



Western Edition

"Memorializing the West: Catalina Barracks"

Released May 2, 2023

(MUSIC – SAD EYED WALTZ)

BILL DEVERELL (HOST): I'm Bill Deverell. Welcome to "Civil War Catalina," the first episode of *Western Edition* Season 3: "Memorializing the West". Throughout the season, we explore historical memory, commemoration, and memorialization across the American West. We start the season on Catalina Island just off the coast of Southern California, at a Civil War barracks that is now a private yacht club. That building is our focus today - what is this, why does it remain, how is it marked, and what should we know and remember about it?

LINDA MASSEY: Most people just stop and think, "Wait a minute, Civil War? Not in California." And that has turned out to be what is interesting and fun for me. And frankly, I've met some very interesting people - including you - that are interested in it. And most people have no idea that there was anything about the Civil War in California. They just think of California as being totally removed from it.

KEVIN WAITE: The first time I had been, I didn't know it as a Civil War garrison. I just knew it as the yacht club headquarters for the Isthmus. And I think I had heard some whisperings of the connection of the yacht club to the Civil War, but truth be told, I never really put two and two together even when I was doing research for the book.

DEVERELL: One of eight Channel Islands, Catalina Island sits twenty miles off the coast of Southern California. It is a remarkably beautiful place, home to about 5,000 people. This island

was once a western outpost of the region's native Tongva peoples who mostly lived on the mainland but had a set of villages here that date back nearly 10,000 years, at least one of which may have been home to as many as 8,000 people.

CLIP FROM SANTA CATALINA ISLAND & AVALON CALIFORNIA - 1938 TRAVELOGUE MOVIE: "Out in the blue Pacific, 20 miles as the flying fish flies, lies Santa Catalina Island - a fisherman's paradise abounding with swordfish and leaping tuna in fathomless waters reflecting the blue of the sky, bathed in glorious sunshine, mecca of romance, haven of fun."

DEVERELL: The island is a well-known tourist destination - vacationers come to fish, kayak, camp, Airbnb, check out the local wildlife, which includes a rare species of fox and a small herd of bison, the descendants of a group brought over as backdrop to a western movie made long ago and then just left to forage for themselves, which they've done successfully. USC's Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies is here, its name a vestige of when the Wrigley family of Chicago - chewing gum barons - owned the whole island. The history of the island, its plant, animal, and human residents then and now, is fascinating and complex. Because we are interested in memorial and commemorative sites in this season of *Western Edition*, we've narrowed our focus to a single sprawling building at one end of the island. A tiny hamlet occupies the north end of the island, right where an isthmus chokes Catalina down to a narrow bridge between two harbors - one looking northeast back at the coastline, the other looking southwest at, well, Hawai'i some 2,500 miles away. This is Two Harbors. On the isthmus itself sits a red building, low-slung and obviously old. Stephanie Yi from the Institute on California and the West, reads the words on that plaque.

STEPHANIE YI: "Built in 1864 as quarters for Company C, Fourth California Volunteer Infantry, which maintained order among the miners, discouraged smuggling of Chinese, prevented use of Isthmus Harbors by confederate privateers and kept the island and its miners secure. The Garrison, commanded by Captain R. B. West, was in place from January to December 1864."

DEVERELL: I walked the couple of miles from the Wrigley Institute to Two Harbors and this building.

It's a large building with a big porch. It's red. It flies yacht flags and an American flag out front. There's a payphone in the parking lot that makes the place look all the more archaic - no payphone is empty; the box is empty. Kids are out here playing Frisbee golf. It's incredibly beautiful to be here at sunset. There are older homes within very short walking distance. They look to date from about 1900 with its big veranda and porch. And I can imagine the officers sitting out here while the soldiers drilled. The Civil War barracks is now called the Isthmus Yacht Club, and there are people sitting out in front of them around the veranda, looks to be having drinks or dinner. I wouldn't describe it as fancy. It's a little down on its heels. But of course, it's been here a long, long time.

DEVERELL: Because the Yacht Club is private property, I knew we needed to connect with someone to help fill in some of the gaps but before we move to the present, let's pull on some

of the threads in this plaque. Most people don't know it, but Southern California was a hotbed of pro-Southern, pro-slavery, and then pro-Confederate sympathies before and during the Civil War. Historian Kevin Waite, who teaches at Durham University in England, is an authority on the South's western designs.

