

THE SOLDIERS' CITY:

Sawtelle, California, 1897–1922

By Cheryl L. Wilkinson

ABSTRACT: The Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, a domicile and hospital for Union veterans of the Civil War, opened west of Los Angeles in 1888 on land donated by real-estate developers. Barrett Villa Tract, a development of small plots later renamed Sawtelle, was established outside the south gate of the Soldiers' Home. There veterans bought homes where they could "live out" and enjoy family life while continuing to avail themselves of the services of the Pacific Branch. Sawtelle incorporated as a city in 1906 but consolidated with Los Angeles in 1922. Issues of Pacific Branch members' votes, behavior, and community leadership mark Sawtelle's history. Union veterans played a significant role in the development of West Los Angeles.

Keywords: Veterans Administration; Civil War Veterans; Sawtelle, California; West Los Angeles; National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers

Sawtelle is where you get off [the streetcar] when you go to the Soldiers' Home. It is a mile square and has 4300 voters[,] a good variety of stores, paved streets, water mains, street signs and almost everything. *Los Angeles Times*, 1922¹

A recent issue of *Los Angeles Magazine* invited readers to explore West Los Angeles's Sawtelle Boulevard, which, it claimed, had been "nicknamed Little Osaka for its long-standing population of Japanese Americans."² However, the street and the surrounding area were not originally developed by or for

1. "To Be or Not To Be Sawtelle?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1922, II–1.

2. Elina Shatkin, "Do Street Smart: Sawtelle," *Los Angeles Magazine*, February 2013, 56.

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Japanese Americans. Indeed, the Japanese immigrants who first settled in the area during the mid-1920s and 1930s made up the second wave of immigrants to call the area their home. At the turn of the twentieth century and during the next two decades, rather than Little Osaka, the Sawtelle area was known as the Soldiers' City for its high concentration of Union veterans of the Civil War and for the nearby Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (hereafter Pacific Branch).³

Perhaps it is because the city of Sawtelle ceased to exist after its 1922 consolidation into Los Angeles that, with the notable exception of pictorial histories, modern studies about the expansion of Los Angeles overlook its existence.⁴ In contrast, local histories written in the early decades of the twentieth-century include not only the little city, but also the nearby Pacific Branch, where many of Sawtelle's Union veterans resided and received medical care and other services.⁵ The history of the city of Sawtelle is important because it reveals a previously un-examined settlement of Civil War veterans as an early foundation of the development of West Los Angeles.

The historiography has been equally silent about both Sawtelle's veteran residents and the Union veterans who resided at the nearby Pacific Branch. Indeed, historians have neglected the Union veterans

3. Throughout this article, I have used the designation Pacific Branch interchangeably with the term Soldiers' Home.

4. Jan Loomis, *Images of America: Brentwood* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 7–8 and 15. See also, Kevin Roderick, *Wilshire Boulevard: Grand Concourse of Los Angeles* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2005), 189–293. Robert M. Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis* specifically references Sawtelle in a table that reports the names of municipalities annexed by Los Angeles after the city required annexation if outlying communities wanted access to Los Angeles's water and power. Notably, Sawtelle was "consolidated" rather than annexed to Los Angeles. Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 223, 227. While John E. Baur briefly mentions Sawtelle and the Soldiers' Home in his study of California's late nineteenth-century health migration, Baur seems unaware that during the time period he discusses, neither the city nor any area by that name yet existed in Los Angeles County. John E. Baur, *The Health Seekers of Southern California, 1870–1900* (San Marino, CA: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1959), 160–161.

5. Luther A. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History: Santa Monica Bay Cities* (Los Angeles: Luther A. Ingersoll, 1908), 338–343, 345–352; Harris Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California, 1853–1913: Containing the Reminiscences of Harris Newmark*, edited by Maurice H. Newmark and Marco R. Newmark (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1916), 339, 352–353, 586; J. M. Guinn, *A History of California and An Extended History of Its Southern Coast Counties*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1907), 970–973; John Steven McGroarty, ed., *History of Los Angeles County* (American Historical Society, 1923), 503–504; William A. Spaulding, *History and Reminiscences: Los Angeles City and County, California* (Los Angeles: J. R. Finnell & Sons Publishing Co., 1931), 250, 269, 315, 317, 414, 440.

who lived in the Far West, California, and, in particular, Los Angeles.⁶ However, the region attracted a sizeable population of old Union soldiers. When one considers that California's population exploded from under 400,000 in 1860 to over two million in 1910, and that 60 percent of white men in the North who were born between 1837 and 1845 had served in the Union army, it is logical to conclude that California's post-war influx would have included a sizeable proportion of Union veterans.⁷ Though there have been studies of California's military participation in the Civil War, the scholarly exploration of the veterans' post-war lives is at best fragmentary and does not reflect the significant impact of Union veterans on the development of the Southland.⁸ Examination of the residents of both the

6. In 1932, the Pacific Branch became the last of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) branches to be consolidated into the newly created Veterans Administration. At the time, the majority of the veterans receiving care from the NHDVS were veterans from World War I; even at that late date, however, 708 Union veterans were still in residence. Patrick J. Kelly, *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State, 1860–1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 198. The former Pacific Branch is now called the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (GLAHS). In addition to providing medical services to disabled and ailing US veterans, the GLAHS and the other branches of the former NHDVS continue to provide jobs to their host communities and serve as a market for local goods and services. *Ibid.*, 178.
7. The exact population figures for California are 379,994 in 1860 and 2,377,549 in 1910. "Resident Population and Apportionment of the U.S. House of Representatives," United States Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/resapport/states/california.pdf>, accessed October 1, 2012; James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4.
8. According to Brigadier General Richard H. Orton, despite the fact that California was not called to furnish troops to fight the Confederates and no quota was assigned to it, California's war-time governors issued calls that resulted in the enlistment of more than sixteen thousand men in the Union Army. He notes, however, that with the exception of five hundred of those men who were later included in the quota for Massachusetts, no California troops took part in any of the great battles of the Civil War. Brigadier General Richard H. Orton, *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1867* (Sacramento: State Office, J. D. Young, Superintendent State Printing, 1890). Leo P. Kibby provides an overview of California's role in the Civil War in his monograph, *California, The Civil War, and the Indian Problem: An Account of California's Participation in the Great Conflict* (Los Angeles: Lorin L. Morrison, 1968). Studies specifically written about Californians in relation to their military service include: Andrew Edward Masich, *The Civil War in Arizona: the Story of the California Volunteers, 1861–1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006); Alvin M. Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1991); Darlis A. Miller, *The California Column in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Aurora Hunt, *The Army of the Pacific: Its Operations in California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Plains Region, Mexico, 1860–1866* (Glendale: A. H. Clark, Co., 1951). Studies about individual Californians during the years leading up to and during the war include several volumes about the Unitarian activist minister Thomas Starr King, the most recent of which is Glenna Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War: Thomas Starr King, the Republican Party, and the Birth of Modern California* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also, Louis A. Di Donato, "Charles Myers Jenkins: A Sketch of the Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Man," *Southern California Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 125–160; Aurora Hunt, *Major-General James*

Pacific Branch and Sawtelle extends that conversation by drawing attention to a small group of Union veterans who, like thousands of other Civil War veterans, came to southern California after the war.

When the Civil War ended, Union veterans were declared the nation's saviors and told that they were "owed a debt that could never be repaid."⁹ In an attempt to make restitution, the federal government accorded its former soldiers a social-welfare benefit package that assisted Union veterans well into the twentieth century.¹⁰

Henry Carlton (Glendale: A. H. Clark Co., 1958); Leo P. Kibby, "With Colonel Carleton and the California Column," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1959): 337–344; Max L. Heyman Jr., *Prudent Soldier, A Biography of Major General E. R. S. Canby, 1817–1873: His Military Service in the Indian Campaigns, in the Mexican War, in California, New Mexico, Utah, and Oregon; in the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi West, and as Military Governor in the Post-War South* (Glendale, CA: A. H. Clark Co., 1959); Paul Fatout, "The California Regiment, Colonel Baker, and Ball's Bluff," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1952): 229–240. John W. Robinson's *Los Angeles in Civil War Days, 1860–1865* (Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1977) is specifically about Los Angeles during the Civil War.

Los Angeles's Civil War veterans, both able bodied and disabled, have received scant scholarly attention. James Marten examines the writings of one Henry Clinton Parkhurst, a terminally disgruntled resident of state homes in both California and Iowa at the turn of the twentieth-century, and very briefly mentions a state soldiers' home at Yountville, California, but the vast majority of his research about the residents of the so-called Soldiers' Homes involved veterans living in the Midwest and the East. James Marten, *Sing Not War, 187–189*. Existing research about disabled Union veterans in the Far West includes an undergraduate thesis that explores the history of the Pacific Branch of the NHDVS, the memoir of the daughter of the first Pacific Branch surgeon, and a project tracing the history of Dixie Manor, a Confederate soldiers' home founded by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Pasadena, California. See Cheryl L. Wilkinson, "Forgotten Saviors: Disabled Civil War Veterans in West Los Angeles: A History of the Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1888–1915" (senior honors thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2008); Elsbeth Andrae, *The Dear Old Boys in Blue: Memories of the Early Days of the Veterans Administration Center, Los Angeles* (San Francisco: Reynard Press, 1948); Elizabeth Corbett, *Out at the Soldiers' Home* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Corporation, 1941); Connie Walton Moretti, *Dixie Manor Days* (Redondo Beach: Mulberry Bush Publishing, 2004).

9. Stuart McConnell reports that Union veterans who participated in the Grand Review in Washington, D.C., May 23–24, 1865, marched past a banner hung from the Capitol that read: "The only national debt we can never pay is the debt we owe the victorious Union soldiers." For the men who marched that day, the Grand Review was the last hurrah before they were mustered out of the army, but McConnell points out that the banner's words prophesized future claims on the federal government by Union veterans. Fifteen years later, their pension demand was one of the most heated political issues of the late nineteenth century. McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 10.
10. The federal program provided a triple-tiered system of benefits to disabled Union veterans that included disability pensions, residential care facilities, and free prosthetics for amputees. Undoubtedly, the most widely accessed of these benefits were the disability pensions. Theda Skocpol reports that by 1900, after Congress had liberalized pensioners' eligibility requirements, more than a million veterans, or 74.13 percent of surviving Union veterans, were enrolled as pensioners. Less than one hundred thousand men ever sought the services provided at the long-term care facilities of the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers during their nearly seventy-five-year existence. Perhaps because the devices were uncomfortable and did not fit properly, Union veteran amputees seemed even less inclined to avail themselves of the free prosthetics the government offered. Most of

One aspect of that package was the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (hereafter the NHDVS), a federally funded national network of domiciles and hospitals created to provide long-term care to deserving Union veterans.¹¹ Established by Congress in 1865, the NHDVS was originally intended for those men who were wounded or were otherwise permanently disabled during the war. However, in 1884, Congress significantly loosened admission guidelines to the point that old age itself counted as a disability.¹²

Despite its designation as a “home,” the NHDVS bore little resemblance to Victorian ideals of what constituted one. Residents lived in barracks, wore uniforms, ate communally, and needed permission to leave the premises for extended periods of time. Rather than living in the cozy bosom of domesticity, the residents’ lives were governed under a strict code of military discipline. Perhaps the most draconian element of this code was the stipulation that made all NHDVS residents subject to the rules and articles of war and the governance of the US Army.¹³ While the NHDVS Board of Managers (hereafter the Board of Managers or Board) insisted that military discipline was necessary in order to maintain control of the former soldiers, it also claimed that the discipline “was designed to be firm, but kind.”¹⁴ Officially, the NHDVS was neither an asylum for paupers or lunatics nor a military installation, but it bore a remarkable resemblance to the characteristics of both those types of institutions. NHDVS residents enjoyed a certain amount of liberty and personal autonomy, but they were permanently consigned to the rigors of a life modeled on the Army.¹⁵

those who qualified for artificial limbs chose to take the government’s cash payment instead. Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 109; Larry M. Logue, *To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 90; Frances Clark, “‘Honorable Scars’: Northern Amputees and the Meaning of Civil War Injuries,” in *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments*, edited by Paul A. Cimbal and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 364–365.

