

## Pikes Peakers in the Civil War: The Battle of Glorieta Pass

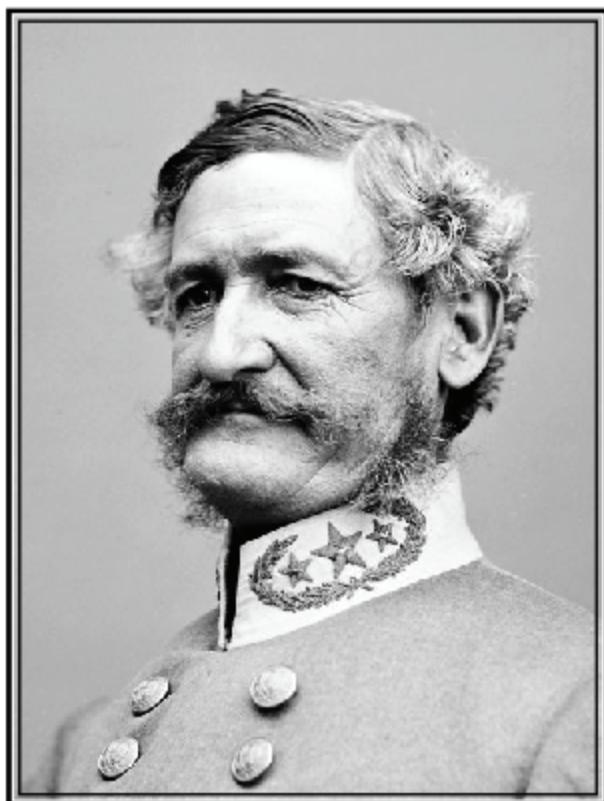
By Phil McDonald

When Civil War buffs congregate to reprise famous battles of that conflict, the Battle of Glorieta Pass is not likely to be raised as a subject of their conversation. But Pikes Peak area historians know that in March of 1862 Glorieta Pass, New Mexico was the site of a significant engagement in which an audacious band of Texans under the command of Henry "Walking Whiskey Keg" Sibley was ultimately repulsed by a feisty and resourceful unit of Coloradoans. Sometimes called "The Gettysburg of the West," the Battle of Glorieta Pass would make a 6'7" 250 pound "fire and brimstone" Methodist preacher named John Milton Chivington a statewide hero.

Perhaps it is a bit of exaggeration to compare the Battle of Glorieta Pass to Gettysburg, but that is not to say that it was an unimportant sideshow. Had General Sibley's risky plan succeeded, the West Coast would have been isolated from the Union, the seizure of California's coastal ports would have broken the Union blockade and the Colorado goldfields would have fallen into Confederate hands. It is fair to speculate that the course of the Civil War would have been changed. But Sibley's designs were thwarted primarily because of a clever plan hatched by the behemoth Methodist preacher, John Chivington.

When the Civil War erupted in 1861, Colorado was part of the Kansas territory. The population of Kansas was a relatively paltry 34,277. Were it not for a monumentally important event that occurred two years before in 1859, the territory would have been virtually irrelevant. That event, of course, was the

discovery of gold in the Cherry Creek area. While no official battles occurred in Colorado, Coloradoans were not immune from the passions that seized their countrymen in the East. While most of the residents of the territory were Union loyalists, significant pockets of rebel sympathizers existed and skirmishes between the two groups broke out in Denver City.



*Henry Hopkins Sibley*

*Continued on page 4*

**Old Colorado City Historical Society**

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or Don Ellis - [spiderwort@pcsys.net](mailto:spiderwort@pcsys.net)

SUBMISSION DEADLINE IS THE 15th OF EACH MONTH

**MISSION**

Revised April 2004

*The Old Colorado City Historical Society was founded as a volunteer organization to recognize the historical significance and unique culture of original Old Colorado City and early El Paso County. This spirit is perpetuated through the preservation of artifacts and archival materials, encouragement of research, education of the children and the community, through the membership and the operation of the History Center at 1 South 24th Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado.*

**MEMBERSHIPS**

Memberships are welcome at any time. Membership renewals are due on the anniversary date of the initial membership. Members receive the *West Word* newsletter, discounts, local meetings and programs.

