



California toponyms, A to Z: **Figure 1 (Left):** The name of the Los Angeles County town of Azusa is a Gringo garbling of an earlier Spanish garbling of the Shoshonean Indian word Asuc' sangna, for the late prehistoric and early historic Native settlement that once was there. **Figure 2 (Right):** Zzyzx, on the other hand, is a made-up name, created by bored San Bernardino County desert rats so that it would come last in every alphabetical listing. Both photos from the internet, in the public domain.

California Toponymic Lingo From A to Z

By Brian Dervin Dillon

Introduction

No country on the face of the earth has a greater variety of placenames than the United States. And within our 50 states and overseas territories nowhere is there a greater diversity of placenames than California. For exactly thirty years my Dear old Dad, pre-eminent

California and Western American historian Richard H. Dillon (1924-2016), taught a popular class at the University of San Francisco called *Western Words*. Not just English translations of Spanish placenames in everyday use like “Saint Francis” from *San Francisco* or of 19th century cowboy garblings like “buck-

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The Branding Iron is always seeking articles of up to around 20 pages dealing with every phase of the history of the Old West and California. Contributions from both members and friends are always welcome.
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Editor's Corner . . .

The lockdowns may be over, but COVID-19 still hasn't entirely gone away... as I have personally discovered! But it'll take more than a little infectious disease to halt the publication of *The Branding Iron*. This Fall 2023 issue features a lead article by Brian D. Dillon, on the fascinating history of how California's places got their names, from the Spanish to the strange. Abe Hoffman also contributes an article about California's (brief) encounter with the Latin American wars of independence, via the Franco-Argentine privateer Hippolyte Bouchard.

Next up, Brian Dillon and yours truly re-

cap all of the exciting Westerners events held this past season, out of state and at home. Catch up here if you missed anything! Lastly, we have three book reviews for your consideration, by Brian Dillon, Warren Thomas, and Abe Hoffman.

Many thanks to our awesome contributors who help to make *The Branding Iron* a journal we can all enjoy. If you have any ideas for future submissions, I would love to hear your thoughts. Happy Trails, and Happy Holidays!

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aroo" from *vaquero*, this was a semester-long etymological trip down four centuries of California's memory lane. It traced the varied historical and ethnographic sources of the most unique form of English ever spoken, that which *passed* the lips of *past* Californians.

During the Gold Rush of 1848-1859 people came here from every corner of the occupied world, not just the American East, but Europe, Asia, Mexico, South America, even Australia. They mixed and mingled their varied tongues into a seething babel that overlaid the most diverse crazy-quilt of different AmerIndian languages in all of North America. Despite the best efforts of Anglo-Americans to wipe out the California Indians living on every gold-bearing stream in the Mother Lode, and then on all the best potential farm and ranch land in the Central Valley and Coast Ranges, a few of the Natives managed to survive the onslaught of the White man. And so in the simmering cultural cauldron of the Golden State the most distinctive form of Western American speech was cooked up, what stodgy Easterners termed the *California Lingo*.¹

This linguistic diversity was sometimes explained in California grammar schools as the legacy of successive "political" layers of our history: Spanish Colonial, Russian Colonial, Mexican, and finally Anglo-American. All Californians my own age remember the 3rd grade classroom assignment of drawing the "Four Flags of California History," as if there were *only four* sources of our history. This error was imparted to us students mostly by teachers recently-arrived from back East, profoundly ignorant of California history.

Archaeologists and anthropologists, on the other hand, always look at any kind of history as *ethnohistory*. Missing from the overly-simplistic "four flags" of California history taught in the 1950s and even into the early '60s were the 200+ Native Californian AmerIndian groups, none of them "nations" on the European model. All of them were prehistoric, all persisted into the early historic period, but very few survived it. Many other different ethnic groups were likewise missing from the "four flags" cliché. These in-

cluded Spanish-speaking AmerIndians from Mexico and other Latin American countries, Native Hawaiians² in much smaller numbers, and hundreds of thousands of Asians, first Chinese,³ then Japanese, and finally Filipinos. And, beginning with the Gold Rush, the tidal wave of Europeans and Euro-Americans inundating California were not just English-speaking but also included Irish, French, Germans and many others. Each different ethnic group left its imprint as California placenames.

My father grew up *bilingual* in English and Spanish, raised by my grandfather who was *quadrilingual* in English, Spanish, German, and French. Both Dad and Granddad (1869-1938) also had passing familiarity with Irish (what the non-Irish call Gaelic), Italian, and Portuguese, the latter two spoken on the streets and waterfront of their multilingual home town, Sausalito, California.⁴ Even Tagalog (*boondocks*) and Cantonese (*chow*) entered the family vernacular, derived from Grandpa Dillon's three military tours in the Philippines (1898-1909) and Dear old Dad's association with Chinese age-mates in his native Marin County of the 1920s and '30s.

As a kid in the 1950s and early '60s I was exposed to the intellectual underpinnings of my father's future college course on *Western Words*. These came from a great many car trips throughout our Western States, and as far north as British Columbia. We were never bored on these very long drives, since Dear old Dad was always pointing out some river, mountain range, or small town either occupied or abandoned.⁵ He then told us the source of its name in the local AmerIndian language, or Spanish, or even Hawaiian, and how these names changed over time. Sometimes older names were discarded in order to curry favor with politicians, then changed back once such *politicos* either died or were disgraced: *Lake Bigler* reverting to *Lake Tahoe* was a case in point.⁶ But sometimes the last name stuck. An example was the reed-choked inland port first called *Weber's Landing*, then *Tuleburg*, and finally *Stockton*, after the U.S. Navy officer who tangled with every other person he came into contact with during the Mexican War of 1846-48, includ-

ing military officers and civilians on his own side of that conflict.⁷

In California during the 1820s, '30s, and '40s, many of the old Indian placenames were replaced by Spanish ones, and then, in the 1850s and '60s, the Spanish ones by English. Equally often the most recent placename was garbled into an illegitimate linguistic offspring breaking the rules of grammar, syntax, spelling, and pronunciation of not *one*, but *two* different languages. My Spanish-speaking Dad called these word-clobberings *Gringolés* and noted that monolingual English-speakers called them *Spanglish*. The unique language we spoke at home, *Dillonese*,⁸ was a mixture of English with lots of Spanish loan words and phrases, and also borrowings from Irish, Hawaiian, Chinese, and Japanese, the languages spoken by our friends and relatives. Exotic French, German, Portuguese, and Italian words also seeped into the mix.

California Toponymic Pioneers

My father made his interest in California etymology and toponymy explicit in public lectures for various bibliographic and historical associations even before it congealed into his full-length college course. One of these presentations was taken down verbatim and published in a trade journal read almost exclusively by some of the most literate members of our increasingly illiterate society, *Special Librarians*.⁹

Long before my Dad gave that speech 52 years ago, an abundant literature on California placenames had already been published. First out of the gate was the wonderful 1914 book by Nellie Van de Grift Sánchez, her reaction against the ongoing *Gringification* of California.¹⁰ Nellie was Robert Louis Stevenson's sister-in-law, who had married the scion of an old *Californio* family, and was eager to preserve the rapidly vanishing Indian and Spanish placenames of her adoptive state. Her research was profoundly influenced by the resident anthropological genius of the University of California, Alfred Louis Kroeber, who published his own alphabetical listing of California Indian placenames

two years later in 1916. Kroeber's study was largely a debunking exercise, correcting the bad translations of Indian and pseudo-Indian words that had become permanent fixtures in California. In this he superseded the pioneering research of Stephen Powers, the first (1877) English-speaking ethnographer of the Golden State. Nine years later in 1925 Kroeber incorporated his toponymic conclusions in his monumental encyclopedia of California Indian culture.¹¹

The following decade saw the earliest comprehensive cataloging of historical locations, first for just the southern half of the state,¹² and then, as more scholars jumped onto the bandwagon, for every nook and cranny of California.¹³ Studies were mostly *of* and *by* Anglo-Americans with few forays into ethnology, archaeology, or even natural history, yet all diligently pursued the naming history of the cities and towns they inventoried. Later still George Stewart, one of the greatest of all American thinkers and writers, turned his hand to etymological placename research, which he defined as *toponymy*.¹⁴ Stewart "raised the bar" for state-specific toponymic compendiums, including California,¹⁵ for natural and cultural regions within it,¹⁶ and for specific ethnicities.¹⁷ None of these studies should be considered the "final word," only as points of departure for more specific and intensive toponymic investigations.

An Exercise in Etymology: Toponymy of the California Counties

My review of the origins, meanings, and ethnolinguistic derivations of California's County names (Table 1) illustrates the extent of cosmopolitanism in *California's Toponymic Lingo*. Table 2 reveals how much California has been *Anglofied* since statehood in 1850, when all but two of the original 27 counties bore either Spanish or Indian names.¹⁸ By 1907, when the 58th and final California county was created and named, fully a quarter of the state's counties now had names that were *neither* Spanish *nor* Indian.¹⁹

Table 1: Ethnic Etymology of California’s Present-Day 58 Counties

County:	Created:	Ethnic Derivation and Meaning:
1. Alameda	1853	Spanish, meaning “shady thoroughfare.”
2. Alpine	1864	English, for the smallest in population of all of California’s land-locked Sierra Nevada counties.
3. Amador	1854	Spanish, named for the mass-murderer José María Amador (1794-1883), who slaughtered a hundred Mokelumne Indians after they were taken prisoner.
4. Butte	1850	English, named for the Sutter Buttes. “Butte” is French, but had passed into English usage by the 1840s.
5. Calaveras	1850	Spanish, after the river of that name, the “River of Skulls” i.e., of unburied dead. Named by Gabriel Moraga when he traversed it shortly after the deadly malaria epidemic of 1833.
6. Colusa	1850	AmerIndian, for the local Native group wiped out through introduced disease and forced resettlement.
7. Contra Costa	1850	Spanish, literally “the opposite coastline” from the Golden Gate, on the east side of San Francisco Bay.
8. Del Norte	1857	Spanish, the descriptive name for California’s northernmost coastal county.
9. El Dorado	1850	Spanish, “the golden man” from 16th Century Spanish Colonial myth about the South American Indian king who was covered in gold dust before his daily swim.
10. Fresno	1856	Spanish, for “Ash Tree” the shallow-rooted tree that propagates after being blown down by high winds.
11. Glenn	1891	English, named after physician, farmer, politician, and murder victim Hugh J. Glenn (1824-1883).
12. Humboldt	1853	German, named for explorer and scientist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) who was never there.
13. Imperial	1907	English, California’s latest-created county. Named for the supposed agricultural riches of the Imperial Valley, created after the Colorado River was forced into a man-made channel, which broke, forming the Salton Sea.
14. Inyo	1866	AmerIndian, probably a Monache personal name.
15. Kern	1866	English, after the river named for John Charles Fremont’s cartographer, Edward Kern (1822-1863).
16. Kings	1893	Spanish, originally from <i>El Río de los Los Santos Reyes</i> (the “three Kings” of Bethlehem present at the birth of Jesus). Later changed to English and simplified.
17. Lake	1861	English, named for Clear Lake.
18. Lassen	1864	Danish, after Peter Lassen (1800-1859) the pioneer, gouger, and murder victim. Misspelled from Larson.
19. Los Angeles	1850	Spanish, amputated from <i>El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de la Reina de Los Angeles del Río Porciúncula</i> , “The town of our Lady, Queen of the Angels, of the Porciúncula River.” The original name of the Los Angeles River was taken from the watercourse that ran past Saint Francis’s original church in Assisi, Italy. “Queen of the Angels” is an obvious reference to the Virgin Mary.