11. Key studies about the NHDVS include: Kelly, *Creating a National Home*; Marten, *Sing Not War*; Larry M. Logue, “Union Veterans and Their Government: The Effects of Public Policies on Private Lives,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 22 (1992), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/204987>; and Judith G. Cetina, “A History of Veterans’ Homes in the United States, 1811–1930.” PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1977.

12. Cetina, “A History of Veterans’ Homes,” 182.

13. *Ibid.*, 88.

14. *Ibid.*, 89.

15. Logue, “Union Veterans and Their Government,” 417.

Intent on making NHDVS services available to the greatest number of disabled veterans, and believing that the men would not willingly seek refuge in facilities located far from their homes, relatives, and friends, Congress and the Board of Managers envisioned the NHDVS as a federal institution, but one with a local identity. This meant that facilities would be opened in multiple locations across the nation. Ultimately, the Board's system included ten residential institutions with hospitals on their grounds, as well as one sanatorium. The first of the facilities opened at Togus, Maine, in 1867. By the time Congress authorized construction of Los Angeles's Pacific Branch in early 1887, the system had grown to include five regional branches.¹⁶

THE PACIFIC COAST BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS

Beginning in 1884, the Board of Managers lobbied Congress annually for a West Coast branch of the system. The Board informed Congress that there were a number of Mexican War veterans and more than six thousand Union veterans living on the Pacific Coast, "many of whom [were] destitute and [in need of] government care as much as disabled soldiers and sailors residing east of the Rockies."¹⁷ Finally, on March 3, 1887, Congress appropriated \$150,000 for construction of a California branch of the NHDVS.¹⁸

Four months later, the *San Francisco Bulletin* published the Board of Managers' formal call for sealed proposals to determine a location for the new facility.¹⁹ Newspapers across the state quickly picked up the story, spreading word about the bidding process. Determined to secure the economic future for their city that the construction, operation, and constant supply of goods, services and labor necessary to build and operate an NHDVS branch would entail, civic leaders and businessmen of several California cities began putting together bids.²⁰ With stakes so high, the competition was intense.

16. Cheryl L. Wilkinson, "Forgotten Saviors," 94.

17. Cetina, "A History of Veterans' Homes," 184–185.

18. U.S. Congress, House, *Letter from the President of the Board of Managers of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, transmitting his report for the fiscal year 1888*, 50th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1888) H. Misc. Doc. 35, 2.

19. "Site for Soldiers' Home," *San Francisco Bulletin*, August 3, 1887, 2.

20. Kelly, *Creating a National Home*, 180.

Los Angeles-area real-estate developers and land owners played important roles in the statewide bidding war. By November, when the Board of Managers arrived in Los Angeles to inspect prospective sites, the Los Angeles Board of Trade, in partnership with the members of several local Union veterans' groups and city officials, had identified offers of seven prospective sites. Nearly all of the offers required that the Board of Managers purchase land, albeit at reduced rates.²¹ The most generous offer included a donation of several hundred acres of undeveloped rural land fourteen miles west of the city. The parcel was owned by Santa Monica's developers, John Percival Jones, the millionaire United States Senator from Nevada, and his business partner, Colonel Robert Symington Baker.

Baker and Jones had joined forces when the millionaire Senator Jones purchased an undivided three-fourths interest in Baker's Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica in 1874.²² The colleagues began selling lots in their newly platted town of Santa Monica on July 15, 1875. Within less than a year, the ocean-front town site boasted a population of nearly a thousand permanent residents, "160 houses and half as many tents."²³ However, the senator and his partner had much bigger plans for the new municipality. They envisioned Santa Monica as a major seaport and the regional metropolitan powerhouse, surpassing Los Angeles.²⁴ Toward that end, Jones personally financed construction of the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad, the first local transit system connecting the two towns, as well as a commercial wharf.²⁵

21. The Board of Managers had made clear that preference would be given to bids that included incentives, such as free land coupled with cash contributions that could be used toward property improvements. This proved troublesome to many southern California businessmen given that the area was in the midst of one of the largest real estate booms in its history. According to historian Glenn S. Dumke, during June, July, and August of 1887 "over \$38,000,000 changed hands in real-estate transactions in Los Angeles County, and the figure for the year was nearly \$100,000,000." Glenn S. Dumke, *The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California* (San Marino, CA: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1944), 9.

22. Palmer Conner, *The Romance of the Ranchos* (Los Angeles: Title Insurance and Trust Company, undated), 30.

23. Fred E. Basten, *Santa Monica Bay: The First 100 Years* (Los Angeles: Douglas-West Publishers, 1974), 5.

24. Paula A. Scott, *The Making of America: Santa Monica, A History on the Edge* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 37.

25. With extensive mining investments in the Inyo Mountains, Senator Jones had far more elaborate plans for the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad than as inter-urban mass transit. He envisioned it linking Independence, California, in the Owens Valley, with the coast at Santa Monica. Scott, *Santa Monica*, 37.

A combination of the slow growth of Santa Monica, shipping competition from San Pedro harbor, and failed mining investments forced Senator Jones to sell the railroad and the wharf to the Southern Pacific Railroad in the early 1880s.²⁶ With their sale, the senator lost any hope of controlling the lucrative southern California rail freight business, but he did not relinquish his plans for the town's future as the region's commercial center. As late as September 1891, Jones still believed that Santa Monica could become "the most important commercial city of Southern California."²⁷ Jones was determined to secure the location of the new NHDVS near his developments. As a savvy businessman and a sitting US senator, Jones was in a position to influence appropriations for the future NHDVS and Santa Monica. To strengthen the chances of his site's selection for the new Soldiers' Home, he sought partners.

Moving to capitalize on the regional real-estate boom, key members of the Los Angeles business community incorporated the Los Angeles and Santa Monica Land and Water Company in June 1887.²⁸ In its name, they purchased John Wolfskill's ranch, which adjoined the eastern boundary of Jones and Baker's Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica property. The corporation's shareholders intended to subdivide and re-sell the acreage at a substantial profit. They believed that placing the new NHDVS near their property would not only increase profits from their recently platted town of Sunset, but also that it would ensure support for the new town's economy with money, jobs, and a market for local goods. More importantly, it would generate new communities on the miles of vacant

The senator's railroad, which began service in 1875, was not the first railroad between Los Angeles and the coast. That distinction fell to the Los Angeles and San Pedro Railroad. Constructed in 1869 at taxpayer expense, it linked the city of Los Angeles to the wharves at Wilmington. Franklyn Hoyt, "The Los Angeles & San Pedro: First Railroad South of the Tehachapis," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1953), 327–348, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25156449>; J. M. Guinn, "Pioneer Railroads of Southern California," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* 8, no. 3 (1911), 188–192, doi: 10.2307/41168875.

26. William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 98.

27. *Ibid.*, 18. Quoted from a letter to Georgina Jones from her husband, Senator John P. Jones.

28. Gillette, Gibson and Wood, "Abstract of Title of that Certain Real Property in the Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres, County of Los Angeles, State of California, Bounded and Described as Follows: All of said Rancho as per map appearing on page 53 of this Abstract," Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Library, University of California, Los Angeles, <http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/>.

land, much of it owned by them, between Los Angeles and Santa Monica.

Ultimately, what became known as the Baker and Jones offer included three hundred acres of land, a guaranteed water supply, additional land for a reservoir, and \$100,000 in cash installments for landscaping and other improvements to the grounds of what would become the newest National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.²⁹ Other California communities also offered the Board of Managers free land, but the \$100,000 cash donation was by far the largest monetary inducement.³⁰ The Board of Managers awarded the project to the "Santa Monica site" on December 6, 1887. The *Los Angeles Times* crowed, "The Managers Decide on Los Angeles. The Envious Northern Citrus Belt Left Out to Freeze. [There is] Nothing Else in the State So Good as Los Angeles County."³¹ A month later, as the three-year real-estate boom finally began to lose momentum, the newspaper continued to celebrate the award's value to the community.³² "The location at this point of the home . . . is worth much to Los Angeles county. It will cause land in that section to advance in value, and the trade thrown into the way of our merchants will be considerable."³³ Interestingly, that money-focused article closed by describing the Pacific Branch's future residents not as sources of pension revenue but as "the gray, grizzled and gallant defenders of their country."³⁴ Through that article and others like it, the future residents of the Pacific Branch entered the public dialog not as men, but as heroic scenery.

During the next six months, the Board of Managers' construction committee became a familiar sight in Los Angeles and Santa Monica. The local newspapers excitedly reported its activities and the

29. U.S. Congress, House, *Letter from the President of the Board of Managers transmitting the Report of the Board for the year ending June 30, 1887*, 50th Cong., 1st Sess. (1888) H. Misc. Doc. 86, 5–9.

30. When Judge Theodore Van Dyke first presented the Jones and Baker offer to the Board of Managers, the bid included a \$50,000 cash donation, free land, a guaranteed water supply, and reservoir property. While generous, the offer did not eclipse those made by other entities. The Board left town undecided and seemingly unimpressed. Upon advice from Van Dyke, Baker and Jones upped their offer to a \$100,000 cash donation. It clinched the deal for southern California. "The Soldiers' Home. The Managers' Decide," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1887, 1.

31. Ibid.

32. Dumke, *Boom of the Eighties*, 9.

33. "The Branch Soldiers' Home—Its Location," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1888, 14.

34. Ibid.

construction's progress. Everyone knew when Captain Charles A. Treichel was appointed as the first governor of the Pacific Branch.³⁵ The *Los Angeles Times* reported that two thousand citizens of Santa Monica trekked out to the construction site to participate in flag raising ceremonies on April 27, 1888. Yet, not a single local newspaper noted the arrival of the man who would become the first resident of the new branch.

