

The UDC California Division Members Database: Using Spatial Analysis to Shed new Light on the Formation of Civil War Memory in California

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The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in California played a pivotal role in advancing the "Lost Cause" narrative in the state, including erecting Confederate Memorials. Their activities molded a Californian public perception that aligned more with the Southern viewpoint of the Civil War. Given the substantial influence California holds in U.S. culture and politics, understanding this shift is crucial. While there's a wealth of research on the national UDC and its operations in the South, the California branch remains under-explored.

In this paper, I present a detailed digital database of all the 6637 organization's members and officers from roughly half the years between 1914 to 1979, with additional summarized data for the years 1900-1914. The database is a result of digitization of membership rolls, including role and addresses, from several dozens yearbooks: scanning, transcribing, extracting structured data from the transcription, curating and finally geolocating all addresses.

This detailed database enables first of a kind research on this organization: locating the exact addresses on a map not only enables analyzing the geospatial distribution of the organization with its ebbs and flows over time, but also tracking the immediate surroundings of member concentrations, enabling innovative insights into path of influence the organization had on Californian, and indeed American, politics and culture.

CCS Concepts: • **Applied computing** → **Digital libraries and archives**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Digital Humanities, Geospatial Database, Californian History, Civil War, United Daughters of the Confederacy

ACM Reference Format:

Or Rappel-Kroyzer. 2023. The UDC California Division Members Database: Using Spatial Analysis to Shed new Light on the Formation of Civil War Memory in California. 1, 1 (September 2023), 10 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/nnnnnnn.nnnnnnn>

1 INTRODUCTION

In August 2019, the U.S. saw a resurgence in debates about the removal of Confederate monuments. This resurgence was triggered by events in Charlottesville, VA, where the removal of the Robert E. Lee statue was closely followed by the tragic "Unite the Right" rally, resulting in three deaths. These events spurred historians to dive deeper into the widespread nature of Confederate memorialization, which extended beyond the traditional Southern borders. For example, many in Los Angeles were surprised to discover a prominent monument dedicated to Confederate soldiers at the Hollywood Forever cemetery, a famous resting place for many celebrities. [12]

Following the Charlottesville incidents, wider discussions in the U.S. and specifically in California led to the removal of the monument in Los Angeles and other Confederate markers across the state [11]. This highlighted an often overlooked facet of California's history: its connection to the Southern cause and Confederate memorialization. Even

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Manuscript submitted to ACM

Manuscript submitted to ACM

though California was a free state, many of its early residents and influential figures had Southern sympathies before the Civil War. Los Angeles, in particular, was a hub for pro-Confederate sentiments before and during the war years. After the war, some Californians pushed the Southern "Lost Cause" narrative. This viewpoint understated the severity of slavery, presented the Civil War as a fight for states' rights rather than against slavery, and cast the South as the aggrieved party in both the war and its aftermath. Confederate monuments in California played a significant role in endorsing this narrative.

The United Daughters of the Confederacy, set up in Nashville, TN, in 1894, played a key role in promoting the "Lost Cause" narrative both in the South and nationally. By 1896, the first UDC chapter in California, the Albert Sidney Johnston chapter in San Francisco, was chartered. Following the national organization's lead, California's UDC division had a significant hand in Confederate memorialization. Despite its impact, this topic hasn't been deeply explored in research. Fortunately, archives from two local universities offer crucial insights into this division's history.

2 DATABASE CONSTRUCTION

2.0.1 Archival Foundations. The archives of the Emma Samson chapter in Santa Ana and the Sterling Price chapter in Stockton are preserved at two Californian universities: California State University in Fullerton [9] and the University of the Pacific in Stockton [10]. Collectively, these repositories hold yearbooks from 1915 to 1978, with gaps in the years 1933-1939, 1941-1946, and 1972-1977.