Table 1: Ethnic Etymology of California's Present-Day 58 Counties (Cont'd)

County:	Created:	Ethnic Derivation and Meaning:
20. Madera	1893	Spanish, for "wood," more accurately "standing timber," where much Gold Rush period cutting was done, and where later flumes of immense length (50+ miles) brought logs cut at high elevation down to sawmills on the Central Valley floor.
21. Marin	1850	AmerIndian, a <i>Gringo</i> garbling of the Spanish word <i>Marinero</i> after the California Indian boatman who ferried Spanish Colonial passengers across the Golden Gate.
22. Mariposa	1850	Spanish, after the "River of the Butterflies" named by Gabriel Moraga who visited it during a "butterfly bloom."
23. Mendocino	1850	Spanish, named for Antonio de Mendoza (1495-1552), the first Viceroy of New Spain, the northernmost province of which was, of course, California.
24. Merced	1855	Spanish, from <i>El Río de Nuestra Señora de la Merced</i> , "Our Lady of Mercy River," i.e. the Virgin Mary.
25. Modoc	1874	AmerIndian, after the small tribe defeated in the Modoc War of 1872-73.
26. Mono	1861	AmerIndian, Spanish contraction of <i>Monache</i> , the neighboring Yokuts word for the Indian tribe to their east. Also a pejorative, racist, Spanish slang term "Monkey" used to denigrate AmerIndians.
27. Monterey	1850	Spanish, after the Mexican town of Monterrey, itself named for the Viceroy of New Spain, Gaspar de Zuñiga, the 5th Count of Monterrey. The California <i>Gringo</i> spelling deleted one "r."
28. Napa	1850	AmerIndian, a Pomo word for "Fish Harpoon Tip."
29. Nevada	1851	Spanish, adjective meaning "snowy."
30. Orange	1889	English, named for the citrus boom that took place there.
31. Placer	1851	Spanish, after <i>placer</i> ("pleasure") washing gold from rivers and streams without actual "digging." Was later gringified to mean simply "gold bearing sediments."
32. Plumas	1854	Spanish, named for the <i>Río de las Plumas</i> , the Feather River, named by Gabriel Moraga who visited it while doves were shedding their temporary feathers along its banks.
33. Riverside	1893	English, after the town of the same name on the Santa Ana River.
34. Sacramento	1850	Spanish, means "Blessed Sacrament."
35. San Benito	1874	Spanish, for the Saint of that name.
36. San Bernardino	1853	Spanish, for the Saint of the same name. At 20,062 square miles, it is the largest California County, and three times larger than the largest counties of Texas and New Mexico, twice the size of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont, 4 times the size of Connecticut, 8 times larger than Delaware, and 9 times larger than Rhode Island.
37. San Diego	1850	Spanish, for the Saint of the same name.
38. San Francisco	1850	Spanish, for Saint Francis of Assisi. The smallest of all California counties at only 47 square miles, and the only one that is both a city and a county of exactly the same size and the same name.
39. San Joaquin	1850	Spanish, for the Saint of same name, and the river named by Gabriel Moraga for his father, Joaquín Moraga.

Table 1: Ethnic Etymology of California's Present-Day 58 Counties (Cont'd)

County:	Created:	Ethnic Derivation and Meaning:
40. San Luis Obispo	1850	Spanish, for the French Bishop of Toulouse, who was named after the Saint of that same name.
41. San Mateo	1856	Spanish, after the Saint of that name.
42. Santa Barbara	1850	Spanish, for the female Saint of that name.
43. Santa Clara	1850	Spanish, for the female Saint of that name.
44. Santa Cruz	1850	Spanish, for the Holy Cross.
45. Shasta	1850	AmerIndian, after the local tribe of the same name.
46. Sierra	1852	Spanish, meaning "mountain range."
47. Siskiyou	1852	AmerIndian, Chinook Jargon for "Bob-tailed Horse."
48. Solano	1850	AmerIndian, named after Patwin Sem Yeto, "Chief Solano."
49. Sonoma	1850	AmerIndian, "valley" in Pomo.
50. Stanislaus	1854	AmerIndian, named after the Mission Neophyte <i>Estanislao</i> , who was named for the Polish Saint. He ran away from his birthplace, and led Indian warriors against Mexican punitive expeditions in many pitched battles.
51. Sutter	1850	German, named for Swiss-born John Sutter (1803-1880).
52. Tehama	1856	AmerIndian, from the name of the Wintu village on the opposite bank of the Sacramento River.
53. Trinity	1850	Spanish, originally <i>Trinidad</i> , for the Holy Trinity.
54. Tulare	1852	Spanish, meaning the great tule swamp.
55. Tuolumne	1850	AmerIndian, probably Yokuts, down-river from the Sierra Miwok who lived at Yosemite.
56. Ventura	1872	Spanish, <i>Gringo</i> amputation of <i>San Buenaventura</i> , "Saint Bonaventure."
57. Yolo	1850	AmerIndian, <i>Gringo</i> garbling of <i>Yo-loy</i> or <i>Yolotoy</i> , the name of the Patwin settlement near Knights Landing.
58. Yuba	1850	AmerIndian, a corruption of the Maidu word <i>Yubu</i> , given to a Native settlement on the river of the same name.

Table 2: California County Names by Ethnic Origin, 1850 vs Present Day

1850:			Present Day:		
Language:	No.:	% of Total:	Language:	No.:	% of Total:
Spanish	16	60%	Spanish	32	55%
AmerIndian	9	34%	AmerIndian	15	26%
English	1	3%	English	8	14%
German	1	3%	German	2	4%
Danish	0		Danish	1	2%
Total Counties:	27		Total Counties:	58	

Indian Placenames, Local and Imported

California's population today is overwhelmingly urban, and most of these city-dwellers spend their entire lives without ever visiting a California Indian Reservation or having met a California Indian face-to-face. My own situation, was and still is, completely the opposite. As a child in Marin County, California, while Eisenhower was in the White House, my next door neighbor was a very reserved Maidu Indian woman. A more outgoing Pomo Indian woman came every year to my grammar school to cook acorn mush for the entire kindergarten class. And, of course, after taking the vow of poverty and becoming an archaeologist more than 50 years ago, my life has not only *been in ruins*, but many of my friends, students, employees, and now even family members, were and are AmerIndians.

As a 5th generation Marin County boy I grew up with *Coast Miwok* placenames. I lived at the foot of Mount *Tamalpais*, whose name means "mountain of the bay" and I learned to swim, as did my father before me, in *Tomales Bay*. When Merle Haggard's 1969 hit song *Okie from Muskogee* became the Redneck National Anthem, we Marin County Hippies riposted with *I'm Proud to be a Hippie from Olema*. If Haggard's *Muskogee* was about as Indian a placename as possible from the old Oklahoma Indian Territory, then *Olema* was about as California Indian (*Coast Miwok*) a name as could be also. Right next to *Olema*, where my Hippie friends and I posed for our 1969 *Tamalpais* High School yearbook photo, is *Tocaloma*. There my Grandfather shot a deer from the driver's seat of our family's first automobile, a U.S. Army surplus 1918 Dodge touring car, exactly a hundred years ago. More recently, only 50 years ago, high school friends of mine played rock n' roll in the *Tocaloma Swamp Band*, but never made it big: perhaps they were jinxed because their name meant "cold-water salamander."

My cousin lives at *Petaluma*, Sonoma County, just up the road from Rancho *Olompali*, where I visited the Grateful Dead before they moved to the Haight-Ashbury in 1966. As a teenager I used to hitch-hike up

and down the *Comptche-Ukiah* road, from the Mendocino County seat (*Ukiah*) out to the coast past that wide spot in the road (*Comptche*) that few outsiders had ever heard of, much less been to. Both words are *Pomo* toponyms, and plenty of *Pomo* Indians still lived nearby. In later years as an archaeologist, I worked in 46 of California's 58 counties, seeking out California Indians to interview about local place names, legends, and lore. I spent 20 years working in *Siskiyou* County (*Chinook Jargon* for "bob-tailed horse")²⁰ with occasional forays over the line eastward into *Modoc* County, named for the losers in the Modoc Indian War of 1872-73.²¹ I have worked in *Kaweah* Indian country in *Tulare* County²² and also in *Cahuilla* Indian country 300 miles south, in *Riverside* County.²³ The two names sound phonetically identical, but the two Indian groups are completely different linguistically, and of course have different cultures and ethnohistories. In northern Marin County, I investigated the proposed *Soulajule* Reservoir and, in the southern Sierra Nevada, I spent many years working on the many branches of the *Mokelumne* River. In the Coast Range, I recorded the first rock art site ever discovered in *Santa Cruz* County on *Soquel* State Forest,²⁴ and after completing many archaeological surveys in the southeastern deserts of our state, I delivered my reports to a long-term client in *Yucaipa*. I presently live where the local Indian placenames are *Shoshonian*, and end with the locative suffix -nga. Hence, *Asuc' sangna* (present-day *Azusa*, Figure 1), *Topanga*, *Tujunga*, and W.C. Field's old favorite, *Cucamonga*, to mention but a few.

During the past 50 years when talking to California Indians about traditional placenames I often found that I knew as much as they did, having read the oral history interviews given by their own great-grandfathers, but occasionally I struck gold. On one memorable occasion, I spent a day with an elderly Pit River Indian woman who still remembered the Indian names for all of the contact-period sites I had just recorded on a stretch of the Pit River that I was the first archaeologist to survey. These were old, abandoned, villages and cemeteries she had last been to sev-

enty years before. The placenames she gave me had never been written down prior to my oral history interview, and she was quite literally “the last of her tribe” to retain such knowledge.²⁵

But not all “Indian” placenames in California are of local origin. Some were imported from other parts of Native North America, while others were applied by Whites. *Camanche*,²⁶ in Calaveras County, was first called *Limerick*, after the Irish city. It was re-named in 1849 by miners from *Camanche*, Iowa, who misspelled the Spanish name for the mounted Indians of the southern plains *twice* in only a dozen years. And then there are no fewer than four different *Cherokees*²⁷ in California (*Cherokee Flat*, *Cherokee Diggings*, etc.) in Butte, Nevada, Plumas, and Tuolumne Counties. All were named either by Cherokee Indians trying their luck in the California gold fields, or by people who had come west from the Oklahoma Indian Territory.

A California Babel

All California placenames in 1541, the final year before initial European contact, were AmerIndian. Then for the next three hundred years they were overwhelmingly Indian, with only a very few Spanish additions and intrusions, almost all of these limited to the coastal strip. But after the Mexican War and the California Gold Rush that immediately followed it, an avalanche of English names were applied to thousands of locations within California. Some of these toponyms are still with us today, while many others disappeared when the prospectors and miners moved on to richer diggings. In addition to the dominant Indian/Spanish/English toponymic trinity were many other placenames of varied ethnic origin. Most of them post-date the Mexican War, but a few pre-date it.

The Russian colonial outpost at *Fort Ross* on the Sonoma County coast was simply a toe-hold, and Russian influence in California was negligible. Nevertheless, a few places derived their names from this hit-and-run colonial venture. The *Russian River*, where my brothers and I used to float downstream on inflated inner tubes, and were occasionally

shot at by unfriendly locals, still flows to the sea. Near *Sebastopol*, Sonoma County, named for the Russian holdout city of later Crimean War fame, apples descended from the original 1811 plantings by Russians from *Fort Ross* are still harvested.