On May 2, 1888, the Pacific Branch admitted its first member,³⁶ Private George Davis. A native of England, Davis had first entered the NHDVS system at the Eastern Branch in Maine in 1873. He had already transferred to the Central Branch in Dayton, Ohio, when he heard about the new institution being built in California. Presumably fed up with the harsh Ohio winters, Davis immediately applied for yet another transfer to the new Pacific Branch.³⁷ Fortunately for him, the Pacific Branch's new governor needed secretarial assistance during the home's construction and Davis had formerly earned his living as a "clerk." The skills he possessed got him transferred and admitted to the Pacific three months before any other veteran.³⁸ Even then, other veterans had already submitted their applications to the Pacific Branch and were eagerly awaiting word that they would be moving to Los Angeles. Writing from the poor house in San Francisco, a desperate Felix McHannan pleaded, "i have no way [to] sepoport myself . . . i have no money i have no strength to work i do not want to end my days in the alms house [*sic*]." ³⁹ At the same time, family man Winfield Pearson claimed, "California is my home . . . my family is here and I do not care to be separated from them."⁴⁰ Other veterans simply packed their bags and caught trains bound for southern California, hoping for immediate admission.

35. "Coming to California," *The Evening News* (San Jose, CA), December 24, 1887, 4.

36. The Board of Managers referred to NHDVS residents as "members" to avoid the opprobrium attached to the word "inmates," as the residents of alms houses and insane asylums were termed. In this essay, residents of the Pacific Branch facility will be referred to as Pacific Branch members.

37. National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region, Riverside, CA, "Records of the Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1888-1933," RG 15, "Sample Case Files," box 2, George Davis File.

38. Ancestry.com, *U.S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2007). The second veteran admitted, John O'Connor, transferred from the Northwestern Branch on August 10, 1888. Governor Treichel did not admit another disabled veteran until September 1, 1888.

39. NARA (Riverside), RG15, Felix McHannan File, box 5.

40. NARA (Riverside), RG15, Winfield S. Pearson File, box 6.



The first of two barracks buildings opened at the Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in February 1889. The Union Army veterans who were admitted to the facility were governed under a strict code of military discipline. They wore uniforms, ate communally, and needed permission to leave the premises for extended periods of time. *Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. photCL91(430)*

By the time the contractor put the final coat of paint on the first two barracks buildings in February 1889, nearly fifty disabled veterans lived at the Pacific Branch.⁴¹ That March, one hundred more joined them in a single day.⁴² When the NHDVS's fiscal year ended on June 30, the population of the Pacific Branch had ballooned to more than three hundred men.⁴³ The increased veteran presence drew the nearby community's attention to their new neighbors.

The disabled veterans' distinctive dark blue uniforms set them apart from the greater community. On Santa Monica's city streets,

41. Ancestry.com, *U.S. National Homes*.

42. Ibid. Thereafter known as the "Yountville 100," tales of the veterans' mass admission into the Pacific Branch became the stuff of myth. Ultimately the tale lost all semblance of truth beyond the number of men involved. Newspaper reports at the time agree that the Yountville veterans arrived by railroad in Los Angeles on March 15, 1889. They were met at the train by carriages which transported them to the Pacific Branch. "Veterans from Yountville," *Los Angeles Herald*, March 16, 1889. In later years, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the men had been so anxious to leave the Yountville Veterans' Home that they walked the five hundred miles from northern California to Los Angeles. Cecilia Rasmussen, "L.A. Scene," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1994.

43. U.S. Congress, House, *Letter from the Board of Managers of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers transmitting the report of the Board for the fiscal year 1889*, 51st Cong., 1st Sess. (1890) H. Misc. Doc. 77, 145.

their attire trumpeted not only their invalidism and institutionalization, but also their presumed poverty—a state which nineteenth-century Americans considered to be “a consequence (or alternatively a cause) of poor morals and poor habits.”⁴⁴ Many felt that those unable to succeed in California and the West, a region equated with opportunity, likely deserved their own failure.⁴⁵ Not incidentally, the deliberately military cut of their uniforms reiterated their status as former soldiers, a tainted identity stereotypically associated with drinking, gambling, and prostitution.⁴⁶ Needless to say, whenever any veteran wearing a Pacific Branch uniform indulged in questionable behavior, the whole town noticed.

As long as the behavior of the men conformed to social expectations for quaint elderly soldiers, the local newspapers published proud accounts about the aging heroes and the inchoate Soldiers' Home. However, as the Pacific Branch population continued to grow, the behavior of certain of its residents repeatedly clashed with the increasingly temperance-minded bent of Santa Monica's elites. If the veterans' vices were not problems enough in Santa Monica's eyes, the fact that the institutionalized men represented a significant voting bloc that controlled certain local elections was intolerable.

The increasingly temperance-minded town took measures to curb what it considered to be the immoral behaviors of all of its visitors, including those of the growing number of Pacific Branch residents who poured into Santa Monica to celebrate receipt of their quarterly pension payments. After a number of false starts, Santa Monica outlawed saloons within its city limits.⁴⁷ However, Santa Monica's objections were not limited to the vices of certain Pacific Branch residents. After an 1895 school board election was overwhelmingly decided by

44. Chad Alan Goldberg, *Citizens and Paupers: Relief, Rights, and Race, from the Freedmen's Bureau to Workfare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.

45. Marten, *Sing Not War*, 20. Marten argues that observers believed that “anyone who could not make something of himself in the fast-paced and opportunity-rich North probably deserved to fail.”

46. *Ibid.*, 51–54. See also, Steven J. Ramold, *Baring the Iron Hand: Discipline in the Union Army* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010). Among those vices, Ramold contends that alcohol caused the most severe disciplinary problems. Union soldiers not only demanded access to alcohol but “drank on a scale both epidemically and endemically [*sic*], creating disciplinary problems from . . . the first days of the war to its very end” (123).

47. Santa Monica first outlawed saloons within its city limits in 1900. However, the measure allowed restaurants and hotels to continue to sell alcoholic beverages. By 1908, alcohol was again flowing freely in the town until Santa Monica residents approved a 1917 initiative forbidding the sale of alcoholic beverages within city limits. Scott, *Santa Monica*, 101.

the votes of Pacific Branch residents, outraged Santa Monica electors sought state legislation to prevent that from ever happening again.⁴⁸ When that maneuver failed, the Santa Monica school district was redrawn to exclude the Pacific Branch property. Pacific Branch votes would never again determine who sat on Santa Monica's school board.

While Santa Monica's permanent residents did not want inebriated Pacific Branch veterans in their streets or Pacific Branch votes interfering in local elections, real estate developers and businessmen continued to seek new ways to attract Pacific Branch pension dollars. In 1896 a novel solution presented itself when Moses Sherman and Eli Clark announced their plans to build an electric trolley line from Los Angeles to Santa Monica. As was the business practice at the time, in return for locating a trolley stop near the Pacific Branch, the partners requested a cash subsidy to help defray construction costs. Instead, Senator Jones and Arcadia Bandini de Baker stepped in with a donation of two hundred twenty-five acres of land to the streetcar company to link the proposed line to the NHDVS.⁴⁹ Sherman and Clark immediately sold the land, which abutted the Pacific Branch, to Senator Jones's nephew Robert F. Jones and his business partner, Robert C. Gillis.⁵⁰ Jones, Gillis, and other investors formed the Pacific Land Company of Santa Monica (hereafter PLC) which then subdivided the property and offered the resulting lots for sale.

48. In that election, Pacific Branch members cast 300 out of the 465 votes to determine the Santa Monica School Board. NARA (Riverside), RG15, "That School Matter," unidentified and undated newspaper clipping, *Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings Pertaining to the Branch 1894-1898*, box 11; "All Along the Lines," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1897, 7; "Santa Monica. The Soldiers' Home—Santa Monica School District Question," *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1897, 9; *Final Calendar of Legislative Business Thirty-Second Session, California Legislature, 1897 and History of Bills Introduced, Together with a Report of Legislative Expenses*, compiled by F. J. Brandon, Alfred D. Bowen, and Robert V. Robertson (Sacramento: A. J. Johnston Superintendent State Printing, 1897), 163. See also, Cheryl L. Wilkinson, "The Veterans in our Midst: Disabled Union Veterans in West Los Angeles, 1888-1914" master's thesis, California State University, Northridge, 2013.

49. As the widow of Don Abel Stearns, Arcadia Bandini was already wealthy in her own right when she married Robert S. Baker in 1875. After Baker died in 1894, Arcadia Bandini de Baker continued as an active participant in the land development partnership her husband and Senator Jones had begun. As a result of her savvy real estate investments, Mrs. Baker was reportedly the wealthiest woman in California when she died in 1912. Loomis, *Images of America: Brentwood*, 13; Jan Loomis, *Westside Chronicles: Historic Stories of West Los Angeles* (Charleston: The History Press, 2012), 24-26.

50. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History*, 345.

SAWTELLE, "THE SOLDIERS' CITY"

In May 1897, PLC began to offer property for sale in the Barrett Villa Tract immediately to the south of Soldiers' Home. Signaling its soldierly connection, they named the new tract in honor of Robert Gillis' friend, General A. W. Barrett, who was both a member of the NHDVS Board of Managers and the commander of California's National Guard.⁵¹ PLC targeted Union pensioners and Pacific Branch members as prospective customers by offering small lots, low prices, and an "installment plan on terms to suit the purchaser."⁵² The developers advertised that the new community, "being near the Soldiers' Home, . . . is by United States authority, forever protected from the moral and social curse of the saloon."⁵³ By implication, Santa Monica need not worry that its saloon reform measures would be undermined by businesses in the new community.

From its inception, Barrett, or Sawtelle as it later came to be named, was a community conceived by real estate developers to draw Pacific Branch veterans into a community of their own: a "Soldiers' City."⁵⁴ As inhabitants of the new community, Pacific Branch members became yet another source of profit for southern California elites. As property owners, they also redefined the boundaries of membership at the Pacific Branch and the relationship between Soldiers' Home members and the adjacent community.

Not coincidentally, almost immediately after construction of the community's first home, Stephen H. Taft, a manager for PLC and a resident of Santa Monica, organized a school district, purportedly for the children of the new town. While regulations required that a minimum of fifteen school-aged children reside within a new district, the children of Pacific Branch officers and Sawtelle residents together totaled just thirteen, so Taft expanded the school district's boundaries to include four more children who lived two miles to the north of the Soldiers' Home. Because Pacific Branch votes would now

51. "National Guard Adjut. Gen. Barrett says it is in Good Shape," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1898.

52. "Barrett Villa," *Santa Monica Outlook*, March 18, 1898.

53. Ibid.

54. PLC changed the name of the new town after the United States Postal Service asserted that the name "Barrett" bore too close a resemblance to the existing California town of Bassett. The postal authorities would not authorize a post office in a town with a name that "would cause confusion." The town's name was changed to Sawtelle in honor of W. E. Sawtelle, a PLC stockholder and the elderly S. E. Taft's replacement as the development's manager. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History*, 345-348.

be cast in the new school district and not in Santa Monica, this solved any possible future problem of Pacific Branch votes controlling the Santa Monica school-district elections.⁵⁵

In order to tap into Pacific Branch pension dollars for real estate investment, PLC negotiated an agreement with the local Soldiers' Home management that allowed resident veterans to sleep outside the Pacific Branch, while still retaining their full membership benefits.⁵⁶ Although any member could apply to "sleep out," the arrangement proved particularly attractive to married men. The new option not only kept families intact, it allowed cash-strapped Pacific Branch veterans to spend time with their families while still eating one or more meals each day in the Pacific Branch dining hall. With one mouth less to feed at home, limited pension funds stretched further, allowing some families a needed step back from the brink of poverty. It also freed up funds, allowing some veterans to purchase property and build cottages in Sawtelle.⁵⁷

Attracted by prices as low as \$60 for a small residential lot and \$150 an acre for farm land, a number of the "old soldiers" bought property in PLC's Barrett Villa Tract; "many of them buying on the installment plan and paying as their pension money came in."⁵⁸

55. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History*, 346. However, because the population of the Pacific Branch was always greater than that of Sawtelle, the institutionalized veteran voters, for as long as the Soldiers' Home was considered part of the Sawtelle voting precincts, could control the Sawtelle Board of Education. The veterans at the Soldier's Home could, if they wished, control the Sawtelle Board of Education. S. H. Taft later solved this problem when the county Board of Trustees gerrymandered the Soldiers' Home out of the district.