Annual membership classifications are:

Student	\$15	Lifetime	\$150
Individual	\$25	Business	\$50
Family	\$30	Corporate	\$250

*Funds from a Lifetime membership are placed into a Perpetuity/Endowment Fund to be used only for projects which have been approved by two-thirds of the membership. Only the interest will be used for current expenses. We welcome gifts to this fund, which will be credited to the donor or as a memorial.*

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**MEETINGS**

OCCHS Monthly Meeting & Program is held at 11 a.m. on the second Friday of each month, except during June, July, and August. The History Center opens at 10 a.m. on the day of the meeting for refreshments and visitation. The program begins at 11 a.m. This meeting is free and open to the public.

## WELCOME TO OCCHS!

### ~ NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS

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# Thank you all!

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Old Colorado City Historical Society, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the following individuals for their work on behalf of the Society during the 2010-2011 year.

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Thanks so much for your quality service to the OCCHS

Phil McDonald, President  
OCCHS

*Glorieta continued from page 1*

Henry Hopkins Sibley, an eccentric and gifted West Point graduate of the class of 1838, immediately recognized the value of seizing Colorado's gold and isolating the coastal states of the West. However, the plan proved to be as flawed as the man who conceived it. Sibley, the inventor of a tent and stove that bear his name, was known as an argumentative and insubordinate alcoholic. The proposal that was submitted to president Jefferson Davis was premised on a number of questionable assumptions. In Sibley's mind, a competently led and dedicated Texas regiment could easily rout a poorly trained federal militia stocked with inept native Hispanics. He believed that minimal provisions would be necessary since the native populace, once liberated from Union control, would rally to the cause of the Stars and Bars and happily supply their Southern liberators with all the food and supplies that were required. On the march northward to the gold fields, the Texans would seize federal forts and arsenals along the way.

The march of the Texans commenced in July of 1861 when Confederate forces under the command of Colonel John Baylor routed Unionists at the Battle of Mesilla and seized federal forts along the Texas-Arizona border. The success of Baylor's mission resulted in the formation of a newly declared Confederate Territory of Arizona.

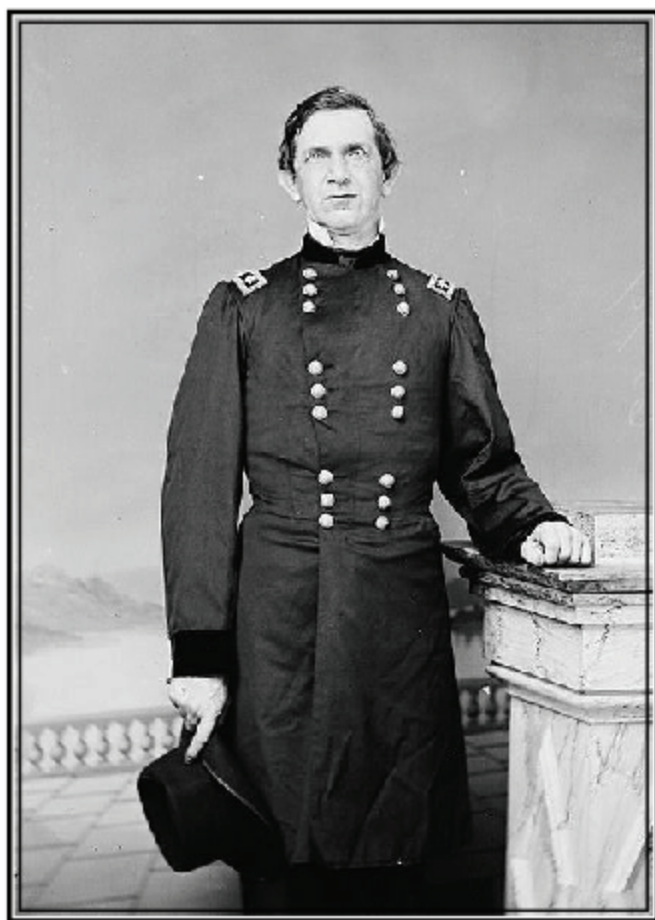
After Davis hastily approved of his scheme, Sibley led his forces on a 673 mile march from San Antonio to Fort Bliss in late 1861. The results were disastrous as 500 men were lost to diseases, accidents and desertion. It was not an auspicious beginning.