German and Scandinavian names are also comparatively rare in California. *Anaheim*, in Orange County, is one of the best-known of the very few Teutonic California toponyms, and is supposed to mean “home” (*heim*) by the river (the *Santa Ana*, River, to be precise). Folklore still persists that *Anaheim* was cobbled together from a boy’s and girl’s personal names. In either case, no corresponding German town of that name exists. The Danish-derived tourist town of *Solvang* in far western Santa Barbara County is one of the very few Scandinavian California toponyms. Forty years ago this was where I and my archaeology crew, working on Vandenberg Air Force Base, had to go to get the nearest hamburger and milkshake, since we were not admitted to the Base PX. There are many more French toponyms in California than Teutonic ones, *Lafayette*, in the East Bay, and *Lebec* (corrupted from Levesque) in Tejón Pass, come immediately to mind. *French Camp*, San Joaquin County, is one of the few surviving examples of what were once a fair number of places where Gallic gold-seekers congregated. Irish placenames, on the other hand, are scattered throughout the length and breadth of California.²⁸ Many like *Downieville*, Sierra County, date to the Gold Rush, while others, like *Dublin*, Alameda County, and *Dillon Beach*, Marin County, are of more recent vintage.

There used to be dozens of *China Camps* and *China Diggings* throughout California’s Gold Country and along its coast.²⁹ Most were enclaves where the dominant White population forced the despised and unwanted Chinese miners and fishermen to congregate. Over time, as anti-Chinese sentiment grew ever more virulent, most such Chinese settlements were abandoned, and California’s dwindling 19th century Chinese population took refuge in big city ghettos in San Francisco and Los Angeles, the only places where they were grudgingly tolerated.



Figure 3 (Left): One of the dumbest California toponymic errors is when monolingual English speakers mistakenly substitute Italian words for Spanish ones. Hence, Marin County's Terra Linda incorporates both Italian (*Terra*) and Spanish (*Linda*) words, meant to indicate "beautiful land." **Figure 4 (Right):** An even more common Gringoism is misspelling common Spanish words either accidentally or intentionally. The Conchilla Valley, named for the small freshwater mollusk shells speckling the shores of its ancient lakebeds, was misspelled by a monolingual English-speaking cartographer, who turned it into Coachella, meaningless in both Spanish and English. Both internet images, in the public domain.

Those Gringos Can't Spell, and Sure Have Short Attention Spans

California is full of placenames that are misspellings of Spanish words and phrases amputated by English speakers. Too many *Anglos* never asked Spanish-speakers to check names coined to impart a romantic or poetic flavor to towns, housing developments, or streets. "Spanglish" *Hacienda Heights* may sound O.K. to the *Gringo* ear, but grates on Spanish *orejas*. An even more cringeworthy *Gringoism* is mixing up *Italian* words with *Spanish* ones. This tradition is as old as the publication of *Ramona*, the 1880s potboiler whose California Mission Indian protagonist was called *Alessandro* instead of *Alejandro*.³⁰ This conflation of Italian with Spanish by the East Coast novelist Helen Hunt Jackson in her New York City hotel room was a foretaste of toponymic things to come. One example is Marin County's *Terra Linda* (Figure 3), on the outskirts of San Rafael. Supposedly "Beautiful Land," *Terra* is Italian, while *Linda* is Spanish. In Iberia it would have to be *Tierra Linda* while in Italy *Terra Bella* would be correct. In fact, *Terra Bella* is a street name and major offramp for the I-5 Freeway in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles County. Here, local wags call it *Terraza del Panzón*, or,

in vernacular English, "Belly Terrace." When names such as *Terra Linda* become graven in stone the *Gringo* garblers get *two* different languages wrong for the price of *one*, with double the embarrassment quotient.

A full century earlier, Chilean miners from South America worked at *Chile Bar* on the south fork of the American River in El Dorado County, and at *Chile Camp Gulch* in Calaveras County. Their national name was, of course, corrupted by the *Gringos*, who always, inexplicably, delete the terminal "e" and substitute an "i" for it. This spelling error persists not only on hot sauce bottle labels, but also on modern maps and subdivision signs. Similarly, the tiny 1830s hamlet on the opposite side of the Golden Gate from *Yerba Buena*, later *San Francisco*, the old Dillon family home town of *Saucelito*, named for the *little willow tree* that grew there, has been misspelled and mispronounced as *Sausalito*³¹ ever since the Mexican War.

The earliest Spanish-speaking explorers to penetrate the desert lands of the *Cahuilla* Indians found millions of tiny, bright white, freshwater shells around the dry shorelines of ancient lakes that had evaporated hundreds of years earlier. So they named the place the *Conchilla* (little shell) Valley. Unfortunately when monolingual *Anglo* cartographers from



Toponymic Amputations: Figure 5 (Left): Indio, the California City with the pejorative Spanish term for a male Native American, was amputated from Pozos de los Indios, or “Indian wells.” Figure 6 (Center): Chino, the California City with the Spanish slang term for a really “Indian” looking Native American man, was amputated from El Rancho del Chino. Figure 7 (Right): Chico, the California city whose name was amputated from Arroyo Chico “the little creek” but which now means “little boy.” The Chico State University mascot should not be a wildcat, but a little, thumb-sucking, toddler. All three internet images in the public domain.

back East transcribed the very few maps with Spanish notations, “Little Shell Valley” was misspelled *Coachella*³² (Figure 4), meaningless in both languages. An even more laughable *Gringoism* encountered by present-day motorists driving through Merced County on I-5 is the pseudo-Mission tourist trap called *Santa Nella*. There is no Catholic “Saint Nella.” Here monolingual *Anglos* garbled the Spanish word *Centinel* (the sentinel) given to a nearby mountain peak.

The most puzzling aspect of California *Gringolés*, at least to all Spanish speakers confronted with nonsensical placenames of supposed “Spanish” origin, is the amputation of adjectives, nouns, and modifiers by *Anglos* with too-short attention spans. *Gringos* delight in the slaughter of Spanish phrases deemed too long or too complicated. Over the hill from the small town I grew up in was *Corte Madera*, two lonely words surviving from the linguistic massacre of *El lugar donde se corta la madera para El Presidio de San Francisco*, “The place where wood is cut for the San Francisco Presidio.” Lopping off 80% of this sentence and then misspelling one of its two left-behind words changes the *name* to a *command*: “You must cut wood!” as if the shortened placename was for a penal colony populated by sawdust-covered convicts.

Throughout California many place-

names have suffered from *Gringo* amputation mania. In what is now Riverside County, *Los Pozos de los Indios* or, more simply, *Pozo del Indio* (artificial, hand-dug wells in the desert made by the local, prehistoric, people), was simplified to *Indio*, the impolite Spanish term for a Native American man (Figure 5).

In what is now San Bernardino County, *El Rancho del Chino* got reduced to *Chino* (Figure 6) which is Mexican and Central American slang for an AmerIndian man who “looks Chinese” i.e., has very pronounced Indian features. The *Chino* involved was not the actual *dueño* of this ranch, but the AmerIndian *mayordomo* who lived there and stood in for the absentee, *Gringo*, landowner.

In what is now Butte County, half of *Arroyo Chico* (“the little creek”) got amputated. The placename became *Chico* which in direct translation means “little boy.” Over a great many years I spent many days doing research in the SHPO, later renamed the CHRIS³³ office at *Chico State University*. I can testify from personal experience that yes, they do allow *little girls* to attend *Little Boy State University* (Figure 7) in the Sacramento Valley town of the same name. Finally, the biggest amputation of them all is *L.A.*, shortened from *Los Ángeles*, shortened from *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de la Reina de Los Ángeles del Río Porciúncula*, “The town of our

Lady, Queen of the Angels, of the *Porciúncula* River." Since no *Gringo* ever born could pronounce the name of the river running through Saint Francis' home town, the old name was discarded long ago in favor of a new one, now usually pronounced *El Lay*.³⁴

His n' Hers Pseudo-Spanish

One of the strangest California naming traditions by monolingual English speakers is the propensity for bequeathing pseudo-Spanish place names that sound quaint or romantic to the Anglo ear, but make little or no sense in actual Spanish. Los Angeles County, which sometimes seems to be mostly populated by monolingual English speakers recently arrived from New Jersey has, by far, the greatest number of these: *La Cañada*, *La Crescenta*, *La Mirada*, etc. These New Jersey natives are the same people that pronounce the name of the City of the Angels *Loss-Ang-A-Leeze*, and San Pedro a few miles south as *San Peeeeeee-Drow* instead of *San Pay-Drow*.

Thanks to them we find, on the female side of the coin, *La Cañada*, which to the New Jersey ear sounds more poetic than "the Gulch." Only three miles away is *La Crescenta*. This place is not the SoCal counterpart to *Crescent City*, Del Norte County, 725 miles to the north, the last city of any size just below the state line and "the free world" beyond it. And then there is *La Mirada*, named by Andrew McNally (1836-1904), who was born even farther east than New Jersey: in Armagh, Northern Ireland, to be exact. McNally thought the word he chose for his ranch meant "the view," but, as any Latin American Spanish speaker will tell you, "view" is *vista* (as in *buenavista*, or "good view.") *La Mirada* means "the glance" as in *smouldering glance* of the kind exchanged between Latino and Latina paramours, absolutely unfamiliar to straight-laced Scots-Irish Protestants like McNally, who might, at their most uninhibited, only wink.

On the masculine flip-side of the same Pseudo-Spanish coin are *El Centro*, *El Segundo*, *El Sereno*, etc. If you ask anybody who lives in *El Centro*, Imperial County, founded in 1908, how and why their town got its name, they

will tell you that it is appropriately named since it is in the exact, absolute, *center of nowhere*. Back in *Loss-Ang-A-Leeze* County is *El Segundo* ("the second man"), recently made famous by its top-ranked junior baseball team, which just won the 2023 Little League World Series. We hope and pray that this town's city fathers consider a name change to *El Primero* ("the first man"), or, better yet, in Mexican and Central American slang, *El Mero* ("the best"). And, only around 17 air miles away is *El Sereno*, which most residents have been told means "the tranquil place." Unfortunately, they have been lied to. *El Sereno* best translates to "the calm man:" an inoffensive person. As off-duty *Gringo* jarheads from Camp Pendleton duking it out in Tijuana cantinas will tell you, the command given by Mexican policemen to belligerent barflies engaged in fisticuffs is "¡Tranquilo!" Or, in plain English, "calm down!" And, there is already a *Tranquillity*, California, population 800, in Fresno County 235+/- miles north of *El Sereno*. There the most popular pastime is sitting on the porch and watching the rust patches on the non-running Studebakers in the front yard darken and spread.

In keeping with the proud California tradition of his n' hers Pseudo-Spanish, we await the founding of *La Llorona* (the weeping woman) and *El Crepúsculo* (the aged and infirm old man), in the days to come, not in New Jersey, but Los Angeles County.

Two Famous Fatsos But No "Teethadore"

Anyone driving up Interstate 5 from the intellectual desert of Los Angeles northwards towards the cultural Mecca (no, not that *Mecca*, the town in Imperial County) of San Francisco must pass between the twin Kern County guardians of the southern San Joaquin Valley named for two *famous fatsos* of late 19th/early 20th century America. Both *Taft* (founded in 1910) on the west, and *Shafter* (founded 1938) on the east tangled with President Teddy ("Teethadore") Roosevelt.

William Howard Taft (1857-1930) was trust-busting Teddy Roosevelt's hand-picked successor, who, despite going even farther than T.R. did in battling unfair monopolies,



Figure 8 (Left): William Howard Taft, soon to become the 27th U.S. President, in a cartoon from the cover of *Judge* magazine, September 1, 1906. **Figure 9 (Right):** General William Rufus Shafter, commander of all U.S. ground forces in Cuba during the Spanish American War, almost crushing his diminutive riding mule in Cuba in 1898. Both images courtesy of the Library of Congress.

failed to live up to “Teethadore’s” expectations, and abruptly terminated Teddy’s self-imposed retirement from national politics in 1912. While Teddy was no lightweight, Taft (Figure 8) was humongous, weighing way over 330 pounds. He had trouble getting through doors in the White House, and his most embarrassing presidential claim to fame was getting stuck in the regulation-sized White House bathtub. Rescue from his involuntary, ablutionary, predicament required muscle work by no fewer than six attendants. After he was pulled free President Taft had a special, mega-tub installed. The new bathtub was big enough, it was said, for *four* normal-sized Presidents, but barely adequate for walrus-bodied Taft.

