Exchange at the Presidio

The Mormon Battalion Enters Tucson, 16 December 1846

El Presidio Plaza, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona

TRAIL SEGMENT
2. Main Command

TRAIL DATE
16 Dec 1846

DEDICATION DATE
14 Dec 1996

GPS COORDINATES
32° 13.373' N
110° 58.452' W
WGS84
Description
This bronze statue commemorates the day in 1846 when the Mormon Battalion passed through Tucson en route to Southern California during the Mexican-American War. Individuals depicted on the statue are Teodoro Ramirez, Christopher Layton, and Jefferson Hunt. There are six plaques embedded in the hexagonal base, three of which are short biographies of these individuals and with their contributions to this event. There are a number of factual errors in the other plaques:

- They incorrectly list LtC Cooke’s rank as Colonel.
- They completely ignore the role played by Jesse Little and Col. Thomas Kane in negotiating recruitment of the Battalion with President Polk.
- They erroneously refer to the Mormon Battalion as the “U.S. 101st Infantry (Mormon) Battalion.” There was no such unit! Just as companies were lettered A through F within their parent battalion, battalions were numbered from 1 to 5 within their parent regiments. Higher numbers have always been unique army-wide division designators. The “101st” unit designation belongs exclusively to the famous 101st Airborne Division. During the Mexican-American War, volunteer regiments were sequentially numbered and named after the state or territory from which they were drawn, i.e., the 1st New York Volunteer Regiment which replaced the Mormon Battalion in California. The Mormon Battalion was an extremely unique expatriate mercenary unit, being drawn exclusively from an unwanted religious group expelled from Illinois and emigrating OUT of the United States into what was then Mexican territory. The Mormons were a non-aligned wild card factor in the coming Mexican-American War, owing no allegiance to any state, territory, or even the United States. President Polk secured the allegiance of the Mormons by authorizing direct recruitment of the Battalion as an independent federal volunteer unit (it was NOT an Iowa territorial unit) attached directly to the Army of the West. It was simply named the “Mormon Battalion.”

Driving Directions
Take Congress Street Exit from I-10 in downtown Tucson, Arizona. Go east 0.2 miles and turn left at North Granada Avenue. Go one short block and turn right on West Alameda Street. The monument is 700 feet ahead on your right in El Presidio Plaza between the Pima County Courthouse on the east, the Pima County Government Center on the south, and the Tucson City Hall on the west.

Inscriptions
Plaque 1 of 6. South Plaque
Near this site on December 16-17, 1846, the U.S. 101st Infantry ("Mormon") Battalion under the command of Colonel Philip St. George Cooke peacefully occupied the Presidio San Agustín del Tucson.

Organized in Council Bluffs, Iowa, to reinforce General Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West during the Mexican-American War, the battalion marched 2,000 miles to San Diego, probably the longest march in the U.S. military history.

By the time the battalion reached Tucson, it was reduced in numbers and sorely in need of provisions. Despite the fact that this was Mexican territory, the opposing military forces avoided hostilities, agreeing instead to a peaceful barter.

Buttons, clothing, and other items were traded for Mexican grain and salt. The United States Flag, the first to fly over Tucson, was posted briefly on December 16, 1846.

The following day, the battalion continued its march northward toward the Gila River.

The figures depicted on this monument represent the "Mormon" Battalion and residents of Tucson. They personify the uncommon dedication, courage, and desire for peace that was demonstrated here. In addition, they symbolize the harmonious blend of cultures in what is now the City of Tucson.

Dedicated December 14, 1996 on the sesquicentennial of the event. This memorial sculpture is a gift to the people of Tucson from the TUCSON MORMON BATTALION MONUMENT FOUNDATION through the support of many individuals dedicated to preserving and honoring Arizona's historical heritage.

---


by Bill Kirchner, 30 January 2010

THE MORMON BATTALION

In July 1846, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints ("Mormons") were in desperate condition. With their prophet, Joseph Smith, martyred, they had fled their homes and farms in Illinois and were living in makeshift shelters along the banks of the Missouri River in Iowa.

Seeking escape from further prosecution, Mormon leader Brigham Young decided to resettle his people in the Far West. Early in 1846, he wrote to President
James Knox Polk requesting federal aid for their exodus.

Before a response could be received, the United States declared war on Mexico. In answer to Young's request, General Stephen W. Kearny was authorized to enlist “a few hundred Mormons” as part of his Army of the West.

Sensing the opportunity to move a large number of his people west with federal support, Brigham Young encouraged the Mormons to volunteer. On July 16, 1846, the five companies of the 101st United States Army Battalion were enrolled at Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Twenty-two officers and 474 enlisted men made up the first official roster, along with 37 women and 53 children, many of whom were totally unfit for a march of more than two thousand miles to their destination in San Diego, California. Three times during the journey disease, hardship, and near starvation forced battalion officers to send women and children along with sick enlisted men to a small Mormon settlement at Pueblo, Colorado to wait for Brigham Young and his people who were slowly making their way west from Council Bluffs to what is now Utah.

On December 16, 1846, with their numbers reduced to 350 men and four women, the Mormon Battalion reached Tucson. After resting and bartering for needed supplies the following day, this lean and hardened contingent continued north to the Gila River and thence to their destination. They arrived in San Diego on January 29, 1847.

Covering more than 2,000 miles of harsh, unforgiving territory, the march of the Mormon Battalion has been called the longest in United States Army history. The trail which they followed was instrumental in the settlement of what would later become southwestern United States.


Jefferson Hunt
1803 - 1879

Captain, Company “A” of the Mormon Battalion. While in Tucson, Hunt was in charge of negotiating the exchange of goods with the local citizenry. Days later on the trail, Hunt made friendly contacts with Pima Indians along the Gila River. This contact very likely aided the Mormons in their colonization of the Salt River Valley, where Phoenix is now located. Called by Brigham Young in 1851 to colonize San Bernardino, Hunt remained in California until 1857, when he finally returned to Utah.

Christopher Layton
1821 - 1898

Private, Company “C” of the Mormon Battalion.
Colonizer, statesman, and leader. Layton probably
was the one to post the colors, thus flying the first
American flag in Tucson. After the Battalion was
discharged in Los Angeles, Layton remained in
California until he rejoined his family in Utah in 1852.
Sent by LDS President John Taylor in 1883 to
colonize the Gila Valley, Layton helped settle the
towns of Pima, Thatcher, Graham, and Curtis.


Teodoro Ramirez
1791 - 1871

Merchant, rancher, scholar, teacher, and
peacemaker. Teodoro Ramirez was a leading citizen
of early Tucson. As the primary merchant serving
the Presidio, he was instrumental in the friendly
exchange of goods and supplies with the Mormon
Battalion. Fluent in many languages, he served,
when needed, as interpreter among the native
peoples, the church, and the government. Ramirez
was appointed the first U.S. Justice of the Peace in Arizona.


1846 - 1847
U.S. 101ST INFANTRY
"MORMON"
BATTALION ROUTE
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA
to
San Diego
Tucson, December 16, 1846

History
Erected 1996 by Tucson Mormon Battalion Monument Foundation.

Credits
See http://www.hmdb.org Marker.asp?Marker=73983 This page originally submitted on 14 January 2010, by Bill Kirchner of Tucson, Arizona. • Syd Whittle was the editor who published this page.