56. *Ibid.*, 345. At the Pacific Branch each member in good standing was issued a card or daily pass, which permitted the holder to come and go at will between reveille and 8:30 p.m. U.S. Congress, House, War Department, Office of the Inspector General, *Report of an Inspection of the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, made from August 9 to November 14, 1901*, 57th Congress, 1st Sess. H. Doc. 137 (1901), 37. Men with permission to sleep off the reservation were expected to provide housekeeping assistance in their barracks and attend inspection each Saturday. They were entitled, but not required, to eat their meals at the Pacific Branch. S. Rpt 1167 (1913), 422–423. Apparently the option to "sleep out" was not unique to the Pacific Branch. In his photographic homage to the Eastern Branch, in Maine, author Timothy Smith indicates that by the late 1890s, a number of its members had "built camps in the woods and received outdoor relief equal to the amount of money required to house a veteran at [the Soldiers' Home]." It is not clear whether the men who lived in the camps received other NHDVS benefits. Timothy Smith, *Images of America: Togus Down in Maine: The First National Veterans Home* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 1998), 40.

57. By 1910, even men who had indicated they had earned their living as laborers when they had been admitted to the Pacific Branch reported to the census that they owned their homes and those homes were mortgage free. Ancestry.com, 1910 Census.

58. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History*, 347–348.



Dinner time, Soldiers' Home. The developers of Sawtelle negotiated an agreement with the Soldiers' Home that allowed resident veterans to sleep outside the Pacific Branch, while still retaining their full membership benefits. This option permitted married Pacific Branch veterans to spend time with their families while saving money by eating one or more meals each day in the Pacific Branch dining hall. In this photograph by C.C. Pierce (ca. 1890s-1901) of disabled veterans heading toward the dining hall, we can see that at least one of them is on crutches. *Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. photCL Pierce 05842*

Indeed, as Luther A. Ingersoll commented in his contemporary history: "It was noticeable that some men who had hitherto squandered their money in dissipation now purchased land and became valuable citizens. Many families of veterans and widows also secured little homes [there]."⁵⁹ In fact, married members of the Pacific Branch bought land in Sawtelle in order to return to some semblance of normal family life. Likewise, single veteran homebuyers sought privacy and a resumption of their civilian lives while retaining the safety-net that NHDVS membership provided. In addition, some Pacific Branch members preferred to "live out" by renting rooms or cottages in the town.

Though Pacific Branch members and their families made up a large segment of Sawtelle's population, they were by no means its only inhabitants. After Henry Laird bought land and built Sawtelle's first grocery store, businessmen from Santa Monica and Los Angeles

59. Ibid.

invested in and opened other businesses in the new town.⁶⁰ Several of them built homes there as well. Civilian employees of the Pacific Branch saved both time and the cost of commuting to work by buying or renting cottages in Sawtelle. Able-bodied Union veterans from throughout the western states who sought homeownership, businesses opportunities, and the fellowship of other veterans moved to the "Soldiers' City" as well. Luther Ingersoll commented that PLC's pricing policies, which allowed "old soldiers, their families and the laboring people . . . to secure homes" in Sawtelle, had produced a "thrifty community . . . which is a valuable addition to the wealth and population of this district."⁶¹

As the twentieth century opened, it was not unusual to find announcements in California newspapers reporting a local family's intended move to Sawtelle.⁶² In some instances the move signaled the veteran's imminent admittance to the Soldiers' Home. However, another phenomenon began to emerge: aging veterans and their families moved to Sawtelle in anticipation of a future day when their health would decline and they would require the free medical care available to members of the NHDVS. For the working- and middle-class veterans who bought property in Sawtelle, membership at the Pacific Branch no longer meant prolonged separations from their wives and children. Instead it ensured that their families could remain intact in their declining years.

For certain Pacific Branch members, residency and property ownership in Sawtelle signaled a return to the social and cultural amenities of civilian life. As one historian has recently noted, Gilded Age Americans were organizers and joiners. Pacific Branch members were no exception. The Pacific Branch hosted a number of religious, social, and fraternal organizations on its campus. In 1899 and 1901 a new auditorium and chapel, respectively, were built to accommodate their activities.⁶³ The Home's on-site canteen sold beer, but to members

60. Elmer Wallace Holmes, *History of Riverside California with Biographical Sketches* (Los Angeles: Historical Record Company, 1912), 676; Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History*, 347.

61. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History*, 382.

62. "Ladies G.A.R.," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, June 4, 1903; "West Riverside," *Riverside Independent Enterprise*, September 17, 1905. Newsbank. America's Historical Newspapers (accessed July 1, 2012), <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.csun.edu>.

63. Marten, *Sing Not War*, 11; "Soldiers' Home. Dedication of New Chapel," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1900.

only, thus restricting sociability.⁶⁴ The residents of Sawtelle took early action to provide similar social and cultural amenities in the town. Thus, Wyant Hall, a public meeting hall built by long-time Pacific Branch member Andrew Wyant, was among the first structures in the town.⁶⁵ It was 1900 before a church would be built, but “members of the Holiness church of the [Pacific Branch]” purchased two lots in March 1898 on which they planned to build a church in Sawtelle.⁶⁶ By 1901, four other churches and a chapter of the Women’s Temperance Union provided religious and temperance instruction to the community.⁶⁷ Notably, all of Sawtelle’s churches preached abstinence from alcohol.⁶⁸ Despite the reputation of veterans for drunkenness, the temperance movement sweeping the nation and southern California was popular among many Sawtelle-dwelling Pacific Branch members.

Freed from wearing their NHDVS uniforms and from the necessity of returning to their barracks each night, a number of Pacific Branch members opened businesses in Sawtelle. Responding to the current nationwide infatuation with the “wheel,” Thomas Newman commenced business as the “Sawtelle Bicycle Doctor.”⁶⁹ Dr. George Corey hung out his shingle and practiced general surgery at his home on Fourth Street. Former Judge James R. Fairbank was admitted to the Pacific Branch in 1906, where he remained a member until shortly before his death in 1916. During that time he sold real estate and “attend[ed] to pension papers and affairs of veterans” from the home

64. Following the lead of several other branches of the NHDVS, the Pacific Branch opened a dedicated beer hall on July 4, 1890. A “members only” establishment, the beer hall sold only that beverage. The goal of the on-site beer hall was to manage residents’ alcohol intake in order to avoid problematic behavior out in the community. Much to the Board of Managers’ dismay, though, the canteen did not satisfy some residents’ desires for alcohol: they continued to drink in nearby communities. The Pacific Branch closed its beer hall in 1907 after Congress tied NHDVS appropriations to an order that abolished all NHDVS canteens as of March 4, 1907. If the Board of Managers did not close the canteens, no funds would be appropriated for the operation of the NHDVS. Cetina, “A History of Veterans’ Homes,” 446.

65. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll’s Century History*, 349.

66. “Soldiers’ Home,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 1898.

67. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll’s Century History*, 349.

68. By 1901, in addition to the Holiness Chapel, the Free Methodists, Southern Baptists, Christians, and Seventh Day Adventists had built churches in the town. *Ibid.*

69. Considering that riding a bicycle was being touted as the ultimate cure-all, Sawtelle’s proximity to the Pacific Branch’s invalid population was an ideal location for a repair shop. Indeed, one historian argues that the “wheel was allegedly able to cure everything from neurasthenia to consumption,” diseases commonly suffered by Pacific Branch members. Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 229.



The community of Sawtelle quickly formed its own institutions. By 1901 it had four churches. In this 1910 view from Santa Monica Boulevard, the Sawtelle Grammar School is on the left. To its right is the First Baptist Church. *Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. 00040824*

he owned on Fourth Street.⁷⁰ Sawtelle twice elected Fairbank to its Board of Trustees.⁷¹ When he died in July of 1916, Fairbank's front-page obituary in the *Santa Monica Bay Outlook* reported, "He had been in business of some kind the greater part of the ten years he spent in Sawtelle."⁷² As merchants, capitalists, and public servants, Pacific Branch members who resided in Sawtelle became influential citizens of their community.

Since federal law prohibited the sale of alcohol within a mile and a half of the Pacific Branch, no establishments offering intoxicating beverages received business licenses in the new town. However, the existence of a community so close to the Pacific Branch veterans and their federal pensions drew wily individuals with illicit schemes to get that money.⁷³ As was the case in the towns adjacent to every branch of the NHDVS, Pacific Branch veterans soon imbibed "villainous concoctions of alcohol at 'blind pigs'" in Sawtelle. If illegal booze was not enough of a problem, the *Los Angeles Times* declared in 1904, "Sawtelle [was] simply overrun with every sort of sure-thing nickel-in-the-slot machine known, even to the poker-card hand which has never been beaten yet." The *Times* portrayed the dependent veterans

70. "Passing of a Gentle Man in Sawtelle," *Santa Monica Bay Outlook*, July 11, 1916.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Because virtually every NHDVS member received a federal pension by 1900, an enormous amount of money was at stake. The lure of so much disposable income drew predatory entrepreneurs to establish unlicensed saloons, gambling dens and brothels just outside the gates of all the branches of the NHDVS despite federal law prohibiting them. Kelly, *Creating a National Home*, 175.

as the hapless victims of heartless predators who were intent on bilking Pacific Branch members out of every single one of their pension dollars, even if it meant killing the men in the process.⁷⁴

However, not all of Sawtelle's beasts of prey were civilians. The same "sleep out" policy that encouraged Pacific Branch members to open legitimate businesses also allowed those who were less scrupulous to open illegal establishments there.⁷⁵ Bootlegger and barber Hiram H. Bolster trimmed beards and cut hair in the front room of his establishment, but his real profits came from the "demijohns, beer bottles and flasks of liquor" that he served to clients in the back room. John F. Brown, who ran a pool room across Fourth Street from Bolster's place, also supplemented his income with illegal liquor sales. Another comrade, John Dupree, operated a nearby underground card parlor. All of their establishments offered their wares just steps from the Pacific Branch's south gate. Heavy enforcement—police raids, hefty fines, jail time, and even dishonorable discharges—did nothing to stop a relentless quest for pension dollars that left some Pacific Branch members penniless, even as their predatory comrades amassed profits every pension payday.⁷⁶

John Dupree's dishonorable discharge for running an illegal gambling den had the potential to bar him permanently from receiving shelter or services at any NHDVS facility.⁷⁷ However, Dupree's seemingly foolhardy venture paid off. While his choice of employment remained questionable, its proceeds, when combined with his disability pension, allowed Dupree to support himself outside the institution. In 1907 the formerly dependent veteran purchased a home on Fourth Street and by 1910 owned it outright.⁷⁸ Two years later, Dupree apparently entered the realm of respectability, becoming an active member of Sawtelle's political community, where he served as

74. A "blind pig" was an unlicensed drinking establishment like the speakeasies of the 1920s. "Robbing Veterans of Pension Money," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1904.

