

Blazing the Overland Trails

Part 2:

Gen. Kearney blazes a trail

The Mormon Battalion trail

The "Brewsterites" in Socorro

Originally published in *El Defensor Chieftain* newspaper, Socorro, NM Saturday, March 6, 2010.

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Mexican-American War

In the early months of 1846, Brigham Young began leading thousands of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also called Mormons, from Illinois to Utah. Their request for an Army escort for safe travel was denied.

On April 25 of that same year, and 1,000 miles away, a large Mexican force crossed the Rio Grande, entered Texas near Corpus Christi, killed 11 American soldiers and captured another 47. American blood shed on American soil justified Congress to declare war against Mexico on May 13.

These two unrelated events soon crossed paths to write an interesting chapter of Southwest history.

When President James Polk called for volunteers for

the Mexican-American war, about 100,000 men stepped forward. This included Mormons, which was met with opposition in Washington, D.C. due to the issue of polygamy. Congressmen argued, "Which of the wives would receive the pay or disability benefits?" It was a lame argument since few Mormons practiced polygamy. The real reason was the government was dodging the issue on why they refused to escort the Mormons across the Great Plains.

Brigham Young sent church leaders to negotiate with the government and encouraged the Latter-day Saints to enlist as "the patriotic thing to do." After all, Mormons were also Americans, and Brigham Young believed that Mormon participation in the war effort would prove their loyalty to the United States and go a long ways towards healing past wounds. This proved to be very true.

The original plan was for the Mormon men to join Gen. Stephen Watt Kearney's Army at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas for the march to New Mexico and California. While waiting for the decision to accept Mormons into the Army, Kearney grew anxious and departed Fort

The Trail Blazers –



Photos courtesy Library of Congress and National Park Service

(1) Gen. Stephen Kearney led the "Army of the West" to blaze the first trail from Santa Fe to California in 1846; (2) Gen. Philip Cooke led the Mormon Battalion 1846-47, founding "Cooke's Wagon Road" to California; (3) Christopher "Kit" Carson served as a trail guide for explorer John Fremont, Gen. Kearney, and others; (4) Maj. William Emory accompanied Gen. Kearney and the first to map the west for the U.S., and later mapped New Mexico; (5) John Butterfield laid out the Butterfield Overland Stage trail from St. Louis, MO to San Francisco, California in 1857.

Leavenworth on June 30, 1846. The very next day, the formation of the Mormon Battalion was authorized.

On July 16, 543 Mormon men were enlisted at Council Bluffs, Iowa for a one-year term. The battalion also included 33 women, mostly wives of the soldiers, and 51 children. The Mormon Battalion is the only religious unit ever to serve in the U.S. military, commanded by Captain James Allen, a non-Mormon.

