

# Mormon Battalion Invades Tucson Presidio

By Margaret Jorgenson

The residents of the Mexican Presidio of Tucson, Sonora Mexico, considered the arrival of the Mormon Battalion an "Invasion". They did not know what to expect from this "rag tag" army of the United States.

Since my great, great Grandfather on my father's side, Ebenezer Brown, 2nd Sergeant, Company A was a member of the invading army, I know the story most of you probably know...the Battalion's version.

But.....Since many of the Mexican soldiers and most of the inhabitants of Tucson were my relatives on my Mother's line, I would like to present the other side of this story!

To set the stage for the "Invasion" of Tucson Presidio, let me take you back to the early 1700's when Spain sent military families to claim "New Spain" (America) for the glory of Spain. By the mid 1700's, my Spanish ancestors had made their way to what would later be known as Tucson, Arizona.

We begin with Hilario in 1752. Modesto Hilario Santa Cruz was born in El Mortero, New Spain, which would become the Mexican province of Sonora. In about 1774, he married Mariana Gonzalez. He didn't want to work in the mines as his father had, and he knew nothing of farming, so he joined the Spanish military in the Tubac garrison, 35 miles south of Tucson. In 1784 he is listed as a carbineer (a cavalryman with a "carbine" or musket) in the Tucson Garrison. The 1797 census of Tucson lists him as "the leading settler of Tucson at that time". (The Sacred Life History of Clifford James Stratton, *The Life of Modesto Hilario Santa Cruz and Mariana Gonzalez* and *The Life of Samuel Hughes and Atanacia Santa Cruz*. 1986.)

Hilario and Mariana Santa Cruz named their oldest son Ignacio. He, in turn, married Lucia Morales and followed his father's vocation by enlisting in the Tucson Garrison. Juan Santa Cruz, their second son, was born within the walls of the Tucson presidio. Juan was 19 years old in 1795 when the artisans from Mexico City were finishing the delicate artwork inside the beautiful San Xavier del Bac Catholic Church near Tucson. Thanks to his father's prominence, Juan had the financial resources, time and natural ability to be an artists' apprentice. Art historians agree that the main fresco work at San Xavier in the main chapel are the work of only a few, very skilled, master artists. While they did the fine art work, Juan did the background and fill painting. When the artisans left in 1797, only the main chapel had been painted. After the artisans left, Juan continued the work, painting the frescos in the choir loft and likely some of the decorative painting on the retables (alter panels). Family tradition also has him painting the large mural in the sacristy. (Effie Leese Scott. *Bride Recalls Romantic Trip For Wedding:Matron of Old Tucson Tells Story on Her Anniversary*. The Tucson Citizen. May 27, 1862; *Wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Hughes*. Arizona Star. May 28, 1912.)

During this time Juan married Petra Alcantar. It is at this point that our rich Native American heritage joined our Spanish heritage. Petra's mother was a Pima Indian. We undoubtedly have other ancestors who were Native American. Most of the children born in Sonora at that time had Indian mothers since very few Spanish women came to Tucson. When our Spanish ancestors married local Native Americans, they were usually marrying Hohokam Pima, Hohokam Papago or Hohokam Yaqui, descendants of the Mayans of Mesoamerica. Most of our very early family history took place at Guevavi (established 1691), Tumacacori (1691) and Tubac (1740), all in what is now southern Arizona. The Sonoran provincial governor founded a post at Tubac after the Northern Piman Revolt in 1752. (Jay J. Wagoner, *Early Arizona: Prehistory to Civil War*. Ch. 3: Prehistoric Indian Cultures. The University of Arizona Press. Tucson. 1985. Pp.17-43; The Hohokam, 200 B.C. – 1450 A.D., Prehistoric Desert People. [www.desertusa.com/ind1/du\\_peop\\_hoh.html](http://www.desertusa.com/ind1/du_peop_hoh.html); Pima Indians; New Advent. [www.newadvent.org/cathen/12100a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12100a.htm). Linda M. Gregonis & Karl J. Reinhard. *Hohokam Indians of the Tucson Basin*. Ch. 1: The Hohokam World. [www.uapress.arizona.edu/online.bks/hohokam/chap1.htm](http://www.uapress.arizona.edu/online.bks/hohokam/chap1.htm).) (James E. Officer, *Hispanic Arizona, 1536-1856*. Ch. 2: Early Exploraton and Settlement. The University of Arizona Press. Tucson. 1987. Pp. 36-44.)