WAITE: Southern Californians saw Confederate conspirators everywhere they looked in the early 1860s. And Catalina was no different. I mean, there was a small mining community there at the outset of the Civil War. Some federal authorities feared that there was sort of a Confederate fifth column within that mining community. There's not great evidence to point to the fact that there actually was, but the fact that US authorities feared some sort of Confederate activity on Catalina made them more interested in the island as a strategic base.

DEVERELL: What's your sense? Let's say there was a Confederate conspiracy. Let's say there was a fifth column on Catalina. What strategic use is Catalina to the Confederates? Are they going to bombard the coastline? Are they going to waylay ships that are moving north and south, up and down the Pacific? What would be the plan?

WAITE: The thinking, or at least the fear, was that it could have been a way station for a Confederate frigate to then start raiding the shipping of the Pacific. And I mean, there was some justification for this fear. There was a sort of a stillborn Confederate privateering expedition launched by a guy named Asbury Harpending, ending just basically the same year that the US became really interested in Catalina. I mean, it would have taken quite a bit of logistical maneuvering to get any Confederate military or naval presence on Catalina. But I mean that the US authorities wanted to be proactive and wanted to short circuit any possibility from even starting.

DEVERELL: Yeah. So just to close the chapter on this quixotic fellow, what was his name again?

WAITE: His name is Asbury Harpending. And he actually got a commission from Jefferson Davis as a captain in the Confederate military. I mean, Davis was really worried about the optics on Confederate piracy because, of course, that really wouldn't play well in the courts of Europe. But Davis gave Harpending a commission as a captain. Harpending outfitted a schooner with a bunch of Confederate sympathizers. And the plan was to launch a privateering expedition out of San Francisco Harbor and raid the gold shipments coming out of the city. His plan was exposed, and he was arrested before it really got anywhere; they were still off the coast. But Harpending sort of loomed large in the US imagination about the possibility of some sort of Confederate naval intervention. And so, I think he was probably on some people's minds when they looked at Catalina and thought, "Hmm, that's actually pretty strategically located for a potential privateer."

(MUSIC – DEVIOUS LITTLE SMILE)

DEVERELL: While the plaque mentions the Confederacy as a target of Union or federal attention, it doesn't mention one proposed use of the space that is discussed in archival

records. Brigadier-General in the U. S. Army George Wright communicated with Washington DC:

“A few days since I received your dispatch of the 20th of February...advising me that the Interior Department had been requested to make Catalina Island an Indian reservation. Colonel Black, Sixth Infantry California Volunteers, commanding the District of Humboldt, is prosecuting vigorously the war against the hostile Indians in that quarter, and every possible effort will be used to capture all those Indians and remove them entirely out of the country. We now have sixteen companies of troops in the District of Humboldt, and I am in hopes to settle the Indian difficulties there in the course of the next three months when at least twelve of these companies can be withdrawn for service elsewhere. In setting apart the island of Catalina for an Indian reservation, the question arises as to the mining operations on the island. A large number of companies have been incorporated, and although the mines have not yet been fully developed, the prospect is that they will prove remunerative. I have permitted those people to remain on the island until the decision of the government could be received but cautioned them against erecting any expensive works for the present. My previous communications will have informed the Department of the size and topography of the island, as well as its capabilities. Should the Department decide to allow the mines to be worked I would recommend still that the whole island be held as an Indian reservation in order that improper persons can be removed without any difficulty.”

WAITE: General Wright, who was the commander of the Pacific Department, was thinking really seriously and lobbying pretty hard for Catalina to be used as an Indian reservation. And that's why the garrison was built there in the first place. I think simultaneously they realized that the Confederate threat wasn't real enough and that the Indigenous “problem” could be solved or at least relocated to Catalina.

DEVERELL: And so, the notion of the original construction of the garrison is a police force for the natives.

WAITE: Exactly. Yeah, yeah.

DEVERELL: And then very quickly, it becomes - I mean, really quickly, like within the span of months - it becomes more of a Union Army garrison without Indigenous people present, or at least

WAITE: Exactly.