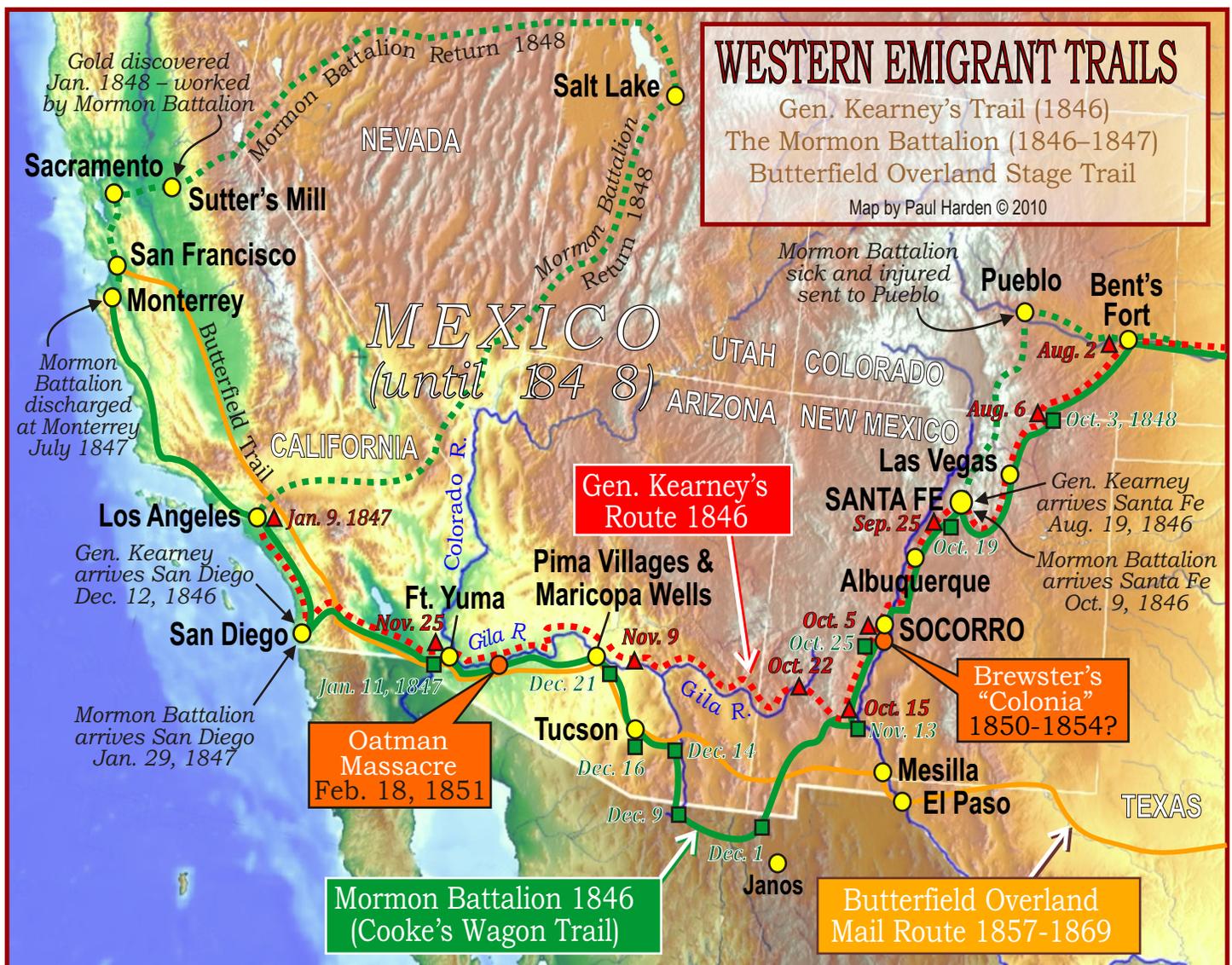
The men marched to Fort Leavenworth in late July. Arriving on August 1, they found Gen. Kearney and his Army of the West were long gone. The battalion was issued rifles, ammunition, and provisions. Like most volunteers, they wore their own clothing rather than uniforms, taking instead the \$42 clothing allowance to send to their families.

President Polk orchestrated a three-prong war against Mexico. Gen. Zachary Taylor was sent to the disputed land along the Rio Grande while Gen. Winfield Scott

was sent to Mexico City. The United States had no intention of claiming the land of Mexico, invading it merely to occupy Mexican forces while the third-prong of his plan took place.

And, the third-prong, was ordering Gen. Kearney and the Mormon Battalion to Santa Fe. They were tasked with claiming New Mexico and California as United States land from Mexico, and organize territorial governments.

These two armies, traveling down the Rio Grande about a month apart, are important to New Mexico history for two reasons. First, leaving the river by present day Hatch, they blazed the first wagon trail to California, used by immigrants for years afterwards. Secondly, officers and men of these units kept journals of their travels describing life along the Rio Grande, including the Socorro area. These are among the few descriptions we have of travel and life along El Camino Real during pre-Territorial New Mexico.



General Kearney's Trail

Gen. Kearney, and 1,800 men of his "Army of the West," traveled 775 miles along the Santa Fe Trail, over Raton Pass, and entered the Mexican capitol city of Santa Fe on August 18. Governor Manuel Armijo surrendered the city to the U.S. without firing a shot to spare the lives of the Mexican people. Kearney remained at Santa Fe for about a month to assure a peaceful transition to a civil territorial government, and guarantee land ownerships to all New Mexicans.

