The San Joaquin Historian
Official Journal of the San Joaquin County Historical Society

Winter 2016

Published by
San Joaquin County Historical Society, Inc.
Micke Grove Regional Park
P.O. Box 30
Lodi, CA 95241
(209) 331-2055

www.SanJoaquinHistory.org
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The Historical Society operates the San Joaquin County Historical Museum in Micke Grove Regional Park in partnership with the County of San Joaquin.

The Historical Society meets quarterly. Membership includes subscriptions to The San Joaquin Historian and the monthly newsletter, as well as free admission to the Museum and waiver of the parking fee for Micke Grove Regional Park.

Well-researched manuscripts on the history of San Joaquin County are welcome. The editor reserves the right to shorten and edit submitted material. Inquiry should be made through the Museum office.

Copies of the Historian can be purchased at the Museum and viewed online at sanjoaquin-history.org/articles.php.

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Preface

In 2011, the San Joaquin County Historical Society was awarded a grant from the Nature Education Facilities Program, administered by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The program was funded by a 2006 bond measure for water quality projects that included allocations for public access to natural resources. The grant project at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum was one of forty-four projects funded from among more than three hundred applicants.

The original purpose of this document was to provide a summary from secondary sources to assist the planning, design, and development of the new Native Peoples exhibition supported by the grant, as well as future exhibits, programs, and media.

Part One, printed in summer 2016, focused on Native peoples prior to the arrival of Europeans. It included (1) a summary of the ancient prehistory of what is now San Joaquin County, (2) a discussion of the complex ways in which Native nations cared for the natural landscapes and resources of their homelands, and (3) an overview of the lifeways of the Miwok- and Yokuts-speaking nations of this region shortly before Europeans arrived.

This issue, Part Two, summarizes the history of San Joaquin County from the perspective of its Native peoples. It includes (4) a summary of the experiences California Indians had after the arrival of Europeans and Americans, and (5) a recognition of the remarkable survival of traditional Indian cultures.
Spain Colonized the Alta California Coast

Although Spain had colonized Mexico in the 1500s, there were only a few brief contacts between Europeans and coastal California Indians. California was a decidedly hard place to reach—it was easier to sail from Acapulco across the Pacific Ocean to the Philippines than it was to sail north to the fog-shrouded California coast. Because of the currents and prevailing winds, sailing from Mexico to California often took four to six months.

European interaction with California Indians began in earnest when Spain extended into Alta (upper) California the nineteen missions the Jesuit order had built on the Baja (lower) California peninsula. The Franciscans established the first of the string of twenty-one Alta California coastal missions, San Diego de Alcalá, in 1769.

The Spanish colonial expansion eventually also included four military presidios (garrisons or forts), including Monterey and San Francisco, and three pueblos (civilian villages), including San José and Villa de Branciforte, a town near present-day Santa Cruz that never fully materialized. Other unplanned pueblos grew around several of the missions and presidios.

Motives for Spain’s northern advance from Mexico included: control of the Colorado River and hostile Indians in what is now Arizona; protection of its silver mines in northern Mexico; and especially concerns over possible Russian or British control of the harbor at Monterey Bay. Spanish galleons carrying riches from the Philippines to Mexico were vulnerable when sailing past California.

Let there be no doubt that the [California] mission was much more than a merely religious institution. On the contrary, it served as a primary instrument of conquest for the sole benefit of the Spanish Crown.

For most Indians with homelands in coastal California, the northern expansion of Spain changed almost everything.

[Missionization] was not simply a question of baptism and acceptance of Catholicism, it was a total uprooting of individuals and entire villages and their movement...to the missions. Its aim was the total destruction of Native American culture and the creation of an Indo-Spanish society.

The reality of the California missions was far from the romantic communities portrayed in tourist publications, pageants, and, unfortunately, most textbooks.

The Indians, whose options were restricted when the Spanish colonialists seized their land and resources to use for grazing Spanish livestock and raising Spanish crops, were attracted to the missions with a combination of goods (food, beads, cloth), promises of security (including security from Spanish violence), and spiritual salvation. In exchange, the Indians lost their freedom and, once baptized by the priests, could not leave except with permission. Their lives were totally controlled and regulated twenty-four hours a day.

Natives “who actively opposed the Spanish settlements were either shot or arrested and whipped by the Spanish soldiers who guarded
The Spanish Presidio at San Francisco in 1816. Drawing by Louis Choris, courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
the missions.” Accusations of slavery and mistreatment were frequent, with even mission Franciscans filing reports depicting the excesses of their fellows.

**California Natives Resisted the Spanish Missions**

Stern punishments and severe conditions at the mission labor camps fueled resistance by the Indians. *Kumeyaay* Indians attacked Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in the Los Angeles basin shortly after it was established in 1771, primarily in response to rapes by Spanish soldiers. In 1775, *Kumeyaay* Indians killed a priest and destroyed Mission San Diego de Alcalá. Four *Kumeyaay* leaders were executed by the Spanish, the first historic public executions in California.

Native peoples skirmished with soldiers at the Northern California missions from the beginning. No Indians were baptized at Mission San Francisco de Asís during its first year of operation (1776-77), due to a series of violent confrontations between soldiers and local Natives. A similar situation prevailed after the establishment of Mission Santa Clara de Asís in 1777. Later, the resistance stimulated Indians to “run away from Mission San Francisco in large numbers. By the end of the summer of 1795, at least 280 had fled, a high enough percentage to threaten the survival of the mission.” The tule marshes of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta were an important refuge for San Francisco Bay Area mission Indians seeking freedom.

Mission San José, founded in 1797, two decades after the other Bay Area missions, was strategically closer to new Indian recruits in what is now San Joaquin County (see below). It attracted only thirty-three Indians its first year. Without a labor force, it struggled to survive through 1810, when it had a population of only about five hundred people.

Underground resistance within the mission communities was common. Indians poisoned a number of priest “witches” at Missions San Miguel Arcángel and San Antonio de Padua in 1801 and murdered a priest at Santa Cruz in 1812.

The most famous mission Indian revolt occurred in 1824, when two thousand Chumash-speaking Indians razed Mission Santa Inéz, captured Mission La Purísima Concepción, and threatened to take Missions Santa Bárbara, San Buenaventura, and San Gabriel Arcángel. The Spanish soldiers bombarded Mission La Purísima with artillery. “Spanish arms prevailed…, reinforced with muskets clandestinely supplied by the Russians from their distant colony at [Fort] Ross.”

The uprising of 1824 was a well-planned and coordinated attack on several missions by many Indians. It marked a turning point in Native resistance, a departure from the individual or small-scale acts of rebellion in prior decades. Traditionally, [Native] people had been divided into small [nations]…each with its own territory and leadership [see Part One]. In the missions, [Native] people found themselves having to get along with others who spoke different languages and who in some cases were traditional enemies. Divisiveness and dispersion of power hampered revolt and enabled [Spanish] missionaries and soldiers, though outnumbered, to control the native population.

Growing cooperation among Native groups and the emergence of Spanish as a shared language led to ongoing guerilla warfare and eventually to pitched battles in defense of the Indian homelands (see “Homeland Defense,” below). These acts of “rebellion began the series of events that led to the eventual destruction of the…mission system.”

**European Diseases Killed Many Native People**

The Spanish soldiers were, however, aided by European diseases, unintentional weapons of mass destruction. “Indians in California,
like Indians throughout the Americas, were highly susceptible to most European diseases; and contact between the two [populations] almost inevitably resulted in a high death rate [among the Natives]."^{12}

Some historians have suggested that epidemics of European diseases began with the very first contacts on the Pacific coast.\(^{13}\) They argue that California Native populations had already been greatly diminished by the 1700s.

\[\text{Certainly,}\] California Indian groups had dense populations that lived in closely-spaced and relatively large and permanent communities, with intensive social and economic interactions with their neighbors. These demographic characteristics, along with the lack of prior exposure to a host of Old World diseases, left them highly susceptible to devastating epidemics.\(^{14}\)

It is well-documented that numerous epidemics occurred at the California missions. For example, in 1777, an epidemic of a respiratory disease swept Mission Santa Clara de Asís. An epidemic of diphtheria and pneumonia ravaged the confined Indians from Mission San Carlos Borroméo de Carmelo (Carmel) south to San Luis Obispo de Tolosa. And in 1806, measles swept from Mission San Francisco de Asís through Mission Santa Bárbara, killing thousands and almost wiping out all Indian children under ten years of age. Overall, about three-fourths of the Indians baptized at the missions soon died there.

The high death rates and negative population growth [at the missions] were not merely the result of occasional terrible epidemics. Year in and year out, infant death rates were incredibly high. This was due primarily to two factors: (1) poor sanitation conditions that caused food- and water-borne diseases to be endemic in the mission villages, and (2) increasingly, endemic syphilis. Families in the mission were unable to bear and raise children who could replace those who died. Among adults, death rates for females were almost twice those of males. Thus the sex ratios in the mission settlements… [also] limited the ability of the population to rebound after the more severe epidemics.\(^{15}\)

One study showed that through the entire history of a mission, more than one-third of the babies born did not live until their first birthday. Of the ones who did, almost half did not survive to the age of five years. In other words, less than one-third of the mission Indian babies survived into their fifth year; two-thirds or more died in early childhood.\(^{16}\)

In the first hundred years of European colonialism, the population of California Indians was reduced by 90 percent or more, prompting some to label the period the “American Holocaust.”\(^{17}\) To be fair to the Spanish, the term \textit{holocaust} implies genocidal intent, whereas Spain did not seek the physical death of the Native people of California. The Spanish desire for self-sufficient frontier communities in California was predicated on the labor of the subjugated and acculturated Indians, filling the largest but lowest rank of Spanish society, below the middle-class \textit{creoles} (Hispanics born in the New World) and the upper-class officers and officials born and educated in Spain.

After ten years of tutelage to make mission Indians into good Spanish subjects, they were to receive the mission lands held in trust for them by the padres and to form pueblos, [the towns giving Spain] effective settlements on its northern frontier…against foreign encroachment.\(^{18}\)

Of course, from the start Spain sought to change the traditional religions, economies, languages, and social structures of California Indians, a practice that has been called “cultural genocide.”\(^{19}\)
Spain Reached into the Northern San Joaquin Valley

European exploration of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and the California heartland began after 1772 when Father Juan Crespi and Captain Pedro Fages stood atop Mount Diablo and described the inundated marshlands to the east. In subsequent years, explorers from the presidio at San Francisco began probing the Delta in boats, but the lands east of the San Joaquin River remained virtually unknown to the Spanish.

In 1806, a party led by Father Muñoz and Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga, with twenty-five soldiers from San Francisco and San Juan Bautista, descended Pacheco Pass into the San Joaquin Valley and headed north, and, when it crossed the Stanislaus River, reached what is now San Joaquin County. Father Muñoz reported that near the Calaveras River (present-day Stockton)

In the afternoon...about forty armed Indians suddenly appeared at the camp. They fired arrows into the air, and while skirmishing around, three of them separated from the rest, as ambassadors, carrying a flag which was a black ribbon of feathers with a red stripe in the middle.20

In this first meeting between local Indians and the Spanish, the envoy from the Yokuts-speaking nation made it clear that the Natives had heard rumors of Spanish murders and kidnappings. They refused to negotiate and fled to remain free in their homeland.

Two years later, in 1808, Father Narciso Durán, Moraga, and a party from Mission San José explored the east bank of the San Joaquin River from the Stanislaus River to the Mokelumne River. In another five years, the expeditions became military campaigns. The first Spanish battle with Indians in this area occurred when a party of twelve soldiers and one hundred Indian militiamen attacked Miwok-speakers on the lower Cosumnes River. Although the Spanish war party inflicted heavy casualties, the Indians did not surrender and they remained free.