William Rufus Shafter (1835-1906) was a Civil War hero and medal of honor winner. By the end of the 19th century he was unfortunately well past his “sell by” date. Shafter commanded all the U.S. troops fight-

ing in Cuba in 1898 (Figure 9), then later became the commander of the Department of California. He served in the Golden State until retiring in 1901. In and out of trouble during his long career, and even court-martialed at one point, Shafter was a bully who nursed grudges against underlings and sabotaged careers as revenge for slights both real and imagined. He was so ponderous (300+ lbs) that he had to be winched atop his mule by a system of ropes and pulleys. It was said that even Shafter’s *mustache* was fat. Teddy Roosevelt “declared war on fat officers” as soon as he became commander-in-chief of the armed forces in 1901. This was payback for T.R.’s commanding officer, Shafter’s, sloth and lethargy during the Spanish American War three years earlier. Not only was the Kern County, California, town named for the corpulent general, but *Fort Shafter*, the oldest (1905) permanent U.S. military base in Hawaii, was also named for him. For more

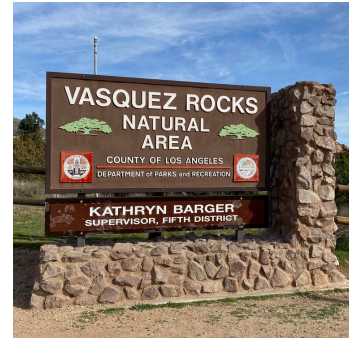


Figure 10 (Top left): Lassen County, California, was named after the Danish reprobate that bilked and extorted money from destitute emigrants heading into California, and was murdered by his own vengeful victims. **Figure 11 (Top Center):** Amador County, California, was named for José María Amador, one of the worst mass-murderers of California history, who killed a hundred Christian Indians because he didn't want to feed them. **Figure 12 (Top Right):** Vásquez Rocks Park in Los Angeles County is named for Tiburcio Vásquez, one of California's most famous bandidos, who ended his life on the gallows. Vásquez, of course, never actually "hid out" in these rocks. **Figure 13 (Bottom):** Verdugo Hills, Los Angeles County, is named for the Verdugo family: their surname means "hangman," or executioner. I don't think any criminals hanged in Los Angeles ever ended up in "Hangman's Hills Cemetery" though. All four images from the internet, in the public domain.

than a century Native Hawaiians have bitterly noted that this is appropriate, since, by virtue of the American military presence there, they not only had their country taken away, but have been *Shafted* ever since. Curiously enough, despite the two *famous fatsos* having California towns named for them, there is no Roosevelt, California.

Crooks, Mass-Murderers, Gallows-Birds, Hangmen, and Cannibals

Only a tiny percentage of modern-day Californians are aware that some of our oldest and most venerable Golden State place-names commemorate crooks, mass-murderers, killers who met their end on the scaffold, executioners that "turned off" such criminals

on the gallows, even cannibals.

Lassen County (Figure 10) was misnamed (it should be *Larson*) for Peter Lassen (1800-1859), the carpenter and barrel-maker who helped put California's Mexican-Period booze industry onto a firm footing. He then made tracks for the Cascades where he promoted his "Lassen Cut-Off" into California in order to exploit the broken-down, hungry emigrants foolish enough to follow his trail to nowhere so that he could gouge them when they bought supplies. Lassen was murdered by some of his many victims, who dressed his body up to look like he had been done in by Indians.³⁵ *Amador County* (Figure 11) was named for José María Amador (1794-1883), who led many punitive military expeditions into the California interior from the

coast beginning in the 1820s. After taking the surrender of over 100 inoffensive *Mokelumne* Indians he had those who were not professed Christians baptized, then slaughtered all of them in groups of six at a time, on their knees, tied together. He later justified this orgy of mass-murder by saying that it was “cheaper than feeding them.”³⁶ So far, no California town has yet been named for our state’s most famous 1960s mass-murderer Charley Manson, but given past precedents, *Mansonville* in Los Angeles County may yet emerge at some future time.

Vásquez Rocks County Park and *Vásquez High School* in Los Angeles County (Figure 12) are named for Tiburcio Vásquez, one of California’s most celebrated *bandidos*. Vásquez (1835-1875) was no Latino Robin Hood, as frequently portrayed, but victimized his fellow *Californios*, routinely seducing the wives of his own gang members. Wanted for murder in Northern California, Vásquez was captured in Los Angeles County, extradited to San José, tried, convicted, and hanged there.³⁷ *Verdugo Hills*, Los Angeles County (Figure 13), is named for the Verdugo family, one of whom I came to know a half-century ago. Just as the medieval English names *Miller* and *Smith* bespoke the occupations of their bearers, so did the Spanish name *Verdugo*, which means “executioner” or “hangman.” Spanish speakers often do “double-takes” when they see this name on road signs, and I have to explain to them that no, it is not a “joke.”

Donner Pass, *Donner Summit*, and *Donner Lake* in Nevada County of course commemorate the most famous cannibals of California, if not American, history. Snowbound and starving in the Central Sierra Nevada, the 90 members of the Donner Party were victims of their own poor planning and slow travel. When their food ran out, they ate each other, and even two California Indians that had been sent to assist them. As many as 21 people ended up “on the menu.” Only 45 survivors, many of them admitted cannibals, escaped their starvation camp. A hundred and fifty years later I had a Washo Indian in one of my archaeology classes. This student was descended from the Natives who had gone ice-

fishing in frozen Donner Lake every winter for hundreds of years, and could have halted the Donner Party’s protracted cannibal feast simply by informing the Whites of the piscatorial food resources readily available. When I asked why his great-great-grandfathers did not do so, I was told: *Are you crazy? Those people were eating anybody that showed up at their camp, even each other!*

And while on the subject of California cannibalism, we cannot fail to mention Napa County’s *Rancho Carne Humano*.³⁸ Its owner, cantankerous, alcoholic, Dr. Edward Bale, was told by his Spanish-speaking *Californio* neighbors that the old *Wappo* Indian (from the Spanish word *Guapo*, meaning “brave, fearless, and handsome”) name for their nearby settlement was, in garbled Spanish form, *Callejomanes*. Dr. Bale thought it humorous to call his *rancho Carne Humano*— Human Flesh Ranch—but none of his neighbors appreciated the macabre joke, and wondered why it was taking so long for the English doctor to drink himself to death.

Malas Palabras

California used to have many more off-color placenames than it does today. Most of the names invoking structures within which bodily functions were performed, or where the exchange of biological information between the sexes took place, were found in or adjacent to short-term 19th century mining or logging camps. Some of these names lingered on early 20th century maps, but most were removed, changed or “sanitized.” *El Cerrito*, (“the little hill”) of Contra Costa County still, however, often has its name changed via the substitution of only two letters on signs by playful residents to *El Cerrrote*, standard Spanish slang for “pile of human manure.”

Some sexually suggestive names in *English* persisted in backwoods California into the early 20th century, coined by miners or loggers congregating in mostly or exclusively male enclaves. Two placenames connoting the kind of short-term female companionship available on a sliding scale of prices survived in Siskiyou County. *Chippy Spur* was where a solitary soiled dove set up



Figure 14 (Left): Putah Creek, in Yolo County, incorporates the Spanish slang term for what in English are politely termed “prostitutes,” even though the Native women referred to were never actually paid for biological exchanges of information in the 1840s and ‘50s. **Figure 15 (Right):** Panoche Pass, Hills, and Big and Little Creeks incorporates the Spanish slang term for female genitalia. Both photos from the internet, in the public domain.

shop in a tent during a single summer’s logging season to ply her trade, while the much more sophisticated hamlet named, tongue in cheek, *Red Cloud*, the “red-light district” across the tracks from the squeaky-clean town of McCloud, did a booming business for a quarter-century.³⁹

The few “dirty” placenames that remain in common use are almost all Spanish, lingering remnants of past linguistic naughtiness that have only survived because the vast majority of the state’s present-day English-speakers don’t know what they mean, or have been misinformed as to their nature. Thus, *Putah Creek* in Yolo County (Figure 14), most politely translated in English to “Prostitute’s Watercourse” was actually the very coarse and racist reference to where “Native women of very easy virtue” could be found, by the class of miners who referred to all women not their own female relatives as “whores.” Similarly, *Panoche Pass*, *Panoche Reservoir*, the *Panoche Hills Recreation Area* (Figure 15) and *Big and Little Panoche Creeks*, in Fresno County, the latter prominently marked by giant signs along the I-5 Freeway, are said to mean big and little “raw sugar cones.” Gullible *Anglos* are told that early Iberian travelers thought that local mountain peaks resembled these peninsular delicacies. All Spanish speakers, however, avert their womenfolk’s eyes when they drive past these freeway signs, lest they be scandalized by the Mexican slang term for that part of the

female anatomy that is never mentioned in polite society.

Moving from sexually objectionable placenames to racially insensitive ones, there used to be a great many places in California where the “N-word” was coupled with other geonymics: N_____ Creek, N_____ Head Peak, etc. On some later maps, many of these names were changed to “Negro Creek,” “Negro Head Peak,” etc. And, of course, in downtown Los Angeles, N_____ Alley aka *El Calle de los Negros* eventually had its name changed to Los Angeles Street.⁴⁰

Similarly, “Squaw,” the pejorative term for a Native American woman, was even more prevalent. There used to be dozens of *Squaw Creeks* up and down the length of California. One of the most famous of these, in Siskiyou County, was named for where the man who came to call himself Joaquin Miller, California’s most famous literary liar, lived with his common-law Indian wife in the 1850s.⁴¹ Other places employed that insult much more recently. The *Squaw Valley* ski resort of Fresno County has, since 1949, catered to well-heeled winter visitors, 99.99% of them White. Few of these Ski-Bunnies have ever met, much less spoken with, any female Native American.

And then, there is the pejorative Spanish term for AmerIndians enshrined as a California county name: *Mono*. Naive present-day monolingual English speakers are spoon-fed incorrect blather that the word

means “solitary” or “stands alone” but in fact the origin of the name was racist, and particularly nasty. *Peninsulares* who considered AmerIndians to be sub-human sometimes called them “monkeys,” using racial epithets like *Monos*, *Changos*, and *Saraguates*. These insults can still be heard in rough and tumble *cantinas* south of the border in Mexico and Central America. Their use is typically a prelude to fisticuffs or worse. In a perfect world, California’s *Mono County* would have its name changed to *Monache County*.

Poison Mud

One of the greatest joys of working as an archaeologist is that you can bequeath your own names to the archaeological sites you discover, record, and study, usually in unpopulated or depopulated deserts, mountains, forests, and jungles. I have done this in five different New World countries, employing English, Spanish, and a variety of AmerIndian names. Some of the placenames I assigned have vanished, while others have become permanent, and have been on maps for years or even decades. This toponymic privilege is not unique to prehistorians, but is also enjoyed by others who spend their working lives in the great outdoors: geologists, foresters, and surveyors, for example.

