

The Tribune: A Pro-Southern Paper In A Pro-Northern County

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INTRODUCTION

The San Jose Tribune, a paper that lasted a relatively short time in regards to the history of the city, was definitely a pro-southern paper in a pro-northern county. Taking place at a tragic time in the history of this country, the Tribune is a great part of the history of San Jose and Santa Clara County because it showed the diversity of the Valley's residents in a period that has long been underplayed in the success of the Valley. In this report, I hope to give justice to the people of a bygone era who did much to help make the County what it is today. As the Tribune was supported by at least a few of the valley's 1850's to 1860's residents, this report will show a minority group's views as expressed in their newspaper.

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The Tribune

A Pro-Southern Newspaper in a Pro-Northern County

Most people's first impressions are that simply because California, as a state, remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War, there must not have been any Confederate sympathizers in the Santa Clara County. However, these first impressions are wrong. Although it is true that Santa Clara County as a whole was loyal to the Union, as is evident by the fact that it furnished to its best capacity both men and money to the Union cause,¹ there were many Confederate sympathizers in the valley who did their best to help the southern cause. There were many Confederate gangs in this spacious valley during the War years. One gang, under the command of Ralph Henry, alias Ingraham, and the Dick Baker gang of Confederates stole gold off of local coaches and horses from local coaches and horses from local ranches to help support the Confederate Army.² Generally though, the county was pro-Union. The numerous loyal citizens helped eagerly in the arrest or killing of the Confederates. Citizens who showed Confederate sympathy or gladness for the death of Lincoln after his assassination were quietly arrested and placed on Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay for a short imprisonment.³ The citizens of this county were not only just loyal as far as matters within their county went, but they also wanted to help fight the Con-

¹Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County, California (Los Angeles, 1922), p. 132.

²Sawyer, p. 133.

³Sawyer, p. 134.

federates by joining the Union Army. In fact, so many men joined that no draft were required, not only in the county but also the state, that no draft was ever needed in California. However, the majority of the volunteers saw little or no action as they were either retained in the state to ward off any possible invasion from the coast or were sent to Arizona or New Mexico. Despite this, so many flocked to enlist that a quota was set in this county as to how many could enlist. Not allowing this to hold them back, the adventurous young men would travel to San Francisco and enlist there or join the California Battalion. Without a doubt and despite the few Confederate uprisings by a small minority of the population, Santa Clara county was definitely pro-Union during the Civil War.

With such pro-Union sentiment, one would think that anybody with half of a mind would keep their pro-Confederate feelings to themselves. With the exception of the few gangs who were mostly from the South anyway, the people with southern tendencies did keep quiet...that is, except for a newspaper called the San Jose Tribune.

From first glance at the San Jose Tribune, a San Jose and Santa Clara Valley publication which was printed before and during the Civil War, one would say that it was just like the other two leading city papers, the San Jose Mercury and the San Jose Telegraph. All three of these writings included local happenings, stories and poetry from local citizens, national news, taxes, sales, and postal notices, and advertisements from the local businesses. To really determine the papers' true

feelings on the war issue, however, one must pry into the workings of each paper, digging deep into each related article, and comparing the results. By doing this, the San Jose Tribune's real disposition comes out. This process is necessary as there are absolutely no exact and specific books on this subject that I have found. By doing this, I came up with the proof needed to signal the Tribune as pro-Southern amidst its pro-Northern counterparts, the Mercury and the Telegraph, and the pro-Northern county. There are three major proofs in this paper. The first, proving that the county was generally pro-Northern, was exhibited earlier in this paper. The following two proofs relate to the popularity of the Tribune and then the comparing of the actual papers in relationship to the War.

The first proof relates to the popularity of the Tribune. For example, just how well did a pro-Southern newspaper do in a predominantly pro-Northern county? The answer to this is obvious in the extremely short life of the Tribune. The Tribune began as the Semi-Weekly Tribune of San Jose on July Fourth, 1854. At this time, the Tribune's relatively Southern point of view was not bothersome to the people of the county. This was a time when being called an abolitionist to most people would have been an insult. However, as the Civil War approached, the real trouble began. With the county and the other newspapers being mostly pro-Northern and the Tribune pro-Southern, there was a vigorous attack on the Tribune in which it valiantly retaliated and defended itself. This led to a time that was known as "a lusty period in San Jose journalism, the bitterest editor-

ial feud being between J.J. Owen and Murdoch."⁴ Owen, as the owner of the Tribune, defended the paper from the attacks from Murdoch's paper, the Mercury, until the sale of the Mercury in 1860. The Mercury remained a "staunch advocate of the Union cause in the conflict between the states,"⁵ despite the change in ownership. The fight continued until the Tribune ended its short life in 1863. It had been suspended nine months in 1862 and 1863 by the order of General Wright for its Southern tendencies.⁶ After it resumed operations on May 27th, it seemed to have lost its spark and sales spiraled until it was bought by B.F. Murdock, the previous owner of the Mercury, who renamed it the Weekly Patriot, now a pro-Northern paper, thus ending the feud between the rival newspapers in the valley on the Civil War question.

The final proof would be the comparing of the three leading newspapers to each other. There were so many articles that showed obviously the Tribune as pro-Southern, but I have limited space in which to comment on them, so I chose the ones that were most clear, understandable, and best for this paper.

Before the War began, the Tribune spoke out beligerently against the personal liberty laws of the North, calling them obnoxious and saying that they made stealing legal in the Northern states.⁷

⁴William F. James and George H. McMurry, History of San Jose, California (San Jose, 1933), p. 93.

