



**A BRIEF HISTORY OF
THE TONGVA TRIBE:
THE NATIVE INHABITANTS OF
THE LANDS OF
THE PUENTE HILLS PRESERVE**



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While several bands of Indians are thought to have traversed the lands now comprising the Puente Hills Preserve, these lands, once known by the name Awing-na (or Ahwiinga), served as the major homeland of the Tongva Indians. Historically, the tribe has also been known as the Gabrielinos because of the incorporation of much of their population into Mission San Gabriel in the late eighteenth century. Since Spanish missionaries imposed that name upon them it carries negative connotations to many in the tribe today, so descendants of this people have reverted to using their original name.¹ This paper will respect those wishes as it seeks to understand who the Tongva were before contact with Europeans and what they became in the two distinct periods immediately after contact: the Mission Era and the era right after secularization of the former Mission lands. Following the Tongva Nation in these periods demonstrates how important the Puente Hills Preserve lands were for the tribe during eras of great loss, transition and, finally, adaptation. (In the rest of this paper I will shorten the Puente Hills Preserve to Preserve.) Understanding more of the history of the Tongva shows how important the tribe was to the survival of the Spanish missionaries and to the success of the ranch owners who followed them, so important it is possible that an additional mission, now mostly lost to history, was once erected at La Puente by rancher William Workman for use by his Tongva employees.²

Though one distinct tribe inhabited the land of the Preserve, scholars have extensively studied three distinct periods of that tribe's habitation: native life and culture before contact with Europeans, changes encountered during the period of the Spanish Missions, and the period following the secularization of the missions when those native peoples who had survived found

¹ *Kuruvugna: A Place Where We Are in the Sun: The Bulletin of the Gabrielino/Tongva Springs Foundation*. Winter Issue, 2005.

² This concept comes from a reading of the 1855 Public Survey Map of the Workman Rancho from the files of the Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum Archives. On this map there is a clear notation of a mission on the grounds, yet no mission is in the records. Collections Manager Paul R. Spitzzeri considers it to be either the notation of a planned mission never built or the mistake of a surveyor who considered the Workman Family Chapel as part of the mission property.

employment on what became the Workman/Rowland Rancho. To illuminate Tongva life and culture during each of these periods I have chosen to provide profiles of several individual members of the tribe, since individual lives can so compellingly illustrate the attitudes and experiences of the group as a whole.

For most information about the Tongva, previous historians have relied heavily on the writings of two white men: rancher and journalist Hugo Reid, who lived among the Tongva in the mid-eighteen hundreds, and sociologist and anthropologist, C. Hart Merriam, who studied the scattered members of the tribe in the early 1900s. Historian Douglas Monroy acknowledged Reid's contribution to the preservation of Tongva history when he wrote that Reid's letters significantly informed his own historical narrative.³ What is less often noted among historians, however, is the fact that both Reid and Merriam gained much of their knowledge about the tribe from two particular Tongva women, making the names of Bartolomea de Comicrabit, who married Reid in 1837, and Narcissa Higuera, who provided Merriam with his language list and allowed him to record her singing of sacred songs, equally important in the preservation of the heritage that this paper explores.

PRE-EUROPEAN CONTACT

In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo led the first European expedition to explore what is now the west coast of the United States. He sailed up the California coast and landed on Catalina Island, making the first recorded contact between the Spanish people

³ Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 160-161.

and the Tongva Indians, a semi-nomadic coastal hunter-gatherer tribe that, at the time, populated a territory covering almost 4,000 miles including both of the offshore islands now known as Santa Catalina and San Clemente, part of Orange County, and most of modern day Los Angeles County. These lands in turn provided food and shelter for a population of nearly 5,000 people.⁴ Ninety percent of the mainland Tongva territory lay in the extremely rich Sonoran life zone. As classified by C. Merriam Hart in his 1889 study of western American plant life, the Sonoran life zone consisted of high desert woodland and chaparral where abundant food resources included acorn, pine nut, small game, deer and quail. The Tongva traveled among other tribes on foot and also by canoes, called ti'ats, which could hold 15 people and were specially designed and crafted by their artisans out of large wooden planks.⁵ The canoes allowed them to enjoy a rich variety of sea resources such as fish, shellfish, and sea mammals and to offer the resources in trade to their inland neighbors.

The landing party Cabrillo sent ashore fell under attack, and he broke his leg attempting to aid his soldiers, an accident which took the explorer's life. His accident proved prophetic in regards to how often these two cultures would clash in subsequent encounters.⁶ Cabrillo died on January 3, 1543, and his expedition returned to Mexico without him. As they had found no valuable metals, only what they classified with their Eurocentric bias as yet "more poor Indians," the Spaniards left the Tongva alone for the next two hundred and thirty years.

⁴ Mark Frank Acuna. *A Journey to Tovanger (A Journey to the World)*, A paper presented as part of the "Natural History of Urban Southern California: Lectures and Excursions" Series, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (Claremont, CA), Spring 1999 (Photocopy of author's typescript in Special Collections, Honnold/Mudd Library at the Claremont Colleges)

⁵ Robert F. Heizer and M.A. Whipple, *The California Indians: A Source Book*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 355.

⁶Robert Heizer. Impact of Colonization on the Native California Societies. In *Native American Perspectives on the Hispanic Colonization of Alta California*, ed. Edward D. Castillo, 121. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991).

How long the tribe had lived on the lands of the Puente Hills Preserve is still in question. Language studies and archeology have placed the Tongva in the Shoshonean branch of Uto-Aztecan linguistic stock, surmising that this branch migrated to the Pacific Coast through the current Southwest states of Arizona and New Mexico at a time as yet unclear. Since the Tongva used steatite or soapstone cooking pots instead of making their own pottery, scholars have not yet found a clear way to date their arrival such as has been possible with the Hopi culture of the Southwest. Through fragments of pottery, taken in trade from those areas, archeologists have been able to calculate Tongva presence in the area dating to 7th, 8th or 9th century B.C.E.⁷ The Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits holds a 7,000 year old skeleton that museum officials believe is the only human ever to be trapped by the pits. It is the skeleton of a Tongva female.⁸

While archeologists work to discover definite dates and times, the Tongvan language illustrates the culture of the Tongva by virtue of showing us what they found important enough to create words to describe. For instance, in Merriam's extensive 1903 interview with Narcissa Higuera, a Tongva woman who preferred to use her married name, Mrs. James Rosemyre, Merriam found "to-vah-aht" translated as "pine nut" and "shev-ve" as "acorn," two staples of the tribe's diet. In fact, the acorn was so important that Merriam recorded words for a feast of acorns (ke-hi-e), acorn meal before leaching (kwarpar-e), acorn meal after leaching (wo-e-ch) and acorn mush (we-ch). Of

⁷ Bernice Eastman Johnston. *California's Gabrielino Indians*. (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1962), 2-5.