While working in the timberlands of California’s Sierra Nevada and Cascade Ranges, I surveyed thousands of acres in many different counties for archaeology on many dozens of different Timber Harvest Plans, or THPs. Every one of these THPs was named by the forester responsible for it. As many names were whimsical or humorous as objectively descriptive. One of my favorites was the *Poison Mud THP* in Calaveras County.⁴²

The vast majority of tourists driving up California Highway 4 into the Sierra Nevada zoom in happy, ignorant, oblivion past springs, creeks, lakes, meadows, valleys, peaks and ridgelines, all of which are named. But such names are familiar only to we happy few, we band of brothers: foresters, archaeologists, and geologists. The *Poison Mud Timber Harvest Plan* a short distance to

the west of Highway 4, just a couple of miles downhill from Ganns (a wide spot in the road) was so named because at its northern end is *Poison Spring*, while at its southern end is *Mud Spring*. Neither place is unique within California by virtue of either the meagreous or the toxic adjective. Not too far to the north, just over the Amador County line, near Highway 88 is yet another *Mud Spring*, and much farther afield even more *Mud Springs* can be found in Alameda, Kern, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties. *Mud Springs Gap* in Tulare County completes this tally. And there are as many *Mud Creeks* in California as *Mud Springs*, with examples in Butte, Mendocino, Siskiyou, and Ventura Counties. Monterey County, however, takes the prize with two *Mud Creeks*, one coastal, the other in its interior. Nor should we neglect the many *Mud Lakes* in California, in Plumas, Shasta, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Clara Counties, to name but a few. Finally, if Calaveras County has its *Poison Spring*, then Alpine, Mono and Plumas Counties all have their own *Poison Creeks*. Don’t drink the water from any of them, please.

What Were They Thinking?

Some California placenames are so goofy as to verge on the ridiculous. Some may have been a kind of “payback” to unsuspecting future residents by vengeful predecessors forcibly evicted, or perhaps, were simply thought up by bored inebriates sitting around the campfire trying to outdo each other. *Zzyzx*, in San Bernardino County (Figure 2) is a good example of the latter.

I have been guilty of the time-honored western tradition of *spoofing the rubes* by suggesting possible names to gullible landowners I submitted archaeological survey reports to. When asked what a proposed hillside development, miles from the nearest paved road, should be called, I suggested *Nuchal Crest*. The Eastern developers thought this a pretty good name until they asked me what it meant, and I had to tell them that it was an anatomical term for the bony protuberance on the back of the human skull facilitating the attachment of the neck muscles.



Figure 16: The city of lard, Manteca, San Joaquin County, California. Internet image in the public domain.

Many ridiculous California placenames remain embedded in our consciousness and on our maps. *Copperopolis*, in Calaveras County, for example, was indeed the place where prospectors did not find gold, only much less valuable copper, and then made the most of it. And, almost exactly 140 miles as the crow flies due west is the exclusive, upscale, Marin County town of *Tiburon*, gateway to *Belvedere*, where some of the priciest real estate this side of downtown Tokyo can be found. *Tiburón* (*Gringos* removed the terminal accent), is Spanish for shark. Perhaps it was so named in honor of the great many lawyers who live there, as a veiled warning to any non-lawyerly humans, especially Spanish-speakers, who might be tempted to swim in such shark-infested waters. Fortunately no sharks inhabit the reflecting pool at *Las Pulgas Water Temple* near the 280 Freeway south of San Francisco. This magnificent 1934 landmark was inspired by the ancient Athenian Acropolis and the thousand-year-old gardens of the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. No-one, however, has yet satisfactorily explained why they named the place *the fleas*, after those pesky insect parasites your cat brings home.

Not too far from *Copperopolis* is *Modesto*, the seat of Stanislaus County. *Modesto* was a common Medieval Spanish first name, meaning “a modest man” but is now so old-fashioned that it ranks with *Belarmino*

as a centuries-out-of-date throwback. No California town has yet been named after Saint Bellarmine but *Ramona*, in San Diego County, and *Tarzana*, in Los Angeles County do exist. Both were named for fictional characters from popular novels. Given the rising tide of illiteracy in California, if this trend continues future towns will be named after comic book heroes: watch for *Batmana*, coming soon in Orange County near *Disneyland*.

The absolute, hands-down winner in the *What were they thinking?* California placename sweepstakes is *Manteca*, San Joaquin County (Figure 16). *Manteca* (*Gringos* from New Jersey pronounce it “Man-tee-kaw”) is Spanish for, I kid you not, lard. When Creedence Clearwater Revival sang their 1969 hit song *Oh, Lord, Stuck in Lodi, Again*, their lament could have been worse. They could have been *Mired in Manteca*, only 25 miles to the south, and their refrain would have been *Oh Lard*, not *Lord*. . .

Conclusion

Language is a living thing, and as new words, including toponyms, are added to the dominant vernacular, other, older words, are lost or replaced.⁴³ And, as we have seen, many old words undergo misspellings, mispronunciations, and misinterpretations at the same time that new ones are invented out of whole cloth. Very few of the 40 million+/- present-day Californians have any comprehension of how or why so many of their city, county, and other placenames came to be. The *lingo* of the Gold Rush, 170+ years ago, is Greek to them, as foreign as *Dillonese*, the *lingo* spoken within my own house only sixty years ago.

Fortunately, not every location in California is called *Pacific Heights* nor *Hathaway Pines*.⁴⁴ Many placenames in the old California *lingo* still *linger* throughout the Golden State on signs at the city limits of towns, both large and small, and even on the big green placards seen along that peculiar California invention, the Freeway. So watch for *Nuchal Crest*, gateway to *Manteca*, next exit.

End Notes

1. *Lingo*: This word is a garbling of the Spanish *lengua*, quite literally “tongue,” meaning language. *No hablo su lengua* was said when Spanish-speakers encountered American Natives in the Caribbean in the 1490s and then on the Central, North, and South American mainland only a few years later. AmerIndians in Mexico and Central America still refer to their own, Native language, as opposed to Spanish, as their *lengua*. In their turn, Anglo-Americans during the Gold Rush, when confronted with Spanish-speakers or California Indians, used the word in typically garbled fashion, saying “no *speaka-da-lingo*.”
2. *Native Hawaiians in 19th Century California*: R. Dillon and B. Dillon, 2021.
3. *Chinese in 19th Century California*: Dillon, Dillon and Dillon, 2014b.
4. *Multilingual Sausalito, California*: W. Dillon and B. Dillon, 2018.
5. *Running Etymological Narrative in the Western U.S.*: B. Dillon 2020: 146-151.
6. *Lake Tahoe Placenames*: Lekisch 1988; R. Dillon 1988.
7. *Weber’s Landing = Tuleburg = Stockton*: R. Dillon, 1982: 58-59.
8. *Dillonese*: B. Dillon 2020: 1.
9. *Names on the Land*: R. Dillon 1971; B. Dillon 2020: 210-212.
10. *First Scholarly Publication on California Placenames*: Sánchez, 1914.
11. *California Indian Placenames*: Powers 1877; Kroeber 1916, 1925.
12. *Southern California History and Placenames*: Rensch and Rensch 1932.
13. *Pan-California History and Placenames*: DPR 1990; Hoover, et. al, 1990.
14. *North American Placenames*: Stewart, 1945, 1970. A fixture at the University of California, Berkeley, the brilliant George R. Stewart (1895-1980) was the professor of English who wrote more and better history than most historians. An inspirational teacher, he profoundly influenced my father while he was a Berkeley student before (1941-43) and after (1946-50) his WWII service. Stewart called what he was writing about “place names” (two separate words) at first, then later changed the term to “Place-names” (with a hyphen). Other writers have employed alternative terms such as “geonymics,” usually for natural, not cultural, features, while Hanna (1946) perhaps simply not wanting to follow Stewart, uses “Land Names.” In this paper I prefer “placenames,” a single word, as does Bright (2004) and “toponyms” Stewart’s own (1945) invention.
15. *California Placenames*: Hanna 1946; Gudde 1960; Gudde and Bright 1998.
16. *Sierra Nevada Placenames*: Farquhar 1965.
17. *North American Indian Placenames*: Bright 2004.
18. *California’s Original 27 Counties*: Mariano Vallejo, who had been locked in his own Sonoma jail by the Bear Flaggers during the Mexican War overthrow of California, personally chose all or most of the names of the original 27 California counties during the convention that preceded Statehood in 1850. R. Dillon 1970: 331; Rosenus 1995.
19. *California’s Present-Day 58 Counties*: Beck and Haase, 1974: Maps 65-66.
20. *Siskiyou County, California*: R. Dillon 1975; B. Dillon 1995b, 2019.
21. *Modoc County, California*: R. Dillon 1973.
22. *Kaweah Indians*: Meighan, Dillon and Armstrong, 1988.
23. *Cahuilla Indians*: B. Dillon 1997.
24. *Soquel, Santa Cruz County*: B. Dillon 1992a.
25. *Pit River Indians*: Dillon and Gorenfeld 2017. The river was named for the animal pit traps dug by local Indians along game trails, not for the British Prime Minister, who spelled his name with “Two Tees.”
26. *Camanche, California*: Dillon, Dillon and Dillon, 2014a: 23.
27. *Cherokee, California*: B. Dillon and R. Dillon, 2022: 19.
28. *Irish Placenames in California*: Dillon, Dillon and Dillon 2017.
29. *Chinese Placenames in California*: Dillon, Dillon and Dillon 2014b.
30. *Conflating Italian with Spanish in California Placenames*: R. Dillon 1970: 171-176. And, of course, there is an *Alessandro*, not *Alejandro*, in Riverside County.
31. *Saucelito = Sausalito*: W. Dillon and B. Dillon 2018.
32. *Conchilla = Coachella*: B. Dillon 1997.
33. *SHPO, CHRIS*: The former acronym stands

for State Historic Preservation Office, the latter for its successor, the California Historic Resources Information System. Not mentioned is ORO, the Office of Redundancy Office.

34. *Los Angeles, California*: B. Dillon 2021: 168-169.
35. *Lassen County, California*: R. Dillon 1970: 206-209.
36. *José María Amador*: B. Dillon 1995a: 19-20; 2021: 223-224.
37. *Tiburcio Vásquez*: B. Dillon 2021: 123-134.
38. *Rancho Carne Humano*: R. Dillon 2004: 80, 270.
39. *Red Cloud, Siskiyou County*: B. Dillon 1995b, 2019.
40. *Calle de los Negros, Los Angeles*: López, 2012.
41. *Squaw Creek, Siskiyou County*: B. Dillon, 1995c, 2019.
42. *Poison Mud THP, Calaveras County*: B. Dillon 1992b.
43. *Language as a Living Thing*: Ruhlen 1994; McWhorter 2001.
44. *Hathaway Pines*: is a small community in Calaveras County. Punsters refer to it as *Hiawatha Palms*.

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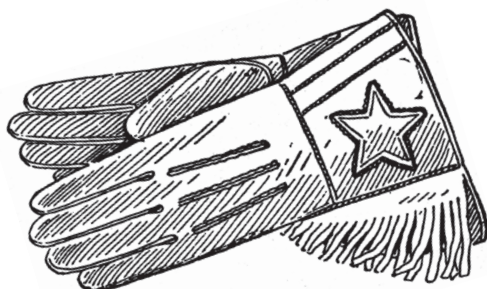
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Next Special Issues: *Cookin' Irons! and Cowboy Couture!*

Engage your tastebuds vicariously in our next culinary special edition of *The Branding Iron*, to be published in Winter 2024! Corral members and friends are invited to share their Western American food histories, dining stories, and rustic recipes. *How 'bout some more beans, Mr. Taggart?*

To be considered for publication in this special issue, please observe a deadline of February 15th, 2024 for *cookin' irons* submissions. Additionally, articles on other topics are always welcome and encouraged for future non-themed issues.