Each yearbook is a treasure trove of information, with division officers' reports and the records of meetings providing insights into the organization's activities. However, the focal point of our research, and our primary interest from this point onward, lies in the extensive membership rosters. Starting in 1920, every yearbook presents a detailed roster of all division members, showcasing their roles, addresses, and, in later editions, phone numbers. For reference, a snapshot of these rolls can be seen in Figure 1. For the years 1914 to 1919, only the officeholders are documented.

2.1 Digitization Process

The linchpin of this research is the digitization of the UDC membership rolls, a process that spanned five main steps:

Scanning Some of the yearbooks were scanned by me, while others were diligently scanned by the library staff at California State University, Fullerton.¹

Transcription For the initial transcription of the rolls, I utilized Abby Finereader.[2]

Extracting Structured Data: Utilizing Python scripts based on regular expressions, I was able to extract data into a structured format. This was followed by manual corrections by myself and a team of RAs² where the transcription deviated from the anticipated format.

Merging Yearbooks Data from various yearbooks was merged, and any palpable missing data was supplemented from adjacent years were possible.

Geolocation The Google Maps API [4] was employed to geolocate each member's address.

After the creation on the database I performed the geospatial analyses using plotly directory in python [5] and maps by mapbox [7]

¹I extend my profound appreciation to the devoted library staff at California State University, Fullerton. A special shout-out to Patrisia Prestinary for her instrumental assistance with the scanning process.

²I extend my warmest gratitude to research interns Zack Gold, Andrew Orfali, Molly Cohen, Caterina Cappelli, Zack Ohrn, Eliana Spierer, Nathaniel Schmidt, Sarina Samuel, Rachel Collson, Zack Greenberg, and Benji Greenspan. Their commitment and contributions were paramount to the success of this endeavor. Special acknowledgment to Udi Sommer for connecting these bright minds to the project.

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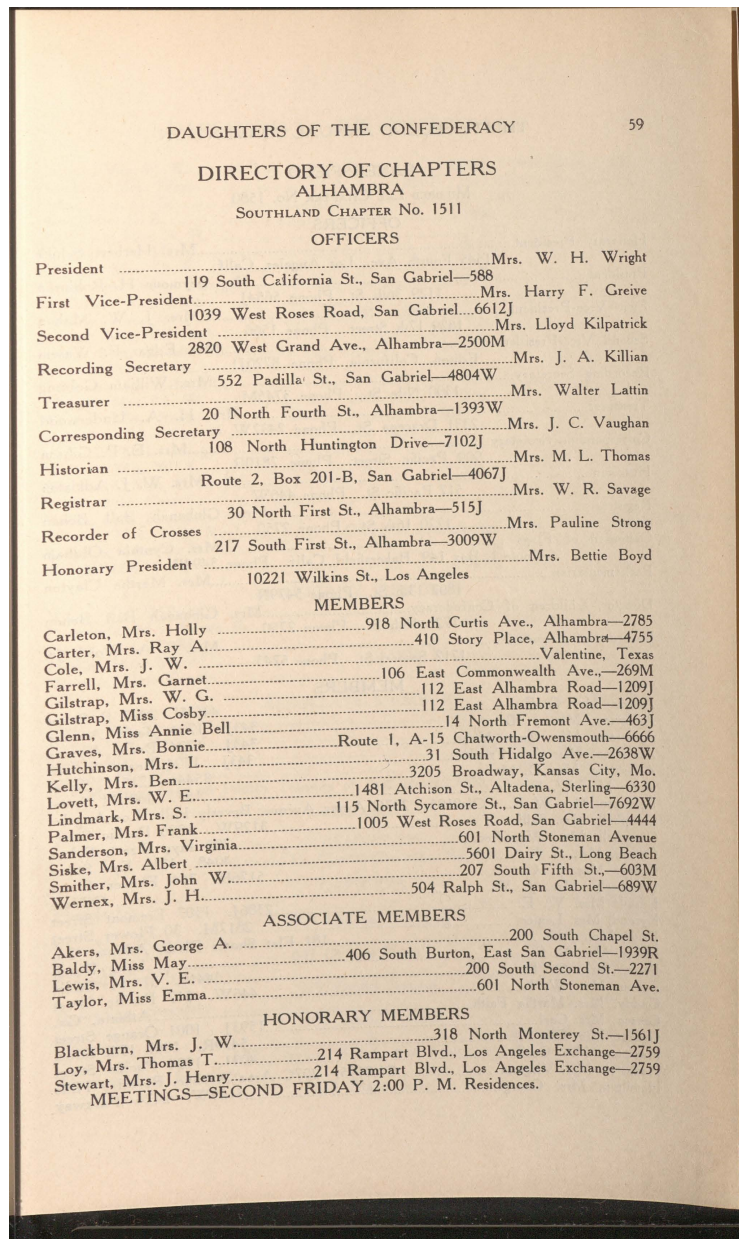


