more likely they

¹⁵⁰ "Excitement on the Suscol Ranch," *Daily Evening Bulletin*. Dec. 23, 1862, 1.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *The Placer Herald*, Jan. 15, 1859, 2.

¹⁵³ "Squatter Troubles at Healdsburg," *Daily Alta California*, July 16, 1862, 1.

were to vote for Breckinridge. Land shaped the political landscape. Counties and cities with large numbers of farms, and farms with large acreages, typically voted for candidates in favor of slavery. These counties were still in the Union majority northern California, and this closed space of ideologies in northern California contributed to a sharp tension amongst Republican and Southern Democratic voters and rural and urban areas, and the rhetoric of the war was enough to spark the interest of Union supporting citizen to rise in arms against squatters in these divided counties.

Today, Commuting to and from the Napa Valley, thousands of residents and tourists pass by the Suscol Ranch to go home or visit the Healdsburg wineries, without ever realizing the role a war over 150 years ago and thousands of miles away played in the land's history. Downtown Healdsburg is laced with brick walkways, locally owned eateries, and a more than welcoming small-town feel, but just a few miles outside of downtown Healdsburg lays the Sotoyome Rancho, its tumultuous past, and Healdsburg's forgotten entry into the Civil War. Colonels earned their ranks on the Sotoyome Rancho, and some even lost their lives. It was not the mortars that left their mark on the land there, but it was the rhetoric of a divisive time in American history that played the largest part in northern California's Civil War history—even if it is northern California's forgotten past. The history of land is much like the land itself; years of growth and changing landscapes can mask what is underneath and what has already been here; however, if you dig deep enough, the earlier grains and layers of yesteryear are there.

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