We need to make a clear distinction here. Most of the inhabitants of Tucson, including the military personnel, were loyal to Spain. However, they proudly considered themselves to be "Mexican" because they had both Spanish and Native American ancestors. Remember, there was no geographic "Mexico"

yet; it was all “New Spain”. In honor of their proud biological heritage, the rest of this article will refer to the residents around Tucson as “Mexicans”.

Juan Santa Cruz, a Spainard, and Petra Alcantar, a Native American, had five children. Their son, Juan Maria Santa Cruz, my ancestor, was born in the Tucson presidio in 1814. He married Manuela Bojorquez in 1842. (Her Grandparents also came from Spain in the 1700’s). They and many of their relatives were residents of the Tucson Presidio when the Mormon Battalion arrived on Sunday, December 16, 1846. (C. J. Stratton, *The Sacred Life History of Clifford James Stratton, The Life of Modesto Hilario Santa Cruz and Mariana Gonzalez and The Life of Samuel Hughes and Atanacia Santa Cruz*. 1986.)

Our family watched the abandonment of the Spanish military garrison at the Presidio of Tucson as it was replaced by the American armed forces. The Mormon Battalion, under the command of Lt. Col. George Cooke, “demanded a surrender of arms as a guarantee that Tucson’s inhabitants would not ‘bear arms against the United States’. Mexican Commander Comaduran (another cousin) declined to surrender his arms. The situation was growing tense. The Mormons had been ordered to load their muskets and Cooke was determined to avoid that detour of a hundred miles around Tucson. Furthermore, his troops needed food. A detail of twelve Mexican soldiers arrived at the camp east of Tucson...the Mexicans were retreating, taking with them, two brass cannons and most of the population of Tucson.” (Bernice Cosulich, *Tucson*, Ch VI: Mormon Battalion. 1953. Pgs 80-91)

My brother, Clifford J. Stratton, picks up the story from our oral family history...”The Battalion, as observed by our Mexican ancestors, was really a rag-tag army. Recruits, some even with wives and families, left Nauvoo, but because of sickness, many had to be sent back when they reached Santa Fe, New Mexico. They were reasonably well provisioned up to that point, by the Federal Government, and they had decent clothes and ammunition. That was also the case when they left Santa Fe, so their experiences were pretty much about the challenges that all wagon trains and military expeditions experienced in those days. However, many of the Mormon soldiers sent part of their government pay to their families who were getting ready to cross the plains to what would later be called Salt Lake City. Our Battalion ancestor, Ebenezer Brown sent a substantial amount of his pay to his daughter’s family who were taking his children across the plains to Salt Lake City. This did induce severe hardships on many of the Mormon soldiers. But that was of their own choosing and the federal Army Officers weren’t too sympathetic.

“However, what it did from the Tucson perspective was that when the Mexican soldiers were sent out to reconnaissance the invading army, they came back to Tucson and told our people that they did not really look like an army at all. They looked like a rag-tag, hungry, tired, “mob” of disreputes. The Mexicans knew nothing about the standards of the Mormons; they knew nothing about the Church at all. They also reported that they saw little military discipline.

“Many in the Battalion were young or middle-aged males and were therefore perceived by the Mexicans of New Spain to be a threat to the virtue of the young Mexican women and wives at the Presidio. There were rumors that when they invaded Tucson, they would rape, pillage and burn it down, so that Spain would no longer have any foothold in the region. Militarily, the latter point made a lot of sense. Because of the prolonged Apache problem, there really wasn’t any military presence at Tubac or Tumacacori; the only real fort wasn’t for a two days’ hard march to Arizipe. The Mexican commanders felt that Tucson would be burned to the ground because that would open up the entire southwest all the way to California for American expansion.