Kearney split-up his command sending 1,000 men south to join the war in Mexico. The remainder of his First Dragoons commenced the great march to California with numerous wagons of baggage and provisions. The horses were taken away from the men – given Mexican burros instead, as they were better suited for the dry desert and mountain terrain that lay ahead.

Kearney's dragoons departed Santa Fe on September 25, 1846 and traveled south along the Rio Grande. Reaching La Joya on October 2, the men noted that the bottom of the Rio Grande was a mile and a half in width and the river "is rapid and regular and can be tapped at any point" for irrigation. The soldiers wrote of the high state of cultivation in the area and were well pleased at the number of catfish from the Rio Grande they feasted on that evening.

The following day, the command entered Polvadera, where they learned of an attack on the village the



Courtesy National Archives
Many explorers used the burro to blaze the trails for their endurance through the desert and sure-footedness in the mountains. The Mexican burro was the unsung hero of the emigrant trails, able to carry 600 pounds without complaint.

Distances from Independence Mo. to Pacific.		
To Santa Fe	775 miles.	775 ms.
Rio Grande left	258 "	1033 "
Tucson	363 "	1396 "
Pino Villages	81 "	1477 "
Crossing of Colorado	205 "	1682 "
First Wells	13 "	1695 "
2 nd Wells	23 "	1718 "
3 rd Wells	25 "	1743 "
Cariza (Stream)	28 "	1771 "
1 st Settlements	47 "	1818 "
San Diego	52 "	1870 "

Gen. Cooke's mileage chart from his report "Conquest of New Mexico" showing distances from Independence, MO to San Diego, California – being 1,870 miles.

previous day by Navajos. Fortunately, no one was killed, but they lost a great number of their stock. The people of Polvadera, evidently trying to respect the new U.S. government, asked if they had permission to pursue the thieves. Kearney's aide recorded, "The general here gave permission to the people living on the Rio Abarjo [sic, Rio Abajo] to march against the Navajos in retaliation for the many outrages they had received at their hands." Well, that was settled

The column next marched through Lemitar and Socorro. This was the first visit of the American Army this far south along the Rio Grande. Socorroans reportedly "gazed with astonishment and admiration upon an army passing orderly and silently through the country, abstaining from acts of violence and outrage, as though it were in the country of an ally." Apparently, Socorroans have always been easy to impress.

Camping three miles south of Socorro, the column was met by Lt. Christopher "Kit" Carson and a party of 15 men. They were traveling to Washington D.C. to inform President Polk that the U.S. Navy and the Marines in California, under the command of Commodore Robert Stockton, had taken Monterrey and San Diego. Kearney told Carson, "Lieutenant, you have just passed over the country we intend to traverse,

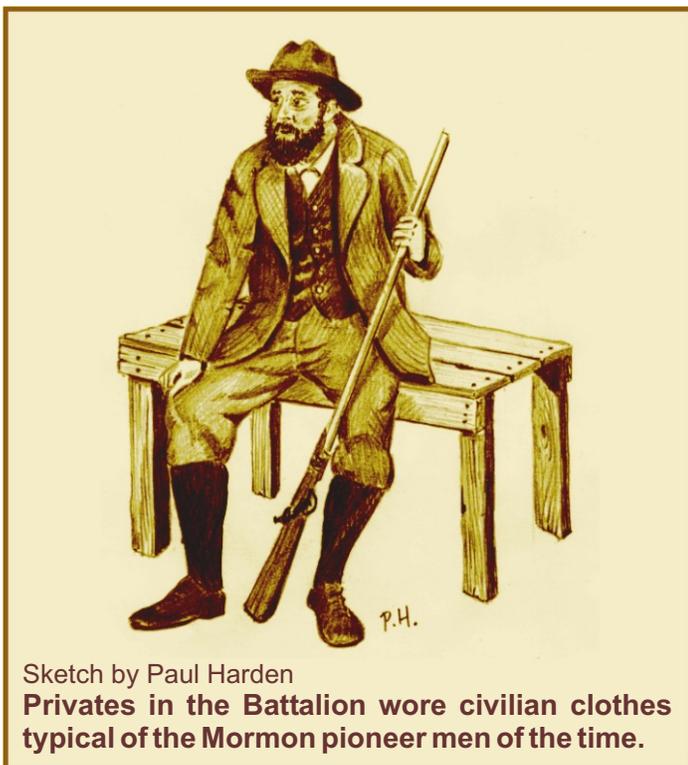
and you are well acquainted with; we want you to go back with us as our guide.” Carson finally agreed, the dispatches and mail were carried to the President by the rest of his men.