⁵Edwin A. Beilharz, San Jose-California's First City (San Jose, 1980), pg. 117.

⁶Frederic Hall, History of San Jose and Surroundings (San Francisco, 1871), p. 180.

⁷San Jose Tribune, January 25, 1861, p. 1. (microfilm)

Then, with the first part of the Secession Crisis, the Tribune made several comments on the state of the Union. It thought that Mississippi would follow South Carolina's example and secede. The paper hoped "that some plan" would be devised to prevent "the calamities" which would "inevitably result from a dissolution of the Confederacy".⁸

The Tribune spoke out against a paper from the North that called a man, who had sung "John Brown's Body" on a cupola in the South, a gentleman.⁹ The paper felt that the man was a fool. The paper spoke bluntly on the affairs of the Union and its war against the South, saying that the press was "bound hand and foot to the government and would be denied a passage with the army unless they gave a strong coloring to every subject upon which they wrote, amounting to absolute mendacity."¹⁰ The paper goes on to refute the people who claimed that the South still had some Union sentiment. It said that the South was an example of "perfect national unanimity", including even the women and children."¹¹ It praised the South for playing like Moscow in the burning of their cities, cotton and tobacco in the path of the Northern attackers. The paper said that the South had "the most heroic sacrifices made by rich and poor". It compared this to when "Napoleon took to conquer Russia",¹² a few years earlier. The paper said that "the Confederates have fought nearly every instance with unflinching courage and heroism."¹³ The newspaper severely chastized the Northern

⁸San Jose Tribune, Jan. 4, 1861, p. 3. (microfilm)

⁹San Jose Tribune, May 16, 1862, p. 1. (microfilm)

¹⁰San Jose Tribune, May 16, 1862, p. 2. (microfilm)

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San Jose Tribune, May 16, 1862, p. g. (microfilm)

¹²San Jose Tribune, May 26, 1862, p. 3. (microfilm)

¹³San Jose Tribune, May 16, 1862, p. 2, (microfilm)

belief that only a few politicians in the South wanted secession and that the soldiers had been "deluded and pressed into the service." Using a chance to call the U.S. government mild and paternal, the paper goes on to say that no politician could have "suddenly inaugurate(d) a rebellion of such magnitude....."¹⁴. The paper then asks if the North really "intended to restore the Union by adding so many conquered provinces, or is the U.S. only fighting for territory?"¹⁵ The paper hailed the heroic effort of the South, where only a few states fought over 20 states against unimaginable odds and causing great debt for their beliefs.¹⁶

The Tribune, in another issue, says that Lincoln could have no credit for "fairness, candor, or straight-forwardnes(s)". The paper said that General Hunter's freeing of the slaves of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, which was authorized by the president, was "robbing the people of those states of property" that was guaranteed to them by the Constitution which the president had sworn to support. In the paper's eyes, this made the President a hypocrite.¹⁷

Moving on to a date further into the War, the Tribune spoke out against the Congressional attitude towards forfeiture. The paper said that Congress could not forfeit anything for treason because it was unconstitutional.¹⁸

¹⁴San Jose Tribune, May 16, 1862, p. 1. (microfilm)

¹⁵San Jose Tribune, May 16, 1862, p. 3. (microfilm)

¹⁶San Jose Tribune, May 16, 1862, p. 4. (microfilm)

¹⁷San Jose Tribune, June 13, 1862, p. 1. (microfilm)

¹⁸San Jose Tribune, June 20, 1862, p. 2. (microfilm)

The Mercury and the Telegraph also spoke out on the war, but favored the North. In a Mercury article of 1862, it was said that Congress could forfeit a traitor's goods and said that the government should become "owner in fee, not conditionally, but absolutely, not temporarily, but forever." The Mercury said "any other definition would be to make the government a trustee for the benefit of the heirs of the traitors, which was never contemplated by the framers of the Constitution."¹⁹ The Mercury also endorsed an article written by a freelance reporter on abolitionism, saying that slavery should be destroyed and its destruction would keep the republic from utter ruin.

The Telegraph, another leading paper of this period, called the Disolutionists "hypocrites" and "revolutionists". It also pointed out the evidences of the rebels "dishonesty".²⁰

The Telegraph was also loyal to the Union as is shown in its name-plate, printed every week:

San Jose Telegraph

"Civil and Religions Freedom; open political
action; and fidelity to the Constitution
and the Union"²¹

Finally, as an interesting note, the Mercury referred to the Civil War as it thought it was a rebellion or insurrection. The Tribune, on the

¹⁹ San Jose Mercury, July 31, 1862, p. 1. (microfilm)

²⁰ San Jose Telegraph, Sept. 22, 1858, p. 1. (microfilm)

²¹ San Jose Telegraph, (all issues), p. 1 (microfilm)

other hand, referred to the War as it felt it was: a war between two countries.²² The Tribune also constantly called the Confederate States of America a separate country, a novelty which the Mercury did not offer.

In conclusion, from the proofs I have shown, the San Jose Tribune was definitely pro-Southern in its attitudes and writings. Also from my proofs, Santa Clara County and the two other leading newspapers were definitely pro-Northern, and therefore clashed vehemently with the Tribune, giving the Tribune an uphill fight in a literary battle of the Santa Clara Valley in the mid-nineteenth century, a battle that it valiantly lost. It is too bad that the Tribune, because of being so set in its ways, could not make the needed changes of attitude that might have enabled it to outlive its first decade, which had turned out to be its last.

²²San Jose Tribune, (War Year Issues), p. 1-4. (microfilm)

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6. San Jose Tribune, 1854-1863.
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