Fig. 1. The first page of members directory of the UDC California division from the 1932 yearbook. [9]

2.2 Challenges

Transcription AbbyReader effectively transcribed most of the yearbooks. However, the yearbooks from 1921, 1922, 1929, and 1931, due to their poor scan quality, posed substantial transcription challenges, necessitating their omission from the database.

Extracting Structured Data The format for member records was notably inconsistent, with some records lacking a street address or offering unconventional locations, such as country roads, post office boxes, hotels or apartment building names. Over time, the Division also made several format alterations to the membership rolls, affecting the order of names, placement of roles, and other structural aspects. Creating extensive, and at times distinct, regex-based scripts was imperative to address these inconsistencies. Transcription errors further complicated data extraction, demanding extensive manual corrections.

Merging across Yearbooks Name inconsistencies were frequent: variations in spelling, use of abbreviations, inclusion or exclusion of middle names, and identification by a spouse's name, such as "Mrs. James Smith." These inconsistencies resulted in an initial database expansion from approximately 6,600 members to nearly 25,000 records. Consequently, a significant effort was dedicated to merging records and eliminating duplicates. Furthermore, certain members' absences in one year's record, despite their presence in adjacent yearbooks, required attention. I identified 668 such cases, impacting 573 members – about 10% of the database. I attributed these discrepancies to potential oversights by chapter registrars. To achieve data consistency, I made the following assumption: if a member appeared in year N and year $N + 2$, I assumed their registration (with the same role) for year $N + 1$ as well.

Geolocation The geolocation process, through Google Maps, proved successful for approximately 80.5% of the records. The remaining 19.5% either had outdated or unrecognizable addresses or lacked an address altogether. In such cases, Google Maps returned the nearest geopolitical unit, whether a city or state. These addresses were omitted from geospatial analyses but the members retained for member histograms.

2.3 Complementary Database

Our main data comes from yearbooks stored at California State University, Fullerton, and the University of the Pacific, starting from 1914. However, the California division of the UDC was established earlier. Its first chapter, named after General Albert Sidney Johnston, was chartered in San Francisco in 1896, and the whole division was officially set up in 1900. We don't have detailed member lists from before 1914, but we can get some figures from the national UDC convention yearbooks. At the national conventions, the California delegates would share member numbers for each chapter. These convention yearbooks, found in different libraries, are available online up to 1914 [8]. I added this extra data to my main database by hand. From this, I learned about 9 chapters that were chartered and dechartered before 1914. When geolocating these chapters' locations, I used the center point of the cities they were in.

2.4 Final Database

The result of the above mentioned process is a database with details of 6,637 individuals - both ladies and veterans - who were registered in the state division throughout the yearbooks. However, this list doesn't fully reflect the organization's real-time activity, as the database includes several hundred honorary and associate members. For a more accurate representation, I focused my primary analysis on the 5,922 records of active members. Furthermore, Within this group, I identified 190 cases where members shifted from one chapter to another. After accommodating these transitions, I can pin down a total of 5,732 unique active members spread across 39 yearbooks. Additionally, I possess summarized or fragmentary data spanning the years 1900-1919.