⁸ Christine Pelisek. "Casino Nation: Indians and Tribal War Over a Club in Compton" *LA WEEKLY*, April 9-15, 2004.

importance to the tribe in nature, ah-kar-ah-ah-poo-ahn meant the plume of a California quail and earthquakes translated to Yi-tok-ah-hor.⁹

Rosemyre had been trained as a shaman (Yo-vaa-re-kam) by her parents, and by tribal custom was charged with composing sacred songs and dances, telling the stories of the tribe, and creating poetry in honor of great events or people.¹⁰ Therefore, her contribution to Merriam's language section involving Mortuary, Ceremonial, and Religious Terms was extensive, including names for a burial ground or cemetery (koo-nasgna), a funeral pyre (ah-toch-gnah) and the ashes and burnt bones of the dead (koo-see-rok). In response Merriam's request for the name of the box or urn one would use to store such ashes after cremation, Rosemyre replied that they were not saved, but scattered to the East.¹¹

Rosemyre served as a solid connection to the scattered tribe since, when she was born in San Gabriel in the mid 1850s, her mother was a Tongva while her father came from the neighboring tribe to the north, the Serrano¹² (Ko-ko-em-kam) so she also provided Merriam with the language of that tribe for his study. Sadly, neither she nor Merriam recorded the names of her parents at that time, so they have been lost to history. On page 75 of his linguistic study, Merriam made note of "Common Girl Names" of the Tongva and beside the contribution 'Loo-Soo' he hand wrote "Mrs. Rosemyer's own name."¹³

⁹ C. Hart Merriam Papers, Collection #BANC MSS 80/18c, Negative # BNEG Box 1556; 48. Reels 48 and 49.

¹⁰ Acuna, *A Journey to Tovarager*.

¹¹ C. Hart Merriam Papers, Collection #BANC MSS 80/18c, Negative # BNEG Box 1556; 48. Reels 48 and 49.

¹² Robert F. Heizer, *The Indians of Los Angeles County: Hugo Reid's Letters of 1852* (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum Papers, 1968), 5.

¹³ C. Hart Merriam Papers, Collection #BANC MSS 80/18c, Negative # BNEG Box 1556; 48. Reels 48 and 49.

Socially, the tribe inhabited a collection of villages of 50 to 500 people. The Spanish missionaries would eventually record names for many of these villages but no maps have yet been found to clarify exactly how many of the villages were located on the lands that became the Puente Hills Preserve. One village of major importance, Ahwing-na (or Ahwiinga), appears frequently in ethnographic studies of the area. As interpreted by certain historians, among them Bernice Johnson and J. P. Harrington, there is some data that might prove that Ahwing-na served as a type of provincial capital among the Tongva people, acting as a center of trading and home to leaders who held power over several nearby villages, but such data is scarce and has not yet been corroborated by many other sources.¹⁴ Since Tongva habitations were built for easy construction and destruction to facilitate moving quarters during different seasons of the year, it is hard to claim one location as a permanent site for any of these villages, much less to guarantee the status of any particular village. Even William McCawley in his thorough study of the Tongva, considers the political status of Ahwing-na to be speculative in nature.

While historians and archaeologists continue to investigate the physical locations of particular villages, the culture of those villages has been more thoroughly recorded by ethnographers. Each village was ruled by its own chief or Tumia'r (or tomyaar), and each bonded with the others by economic and religious ties as well as the social ties of family. Tongva Indians regarded marriage as a diplomatic arrangement that strengthened trading and security needs. This contributed to making marriage an economic relationship, which underscored the importance of women in tribal society.¹⁵ Larger Tongva society was organized under a hierarchical structure in which the elite group of

¹⁴ William McCawley. *The Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles* (Banning: Malki Museum Press, Morongo Indian Reservation, 1996), 45, 69, 91.

¹⁵ Albert L. Hurtado, *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 172.

chiefs, their families and any other families who were successful within the village as artisans, hunters or traders sat at the top.¹⁶ Since the position was based on blood lineage, Chiefs could be male or female. If a chief had no son or brother, elders could appoint his sister or eldest daughter, but not his wife as she was of a different lineage. The other men and women of the village had rights to approve or disprove the elders' choice. The second highest group recognized in Tongva society included families of long lineage in the tribe who might be less successful than their ancestors, but were still respected for past contributions to the welfare of the tribe as well as other moderately successful families in the village. The third group contained most of the remaining population.¹⁷

Work divided itself along gender lines with men acquiring meat through hunting and fishing and women planting and harvesting vegetation and preparing the food. Women also wove the many baskets necessary for transporting items to trade or for use in sacred ceremonies and they passed on the tribe's traditions as they raised their children. Each gender respected the other's contribution to the whole. Women held high regard because the acorns, pine nuts, and other plant foods they gathered were staples of the Indian economy. As historians of Native American culture have noted, Indian women worked as horticulturists tending to plants to increase the tribe's food production. The mindset of the early explorers, the missionaries and even the early historians of Native American societies across the continent considered hunter-gathering a childlike activity, evidence of the Indians' need to be trained as farmers. Slowly, however, through the work of ethnobotany, writers and scholars are coming to understand that gatherers had to

¹⁶ McCawley, *Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles*, 104-105.

¹⁷ Edward. D. Castillo, "Gender Status Decline Resistance and Accommodation Among Female Neophytes in the Missions of California: A San Gabriel Case Study," *American Indian Cultures and Research Journal* 18 (1994): 68.

tend the plants from which they gathered or there would be no bounty.¹⁸ This new understanding helps explain why the work of women in Native American societies such as the Tongva was so essential.

