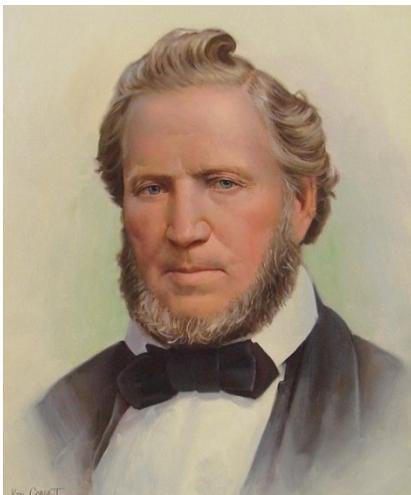


Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

January 29, 2014

THIS WEEK: Iowa's Connections to the Mexican War, Part 2

Iowa's Connections to the Mexican War



Brigham Young

In 1846, the Mormons trailed across Iowa on their way to Utah. There were Mormons camped in western Iowa shortly after war was declared on Mexico. Although "Iowans" by chance, the Mormons were counted as Iowans in the Mexican War. Brigham Young had sought aid from the federal government for the migrating members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, and President Polk offered aid by allowing the Mormons to raise a battalion. The agreement between the church and the U.S. government allowed the Mormon soldiers to keep their weapons when they left the service and forwarded all their Army pay to the church. Captain James Allen, who had established Fort Des Moines, was authorized to lead these members out of Iowa into Kansas and eventually to California. The Mormon volunteers mustered in at Council Bluffs. Most were between the ages of 18 and 45. There were a little more than 500 members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints who served with the U.S. Army. This battalion



Captain James Allen

was to join Colonel Stephen Kearny, the Commander of the Army of the West.

Colonel Kearny instructed Captain James Allen to raise five companies of able-bodied men. Allen was treated with suspicion when he arrived at the Mormon encampment, but he calmed their fears by giving the Mormons permission to camp on American soil. The land actually belonged



Colonel Stephen Kearny

to the Pottawattamie Tribe who signed an agreement with Allen allowing the Mormons the use of the Pottawatomie lands. In July of 1846, the Mormon Battalion, along with more than 30 women and about 50 children, marched from Council Bluffs to Leavenworth, Kansas. They were delayed leaving Fort Leavenworth because the now Colonel Allen was ill. They continued their march with Captain Jefferson Hunt and soon received word that Colonel Allen had died. Lieutenant A.J. Smith was chosen as commanding officer by a vote of the men, but under his leadership, the soldiers saw little food, and medical treatment was scarce. The battalion was forced to march long distances. Upon arriving in Santa Fe, the women and children were sent to join a detachment that had been sent to Fort Pueblo, Colorado, because of illness. A total of 273 were sent to Colorado during the winter of 1846-1847. Lieutenant Smith was relieved of his command by Lieutenant Colonel Cooke.



Mormon Battalion Flag

The remaining members crossed the continental divide in November of 1846. While crossing Arizona, the men were attacked by wild bulls. Two men were wounded, and many of the bulls were killed. There were no other "engagements" fought by the Mormon Battalion. They continued their march toward Tucson expecting a battle with Mexican soldiers, but the Mexican soldiers had fled. The battalion arrived at the Mission of San Diego on January 29, 1847. This camp was about five miles from General Kearny's

quarters. The Mormon march from Council Bluffs to California is one of the longest marches in military history. All soldiers of the Mormon Battalion, whether in Los Angeles or Pueblo, were mustered out on July 16, 1847, and most rejoined their families in the Salt Lake Valley.



Mormon Battalion Trail Map