Concerned by rising sectional tensions in July of 1861, Colorado Governor William Gilpin was alarmed by the territory's total lack of preparedness. Accordingly, the Lincoln appointee and former West Point cadet decided to take matters into his own hands. Correctly concluding that he would receive no help from a federal government preoccupied with fighting a war in the vicinity of the nation's capitol, he issued "sight drafts" to finance raising a Colorado army.

The man charged with the responsibility of defending the New Mexico and Colorado territories from Sibley's incursion was a West Point classmate of the eccentric Texan, Colonel Edward R.S. Canby. The two leaders could not

have been more different. While Sibley was bold, impulsive and reckless, Canby was quiet, cautious and reserved. Sibley detested administrative duties while Canby relished this type of work.

Canby was blessed by the good fortune of coming into possession of a letter hinting at Sibley's invasion. Accordingly, two "worse than worthless" regiments of New Mexico volunteers were recruited and a request was issued to Governor Gilpin to assist with the contribution of Colorado troops stationed at Fort Garland.



*General Edward Canby*

Preparations for war were underway in Denver City. The Colorado recruits authorized by Gilpin were to be commanded by John P. Slough, a local attorney. He could not have been a worse choice. Described as an abrasive, hypercritical martinet, he was despised by officers and men alike. Two other senior officers were appointed to serve under Slough, Samuel Tappan and John Chivington. Each of the three principal commanders was responsible for recruiting his own unit. Slough raised troops in the Denver area, Tappan recruited Central City,

Black Hawk and Gregory Point and Chivington, who had declined a chaplaincy appointment, enlisted his soldiers in the Pikes Peak region.

Chivington's Pikes Peakers, affectionately known as "Gilpin's Pet Lambs", were anything but that. Composed of German immigrants and miners, these lambs would prove to be tough, resilient, resourceful and fearless. The raw volunteers trained at the newly created Camp Weld in present-day Denver. Regarded as the "finest post in the Rockies" Weld, financed by \$40,000 in sight drafts, was completed in 1861. Training at Weld consisted of drilling, marksmanship, guard duty and housekeeping chores. Predictably, the men tired of this dull regimen; and drunkenness, carousing and fighting were routine. I suspect that many Denver City residents were relieved when eventually the Pikes Peakers were sent south to fight in New Mexico!

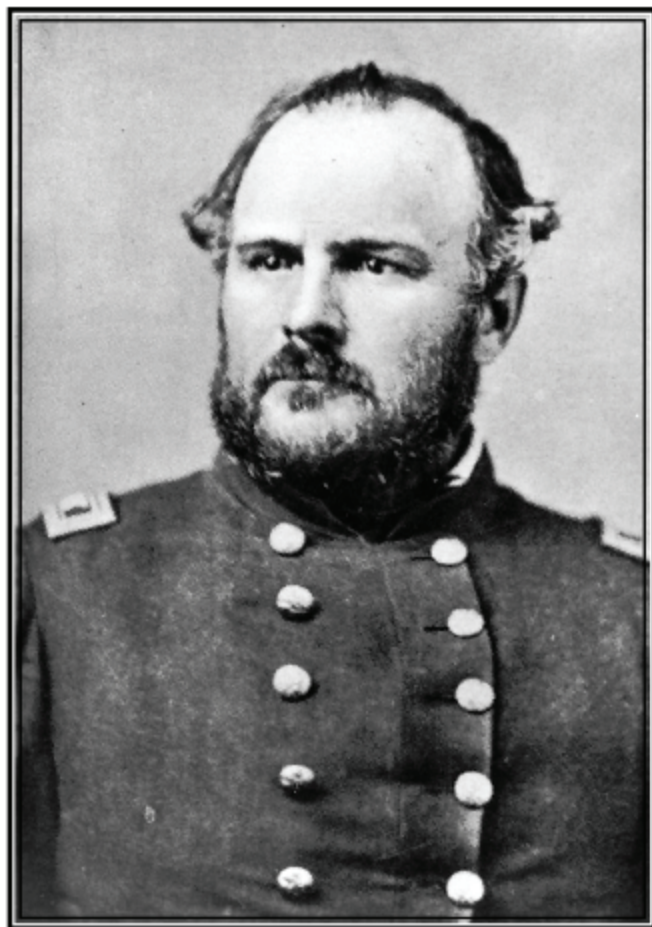
As the Lambs were training at Weld, Sibley's march appeared to be advancing more or less according to plan. Union forces were routed by "Dirty Shirt" Scurry's rebels at the Battle of Valverde in southern New Mexico. In this flawed Confederate victory, Scurry's men forced a federal retreat, but abandoned their attempt to capture Fort Craig and its supplies. Undoubtedly the highlight (or lowlight) of this battle was the tale of Paddy Graydon's exploding mule bombs. The Irishman Graydon conceived the idea of loading up a herd of mules with bombs on their backs, lighting the explosives and sending them off toward the rebel lines (perhaps this idea inspired modern-day Middle Eastern suicide bombers). The scheme literally backfired when the frightened and confused animals turned around and ran in the direction of Union lines instead! Deprived of the booty located at Fort Craig, the rebels resumed their trek northward to Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