To maintain the dwindling labor force at the San Francisco Bay Area missions, Spain sought new Indian laborers from the recently explored interior. The first Indians to go to Mission San José from nations within what is now San Joaquin County had homelands closest to the mission. Between 1809 and 1813, Natives from the southwest Delta area of San Joaquin County—from the Cholón, Tamcan, Coybos, and Josmite Yokuts-speaking nations (see the map in Part One)—were the first to go in large numbers, in part due to two land expeditions sent through the area in 1810 and a boat expedition up Old River in 1811.21

Yokuts-speaking Indians from the central and southern portions of San Joaquin County—from the Jalalon, Nototomne, Yatchicumne, Passasimi, and Lacquisenne nations—appear in the Mission San José records during the 1814–20 period.22 Natives from the southern edge of present-day San Joaquin County also went to Mission Santa Clara de Asís. Yokuts dialects from the northern San Joaquin Valley were “the predominant native language at missions Santa Clara and San Juan Bautista during the late mission period.”23

In 1818, a village near present-day Stockton was attacked by twenty-five Spanish soldiers, plus Indian militiamen. Twenty-seven Indians were murdered. “Those who did not fall into our hands escaped in the brush,” wrote one Spanish soldier. “There must have been many wounded among them. After firing a rifle volley at them we charged them with our lances and slaughtered them.” About fifty were taken as prisoners to the presidio at San Francisco, where they “were put at hard labor—at that time the main quarters of the presidio were being built.”24

Few Plains Miwok people had gone to the missions by 1820. By then, the Muquelemne
nation from near modern Lodi had become known for stealing horses from the coastal missions and ranchos (ranches) and for harboring mission runaways.

In the spring of 1821, revolutionary leader Augustín de Ituribe declared Mexico’s independence from Spain after a decade of civil war. Although it took a year for the news to reach the California coastal frontier, Mexico officially took control of Southern and Central California.

Most members of the Miwok-speaking Musupum nation from the heart of the Delta went to Mission San José in 1824, as did the Yokuts-speaking Tauquimes from the area that became northwest-central San Joaquin County. The Quenemsia from near present-day Isleton went in 1825. In 1826, a few Muquelemne and Locolomnes Miwoks were baptized at Mission San José, and some Yokuts-speakers from the lower Stanislaus River moved to Mission Santa Clara de Asís.

In 1826, the Cosomne Miwok nation from what is now southern Sacramento County routed a force of soldiers and Indian militia-men from Mission San José. “Evidently, the [mission Indian] auxiliaries initiated the attack and suffered as many as thirty-four dead. The intruders retreated, abandoning the cannon they had employed against the Cosomne.” Later that year “[Sergeant] José Antonio Sánchez of the presidio at San Francisco led a punitive expedition, consisting of 21 soldiers, 21 volunteers, and 150 [Indian militiamen], against the Cosomne. [T]he command killed forty-one Cosomne and returned to Mission San José with forty prisoners, mostly women and children.”

The Miwok-speaking Unisumne nation, from the Walnut Grove-Thornton area of northwest San Joaquin County, and their neighbors to the south, the Guaypem, had strongly resisted the Spanish since 1813, but they went to Mission San José in 1827 and 1828. Many Tihuechemne from near present-day Farmington, Seuamne from near Jenny Lind, and Locolomne people from the Ione vicinity joined them in early 1830. Plains Miwok dialects from what later was northern San Joaquin County became the dominant Native languages at Mission San José.26

“In the fall of 1834, a huge number of [Indian] people were baptized at Mission San Jose, probably as a result of the devastation caused by the previous year’s [malaria] epidemic,” (see “Furs and Footholds,” below).27 Included among the newly baptized were many people from the Muquelemne, Lelamne, Chilamne, and Seuamne Miwok-speaking nations and the Tihuechemne Yokuts-speaking nation, all from what would be San Joaquin County in less than twenty years.

Mexico Granted Land for Ranchos to Replace the Missions

Between 1834 and 1836, the Mexican government decided to turn the coastal missions into regular parish churches. In the following years, the vast mission lands were granted to prominent Mexican citizens—and the original Spanish plan to return the lands to acculturated Native people was ignored. “An interlocking clique of leading Mexican families—Pacheco, Soto, Bernal, Higuera, Moraga, and Sunol—petitioned for the best mission lands,” and the governor rubber-stamped the petitions.28 Some Indians did get land and livestock from the missions; others got a few horses or cows, but most got nothing. On the other hand, the leading [Mexican] ruling class families, who had mainly been military officers and officials up to the early 1830s, got the bulk of the mission wealth. They were able to seize vast landed estates along with most of the animals and Indians residing there—by far the greatest [transfer of land and resources in California] since the Spanish had [first] seized the land from the Indians.29
Mexico granted more than five hundred large ranchos—compared to less than twenty-five that Spain had previously granted. The Mexican land grants totaled some ten million acres, or ten percent of present-day California.

“[B]y 1840 the private rancho had replaced the mission as the dominant social and economic institution in [coastal] California, and all but a handful of former mission Indians had been rendered landless.”

Many of the mission Indians joined multinational refugee bands or sought peonage on the Mexican ranchos. “Some people from [Native nations in what is now San Joaquin County] chose to remain and work in the East Bay after the Mission San Jose communal experiment came to an end [in 1836].”

“The typical Mexican rancho was based, economically and socially, upon the exploitation of Indian labor...which was virtually unpaid.”

“Thus the rancho society...was essentially a feudal society. The [owners] ruled as lords on their great landed estates, and the Indian workers...were their serfs.”

Salvador Vallejo recalled that at his brother Mariano Vallejo’s Rancho Petaluma, north of the San Francisco and San Pablo Bays,

[Indian men] tilled our soil, pastured our cattle, sheared our sheep, cut our lumber, built our houses,...ground our grain, [butchered] our cattle, dressed...hides for the market, and made our unburnt bricks; while the Indian women made most excellent servants, took good care of our children, and made every one of our meals.

Vallejo’s rancho had as many as one thousand Native “serfs” during certain times of the year. Former mission Indians usually worked as artisans in the crafts in which they had been trained at the missions, or were vaqueros (cow-boys), lead tillers and harvesters, or household servants. “Wild” Indians that had not been at a mission were typically seasonal, unskilled laborers.

Francisca Benicia Carillo de Vallejo said that their home in Sonoma was also well-stocked with Native servants:

Each one of my children, boys and girls, has a servant who has no other duty than to care for him or her. I have two for my own personal service. Four or five grind the corn for the tortillas.... Five or six are continually occupied in washing the clothes of the children and of the rest employed in the house; and finally, nearly a dozen are charged to attend to the sewing and spinning.

Although the ranchos had different political and economic bases than the missions, Indians worked on them for similar reasons: physical enforcement, social coercion, desire for goods or food, and the lack of other options.

There were no missions to which captured “wild” Indians or runaways could be taken, but the Mexicans continued sending expeditions into the interior. In fact, these expeditions had become slave raids, seeking Indian laborers for the coastal ranchos and the households of the Californios (Californians of Spanish descent). As a result, many Native people from what is now San Joaquin County disliked the Californios and wanted to keep them out of the northern San Joaquin Valley.
Furs and Footholds: American and Hudson’s Bay Trappers

American Trappers Fueled International Competition

Jedediah Strong Smith and approximately fifteen American trappers entered California in November 1826, hoping to “find parts of the country as well stocked with Beaver as the waters of the Missouri.”37 Beaver trapping in the Rocky Mountains had become fiercely competitive and Mexico had loosened trade on the Santa Fe Trail. Smith and his men crossed the Mojave Desert and the San Bernardino Mountains, blazing what would be called the Old Spanish Trail. They were the first Americans to enter California by land from the east.

The Mexican government put the American trappers under house arrest as spies. Governor José María de Echeandía eventually signed a passport allowing the Americans to depart, after American shipping merchants posted a bond to assure that the trappers would return the way they came. Instead, after re-crossing the San Bernardino Mountains, Smith led the company north through the San Joaquin Valley, which was then largely unknown to the Mexicans and was not considered by Smith to be part of Mexican California.

The American trappers probably had little to fear from the Mexican soldiers stationed along the California coast. The soldiers had not been paid in years and had either refused to serve until paid or had abandoned their posts. Three years after the arrival of the American trappers, the soldiers at Monterey mutinied and took over the presidio, although Governor Echeandía still ignored their privations.

The rivers of California’s Central Valley and especially the edges of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta had abundant furbearing animals such as otter and beaver. Thomas Farnham, who had explored much of the American West, exclaimed, “There is probably no spot of equal extent on the whole continent of America which contains so many of these much-sought animals.”38

When Jedediah Smith’s party crossed into the Mokelumne River watershed in what is now northern San Joaquin County, the Miwok-speakers there were less cooperative than the Northern Valley Yokuts nations had been. On the Cosumnes River near present-day Wilton, Indians stole some traps. After reaching the American River (named after these trappers) Smith’s party turned east to cross the Sierra Nevada and Great Basin to attend the annual trappers’ rendezvous in the Rocky Mountains. The attempted Sierra crossing failed and the trappers skirmished with Nisenan-speaking Indians. Two Indians were killed, the trappers suffered from extreme cold and deep snows, and they lost five horses.

The trappers returned to the friendly Yokuts-speaking people on the Stanislaus River and camped for the summer near present-day Oakdale. They had a cache of more than fifteen hundred pounds of beaver pelts.

On May 20, 1827, Smith, Silas Gobel, and Robert Evans left camp and from the north bank of the Stanislaus, they veered gradually away from the river and its canyons, climbed up through the foothills to the forests of pine and fir, and eventually reached the granite ridges. By this time the snow was well packed and they were able to make good progress. In a week they reached the main crest of the Sierra
not far from the present Ebbetts Pass. Thence they found their way down the eastern slope and into the deserts of Nevada. A High Sierra pass had been crossed for the first time by white men.\(^3^9\)

Smith, Gobel, and Evans attended the rendezvous at Bear Lake, beyond the Great Salt Lake, in early July. They told the other trappers about the bounty of the California heartland. They thus initiated the fur trade in California and almost overnight the heartland became a focus of international competition. The United States, Russia, Great Britain, and other foreign nations began vying for a foothold in the Spanish-Mexican frontier on the Pacific Coast.

At about the same time, four hundred Indians at Mission San José ran away, declaring that they would remain in the area that is now San Joaquin County. Father Durán could not “get over the surprise of such an unforeseen occurrence by a people that appeared to be so peaceful and docile.”\(^4^0\)

Father Durán and Commander Martínez from the presidio at San Francisco did not think the timing was a coincidence; they blamed Smith and the Americans, claiming that the Americans had “sent several communications to [Indians] in that part of the country, offering them protection to abandon the mission[s and]… return to their villages.”\(^4^1\) Sergeant Francisco Soto was sent to check on the American trappers, but found no evidence to support Durán’s accusations.

In September 1827, Smith returned. He and his men again trapped the lower Calaveras, Mokelumne, and Cosumnes Rivers, Lone Tree Creek, and Old River in the Delta. Smith went to San José for supplies and was again arrested by the Mexican authorities. Once again, he was allowed to leave and, in December, he and his band left for Oregon country via the Sacramento Valley and the Northern California coastal mountains. Although Smith did not return to the California heartland, he had initiated a lucrative horse trade that would involve trappers and California Indians for a couple decades—the Plains Miwok and Northern Valley Yokuts people had been stealing and eating mission and rancho livestock for years and had amassed sizeable horse herds.
The Native Peoples of San Joaquin County

Hudson’s Bay Company Established French Camp

The entry of Smith and other Americans into this region emboldened Native patriots and stirred lingering Spanish concerns about the Russians—whose Rus colony (Anglicized as “Fort Ross”) had been established in 1812 on the Northern California coast in the homelands of the Kaskaya Pomo Indians. The Mexican government was also worried about the British, who were active in the Pacific Northwest.

Smith’s reports of the rich California heartland, the pelts he took north into Oregon country, and a map he drew, prompted the British Hudson’s Bay Company to send trapping and trading parties south. They followed Smith’s 1827 exit route to create the sketchy California Brigade or Siskiyou Trail, which linked Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River with Northern California.

Although the Mexican governor repeatedly ordered Hudson’s Bay Company to vacate the California heartland, from 1832 to about 1840 as many as four hundred people affiliated with the Company—trappers, traders, and their large families—lived seasonally at the southern terminus of the trail, now known as French Camp.

The first Hudson’s Bay brigade came to the San Joaquin Delta in 1829, but the first brigade known to rendezvous on French Camp Slough—sixty-five “men, women, children, and Indians”—arrived in 1832, led by the legendary Michel La Framboise. Thus, the community that the Mexicans on the coast called El Campo de los Franceses (the Camp of the French) was the first non-Indian settlement in what a couple decades later became San Joaquin County.