One of the major cultural conflicts to arise between the Tongva and the Spaniards came in the form of work rhythms. From the accumulationist perspective of the Europeans, Indian patterns of working intermittently--when nature allowed hunting and acorn harvesting or when survival required it--created the impression of indolence. This rhythm further fed the Spaniards' belief that the Tongva (and most other Indians they encountered) were childlike and needed their guidance and protection despite the fact that Indians had survived in the area for centuries.¹⁹

As for religion, the Tongva viewed humanity not as “the focus of creation but merely a strand in a larger web of life” so humans' primary religious responsibility was to act as wise stewards of the earth's living things and sacred places, offering ceremonies of thanksgiving.²⁰ Specifically, the Tongva believed in one god, whose sacred name of Qua-o-ar or Chingichngish they rarely uttered. In common speech they would refer to Y-yo-ha-rivg-nain, which translated to The Giver of Life. This supreme being organized the universe and laid it out on the shoulders of seven giants. The Tongva creation story matched that of the Christians in that it concerned a first man and woman, Tobohar and Pabavit, and the fact that Qua-o-ar lived in a heaven-like location, receiving the souls of all who die.²¹ Heaven and earth were originally brother and sister. Earth gave birth to Wiyot who ruled the Tongva people cruelly so his sons killed him to

¹⁸ For a discussion of changing attitudes among scholars as regards Native American land use see Rebecca Solnit *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West* and William Cronon *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England*.

¹⁹ Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers*, 16-17.

²⁰ Edward. D. Castillo, “Gender Status Decline Resistance and Accommodation”, 68.

²¹ Heizer, *Indians of Los Angeles County*, 19-21.

end his evil. Their faith stories tell that, while the Tongva people gathered to decide what to do next, Qua-o-ar appeared to them for the first time.

To shepherd the Tongva on their spiritual path, two kinds of shamans, or religious leaders divided their work two ways. Those known as Ahhoovaredoot could interpret dreams, do astrology, make magic potions and herbal medicines for cures. The Yovaarekam were more ceremonial in nature, charged with composing sacred songs and dances, telling the stories of the tribe and creating poetry in honor of great events or people.²² Several of these songs have survived because Mrs. James Rosemyre sang them for Merriam to record. While she described to him one of the most sacred events, the Tongva Mortuary Ceremony, she sang the very song she had sung earlier in her life at her own parents' Fiesta for the Dead ceremonies. She also described the forty or fifty foot Ko-too-mut pole mourning Tongva would cut from a freshly cut pine tree trunk, paint and hang with ornately designed mortuary baskets. Mourners would dance around it for the eight day Mortuary Ceremony and then leave it at the burial site as a memorial to the dead.²³ Eventually, these markers made from natural products disappeared back into nature, allowing successive inhabitants of the land to forget the previous owners and leaving no easy path for archeologists to follow. Despite being born and raised on mission grounds, Rosemyre continued these practices throughout her life, which makes it probable that other Tongvas did so as well despite the presence of the missions.

MISSION ERA

In the late 1760s, the Spaniards in California began to fear further encroachment on their territory by Russian fur traders in the northern parts of modern-day California.

²² Acuna, *Journey to Tovanger*.

²³ C. Hart Merriam. *Studies of California Indians*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 77-86.



St. Joseph Church Alter Society Party. Courtesy of Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum.

To curb the Russian advance, the Spaniards established a set of missions to bring Christianity to the new peoples they encountered, making them honorable, and taxable, subjects of the Spanish crown before the Russians could claim them and the territory they held.²⁴ In the journal he kept of the 1769 expedition to what is now San Diego, Father Juan Crespi recorded some of the first impressions taken by Europeans of the Tongva Indians. Upon making camp near “a large heathen village with a small pool of fresh water” which was two hours walk from their earlier camp in modern day Fullerton, the padre noted that the whole village came to meet them. He counted what he called “70

²⁴ Kent G. Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3 and Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 20.

souls in all” (he saw only men and boys) and, of most importance, “none of them [were] carrying weapons.” He noted that the expedition understood that messengers were being sent to other villages “to tell them that we do not harm them but are good people, so that they are already notified and quite fearless of us.”²⁵ Of the three journals the explorers kept of this expedition, only Crespi mentioned or described the Tongva people they encountered. Perhaps since he was on a mission to create converts to Catholicism, Crespi was more likely to consider these important encounters, whereas the other journals, kept by soldiers, concentrated on the potential profits of goods found in the area

As a result of this expedition, the Spanish built the first mission, San Diego de Alcalá, was constructed in 1769. Mission San Gabriel, the fourth in the chain and the nearest to the subject of this paper, came in 1771. The many Tongva villages surrounding the missions became known as *rancherías*, or little ranches, and the newly-arrived Spanish gave them Spanish names. The Tongva people understood these actions to be perilously permanent, especially once construction of the mission buildings began, and feared these newcomers would be destructive to their land and food supply, according to scholar Edward D. Castillo who judged their discomfort with Spanish presence by the immediacy of their resistance.²⁶

Tongva resistance to missionaries came soon after the arrival of the Spanish padres in San Gabriel, California in September, 1771, as reported by Father Zephyrin Engelhardt in his 1897 history of the Franciscans in California. Although modern scholars rely on Engelhardt’s accounts of events for accuracy with respect to dates and

²⁵ Juan Crespi. *A Description of Distant Roads: Original Journals of the First Expedition into California*. (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 2001), 323-327.

²⁶ Edward D. Castillo, *Native American Perspectives on the Hispanic Colonization of Alta California*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 176-180.

names since he based much on the writings and legal records of the missionaries (many now lost), they nevertheless dismiss many of the arguments he presented as merely a defense of the Franciscans he so clearly admired. Engelhardt began writing after H.H. Bancroft published his six-volume history of California in the 1880s, which for the first time criticized the padres for harsh treatment of the Indians with whom they came in contact. Immediately after that, Engelhardt wrote a series of books “that can only be characterized as church self-history, with very evident Eurocentric bias,” according to scholars Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo whose specialty is the impact of the mission system on California Indians.²⁷

Still, the story of how Fathers Angel Somera and Pedro Benito Cambon and ten soldiers arrived from San Diego to found the new mission near the Rio San Miguel/San Gabriel River could not hide the fact that their presence was not welcome among the native inhabitants of the area. Upon arrival in the area on September 8, 1771, “a great multitude of savages, armed and headed by two chiefs, appeared and with frightful yells.”²⁸ One of the Fathers then unfurled a banner showing an oil painting of Mary, (according to the New Testament) the mother of Jesus. In Engelhardt’s account, “The Indians had scarcely seen the picture when they at once threw down their arms, and their two chiefs ran up to lay their necklaces at the feet of the beautiful Queen.” Engelhardt also proudly noted that other men, women, and children then came carrying seeds and other offerings, which he took as a sign of the natives’ openness to receiving

²⁷ Robert H. Jackson, and Edward Castillo. *Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 4.