As the Confederates resumed their march toward central New Mexico, supplies were growing scarce. Both Albuquerque and Santa Fe were deemed to be indefensible and conceded to the rebels. While Sibley's forces were successful in securing some foodstuffs in Albuquerque, their luck ran out in Santa Fe. Most of the town's supplies had been moved to nearby Fort Union before the rebels could seize them.

On February 22, 1862 preparations were made for the Pikes Peakers to leave Denver to defend Fort Union. Rickety wagons were loaded up and the poorly clothed and equipped immigrant

miners were led on a 400 mile forced march to New Mexico. After 13 excruciating days of slogging through blizzard conditions, they arrived dog tired at Fort Union to take their stand against the Texas invaders.

On March 26, Major John Chivington and his troops received their baptism of fire in a skirmish at Apache Canyon. Splitting his force of 400+ troops, Chivington managed to flank Major Pyron's 300 man Confederate unit and force a retreat of the rebels. Chivington then moved his victorious forces to Pigeon's Ranch to await further action. It was but a tantalizing glimpse of the glories that lay ahead for the Fighting Parson.



*Major John Chivington*

After suffering defeat at the hands of John Chivington, Pyron retreated to Johnson's Ranch and sent out an SOS to his comrade, "Dirty Shirt" Scurry. Eighty supply wagons were parked and Scurry waited one day for an anticipated Union attack. When the assault did not materialize, he made a fateful and fatal decision. Leaving his supply train behind, he moved out to engage federal forces at Pigeon's Ranch.

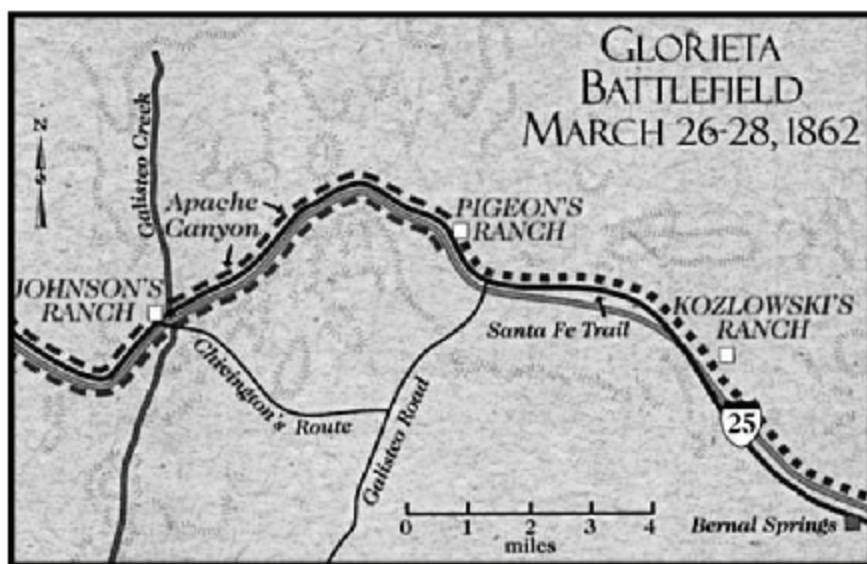
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*Glorieta continued from page 5*

The ever cautious Colonel Canby's strategy called for a defense of Fort Union. Accordingly, John Potts Slough and the Coloradoans were instructed to hunker down in defense of the supply laden fort. Eager to engage the enemy, Slough disregarded the orders and instructed his 900 man force to move out. His main force would engage the Confederates at Pigeon's Ranch while a 400 man detachment commanded by Major Chivington would attack the Confederate rear at Johnson's Ranch.