75. *Ibid.*

76. "Soiled Doves Paid the Fines," *Santa Monica Outlook*, February 2, 1906; "Robbing Veterans of Pension Money," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1904; Ancestry.com, *U.S. National Homes*.

77. Cetina, *A History of Veterans' Homes*, 414–415. At the request of a dishonorably discharged member, the NHDVS Board of Managers could lift the lifetime ban. In 1919 Dupree applied for such consideration and was readmitted to the Pacific Branch. He remained a member of the Pacific Branch until his death in 1923. Ancestry.com, *U.S. National Homes*.

78. "Real Estate Transfers," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1907; Ancestry.com, 1910 *United States Federal Census* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006).

a precinct judge during local and national elections.⁷⁹ Sawtelle provided the opportunity for some ambitious members to build new lives of relative self-reliance and respectability outside the Pacific Branch.

A few African American Pacific Branch members also settled their families in Sawtelle. Though African American veterans ostensibly received the same services at NHDVS branches as their white counterparts, they lived in segregated quarters and ate at separate dining tables.⁸⁰ Given those conditions, even considering their small presence in Los Angeles and Santa Monica, it is not surprising that the African American veteran population of the Pacific Branch remained low in number.⁸¹ Governor Cochrane reported 2,271 Pacific Branch members as present on June 30, 1910.⁸² In a separate entry, he described nineteen of the men as being “colored.”⁸³ That same year, Pacific Branch member and Sawtelle resident William Johnson and his wife, Rosa, told census takers that the former laborer had retired and owned their home on First Street mortgage-free.⁸⁴ Only four households were identified as “colored” or “mulatto” in the census pages for Sawtelle’s 1910 enumeration. Notably, all of these households were located on the outskirts of town.⁸⁵ The arrangement seemed to mimic the de facto segregation of African American veterans who lived at the Pacific Branch, offering no alternative to the racial politics of the day.

Though many of the Pacific Branch members residing in Sawtelle retained their NHDVS membership until their deaths, they considered themselves to be citizens of the town rather than inmates of the

79. “List of Coming Election Officers,” *The Daily Outlook*, August 21, 1912, 2; “Election Officers Sawtelle, Venice,” *The Daily Outlook*, October 26, 1912, 4.

80. Kelly, *Creating a National Home*, 98–99.

81. Merry Ovnick, *Los Angeles: The End of the Rainbow* (Los Angeles: Balcony Press, 1994), 233. Donald R. Shaffer argues that the African American population remained low at all NHDVS branches because the black veterans may have considered it unmanly to become dependent in a soldiers’ home. Instead, the black community preferred to care for its own rather than come to rely upon outside help. Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 137–142.

82. U.S. Congress. House. *Report of the Board of Managers of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1910*, 61st Cong., 3rd Sess., H. Doc. 1078, 190.

83. *Ibid.*, 197.

84. Ancestry.com. *1910 Census*. William Johnson’s status as a homeowner was not unique. As historian Josh Sides notes, African American homeownership in Los Angeles County was not unusual by 1910. Indeed, Sides reports that at the time nearly 40 percent of African American residents were homeowners. Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 16.

85. Ancestry.com. *1910 Census*.

Soldiers' Home. As property owners and business investors in the town, they had regained responsibility for their own welfare and restored their independence, significant elements of Victorian manhood. They took active roles in the civilian community, holding political offices, voting in the town's precincts, and reporting Sawtelle as their primary residence to 1910 census takers.⁸⁶ The unique status of Sawtelle's Pacific Branch residents set them apart from the Soldiers' Home, even as it elevated their standing in the civilian community

The Soldiers' Home management identified Sawtelle's Pacific Branch residents as a distinct class of member in 1913 when it segregated these men into a separate unit in the basement of one of the barracks.⁸⁷ Persistent overcrowding at the Pacific Branch probably drove the move, but the absence of beds and a paucity of storage space in their new quarters served to emphasize that those men no longer resided at the Pacific Branch. When coupled with a policy that strictly forbade the Pacific Branch members not living in the facility from wearing any item of their government-issued uniforms outside the institution's boundaries, the men who did not regularly receive NHDVS services, such as food or medical treatment, saw little reason to consider themselves as part of the Pacific Branch population.⁸⁸

Pacific Branch members who lived in Sawtelle so thoroughly separated themselves from their former institutional lives that they formed their own GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) post, despite the existence of two such groups at the Soldiers' Home. The Burnside Post 188 GAR welcomed Sawtelle's Union veteran residents, including those who were members of the Pacific Branch. Indeed, eight

86. Ibid. In the 1910 census, at least 6 percent of the Pacific Branch's population reported Sawtelle as their primary residence. The same Pacific Branch members are also enumerated as inmates of the Pacific Branch.

87. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Soldiers' Home at Santa Monica, California. Report of the Committee on Military Affairs pursuant to S. Res. 160, 62nd Cong., 3rd Sess. (1913), S. Rpt. 1167, 420.*

88. In the minds of certain of Sawtelle's Pacific Branch residents, the separation between their membership at the Pacific Branch and their life in town became so complete that they chose to be enumerated twice in the 1910 federal census. Ancestry.com, *1910 Census*. While the Pacific Branch staff may have responded to census questions on behalf of some members, the *Los Angeles Times* reported in 1910 that on Friday, April 15th, work would begin on the census. Veterans at the home had already "assured the appointed enumerator of their readiness to facilitate the work," suggesting that the majority of the Pacific Branch members answered the 1910 census questions for themselves. "Recall Scene at Appomattox: Veterans at Soldiers' Home Celebrate," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1910.

members of its first slate of officers, including the commander, held current enrollments at the Soldiers' Home.⁸⁹ However, though the Burnside Post sponsored and attended activities with the Soldiers' Home posts, full-time Pacific Branch members did not join the Sawtelle post.

The Pacific Branch veterans who lived in Sawtelle may have considered themselves to be residents of that community, but regardless of their segregated unit within the Pacific Branch, the institution's management still saw itself as their benefactor and, when necessary, as their disciplinarian. For Sawtellians this proved to be both a blessing and a curse, especially at those times when Pacific Branch managers took it upon themselves to govern areas of the men's lives beyond the Soldiers' Home gates, whether or not it had the authority to do so.

A case in point is the matter of Thomas Newman's repair bill for eleven-year-old Evalina Groh's bicycle. Newman seemingly should have been a highly favored inmate of the Pacific Branch. The partially blind and badly crippled Englishmen had been admitted to the Pacific Branch at the request of his "old friend," Senator John P. Jones.⁹⁰ Because of the senator's support, Newman's application sailed through the admissions process, despite an ongoing moratorium on NHDVS admissions. Newman's six-foot-tall, four-hundred-pound frame would have made him conspicuous whether he was at work in his shop or trudging to the Pacific Branch for dinner. He seems to have been a hardworking, law-abiding citizen. In fact, according to his Pacific Branch file, the only charge ever brought against him was in connection to the reconditioning of little Evalina's bicycle at his Sawtelle shop, *The Bicycle Doctor*.⁹¹

When Evalina left her bicycle at Newman's shop it was a rusted hulk, with broken spokes, a damaged saddle, and one flat tire. Newman had to soak its guard screws overnight in coal oil just to be able to work on the bicycle. By the time he finished his work he had sanded off the old finish and given the bicycle a new coat of paint, trued and polished the spokes on both wheels, repaired the damaged

89. "Notes from the Soldiers' Home," *Santa Monica Outlook*, October 14, 1904. The Pacific Branch GAR Posts assisted with the institution of the new Burnside GAR Post.

90. NARA (Riverside), RG15, Thomas Newman File, box 6, letter dated December 3, 1896, from Senator John P. Jones to J.G. Rowland.

91. *Ibid.*

saddle, repaired both pedals, and installed a second-hand inner tube in the flat tire.⁹² For restoring Evalina's bicycle to near mint condition, Newman charged her mother \$4.00.⁹³ The amount reflected a \$2.00 discount from his initial bill of \$6.00, presumably because Evalina's mother was a Pacific Branch employee. Despite the discount, mother and daughter claimed that the bill was too high, but they paid it anyway. Later, Evalina complained to Soldiers' Home authorities, claiming price-gouging on Newman's part. Rather than referring the girl to Sawtelle's municipal court for redress, the matter made its way to the desk of Pacific Branch Governor LaGrange. LaGrange stepped in to settle the matter. Newman was forced to defend his business practices and repair fees in Sawtelle to the governor of the veterans' institution. The governor's final verdict in the matter has not survived. However, that Newman was told to lower his bill even further is suggested by the credence that the governor's staff gave to outside opinions about the value of the work. Interestingly, the staff seemed so intent on proving their case that when they compared an outside quote of \$3.25 for cleaning and painting a ladies bicycle to Newman's invoice, they failed to notice that Newman's bill also included a tire repair. Despite his ownership of a successful business in Sawtelle, Newman was perceived by the Pacific Branch administration as a morally questionable individual liable to cheat his customers. The very existence of the case is evidence that the Pacific Branch management saw even relatively prosperous out-living members as less than independent citizens who were unfit to govern themselves without the moral guidance of the institution.⁹⁴

Regardless of their separate GAR posts and declared residence, social and commercial exchanges between the citizens of Sawtelle and Pacific Branch members occurred daily. Though the majority of these encounters took place in the town, Sawtellians could often be seen passing through the Pacific Branch's south gate. Sawtelle women's philanthropic groups regularly hosted events at the Soldiers' Home

92. Ibid., Thomas Newman's signed statement, dated June 3, 1902.

93. Ibid., handwritten invoice to Mrs. Lovejoy from Thomas Newman, dated June 3, 1902.

94. In addition to his personal effects, Thomas Newman's estate, upon his death in 1914, included a small amount of cash, a savings bond with a face value of \$300 and a savings account with a balance of \$700. Letter from Adjutant and Inspector of the Pacific Branch to Mr. William A. Newman dated September 11, 1914. NARA (Riverside), RG15, Thomas Newman File, box 6.

for members.⁹⁵ Wives made the trek to visit hospitalized husbands. Sawtellians not only attended friends' funerals in the chapel at the Pacific Branch, some of them attended regular church services there as well. Residents of the town regularly walked through the gates to see movies or enjoy the variety of live entertainment offered in the institution's amusement hall. Adding to the traffic flowing between the two communities were a number of townfolk who were paid employees in the offices, hospital, farm, or shops of the Pacific Branch.⁹⁶ Also, certain of the Pacific Branch members who resided in town walked up to the Soldiers' Home each day for their meals or to see a doctor. Less frequently, wagons filled with free firewood, the gleanings from recently pruned trees, left the Pacific Branch bound for the pot-bellied stoves with which many veterans heated their cottages.⁹⁷

Social interaction between the Pacific Branch and outside communities was not limited to Sawtelle, however. Residents of cities throughout the Los Angeles basin considered the grounds of the Pacific Branch a rural park, often holding meetings, picnics, and patriotic observances on its grounds.⁹⁸ Tourists joined the mix as part of a day-long Los Angeles-Pacific trolley tour which looped through the Soldiers' Home on its way to Santa Monica. When a tour stopped at the Pacific Branch, a group photograph would be taken on the steps of the dining hall or the library, to be processed and delivered to the tourists later that same day.⁹⁹

95. By 1905, the women of Sawtelle had formed at least three auxiliary groups to support the veterans living at the Soldiers' Home. These included the John A. Martin Women's Relief Corps, the Uncle Sam Women's Relief Corps and Ladies Auxiliary, and the Appomattox Circle Ladies of the GAR. In addition to entertaining the veterans at evens held both at the Pacific Branch and in the town, the ladies were regular participants in Pacific-Branch Memorial Day observances. "The Program at the Soldiers' Home," *Santa Monica Daily Outlook*, May 30, 1905.