This suggests that much of the fame earned by Gen. Kearney in blazing the first trail from New Mexico to California is due largely to New Mexico's own Kit Carson.

Learning California was under U.S. control, Kearney reduced his column to about 100 men to complete the march to the Pacific. That evening in camp, they were approached by a band of Apache, four of whom volunteered to also serve as guides.

Marching through Luis Lopez and San Antonio, “the last Mexican town on the Rio Del Norte,” they continued south. On October 15, they left the river north of present day Hatch to begin their westward trek, blazing the trail to California through uncharted territory. The route they blazed was passable, but as they entered the mountains, they abandoned their wagons near Cooke's Peak and continued on their burros. They crossed the Mimbres River, continued west until finding the Gila River near today's border with Arizona. See the map accompanying this article.

They followed the Gila River to Fort Yuma, crossed the Colorado River on November 25, two months after leaving Santa Fe. Nearly three weeks later, they entered San Diego and joined forces with Naval Commodore

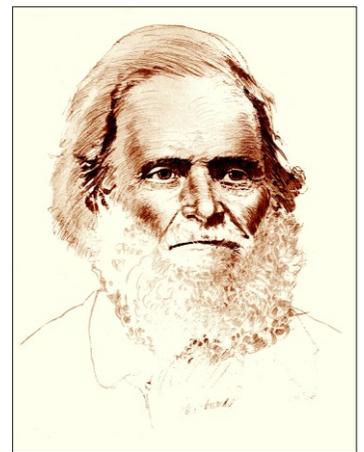


Stockton. In January, 1847, the combined forces won the battles of San Gabriel and La Mesa to raise the American flag over Los Angeles.

The Mormon Battalion

The Mormon Battalion reached Santa Fe on October 9, about six weeks after Gen. Kearney. Their arrival was honored with a 100-gun salute. Command of the battalion was transferred to Lt. Col. Philip Cooke. With many in the battalion exhausted from the trip thus far, Cooke ordered those sick, and all women and children, to the post at Pueblo, Colorado for the winter. Still, some of the wives elected to remain with their husbands. On October 19, the battalion left for California.

Upon reaching Socorro, Pvt. George Taggart wrote in his diary, “Their buildings are all made of Egyptian bricks or mud. The people were fond of trading and were quite friendly.” He made note of how the local Mexican men were curious of their fair-skinned wives, proving that some of the women were still with the brigade, and that Socorro men have a long history of admiring beautiful women.



Mormon Battalion website
Pvt. George Taggart, Co. B, kept a journal of his travels along the Rio Grande and onward to California.

Pvt. William Coray was more descriptive, writing, “Oct. 24, marched 15 miles. Passed a town where the old governor of N.M. lived [Lemitar]. The Spaniards brought us apples, grapes, corn & wine for sale. They would cry out Mericarry Mohair Cairy Munsina?” [Marcase mujer quiera manzana?].

The battalion followed Kearney's trail to where it started through the mountains. They even found the wagons left by Kearney. Remembering their job, like Kearney, was to establish a wagon road to California, they decided to find a less mountainous route suitable for wagons. After negotiating the peak west of Hatch, which they named “Cooke's Peak” in honor of their commander, they struck off in the southwesterly direction following smoother terrain through the bootheel of New Mexico. Entering present day Mexico, they turned west, then followed the San Pedro River north to enter Tucson. They continued northwest

around Picacho Peak to the Pima Villages and Maricopa Wells, present day Phoenix. From there, they followed Kearney's trail along the Gila River to Fort Yuma and into California. They arrived at San Diego on January 29, 1847, about a month after Gen. Kearney.