3 GEOSPATIAL ANALYSES

3.1 Chapter-level Analysis

The state division of the UDC in California comprised a total of 59 chapters, geographically spread from San Diego in the south up to Colusa in the north. Three chapters stood the test of time — the Albert Sidney Johnston chapter in San Francisco, the Los Angeles chapter, and the Emma Samson chapter in Santa Ana — remaining active through the entire period from 1900 to 1978. Six chapters ceased operations before 1914, limiting our insights into them solely to their annual membership counts. On breaking down the lifespan of these chapters, we find that a chapter persisted, on average, for around 36 years. A visual representation detailing the geographical placement of these chapters across California can be found in Figure 2.

Our database tracks the ebb and flow of the division’s membership and its chapters over time, as depicted in Figure 3. Initially, the division experienced rapid growth, peaking at 1,607 members in 1908. But soon after, a sharp drop ensued. As the division was inconsistent in removing inactive members, this decline might not solely relate to 1908 events. A notable part of this drop, particularly in the San Francisco chapter, can potentially be attributed to the repercussions of the 1906 earthquake and fire.

The division witnessed a membership resurgence in the 1910s and 1920s, nearly reaching its 1908 record, and peaking at 1517 members in 1930. This trend diverged from the national one, where membership began waning post-WWI. Unfortunately, a gap exists in our records from 1932 to 1941, a span seeing a notable membership dip. Hence, the exact reasons from the division leadership remain elusive. However, the Great Depression’s financial hardships might have made membership—a commitment involving dues and donations—less viable for many. The Depression-era relocations might have also played a role. While many migrated to California during this time, the state wasn’t exempt from residents leaving.

After stable numbers in the 1940s and 1950s, the division faced a downturn in the 1960s. The final chapter was established in 1958. The Civil Rights movement’s cultural shifts made the Lost Cause narrative less enticing. The younger crowd in the 1960s was less keen to join, and with the passing of older members, the total count decreased. However, by 1978, around 2,400 members still remained in the database.

Figure 3 provides a closer look at the geographical distribution of UDC members across California over time. In existing research literature, a prevailing narrative suggests that Southerners in California mainly settled in the southern regions of the state. Indeed, during the antebellum period and the Civil War, Los Angeles emerged as a stronghold of pro-Confederate sentiment. Later, the establishment of the Southern Pacific railroad, which linked Texas to Los Angeles, likely enhanced the flow of Southerners to this particular region. [3]

Our data, however, tells a more nuanced story. In the UDC’s early years, there was a distinct dominance of members in the northern counties, accounting for almost 60% of total members in 1903. And although southern chapters increased their presence over the years, the northern chapters consistently maintained a substantial representation, never dipping below 25% of the division’s total membership.

This geographical distinction becomes even more pronounced when comparing the centers of population of UDC members to the center of population for the entire state [1]. This delineation is vividly captured in Figure 4. Though the UDC members’ center of population is situated to the south of California’s overall center, it stands conspicuously northward of the Los Angeles metropolitan expanse. Furthermore, this center shadows the progression of California’s overall demographic center across time. The 1920s — the division’s zenith in terms of activity — is particularly noteworthy; during this decade, its demographic center showed remarkable stability in latitude.