96. Although they did not necessarily have to work, many veterans earned extra money by working in the NHDVS workshops, gardens, hospitals, and farms. Their labor was of double benefit to the NHDVS: the Board of Managers believed that men without idle time on their hands were happier and tended to stay out of trouble—more importantly, the disabled men were compensated at a lower rate than outside contractors.

97. S. Rpt. 1167 (1913), 720–721.

98. Similarly, James Marten notes that Milwaukee viewed the Northwestern Branch of the NHDVS as a "community resource" where local residents regularly hosted parties, meetings, and picnics. James Marten, *Sing Not War*, 163–164.

99. The \$1.00 Los Angeles-Pacific trolley tour was advertised as the Balloon Route Excursion because its route was shaped like a hot-air balloon. The day-long journey began in Hollywood and moved west, stopping at the "Old Soldiers' Home," which was billed as a "prime attraction," on its way to Santa Monica. E.C. Moore, Martin C. Neuner, and Robert O. Hoedel, *Los Angeles: A Guide Book* (Los Angeles: The Neuner Company, 1907), 130; The Electric Railway Historical Association of

THE CITY OF SAWTELLE

In 1905 those business proprietors and homeowners who were Pacific Branch members joined other Sawtelle voters to petition the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to “incorporate and to organize the government as a municipal corporation.”¹⁰⁰ At stake was Sawtelle’s direct control of its city government, law enforcement, and fire protection. In order to be considered by the Board of Supervisors, the petition required the signatures of fifty qualified electors residing within the limits of the proposed city. Notably, twenty-one of the required signatures were those of current Pacific Branch members who, as property owners, had moved their voter registration into Sawtelle.¹⁰¹

While a number of Sawtellians were anxious for the town to attain cityhood, many were opposed. A special election was called in 1905 to determine the issue. But before it took place, much to Sawtelle’s surprise, the nearby Westgate section demanded to be excluded from Sawtelle’s proposed city limits.¹⁰² The campaign ended on August 15, 1905, when, to the dismay of the incorporationists, the anti-incorporationists won the election by a vote of 130 to 79.¹⁰³ Sawtelle was not to be a city, at least not yet. An undaunted minority continued to campaign for nearly a year before a second special election

Southern California, *Los Angeles Pacific Balloon Route Excursion*, <http://www/erha.org/balloon.htm> (accessed December 12, 2007).

100. “Notice of Hearing of Petition to Incorporate,” *The Daily Outlook*, May 30, 1905, 7. By 1905, the original Barrett Villa Tract had been joined by the Lindsey Tract, Pacific Farms, the Artesian Tract and the Castle Garden Tract together with numerous small subdivisions within each tract. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll’s Century History*, 349; Los Angeles City Clerk, Records Management Division, Los Angeles City Archives, Box 82, *Sawtelle Municipal Records*, Meetings of the Board of Trustees, Vol. 1, 1906–1910.

101. *Ibid.*, Ancestry.com, *U.S. National Homes*.

102. Because it was located just outside the west gate of the Pacific Branch and bordered on Sawtelle, it seemed obvious to Sawtelle’s businessmen that Westgate should be included within their new city limits. Undoubtedly, they envisioned the rapidly appreciating property values in Westgate as a welcome addition to their new city’s tax base. However, Westgate residents and the Santa Monica Land and Water Company, Westgate’s developer, refused to become a part of the new city. Westgate was the first of several developments that Santa Monica Land and Water Company planned in connection with the westward development of land between the Pacific Branch and Santa Monica. Developments like Westgate Acres, Westgate Gardens, Westgate Heights, and other future real estate tracts would not be marketed to attract veterans and pensioners. Instead, in anticipation of escalating property values as development moved toward Santa Monica and the ocean, those tracts targeted a more prosperous class of real estate investor. “All Absorbing Sawtelle Topic,” *The Daily Outlook*; “Sawtelle to Take a Vote,” *The Daily Outlook*, July 11, 1905; Loomis, *Brentwood*, 8.

103. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll’s Century History*, 350.

resulted in an overwhelming vote for incorporation as California's newest sixth-class city.¹⁰⁴

On November 16, 1906, Sawtelle finally became a city. As an incorporated municipality, it gained the right to make and enforce local laws governing the behavior of its citizens and its visitors.¹⁰⁵ Despite the existing federal ban on the sale of alcohol within a mile and a half of the Soldiers' Home, Pacific Branch members who were tanked up on illegal booze increasingly disturbed the streets. The imminent closure of the Pacific Branch canteen by an increasingly prohibitionist Congress augured a torrent of newly cut-off veterans looking for new places to imbibe.¹⁰⁶ As the nearest town to the Soldiers' Home, Sawtelle would attract the bulk of them. If the new city were unable to act quickly to control the flow of illegal alcohol within its borders, it risked becoming the out-of-control community that the press had so often accused it of being. Legitimate new businesses and real estate investors would be repelled by this shift to degeneracy, so Sawtelle's property owners, temperance advocates, and newly elected Board of Trustees moved to control the situation using the additional powers conferred by cityhood. The city's investors understood what historians Carey McWilliams and Greg Hise later recognized: that expansion was southern California's "primary business; a growing population opened opportunities in construction, manufacturing, and commerce[;] if immigration . . . diminished the result would [be] . . . as 'disastrous as a drought.'"¹⁰⁷

Sawtelle's first Board of Trustees promptly adopted city ordinances that outlawed gambling and punished "Drunkenness and Disorderly Conduct."¹⁰⁸ Next, in an effort to shore up the existing federal regulations regarding the sale of alcohol in the area, it attempted to limit to

104. The results of that second cityhood election were 241 votes for incorporation and 58 against it. Ibid. Pursuant to a legislative act adopted on March 2, 1883, and subsequently amended in 1901 and 1911, California classified incorporated municipalities with populations of less than 6,000 residents as "sixth class" cities. Frank C. Jordan, Secretary of State, *California Blue Book or State Roster 1911* (Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1913), 139.

105. Ibid.

106. Cetina, "A History of Veterans' Homes," 446. In 1906 Congress tied NHDVS appropriations to an order that abolished all NHDVS canteens as of March 4, 1907. If the Board of Managers did not close the canteens, no funds would be appropriated for the operation of the NHDVS.

107. Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 11; McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, 134.

108. Los Angeles City Clerk, Records Management Division, Los Angeles City Archives, box 82, *Sawtelle Municipal Records, Ordinances 5-52, 1901-1908*, Ordinance Nos. 9 and 26.

one pint the “Amount of Vinous or Alcoholic Liquors any Person or Corporation May Have in His or Its Possession” within city limits.¹⁰⁹ Finally, the Board contracted with Los Angeles County to run its newly built satellite jail in return for authority to use the facility to incarcerate Sawtelle’s own lawbreakers. Within months the Soldiers’ City had adopted regulatory laws that were stricter than similar ordinances in either Santa Monica or Los Angeles. More importantly, the new city had the means to punish those who ran afoul of those laws, both controlling illicit behaviors of Pacific Branch members when necessary and protecting the veterans from those who would prey upon them.

Despite the considerable Union veteran population of the town, not one of the five “representative business men” elected to Sawtelle’s first Board of Trustees had served in the Civil War.¹¹⁰ However, Union veterans were elected to other city offices. Now in their sixties, City Clerk Leroy S. Fallis and Recorder Oris W. Jewett had survived some of the most horrific battles of the war. Private Jewett had seen battle at 2nd Bull Run, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg with the 20th Indiana Infantry.¹¹¹ Sergeant Fallis had marched with the Indiana 8th Cavalry and Sherman to the sea.¹¹² Both men now owned businesses and homes in Sawtelle. Jewett, the man elected to adjudicate any violations of Sawtelle’s city ordinances, was also a member of the Pacific Branch.¹¹³ Like their younger civilian

109. *Sawtelle Municipal Records*, Ordinance No. 37. Following an appeal of a guilty verdict on charges of possession of more than one pint of liquor within Sawtelle’s city limits, the ordinance was declared unconstitutional. In his verdict, the judge in the case declared, “No one can say how much liquor a man may keep in his cellar without breaking the law.” “Says Liquor Law Won’t Hold Water,” *Los Angeles Herald*, June 23, 1907.

110. “City Officials of City of Sawtelle,” *The Daily Outlook*, November 22, 1906, 1.

111. Ancestry.com, *U.S. Civil War Records and Profiles* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 1999); U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Soldiers and Sailors Database*, <http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>

112. Noah Andre Trudeau, *Southern Storm: Sherman’s March to the Sea* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009) 276, 287, 288, 290, 292.

113. Oris W. Jewett, his wife, Annie, and their two children arrived in Sawtelle in 1903. Until then, despite years of failing health, he had operated a successful law practice in Sturgis, South Dakota. However, by 1903 it seemed clear that he would soon require the long-term medical services provided at the Pacific Branch.

On February 17, 1903, the *Santa Monica Outlook* announced that Oris Jewett had purchased a home on Fifth Street in Sawtelle with plans to make it the “family home.” That same year he opened a law practice and became partners with fellow veteran John Farley in a real estate sales business. The Pacific Branch finally admitted Jewett on May 5, 1904. As his political and business careers attest, Oris W. Jewett became a popular member of the Sawtelle community before and



Katherine Newton Graybill in front of her Sawtelle cottage in the early 1900s, justifiably proud of her well-kept vegetable garden and fruit trees. A lot sold for as little as \$60. There, a small cottage could be built and, with the help of diligent garden production, a veteran could afford to live with his family, outside the gates of the Pacific Home. *Courtesy of Thomas M. Miller.*

colleagues, Jewett and Fallis were motivated by personal business interests to keep the new city crime free and its property values on the rise.¹¹⁴

Notwithstanding the public service and economic success of men like Oris Jewett, only a small segment of the Pacific Branch members who lived in Sawtelle attained financial independence. Many more of the veterans relied upon government assistance and an assortment of self-provisioning strategies in order to eke out a living outside of the

during his Pacific Branch affiliation. He remained a member of the Pacific Branch until his death in Sawtelle on October 24, 1907. The successful Jewett chose to be buried in Santa Monica's Woodlawn Cemetery rather than the Pacific Branch's home cemetery. Ingersoll. *Ingersoll's Century History*, 386-387; Ancestry.com, *U.S. National Homes*.