This longer, though less rigorous trail of the Mormon Battalion, became the southern immigrant trail, used for years by those traveling through New Mexico to California. In 1857, the Butterfield Overland Stage Company adopted much of this route for their famous stage and mail line to California. They blazed a new section of trail from Mesilla to Tucson to avoid entering Mexico. Soon, the railroad followed the same path. Towns, such as Deming, Lordsburg and San Simon sprang up along this section of the trail. Today, Interstate 10 closely follows the route of the Butterfield and Mormon Battalion trails.

The men of the Mormon Battalion were discharged from military service in Monterrey, California in July 1847. The early winter snows in the mountains kept much of the battalion in California waiting for spring. Many went to Sacramento and were at Sutter's Mill when gold was discovered in January 1848. It was these men of the Mormon Battalion that first panned the placer gold out of American Creek that started the famed California gold rush. As a result, many of these men arrived in Salt Lake with money in their pockets.

Upon their discharge, many of the men had quite a challenge in front of them. Where were their families? Remember, the battalion was formed as the Mormons began their trek to Utah. By 1848, over 5,000 Mormons were on the trail from Illinois to Salt Lake. Over the next two years, these discharged soldiers traveled the trails to Salt Lake and across the Great Plains in search of their families. Some were found at Salt Lake; many were not.

For example, Pvt. Levi McCullough arrived in Utah in late 1847 to learn his wife had died on the trail in July. After a two-year search, he finally found his children in Nebraska.

Pvt. Azariah Smith panned gold at Sutter's Mill over the winter and arrived in Salt Lake in September 1848. With \$500 of gold money and finding his family in Utah, he was one of the lucky ones.

Kearney's army and the Mormon Battalion entered New Mexico fully expecting to engage the enemy, the Mexican army. Instead, they raised the American flag from Santa Fe to California with little resistance. The



Courtesy Mormon Battalion website

Brothers Meltiar Hatch (left) and Orin Hatch were privates in the Mormon Battalion, Company C. Orin was only 16 years old when he and his brother camped at Socorro on October 25, 1846. Melvin Hatch, of Socorro, is a distant relative of the brothers.

Mexican Army was virtually no where to be seen and the local people seemed to welcome their presence. With no major battles to report, their successful campaign of claiming New Mexico, Arizona and California as U.S. Territories has gone largely unnoticed.

The Brewsterites

In 1836, like Joseph Smith, a young man named James Colin Brewster claimed to have received prophetic messages from the angel Moroni. Smith ordained the young man a "prophet and a seer."

In 1841, Brewster produced translations he claimed were the missing books of Esdras (Ezra in some bible versions). Smith rebuked Brewster for the doubtful translations and not to discuss the contents further. Instead, Brewster published a book of the translations and promptly found himself dis-fellowshipped from the church.

Brewster began to criticize Smith for leading the church away from the original founding and being a false prophet. Calling the leader of the church an apostate to the faith was not a healthy thing to do. Brewster found himself permanently excommunicated from the LDS church by Joseph Smith himself.

Brewster was 17-years old when Joseph Smith was killed in 1844. Many splinter groups were formed during this time. One of these was by former elder Hazen Aldrich who believed Brewster was a true prophet. They formed the Church of Christ, which quickly became known as the "Brewsterites."

Brewster began publishing his prophecies in a publication called the Olive Branch. He claimed the angel Moroni instructed him to take the Mormon people to the land of "Basham" on the river "Amli," which Brewster interpreted as being the Rio Grande River near Socorro. Now, you can see where this story is going.

It must be stressed that the Brewsterites had no connection with the established LDS church. Brewster, and most of his followers, had been excommunicated years before and considered apostates by the true LDS church.

Brewsterites Head to New Mexico

The Brewsterites departed Missouri on August 5, 1850 with Jackson Goodale selected as captain. The expedition consisted of 90 people representing 17 different families, 27 wagons, 200 head of cattle, and some horses for the "land of their inheritance" – New Mexico. James Brewster, now 24-years-old, traveled with his parents and five brothers and sisters.

Traveling along the Santa Fe trail, they arrived in Las Vegas about October 9. The party was already in a high level of strife as they had some sort of "falling out" and

the company split into two parts. One company, called the Oatman party, consisted of the Oatman, Wilder, Kelley and Mateer families, a total of 26 people. They left for California while the rest of the Brewsterites continued on to Socorro.