“The Battalion appeared edgy and very cautious to danger, not only as a result of their increasing proximity to the Mexican armed force, but because of the increased danger to wild bulls. The Battalion had recently experienced encounters with wild bulls, and lost! The final result was that the wild bulls had destroyed 2 wagons and frightened the Battalion soldiers. There was no natural place to defend themselves against bull attacks in the Sonoran Desert; it was open country with only a few Saguaro cacti. It is a fact that the closer they got to Tucson, the greater were the number of wild bulls they encountered. The only water for miles around was the Santa Cruz River; the bulls had to drink every day. Our family used to go out and hunt the wild bulls for meat; there were a few thousand of them in what was to become New Mexico and Arizona. Wild bulls: a good source of meat for the Mexicans, a threat to the life and limb of the Yankee Americans!

“The American Expansionist Doctrine, as it had already been historically displayed, also worried our Mexican ancestors. The Americans had beaten the French in Quebec, Spain in Florida, and England along the Eastern Seaboard. The Mexican leaders knew that American Expansion meant no respect for any previous European ally in the long term. Indeed, regardless of the Battalion, they reasoned that Tucson would probably have to be eventually sacrificed anyway. The troops would have to be moved to Arizipe to form a stronger military hindrance there, in case at some point in the future the Americans invaded from Texas or New Mexico, South into the heart of New Spain. Tucson was an isolated fort, some distance from Spanish security, far out on the Spanish frontier and particularly vulnerable. The Tucson Mexicans didn't really know what “American Expansion Doctrine” meant. This was, legally at least, a “war” with Spain, and our ancestors were the military presence of New Spain at Tucson. At that time, our Tucson families had no way of knowing what the American Expansionist intentions really were, until after they witnessed what happened in and around Tucson. And most of them didn't want to be present to witness the “Invasion.” From a historical perspective, the prospects that the Americans would actually seek for peace with the native population of Tucson were dim, at best.

“So, all of this “information” was circulating from Mexico City to Tucson. And it all looked pretty grim for Tucson. The Mexican leaders deciding Tucson was too harsh a place to live anyway agreed that the Presidio should be abandoned and the total population moved South until the real intent of the invading American army could be confirmed. Mexican Commander Comaduran (another cousin) had sent out officers to meet with the American invading force, and were assured that they only wanted to march through Tucson, raise the American flag as a token that the Americans had captured the territory for America, and that they would then peacefully go on to California. However, the Mexican emissaries saw the decrepit state of the invading force and probably didn't trust what the American officers told them anyway. That's why most of the Presidio inhabitants actually left and went South.

“Atanacia, the granddaughter of Juan Santa Cruz and Petra Alcantar, said that our Perea, Morales, Romero, Gonzalez, Martinez and most of our Bojorquez families left Tucson just before the Americans arrived. They didn't go very far, however. Atanacia said that most didn't go much further South than San Xavier and Tubac (17 and 32 miles respectively). A small, friendly, Native American force at San Xavier, along with the Mexican force from Tucson would provide some temporary safety from the Apaches. They were in hopes that the exhausted American army was a “temporary” invading force since there was nothing of real military value until Arizipe. They concluded that the Americans would probably take what supplies they could find, burn it down, and move on to California.

“It was our cousins, Francisco Bojorquez and Teodoro Ramirez, highly respected Tucson Presidio merchants, who greeted (not “welcomed”!) the Americans when they came into the Presidio. They, with a few others, stayed and negotiated for the supplies the Americans wanted to purchase (not steal). They actually put themselves at great personal risk, because if the Americans had indeed conquered and raided the Presidio, they would have been some of the first ones executed by the Americans, being Presidio business leaders. In spite of those concerns, they felt they had to try to save the Presidio from fire. If the Presidio was burned, their families would be homeless and destitute. They would be exposed to the ruthless Apaches. Population dynamics in the Sonoran Desert were determined by the presence of water. The Santa Cruz River from Tubac to Tucson was the only water source large enough to sustain the Tucson inhabitants for any extended period of time. They needed the Presidio to protect themselves from the Apache. There was nowhere else to go. If the Precidio was razed, their families could not return to the Tucson area until another fort was built. And under the current state of affairs, that probably wouldn't happen for some time. There was no safe haven, anywhere; they felt threatened by the Americans on one hand and the Apaches on the other hand. They had to try and save the Presidio, regardless of personal risk.