²⁸ Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, *San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1927), 4.)

Christianity.²⁹ The padres at the time took this as a sign that their presence was acceptable to the Tongvas.

Modern scholarship conducted by those who have studied the Tongva religious beliefs, argues different possibilities for the Tongva people's reaction to the painting. Tongva Indians may have thought it was a rendering of their own female spirit Chukit who, impregnated by lightning, bore a male child they, too, regarded as "the Son of God." In this case the Tongva people may have thought the Spaniards shared their knowledge of Chukit and considered it a friendly gesture.³⁰ All that can be known for sure is that the unveiling of a piece of art abated this first active form of resistance. Peaceful solutions would not come that easily again. With the fear of future attacks in mind, the padres requested two new soldiers to fortify the mission, but in many ways soldiers became a continuing source of problems.

On October 19, 1771, a month after the padres' arrival and two days after the requested two new soldiers had arrived and reported for duty, a crowd of Indians attacked the soldiers. In Engelhardt's account, one of the soldiers had "insulted the wife of a chief." This probably stands as another example of Engelhardt's attempt to absolve the church from wrongdoing because later historians, including Douglas Monroy in *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*, argue that the 'insult' was actually a sexual assault. The rest of the details, however, have yet to be challenged and they offer an example of the second resistance the Tongva showed the missionaries within the course of their first month. As Engelhardt reports:

²⁹ Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California* (Harbor Springs, Michigan: Holy Childhood Indian School, 1897), 266-267.

³⁰ Edward. D. Castillo, "Gender Status Decline Resistance and Accomodation", 70.

“The enraged husband discharged an arrow at the guilty soldier, who stopped it with his shield and killed the chieftain with a musket ball. Terrified by the destructive effect of the gun, the savages fled, when the soldiers cut off the fallen warrior’s head and set it on a pole before the gate. Fearing another assault from the Indians, the commandant sent the guilty soldier to Monterey, and for greater security stationed sixteen soldiers at San Gabriel... Strange to say, one of the first children brought to the mission for baptism was the son of the murdered chief, and the sacrament was administered at the request of the widow.”³¹

Even Father Engelhardt found that act strange and there is no written record to explain why the Tongva woman would have brought the child of the man they murdered to the missionaries for baptism. Perhaps the Tongva people thought presenting one child for this ritual in which they had yet to be thoroughly schooled would pacify the invading Spanish and encourage them to live in peace or even to leave the area. However we account for the Tongva people’s actions, the Spanish took the baptism as a sign of their success and began to recruit others to work and live at the mission where they would be indoctrinated into the Catholic faith. Historians have described this recruitment as either invitation or kidnapping, depending on whether the scholar’s sympathies lay with Church or with the Tongva. All that can be known for sure is that the mission offered something new and possibly intriguing to some Tongva, but also offered an unfamiliar work rhythm and unending workload that kept much of the population from voluntarily joining. Too, many who joined changed their minds as fugitivism presented yet another problem for the missions. According to William McCawley, 473 neophytes escaped from Mission San Gabriel before the year 1817, a number that represents more than 8% of the total

³¹ Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, *The Franciscans in California*, 266-267.

baptisms.³² Those who did not become Christian appear in the priests' diaries and letters as renegades who stole livestock and foodstuffs. The padres did not recognize such actions as the Tongva continuing to practice their hunter-gatherer traditions.

The first baptism led to others so that by December 1775, four years later, the mission recorded a population of 198 baptized Natives. When we recall that the entire Tongva population upon European contact was probably in the thousands, and recognizing that villages in the area of the Puente Hills Preserve could have contained over 1,000 Tongva, a mere 198 baptisms does not appear to indicate extraordinary progress on the part of the Catholic Church. The rigid structure of life at the mission must have been difficult for the Tongva people who, as mentioned previously, were used to working according to their own cultural and seasonal rhythms and relaxing at other times. Tongva children who went to live at the mission stayed in guarded dormitories called *monjerios* from the age of six until puberty. How many went because of parental choice, family or tribal need—how much was willing and how much coerced—cannot be measured. When girls reached age thirteen the padres chose husbands for them from among the other Christianized Tongva or among the soldiers guarding the mission. Should the chosen husband die and a young woman become a widow, she was required to return to live in the *monjerio* until another appropriate new husband could be chosen.³³

Each mission day began with a celebration of the mass at sunrise, followed by a breakfast of corn meal mush called *atole*. Work came next with neophytes (the term for the new converts), supposedly assigned tasks to which they were best suited. Vegetable soup that the Spanish called *pozole* came at noon followed by more work and, finally, at

³² McCawley, *Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles*, 196.

³³ Edward. D. Castillo, "Gender Status Decline Resistance and Accomodation", 67-93.

sunset, everyone gathered to recite prayers and sing religious songs.³⁴ The work the padres expected the Tongva to accomplish included weaver's arts for women--carding, spinning, weaving, and working a loom. Men were assigned exterior farm chores. This farm labor was performed for the padres by the neophytes as well as by the non-baptized, who worked for wages or by the newly arriving settlers from Mexico in the late 1780s.³⁵

Resistance against the Spanish missionaries and soldiers continued for the next century. Tongva women as well as men participated in the acts against the Europeans. Much of the female resistance appears to have been caused by their continued degradation at the hands of the soldiers who were supposed to protect the padres. But, according to reports from Father Junipero Serra, founder of the missions, even the padres disliked the soldiers for their idleness, quarrelsomeness, impudence toward religion, and insolence. Serra attempted to rectify the problems between the soldiers and the female neophytes by seeking to get Captain Pedro Fages, the military commander of California, relieved of his command. In a letter written to the Viceroy of Mexico on May 21, 1773, Serra detailed the lack of control Fages exhibited over the soldiers:

The soldiers, six or more, would leave in the morning, either with permission of the corporal or without it, on horseback, and would go to the rancherias, though many leagues distant. When the men or women on seeing them ran away, the soldiers availed themselves (as the declarations of the Fathers repeatedly and also the complaints of the pagans informed me) of the dexterity they possess in catching with the lasso a cow or a mule; and in this same manner they lassoed Indian women, in order to

³⁴ Engelhardt, *San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles*, 35-37.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 60-63.

gratify their unbridled lust; and occasionally, when the Indian men sought to defend the women, the soldiers killed several with musket balls.”