Earlier prophecies of Brewster claimed Zion was at the confluence of the Gila and Colorado Rivers; later he claimed California. Now it was Socorro. It can only be guessed that this constantly changing prophecy of their destination caused the split within the Brewsterites.

Enroute to Santa Fe, Brewster removed Goodale as captain of the company for unknown reasons, other than for being "guilty of transgression against God." Goodale and his family continued to travel with the Brewster party.

Brewster sent a letter home indicating they had arrived in Socorro in late December. Research for this article proves this to be true, as the Brewsterites were counted in Socorro on December 31 for the 1850 census. A copy of the census sheet is shown below that lists Zephaniah Brewster, James Brewster's father, registered as being 53 years old and a carpenter as an occupation. James registered as "J. Colin Brewster," age 24, and listed his

640

SCHEDULE I.—Free Inhabitants in the Town of Socorro, in the County of Albuquerque State of New Mexico; enumerated by me, on the 31st day of Decr, 1850. John P. Tilling Ass't. Marshal.

Dwellings enumerated in the order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The Name of every Person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1850, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate owned.	PLACE OF BIRTH. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.			
			Age.	Sex.	Color.				10	11	12	13
1897	1900	Jackson Goodale	34	m		Blacksmith		N.Y.				
		Maria Goodale	26	f				Ind.				
		Orrille Goodale	10	m				Ind.				
		Edgar Goodale	4	m				Ind.				
		Chauncey Goodale	2	m				Ind.				
1893	1906	Zephaniah Brewster	53	m		Carpenter		N.Y.				
		James Brewster	40	f				N.Y.				
1858	1900	J. Colin Brewster	24	m		Mormon Prophet		N.Y.				
		Amesbury Brewster	21	m		Cooper		N.Y.				
		Samuel Brewster	18	m		Wood Carver		Ohio				
		Leitch Brewster	16	f				Ill.				
		Amarilla Brewster	11	f				Ill.				
		Abigail Brewster	1	f				Ill.				

Author's Collection

A portion of the 1850 Socorro census. The Brewsterites Goodale family is listed at the top followed by the Brewster family. The arrow shows the census for "J. Colin Brewster" listing his occupation as "Mormon Prophet."

occupation as “Mormon Prophet!” A rather egotistical stance under any circumstance.

Brewster wrote from Socorro on January 16, 1851, the letter published in the next issue of the Olive Branch magazine. It stated, “I informed the readers of the Olive Branch that it was our intention to make a settlement on this river, not far from Socorro. I am now happy to be able to inform them that we have purchased a large tract of land, and that the settlement has already been commenced.” Brewster named their new settlement Colonia, a name taken from the writings of Esdras. It appears Colonia was located near Luis Lopez.



Photo by Paul Harden

Dissident Mormon James Brewster claimed to have received angelic revelations that prophesied Luis Lopez was the site of Zion – God’s promised land. In 1851, he brought 65 followers to build their utopian society. It failed – but Luis Lopez is still going strong.

The Oatman Party

Separating from the Brewsterites at Las Vegas, the Oatman party traveled along El Camino Real. Writing letters home, they indicated they camped near La Joya in January 1851 before arriving in Socorro. They stayed in the area cutting and transporting hay “to a nearby Army post” to make \$50 per wagon load. In 1851, the only Army in the area was the post at Lemitar, and rented quarters in Socorro, where U.S. Dragoons were stationed until Forts Conrad and Craig were later built.

From Socorro, the party followed the trail blazed four years earlier by the Mormon Battalion. Now called “Cooke’s Wagon Road,” they arrived at Maricopa Wells on February 16th after being shadowed by Apache for a several days. They decided to remain at the Pima villages to await more wagons to continue their journey with the safety of greater numbers.

After three weeks, Royse “Roy” Oatman grew

impatient. In spite of pleas from the other families, Roy placed his pregnant wife, Mary, and their six children into their wagon and set out for Fort Yuma alone, 190 miles to the west. They never arrived.

On the evening of March 18, Apaches attacked their camp near the Gila River. All of the Oatmans were killed except for son, Lorenzo, who was left

for dead; two of the daughters, seven-year old Mary and 14-year old Olive, were taken by the Indians.