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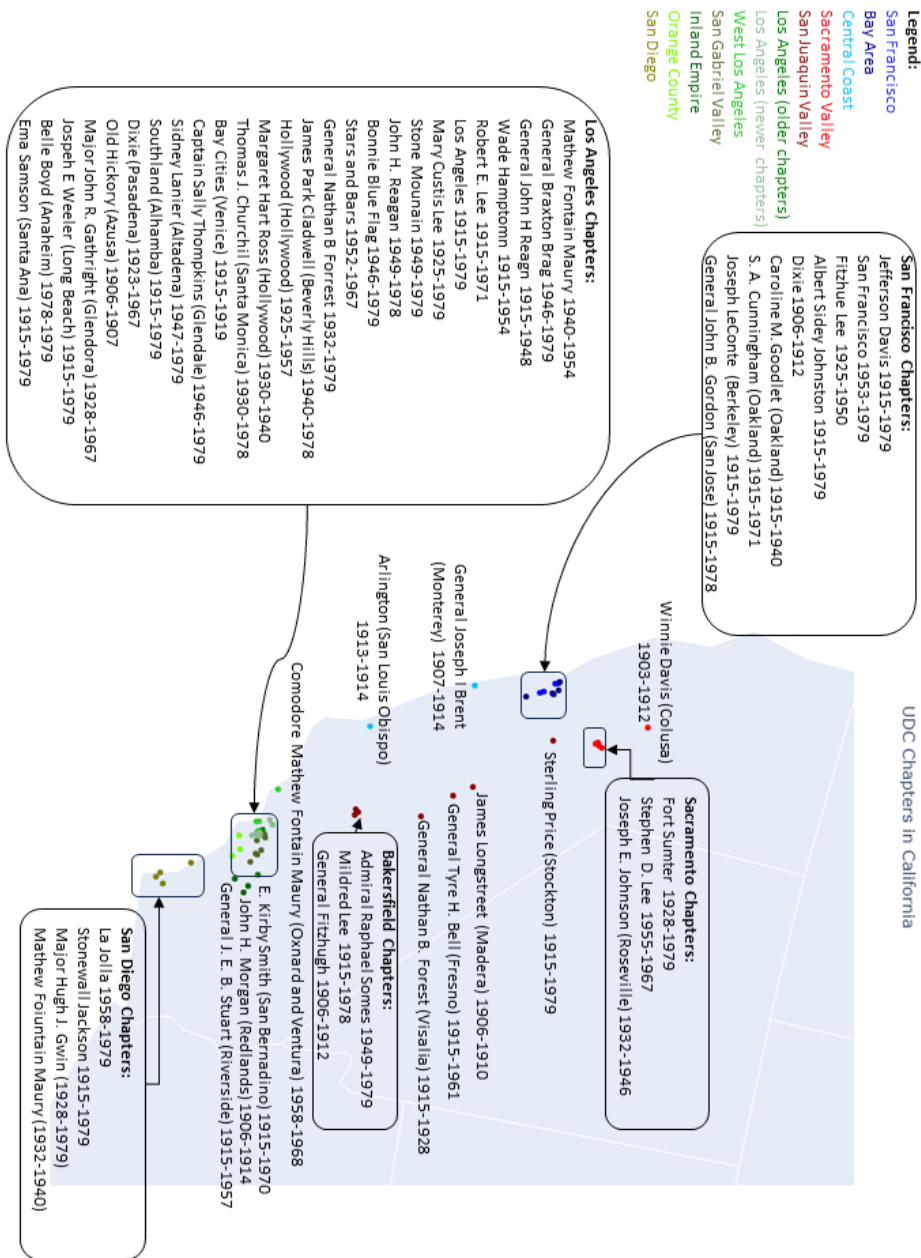


Fig. 2. Chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in California, along with their years of operation according to the membership roles. Chapters in the northern part of the state are colored in shades of blue; chapters in the southern part are colored in shades of green; and chapters in the inland parts are colored in shades of red. The specific colors of chapters are according to the sub-region they are located in. each chapter is located in the centroid of the addresses of its members over the years. for the 6 chapters dechartered before 1914, the center of the city they reside in was taken.