The ensuing battle at Pigeon's Ranch on March 28 resulted in Slough's Union forces getting sliced and diced by the resourceful "Dirty Shirt." Following heavy fighting that had commenced at 11 AM, Slough's force retreated from the field of battle by mid afternoon in apparent defeat. But Scurry's victory was only an illusion.



Meanwhile, back at the (Johnson's) Ranch, Chivington's forces were patrolling on the bluffs above Apache Canyon. They could not believe their good fortune when they spied the sparsely guarded Confederate wagon train in the canyon below. In a daring and courageous maneuver that required his troops to descend the walls of the steep canyon, the parson's Pikes Peakers

overtook the meager guard force and commenced the work of destroying the wagons and slaughtering the mules and horses. The grim task required several hours, but by the time the work was done, the rebels' entire cache of supplies had been destroyed and their mission to seize Colorado's gold had been rendered Mission Impossible. With no supplies on hand, Sibley's forces had no choice but to commence their retreat back to Texas. The "Fighting Parson" and Gilpin's Pet Lambs had saved the day and kept Colorado's gold out of the hands of the Confederates.



➔ *Annual Meeting*  
*June 11 at 10:30 A.M.* ➔

### Treasurer's Report, April, 2011

As always the first four months of the year are following true to form. Income is low and some expenses are high. The first of the year always includes Insurance and other Fees and costs that exceed our income. However, we were prepared for these events and are in good financial condition. We have also incurred some additional costs in procuring needed electronic and digital equipment for the Center. We purchased a digital projector which those who have attended the last two Friday programs have seen enhance the programs. And we also purchased some new, much needed, file cabinets for the Collection Department. A \$500 grant was received to expedite this. Now that we are entering the Spring season, with Territory Days just around the corner, our income will receive a needed boost. We are also now working closely with the Historic District Merchants, which will be a needed boost for both groups. Founders Day preparations are well underway. Please contact Bev Disch, Jo Cervone, or Johnie Jackson if you can donate some time to make this event the best ever. Our emphasis this year is the 150th year since the beginning of the Civil War, possibly the most important event in American history. We would like to have as many members as possible involved with the day celebrating the founding of Old Colorado City. This event has never been proposed as a fund raising event but I think that in the future this could turn out to be one of our best events in all areas. This is truly the one historical event that celebrates the beginning of our city. We encourage all of our members to participate in some way.

Johnie E. Jackson, Treasurer  
Old Colorado City Historical Society

### OCCHS GENEALOGICAL GROUP

Who are you? We have a group that is interested in finding out just who they are and also in finding out the genealogy of those who were the original settlers of Old Colorado City. We have some who are just beginning their search, and then we also have some who have spent years and countless hours in genealogical research. We invite all members to visit our group. The meetings are on the second Wednesday of the month at 3:00 PM. Membership in this group is free to OCCHS members. Join us for an hour or so of good fellowship and education.

Johnie E. Jackson

### *Arts & Crafts* *on W. Pikes Peak Avenue*

*Saturday*

*June 11th.*

*This will be  
our season's first  
Arts & Crafts Day  
on the  
History Center's grounds.  
Arts & Crafts Days  
will be regular  
Saturday events  
through September.*

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## May Calendar

### **Friday, May 13**

10:30 AM meeting  
11:00 AM program

**ANNUAL MEETING -- Election of Directors**

**Program:** Focusing on the **1860 Fosdick Plat** A recent OCCHS acquisition of OCCHS is one of the original copies of this historic document which established the parameters of Colorado City and its development. Historian, Dave Hughes will share his collection of oral history from one of the oldest Fosdick family members living in Colorado. The program will include a PowerPoint presentation. A digital copy of this document will be on display.

**Saturday, Sunday, Monday,  
May 28, 29, 30**

**Territory Days** on Colorado Avenue  
Memorial Day weekend.  
OCCHS events at Garvin Cabin in Bancroft Park.  
History Center open limited hours.

### **Old Colorado City History Center**

*1 S. 24th. Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904 - 636-1225 - <http://www.occhs.org>*

*Museum Hours: Tues. thru Sat. 11 - 4 Free Admission. Donations greatly appreciated.*