

TWICE in its early days San Bernardino was saved from attack and destruction by sufficient warning and by the resolute preparation of its citizens for defense. On the first occasion, in 1851, when the Indians learned about the stockade the Mormons had built, they abandoned their plans to drive out the American settlers. Some 15 years later local pioneers again prepared to defend the town against attack and looting. This time the danger was not from Indians but from Confederate renegades.

REBEL RAID ABORTED

By ARDA M. HAENSZEL

During the Civil War there was much Confederate sympathy in southern California, and some wild and lawless groups made it an excuse for criminal acts. In 1865 such a group gathered in Visalia and started south, attempting to enlist recruits for the Confederate forces on the way. They were heading for Texas. After coming through Tehachapi Pass and crossing the desert along the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains, the group reached the Holcomb-Bear Valley area and eventually separated. Some went into Lower California through San Diego County. Some headed across the desert for the Colorado River. Others hid in the mountains intending to raid San Bernardino for supplies and horses for the trip.

For about a month plans and preparations had been going on. Holcomb Valley was an ideal place to hide out, for it had long been a hotbed of Confederate activity. The men, of course, pretended to be prospectors.

But news of President Lincoln's death, which reached San Bernardino in April, brought a request from responsible San Bernardino citizens to the Los Angeles Army headquarters for a company of soldiers to keep things quiet and orderly in this strongly Confederate town. And then Dr. Ben Barton, a Southerner himself, learning of the threatened attack, warned his San Bernardino friends and neighbors, and advised them to prepare to defend themselves. John Brown, Sr., sent his women-folk to Los Angeles for safety. Myron Crafts, whose wife Eliza had come to town from the ranch at Crafton, was serving with the defenders, and considered it unsafe for her to return alone, so she took refuge at the home of Dr. Peacock.

By 1864 construction had begun on the first Catholic church in San Bernardino, where St. Bernardine's parish was established after the great flood had wiped out most of Agua Mansa. This was not the brick church at the corner of 5th and "F" Streets, but a wooden chapel located immediately east, at the site of the present rectory. The earliest of the three St. Bernardine's churches, it burned in 1867, and was replaced at the same site in 1870 by a small brick church. In turn, the second structure was superseded in 1910 by the present building on the corner.

When the attack by the Confederate renegades threatened in May, 1865, however, the partially completed walls of the little wooden church were considered the "best" fort the town had to offer in the emergency, and supplies, weapons, and ammunition were quickly gathered there. The citizens cooperated by taking turns at guard duty in a 24-hour watch, and, in answer to their earlier appeal, a company of infantry arrived at this most opportune time.



In the interim, seeing that the people were prepared to defend themselves, and were supported by soldiers, the would-be raiders became discouraged, gathered up their forces and equipment, and headed south, carefully avoiding San Bernardino.

The crisis had united the community -- both lawful and unlawful citizens -- and it emerged victorious as a result.