DEVERELL: At least Indigenous people brought onto Catalina, certainly there were Indigenous people on Catalina in the mid 1860s. Yeah?

WAITE: Yeah. It was very briefly a Union army complex waiting to become a penal colony. And those federal troops there were waiting to become prison guards.

DEVERELL: To learn more about that story, we have to leave Catalina and go far north, up near the Oregon-California border. There, in the late 1850s, tensions between white settlers and ranchers and the resident Indigenous populations of the region broke out in warfare. Ranchers, their livestock and their pigs, not to mention their wheat, barley, and other crops, wreaked havoc on the local ecology. White settlers proved all too willing, often with the support of the California militia - a kind of national guard of the era - to use violence against Indigenous people. I spoke with historian Willy Bauer of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, to learn more about this era.

WILLY BAUER: It's always difficult sometimes to briefly summarize 10 to 15 years of conflict between Indigenous peoples and the states. But I think a lot of these conflicts, especially in Northern California, kind of boil down to two a couple of issues. It's on one hand, it was kind of the rapid influx of miners coming into northern California, you know, along the Trinity, the Klamath, the Smith and even the Eel Rivers. And they were there obviously to mine and search out for gold. And throughout California, the miners kind of destroyed Indigenous ecological areas along river areas. And so mining, for instance, would produce silt; it would get into the river streams, and it would harm salmon populations and salmon runs. And then after the miners came in, we see merchants and even farmers and ranchers moving into Northern California. They either grew crops that would go and feed the miners or they would raise livestock, which they would sell and feed miners. So, we see this kind of economic system that emerges right in the connection with the California gold rush. But even growing crops and raising livestock harmed and undermined Indigenous economies.

DEVERELL: You've painted this picture of fairly rapid disruption given the demographic explosion of Anglo-American miners into the gold rush country of the far north. So, this is incredibly chaotic, I suspect, for the Indigenous people.

BAUER: Oh, absolutely. And so Indigenous peoples responded quickly. On one hand, they might attack some of the Americans that were living in their areas; they might also attack livestock. That's one of the things that I've heard a lot, sometimes it wasn't necessarily the Americans that were the concern, it was their livestock. And so, they might attack and kill cattle or pigs or that sort of thing. And so, they so that might supplement their own food sources. But it became kind of a violent protest against the ways in which private property was impinging on their ways of life. And then additionally, Indigenous groups would attack the supply trains that were going through Northern California. They astutely understood how to kind of target the aspects of the American invasion that were affecting their lives, whether it was domesticated livestock or the growing of crops.

DEVERELL: So, in response to that astute counterattack - I guess we'd call it - of Indigenous people against the encroaching Anglo-American state and the Anglo-American peoples; this notion that one solution for the American regime would be to remove the Indigenous rebels and the Indigenous attackers - that fits into a long standing pattern, right?

BAUER: Oh, absolutely. In a lot of ways, it is very much part and parcel with early 19th century federal Indian policy. The federal government wanted to separate Indigenous peoples from Americans, whether that was through the forced removal of tribes on the eastern United States, leading to the more well-known Trail of Tears. But then in the 1840s and the 1850s, we see the creation of the reservation system to concentrate Indigenous peoples onto smaller and smaller parcels of land, put them in places where they could be easily identifiable and confined - like kind of an early kind of prison system, right? Confining Indigenous peoples to one spot where they could be monitored and surveilled. And one of the interesting things about kind of what California does - so, in this older idea about kind of removal policy - removal was always the idea that Indigenous peoples could be pushed west and in order to separate Americans from Indigenous peoples. But there's nothing west of California anymore. And so Indigenous peoples then were kind of removed to other parts of the state or even other parts of the interior of North America. And so, as we've been talking about, there were proposals to remove Indigenous peoples from, say, Northern California to Catalina Island; move them to Southern California. And then if you read newspapers in the 1850s and 1860s, there's even proposals of removing California Indians to Nevada. So, the most out of the way backward place that they could possibly find would be a place like the Great Basin in Nevada.

DEVERELL: You know, it's amazing. I hadn't even thought about it the way you just put it. But the notion that there's nothing west of California but the Pacific and this island or this islands, right? So, the notion of removing Indigenous leaders from way North California and putting them behind bars at a prison on Catalina, there's some kind of settler colonial violent logic to that, isn't there?