Lorenzo was found by an immigrant family and taken back to Maricopa Wells, where the incident was reported. A mass grave was dug for the Oatman family and covered with a monument of stones, which marks the massacre site to this day.

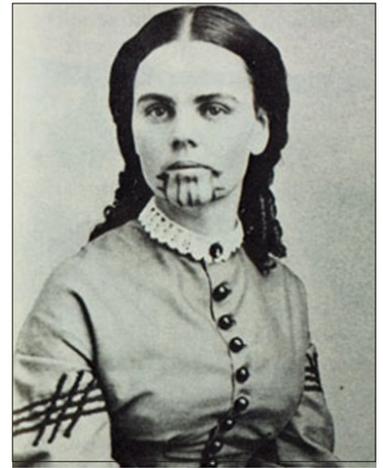
In 1856, the Army found Olive living with the Mojave Indians and negotiated her release. Olive told her story, telling how it was the Yavapai who kidnapped her, not the Apache; she was later sold to the Mojave. Her sister, Mary Ann, died after two years in captivity.

While a captive, Olive’s face was heavily tattooed marking her as a Yavapai slave. At first, she told her stories and displayed her grotesque tattoos on the lecture circuit before going into seclusion. Olive died in 1903 at 66 years of age, still bearing her tattoos.

The Oatman Massacre remains a major story in Arizona history; the remote grave site is visited by hundreds each year.

Brewster’s Colonia

Last year, I was contacted by Jon and Deborah Lawrence who brought this previously unknown story of the Brewsterites to my attention. They have researched the story for years and inquired if I knew where Brewster’s Colonia was located, or the disposition of any of the Brewsterites. What happened to most of them remains a mystery. After several months of research, I have been somewhat successful in locating the general area of Colonia, and tracked down a couple of their members. This new research has



National Park Service
Brewsterite Olive Oatman was tattooed as a slave by the Yavapai Indians of Arizona, disfiguring her for life.

since been published in "Desert Tracks," a publication of the Oregon-California Trails Association.

James Brewster left a few clues. In letters to the Olive Branch magazine, he described the location of Colonia as "in the valley of the Rio Grande seven miles south of Socorro Peak." This, and other clues, places the location of Colonia about a mile south of Luis Lopez. The map below shows the likely location of Colonia.



There are no records in the Socorro County Courthouse of a land sale to the Brewster party. In 1851, land sales were also recorded by the priest at San Miguel. Considering themselves Mormons, it is unlikely they had any dealings with the Catholic church.

I did, however, find marriage records in the Socorro County Clerks Office of a marriage between Orlando Barkley and Mary Conner, witnessed by William Conner, members of the Brewsterites. Then, I discovered another interesting link. Vincent St. Vrain was Socorro's first postmaster in 1851. The second postmater was William Conner, the Brewsterite who married off his daughter. He served from 1852-1855, and again from 1863-1866. Then, from 1866-1868, Orlando Barkley served as postmaster, none other than William Conner's son-in-law. Apparently, two of the Brewsterite families remained in Socorro for many years. Family records indicate Orlando Barkley, and wife Mary Conner, returned to Missouri in 1868.

Where was Colonia? A few clues . . .



Photos by Paul Harden

In 1850, the west bank of the Rio Grande at Luis Lopez was about where the railroad tracks are today. Colonia would have been west of the railroad tracks.



Estancia Luis Lopez was established in the early 1600s. In the 1850s, it was behind the trees shown here, south of the present townsite. Brewster referenced the location of Colonia to Socorro Peak, clearly seen from Luis Lopez.



Colonia may have been located near the suspected pueblo of Teypama. Only rocks scarcely shows the rooms of the pueblo today. What condition the pueblo was in during the 1850s is not known.

James Colin Brewster ended up in Illinois by 1855 and later served in the Civil War. He never did much with the rest of his life and there is no indication he continued to proclaim to be a prophet or held any further connection to the Mormon faith after returning to Illinois from New Mexico. He died in 1909, listing his religion as Protestant.

Perhaps Joseph Smith said it best, claiming “Brewster will make it to California only if someone carries him there.” There were many Mormon break-away splinter groups formed in the 1840-50s; like the Brewsterites, few survived more than a few years.