Or at least partially non-Indian. As was typical of Hudson’s Bay Company operations, the community would have been a multicultural one with Scottish or English managers—who filed their reports to the Company in English—Indians from the Pacific Northwest, French and other Europeans, Métis (individuals of combined Native and European ancestry, the “children of the fur trade”), and Kanakas (Hawaiians). Some of the men undoubtedly had local Native wives, too. The camp would have spoken a pidgin mixture of Chinook, Nootka, Chehalis, English, French, Hawaiian, and perhaps Yokuts and other languages.

The Mexican governor allowed Hudson’s Bay Company to maintain a trading post at Yerba Buena cove (now San Francisco) from 1841-1845. The company sold products from Fort Vancouver, such as salmon and lumber, and British trade goods. But changes in hat styles, over-trapping, and growing political tensions sent the fur business into steep decline and the post was closed in 1845.

Trappers Brought Malaria That Killed Many Valley Indians

The biggest impact the trappers had on Native nations in the California heartland was inadvertent. Hudson’s Bay Company trappers in the fall of 1832 unwittingly introduced malaria into the mosquito-infested wetlands of the Central Valley. The Indian inhabitants had no immunity to the disease and died in huge numbers. By the late 1830s, the Bay Miwok nations had disappeared and the Plains Miwok nations in what is now northern San Joaquin County had lost perhaps 80 percent of their people to the malaria epidemic.

Trappers passing through this area were struck by the rapid impact of the disease:

On our return, late in the summer of 1833 we found the valleys depopulated. From the head of the Sacramento to the great bend...of the San Joaquin [River near present-day Fresno], we did not see more than six or eight [living] Indians; while large numbers of their skulls and dead bodies were to be seen under almost every shade-tree near water, where the uninhabited and deserted villages had been converted to grave-
yards; and on the San Joaquin River, in the immediate neighborhood of the larger class of villages, which, the preceding year, were the abodes of a large number of these Indians, we found not only many graves, but the vestiges of a funeral pyre.44

Four years later (1837), the already-decimated Miwok- and Yokuts-speaking people in this area may have been struck again, this time by a smallpox epidemic that originated at Fort Ross. Throughout the Mexican era, influenza, measles, pneumonia, diphtheria, and other European maladies continued to decimate the already-diminished Indian populations, although refugees from the coast helped shore up the interior Native populations to some degree.
Homeland Defense: The Indian Freedom Fighters

Native Patriots Wanted to Keep the Mexicans on the Coast

Concurrent with the decline and demise of the missions was an increase in armed resistance by California Indians. Many ex-mission Indians fled inland, often to join multinational refugee bands. Californio slave raiders were a common enemy for Native patriots. Horses had become abundant and provided meat, quick transportation, and a resource that could be traded.

At the same time as they were acquiring horses, the Indians of the Central Valley were also becoming more knowledgeable about [Mexican] fighting tactics...Along the whole frontier, mounted Indians were preparing themselves for increased warfare...more than anything else,...to prevent Hispano-Mexican expansion into the interior of California.45

The Native patriots may have become emboldened by the lack of an effective response by the Mexicans to the intrusion of the American and Hudson’s Bay Company trappers (see above). The Indians were convinced that the Mexican soldiers were “few in number,...very young,” and “could not shoot very well.”46

Estanislao and Cipriano Led the Native Fighters

In 1828, a Lacquisemne Yokuts man in his mid-thirties from what is now southern San Joaquin County left Mission San José and established a refugee band in this area that openly revolted against the Mexicans. His name was Cucunuchi, although in 1821 the Spanish had renamed him Estanislao, after the Polish saint, Stanislaus. Another key leader of the Native resistance was Huhuyut, christened Cipriano at Mission Santa Clara de Asís and related by marriage to Estanislao. Estanislao’s brother, Sabulon, was also an important leader. Their band raided ranchos and attempted to foment revolts at Missions San José, Santa Clara de Asís, Santa Cruz, and San Juan Bautista.

Estanislao Cucunuchi [led] the most serious rebellion ever mounted against the California mission system—a rebellion which may have been directed more against the Mexican authorities than against the missions themselves. The chief, events later proved, held deep affection for Father [Narciso] Durán of Mission San José.47

Nevertheless, it was the powerful Durán, Father-President of all the California missions, who in November 1828 asked for military intervention in response to the raids: “Everything depends upon capturing dead or alive a certain Estanislao from this mission and a person from Santa Clara called Cipriano.”48 Estanislao and Cipriano prepared for the confrontation by putting out a call to arms to Native patriots in the Central Valley.

Soon there was a skirmish along the Stanislaus River between the Native freedom fighters and fifteen Mexican soldiers from the San Francisco presidio under the command of Sergeant Francisco Soto. Accounts of this confrontation are sketchy because the sergeant was wounded in the exchange and died shortly thereafter. The Indians apparently lured the hot-headed Soto into their chosen battlefield and killed two or three soldiers and wounded four to six others before the Mexicans retreated to the coast.
Indians Defeated Mexican Soldiers on the Stanislaus River

More fully documented was a subsequent expedition, after the rainy season, in early May 1829. Forty soldiers from the San Francisco presidio, plus about seventy Indian militiamen from Mission San José, led by an experienced Indian-fighter, Sergeant José Antonio Sanchez, were sent to apprehend Estanislao and his followers. The rebel band was holed up in the dense riparian forest “jungle” along the Stanislaus River, probably somewhere near present-day Riverbank or Oakdale, although some researchers have located the battle site as far downriver as Caswell Memorial State Park. The Native patriots had constructed elaborate defensive structures: “a palisade of split stakes, in the recollection of one Mexican soldier who confronted it. Parapets of thick, strong timbers interlaced with trenches, in the memory of another.” It was also described as a series of stockades linked by a labyrinth of deep trenches.

Sergeant Sanchez had intended to bombard the Indian rebels, but a broken field carriage on the artillery piece rendered it useless. Infantry tactics proved ineffective against Estanislao’s defensive works. After two full days of fighting, the Mexican forces had not driven the Indians out of the stronghold and had suffered two dead and nineteen wounded. Sanchez abandoned the siege and withdrew from the victorious Indian freedom fighters, arriving at Mission San José on May 10.

This victory by the Native patriots over Mexican regular forces and militia was a milestone in large-scale armed resistance among California Indians. It was the first substantial Indian military victory over the Spanish or Mexicans. It was also noteworthy because the Indian fighters included individuals originally from many nations in the San Joaquin Valley and the lower Sacramento Valley—perhaps even Chumash-speakers from the Santa Barbara coast who had fled to the tulears (Central Valley tule marshes) after their 1824 revolt.
Moreover, the Native patriots quite effectively used European tactics and defensive earthworks, trenches, and barricades to defend their homelands.

**The Largest Army in California Sought Revenge**

The Mexicans retaliated. Commander Ignacio Martínez wrote to twenty-two-year-old second lieutenant Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo at Monterey:

The Indian rebels from Missions San José and Santa Clara have gathered together at the rivers, resolved to die rather than surrender. They are extremely insolent... seducing the other [Indians] to accompany them in their evil and diabolical schemes, openly insulting our troops and ridiculing them and their weapons. They are relying on the manpower of the wild Indians, on the terrain and positions which they are occupying..., and on the losses which we have suffered. ...[Y]ou will proceed to these rivers with all the troops under your orders as commander in chief. ... The objective will be to administer a total defeat to the...Indians..., leaving them completely crushed.51

All available troops were drawn from the presidios at Monterey and San Francisco to comprise a force of 107 soldiers, some citizens, and at least fifty mission Indian militiamen. Altogether, the group carried thirty-five hundred musket rounds. It was the largest army ever assembled in Hispanic California. Sergeant Sanchez, who had just weeks earlier experienced the tactics and defensive works of the Indian freedom fighters, was Vallejo’s second in command.

The formidable force left Mission San José, climbed up Mission Canyon over Patterson Pass, and descended into the San Joaquin Valley near Laguna del Blanco, not far from present-day Tracy.

Having crossed the San Joaquin River by means of rafts on May 29th, [1829,] the army arrived the next day at the scene of the former battle, where they were met as before by a cloud of arrows. The [riverside forest] was found to be absolutely impenetrable, and Vallejo at once caused it to be set on fire, stationing his troops and his three-pounder [cannon] on the opposite bank of the river. The fire brought the Indians to the edge of the thicket, where some of them were killed. [Late that afternoon, twenty-five soldiers were sent to attack] the foe, and fought over two hours in the burning [forest], retiring at dusk with three men wounded.

Next morning at 9 o’clock Vallejo with thirty-seven men again entered the [stronghold]. He found a series of pits and ditches arranged with considerable skill, and protected by barricades of trees and brush. Evidently the Indians could have never been dislodged from such a stronghold except by [fire].... The enemy, however, had taken advantage of the darkness of night and had fled. Vallejo started in pursuit. He camped that night on the [Stanislaus River] and next morning surrounded a part of the fugitives in another thicket near their [village]....The Indians declared they would die rather than surrender, and late afternoon the attack was begun. A road was cut through the [brush] with axes, along which the field-piece [cannon] and muskets were pressed forward and continually discharged. The [Indians] retired slowly to their ditches and embankments in the center, wounding eight of the advancing soldiers. When the cannon was close to the trenches the ammunition gave out, which fact, and the heat of the burning thicket, forced the [soldiers] to retreat. During the night the
besieged Indians tried to escape one by one, some succeeding, but many being killed. Next morning nothing was found but dead bodies and three living women. That day, June 1st, at noon, ammunition and provisions being exhausted, Vallejo started for San Jose, where he arrived on the fourth.\(^{52}\)

Mexican soldiers executed the three captured women. “Children [from area villages] were spared such deaths. They were more valuable alive. Vallejo’s soldiers captured many, herding them…to the mission and the presidios, where they were distributed as servants and slaves.”\(^{53}\)

Cipriano and his wife may have been killed in the battle, according to the Mission Santa Clara de Asís death register of 1829.\(^{54}\) Other accounts have Cipriano remaining in his Stanislaus River homeland until 1835.\(^{55}\)

Although Father Durán complained to Governor Echeandía about Mariano Vallejo’s barbarous murder of the captured Indian women and the “harvest of children,” Vallejo was exonerated. He rose to prominence and received a 66,600-acre land grant, Rancho Petaluma (see “The Coastal Frontier,” above).

**Estanislao Went Underground**

Shortly after the battle, Estanislao returned to Mission San José and asked Father-President Durán for forgiveness. The Father-President successfully petitioned the Mexican governor and a pardon was granted to Estanislao and his men in October 1829. The governor reasoned “it is easier to control them when they are present than when they are absent.”\(^{56}\)

Few details of Estanislao’s activities after the pardon are known, but it seems that he and his men continued resisting the Californios. Estanislao apparently divided his time between his homeland on the Stanislaus River and Mission San José. Some say he died of smallpox at the mission in July 1831, although his death is not documented in mission records and rumors persist that he lived until about 1839, perhaps then a victim of the great malaria epidemic started in 1832. In 1836, pueblo San José petitioned the governor for relief from heavy raids and specifically mentioned Estanislao. Popular tradition had Estanislao using his sword to carve an “S” at ranchos he raided, perhaps making him the original *El Zorro* (The Fox), a Robin Hood-like folk hero.

Zorro or not, Estanislao fought “for his people…. He was, indeed, a freedom fighter…” “[H]e defeated Mariano Vallejo and the entire Mexican army of Northern California[. He] freed the region east of the San Joaquin River from [Mexican] domination and secured it for its native peoples.”\(^{57}\) “Gone were the days when [Spanish or Mexican] soldiers, civilians, and [mission Indian militiamen] could penetrate the San Joaquin Valley with impunity.”\(^{58}\)

Researcher Sherburne Cook concluded:

> Estanislao belongs with King Philip [Metacomet, from Massachusetts], Tecumseh, Pontiac, and Geronimo, as an outstanding Indian chief who fought the white man with persistence and daring. Like many another champion of a lost people he was, depending on your point of view, a patriot to be venerated or a bandit to be [denounced]. To the…historian he is of interest as by far the most able military and political leader produced by the [Indians] in California.\(^{59}\)

The Stanislaus River and Stanislaus County honor the Indian patriot Cucunuchi, albeit with his Anglicized Christian name.\(^{60}\)

**Other Indian Leaders Continued the Fight**

Some of [Estanislao and Cipriano’s] recruits became well-known native leaders in their own right…[including] Yozcolo, a [lower Stanislaus River] Yokuts alcalde from [Mission] Santa Clara [whose severed head the Mexicans displayed on a pike at that mission in
1839]. A rebellious Miwok alcalde from Mission San José, José Jesús, would also take up horse raiding in the valley of the San Joaquin. He proved to be a remarkably resourceful leader who would help shape events in the interior until the 1850s [(see “Manifest Destiny” and “The Gold Rush,” below)].⁶¹

“The Miwok who [then] lived between the Cosumnes and Stanislaus rivers were the most vigorous...raiders, and the Muquelumne Miwok were the most feared.”⁶² Muquelemne leaders included Ambrosio, Sinato, Nilo, and Crispo.