BAUER: Oh, absolutely. I think it's kind of part and parcel of the general policies of the 19th century of confining Indigenous peoples, finding ways to surveil them and attempt to transform their lives. And I would think that a place like Catalina Island would seem to them to be the ideal place to do that practice.

DEVERELL: Let's imagine that the plans to incarcerate Indigenous leaders was enacted. How would they decide who would be taken - those hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of miles south and then off the coast - how would they make those decisions if it was enacted?

BAUER: They would target the troublemakers of these wars and these battles. One person that comes to mind is a Wailaki leader named Lassik, who seemed to lead a group of Wailakis in these expeditions against the Americans. And this is something that we see throughout North American history - always, there's this focus on these Indigenous leaders, whether it was, say, Lassik in Northern California or Crazy Horse on the Great Plains, these Indigenous leaders are targeted and sought to put in prison in order to prevent and end violence.

DEVERELL: And is it unusual in your reckoning and your knowledge that if this were to happen, it would be a state federal partnership because it would be the federal government building

that facility because they were thinking about building something there, but obviously, the state of California is involved in this, too. Is that unusual?

BAUER: No, I don't think so. We see often these collaborations between states and or territories and the federal government on how to kind of deal with and incarcerate Indigenous peoples in the mid 19th century.

(MUSIC – IN 3)

DEVERELL: Though this process of removal and incarceration of Indigenous leaders was considered, ultimately, the space was to be used for a different purpose. The plan to remove Indigenous people from up north and hold them fast in a Catalina prison - itself part of a planned Catalina Indian reservation that took up the whole of the island - was scrapped. Instead, that now nearly 160-year-old building was put to use as a barracks for Union soldiers, must of whom must have wondered what they were to do there. Returning to the barracks on Catalina, we wondered about its post-Civil War existence and function. I connected with Linda Massey, a long-time member of the yacht club and retired educator to help us better understand the place and the relationship between history and its present use.

MASSEY: It's anything but a polished wooden brass building. It is a yacht club only because a group of boaters in the 1950s that liked to sail and fish got use of the building - which I think had been vacant - and called it the Isthmus Yacht Club, and that is really misleading to other boaters. What is unique about it is that it's not that different from when it was a Civil War Army barracks building.

DEVERELL: If we gave you a time machine, when would you go back to the barracks and why?

MASSEY: I would just love to be there and know what were the soldiers thinking? I mean, this has to be - I know one of the articles I read was a soldier from New England who was writing home and describing what the island looked like and what it felt like. That to me would be really interesting. We do have a photo of when they first arrived, the tents that they lived in while they built the building. And I had someone from the drum barracks over there one weekend, and she saw this big American flagpole in the middle of all the tents. And she said, "I have the requisition to Washington, D.C. for that flag." So, when I'm there again, I'm going to get a copy of it because I'd like to put that by that photo. So, these are the soldiers living in tents, building the building that got used for nine months. What would you like to see?

DEVERELL: Right when you say - 1863, 64. I'd talk to the soldiers; I'd look at the horses. I'd ask them, "Why do you think you're here? Where are you from? What do you think of the island? The isthmus itself is fascinating to go back from the channel to the ocean side. And why do you suppose the Union Army is so interested in putting you fellas out here?" I would ask them all that, just like you. And they'd tell us, but they may not know the answer themselves. When you're out there, do you ever let your mind and your mind's eye wander back to seeing Union soldiers and their horses around that place?

(MUSIC – SHE DIED UP THERE YOU KNOW)

MASSEY: Yeah, and there are people that swear by certain ghosts. Adjacent to the barracks building is a house that was the captain's house. And there is a female ghost in a long white dress that goes back and forth between the barracks building and the captain's house. And many different people from all over have seen her. I haven't. There are definitely people that are interested in ghosts that are *very* interested in our building. And periodically, I'll meet somebody out hiking that'll ask me about it and, "Can I come in?" And one day, I had time, and so I took people through and showed them a little of our history. And that person said, "I'm getting a real eerie feeling." And it's interesting, and it's always good for scaring the kids.