114. In the next decade, Sawtelle's voters elected other veterans to public office. Their vested interest in the city's success fueled a relentless battle against blind pigs, gambling dens, and drunkenness that followed each pension distribution. Of particular note, concurrent with membership at the Soldiers' Home, James R. Fairbank and John Farley served together on the city's Board of Trustees as that Board sought to control not only sundry behaviors of Pacific Branch members, but also sewage disposal practices of the Pacific Branch that affected the town. Sawtelle Board of Trustees, "Board of Trustee Minutes, Volume 1 and 2. For lists of Sawtelle city officials see, *California Blue Book* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office 1907, 1909, 1911, 1913-1915).

Soldiers' Home.¹¹⁵ The average invalid pension was \$172.00 per year in 1910, or about "30 percent of the annual income of the average employed American."¹¹⁶ Contemporary photographs attest that for some of Sawtelle's Pacific Branch residents, survival meant that rabbit hutches, chicken coops, fruit trees, and vegetable gardens were common additions to their yards. Then, as would be the case in other working-class suburbs of Los Angeles, residents' ability to produce their own food and perhaps sell some produce minimized dependence on cash assets, especially for families that relied completely on disability pensions for their income. A very thin line separated some Sawtelle Pacific Branch residents from the poverty that historians have often associated with members of the NHDVS. For those couples and families, the veterans' Pacific Branch dining privileges and the home-production of food became critical sources of security as the aging veterans struggled to avoid complete dependence.

The prolonged illness or death of one spouse would threaten disaster to the economic well-being of Pacific Branch couples. Though the Pacific Branch hospital and medical facilities were available to veterans, the entitlement did not extend to their wives. For poorer couples, an invalid wife might necessitate the permanent return to barracks life for the veteran. However, the death of the Pacific Branch member had even worse implications for his surviving spouse. The loss of their husbands' disability pensions meant that Sawtelle's Pacific Branch widows often faced destitution, even if they received the \$12-per-month widows' pension mandated by federal law.¹¹⁷ The exclusion of family members from NHDVS benefits and the

115. Historian Becky Nicolaides argues that self-provisioning was one way that families in working-class suburbs in twentieth-century Los Angeles minimized their dependence on cash, which provided them some insulation from the marketplace. Sawtelle's pension-dependent veterans used similar techniques to live on fixed incomes outside the NHDVS. Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 12–13, 121.

116. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 135.

117. Widows of veterans who received the minimum pension probably experienced little change in their standard of living. However, as Theda Skocpol points out, many Union veterans received more than the minimum monthly rate. Indeed, by 1910 a few individuals received \$1,200 in pension payments per year. For the wives of men at the higher rates, a husband's death meant a significant drop in annual income. In some cases, it resulted in destitution. The federal government responded to the growing number of poverty-stricken widows in a 1916 act increasing widows' pensions to \$20 per month, still far below the average working American's income at the time. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 135; William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), 141.

lower pension rates for dependents resulted in a steadily growing population of indigent widows, leading to ongoing concern in the community.

As Americans entered the twentieth century, it was not easy for widows to survive without some assistance. Though certain low-level white-collar jobs admitted women to the workplace, they were still blocked from many sectors of employment.¹¹⁸ Sawtelle widows faced an additional hurdle to entering the job market. Most of the women were already in their fifties and sixties, far older than the single young women whom employers sought to employ as office workers and clerks.¹¹⁹ When a number of Sawtelle widows addressed the situation by re-marrying veterans, the *Los Angeles Times* snidely reported: "Marrying and giving in marriage is one of the chief occupations of the widows of Sawtelle," which implied that the women were pension-hungry gold diggers.¹²⁰ What the *Times* ignored was that the widows and other Pacific Branch veterans shared the same social circles, so marriages within this group were natural occurrences. It is true that the security of the larger veterans' disability pensions and the NHDVS benefits of their new husbands made such an arrangement an attractive alternative for some widows, but the prospect of home-cooked meals, housekeeping, and nursing services made marriage an equally agreeable accommodation for certain Pacific Branch veterans.¹²¹ Admittedly, there were women who took advantage of the aging veterans, but the dire circumstances of an increasing number of elderly widows living in Sawtelle became an issue among women across California.

The belief that Pacific Branch membership fractured poor families during veterans' lives and left behind destitute widows when they died led the California and Nevada Department of the Ladies of the GAR (hereafter Ladies) to purchase land and build cottages in

118. Clark Davis, *Company Men: White Collar Life & Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892-1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 9-10.

119. Davis points out that the average age of female office workers living in Los Angeles between 1910 and 1920 was twenty-seven, decades younger than the majority of widows of Civil War veterans. *Ibid.*, 9.

120. "Widows are Not Widows Very Long at Sawtelle," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1917, II-10.

121. Widows' pensions ceased when they remarried. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 142. For a discussion of problems experienced by widows associated with the application process, see: Megan J. McClintock, "The Impact of the Civil War on Nineteenth-Century Marriages" in Cimbala and Miller, *Union Soldiers and the Northern Homefront*, 395-416.

Sawtelle.¹²² The groundbreaking for the first of the Nevada Street cottages for “aged couples” took place in March 1905.¹²³ By 1917 the Ladies had built seven cottages for the rent-free “use of indigent widows of veterans and for indigent veterans and their wives.”¹²⁴ Through this housing program, the Ladies provided needy widows and indigent Pacific Branch couples a level of protection that was not available at the Soldiers’ Home. Moreover, they assumed responsibility for the care of the widows of Union veterans beyond the veterans’ lifetimes.

Meanwhile, inside the attractive buildings and well-kept gardens of the Pacific Branch, members faced the over-zealous enforcement of NHDVS regulations and wanton disregard of their comfort. Thanks to the more than forty-year-old NHDVS bureaucracy, an inflexible aging governor,¹²⁵ and the Board of Managers’ continued commitment to the Soldiers’ Home’s service as a community park and tourist attraction, the quality of life for the rank and file deteriorated to little better than that found at the average county poorhouse. The situation came to national attention when *West Coast Magazine* published muckraker John S. McGroarty’s 1911 article entitled “A Nation’s Disgrace.”¹²⁶

Contradicting the promises made to Pacific Branch members during President McKinley’s 1901 visit, McGroarty reported, they were still, a decade later, not “surrounded with all the comforts and blessings which a grateful nation can provide.”¹²⁷ Rather, the utter lack of privacy and the strict military regimen under which the old men lived

122. Founded in 1886, the Ladies of the GAR was a national women’s organization that limited its membership to women with blood ties to Union veterans. See, Wallace Evan Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans’ and Hereditary Organizations in America 1783–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 38, 101–102; 146–147.

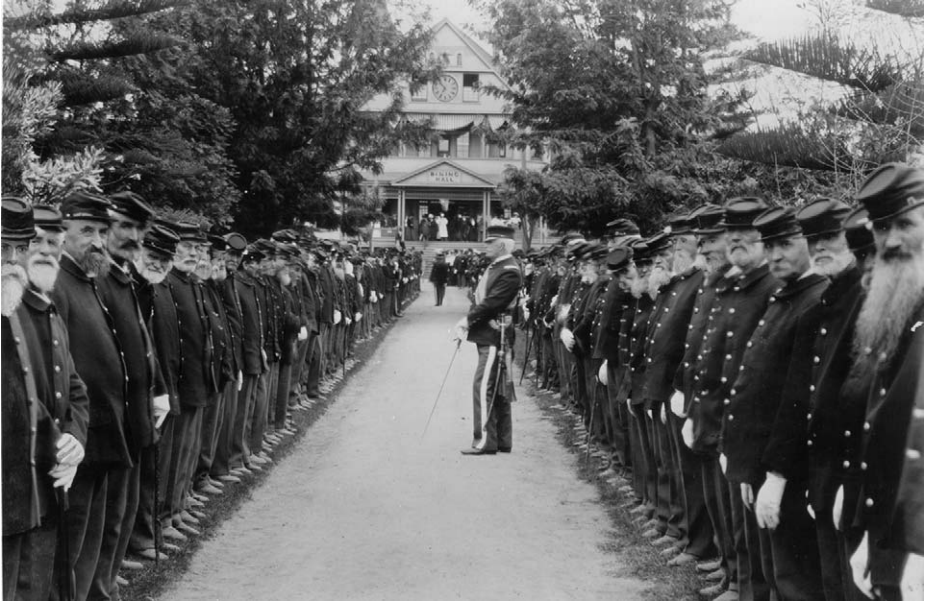
123. “Homes for Veterans,” *Riverside Enterprise*, March 6, 1905, 3.

124. “Widows are Not Widows Very Long at Sawtelle,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1917.

125. Major T. J. Cochrane served as governor of the Pacific Branch from February 1908 until February 1913. For the ten years prior to his appointment to the governorship, Major Cochrane occupied the office of treasurer at the branch. He had served as adjutant of the 77th Ohio Infantry during the Civil War. After the war, he remained in the army until resigning his commission to accept the position of treasurer at the Pacific Branch. Upon his appointment to its governorship, Major Cochrane told reporters that he was determined to discipline “unruly veterans . . . and protect the more quiet element in his charge against annoyances on the part of their bibulously-inclined associates.” “New Officers Are Announced,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1908.

126. S. Rpt. 1167 (1913). McGroarty’s article, *A Nation’s Disgrace*, is reprinted in full on pages 6–11 of the report.

127. “Veterans Salute President,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1901, A7.



Memorial Day Review, Pacific Branch, Soldiers' Home. Wearing their Civil War uniforms long after that war ended, gray-bearded veterans, temporarily distracted by the photographer, prepare to stand at attention at the command of their officer. The Pacific Branch dining hall is in the rear. Photograph by C.C. Pierce (ca. 1901). *Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. photCL Pierce 05912*

shook McGroarty to his core during his 1911 visit to the Soldiers' Home. Outraged, he wrote: "The present method of conducting both the mess rooms and the barrack rooms at our soldiers' home is such as to degrade the men, not to speak of the sufferings it imposes on them."¹²⁸ Pacific Branch administrators not only mistreated Union veterans, he proclaimed, they robbed the veterans of their manhood. After reading McGroarty's article, an apoplectic Senator John D. Works of California demanded a full senate investigation into the accusations of mismanagement at the Pacific Branch.

Steadfast in its support of the Pacific Branch administration and its own disdain for the dependent poor, the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that such a hearing was unnecessary because "unfortunately there are in this as in all like institutions a number of persons afflicted with the 'kicking' habit," that is, unwarranted whining by inmates. Decades of self-inspections conducted by the Board of Managers, which always

¹²⁸. S. Rpt. 1167 (1913), 9.

found the institution above reproach and its inmates somehow lacking, seemed to support the *Times'* position.¹²⁹

However, at the hearing (which opened in Los Angeles on November 20, 1912) testimony by McGroarty, dozens of Pacific Branch members and their families, Pacific Branch employees, Union veterans, civilians, and Pacific Branch residents of Sawtelle overwhelmingly refuted the *Times'* assertions.¹³⁰ Significant problems existed in nearly all facets of life at the Pacific Branch. Together members of the community and Pacific Branch veterans testified that the conditions under which the old soldiers lived demeaned them and infringed on their rights as American citizens in a myriad of large, small, and even petty ways. When the senators considered all of the testimony, they found the NHDVS in general, and the Pacific Branch in particular, to be a thoroughly broken system. Rather than a real home to deserving, aged Union veterans, the Pacific Branch was described as "a vast detention barracks, under an unnecessarily rigid system of discipline."¹³¹

The Senate hearing led to significant changes at the institution. Almost immediately, Governor T. J. Cochrane and many of his officers were either transferred or forced to resign their positions. However, despite nearly universal testimony condemning the harsh conditions of barracks life, the barracks system of residence was not abolished, nor did the government introduce married-couple housing on the grounds of the Pacific Branch. Reform did not solve the central problems faced by Pacific Branch members, yet many veterans had little choice but to remain. Sawtelle's Pacific Branch residents continued to reside in the town rather than leave their wives or submit to the communal living conditions at the Pacific Branch.