Horse raiding by former [mission Indians] living in the Central Valley was nearly destroying the ranches in the Coast Range valleys in 1841.... The main horse raiders...were probably the Chilamnes and Seuamnes of the Calaveras River, and the people from [nations] east of Oakdale on the Stanislaus River and east of Modesto on the Tuolumne River.⁶³

The valley Indians were fighting the Mexican Californians to a standstill, making their lives intolerable with incessant raids upon ranches and missions. What would have been the outcome, no one can tell, for a third element was already making its weight felt, the Anglo-Americans who came now, by 1841, pouring in a never-ending stream onto the Pacific Coast. Both Indians and [Mexican] Californians were submerged and obliterated by the flood, and the fate of the Indian came to be determined by the new invaders.⁶⁴
Many Nations Coveted California

As pointed out in “Furs and Footholds,” above, European nations and the United States had their eyes on California for some time.

Having penetrated as far south as Fort Ross in the Mendocino coast, the Russians dreamed of extending their arc of empire south from Alaska to San Francisco Bay. With their Pacific squadron operating between Mazatlan and the Sandwich [Hawaiian] Islands, the British speculated on the possibilities of establishing a permanent port of call, a [new] Hong Kong enclave on the California coast that would link them to the Hudson Bay trappers and traders operating in the interior. In 1842 Eugène Deflot de Mofras, a special emissary of the French Government in California, filed a secret memorandum with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris suggesting that the French Navy sail into San Francisco Bay and reestablish lost Louisiana on the shores of California.

Mexico eliminated Spain’s restrictive mercantile policies and opened up foreign trade. Soon the California coast became reliant on foreign markets. New England-based American merchants dominated the hide and tallow trade in the 1830s and early 1840s. Quite a few Americans resided in coastal California and many married into the elite Californio families. Thus, Americans controlled much of California’s commerce and maintained strong ties with the United States.

United States Sent Frémont Through the Heartland

The U.S. government sent John Charles Frémont west to map the trail to Oregon Territory. From Fort Vancouver, Frémont—assisted by venerable scouts Christopher “Kit” Carson and Thomas “Broken Hand” Fitzpatrick—proceeded south into California and resupplied at Sutter’s Fort on the lower American River.

That the main objective of [Frémont’s expedition] was closely connected with [his father-in-law] Senator [Thomas Hart] Benton’s plans for acquiring California there is little doubt. The expressed object was “to extend the survey west and southwest of the great range of the Cascade Mountains and the Sierra Nevada….” Frémont add[ed] that “in arranging the expedition, the eventualities of war were taken into consideration.”

Traveling south on a portion of the old trail between Sutter’s Fort and San José in March 1844, Frémont passed through what six years later became San Joaquin County.

We traveled for twenty-eight miles… and halted in a beautiful bottom at the ford of the Rio de los Mokelumnes [Mokelumne River north of present-day Lockeford]…. The bottoms of the stream are broad, rich, and extremely fertile; and the uplands are shaded with oak groves. [The next day] we halted at the Arroyo de los Calaveras, a tributary of the San Joaquin [Calaveras River west of current Highway 88]. The place is beautiful, with open groves of oaks, and a grassy sward beneath, with
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many plants in bloom, some varieties of which seem to love the shade of the trees.  

Near present-day Stockton, Frémont observed, “During the earlier part of our day our ride had been over a very level prairie… separated by… groves of oak-timber, growing along dry gullies, which are filled with water in seasons of rain.”

They continued to the sandy plains that characterize the southern portions of San Joaquin County and, after traveling up and down the Stanislaus River seeking a ford, camped just east of what is now Caswell Memorial State Park. Frémont rhapsodized:

We came upon innumerable flowers, and a few miles further fields of the beautiful blue flowering lupine, which seems to love the neighborhood of water, indicating that we were approaching a stream. We continued our road for about half a mile, interspersed by an open grove of [valley] oaks, which in form were the most symmetrical and beautiful we had ever seen in the country. The ends of the branches rested on the ground, forming somewhat more than a half sphere of regular figure…. The California poppy of a rich orange color, was numerous. Today elk and several bands of antelope made their appearance. …It was pleasant riding among this assemblage of green pastures with varied flowers and scattered groves, and out of the warm green spring to look at the rocky and snowy peaks [of the Sierra Nevada].

Frémont’s assistant, Charles Preuss, shared the lieutenant’s glowing assessment of the region. Preuss wrote to his family, “this valley is a paradise, grass, flowers, trees, beautiful clear rivers, thousands of deer, elk, wild horses and wonderful salmon. I shall probably settle [here].”

Europeans and Americans Started Ranches Around the Delta

Preuss and many other potential settlers “saw about them… a vastness of rich land, undeveloped, unfenced, the dream of every land-hungry farmer.” European and American ranches were established all around the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in the 1840s.

“Doctor” John Marsh built at the base of Mount Diablo (near what is now Brentwood) in 1837 and encouraged Americans to come to California. German-Swiss expatriate John Sutter founded New Helvetia in 1839, anchored by so-called Sutter’s Fort near the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers (now Sacramento).

Sutter received his land grant from Mexico in 1841, the same year the first organized group of American settlers, the Bartleson-Bidwell party, turned off the Oregon Trail, crossed the Great Basin deserts and the Sierra Nevada mountain range, passed through what is now San Joaquin County, and extended U.S. “Manifest Destiny” expansionism to the California heartland.

Young German immigrant Charles Weber was a member of that struggling band of thirty-one men, one with a young wife and a baby daughter. The group followed the Stanislaus River down into the heartland of California.

Friday, [October] 29th [1841]… Mr. Hopper, our best and most experienced hunter, observed that “If California lies beyond those mountains we shall never be able to reach it.” Most of the Company were on foot, in consequence of the horses giving out, and being stolen by the Indians….

Saturday, 30th. We had gone about 3 miles this morning, when lo! to our great delight, we beheld a wide valley [the northern San Joaquin Valley]! This we had entirely overlooked between us and the high mountain which terminat-
Sunday, 31st. Bore off in a N.W. direction to the nearest timber; day was warm, plain dry and dusty…. Hundreds of antelope in view! Elk tracks thousands! Killed two antelopes and some wild fowls [sandhill cranes]; the valley of the river was very fertile and the young grass covered it, like a field of wheat in May…. Distance today 20 miles.

November. Monday, 1st. The Company tarried to kill game; an abundance of wild fowl and 13 deer were bro’t in. My breakfast, this morning, formed a striking contrast with that of yesterday which was the lights [lungs] of a wolf.

Tuesday, 2nd. Capt. B. with his 7 remained to take care of the meat… while the rest of the Company went on. We passed some beautiful grapes, sweet and pleasant…. [We] found an Indian, it because they were anxious to cross the next mountains before snowfall.

ed our view yesterday. Rivers evidently meandered through it, for timber was seen in long extended lines as far as the eye could reach…. Traveled today about 20 miles [following the Stanislaus River into what is now San Joaquin County]. Saw many tracks of elk…. The valley was wonderfully parched of heat, and had been stripped of its vegetation by fire. Wild fowls, geese, etc., were flying in multitudes. 75

Because this was the first party of emigrants to cross the Sierra Nevada, they did not realize they were in California. Some of them thought they had five hundred miles yet to travel. All of them thought they had to cross the range of mountains they could see to the west, the Coast Range. Although they reveled in the food they now had available, they didn’t linger to enjoy
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who conducted [us] to Marsh’s house, but he brought bad news; he said there had been no rain in California for 18 months, and that the consequence was, there was little breadstuff in the country. Beef, however, was abundant and of the best quality. Traveled today 16 miles.

Wednesday, 3rd. We waited till Capt. B. came up, and all started for Marsh’s about noon; arrived at the St. Joaquin [San Joaquin River] and crossed it—distance 13 miles—found an abundance of grass here—the river about 100 yds. in width.

Thursday, [November] 4th [1841]. Left the river...departing gradually from its timber came into large marshes of bulrushes. We saw large herds of elk and wild horses grazing on the plain.... Finally, we arrived at Marsh’s house, which is built of unburnt [adobe] bricks, small and has no fireplace—wanting a floor and covered with bulrushes.76

Although Charles Weber’s first passage through this area was under dire circumstances and at the end of an eighteen-month drought, he may have recognized the richness of what would become San Joaquin County. Much of the area was similar to the agricultural land reclaimed from the Landstuhl swamps near his home in southwest Germany.77

Reminiscing later, Weber recalled being “much struck by the beauty of the country.”78 The Hudson’s Bay Company leader Michel La Framboise, who had trapped out of French Camp since 1832, advised Weber: “If you ever get a grant of land, take this country. The land is rich. It bears succulent roots and grasses and lordly groves of trees. Small game is plentiful, while elk and deer roam the plains like cattle.”79

In early 1844, Governor Manuel Micheltorena authorized a land grant to Charles Weber’s partner in San Jose businesses, William “Guillermo” Gulnac. The grant of more than forty-eight thousand acres was called El Rancho del Campo de los Franceses (Ranch of French Camp) after the Hudson’s Bay Company community. It encompassed much of present San Joaquin County south of the Calaveras River. Soon thereafter, “Carlos Maria” Weber became a Mexican citizen, acquired the land from Gulnac, and established the community that would become Stockton.80

Other Mexican land grants within present-day San Joaquin County included Antonio Pico’s 1843 El Pescadero and Paso del Pescadero grants on Old River (southwest San Joaquin County) and Andres Pico’s 1846 Los Moquelemos grant (northeast San Joaquin County). In early 1846, Mormon colonists—led by Sam Brannan and under orders from church leader Brigham Young to be the vanguard for a new Zion in the West—sowed crops and built log houses on the Stanislaus River just east of its junction with the San Joaquin River (near present-day Ripon and Manteca).81 In what is now southern Sacramento County, land originally granted to German Ernest Rufus, on the north bank of the Cosumnes River, was purchased in 1844 by Weber’s future father-in-law and brother-in-law, Martin Murphy senior and junior.

Traveling overland from Sutter’s Fort in September 1846, Edwin Bryant described the Murphys’ farm as having “a comfortable dwelling-house, and other necessary buildings and conveniences. [Murphy’s] wheat crop was abundant...and he presented us with as much milk and fresh butter as we desired.” Bryant also mentioned the senior Murphy’s daughter, the future bride of Charles Weber and “first lady” of Stockton and San Joaquin County: “Miss Helen, who did the honors...in manners, conversation, and personal charms, would grace any drawing room.”82
Indian Workers Were Vital to Valley Ranches and Farms

Native people worked as free, bound, forced, or slave laborers on all of these Euro-American ranches in the heartland. In the 1840s, Indians were almost the sole source of agricultural labor in California.

The Californios had sought to assimilate Indians, bringing them into the missions and pueblos, intermarrying, and using Indians and mixed-bloods (mestizos) as laborers on their ranchos. Although the new Euro-American settlers also relied on Indian laborers, they kept a greater separation between Indian families and their own. To encourage American immigration, boosters such as John Marsh extolled the virtues of Indians as productive workers, depicting them as innocent primitives, oppressed by the Spanish and awaiting the benefits of American civilization to flourish. Later, when white workers became available, the underlying racist attitudes and segregationist approach to American Indians emerged and California Indians were characterized as savage obstacles to progress and were swept aside (see below).

John Marsh had a labor force of displaced Indians from Mission San José that probably included individuals originally from what is now San Joaquin County. Marsh said of his Indian "serfs":

In a short time [I] have [a] whole tribe as willing serfs. They submit to flagellation with more humility than the negroes. Nothing more is necessary for their complete subjugation, but kindness in the beginning, and a little well timed severity when manifestly deserved.... Throughout all California the Indians are the principal laborers, without them the business of the country could hardly be carried on.