Serra also reported that “not even the boys” who came to the Missions, “were safe from the lewdness of the soldiers.”

Rather than succeeding in getting Fages relieved of command, however, Serra’s letter resulted in the requested retirement of the senior padre in residence. Fages eventually became Governor of Monterey. Serra’s letter also prompted Viceroy Bucareli to declare that the missionaries stood *in loco parentis* to the neophytes, possessing all the rights and duties of parents. While this appears to have reduced some of the power the soldiers had wielded, it now left the Tongva neophytes, as the legal wards of the padres, and therefore even more at the mercy of the padres. The missionaries could now decree who and when the neophytes could marry and where they could live.³⁶ Clearly, this did not ameliorate the situation, as illustrated in the life of a Tongva woman named Toypurina, who was convicted of conspiracy to attack Mission San Gabriel in 1785.³⁷

Among the records of births, deaths and baptisms are records of “Investigations of Occurences at the Missions” kept by the missionaries and it is from these records that even just a few of Toypurina’s words, translated by a soldier-interpreter, managed to survive into the modern century. Historians have gone from romanticizing her story, as did Thomas Workman Temple II in 1953, to chronicling her rebellion as one of many

³⁶ Ibid 11-16.

³⁷ Details of Toypurina and this planned attack against the Mission San Gabriel can be found in Edward. D. Castillo, “Gender Status Decline Resistance and Accomodation Among Female Neophytes in the Missions of California: A San Gabriel Case Study” *American Indian Cultures and Research Journal* 18 (1994): 67-93; Phillips, George Harwood. *Chiefs and Challengers: Indian Resistance and Cooperation in Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Rose Marie Beebe, Robert M. Senkewicz eds. *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535 – 1846* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001), 247-249; Steve W. Hackel, "Indian Testimony and the Mission San Gabriel Uprising of 1785", *Ethnohistory*, (Volume 50, Number 4, Fall 2003), and Thomas Workman Temple II. “Toypurina the Witch and the Indian Uprising at San Gabriel” *The Masterkey for Indian Lore and History*. Vol. 32, September/October, 1958.

acts of resistance by Tongvas to the mission system, to venerating her as a hero, as do the modern day Tongva descendants.³⁸ The audacity of the attack generated written materials and oral histories that have preserved Toypurina's name for over 200 years, despite the fact that she died in 1799. Toypurina became a symbol of Tongva/Gabrielino resistance to the missions and an icon of California Indian women's resistance to colonial oppression. Even today she remains publicly and permanently memorialized in a prayer mound developed by a Gabrielino traditionalist and Chicana artist and placed in a Metrolink commuter train platform in the city of Baldwin Park.³⁹

While the interpretations of Toypurina's resistance have varied over the centuries, a few known facts have remained essentially the same. In 1785, a female shaman in her mid-twenties⁴⁰ named Toypurina, who lived on the Jachivit Rancheria, conspired with an unhappy neophyte named Nicholas Jose to clear their valley of all of the Spaniards who had usurped their lands by killing them all. Toypurina's powers were thought to be so strong that she was expected to kill the missionaries before the main attack so their followers would only have the soldiers to fight.⁴¹ While scholars cannot calculate her spiritual powers, her political and persuasive powers can be judged by the fact that she recruited three entire villages of non-Christianized Indians as well as several local chiefs to join the plot. The additional fact that this list included Chief Ajiyivi (also spelled Aliyivat) of the Jajamivi Rancheria, Chief Tomasajaquichi of Juyuvit Rancheria and

³⁸ The Haramokngna American Indian Culture Center at the Red Box Visitor Center on the Angeles Crest Highway offers flyers and storytelling extolling the courage of Toypurina. For more information call (626) 449-8975 or (310) 455-1588 or visit during their Saturday or Sunday hours.

³⁹ Steve W. Hackel, "Indian Testimony and the Mission San Gabriel Uprising of 1785", *Ethnohistory*, (Volume 50, Number 4, Fall 2003), pp. 649.

⁴⁰ There is a dispute about Toypurina's age. Some historians report she was twenty-four at the time of the attack, some say twenty-seven.

⁴¹ Thomas Workman Temple II. "Toypurina the Witch and the Indian Uprising at San Gabriel" *The Masterkey for Indian Lore and History*. Vol. 32, September/October, 1958, 137.

Chief Temejavaguichi of her own Jachivit Rancheria indicates that she held some level of authority over male chiefs (or certainly had strong powers of persuasion). Her tribal chief, Temejavaguichia was also her brother, which might explain his easy participation.⁴² The fact that the majority of those recruited had not converted to Christianity suggests their deep dissatisfaction with the padres' lengthy presence in their world. It is significant to note that each of the men, when arrested and testifying to his part in the conspiracy identified himself with the Tongva name of his village. They needed no new words to describe places they had known for generations.

Discovered by a soldier at the mission, the conspiracy failed. Alerted to the plan, the padres set a trap and, on the appointed night, October 25, 1785, Toypurina and her followers found themselves surrounded and disarmed before they could harm any of the soldiers or missionaries. Governor Fages came personally to investigate the conspiracy. The warriors not captured in the original trap were identified, sought out, punished with fifteen to twenty lashes, and released. Seven of the Christianized Indian attackers, three of the gentile ones, two non-Christian chiefs, Toypurina and Nicolas Jose were all arrested and tried. Jose Maria Pico, a soldier and Spaniard whom authorities regarded as being implicitly trustworthy and "who knows the language of these natives" served as translator at the trial.⁴³ It is significant to note the fact that an interpreter was necessary. Though the Tongva people knew many of the languages of their Indian neighbors in order to facilitate trade, at least this group of non-Christianized Tongvas had not bothered to learn the language of the Spaniards in the fourteen years they had shared the lands. This may suggest that, at least among elite Tongvas like Toypurina and the other chiefs

⁴² Ibid, 145-147.