But wait—there's more! 2024 will have not one, but *two* special themed issues. Next up is the *cowboy couture* special edition on the history of Western fashion, which will debut in Fall 2024. Grab your stetson, strap on your spurs, and *giddyap!*

Please submit clothing-related articles by November 15th, 2024, to be considered for this special issue.

For submissions and inquiries, please contact *Branding Iron* editor John Dillon at John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com. Thank you!

California's Brief Moment in Latin America's Wars for Independence: Bouchard's Raid

By Abraham Hoffman



Figure 17: Portrait of Hippolyte Bouchard. Public domain internet image.

The Latin Americans wars of independence occurred in several areas, across two continents, and over two decades. These were the Hidalgo-Morelos phase of the first Mexican Revolution, 1810-1814, and Iturbide's success in 1821; the Chile-Peru campaigns of José de San Martín and Bernardo O'Higgins, 1817-1824; and Simón Bolívar's struggles in the area that would eventually become the nations of Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

In contrast with Mexico and South America, Alta California, under Spanish rule, was relatively untouched by the fighting further south. California's chief excitement came when the French captain

Hippolyte Bouchard, sailing under the flag of the United Provinces—a conglomeration of rebel provinces led by Buenos Aires that eventually became the independent nation of Argentina—attacked the Spanish settlement at Monterey. On a ship he had captured from the Spaniards, Bouchard sailed around Africa and then headed eastward for the Pacific Coast. Arriving at the Sandwich Islands (what the British called Hawaii) on August 1818, he obtained provisions from King Kamehameha. Then he made plans for the conquest of Monterey and annexation of Alta California by the United Provinces—all in the name of liberation.

But just what did he represent? His two ships flew the flag of the United Provinces, but he was little more than a French privateer seeking an opportunity to enrich himself under the guise of a revolutionary government thousands of miles away from Alta California. This unusual effort at conquest contrasted with his earlier role fighting Spanish frigates.

In the event, the Monterey campaign proved a near disaster for Bouchard. In November Governor Pablo de Sola, learning of Bouchard's imminent arrival, ordered the evacuation of California's capital. Women and children headed for the hills, taking with them whatever valuables they could carry, as well as driving the family livestock. Bouchard's crew, mainly cutthroats, outnumbered the Spanish soldiers in all of California. However, the attack that took place on November 20, 1818 was filled with misfortune. One of Bouchard's ships, the *Santa Rosa*, was severely damaged by Sola's shore batteries at the Monterey Presidio. Only Sola's sense of humanity stopped the slaughter of sailors caught out in the open. Rather than fighting a superior force (some 200 men were on Bouchard's two ships), Sola retreated, leaving Bouchard with an empty town containing little worth looting. Bouchard raised the United Provinces'



Figure 18: Argentine 500-peso stamp of Hippolyte Bouchard. His French first name has been Hispanicized to Hipólito. When this stamp was issued in 1983, 500 pesos was worth about half of a U.S. cent. Image courtesy of californiamissionguide.com.

flag over Monterey’s customs house, briefly making California territory of the Argentine revolutionary movement. Unfortunately for Bouchard, as historian Matt Meier noted, there was “little acceptance of his idea for a hemisphere-wide revolt against Spain.”

The pirates lost 26 men in the raid, with many more wounded, while *Californio* casualties were near zero. With no loot to plunder, the frustrated pirates ransacked and set fire to the town’s buildings. To Bouchard’s credit, he refused to let his men plunder the nearby church. Bouchard then sailed south along the coast, making a few desultory attempts on ranches, and forcibly obtained ammunition and supplies from San Juan Capistrano where his men burned the town’s few buildings. He failed in his attack on Santa Barbara on December 5, deciding that its mission and presidio were too well defended. He avoided San Diego and went on his way. His men burned a few Indian huts and on December 16, his little armada departed from the California coast after having stayed for less than a month.

Ostensibly serving as a naval force for José de San Martín, and becoming a citizen of the United Provinces, Bouchard functioned virtually as a pirate when he attacked Alta California. In the Latin American wars for independence, Bouchard’s 1818 raid on California’s coast was only a side show.

The actual change in California’s government took place three years later, when Agustín de Iturbide secured Mexico’s independence in 1821. Governor Sola lost no

time in swearing allegiance to the new government. “From this welter of revolutionary movements,” noted historian Meier, “those of California, Mexico, and Chile-Peru were characteristic of the range and variety of the broad movement.”

In later life Bouchard served as commander-in-chief of the Peruvian Navy and was promoted to the rank of Admiral. By 1837 he had retired as a plantation owner, only to meet an untimely end when one of his servants murdered him. California historians rate him as little more than a pirate. Some South American nations, especially Argentina, consider him a hero like our own John Paul Jones, going so far as to issue a postage stamp with his portrait (Figure 18). Streets have been named for him, and monuments erected to celebrate his role in the Latin American wars of independence.

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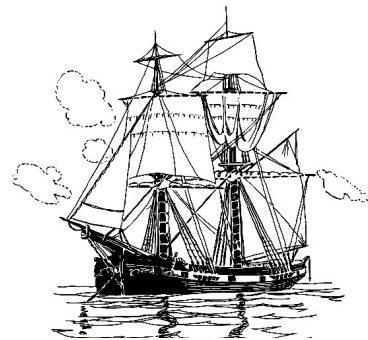




Figure 17 (Left): The California Dillon Gang invades Tombstone, Arizona, and captures prominent cowgirls. L-R: Middle brother Dave Dillon, youngest brother Ross Dillon, oldest brother (and ringleader) Brian Dillon, Westerners International Chair Bonney MacDonald, Westerners International Secretary DeLinda King. **Figure 18 (Center):** Jim Olds (at center) underground in the mine, in the mine, where the sun never shines. . . flanked by other Westerners. **Figure 19 (Right):** Gary Turner receives his “best book of 2022” award for L.A. Corral Brand Book 25 from DeLinda King at the awards dinner, Tombstone, 2023.

The Westerners International Annual Gather, Tombstone, Arizona, September 14-16, 2023

Cowboys and cowgirls from all over the West descended on Tombstone, Arizona, for three days of fun, frolic, education and entertainment in mid-September, 2023 for the Annual Westerners International Gather. The Los Angeles Corral was well-represented, with the infamous Dillon gang (Figure 17) putting in their fourth appearance at this annual event. These three *desperados* were joined by Jim Olds (Figure 18) who motored up in his hot Mustang to the immense approbation of all females present. Even Gary (Figure 19) and Vicki Turner “fired up” their afterburners and arrived just in time for the awards dinner, and the well-deserved Best Book of 2022 award for Brand Book 25.

All present were most thankful to our parole officers for granting us permission to attend, and waiving the prohibition on associating with other Westerners from other Corrals far and wide. Special thanks to Doug Hocking and the Tombstone Corral for hosting such a characteristically “Old West” event, and for scheduling so many side trips to the unique attractions of Tombstone.

We saw some old friends, made some

new ones, and had free and productive exchanges of ideas about the future direction of Westerners International, as well as ideas about each other’s research on a variety of Western topics. We can’t wait for the next proposed Gather, which will, hopefully, take place somewhere within the wilds of the Dakota Territory.

— Brian Dervin Dillon



Rendezvous, October 7, 2023 . . .



Fire Station No. 27 at 1355 N. Cahuenga Blvd, Hollywood, was the largest fire station west of the Mississippi upon its construction in 1930. Later closed in the 1980s and damaged in the 1994 Northridge quake, the firehouse was renovated and reopened in 2001 as the Los Angeles Fire Department Museum and Memorial. Here, the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners gathered for their annual October Rendezvous to socialize, buy books, enjoy a tasty lunch of barbecue pork sandwiches, and appreciate the fascinating history of the fire station and of firefighting.

Docent Jim Finn gave an excellent tour. We began upstairs in the former dormitory, which in the fire station's heyday was home to some two dozen firefighters. On display were vast collections of firefighting paraphernalia. Helmets from many countries and eras decorated one entire wall, and medals and patches another. Also featured were the tools of the trade, which included axes, modified shotguns for line-throwing, and carbon tetrachloride "grenades," long rendered obsolete by less toxic fire extinguishers.

Perforating the dormitory floor, of course, were a row of firemans' poles allowing rapid egress to the downstairs garage. The two-story tall poles wobbled a surprising amount, and a special trick was needed to slide down them safely without suffering friction burns. Sadly for the thrill-seekers among us, the poles were closed off with safety railings. These barriers were originally installed not for the tourists, but to prevent the firefighters themselves from accidentally

falling through the holes in the floor at night.

The downstairs garage hosted a menagerie of red fire engines. The oldest were horse-drawn, steam-powered pumps. These were parked by a blaze and their skittish horses simply let loose, to eventually be herded back together by a team of Dalmations. These working dogs were demoted to mascots as fire stations traded their horses for horsepower. Fire Station No. 27 acquired its first motorized fire engine in 1905—a two-wheeled tractor that pulled a previously horse-drawn crane and hose apparatus. Many more vehicles followed, including a Model T Ford engine, another based on a Willys Jeep, and a 1954 Cadillac ambulance.

It must be emphasized that Fire Station No. 27 is not just a museum, but also a memorial that offered a sobering reminder of the dangers of firefighting and the sacrifices made to protect our communities. Inside, a poignant exhibit honored the fallen first-responders of the 9/11 attacks. Outside, bronze statues celebrated firefighters' heroism and a wall of names commemorated those lost in the line of duty in the history of the Los Angeles Fire Department.

This Rendezvous was made possible by the planning of Sheriff John Shea, the catering of Ann Shea, and book salesmanship of Brian Dillon. The Westerners extends its thanks to the Los Angeles Fire Department Museum and Memorial for their hospitality, the engaging tour, and all the work they do to preserve and honor the history of the LAFD.

— John Dillon



Previous Page (Left): Westerners meet outside the Firehouse. *Previous Page (Right):* The Los Angeles Fire Department memorial, featuring five life-sized statues and an honor wall. Photos by John Dillon.

Above: Docent Jim Finn gives a talk in the former fire-fighters dormitory. *Right:* Fire Station No. 27's first motorized fire engine. *Below:* An exquisitely engraved Singaporean fire helmet. *Bottom Left:* Pete Fries explores the garage. *Bottom Right:* Sheriff John Shea thanks Finn for the tour. Photos by John Dillon.



Monthly Roundup . . .



September 13, 2023

Robert Shafer

The Los Angeles Corral of Westerners welcomed Robert “Bob” Shafer as speaker for the September Roundup meeting. Bob, a former Eagle Scout and retired YMCA Senior Vice President for Los Angeles, was uniquely qualified to present his talk on the history of Catalina Island’s Camp Cherry Valley.

Catalina was a neglected backwater throughout the Spanish and Mexican periods, and only after the American annexation of California did the island see permanent non-Native settlement. Prospectors found modest amounts of gold on Catalina during the Gold Rush, which warranted a U.S. Army garrison to protect the mines from Confederate raiders during the Civil War, and from the disorderliness of the miners themselves. Catalina remained a sleepy, sparsely populated community of miners and cattle ranchers until an economic breakthrough was made in the late 19th century, when tourists discovered the island.

In 1892, the sons of Phineas Banning established the tent city of Avalon, which offered a “rustic” vacation for visitors from the burgeoning city of Los Angeles. These canvas cottages went up in flames in 1915, but this

disaster created an opportunity for Avalon to reinvent itself. In 1919, chewing gum magnate William Wrigley Jr. purchased the island and built more permanent attractions in Avalon like the Catalina Casino in 1929. But Wrigley did not cater solely to highbrow customers. As the self-professed owner of a “five cent business,” he believed that recreation needed to be accessible to all ages and incomes. He sponsored the creation of summer camps, including the Boy Scout’s Camp Cherry Valley in 1923.