Though Sawtelle residents supported the quest of Pacific Branch members for improved living conditions at the Soldiers' Home, tensions between the institution's residents and the Sawtelle out-living members did not magically disappear following the 1912 Senate investigation. Afterwards, Pacific Branch members still managed to find sources of alcohol in the town; the worst offenders often could be

129. "Soldiers' Home. Will Begin the Inquiry," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1912, I-10.

130. S. Rpt. 1167 (1913), 12-1243.

131. *Ibid.*, xii.



After votes against him by the residents of the Pacific Branch caused him to lose his seat on the Sawtelle School Board in 1913, Stephen Taft plotted to disenfranchise the old soldiers. In 1915 he succeeded in getting the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to gerrymander the precinct lines so that the disabled Pacific Branch residents would have to trek to Van Nuys to vote. On school-picture day at the handsome Sawtelle Grammar School, ca. 1910, all the students and the teacher are frowning for some unknown reason—except for the merry boy in front of the right column.

seen passed out in the back of an open handcart as Pacific Branch guards hauled them back to the reservation.¹³²

Certain Sawtelle residents continued to view the veterans who lived at the Pacific Branch as outsiders and citizens of a neighboring community that was clearly separate and less savory than their own. Others conceived political uses for the old soldiers' votes. These issues erupted in 1913 when Stephen H. Taft, the man who had organized the Sawtelle school district to include the Pacific Branch in 1898, allegedly lost his election to the Sawtelle Board of Education because "a large portion of the vote was that of the veteran dwellers at [the] Soldiers' Home, who voted almost solidly for [his opponent,

132. U.S. Congress, House, "Report of an Inspection of the Several Branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers made September 8, 1913 to November 29, 1913, by Maj. W.P. Jackson, Inspector General," 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess. (1913), H. Doc. 502, 55.

A. J.] Stoner.”¹³³ The enraged Taft took action to remove Pacific Branch voters from Sawtelle elections permanently.

He bided his time until the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors meeting on the night before the annual deadline to change school boundaries.¹³⁴ Taft was well aware of the approaching deadline, but unfortunately for the Pacific Branch members, the supervisors who attended the meeting were not. That night the supervisors gerrymandered the Pacific Branch precincts into the Van Nuys district some fifteen miles away. Not only were Pacific Branch veterans ineligible to vote in Sawtelle's school board elections, it was unlikely they would be able to make the long interurban railway trip via Hollywood and the Cahuenga Pass to Van Nuys to cast their votes there either. The wily Taft had succeeded in once again removing what he considered to be unwanted Pacific Branch votes from a local school board's elections.

A WESTSIDE SUBURB OF LOS ANGELES

On the heels of Taft's coup, the city of Sawtelle faced what became its longest and last battle. At issue was whether or not to abandon Sawtelle's independent-city status in exchange for a reliable source of water. Water had increasingly become an issue for the entire Los Angeles basin. Its burgeoning population meant that existing sources could not keep up with demand. In 1905 Los Angeles elites announced plans for an aqueduct designed to provide the region with what was claimed to be an unlimited supply of water from the distant Owens Valley. Financing for the project came in the form of a bond issue that totaled nearly \$25 million dollars. The dedication of the Los Angeles Aqueduct on November 5, 1913, signaled the acquisition of a plentiful water supply for Los Angeles. However, the city of Los Angeles did not intend that its substantial investment would benefit others unless they made significant monetary commitments in return.¹³⁵ In return for water service, outlying areas and incorporated

133. "Sawtelle Has Busy Day," *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1913, I-16.

134. "Cunning, Disfranchise Veterans by Political Jobbery" *Los Angeles Times*, February 24, 1915, II-1.

135. Semi-arid Los Angeles's natural water sources were unpredictable and inadequate to sustain the region's rapid population increase. However, rather than simply a brilliantly engineered water project for the people of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Aqueduct also served a moneymaking land-development scheme that profited a small group of the city's elites. McWilliams, *Southern California: an Island on the Land*, 187-191.

cities would have to cede their corporate identities to become a part of the city of Los Angeles and share proportionately in Los Angeles' "bonded indebtedness . . . for Owens River Bonds, Harbor Bonds and Electric Power Bonds."¹³⁶

In mass meetings held as early as November 1913, Sawtelle began to consider the question of annexation. At the time, an exultant *Los Angeles Times* reported that Sawtelle's citizens were "overwhelmingly in favor of annexation."¹³⁷ By the date of the election, May 14, 1917, the support was not so overwhelming: annexation was approved by a margin of just three votes.¹³⁸ However, when a disgruntled Sawtelle citizen named Charles Coe claimed that voters had not been informed of the extent of indebtedness Sawtelle's annexation would foist upon the city's property owners, a court battle began that the *Los Angeles Times* described as one "of the longest and most bitter fights in the history of municipal governments in the State."¹³⁹

In the meantime, Sawtelle's Board of Trustees and city officers, several of whom were Union veterans, vowed to maintain Sawtelle as an independent municipality until a decision was handed down by the California Supreme Court.¹⁴⁰ However, Los Angeles chose not to

136. Quoted in Los Angeles City Clerk, Records Management Division, Los Angeles City Archives, box 82, *Sawtelle Municipal Records*, Meetings of the Board of Trustees, Vol. 2, 1910–1922, February 19, 1917. See also, Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 223–228.

137. "Sawtelle Ready. Anxious to Join City," *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1913.

138. Notably, the special election of 1917 had been called after S. H. Taft presented the Board of Trustees with a petition signed by more than 600 voters requesting an election to determine whether or not Sawtelle should be annexed to Los Angeles. Los Angeles City Clerk, Records Management Division, Los Angeles City Archives, box 82, *Sawtelle Municipal Records*, Meetings of the Board of Trustees, Vol. 2, 1910–1922. An outspoken annexationist, 92 year-old Stephen H. Taft personally funded, wrote and edited *The Bay District Investigator* as a pro-annexation "mouthpiece." Sadly, Taft would not live to see Sawtelle's 1922 consolidation with Los Angeles. "Oldest Editor's Pen Idle," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1917; "Last Rites for S. H. Taft at Sawtelle," *Santa Monica Outlook*, April 26, 1918. According to the Board of Trustees minutes, a total of 1,035 votes were cast; 519 in favor of consolidation and 516 against. *Sawtelle Municipal Records*, Meetings of the Board of Trustees, Vol. 1, 1906–1910, July 24, 1917.

139. "Sawtelle Jubilant Over Entry into Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1922.

140. Trustee Zachariah T. Walker served in the 46th Iowa Infantry during the Civil War. Moreover, he was a member of the Pacific Branch for the duration of the annexation battle. At that time Walker was the only Civil War veteran on the Board of Trustees. However, Sawtelle's City Recorder, Harmon Cook, also a Union veteran, was a former member of the Pacific Branch. H. C. Head, Sawtelle City Treasurer, was a Union veteran but never a member of the Pacific Branch. Ancestry.com, *U. S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866–1938* (Provo: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2007); National Archives and Records Administration. *U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861–1934* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2000; "Sawtelle to Start Anew," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1921.

wait to finalize the city's annexation, despite the pending appeals. Instead, Los Angeles forcibly seized Sawtelle's city records, took over all municipal services, and installed its own police force, fire department, and board of trustees to manage the city. All the while, Sawtelle's elected Board of Trustees continued to meet and attempted to assert its authority, even after Los Angeles locked the trustees out of City Hall, froze the city's bank accounts, and seized its safe.¹⁴¹ Finally, despite the California Secretary of State's 1918 certification of the annexation, on September 15, 1921, the California Supreme Court declared the 1917 election illegal and annulled Sawtelle's annexation to Los Angeles.¹⁴² One month later, on October 19, the court refused to hear any further appeals to its decision; apparently Los Angeles had "lost" Sawtelle.¹⁴³

Yet, it had not. After electing a new pro-annexation Board of Directors, Sawtelle held a second special election on June 2, 1922, to determine whether or not it would consolidate with the city of Los Angeles. This time, the pro-annexation forces won by an overwhelming majority of 1,287 votes cast in favor of annexation to 210 votes against.¹⁴⁴ Why the turnaround? In addition to water access, it can be argued that between the 1917 and 1922 elections Sawtelle's demographics had drastically changed. The nation had just come through a World War. A new generation of disabled veterans was changing the Pacific Branch from an old-age home into a rehabilitation and recovery center for the young. However, a more compelling reason for the turnabout is suggested in a September 21 statement by Los Angeles City Council President Ralph Luther Criswell seven months before Sawtelle's special election:

During the last fiscal year . . . the city received in taxes from the Sawtelle district . . . \$25,982.06, while the city paid out for fire and police protection, engineering, street repair work and other administrative expenses \$30,657.25. So it can be seen that the city spends more in Sawtelle than it receives.¹⁴⁵

141. "Threaten Strong Box with Dynamite," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1918; "Like Their Job. Sawtelle's Trustee's Still Hold Meetings," *Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 1918.

142. "City to Fight Court Ruling," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1921.

143. "Sawtelle Again Has Own Officials," *Riverside Independent Enterprise*, October 20, 1921; "Sawtelle Lost to Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1921.

144. *Sawtelle Municipal Records*, Meetings of the Board of Trustees, Vol. 2, 1910-1922, June 6, 1922.

145. "City to Fight Court Ruling," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1921.

If Criswell was correct, Sawtelle's tax base was not large enough to support a city. In order for the Soldiers' City to maintain its municipal services and thus its property values, consolidation with Los Angeles seemed to be the only answer. In the end, whether Sawtelle could support itself as an independent municipality became moot at midnight on July 8, 1922, when "the city of Sawtelle vanished" and officially became a part of the city of Los Angeles.¹⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

At the turn of the twentieth century, Sawtelle and the Pacific Branch undoubtedly represented the largest concentrations of Civil War veterans living in Los Angeles and, for that matter, in California. That Union veterans were drawn to live in Sawtelle whether or not they were ever admitted to the Pacific Branch illustrates that there was more to life in Sawtelle than simply aging veterans redefining their federal benefits. Rather, the Soldiers' City provided new opportunities in a new century for Union veterans still open to the challenges of building a community and embarking on new business endeavors forty years after Appomattox. The active social, political, and economic involvement of Union veterans in the city of Sawtelle reveals the significant role that Civil War veterans played in the development of West Los Angeles and, by extension, California.

¹⁴⁶. "City Disappears," *San Diego Union*, July 9, 1922.