John Sutter was granted land by the Mexican governor in hopes that he could reduce the raiding and horse stealing by the interior Natives.

In the spring and summer of 1840, Sutter and his Indian allies attacked and defeated the villages of the neighboring Cosomne and Muquelemne [Miwok nations] that were stealing his livestock. From 1841 onward, the Cosomnes and Muquelemnes worked for Sutter during the wheat harvest season, as did the missionized Seuannes from the plains east of Stockton.

Early California visitors Overton Johnson and William H. Winter observed in 1844: "Indians cultivate, and improve [Sutter’s] farms, attend to his large herd of animals, make up a portion of his trapping parties, and do all the drudgery about the Fort." A couple years later, pioneer Edwin Bryant reported, “The number of laboring Indians employed by Captain Sutter during the seasons of sowing and harvest, is from two to three hundred.”

One account described Sutter’s “Indians in a state of complete slavery..., [fed in] troughs ... like so many pigs.”

Charles Weber worked a season for Sutter at New Helvetia. He followed Sutter’s lead in establishing relationships with Native groups and employing Indians. Weber met José Jesús, an Indian leader originally from what is now San Joaquin County, at Sutter’s Fort. An alliance with José Jesús allowed Weber to settle his land grant.

[Weber apparently] appealed to Jesus’ hatred of the [Mexican] California authorities by telling him the Americans wanted to settle in this area out of reach of the [Mexicans] in case trouble arose between the United States and Mexico. Weber indicated he believed, as did [Sutter and Jesús], that this area was not within the [Mexican] California territory.

The developing relationship with José Jesús allowed Weber to promote aggressively settlement of what became San Joaquin County.

Up to that time the colonists had for the
Indian harvest workers on John McFarland's farm near Galt, 1850s. Photo courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento.
most part been hunters and trappers, a migrant folk, whose hold on the land was uncertain at best. Weber sought to attract men interested in farming from among the immigrants who had come overland to California, offering each a block of property in town, together with 480 acres in the country at no cost, and in some instances free seed, horses, feed, and even implements to cultivate the land.⁹⁰

Other Native leaders, such as the Muquelemne Miwok Maximo, were not as fortunate as José Jesús in their relationships with the settlers. Maximo supplied workers to Sutter, but broke away when Sutter killed his son, Raphero, and displayed his severed head at the fort’s entrance. Sutter drove Maximo off, but Maximo survived for decades after the Gold Rush—perhaps getting the last laugh on his old foe Sutter, who died poor and embittered in 1880. Maximo was interviewed by a reporter from the Galt Gazette in 1885, and as a respected elder he was still passing traditional Muquelemne culture on to new generations of his people.

The United States declared war on Mexico in July 1846, and U.S. forces seized California. Charles Weber—who had briefly fought with Sam Houston for the Texas Republic before emigrating to California—and John Marsh “suggested to their compatriots that they imitate their Texan counterparts and resist Mexican intrusions.”⁹¹ Although the Mexicans recruited Weber, he fought for the American side and for the remainder of his life used the title “Captain.” By early 1847, the U.S. military controlled all of Central California.

José Jesús and thirty-two other local Indians volunteered to be part of the California Battalion fighting against the Mexicans. Author Edwin Bryant described riding to “the [Moke-lumne] river…where [they] met Antonio, [a Sewanee Miwok] Indian chief, with twelve warriors, who had assembled...for the purpose of joining [the California Battalion].” The next day they met “at the ford of the San Joaquin river [near present-day Mossdale], another party of eighteen Indians [originally from what is now south San Joaquin County], including... José Jesús.”⁹²

José Jesús was severely wounded by an American in Stockton in 1849, the act being wholly unjustifiable. Capt. Weber learning of the fact, procured the services of Dr. W. M. Ryer, paying him $500, and thus saved the life of his friend, the chief. As soon as [Jesús] could be moved [Weber] had him quietly conveyed by easy stages to his home in the mountains. It was a final separation between these old allies; they never met again.⁹³

Weber named a street in Stockton after José Jesús, but in the 1860s the City Council renamed it Grant Street to remove the “embarrassment and blasphemy” of the original street name.
Heartland Indians Were the First Miners

Gold was discovered in January 1848 near the Nisenan-speaking village of Kulo-ma on the South Fork of the American River. Although in the coming years hundreds of thousands of miners would rush to Northern California from the United States and around the world, that first year Plains Miwok and Northern Valley Yokuts people from present-day San Joaquin County were heavily involved in gold mining. In 1848, Indians made up at least half of the roughly four thousand miners in the Mother Lode.94

Captain Charles Weber and six partners formed the Stockton Mining Company in the summer of 1848—the first such business in California. Aided by José Jesús (see above), Weber’s company trained hundreds of Indians to recover gold.

The Indians worked according to a division of labor in which “the men dug and gave mud to the children, who then carried it in baskets to the women,” who lined up on the stream and washed the gold “in grass baskets of the most perfect construction.” The Indians then tied up the gold in rags, “in amounts more of less equal,” using them “to trade with just as if it were money.”

The Miwoks and Yokuts had a long history with whites, from the missions to the mines. Witnessing changes in white society, they made adjustments in their own. Well traveled through raiding and trading, they could readily grasp the significance of the gold rush and the changes that came with it, so most of them opted for peaceful accommodation with whites.95

The Stockton Mining Company first worked on a tributary of the American River still known as Weber’s Creek. Soon more than one thousand Indian miners had been trained and were working for the company; it was by far the largest employer of Native people in the placers.

The company sent some Indians south to prospect the Stanislaus River. The hunch paid off. In July, they found a kidney-shaped nugget that weighed eighty ounces. The Indians’ discovery thus opened the rich “Southern Mines,” the Sierra Nevada foothills from the Cosumnes River to Mariposa Creek. The Bank of England displayed the nugget to confirm in Europe the validity of the California bonanza.96

Although the American River, Weber’s Creek, and the gold placers of the Southern Mines were located in the homelands of various Nisenan-speaking and Sierra Miwok nations, the Indian gold panners were predominantly Plains Miwok and Northern Valley Yokuts people originally from the area that in 1850 became San Joaquin County.

[These Valley Natives] had been forced into Spanish Mexican missions earlier in the century and...generally had more experience with non-Indian labor practices than did those Sierra Miwoks who, up to the time of the Gold Rush, had remained largely beyond the reach of Spanish[,] Mexicans and later European and Anglo settlers such as John Sutter and John Marsh.97

Weber’s mining partner and brother-in-law, John Murphy,
for whom Murphys Camp in Calaveras County was named, struck it rich in 1848 and 1849 by contracting for Indian labor in the diggings in exchange for supplying the workers with clothing, blankets, and food. Murphy seems also to have cemented trade and labor relations by marrying a native woman. Indeed, John Murphy married Pokela, the sister of leader José Jesús.

Although Charles Weber had a largely peaceful coexistence with Native people in the region, in January 1848, he did lead a punitive raid “into the mountains of what is now San Joaquin County, attacking a presumably Miwok village and killing ‘most of the bucks [men].’” Benjamin Madley views the raid as evidence of “a fundamental shift in California Indian policy away from coexistence, however exploitative, and toward genocide.”

Trading was quickly shown to be at least as profitable as mining. In June 1848, James Carson reported, at “the Indian trading camp of Capt. Weber’s famed company…I saw Indians giving away handfuls of gold for a cotton handkerchief or a shirt; and so great was the income of the Captain’s trading houses that he was daily sending out mules packed with gold.”

“When outsiders [, especially men from Oregon territory,] arrived [in the gold fields] many of them took offense at the use of [Indian] gang-labor because it threatened the interests of individual (and white) effort.”

The Oregonians had “the massacre of the Whitman family by the Indians of that territory fresh in their minds, [feeling] that the Indians had no rights whatever as human beings.” They initiated a war of extermination against Native people (see below.)
Weber chose to avoid the labor issues and realized that his greatest profits were to be made through commerce rather than mining. He and his partners broke up the Stockton Mining Company and he returned to Stockton, anticipating the onslaught of gold seekers.

Stockton was perfectly situated at the junction of navigable water and relatively firm soil closest to the Southern Mines. Almost overnight, Stockton became “the great mart through which flows the whole transportation and travel to the placers of the Stanislaus, Mokelumne, Mariposa, [Merced], Tuolumne, and King’s, and the various dry diggings lying between them.”

In the fall of 1848, Captain Weber shipped in redwood lumber from the Santa Cruz area with which he built a store at the embarcadero and on Weber Point, his first Stockton home. In 1850, the original little wood frame house was attached to a two-story Monterey Colonial-style adobe house that Weber built for his bride, Helen Murphy.

In 1849, Bayard Taylor reported:

All roads from Stockton to the mines were filled with *atajos* [trains] of mules, laden with freight. ...With good mule-trains and experienced packers, the business yielded as much as the richest diggings. The placers and gulches of the Mokelumne as well as Murphy’s Diggings and those on Carson’s Creek are within fifty-five miles of Stockton; the richest diggings on the Stanislaus...
about sixty, and on the Tuolumne seventy. There seems...to be no other central point so well adapted for supplying the rich district between the Mokelumne and Tuolumne [Rivers].

There were four private express companies running pack mules out of Stockton in 1849. In a couple years, there would be forty-four such companies.

Residents of [Stockton] may have numbered 1,000 in September 1849, and about 2,400 in May 1850. The floating population may have amounted to another 2,000. Regardless of the number, the people were largely engaged in wholesaling and retailing supplies, teaming and packing, hostelling, and other services.

Indian Homelands Were Overrun

Ships and printing presses spread the news to the United States and around the world and soon tens of thousands of gold seekers passed through the traditional homelands of the Miwok- and Yokuts-speaking nations of San Joaquin County. The Native people here were at ground zero of the first international gold rush and worldwide mass migration. Their homelands—their villages, their carefully tended gathering and hunting grounds, their sacred landscapes—were for the most part lost forever.

In the autumn of 1848, the first distant gold seekers had appeared, from Oregon to the north and the Hawaiian Islands to the west, and from Mexico and Chile to the south. In the following spring arrived the first immigration by sea from the eastern United States, and in the late summer and autumn, the first of the great annual overland migrations. Within a year, the small [non-Indian] population of California—perhaps on the order of thirteen thousand at the time of Marshall’s discovery—had been dwarfed by a foreign population eight times as large, and each successive annual immigration further inundated it.

Shortly before the Gold Rush, the Native population had outnumbered the Euro-American population by perhaps ten to one. By the mid-1850s, there were more than two whites for every surviving Indian—the result of American, Asian, and European immigration and Indian depopulation due to disease, starvation, and murder.

Perhaps never in the time-honored American tradition of frontiersing did “civilization” appear to sink so low as in gold-rush California....A volatile assemblage of transients, nearly all of them men, hailing from diverse cultures, were fixated on “making their pile” and heading home. Competition, jealously, and racism fueled unprecedented, nearly uncontrollable, individual and mass violence.

American gold miners quickly tired of competition from Chinese, Mexicans, Chileans, French, Native Americans, and other “foreigners,” particularly in the Southern Mines. These sentiments were expressed in a Stockton newspaper, the San Joaquin Republican: “Since the first settlement of this country by the Americans, the southern mines have been filled with foreigners. We see around us in every direction the results of the indomitable energy and perseverance of the American population.”

“The liberty, the exhilarating sense of personal freedom that only such a far-flung frontier could offer, was also the liberty denied to gold-rush immigrants of color” and especially to California Indians.

The miners passed discriminatory taxes and otherwise put down Chinese and Hispanics. They killed Indians. “[Indians] became the universal target of all groups in the California gold fields. Rumors of Indian depredations drew together varied miners into groups for reprisals.”
A War of Extermination Was Waged Against Native People

California’s first U.S. governor, former Oregonian Peter H. Burnett, said in an address to the State Legislature in January 1851: “a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct.”116 (What was in the 1800s termed extermination, we would now call genocide.) Records indicate that miners murdered at least two hundred Miwok from 1847 to 1860, and overall as many as one hundred thousand California Indians were murdered during the Gold Rush era.