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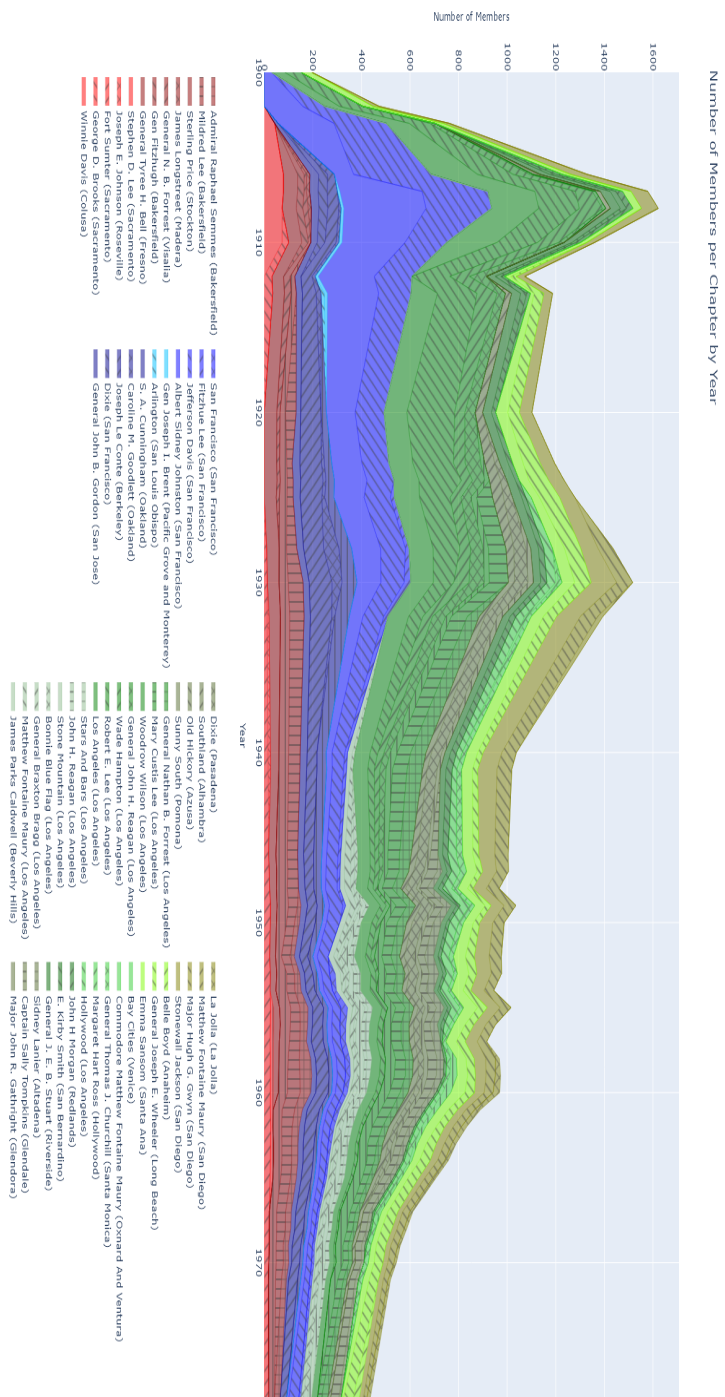


Fig. 3. Number of members per chapter each year. Chapters in the northern part of the state are colored in shades of blue; chapters in the southern part are colored in shades of green; and chapters in the inland parts are colored in shades of orange. The years 1914-1919, 1921-1922, 1929, 1931, 1941-1946 and 1972-1977 are forward-filled from existing data.

This analysis offers insights into the dispersion of ex-Southerners throughout California, revealing nuanced implications for how history is memorialized. Two critical insights stand out:

First, in the antebellum period and during the Civil War, Northern California overshadowed Southern California in terms of development and population density. Given this demographic landscape, if any memorialization of Californian events and figures tied to the intersectional crisis and the Civil War is expected, it would be in the northern part of the state. Curiously, such memorialization is largely absent. Had the UDC had a limited footprint in Northern California, this would have offered a straightforward rationale for this omission. However, the UDC's significant presence there implies that the underlying reasons for this lack of memorialization lie elsewhere.

Second, As the 20th century unfolded, even though the state's demographic and economic weight shifted southwards, Northern California remained a powerhouse in economic, political, and notably, intellectual spheres. The presence of esteemed institutions like the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University underscores this dominance. The proximity of a UDC chapter, an advocate for the Lost Cause narrative, especially near Berkeley, hints at potential channels through which the UDC might have shaped broader Californian narratives and discourses. We explore this facet further in the ensuing section.