The concept of the summer camp came about around the turn of the century, as a way to get city kids “back to nature” and escape the “moral and physical degradations of urban life.” Boy Scouts visiting Cherry Valley were immediately acquainted with nature upon their arrival. There was no pier for arriving ferries, so everyone had to jump overboard and wade ashore, hopefully while keeping their bags dry over their heads. Other camps would be founded later on Catalina, such as Emerald Bay, which this author attended one summer back in his Scouting career.

Camp Cherry Valley had a curious relationship with nautical cinema. Oil baron George Allan Hancock screened movies for the Scouts aboard his ship, the *Velero II*, which he anchored off shore from the camp. In 1935, the camp came to the rescue for the filming of *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Ninety percent of the footage captured earlier in Tahiti was lost in transit to Los Angeles, so Cherry Cove was hastily chosen as a stand-in for locations as diverse as the South Pacific and Portsmouth, England.

Cherry Valley was briefly closed in 1930 due to a polio outbreak, for the duration of WW2, and most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has otherwise served more than a million Boy Scouts with distinction over the past hundred years. Camp Cherry Valley’s rugged interior hiking trails, clear bay for all manner of water sports, and marine biology labs offer a unique blend of experiences, and no other summer camp is quite like it.

— John Dillon



November 8, 2023

Mark Mutz

Along with baseball and apple pie, there is nothing more American than a Thanksgiving dinner of roasted turkey and mashed potatoes. Every school child can at least vaguely recollect the story of the Pilgrims and their first "feast of peace" with the local Indians. However, little remembered today is the process by which Thanksgiving became an American holiday, rather than an exclusively New England Yankee tradition that elicited befuddlement or even ridicule across the country. Nobody wore a Pilgrim buckled hat for Hat Night at the November Roundup, but Mark Mutz nevertheless shared the story of how the Thanksgiving holiday first came to California during the Gold Rush.

Massachusetts native Daniel Mason caught gold fever in 1849 and traveled to California via the Panama route. This was a journey of "only" 5,300 miles by sea compared to rounding Cape Horn at 17,000 miles, but it was not necessarily faster due to the treacherous trek across Panama and the unreliable

schedule of ships on the Pacific leg. Mason arrived in Panama City in mid February, but only departed on the whaler *Niantic* on May 2nd. The crew reckoned that ferrying 49ers was more profitable than whaling, and duly took the next logical step of abandoning their ship altogether in San Francisco in order to hit the Mother Lode. Mason's first Thanksgiving in California was a humble, log cabin affair. He and just two other New Englanders enjoyed a bowl of "smoking chowdered clams" made from "bivalves from the Merrimac," as he recounted in a poem. Mason never struck paydirt in California, and returned to New England in 1851.

The first known, *official* observance of Thanksgiving in California occurred in 1850, when Governor Peter H. Burnett declared it a legal holiday. Joseph A. Coolidge, another Massachusetts 49er, was pleased that his home state's tradition had overcome the initial misgivings surrounding its Puritan origins, and he pulled out all of the stops to celebrate the occasion. At a time when prospectors considered jackrabbit to be a sumptuous feast, Coolidge ordered a full turkey dinner from a French cook for the remarkable sum of \$50, equivalent to \$1,970 in today's money. In gold-rich but services-poor California, the greatest fortunes were clearly made not in the gold fields, but in "mining the miners."

Thanksgiving became formalized as a holiday at the federal level by proclamation of President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, though it took a few decades for Thanksgiving to be observed in the South and finalize its nationwide acceptance. It has, of course, still yet to catch on among the turkey demographic.

— John Dillon



Hat Night contest winners, November 8th, 2023 (Left to Right): Junior firefighter Ann Shea, bird fancier Dorothy Mutz, and vintage footballer Gary Turner, cranium kept safe by hardboiled leather. John Dillon photos.

Down the Western Book Trail . . .

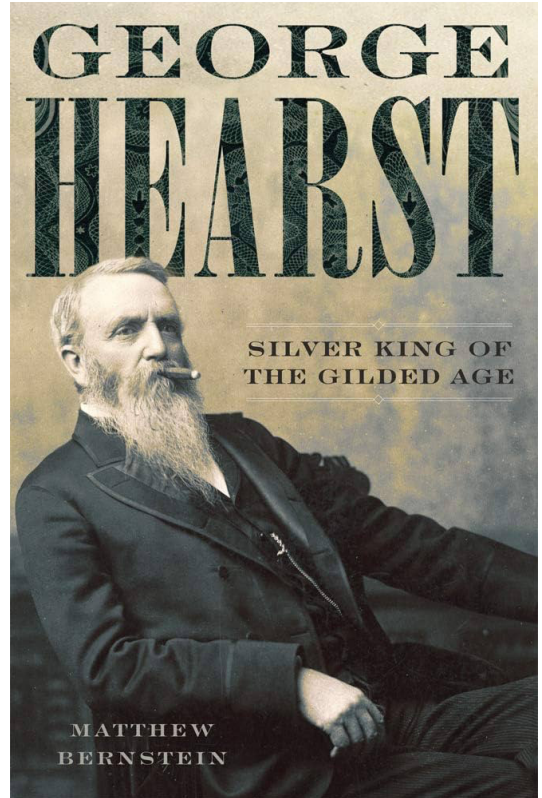
GEORGE HEARST, SILVER KING OF THE GILDED AGE, by Matthew Bernstein. 258 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index, University of Oklahoma Press, 2021. Hardcover: \$55.00, Softbound: \$23.74.

George Hearst (1820-1891), once upon a time amongst the most famous of all Californians, has faded into obscurity over the past century. This is not because present-day Americans now consider him unimportant, but simply because he has been overshadowed by his larger-than-life offspring, William Randolph (W.R. or “Willie”) Hearst (1863-1951).

Willie persuaded Americans to go to war with Spain in 1898 not for altruistic reasons, but simply to boost circulation of his rabble-rousing newspapers. George was even, to a lesser extent, over-shadowed by his younger widow Phoebe Apperson Hearst (1842-1919) who out-lived him by almost three decades. Phoebe became more famous for *spending* the Hearst millions than George was for *earning* them. Beloved by feminist *her-storyans* as a benefactress of worthy causes, including women’s rights, many male academics (myself included) consider Phoebe the *Fairy Godmother* of California higher education.

Matthew Bernstein’s new biography of Willie Hearst’s *father* and Phoebe’s *husband* restores George Hearst to his rightful place amongst the most important movers and shakers of 19th-century California. It will be the standard by which all other biographies of Hearst’s peers will be judged for years to come. George Hearst comes alive, warts and all, as a three-dimensional human being who operated in many different social, economic, political, and even scientific circles. Even those intimately familiar with the Hearst dynasty, or who think there is nothing new that could be written about them, will learn a great many new things from Matthew Bernstein’s outstanding book.

The new biography reveals just how much of a polymath Hearst was. He derived great wealth not just from gold, but from sil-



ver, lead, and copper. This was almost always through his trademark “hands on” approach as an active participant wherever mineral wealth might come out of the ground, instead of simply investing in the work of others like so many bloodless bankers back East. Like the blind men and the elephant, George Hearst was many different things to many different people during his long and unique life. As Matthew Bernstein makes abundantly clear, first and foremost Hearst was essentially self-taught in all of his diverse specializations. If not in fact a genius geologist, he nevertheless had the very rare ability of “reading” the landscape, and visualizing in his mind’s eye what lay under it. He also was an immensely talented self-taught engineer, who could imagine and more often than not plan the best and most economical way of getting the ore out of the ground, the kind of machinery needed to process it, and even how to get that machinery from the

nearest outpost of civilization to the back of beyond where the mineral wealth lay, even through road-building if necessary. George Hearst was indisputably a genius in mining finance. He was willing to take chances few others would, and often ventured where others feared to tread, both underground and above, taking his seed money with him.

George Hearst's business acumen was driven by his fascination with mining and mineral extraction. Politics for Hearst was an after-thought, late in life, as if he and his old prospector buddies had drawn straws to determine what they should do when they got too old and too tired to stand in freezing water up to their knees panning gold. If some drew the ranching straw, and others the farming one, most simply went "back East" to wherever they had come from, and were content to rock on the porch and tell the less adventurous younger generation what they had done so long ago way out west in California. No rocking chair for George Hearst. He may have drawn the political straw by accident, but welcomed it as a useful distraction from his ongoing development of mines, mining, and support industries not just in the California he now represented in the U.S. Senate, but all over his beloved West.

From start to finish I was captivated by the results of Bernstein's scrupulous research and his lively writing style. I must also confess that I opened the new George Hearst biography predisposed to like and admire its protagonist, for very personal reasons. My own great-great-grandfather came to California as a miner in 1850, the same year George Hearst did. The two may have crossed paths in the Mother Lode while "seeing the elephant" (*aka* seeking gold). Neither one "struck it rich" in California despite trying their luck in a great many different river drainages during the next six or seven years. Both eventually admitted that that they were "skunked" and went back East to the families they had left behind. And here George Hearst and my great-great-granddad once again serendipitously charted parallel paths through life. After a short exile back home Hearst realized that he would never be content as a farmer, and that his future would

always lie with mines and mining way out west. He was proved right when he rode the crest of the wave of the Comstock Silver Strike in Utah Territory's westernmost region, Nevada, beginning in 1859. All of the luck that had previously eluded him in the California Gold fields now came his way with that "other" precious metal, silver. He married his much younger cousin Phoebe after convincing her that the far West was more attractive than their native Missouri.

Meanwhile, George Hearst's contemporary, my own great-great-granddad, had also wooed and won a bride in the American midwest. From his earliest days as a prospector, he had kept in the front right pocket of his Levi bluejeans his "poke," his good luck talisman, a small buckskin bag filled with California placer gold. When he got married, he had it melted down and his wedding ring was cast from that same gold that he had panned in the Mother Lode. Like George Hearst, he took his bride back to California, and again like George, started a California family. Hearst stayed in the mining business, following the newest excitement wherever it might take him, not just in California and Nevada, but also in Arizona, the Dakotas, anywhere in the Western states and territories that mineral wealth beckoned. My own family stayed put in Sausalito, California, where my grandmother eventually played her violin at dances hosted by George's son Willie, who lived just up the hill. Five generations after the Gold Rush, the Hearst family retains many millions of dollars whose seed money was great-great-grandfather George's 1859 silver bonanza riches. But I have my great-great-granddad's wedding ring made of 1850s California placer gold, and wouldn't trade it for all the Hearst riches.

In addition to the parallel paths my earliest California ancestor and George Hearst took 173 years ago, my family subsequently owed quite a bit to old George. In 1941 my father was on the U.C. Berkeley rifle team (yes, Berkeley used to sponsor small bore rifle competitions) and Dad's practice range was on the ground floor of *Hearst Gym*, next to Bancroft Avenue. Thirty-one years later, in 1972, when I took my one and only U.C.

Berkeley P.E. class, I practiced fencing in the room upstairs from the old, now-disused rifle range in that self-same *Hearst Gym*. If Phoebe donated the money for the building, it must be remembered that she didn't earn one red cent of it: it was all George's. Across campus was the Hearst School of Mines, a bequest quite a bit closer to George Hearst's heart, where generations of geologists specializing in hard-rock mining, and then later those looking for black gold, petroleum, learned the tricks of the trade. Some of its graduates were friends of mine, both in California and farther afield. My own Ph.D. degree in anthropology at Berkeley, 7 years after I fenced in Hearst Gym, was yet another tangible product of George Hearst's vast riches and his widow's munificence.