A key to understanding the relationship between Native Americans and non-Natives in California is to recognize…a genocide of monstrous character and proportions, perpetuated by democratic, freedom-loving U.S. citizens in the name of democracy, but really to secure great wealth in the form of land against Indians cast as savage, uncivilized, alien enemies.117

As discussed in previous chapters, California Indians had “suffered a devastating demographic decline” in prior decades. “Under U.S. rule, California Indians died at an even more astonishing rate. Diseases, dislocation, and starvation were important causes of these many deaths. However, abduction, [forced] labor, mass death in forced confinement on reservations, homicides, battles, and massacres also took thousands of lives.”118

Preeminent California historian Hubert H. Bancroft asserted,

The California valley cannot grace her annals with a single Indian war bordering on respectability. It can boast, however, a hundred or two of as brutal butcherrings, on the part of our honest miners and brave pioneers, as any area of equal extent in our republic.…When now and then [an Indian man] plucked up the courage to defend his wife and little ones, or to retaliate on one of many outrages that were constantly being perpetuated upon [him] by white persons, sufficient excuse was offered for the miners and settlers to band and shoot down any Indian they met, old or young, innocent or guilty, friendly or hostile, until their appetite for blood was appeased.119

Although the most heinous extermination campaigns occurred in the northern Sacramento Valley, the northwest coast, and the southern Sierra Nevada foothills, there were sizable campaigns in this area, too.

Weber’s 1848 raid was mentioned above as a turning point. An 1849 attack “east of Stockton” tracked Indians to a village, “probably Miwok or Northern Valley Yokuts.”

The massacre … followed a pattern that became increasingly common during coming years. After silently encircling the village, the attackers fired their long-range rifles to devastating effect: the “first volley killed five instantly, and wounded six more severely.” Next they charged to use short-range pistols and bowie knives for close quarter killing. Finally, they pursued and slew those who fled and murdered some of the wounded as well as an old woman.120

It was not reported if the Indians’ houses and stored acorns and other foods were burned, but that was standard procedure.

Calaveras County pioneer Leonard Withington Noyes participated in a campaign in the winter of 1850–51 in which “50 Americans 25 Mexicans and 75 of the Guard Mobile, French refugees,” attacked a Miwok camp on the Stanislaus River.121 There were other raids near Mokelumne Hill, Columbia, and Sonora.

Outright murder was only one genocidal method employed against Native people. Indians were also starved and left to the ravages of disease; children and women were stolen in
large numbers; and traditional Indian social and cultural structures were attacked in various ways. As Brenden C. Lindsay and Benjamin Madley detail, these practices all fit the United Nations definition of genocide. As a result, “By 1900 the California Indian population was only 10 percent of what it had been in 1848.”

Individual Americans wanted the lands previously held by Native nations, but the state had interests, too. “The state was running into financial problems year after year. Because the Gold Rush took place mainly on federal lands, the state was unable to tax gold seekers for profits taken out of the ground and rivers of California.” State leaders sought the elimination of Native claims on lands that had been transferred from Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and wanted to transfer Indian lands to the state, thus allowing it to create revenues through the sale of public lands. The state expenses relating to Native people—reimbursing corps of volunteer militia for hunting down and killing Indians, paying bounties for dead Indians, creating makeshift reservations, and so forth—were an ongoing concern.

Miners Destroyed Resources on Which Indians Relied

The son of Miwok leader José Jesús asked only this of the Gold Rush whites: “Look for l’olo (gold) where you want, let the Ochà (Indian woman) seek her seeds where they are and...(the Indian will be the friend of the white).” But it was not to be...

The Euro-American onslaught largely eliminated the food resources for which the Native nations had cared for generations (see “Caring for the Land” in Part One). “Euro-American pioneers had changed the eastern landscape for two centuries, and in California, they made remarkable changes within two years, whether by endless digging in the watercourses or by the construction of dams and flumes to change the direction and flow of the water.”

By the early 1850s, some former gold seekers—especially those from Italy, the Portuguese Atlantic islands, and China—had turned to commercial fishing. The Stockton Independent reported that Chinese fisherman from Stockton ploled the waters of the Mokelumne, Calaveras, and San Joaquin Rivers for salmon and other species. “The Mokelumne and the channels of the San Joaquin furnish the best fish in the largest quantities,” reported the newspaper.

The first [salmon] cannery opened in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in 1864, followed by twenty more by 1881, packing nine million one-pound cans of salmon meat yearly, caught by gill nets in the river[s]. By 1884 the commercial cannery catch had collapsed...as overharvesting and habitat degradation took their toll.

In 1874, the Stockton Independent reported, Salmon were formerly very numerous in the Stanislaus, Merced and other tributaries of the San Joaquin [River], but had become almost extinct in these streams in consequence of obstructions in the form of dams for mining purposes and agriculture. ...[W]hile the fish were formerly so numerous as to form a large portion of the food supply they have now become almost extinct.

It is estimated that more than eight hundred million cubic yards of hydraulic mining debris was washed into the Delta. Although these “slickens” were primarily associated with the tributaries of the Sacramento River, hydraulic mines in Amador, Calaveras, and Stanislaus Counties also affected the rivers that crossed San Joaquin County. In 1884, the County of San Joaquin filed suit against those hydraulic mining operations “sending debris down the San Joaquin River and those major streams tributary to it.”

Hydraulic mining sediments, dams, overfishing, and other environmental changes thus largely eliminated traditional Native fishing,
which had been a mainstay of the Delta-river way of life for at least five thousand years (see Part One).

To feed the horde of miners, commercial hunters also harvested the waterfowl of the Delta and Central Valley wetlands. A large bore scatter gun aimed at a thick flock could down dozens of birds with a single shot. Hunters typically averaged one hundred ducks per day. In four days in December 1875, a single hunter shot 613 mallards just north of Stockton. Thousands of ducks were shipped to San Francisco markets. From an estimated population of four hundred million ducks at the start of the Gold Rush, after the turn of the century Delta duck numbers had fallen below thirty million, a decline of more than 90 per cent.\footnote{131}

Market hunters also took large numbers of quail, deer, tule elk, and pronghorn antelope from the drier lands of San Joaquin County, driving the latter two animals almost to extinction.\footnote{132}

“In 1854,” wrote market hunter H. C. Banta, “I found elk plentiful in the foothills west of the San Joaquin Valley, as well as in the tule swamp…. [We] practically finished up all the tule elk in that section between Martinez and San Joaquin City [south of present-day Manteca].” Elk had disappeared from the San Francisco Bay Area by the 1860s.\footnote{133}

Later, the market hunters turned to selling bear meat and jerky and contributed to the extinction of the California grizzly. Bayard Taylor reported:

Fat elks and splendid black-tailed does hung at the doors of all the butcher shops [in San Francisco], and wild geese, duck, and brant were brought into the city by the wagonload. “Grizzly-bear steak” became a choice dish at the eating-houses; I had the satisfaction one night of eating a slice [from a grizzly] that had weighed eleven hundred pounds.\footnote{134}
In the 1850s, woodcutting became an industry to supply steamboat fuel. It later escalated to build and fuel railroads. The riparian forests and valley oak woodlands and savannas that had stretched for miles on each side of Central Valley rivers were largely gone by the 1900s, when orchards and vineyards began to dominate the fertile alluvial soils.

Farmers Also Destroyed Important Native Resources

Although overland emigration to California peaked in 1859, as early as 1853 not only had former gold seekers switched to farming, but emigrant farming families began streaming into this region. Stockton’s San Joaquin Republican summed up the new emigrants:

When we consider the character of this great body of people—men who have their wives, their children, their horses, oxen, cows, and in some instances even pigs and chickens, with their farming utensils, prepared to turn up our rich lands—who can estimate the benefit it will be to this part of the State. They, as a general thing, are no mere adventurers, who are bent upon making a little and then returning to the old States. No; they are men who have taken every thing with them which they hold dear upon earth; and, the question first asked by nine-tenths of them was, where could be found a good farm? The men are such as have been used to handle the plough and scythe; and the women are well acquainted with the butter churn and cheese press; people who are neither ashamed nor afraid of labor. The effect will [be seen] next summer when fresh California butter and new Yankee cheese will be found in every house in Stockton.

The grazing of cattle, sheep, and hogs, and other Euro-American agricultural practices destroyed many of the wild plant resources upon which the Plains Miwok and Northern Valley Yokuts people had relied. In addition, more than a thousand species of exotic plants—wild oats, ripgut brome, sow thistle, curly dock, filaree, cheeseweed, and bur-clover, to name a few—were inadvertently introduced to displace native species.

The aggressiveness of Mediterranean grasses and forbs, evolved with the disturbance of European livestock and adapted to the similar, summer-dry climate of California, allowed these plants to jump into gaps between bunchgrasses (prior to this occupied by wildflowers) and other bare areas…The annual grasses took over.

As pointed out in the “Caring for the Land” section in Part One,

The Indians recognized that the non-human world required their perpetual involvement to insure stability and order; however, the…[Euro-American] invaders were oblivious to this dynamic relationship. The result was inadvertent and forced separation of the Indian from California’s non-human world, and the initiation of irrevocable environmental disorder.

“Indians…were not permitted to use their meager resources in the most productive ways they knew. Thus they had to work, steal, or starve.”
**Instruments of Genocide: State and Federal Indian Policies**

[California Indians] were totally deprived of land rights. They were outlawed and all treated as wild animals ... murdered ... enslaved ... and worked to death ... driven back to totally barren vastness ... and they died of starvation. Their life was outlawed and their whole existence was condemned.

John Collier
U.S. Indian Affairs Commissioner 1935

**Indian Homelands Became Public Domain**

When a U.S. Land Commission was finally created in 1851 and began to decide all land claims under the 1848 Guadalupe Hidalgo treaty with Mexico, Native groups were not notified and almost no Indian claims were submitted. Indian homelands legally became part of the public domain.

In one way, this was consistent with federal law: the U.S. legal system had early on decided that the federal government had “preemptive rights of ownership” to the homelands of Native nations from coast to coast. But on prior occasions, the government had negotiated treaties with Indian representatives regarding rights to occupy and use the land.

The Muquelemne nation was the only Native group in this region to submit a claim to the U.S. Land Commission; its members sought ranch land on the lower Cosumnes River. “The case was rejected by the U.S. District Court because no Mexican departmental assembly had ever ratified the grant, which had been given by Governor Micheltorena as a favor to John Sutter just before the governor was driven out of California.”

**State Laws Denied Indian Rights**

The California State Constitution prohibited slavery, but the first State Legislature in 1850 passed An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians that denied Indians citizenship, defined a special set of crimes and punishments for Indians, regulated the employment of Indians, and provided for the indenture of loitering or orphaned Indians. It might be said that “the 1850 Act ... [and subsequent laws were] designed to preserve Indian labor for [white Californians].”

An estimated ten thousand California Indian children were forced to become indentured servants. “During the 1850s, Indian children were kidnapped from the mountainous areas of the state to be sold as servants and laborers in the San Francisco Bay area.”

“The worst that could happen to someone who failed to feed, clothe, and treat the [indentured] child humanely was a ten-dollar fine and the reassignment of the child to a new master. The law thus condoned the kidnapping and sale of children and young women for use as house servants and sexual slaves.”

Indians could not testify in court against white people, nor could they serve on juries or hold office. They could not intermarry. They could not own guns or real estate. They had to yield their land to the government, military, or white squatters. “Some students of California history have referred to [these laws] as a form of legalized slavery. Certainly, [they] resembled the ‘black codes’ adopted by slave states as a means to control free blacks and bondsmen.”

The California government and its subdivisions supported many military or citizen militia
campaigns against Indian communities and paid bounties for dead Indians, verified by bodies or body parts. The state appropriated more than one million dollars in 1851 and 1852 to pay for Indian bounties and campaigns. “In 1857 the California State Legislature issued bonds for $410,000 for the ‘suppression of Indian hostilities,’ a euphemism for continuing the bounty system.”

The effects of white forays against Indians were not what state officials had intended. Instead of suppressing Indian livestock theft, they drove native people farther into the mountains and made them more dependent on raiding for subsistence. Whites retaliated with more military campaigns, thus creating a vicious cycle of violence.

**Eighteen Federal Treaties Were Negotiated**

President Millard Fillmore in 1851 empowered three federal commissioners to negotiate treaties with Native nations in California, continuing the approach followed in other regions of the United States. But the federal policy begun in colonial times to remove Indians from the advancing frontier could not be applied in California. Not only had California already been occupied by Euro-Americans and other non-Indians, but as the commissioners pointed out, there was “no farther west” available for Indian removal. The only policy alternatives were “extermination or domestication” on reservations.