DEVERELL: Perhaps we will return to ghosts in future episodes. The question remains: what happened to the barracks after the war and before it became a yacht club? We asked Kevin Waite to weigh in.

WAITE: I think it's emptied out. I mean, it's actually emptied out pretty quickly towards the end of the war once federal authorities finally abandoned the idea of turning it into a penal colony for Indigenous people. And I think it's probably sort of just forgotten. In that way, it sort of symbolizes the lost memory of the Civil War in California that, I mean, aside from Drum barracks, this is the most significant military installation in Southern California of the Civil War era that I can think of. And the fact that it's so quickly abandoned and then forgotten tells you something about how quickly California's own role in the Civil War was abandoned and forgotten.

DEVERELL: While Kevin is right about California's uneasy relationship with its Civil War and enslavement histories, this barracks stands and is maintained as a private space. I was curious if Linda and club members also had a sense of the barracks immediately after the war.

MASSEY: I don't know. I cannot find any use of the building after the Civil War or after 1864. And I would love to, but I can't find anything. I know that there were fishermen there, and that goes up through the early 1900s when the Bannings owned the island before the Wrigleys. They were going to build a resort there, much like Avalon, and there's some great stories about plans for that which did not take place. And I have some pictures of the building where it's very rundown - green stuff growing over the porches and clearly, it's very doubtful that anybody was using the building. Although given that there weren't other places to stay, I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't find a sheepherder, a miner, a fisherman, an abalone diver, even some cattlemen because they did have cattle ranches in the middle of the island. I can't believe that somebody didn't stay there. I'd love to find out. I'm guessing in the early 1900s, somebody divided this long barracks building room up into small rooms. So, each member of the club - and there's 28 - have their own room.

DEVERELL: So, Linda, when you say it was, let's say, subdivided or divided up into these rooms in the early 20th century, why do you think that was?

MASSEY: I would love for you to help me find out. I'm trying to find out. I did find some pictures at the museum in Avalon - it's an excellent little museum - of some old furniture that Mr. Wrigley had built. In fact, he bought the island from the Bannings. It took too long to get furniture from the East Coast, so he built a furniture factory outside of Avalon. And I was looking at old pictures of that and recognized that all the furniture in our building was that furniture. And so now, over the years, I will tell you that people have gone for comfort and there's not a lot of it left. It looks like it was used as a place for people to stay because the photographs look like our rooms.

(MUSIC – SPRITE STAR)

DEVERELL: So, had it not been for the yacht club - let's say, in the last 60, 70 years or thereabouts - the building likely would have fallen down?

MASSEY: It is. So actually, there's some other legal issues about a corridor of land through there where if anything happens to the building or any of the other buildings in that corridor through the isthmus, they can't be replaced. And so, if we had a fire, we're finished; and that's our greatest fear. It isn't really attractive to other people because of the maintenance problems. There's no foundation, people have fallen through the roof. It's constant repairs. And it's one of those things that most people don't find fun, but there's some of us crazy people that if you're working with friends, it's fun. But it's not fun at home. So, it's a constant maintenance problem.

DEVERELL: So, in sum, we have a Civil War barracks on Catalina Island built to counter Confederate piracy or incarcerate Indigenous Californians that over time has become a private yacht club. While closed to the public, it has an old plaque that acknowledges California's Civil War past but neither the strong pro-Confederate presence in Southern California nor the proposed plans for Indigenous incarceration by federal authorities on the island. The barracks are fragile, vulnerable to the forces of weathering. If Linda is representative of those who enjoy the space, there is a commitment to sharing this history and to learning so much more about the plans and lives lived in the space. We asked all of our guests to share their vision of the future of this space.

MASSEY: Well, you've seen that plaque. It's very small, very brief. And it's just enough to raise the question of "A Civil War barracks?" But there's no way of educating people to let them know anything about it. And the building is set back on the property, it's not like it's right up by the porches. And so, if you don't just happen to run into somebody - like me - that will stop and talk to you or knows anything about it, it's kind of a missed opportunity - people walk away. One thing that bothers me is I hear stories that aren't true.

DEVERELL: Sure.

MASSEY: And tourists, you know how stories get passed on.

DEVERELL: So, what would it look like to correct that lack of interpretive signage or information? How would you do it?