⁴³ Ibid,141.

arrested with her, the Tongva tribe retained the idea that the uninvited invaders would one day leave their land.

The first Tongva to testify at the trial, also known as the *Expediente*, Chief Tomasajaquichi had allowed his own son to be baptized at the mission in 1773. In Pico's translation of Tomasajaquichi's testimony, the chief claimed to have no grudge against the padres, and he blamed his participation in the attack on Toypurina's "sweet words and hidden threats" and expressed a desire to "get my hands around her throat and still her serpent's tongue." He also cast blame on Nicolas Jose as the other main conspirator. So too, did Chief Ajyivi, who testified second and claimed not to have been part of the original plan, but to have encountered the group on its way to the mission. He explained that he merely joined so as to be included in the excitement of the event. Nicolas Jose, himself a baptized Tongva, did not require a translator.⁴⁴ He answered the questions in broken Castillian Spanish, and admitted to planning the attack. He said he had come to hate the padres because once he had been baptized, they refused to let him perform ancient tribal dances and other traditional blessings.⁴⁵ He was particularly agitated over being denied the right to hold the annual Tongva Mourning Ceremony to honor the souls of those who had died since the last performance of the Ceremony the previous fall. Clearly some of the Tongva people did not yet understand that in adopting the new

⁴⁴ Ibid, 145-147.

⁴⁵ Jose's attempt to practice his original religion, though it was against the commandments of the religion into which he allowed himself to be baptized, follows the pattern recognized recently by scholars of minority assimilation. In researching Chinese-American women in San Francisco for her book *Unbound Feet: The Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* historian Judy Young found a recurring model of women who found nothing wrong with attending Christian churches but maintaining Buddhist altars in their homes.

Christianity, they were expected to replace their old beliefs entirely. Nicolas Jose feared that the ban on dances would threaten the repose of dead relatives' spirits.⁴⁶

Toypurina's words from her own testimony illuminate both her power among her people and her deep resentment of the missionaries. When asked why they came to the mission armed and ready to kill priests and soldiers who had "never harmed them" Toypurina's translator responded, "it was true that she had ordered Chief Tomasjaquichi to come and persuade the Christians to trust her and not the priests. She said that she advised him to do this because she was angry with the priests and all the others at the mission, because they were living on their land."⁴⁷ Scholars have speculated that Toypurina's other motive could have been to defend her status since shamans had lost much respect and authority especially given the difficulty they had in curing their villages of the newly introduced diseases that claimed so many lives.⁴⁸

A hint of the padres' fear of the female conspirator comes from the harsher punishment they inflicted upon her. They freed the chiefs, allowing and allowed them to return to their rancherias, though under continuing surveillance. Nicolas Jose received punishment of six years of hard labor at the San Diego presidio; Toypurina was exiled for life to the most distant of all the missions, Mission San Carlos Borromeo in Monterey. What may have been even more punishing, she was baptized while incarcerated on March 8, 1787⁴⁹, and the Padre changed her name to Regina Josepha. The padres later used Toypurina's "conversion" to dissuade other dissidents, making good use of her

⁴⁶ Hackel, "Indian Testimony and the Mission San Gabriel Uprising of 1785", 651.

⁴⁷ Rose Marie Beebe, Robert M. Senkewicz, eds. *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535 – 1846* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2001), 247-249. The direct Spanish translation was: 'Estaba enojada con los Padres y con todos los de esta mision porque estamos viviendoaquiensutierra'' according to Hackel, 655.

⁴⁸ Robert H. Jackson, and Edward Castillo. *Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization*, 77.

⁴⁹ Libro de Bautismos (book of baptisms) of Mission San Gabriel Archangel, 1787.

apparent acceptance of baptism, her acceptance of Catholic marriage to a presidio soldier named Manuel Montero, and the eventual baptism of her four children as they promoted proper choices for all the Tongva people. Toypurina died at the age of 39, on May 22, 1799, at Mission San Juan Bautista.

By this time, the La Puente portion of Mission San Gabriel had become known as a grand sheep pasture with 4,000 head of sheep and 3,000 cattle, all cared for by Tongva neophytes. It also provided most of the grain for the mission in the period from 1806 to 1831, under the supervision of Padre Jose Maria Zalvidea.⁵⁰ The future lands of the Puente Hills Preserve were so prosperous that early settler and soldier, Manuel Nieto, petitioned them as a grant for his service in 1796. Twelve years earlier Nieto had been granted the second rancho in the area along with 1,100 head of cattle. His petition for what was then called La Zanja de la Puente fell into dispute with the padres who argued that they still needed this particularly rich tract of land to harvest enough food for all the neophytes under their care. After reading the report from the survey required to resolve the dispute, the padres felt that it proved, “in order that the Indian neophytes may live in tolerable comfort, they need the land and water of La Zanja de la Puente for the planting of corn; for, although in the immediate vicinity of the Mission there is much land, it is not good, especially not for corn, and even for wheat it yields not a good quality or quantity.”⁵¹

A complaint against the padres by these new white settlers sheds light on conditions at the mission for the baptized Tongvas. In 1810, some settlers were angry that priests would not come to the new pueblo of Los Angeles to administer the Holy

⁵⁰ Leonore Rowland. *The Romance of La Puente Rancho: Including Excerpts from La Puente Valley, Past and Present by Janet and Dan N. Powell, (W.P.A. Writers Project)*. (Covina: Neilson Press, 1958), 35-38.

⁵¹ Engelhardt. *San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles*, 65-70.

Sacraments, especially last rites. In their own defense, Fathers Miguel and Zalvidea explained that they were busy attending to ill neophytes. At the Mission they noticed a “putrid and contagious malady has recently been inflicted on the Indians. It began to show itself after the sojourn which Don J. B. Anza’s expedition made at San Gabriel and, in the course of time it has spread among the Indians here to such an extent that as soon as a child is born it already has in itself this contagion.” The historian, Father Engelhardt, believed the malady to be venereal disease⁵² From attempts to rid their land of the padres to the deterioration of their health, life during the Mission Era held historically recorded problems and dissatisfactions. In later decades, secularizing the Missions offered no better alternative.