Little is known about the rest of the party. If one of your ancestors was a Socorro Brewsterite, please let the author know to learn more of this fascinating Socorro story.

Members of Brewster’s Colonia

The other members of the party, totalling at least 60 people, were the families of:

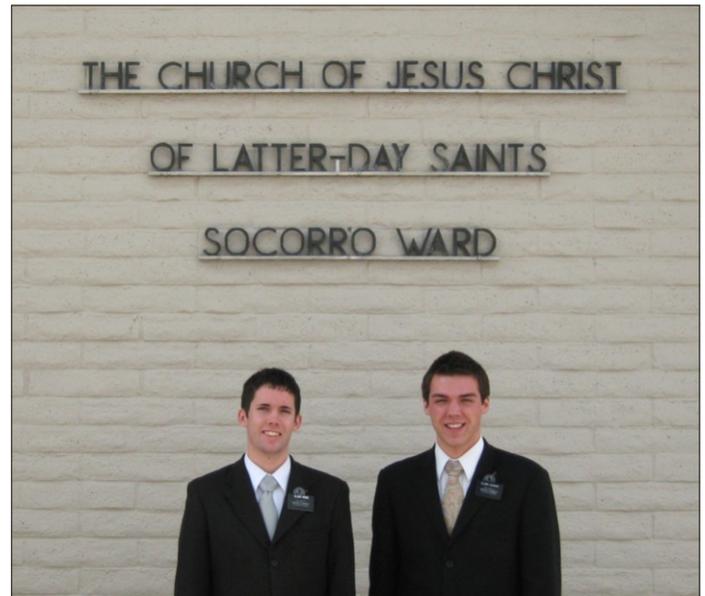
John Prior	Ira Thompson
John Crandall	William Lane
William Conner	John Richardson
J.B. Wheeling	A. Patching
O.F. Beckwith	Robert and John Kelly
Jackson Goodale	Nedelle Stewart

Socorro LDS Church

The Socorro Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (nothing to do with the Brewsterites) began in the 1940s with the arrival of Grace Ralston and family. She organized area Mormons and held services in private homes. In the 1950s, other members of the LDS church began to arrive, many joining the staff at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology.

At first, they began holding their Sunday services in the Knights of Pythias building on Manzanares Street. By the 1960s, they were holding meetings and worship services in rented space in the second floor of the Masonic Building, above today's Chamber of Commerce.

The congregation grew and began to raise money to build their own church in Socorro. It took many enchilada dinners and smart investments, but finally, in 1979, construction of their own church began on El Camino Drive. The first service was held in October 1980 with Alex Tyson the bishop, or presiding minister of the church. Bishops are unpaid volunteers, usually serving for five years and are assisted with church



Courtesy of Dr. Julie Rollins
The Socorro LDS Church was built in 1980. Shown here are missionaries Derick Cooper from Salem, Oregon and Jess Webb from Meridan, Idaho. Young men, 19 years of age and older, are encouraged to serve as missionaries for two years.

affairs by a body of counselors, elders, and visiting missionaries. Today, Layne Lewis is the current bishop of the growing Socorro LDS church.

Socorro’s Martha Hatch conveys that her husband, Melvin, is a distant relative of brothers Meltiar and Orin Hatch, who served in Company C of the Mormon Battalion. Hatch, Utah is named after Meltiar Hatch. The brothers worked the gold at Sutter's Mill during much of 1848 before moving to Salt Lake Valley, where they lived the rest of their lives.

While this article is not about the LDS church, the thousands of Mormon pioneers that blazed our trails, settled the West, served their country in war, and documented life along the Rio Grande over 150 years ago can not be ignored. They helped shape the New Mexico we know today.

Some of the references used in this article:

“Five Years a Dragoon” by Percival Lowe; “Whatever Happened to James Colin Brewster?” by Gary C. Vitale; “Rio Abajo” by Michael Marshall and Henry Walt; various issues of “Desert Tracks,” newsletter of the Oregon-California Trail Association, Southwest Chapter, articles written by Deborah and Jon Lawrence, and Gary Vitale; interviews with Martha Hatch, Alex Tyson, and Dan Boyd, and field work by the author.