“I have often wondered what kind of thoughts must have gone through Francisco's and Teodoro's minds when they saw the Mexican force leave, in total, with their cannon and munitions, leaving them helpless against both the Americans and the Apache. They watched their families leave with most of the food and supplies that had been available at the Presidio, which they would need to sustain themselves during a long trek South to safety, if necessary. And then they watched the Americans march into the Presidio, raise their flag with military fan-fare as the conquering army, and then look around only to see that nearly all of the population and all of the food and supplies that they also desperately needed had been

removed. Would an angry, invading army take out its frustrations on them?! Were they going to burn down the Presidio anyway? Who would take care of their families if they were gone? Would the Americans overtake their families who were driving their goats and pigs with them, and take what they needed by force? A thousand, very disturbing questions, and no answers. They were very brave men indeed.”

Little did Francisco and Teodoro know that in that Battalion was a man and a woman who would become related to them by marriage. Ebenezer Brown was a member of the Mormon Battalion, 2nd Sergeant, A Company. His wife Phebe Draper Palmer was one of only five women who made the trek all the way from Iowa to California with the Battalion. Ebenezer was to become the second great grandfather of our father, Clifford Stratton Sr., just as Atanacia Santa Cruz and Sam Hughes, (the first “Anglo” to settle permanently in Tucson) became the great grandparents of my mother, Patricia Frances Black Stratton. (She was the first to join the Mormon Church in her family.) When our parents, Clifford Stratton Sr. married Patricia Black, the two sides represented in this “Invasion” were united in marriage.

Of the residents of the Presidio, there were only a few men that were brave enough to stay; one of them is represented on the statue “Exchange at the Presidio” by Clyde Ross Morgan (1996.) This sculpture displayed in El Presidio Park in Historic Tucson commemorates the first raising of the American Flag in Tucson by the Mormon Battalion. It depicts the peaceful entry of the battalion into the presidio and the exchange of goods with the settlers.

Cliff goes on to say, “That is really what happened, just as the statue depicts it. A small handful of brave, Mexican businessmen (no military leaders stayed) literally traded Mexican food and supplies to the Americans for buttons. That statue is particularly accurate and tells of the fear and generosity of the Mexicans, and of the peaceful intent and honesty of the Americans. On the statue you can see the buttons that the Battalion was trying to trade to the Mexicans for food. Of course they had other military equipment they traded to the Mexicans, but the buttons are symbolic.

“The Battalion was so beat-up and hungry from fatigue and starvation, but they were honest and sincere. They wanted to trade for food and supplies, not take them by force. It also shows the generosity of the Mexicans. They were willing to trade food and supplies, which were hard to come by in the harsh Sonoran Desert, for whatever the Americans had to offer.

“The Mexicans had plenty of buttons. With a sharp knife and a piece of bone, one could make several buttons in an hour. But the American intentions were honest and moral, so our Mexican ancestors also stretched as far as they could, to also be amenable and friendly. (Of course, it was to their advantage to be friendly; the invading soldiers could change their mind and raze and burn the place any time they wanted.) To me, that statue is a grand reminder of the integrity of the Mormon Battalion and its troops, and of the kindness, bravery and integrity of our Mexican cousins who greeted and traded with them. Both sides had to stretch to make it work. Once the intent of the Americans was found to be friendly, the Mexicans sent word to San Xavier to bring back food and supplies to “trade”, if we can use that term loosely, with the Americans. Of course, the Mexicans knew that they had to “trade” enough with the Americans to give them enough supplies to leave the area and to go on to California. (Otherwise the Americans would have had no recourse but to follow the inhabitants, confront the Mexican army and secure enough provisions and supplies to move on; and the Mexicans wanted to prevent that from happening.) To me, that statue, with Americans and Mexicans trading buttons for food is MONUMENTAL in more ways than one. It says volumes about the integrity, honesty and bravery of both the Americans and the Mexicans.