In 1901, a decade after husband George's death, Phoebe not only set the brand-new field of anthropology on its unique path, but bankrolled it as well. The University of California Anthropology Department, under its resident genius A.L. Kroeber, was financially supported almost exclusively by Phoebe Apperson ("Moneybags") Hearst, who had a soft spot not only for California Indians, but especially for Kroeber. U.C. Anthropology was the second department ever founded in the U.S. Kroeber was a product of the first such department (at Columbia University) and also its founder Franz Boas' very first Ph.D student. So, had not George Hearst left all of his money to Phoebe, and had not Phoebe been committed to California

Anthropology, I might never have become an archaeologist.

Most of the thousands of people who annually visit Hearst Castle, that monument to W.R. Hearst's ostentation, seldom wonder where he got the money for such an orgy of excess. They know (or at least suspect) that Willie didn't earn it all himself. Tour guides relate that most of the lucre came to him via his mother, as if by magic. But lurking just below the conceptual horizon at San Simeon, at least up until now, was Phoebe's husband, a shadowy, unknowable, yet all-powerful Oz-like figure. George's financial accomplishments were obscured by metaphorical curtains drawn closed as early as 1891, long before his son Willie embarked upon the megalomaniacal building, buying, and collecting spree so obvious at San Simeon.

Now Matthew Bernstein's very readable biography of George Hearst pulls back those curtains, and Hearst the elder regains his rightful place in California's pantheon of historical notables. Compared to some of his contemporaries like Leland Stanford, and to his own son Willie, George Hearst, thanks to Bernstein, comes across as a likable, sympathetic, and absolutely unique character. His remarkable success was entirely the product of his own energy and intelligence, and many of us still benefit from both. We are grateful to George Hearst, and highly recommend Matthew Bernstein's excellent new book.

— Brian Dervin Dillon

THE GREAT QUAKE DEBATE: *The Crusader, the Skeptic and the Rise of Modern Seismology*, by Susan Hough. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2020. 318 pp. Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Hardbound, \$34.95. Paperback, \$19.95.

That Southern California is earthquake country is today firmly ensconced as part of the area's self-image. But that was not always the case and, in fact, was the subject of vigorous debate in the early part of the twentieth century. As related by Pasadena-based United States Geological Survey seis-

mologist Susan Hough, this debate involved a large number of participants but was principally engaged in by two well-known geologists, Bailey Willis and Robert Hill. Both had joined the USGS early in that agency's history, both had established reputations for geological mapping and research in other parts of the country and abroad. Both moved to California later in their careers, Willis to a professorship at Stanford and Hill to consulting work with the petroleum industry and the USGS.

Hough spends the first part of her account detailing the two men's early lives,

SUSAN HOUGH

The GREAT QUAKE DEBATE

THE CRUSADER, THE SKEPTIC,
AND THE RISE OF
MODERN SEISMOLOGY

professional accomplishments, and their different personalities. The latter, in her telling, was a crucial factor in the tenor that the eventual debate took. Included in this story is the founding of the Pasadena Seismology Laboratory, the rise of Caltech as a premier research institution, and the involvement of the Washington D.C.-based Carnegie Institution for Science in supporting earthquake research and instrumentation in southern California.

Bailey Willis became active in the newly founded Seismological Society of America and began promoting public awareness of earthquake hazards and risk reduction. Robert Hill, on the other hand, despite his mapping of the many faults, “rifts” in his terminology, which dominate the geology of Southern California, downplayed both the geologic importance of, and risk from, earthquakes.

Shortly after the 1925 Santa Barbara Earthquake, Willis publicly, and a bit bombastically, predicted that a major earthquake would strike the Los Angeles area: “No one knows whether it will be one year

or ten years.” Los Angeles business, civic and booster interests were horrified at the adverse publicity that this prediction engendered and began working fervently to counter it. One of their many concerns was the subsequent raising of insurance rates by Eastern underwriters. In their campaign against the “prediction,” the business interests found Hill, with his established geologic reputation and his skepticism of earthquake risk, to be a valuable ally. Hill gave talks to various organizations that were widely quoted in newspaper articles but, unfortunately, allowed his scientific contributions to Southern California geology to be co-opted and his reputation tarnished.

Hill had not yet published his extensive mapping of Southern California geology and agreed to let his work be published by the Building Owners and Managers Association of Los Angeles, masquerading in an obscure way as the legitimate Southern California Academy of Sciences. After Hill had approved the galley proofs and left for a trip to Texas, his book was hijacked without his knowledge or permission through the addition of an inflammatory first chapter. Parts 3 through 6 are a straightforward presentation of Hill’s pioneering geologic mapping, and Part 2 is an objective recitation of earthquake knowledge at the time. But Part 1, with the provocative title “Southern California Attacked” and written anonymously, focuses on rebutting Willis’ prediction. It is based on Hill’s earlier speeches but edits out his moderating disclaimers. The dust jacket of the book, *Southern California Geology and Los Angeles Earthquakes*, promised that it would prove “that this area is not only free from a probability of severe seismic disturbances but has the least to fear from ‘Acts of God’ of any city under the American flag.” What could have been an objective, seminal publication in Southern California geology was overshadowed by its first, subjective chapter and has seldom been cited in the subsequent scientific literature. Five years after its publication, the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake settled the argument.

Although the great debate can be framed in black-and-white terms, author Susan

Hough is careful to explain the subtleties surrounding it. All through the 1920s and early 1930s scientists associated with the Seismological Laboratory and Carnegie Institution had been studying local earthquakes and deploying the first seismometers in the region. The business and civic interests appear to have been sincerely concerned about earthquake risks yet feared the negative publicity and actively worked against publicizing them. Caltech, beginning its rise to prominence under Robert Milliken, had to walk a fine line as much of its early financial support came from local businesses.

Hough has done a masterful job of inte-

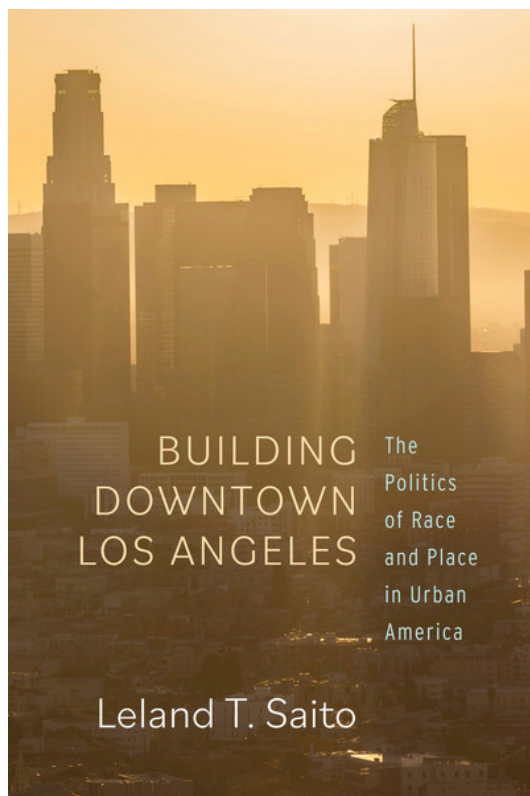
grating the multiple aspects of this story and provides explanations of the relevant aspects of earthquakes that are easily understood by the lay person. The present reviewer, a retired geologist, enjoyed reading about the early history of the USGS, the beginnings of the Seismology Lab and earthquake studies in California, and learning about two once famous, but now mostly forgotten, American geologists. Hough's book is packed with detail, but her skilled presentation and the compelling topic makes it an easy one to recommend.

— Warren Thomas

BUILDING DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES: The Politics of Race in Urban America, by Leland T. Saito. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2022. 257 pp. References, Index. Paperback, \$28.00.

For more than seven decades, the City of Los Angeles has been in the process of remaking its identity. The demolition of Chavez Ravine made a home for the Dodgers in 1957, and the tearing down of the old mansions and boarding houses on Bunker Hill by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) led to skyscrapers such as the Security-Pacific Bank edifice. Also in the 1950s, Angelenos saw the creation of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion of the Music Center and, later on the Disney Concert Hall. It's sad that the modernization of Downtown has failed to deal with the problem of the unhoused, the polite term for the thousands of homeless persons whose living conditions in tents and cardboard shelters still have yet to be resolved by politicians who make promises that seem to vastly underestimate the problem.

Leland Saito takes the reader on a trip to the more recent makeovers in the city, focusing on the Convention Center, Staples (now Crypto.com), and L.A. Live. These major urban removal/renewal projects caused the displacement of the people who lived in the areas that stood in their way. Saito mainly assesses the impact of the projects on racial minorities, but senior citizens living in old



Bunker Hill residences also had to look elsewhere for places to live. I recall the large sign on Bunker Hill's Dome Apartments, once one of the great mansions on the Hill, stating: "Urban Renewal will not affect this building until 1965." Well, 1965 came, and the Dome Apartments, one of the last of the Bunker Hill buildings, went. Ben Abril, an artist and

long-time member of the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners, painted numerous pictures of the Bunker Hill residences, a neighborhood effectively wiped out by the CRA.

Saito carefully documents how private developers succeeded for a time in getting the City to go along with construction of the Convention Center. Vigorous use of Eminent Domain, coupled with branding the neighborhood as crime-ridden, populated by drug addicts, and blight enabled developers to build the Center without troubling over where the displaced Latinos and African Americans would go. Ironically, the Convention Center turned out to be a white elephant, located too far south of downtown and without adjacent hotels, restaurants, and other amenities to attract tourists.

Developers, especially Philip Anschutz who would spearhead the creation of the Staples Center, had an overall plan for the makeover of Downtown. Its industrial and commercial focus would be modified by a Downtown that attracted tourists to major sports events, construction of high-rent apartments, modern hotels, upscale restaurants, all in all, an attractive package that would make Downtown a “happening place.”

But Latino and African Americans fought back, organizing the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE), and other groups that to some degree succeeded in negotiating with developers over construction jobs, unionization, and living wages for service workers, including those who cleaned up the trash in Staples Center after everyone else went home.

The large number of acronyms in the book can get confusing, but its index lists them both ways, so it is fairly clear which organizations are on one side or the other. Negotiations with developers helped create Community Benefits Agreements (CBA) that promised compensation for relocation and living wages for employees in the new venues. In a lengthy concluding sentence, Saito writes, “Lofty goals, but in a concrete example of how they are being accomplished in Los Angeles, trade unions, once the bastion of White Male privilege, are now working

with government agencies and grassroots community organizations to create and improve programs to harness the spending of billions of dollars of public funds to support good wages and benefits that will help all workers, regardless of race” (p.207).

The tone of the book may seem polemical, but Saito provides plenty of documentation to record both sides of the urban redevelopment issue. Most of his research is based on published sources, the bibliography running to almost thirty pages. In lieu of endnotes, either Saito or Stanford University Press made the editorial decision to cite sources parenthetically within the text. This is often distracting, especially when multiple sources are used. Also, it would have been nice to include some photographs of the Convention Center, the Staples/Crypt.com Center/Arena, and L.A. Live, the new hotels, photos of Anschutz, and labor organizers such as Miguel Contreras and María Elena Durazo, among others. There is only one map in the book, and it is unfortunately rather vague in pinpointing the places under discussion. That said, this is a valuable work that in many ways reinforces the notion that Los Angeles has the bad habit of erasing its history. Saito effectively reminds us that what was there once has been replaced at a cost to people who had the bad luck of living in the way of the replacements.

— Abraham Hoffman





**INDIANS, LATINOS, AND CONFEDERATES,
A WESTERN FAMILY: 1598-1973
Frank J. Brito**

**Brand Book 26, Los Angeles Corral,
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