MASSEY: God, You stumped me.

DEVERELL: Linda's frank response is refreshing and a great place to start the season. These can be complex and challenging questions not just about the text or design of a memorial plaque or other historical marker, but the very ways in which we remember and how we can engage many more voices in these conversations. Willy Bauer shared his thoughts as well.

BAUER: I would always start with the fact that it is Indigenous land, and it has been Indigenous land since its creation. And then I would tell the complicated history of North America. Whether you're in the fourth grade in California or whether you are 50 years old, you can understand that there's a complicated historical narrative in California. And a place like Catalina, which is on one hand an Indigenous space and an Indigenous place first, and then is linked to these violent acts of genocide in the 19th century, it adds a layer of complexity to places like Catalina.

DEVERELL: Do you sense a movement to rethink commemorative and memorial sites regarding Indigenous California or the Indigenous West? Is that happening?

BAUER: Yeah, I think that there are many efforts to rethink the Indigenous history of places like California and the American West. On one hand, Governor Gavin Newsom's recognition of the genocide of California has opened people's eyes and allowed us to rethink some of the older historical markers that we that we all know, and we pass by in California. But I think that's got to be bookended on one hand recognizing that California remains Indigenous space, that Indigenous peoples have been in California, and remain in California after the mid-19th century. So, finding ways to trace that long narrative of Indigenous creation, colonialism and then survivance, are the main things that need to be addressed.

DEVERELL: Yeah, I appreciate that sensibility so much because oftentimes we think of the plaque reflex as a way to say, "That was then. That's the deep past. These people don't exist any longer."

BAUER: You know also I think that people get a little upset sometimes about revising these plaques as if historians have not been revising our understanding of the past forever. That's our job as historians - to provide new insights and to provide new perspectives on the past. And if we learn something new or we understand a place a bit differently now than we did – in, say the 1930s, when some of those monuments were first established - I think that we are all better off for it in the American West.

DEVERELL: When I posed a similar question to Kevin Waite, I tried approaching the issue of memorialization by focusing on the historical take-away.

WAITE: I would want them to see and know the twin uses that the island was going to be put to as a sort of a federal defense against the Confederate insurrection in California and as a penal colony to Indigenous people. And that in itself is sort of a microcosm for the Civil War in the West, right? It's a war against two types of perceived rebellion: one, a rebellion led by slaveholders and their allies against the federal government, and then the interrelated rebellion

of Indigenous people against federal authority. And they're both playing out on Catalina, at least in the imaginations of Union authorities. So, I think that's what I would want to convey on that plaque - more succinctly and elegantly than I just said there, but I think that's the message.

(MUSIC – OUTCAST)

DEVERELL: You've helped us think this through a bit that this beloved, interesting Channel Island off the coast of Southern California is itself a kind of tailor-made case study of the intricacies of 19th century American history vis-à-vis the coming of the Civil War and the final last stages of conquest of Indigenous peoples - it's like a case study.

WAITE: Yeah, and it reminds us that the conquest of the West and the struggle over slavery belong in the same narrative frame often, even though they're so often segregated into their own sort of historiographical traditions and courses, and just the way we think and teach about 19th century American history.

(MUSIC – OUTCAST)

DEVERELL: I'm Bill Deverell. Thank you to our guests Willy Bauer, Linda Massey, and Kevin Waite and to Ava Liversidge and Eleanor Veitch for their research on this site. Coming up on the next episode, we move from Catalina to Daly City in Northern California, and we'll ask questions about a 19th-century duel involving a US Senator and a former California Supreme Court Justice.

ELIZABETH LOGAN: This place is fairly empty and almost peaceful. I think it's contemplative, this space. There's so much anger and violence and rhetoric and high stakes in the conversations and in the primary source documents. And it just feels more settled, which might be a false sense of security and settlement in this space, in this moment.

DEVERELL: If you're interested in seeing images related to this episode, please visit our website at dornsife.usc.edu/icw. *Western Edition's* team includes Avishay [ah-vee-shy] Artsy, Katie Dunham, Jessica Kim, Elizabeth Logan, and Stephanie Yi. *Western Edition* is a production of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West. Thank you for listening and be well.