“Before long, everyone knew that the food and supplies the Americans wanted were just South of the Presidio at San Xavier. It might be thought that it would be very simple for the American troops to quickly invade the area and confiscate all of the supplies they needed to go comfortably to California. They knew, however, that the Mexican troops, although comparatively meager in number and munitions when compared to the Americans, were with their families at San Xavier and would have defended their families to the death. The encounter would have been brutal and very costly for both sides. The bravery of the Mexican businessmen who stayed to face an unknown outcome was Providential. As promised, the American commanders led the Battalion out of the city to the Southwest and then to the West, to follow an established trail to San Diego. One American soldier wrote in his memoirs many years later,

that shortly after they left the Tucson Presidio, from a rise, they could see the white church far off to the South, San Xavier; but no one was allowed to go near it.” (Personal communication with C. J. Stratton, 4225 Weems Way, Sun Valley, Nevada 89433, 5/2008; Frank C. Lockwood. *Life in Old Tucson. Atanacia-The Little Maid of Old Tucson*. The Tucson Civic Committee, University of Arizona. The Ward Ritchie Press. Los Angeles. 1943. Pp. 3-15.)

And there you have our family’s version of the “Invasion” of the Tucson Presidio by the Mormon Battalion. My great, great Grandfather, Ebenezer Brown, 2nd Sergeant, Company A, with his wife, Phebe on one side and our Spanish/Pima ancestors on the other. Both sides were represented by courage and integrity. Heaven was kind that day, to both sides. Many faithful prayers were answered.

**And that is “the rest of the story”!**

By Margaret Emma Stratton Dana Jorgenson – 3683 Fernleigh, Troy, Michigan 48083  
With many thanks to Clifford James Stratton – Sun Valley, Nevada  
5/2008



**Exchange at the Presidio, by Clyde Ross Morgan, 1996** (used with permission of artist)

#### Author’s Notes:

(1) A short time after the Mormon Battalion “Invasion” of the Tucson Presidio, the cholera outbreak of 1850-51 killed 25 percent of the inhabitants of Tucson, including Juan Maria. Manuela also succumbed to the harsh environment seven years later. Their three children, Petra (age 15), Atanacia, my great, great Grandmother (age 8), and their brother Filomeno, were cared for by Juan Maria’s sister, Guadalupe Santa Cruz.

Because the Apaches kept the several Tucson families sequestered together, and the harsh environment discouraged the introduction of outsiders, the original Tucson families intermarried for 3 or 4 generations. Guadalupe, Petra and Atanacia were either related to, or personally knew all of the old-timers who had witnessed the “Invasion” and enjoyed hearing their stories of that day. (C. J. Stratton, Santa Cruz Historical Sites, 2004)

The Santa Cruz home became the Overland Stage Station, which provided an income for the family. “It

was a great day for Atanacia and for 'the Old Pueblo' when the first Overland Stage from San Antonio to San Diego came swinging in, in the summer of 1857. The occasion was as exciting for grownups as it was for boys and girls. Now citizens of Tucson were no longer cut off from the outside world. This stage made only two trips a month, but every time it arrived the sleepy town woke up..." (Frank Lockwood. Life in Old Tucson: an interview with Atanacia Santa Cruz Hughes-The Little Maid of Old Tucson. 1943. p 3)

We have the Mormon Battalion to thank for improving that trail for wagon travel after they left Tucson.

(2) When the troops were outfitted for their trek, they were given a clothing allowance of forty-two dollars. Since a military uniform was not mandatory, many of the soldiers sent their clothing allowances to their families in the refugee encampments in Iowa. (Blain S. Nay, The Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War. Cedar City, Utah, 2001). Probably the only ones who wore uniforms were the Officers. The Niles' National Register for July 11, 1846 listed the army pay scale: Colonel Cook would have been paid \$75/mo; Ebenezer Brown 2nd Sergeant = \$15/mo; a Private = \$8/mo. About 20% of their pay went directly to Brigham Young.