POST-SECULARIZATION

In September of 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain, making California a territory of the new Mexican republic. In 1834, Governor José Figueroa issued a proclamation ordering the secularization of the Californian Missions with disbursement of half the property to the former mission Indians who, in the case of Mission San Gabriel, were overwhelmingly Tongva. Some Indians, whose culture still did not embrace the concept of land ownership, turned down their acquisition of small parcels of land. In other cases, Natives accepted the parcels but because they did not farm them productively in Anglo eyes, authorities rescinded the grants. Between 1834 and 1836, each of the 21 California missions was secularized⁵³, and the vast bulk of the mission properties were deeded to a few prominent Californio families rather

⁵²Ibid, 82.

⁵³ The process of secularizing the missions has been written about extensively by scholars who generally take one of three positions: Catholic historians portray the Franciscans as helping to civilize the childlike Indians, militant Native American historians define the missions as brutal labor camps and Catholic Indians claim more of a middle ground.

than to the Indians.⁵⁴ In 1836, control of the missions went from the missionaries, who were ostensibly working for the day when the mission lands could be inherited by the neophytes, to a politically appointed administrator, Juan Jose Rocha, whose main goal was to make each mission contribute financially to the new Mexican nation.⁵⁵ In 1845, Governor Pío Pico, needing more public monies, he auctioned the remaining mission properties, including the crumbling mission churches to individual and group landowners. The maximum legal limit for a private rancho grant was 22 square leagues—about 50,000 acres and each grant was accompanied by a *diseño* or map.⁵⁶

What had been the La Puente rancheria of Mission San Gabriel was soon parceled out to several Mexican citizens, including Andres Pico, brother to the governor, Henry Dalton and Ezekial Rubottom, while the majority of the land came into the hands of John Rowland and William Workman.⁵⁷ In 1841 Governor Alvarado gave the last and largest of the land grants for La Puente Valley to John Albert Rowland and William Workman, who had been in business together in Taos, New Mexico. It was in Taos that they heard from fur trapper Kit Carson about the many farming and ranching possibilities La Puente promised. The grant, like Nieto's before it, drew protest from the remaining missionaries, represented by Father Narcisco Duran. Duran sent a letter to the Mexican Minister of the Interior and Public Instruction complaining that Rowland, "has ordered the Mission to vacate the site which is distant less than two leagues from it." He went on to insist that, "In justice and in accordance with the law of the Mexican Supreme Congress of November 17, 1835, and in keeping with various orders issued by the Supreme Government, the Missions should be restored to their ancient condition." Finally, Fr. Duran

⁵⁴California History Online. http://www.californiahistory.net/ranchos_frame_life.htm.

⁵⁵ Engelhardt. *San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles*, 185-186.

⁵⁶ California History Online. http://www.californiahistory.net/ranchos_frame_life.htm.

⁵⁷ Rowland, *Romance of La Puente Rancho*, 47.

concluded that he opposed the sale or alienation of Rancho La Puente because it was a “flagrant wrong and prejudice to the poor neophytes.” He declared that the neophytes retained “the right which they have to reclaim such property at all times and to claim from now on as minors the beneficent law of restitution *in integrum*.”⁵⁸

His letter succeeded in creating a semi-moratorium on further land grants, although men like Rowland inhabited the land as temporary grantees while the Mexican government debated the issue. By 1846, with the missions in extreme financial difficulty because they were no longer supported by the government, the new governor, Pio Pico, formalized many grants and sold the mission properties for debts. Workman and Rowland then gained full legal ownership.⁵⁹

To gain this post-secularization grant as Americans, Rowland and Workman had to fulfill certain requirements of the Mexican nation. They had to become naturalized Mexican citizens, join the Roman Catholic Church and, finally promise, “to furnish employment to Mission Indian neophytes.” Preliminary title to the land, granted by Spanish Governor Alvarado upon the basis of these agreements, came on January 14, 1842, with permanent title given on March 9 of the same year.⁶⁰ Workman had married the daughter of one of New Mexico’s leading Spanish families, Nicolassa Urioste.

No written records have been found that discuss the Tongva perspective on this change of rule. As they had been promised the return of their lands by the padres, it must have been painful—even anger-invoking—to watch new and different white men establish homes on their territory. The Tongva fomented no large scale attacks against the new invaders. Despite published reminiscences by various Workman or Rowland descendants, which spoke of peaceful existence between the laborers and the landowners, there are also stories of struggle. According

⁵⁸ Engelhardt. *San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles.*, 210-202.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 221.

⁶⁰ Rowland, *Romance of La Puente Rancho*, 10.

to amateur local historians Mr. and Mrs. Dan Powell in their book *La Puente Valley, Past and Present*: “In the early days of Workman’s occupancy of the place, tribes of rather hostile Indians in the neighborhood were a source of trouble to the white settlers. One of these tribes placed the home in a state of siege, arguing among themselves that the whites could not hold out very long as they would soon run out of water.” The Powells claimed that the white settlers survived by using an underground spring reached by a tunnel built by the padres when the area was used as a granary for the Mission. Being unaware of this architectural feature, the Powells argue, made the Indians believe the white man’s god was providing them with water, and they ended the siege in deference to such a powerful deity. Other stories of attacks collected by the Powells include Workman’s being attacked early in his occupation of the land by a group of Indians living on the south bank of San Jose Creek, not three miles from his residence. They claim the Indians were “so impressed by his prowess” as one fighter against a group. From this one can argue that the Tongva believed that once the missions lost their power the land should have reverted back to the original inhabitants, therefore the presence of new that they came to respect him and after the brawl, carried him to within sight of his home.⁶¹ The only other indication of Tongva anger at events comes in the records of the petty larcenies committed by small groups or individual Indians. Had the regimen of mission life and the high mortality rate so destroyed the societal ties of the Tongva that they were unable to act en masse? Or by this late date in the Spanish incursion of their lands had they concluded that the expulsion of the invaders was no longer possible?

