Civil War Saints: Research Update

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This year marks the midpoint of the sesquicentennial observance of the American Civil War. Although Utah Territory was physically removed from Civil War battlefields, the war had a deep impact on the area and its inhabitants. Civil War Saints, published by BYU’s Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book in summer 2012, takes a fresh and comprehensive look at Latter-day Saints and Utah Territory during the Civil War.

Even before Civil War Saints was published, I could tell that it was not going to be the end of my research regarding Latter-day Saint involvement with the Civil War. In the months that have followed the book’s publication, my research efforts have multiplied into several varied, but related, Civil War projects.

**FINDING ADDITIONAL LATTER-DAY SAINT CIVIL WAR VETERANS**

Civil War Saints includes the most complete list published to date of Latter-day Saints—both Yankees and Confederates—who served in the Civil War. By the time Civil War Saints was published, my research team and I had discovered 384 LDS Civil War veterans (330 Union soldiers, sailors, and marines; 71 Confederate soldiers; and 3 soldiers, known as “Galvanized Yankees,” who fought first for the Confederacy, were captured, taken to a prisoner of war camp, and then took an oath of allegiance to fight for the Union). Our veterans list was a great start, but it was not complete. I invited readers to notify me if they had leads or information regarding possible additional Civil War veterans.

During the past year we have added twenty-seven more Civil War veterans (two-thirds are Confederate soldiers) to our growing list. Tables 1–3 summarize their baptismal dates and Civil War military service.

The discovery of one of the recently added veterans required us to create a new military service category. William Vernon, 1832–1895, fought first for the Confederacy with the 23rd Battalion, Virginia Infantry. After an aborted attempt to desert in June 1863, he successfully deserted two months later. Vernon later voluntarily enlisted and fought for the Union in the 118th Regiment, Indiana Infantry.

We were also able to add a fourth Galvanized Yankee to our LDS veterans list. Zachariah West, 1841–1906, served as a private on both sides of the war—first with the Confederate Army (presumed) and then with the 6th Regiment, US Volunteer Infantry.

Since publication of Civil War Saints, I have been contacted by many readers who shared family history information about possible Civil War veterans. Many also wrote asking us to confirm, if possible, family folklore regarding a rumored Civil War ancestor. We have applied the same documentary and research standards to these additional soldiers as we did to the veterans listed in Civil War Saints. During the past year we have added twenty-seven more Civil War veterans (two-thirds are Confederate soldiers) to our growing list. Tables 1–3 summarize their baptismal dates and Civil War military service.

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July 2013 marked the sesquicentennial of the battle of Gettysburg. This research project involved teaming with Ken Nelson, a FamilySearch collection manager and reference consultant in the Church’s Family History Library, to assist and I spent many hundreds of hours in pains-taking and detail-oriented research to find and document the Latter-day Saint Civil War veterans whose stories we have been able to share. The kind of research represented here—twelve years of Civil War veterans’ research, transcribing, and indexing—was made possible because of generous support from donors who support Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Research on additional topics related to Utah Territory and the Civil War will result in future publications and conference presentations. Through continuing research on this important and interesting historical period we are able to increase our understanding of the influence that the Civil War has had on Utah and the Church.

The publication of Civil War Saints—as well as the follow-on research, conference presentations, and publications outlined here—was made possible because of the generous support from donors who support Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Student research assistants and I spent many hundreds of hours in pains-taking and detail-oriented research to find and document the Latter-day Saint Civil War veterans whose stories we have been able to share. The kind of research represented here provides students with needed financial assistance to continue their schooling as well as valuable research and work experience. I appreciate the financial support that makes this research possible and strive to be a good steward of the funds received.


Charles Warren and Daniel Ball met twice near the “Bloody Angle,” shown here—in July 1983 during the Battle of Gettysburg and fifty years later during the 1933 reunion. Library of Congress.

On January 29, 2013, forty-nine years after the Church’s high school in Mexico City was in operation, Elder Dan Johnson, the Mexico Area President, said the school would become a Missionary Training Center following graduation in June. To the emotional students and faculty, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland gently taught, “Tears are the price we pay for love.” He asked, “Do you believe God knows everything?” and then answered, “I do too.” Continuing, he asked the students if God knew when ground was broken nearly half a century earlier that “this day would also come.” To which he answered:

He did. Of course he did. And in fact, that day may have been done and that school started in order that this day could come. Because we need an MTC immediately, we need it now. And if we started to build one tomorrow it would take us three years, and millions of dollars. . . . I believe God knew this day would come the day we broke ground for this school. . . . This is a dramatic moment in Church history. You have lived to see your role in one of the most historic moments in the Church.

In 1958, David O. McKay, after receiving requests from Church leaders and members in Mexico to start schools for the Mexican members, assigned a committee under the direction of Elder Marion G. Romney of the Quorum of the Twelve to propose to the Church Board of Education began taking action. Within five years, nearly thirty elementary schools were in operation throughout Mexico, along with a secondary school in Mexico City, known first as “El Arbolillo” and now as Benemérito de las Américas.

This school for which we are breaking ground today is destined to become a great Spanish-speaking cultural center. Its influence will reach far beyond the valley of Mexico . . . it will be felt in all of Latin America, including South America. Hundreds of thousands of people will come here. Going out from here, they will help . . .