George Harwood Phillips has pointed out that “the federal government intervened in California long before it was prepared to do so,” and its three agents worked valiantly to negotiate treaties even though “they were unsure of their authority and even the real purpose of their mission.” The cynical view is that in the end it was cheaper to isolate Native people on reservations, where they could be neglected to die of starvation and disease, than it was to pay citizen militiamen or federal troops to slaughter them.

The first treaty negotiations were concluded “at Camp Frémont, on the [Little] Mariposa River [Mariposa Creek], March 19, 1851, with six bands of ‘Mountain and Mercede’ Indians [including several Sierra Miwok nations], providing a reservation for them in the foothills country between the Merced and Tuolumne rivers.” It was to be called the Merced Reservation.

In a treaty negotiated in April, Yokuts-speaking nations agreed to the formation of the Fresno Reservation; in early May, to the Kings River Reservation; in late May, to the Kaweah, San Joaquin, Tulare Lake, and Tulare River Reservations; and in early June, to the Tejon Reservation.

On May 28, 1851, a treaty was signed at the ferry run by John and Lewis Dent and James Valentine on the Stanislaus River—later known as Knights Ferry, which was then in San Joaquin County, but became part of Stanislaus County in 1860. In this treaty, José Jesús and other leaders of Northern Valley Yokuts and Miwok-speaking nations agreed to the Stanislaus Reservation between the Stanislaus River (near Knights Ferry) and the Tuolumne River (near La Grange).

The Stanislaus treaty was unlike the seventeen others in that “For the benefit of the Indians, all the ferries on the Stanislaus Reservation…were to be placed under the authority of the yet-to-be-appointed agent,” apparently to provide a revenue source to this reservation that lacked tillable soil.

On September 18, 1851, Nisenan- and Miwok-speaking nations (including perhaps the Lelamnes from the middle Mokelumne River), signed the last of these treaties, agreeing to the Cosumnes River Reservation.

The eighteen treaties the commissioners ultimately negotiated on behalf of the United States with 139 California Indian nations.
The Native Peoples of San Joaquin County

would have created reservations totaling more than 7 million acres (about 7 percent of the state) “for the sole use and occupancy of said Indian tribes forever.”

The commissioners spoke no Native languages, so communication was usually indirect, typically translated one or more times during negotiations… [Moreover,] the concepts being discussed were completely alien to many of the Native attendees. …To have concluded publically, as the commissioners did, that the eighteen treaties they negotiated…fairly extinguished all title to unreserved lands was either patently ignorant or an outright falsehood. Evidence suggests the latter. Some Native Americans were forced to the negotiations at gunpoint; many others never attended, either out of fear or because they were not invited.155

California Whites Lobbied Against Indian Reservations

A t first, the California agricultural community supported the treaty making and agricultural leaders, including John Bidwell, encouraged the negotiations. But the treaties came to be perceived as a threat to agriculture, creating federally subsidized livestock ranches with Indian proprietors. “Native ranchers might have preferred to work their own herds and fields rather than those of white ranches, an unappealing prospect for [white] landholders.”156

Another drawback was that the proposed reservations “included some of the ferries of the Merced River on the great thoroughfare leading from Stockton to Mariposa. Also, they would intersect the Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers on the same routes.”157

Public opinion in California grew increasingly hostile toward the proposed reservations. James H. Carson wrote the following rant from the site of Camp Frémont. It was published in Stockton’s San Joaquin Republican newspaper in 1852:

Here, over these smoking ruins—here, over the graves of our murdered companions have the soft hands of the Commissioner grasped in friendship those of the incendiary, and the murderers of our people. And, here, these good Commissioners signed away to the Digger Indian all the right of the white man to the best portion of this desirable spot. Can these treaties stand? Will the settlers in California submit to it? No! Look among the graves there! One looks greener than the rest! It is poor old Wood’s grave! He was my old companion. We, together, explored the plains around, where the feet of the white man had never trod before. He was the first settler on the Four Creeks. He now sleeps there, murdered by the Indians, who, instead of being punished, have been pampered, fed, and enriched by the christian [sic] hands of the Indian Commissioners.158

The majority report of the California committee assigned to examine the treaties said:

As to the wild Indians now located within this State, your committee must protest against locating them within our limits… It is indispensible that this State should be wholly occupied by a homogeneous population, all contributing, by their character and occupation, to its strength and independence. To take any portion of the country west of the Sierra Nevada for the home of the wild and generally hostile Indians would be manifestly unwise and impolitic.159

Although California’s two senators in 1850, William Gwin and John C. Frémont, had called for President Millard Fillmore to appoint the commissioners and send them to California, the senators in office in 1852 vehemently
opposed the treaties. Senator John B. Weller, who later became governor of California, said:

We who represent the State of California are compelled, from a sense of duty, to vote for the rejection of the treaties, because we know that it would be utterly impossible for the general government to retain these Indians in undisturbed possession of these reservations. They [the commissioners] knew that those reservations included mineral lands and that, just as soon as it became more profitable to dig upon the reservation than elsewhere, the American man would go there, and the whole army of the United States could not expel the intruders.\textsuperscript{160}

Thus Congress, lobbied hard by agriculture and mining interests from California, broke with precedent. It met in closed session in 1852 and unanimously rejected all eighteen treaties. No one told the California Indian leaders who had participated in the treaty negotiations that the treaties would not be honored. Congress even ordered the unratified treaties filed under an injunction of secrecy that did not expire until 1905.

A document submitted to Congress in 1904 by the Northern California Indian Association summed up the situation:

Although the Government has never recognized these treaties as binding upon itself, it has appropriated every advantage conferred by the treaties, without in any manner carrying out its own part of the agreement or paying any of the things agreed to be paid. The Government not only seized the Indian lands which it agreed to purchase in the treaties, but some reservations also, and has sold the same to [white] settlers.\textsuperscript{161}

The Senate did agree in 1852 to “provide $100,000 to purchase food for the Indians who had lost their lands....[T]he Senate resolution concluded with the following provision: ‘That nothing herein shall be construed as to imply the obligation on the part of the United States to feed and support the Indians who have been dispossessed of the lands in California.’”\textsuperscript{162}

A Few Reservations Were Established

In the absence of the reservations that would have been created by the eighteen treaties negotiated in 1851, in 1853, the federal government appointed a California Superintendent of Indian Affairs and eventually created reservations to which to move California Indians. There were no negotiations with the sovereign Native nations prior to the formation of these military reservations. No legal recognition or land titles were conferred. In fact, there was a great deal of confusion as to what was being done.

The Tejon Reservation was the first, followed by Nome Lackee (twenty-eight miles southwest of Red Bluff), Fresno Indian Farm, Klamath Reservation, and Mendocino Reservation at Fort Bragg. Shortly thereafter came the Kings River Indian Farm and, in 1856, the Nome Cult Farm, later called Round Valley Reservation, at Covelo in northwest Mendocino County. “They were administered by civilian agents who proved mainly to be corrupt men who charged the government for food and cattle they failed to provide to [the Indians].”\textsuperscript{163}

State laws established militias that were funded by federal reimbursements and took the lead in killing California Indians, beginning a new, state-sponsored phase in the destruction of Native people that lasted until the late 1860s or early 1870s. By 1856, the \textit{San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin} would note, “A relentless course of punishment for the most trivial offenses ... which is putting into operation without a declaration of war the policy of extermination.”\textsuperscript{164}

Some of the few surviving Northern Valley Yokuts people were moved to the Fresno Indian Farm. Citizens around Fresno submitted a petition to an Indian agent advising that they
had “undertaken Indian removal on their own authority. The petition demanded the removal of any remaining Indians and called on the agent to ensure that those already removed not return, or they would be ‘harshly dealt with’ and ‘summarily treated.’”

In the 1870s, the remnant Northern Valley Yokuts were moved again from the Fresno Indian Farm, which was closed, to the more remote Tule River Reservation in Tulare County, two hundred miles from their homelands in San Joaquin County.

In 1881, the government established an elementary school system for California Indian children. Native groups quickly saw the schools as a threat to their cultures and sovereignty. Concerned Indians burned down the Tule River Reservation School in 1890.

Some Sierra Miwok children as young as five years old were taken to the Greenville Indian Mission School in Plumas County, a federal boarding school established in 1891. “The distance precluded contact with parents… throughout the entire school year, sometimes longer,” separating the children “from what remained of traditional culture in their communities…such as basketry and other traditional arts,…traditional literature, songs, [and] ceremonial procedures that were the soul of their people.” The Greenville boarding school closed in 1921, after which Indian children were sent to federal boarding schools in adjacent states, even farther from their families and homelands.

In the early 1900s, the federal government acquired a few small parcels, from two acres to more than three hundred acres, as “rancherias” or reservations, under a hodgepodge of various acts, orders, and church efforts. Rancherias were created for some surviving Plains, Northern Sierra, and Central Sierra Miwok people (see below). No reservations were established in the territories of the Northern Valley Yokuts or Southern Sierra Miwok nations.

In 1924—fifty-five years after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed citizenship rights and equal protection under the laws for former African-American slaves—Congress finally extended citizenship to American Indians.

By 1940, fewer that 25 percent of the Indians in California lived on rancherias or reservations. Nevertheless, in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a concerted effort by the U.S. government to sever its relationship with Native nations, to break rancherias and reservations into individual land allotments, and to relocate Native people to urban settings.

In great measure, California…Indians have been victimized by a federal policy which has not only been hostile in the sense of seeking to acquire native land, suppress native culture, and rigidly control native affairs[,] but also in the sense of positively discriminating against California…groups within the context of federal Indian programs… [T]his continuing pattern of discrimination stems from the earlier failure to establish large, viable reserves….
Cultural Survival and Sovereignty

“The peoples’ sovereignty is expressed in their journey from then to now to the future.”

L Frank
(Tongva-Acjachemen)168

The Plains Miwok people who had lived in what is now San Joaquin County and once had the highest population density of any region in North America except central Mexico, largely “disappeared through the combined effects of removal of the population to the missions and epidemics.”169 Some Plains Miwok found refuge with their Northern and Central Sierra Miwok “relatives,” and one rancheria survived in southern Sacramento County.170 Whereas there had been about twenty thousand Plains Miwok people before the Spanish arrived, by 1910 perhaps seven hundred survived—a population reduction of more than 95 percent.

“Most of the [Northern Valley Yokuts] nations are now completely gone; the others are represented either by small remnants living among other tribes or by a few isolated survivors.”171 Thorne B. Gray reported that the last of the Northern Valley Yokuts, Wininu or Charley Gomez, died at Knights Ferry in 1933.172

The California census of 1852 recorded nine Indian communities in San Joaquin County, in which lived a total of 379 Indians. Most lived in three rancherias, one each on the Mokelumne, Calaveras, and Stanislaus Rivers. The federal census in 1860 recorded only four Indians living in San Joaquin County—an apparent decline of 99 percent in eight years. Adjacent Calaveras County had 1,847 Native people in thirty-one communities in 1852, whereas the 1860 census recorded only one Indian there. Perhaps more accurately, a 1904 report by the Northern California Indian Association listed a total of eight “Moqueluman” Indians in San Joaquin County (living near Clements) and 230 “Moquelumnan” Indians in Calaveras County living in nine rancherias.173

In contrast, the non-Indian population of California (primarily whites and Asians) continued to grow exponentially after the Gold Rush immigration. The non-Indian population was by 1860 about 379,000, grew to 864,000 in 1880, and had reached 1.5 million by 1900.