3.2 Individual-level Analysis

The analyses presented so far largely derive from an examination at the chapter level. Yet, the fine granularity of our database opens doors for a more detailed exploration. To highlight this, I'll delve into a case study of the Joseph LeConte chapter in Berkeley.

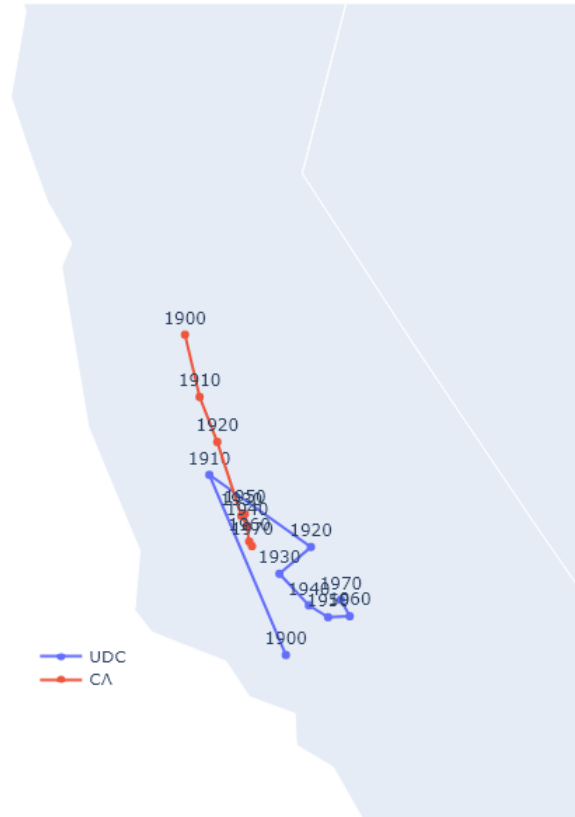


Fig. 4. The centers of population of UDC members, in Blue, vs. the center of population for the entire state, in red, between 1900 and 1920. for the years from 1920 and onward, the center of population for UDC members was calculated based on their exact address. for 1900 and 1910, the center of population was calculated using the chapter location as a proxy for the addresses of all of the chapter's members.

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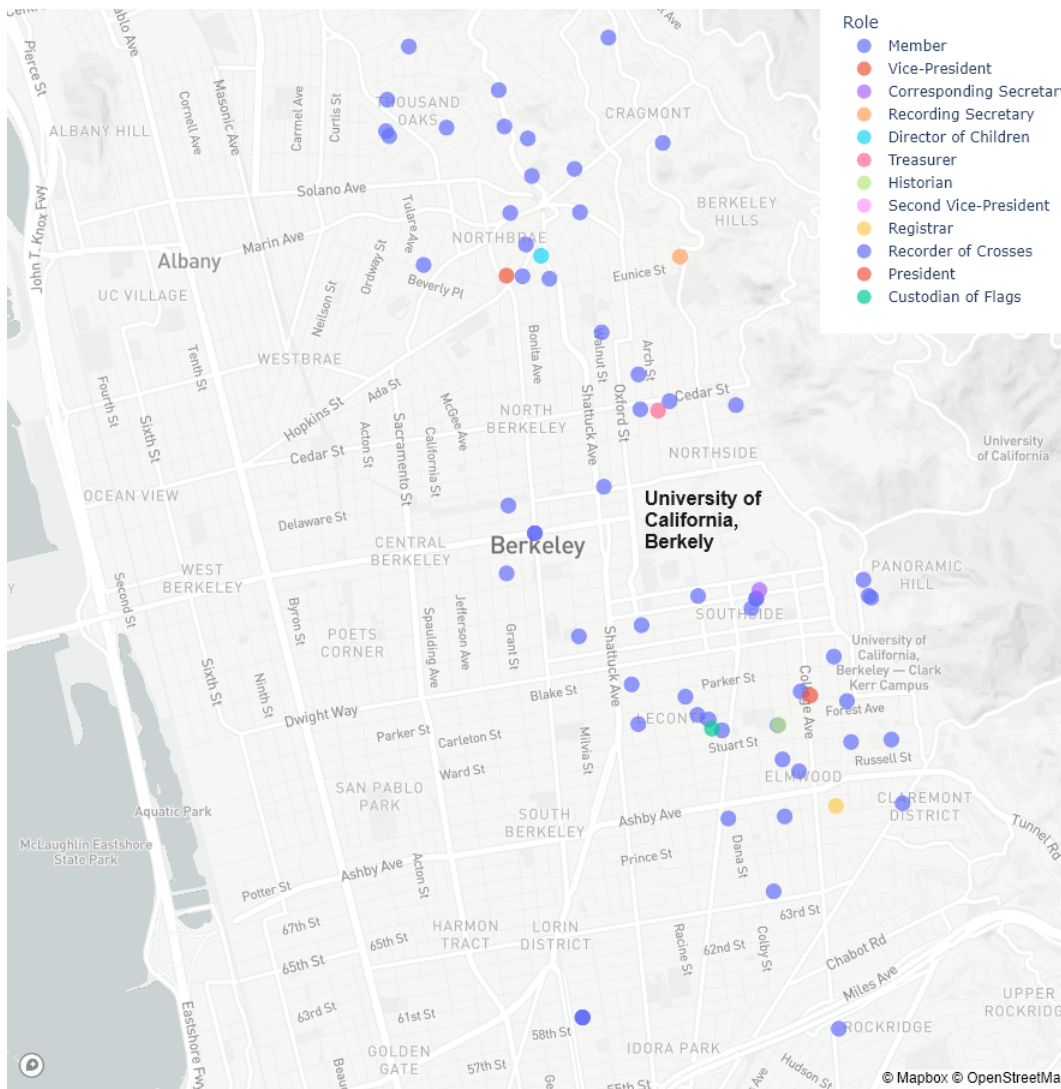


