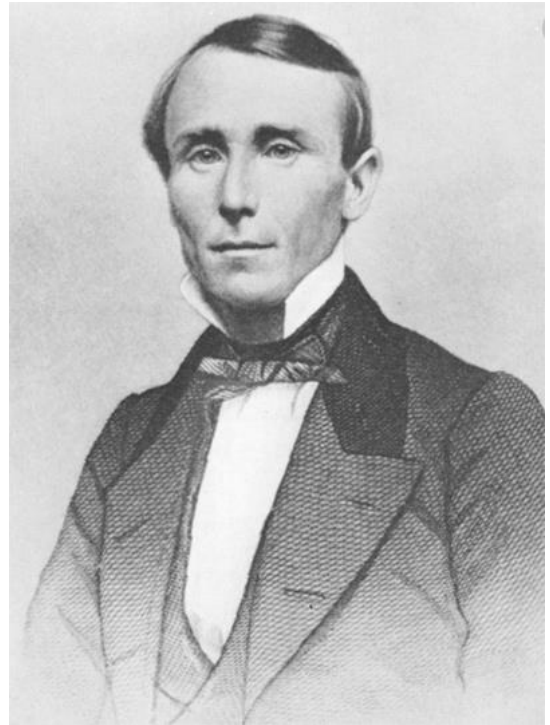


The Auburn Enterprise/Auburn Plan

One of the most fascinating episodes in the American history of "Manifest Destiny" had its beginnings right here in Auburn with the man later called the "grey-eyed man of destiny."

William Walker was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1824. He graduated from the University of Nashville summa cum laude at the age of 14 and went on to receive a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He studied abroad in Edinburgh, Heidelberg and Paris. He only practiced medicine for a short time before moving to New Orleans to study law. Evidently still not content he became co-owner and editor of the *New Orleans Crescent*. In New Orleans the death of his deaf and mute fiancée of cholera was a devastating blow. His rage at officials who handled the cholera epidemic led to two duels from which he escaped unharmed.



William Walker

The lure of gold in California propelled him West in 1849. He was in San Francisco for a while writing for the San Francisco Herald and in 1852 was in Auburn in today's Old Town and at Spanish Flat. (Today's Nevada Street near the Post Office) The whole nation was going through a period of unsettlement. Pro and anti slavery factions were becoming more aroused and the ideas of Manifest Destiny were in the air. Texas had recently been annexed through a process called filibustering: the take over of a territory of another nation by non-governmental military action.

While in Auburn in 1852, Walker and several others developed what they called "The Auburn Plan or Auburn Enterprise." The goal was to take part of Mexico, specifically the provinces of Baja and Sonora by military invasion, annex them to the United States and enter the Union as pro slavery territory, fulfilling both the perceived need for the expansion of slavery and the ideals of Manifest Destiny.

Walker's first foray to implementing "The Plan" was to send two men from Auburn, Frederic Emory, owner of the Eldorado Saloon in Old Town and Henry Watkins to Mexico to obtain a land grant for military occupation. Their stated purpose was to provide protection from the marauding Apaches. The French beat them to this idea forcing Walker to reformulate his "Auburn Enterprise". He decided to simply take Baja and Sonora with a force of mercenary invaders. Walker was provided a substantial amount of financial support from fellow southerners and by the secretive Knights of the Golden Circle both hoping to extend the area where slavery was permitted. Walker's subsequent military adventures are too complex and even convoluted to recount in detail here but basically his "Auburn Plan" played out as follows. Walker and 48 (accounts vary on the number)

men left San Francisco in October of 1853. They captured La Paz in Baja. He declared himself president of Lower California and then extended his mini empire to include Sonora and renamed the territory "The Republic of Sonora." His first proclamation included two decrees; the first decreed that all trade duties were abolished. His second decree announced that the territory would follow the "Code of Louisiana," a civil code of law that essentially sanctioned slavery. After this victory he sent Emory back to California to recruit more men. Sheriff's deputy J. C. Astin, joined up as did Deputy Sheriff William McCarty, Samuel Maserve, Jake Colmas and Robert E. Armstrong all from Placer County.

Even though Walker received reinforcements, in the subsequent fierce fighting between his men and the forces of the Mexican government, Walker's forces were defeated and they escaped by crossing the border near Tijuana and surrendering to American authorities.

Historians believe that Walker's efforts directly led to the Gadsden Purchase of Mexican Territory in 1853 (ratified in 1854) adding the current portions of southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico to the United States. The stated intention of the land purchase was to establish a southern route for a transcontinental railroad, the less explicit motive was to expand pro-slavery territory.

Walker and Emory eventually ended up being tried for their actions of violating the neutrality laws of Mexico but both were exonerated. Walker still had many supporters and financiers. His next plan was to invade Nicaragua. The Nicaragua campaign was complicated. Initially Walker's forces were successful and Walker proclaimed the captured territory to be a republic with himself as President and Frederic Emory as Secretary of State. Walker's short-lived regime was even recognized by the United States in May of 1856.

Most of Central America was incensed at Walker's take over and feared that the United States would eventually take over their countries as well. Their hostility was fostered and financed by Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt who owned the extremely lucrative Accessory Transit Company that ran steamers from both oceans to a land and lake crossing in Nicaragua.

Walker's troops in Nicaragua were eventually surrounded by a Central American alliance led by the Costa Rican army. Walker surrendered to an American Navy Commander Charles Henry Davis and returned to the United States. Undeterred, Walker planned a second invasion in November of 1857. He was arrested by Commodore Hiram Paulding of the American Navy and again returned to the United States. He made several more unsuccessful attempts to return to Central America. On his last trip he sailed from Mobile in August of 1859 and landed in Honduras. The Central American forces proved overwhelming and Walker, with his men deserting, surrendered to a British naval officer in 1860. The "little general" maintained his bravado and belligerence proclaiming that he was still President of Nicaragua and managed to gain his release from the British. He was immediately taken into custody by the Hondurans. The Hondurans, evidently tired of defending their territory from Walker, put him before a firing squad and executed him in September of 1860. He was only thirty-six years old.

William Walker at 5'2" and 110 pounds was indeed a "little general" but left a giant legacy. To some he was a hero for promoting the southern way of life and the expansion of slavery, some even revered him as a savior of the war torn country of Nicaragua that had been immersed in civil

war for two decades. Many others reviled him for his filibustering to take over independent nations. Though he had many supporters in California, many more despised him for his disruption and closure of the inter-oceanic route for passengers and trade.

It is amazing the actions of one man had such global repercussions and that it all most likely began with a group of miners ensconced at Emory's El Dorado Saloon in the gold camp of Auburn, dreaming dreams of adventure and conquest.

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With research by John Knox

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