[For Indians,] simple survival required flexibility, tenacity, and even heroism.... That so few Indians survived is stark evidence of the prodigious upheavals of a remarkable time. That any Indians survived is testimony that abhorrent conditions can produce courage and strength in a people.... Indians were victimized; but they were not merely victims. They made choices about their futures based on their sense of history and their standards of justice. Accommodating, working, fighting, hiding out—in a word, surviving—they were the seed for today’s California Indians.174

The Miwoks and Yokuts [from what is now San Joaquin County] best exemplify the flexible spirit [of] native Californians.... Beginning as hunters and gatherers, some became Christian neo-phytes who lived out their lives in the Franciscan missions. Others chose to be horse-thief Indians who fought Mexicans, allied with fur traders, resisted Sutter, marched with the California
Battalion, opened the southern mines, and peacefully accommodated to the reservations.\textsuperscript{175}

The depths to which Indian people were pushed is graphically depicted in Jack Burrows’s book, \textit{Black Sun of the Miwok}, in which the Miwok elder Walker is quoted as saying: “Looong time ago plenty food for Eenjun. Plenty deer, plenty bear, plenty rabbit, plenty bird. Plenty acorn. Whiteman he come. Kill bear, deer, rabbit, bird. Cut trees. Eenjun he no eat. Beg for whiteman. Bimeby Eenjun he die. No more Eenjun. Sun go black.”\textsuperscript{176}

Fortunately, the sun darkened but did not go completely black for Miwok and Yokuts peoples and their rich cultures. In spite of efforts to terminate their remaining lands and sovereignty, current federally recognized Miwok and Yokuts groups with ties to San Joaquin County include the following:

- Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-wuk Indians (near Ione, Amador County, established in 1927)
- California Valley Miwok Tribe (Stockton, formerly Sheep Ranch Rancheria, Calaveras County, 1916)
- Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians (near Jamestown, Tuolumne County, 1908)
- Ione Band of Miwok Indians (near Ione, Amador County, 1915)
- Jackson Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians (near Jackson, Amador County, 1893)
- Shingle Springs Rancheria (Northern Sierra Miwok, near Shingle Springs, El Dorado County, 1916)
- Tule River Indian Tribe of the Tule River Reservation (Yokuts and others, near Porterville, Tulare County, 1873)
- Tuolumne Band of the Me-Wuk Indians of the Tuolumne Rancheria (near Tuolumne, Tuolumne County, 1910)
- Wilton Rancheria (Plains Miwok, near Wilton, Sacramento County, 1927)

Other important organizations include the Northern Valley Yokuts Nototomne Cultural Preservation Group, the Central Sierra Me-wuk Cultural and Historic Preservation Committee, Calaveras Band of MiWuk (not a federally recognized tribe), and the Sierra Nevada Native American Council.

In 1991, the California Indian Basketweavers Association (CIBA) was founded. It continues as an important nonprofit organization with a mission of preserving and promoting traditional California Indian basketry. Part of fulfilling the CIBA mission has been efforts to preserve, tend, and properly gather native plants that provide the materials for baskets.\textsuperscript{177}

Many Native language preservation efforts have occurred in recent decades, including the Advocates of Indigenous California Language Survival.\textsuperscript{178}

Traditional dance remains important to many contemporary Native Californians.

In Indian cultures, both traditional and modern, [dance] has always been central. There are dances done simply for the fun of it, dances that bring people together in social events, and religious dances that renew the world and put people in contact with the divine. “Praying with the body” is how the religious dances are described, and they are an essential component of Indian spiritual life. In preparation for these dances, ample and special foods must be gathered and prepared, regalia painstakingly manufactured or renewed, and the site sanctified. The dancers have to fast or in some other way purify themselves. Dance is a serious activity, demanding of time and resources, and dancers and dance leaders are greatly respected in their communities. In the wide embrace of the Indian world, “serious” and “fun” are
not mutually exclusive, and the dances are also great fun.\textsuperscript{179}

Traditional foods continue to be relished. “Despite missionization, Mexican land grants…and American expansionism, [California Indians] are still here. And despite urbanization, …agribusiness, water removal, and pollution, [traditional] foods are still here as well.” There is “a growing movement to relearn traditional foodways. The goal is not to return to a historic lifestyle, but to integrate traditional, healthier foods and the processes and attitudes associated with these foods into a modern lifestyle.”\textsuperscript{180}

While not the mainstay they once were, acorns are still used, valued, beloved, and widely connected to many other aspects of Indian life. Go to any native event in California and you’re still likely to see someone making acorn soup…. The food that for so many centuries nourished the body today nourishes the soul.\textsuperscript{181}

Acorns “have become a symbol of California Indian identity.”\textsuperscript{182}

A quarterly publication, \textit{News from Native California}, published by Heyday, features articles on the history, cultures, and current activities of contemporary California Indian people.

Poet Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok) said in her poem “We Live!”:

\begin{quote}
We live!
in concentration camps, tourist centers,
museums, real-live-Indian-villages, reservations, rancherias, colonies, cities, suburban fields, ivory towers, radio stations, laboratories, satellites, mountains of microwave towers; gourds rattle, flutes breathe, wood and rawhide pulse soles of feet become hoof and paw to shuffle and beat upon the earth and from within an answering thunder throats sing
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
down the rain, up the sun…
up the daughters and sons holding to what is sacred, holding to what is left, making it new—how old it is! holding the land holding the rivers holding turquoise sky holding holy
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
mountain holding the earth holding the bones holding the bones holding the bones\textsuperscript{183}\
\end{quote}
Dancer at Mariposa in 2013. Photo © Kobby Dagan/Shutterstock.
Notes

1. San Francisco Bay was not yet known to the Spanish when they decided to expand north. Galleons returning from the Philippines to Mexico typically completed their Pacific crossing when they spied land along the Mendocino coast, then followed the California coastline south.


5. Randall Milliken, Native Americans at Mission San Jose (Banning, Calif.: Malki-Ballena, 2008), 30.


9. James A. Sandos, “Between Crucifix and Lance: Indian-White Relations in California, 1769–1848,” in Contested Eden: California Before the Gold Rush (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 211. Not only were Russian arms a determinant factor in the outcome of the revolt, but a Russian deserter from Fort Ross, Prokhor Egorov, fought with the Indian rebels. Egorov’s involvement has been largely overlooked by most historians, but documentation is presented well by Glenn Farris, So Far from Home: Russians in Early California (Berkeley: Heyday, 2012), 125, 132–38. After the battles, more than 450 Indians fled from Mission Santa Bárbara to find refuge in the tules (freshwater marshes) of the southern San Joaquin Valley. Jackson and Castillo, Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization, 79.


13. For example, when English sea dog Sir Francis Drake and crew spent five idyllic weeks among the Coast Miwok in 1579, repairing the *Golden Hinde* after a year and a half at sea and the strain of thirty tons of booty taken from the Spanish.


22. Ibid., 57.

23. Ibid., 9.


27. Ibid., 70–71.

28. Ibid., 74.


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35. Quoted in ibid., 70

36. Ibid. 24.


38. Quoted in Cunningham, State of Change: Forgotten Landscapes of California (Berkeley: Heyday, 2010), 84.


41. Quoted in Phillips, Indians and Intruders, 74.

42. California Historical Landmark No. 668.


45. Forbes, Native Americans of California and Nevada, 35.


49. Gray, Stanislaus Indian Wars, 44.

50. The cannon barrel exhibited in the Native Peoples Gallery at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum has the exact bore size recorded in Mexican accounts and is the correct style for that period.

Notes


54. Ibid.


60. California Historical Landmark No. 214 commemorates the battles of 1829. In 2001, a statue of “Chief Estanislao” was installed at the Stanislaus County Courthouse in Modesto; the depiction resembles an Indian warrior from the Great Plains, wearing only a Plains-style breechcloth and without the thick hair and heavy beard that was emphasized in the only written description of Estanislao.


63. Milliken, *Native Americans at Mission San Jose*, 78–79.


70. Thumlert and Davis, “Retracing Fremont’s Trail,” 10.


74. Weber was listed in John Bidwell’s journal as “Charles Weaver.”


76. Ibid., 37–38.


80. Weber’s land claim was confirmed by the U.S. Land Commission in 1855 and by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1861.

81. California Historical Landmark No. 436.


83. Rawls, *Indians of California*, 69–80. Vladamir Guerrero, *The Anza Trail and the Settling of California* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2006), xvi–xvii, explains how Spain’s history shaped its openness toward indigenous people (if they converted to Catholicism) and *mestizos* (mixed bloods), in contrast to the attitudes that typified the United States, which “had little taste for southern European culture or religion, or descendants of African slaves or indigenous people.”

84. Quoted in Milliken, *Native Americans at Mission San Jose*, 76.

85. Ibid., 78.

86. Overton Johnson and William H. Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains, with a Description of Oregon and California* (Lafayette, Ind.: John B. Semans, 1846), 76.


94. James J. Rawls, “Gold Diggers: Indian Miners in the California Gold Rush,” *California Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (spring 1976): 28, 30–31. Some have even suggested that an Indian most likely discovered gold at Sutter’s sawmill, since eight or ten Indian laborers did the digging of the millrace in which the first nuggets were found.


106. Weber’s small house, or “cottage,” is now preserved at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum.

107. California Historical Landmark No. 165.


113. San Joaquin Republican, Sept. 25, 1852.


115. Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 223. See also, Sandos, “‘Because he is a liar and a thief.’”

116. Quoted in Hurtado, Indian Survival on the California Frontier, 135. California senator John B. Weller said in 1852 that California Indians “will be exterminated ... [because] the interest of the white man demands their extinction.” Madley, American Genocide, 353.

117. Lindsay, Murder State, x.

118. Madley, American Genocide, 3.


120. Madley, American Genocide, 93.

121. Leonard Withington Noyes, “Reminiscences,” Calaveras County Archives, San Andreas, Calif., 39. “Guard Mobile” refers to members of La Compagnie des Gardes Mobiles, 130 of whom France shipped to California. They had helped put down riots in France but began causing trouble, so France sent them abroad. The Gardes Mobiles kept their organization and attitude in the gold fields. See Chan, “A People of Exceptional Character,” 62–63.

122. Lindsay, Murder State, 128.

123. Ibid., 239.


125. Rohrbough, Days of Gold, 123.

126. Leslie Crow, High and Dry: A History of the Calaveras River and Its Hydrology (Stockton, Calif.: East Water District, 2006), 9, from the Stockton Independent, Apr. 11, 1864.


129. Garone, Fall and Rise of the Wetlands, 111. An estimated twenty million pounds of mercury,
used to process gold ore, also ended up in the foothills waterways and flowed to the Delta.


132. Before the Gold Rush, the population of pronghorn on the grasslands of this region had been the densest in North America.


135. The riparian forests in Caswell Memorial State Park on the lower Stanislaus River and the Cosumnes River Preserve are among the few parcels not completely harvested.

136. The year 1859 was when the Elliott family, depicted in the settlers exhibit at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum, travelled the California Trail from Illinois to San Joaquin County. See David R. Stuart, ed., “Overland to San Joaquin County in 1859: Selections from the California Trail Diaries of S. Eveline ‘Eva’ Elliott Morse and Maria J. Elliott,” *San Joaquin Historian* (spring 2015).

137. *San Joaquin Republican*, Nov. 5, 1853.


140. Preston, “Serpent in the Garden,” 266.


143. Milliken, *Native Americans at Mission San José*, 89.

144. Sandos, “Because he is a liar and a thief,” 94. The lead author of the 1850 law was John Bidwell, whose land grant relied on Indian labor. Likewise, secondary author, rancho owner, Mariano Vallejo. The other secondary author was from the Antebellum South.

145. Milliken, *Native Americans at Mission San José*, 84.

146. Frank and Hogeland, *First Families*, 7.


1630s, and again in northern California in the 1850s and 1860s.”


150. Ibid., 135.


152. See Lindsay, *Murder State*.


162. Sandos, “Because he is a liar and a thief,” 98.

163. Ibid.

164. Quoted in Madley, *American Genocide*, 231. Not only were militia members paid handsomely for their time and expenses while participating in raids, they were also rewarded with 160 acres of federal land. One of the last massacres occurred in 1868, near Woodland, in Yolo County. Ibid., 334.

165. Lindsay, *Murder State*, 283.


Notes

168. Frank and Hogeland, *First Families*, xi.


170. See Casus Oliver’s story and other examples in Bibby, *Deeper than Gold*, 97–98.


175. Ibid., 214.


181. Frank and Hogeland, *First Families*, 16.


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About the Author

David Stuart has been the executive director of the San Joaquin County Historical Society since 2006. He is a fourth-generation native of the region and grew up in Ripon, California, as did his grandfather and both parents. He began his career and interest in Native people when he worked at Caswell Memorial State Park in the early 1970s. Stuart studied anthropology at California State University-Fresno and the University of Colorado, after which he worked in the Colorado Historic Preservation Office and Museum and for the National Park Service. In 1983, Stuart returned to California and developed programs, events, and three historical museums for the City of Ventura. More recently, he directed the Sacramento Science Center (Discovery Museum) and the Sacramento History Museum, in Old Sacramento.
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