Fig. 5. Members of the JosephLeConte chapter in berkeley in 1930

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The Joseph LeConte chapter in Berkeley stands out in its surprising size and longevity. It was chartered in 1906 and lasted at least until 1979, which is the final year in our database. It reached peak membership in 1930, with 94 members. You can see where these members lived in 1930 in Figure 5

In 1930, 83 out of 94 of the chapter’s members resided within the affluent eastern quarters of Berkeley, in relative close proximity to the university. In these prominent neighborhoods, nearly one in every 100 households was steered by a UDC member. This significant presence indicates that UDC activities could have held a notable imprint within the university’s community sphere. Indeed, there exist nuanced ties between the Southern heritage and the University of California in Berkeley that might elude common knowledge. The chapter is named after of Joseph LeConte, a professor

of Geology and Physics at the institution from 1869 to 1901. Hailing from South Carolina, LeConte had affiliations with the Confederate Nitre and Mining Bureau’s innovative endeavors, which were intricately linked to the Confederate Secret Service [13]. His sibling, John LeConte, who likewise hailed from the South and served in the Confederate military during the war, held the position of the university’s president between 1869 and 1887. [14]. A notable hall on the campus bore the mantle of John LeConte until its renaming in 2020 [6]. Considering the pivotal roles that UC Berkeley faculty have played in shaping California’s historical narrative and intellectual milieu, it’s conceivable that the UDC’s presence could have indirectly nuanced the perceptions surrounding the Civil War through these intertwined connections.

4 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this study, we present a meticulously curated database on the members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in California from 1914 to 1979, supplemented by information on chapter sizes from 1900 to 1914. A standout feature of this database is the inclusion of members’ addresses, enabling deep geospatial analysis. Our spatial research highlights fascinating connections, especially the potential ties between UDC members and the renowned University of California in Berkeley.

This database is a solid foundation for future research. There are many paths to explore: understanding individual members’ journeys within the UDC, studying its socio-economic makeup over time, tracing the stories of prominent Southerners who settled in California, and more. We hope this resource sparks fresh interest and thorough academic investigations into the layered histories and influences of the UDC in California.

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