Either way, though a different set of white men now owned the former lands of the Tongva, it was the baptized Tongva who continued to work it as farm hands, tilling the

⁶¹ Ibid, 34-35.

grapevines, pruning the apple orchards, and harvesting the wheat grown there. As ranch hands the Tongva also worked with horses, cows and especially the red and brown mules that Workman and Rowland traded with their former business colleagues in New Mexico.⁶² Rowland's later documents indicate that both Christian and non-Christian Tongva remained as workers on the rancho. "It was regarded by the Indians as an honor to be a vaquero or a house servant. Christianized Indians were selected for this work. The more humble and arduous tasks of plowing and planting were done by the non-Christian natives (sometimes referred to by the Catholics as "gentiles")."⁶³ This is borne out through study of the census of the land owned by John Rowland in 1860. The census recorded 33 Indians on the land: 32 day laborers and one female "Washer." The youngest Indian listed was three months' old, followed by an eight-year-old "Day Labourer" named Maria, while the oldest was a 50 year old, possibly named Rosa. The census listed only first names of those people identified as Indian.⁶⁴

After Workman and Rowland both married and had children, they wished to avoid inheritance difficulties later so they split the original land grant in 1868. Rowland took over the eastern portion and Workman took over the western. Rowland's letters offer other examples of Tongva Indian labor during this period. Rancho La Puente employed Tongva laborers to make sun-dried adobe bricks for the rancho buildings. These laborers were known as retainers because they had worked at the mission for the padres and were retained in the same employment by the men who purchased the lands. Nearly fifty retainers served in various capacities, from blacksmithing to kitchen help, at this time.⁶⁵ The Visiting Committee of the California State Agricultural Society reported in 1858 that the land of Captain John Rowland contained 15,000

⁶² Ibid, 2-8.

⁶³ Ibid, 38.

⁶⁴ Census Records, El Monte Township, California, 1860. Pgs. 266-268.

⁶⁵ Rowland, *Romance of La Puente Rancho*, 17.

thirteen-year-old grape vines, 10 acres of fruit trees, 2,000 cattle, several swarms of bees for honey. On William Workman's farm they noted 10,000 grape vines and three wine cellars for crushing and fermenting the crop. Each man's ranch also included a working flourmill, and Workman's laborers had the additional responsibility of operating a grist mill. During the Civil War some acres of both men's ranches turned to cotton production. Nearby lands given to married children were covered in wheat fields and olive orchards.⁶⁶ The growth of these ranches led to the employment of over 600 Tongva who, as vaqueros worked with the livestock or as farm hands worked with the diverse agricultural products. During the near drought of 1863-1864, thousands of head of cattle had to be killed to salvage a profit from their hides before they died of thirst. The Tongva then switched to working in the wheat fields which replaced so much grazing land that Rowland's La Puente Ranch was renamed Wheatfield Ranch. For their work the Tongva received the equivalent of six dollars a week, paid in merchandise from the commissary rather than in cash. As with the post-Civil War sharecropping and crop lien system in the former Confederate states, such a system kept the workers tied to their bosses, in this case the ranch owners.⁶⁷

Other stories of Indian life in La Puente after the secularization of the missions are fragmentary. Workman's grandson from his only daughter, Antonia Margarita, was named Thomas W. Temple II and became a writer who furnished the local news press with what were termed stories of color, many of which involved Indians. Temple recorded that in 1850 his grandfather created a family burying ground on the land and that the first person buried there was an Indian laborer. The San Gabriel Mission priests protested this act since the land had not yet

⁶⁶ Ibid, 26-27.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 36 -37.

been consecrated.⁶⁸ Apparently, from their protests, the Tongva employee had been baptized in the Mission as a child, otherwise the priests would have no reason to worry about the burial of a pagan.

The baptized Tongva population was clearly important to Workman and public survey maps from 1855 and 1860 testify to the existence of a mission named Craneros on his lands.⁶⁹ On the map, a structure is marked with a cross, which was used only to designate missions, and the name Craneros written beside it. No remains of such a place have yet been found though painter Henry Miller, whose career included working on each of the Missions in California in the mid-1800s, recalled Workman's plans for the building of a chapel "to the benefit of his Indians who live near the house."⁷⁰ Further study is required to decide if this chapel was actually built and then possibly mismarked on the survey as a mission. In later years relics found by children also seemed to suggest the existence of an Indian rancheria on Rowland's parcel, two miles east of modern day Covina. Additional documents also indicate that the family knew of an Indian burial ground on their property "near to the present [consecrated family] cemetery."⁷¹

From his childhood Charles F. Saunders recalled assorted, "adventures with the natives, friendly as a rule, and bringing gifts of wild seeds and acorn meal in baskets."⁷² Those Tongva who worked in or near the main Rowland houses tended to live on site, while others maintained a closer connection to their culture by residing near the creek surrounded by tule and corn stalks. Saunders recalled, "There was a large open space near the rancheria where they used to play

⁶⁸ Ibid, 18-19.

⁶⁹ Public Survey Map, 1860, Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum Archives

⁷⁰ Miller, Henry. *California Missions, The Earliest Series of Views Made in 1856*. (Santa Barbara: Bellerophon Books, 1985), 63.

⁷¹ Rowland, 37-40.

⁷² Charles F. Saunders. *The Little Book of California Missions*. (New York: R. M. McBride & company, 1925), 22.

‘peon’ and other Indian games.”⁷³ Other correspondence recalls native dances named the jota and the cachucha which required skill and endurance to perform. They originally appealed to Anglo land owners but soon went out of fashion with the Americans.⁷⁴ Though only uncorroborated memories, such evidence illustrates that the native population still existed in the post-Civil War era and it demonstrates that some Tongva at least sought to maintain their heritage amidst the continued presence of strangers.

Not all of the former Tongva land ended up in the hands of white settlers. Some lands, according to the original plan of the padres, did get distributed among the Tongva. Such was the case with Bartolomea de Comcrabit, also known as Victoria Reid. Historians have long viewed Bartolomea as a victim, a naïve Indian widow cheated out of her rightful land grant by Hugo Reid, an immigrant Scotsman whom historians have characterized as money-hungry. In my view, however, the marriage of Bartolomea and Reid illuminates the complexities in land acquisition and Native-Anglo relationships in late-nineteenth century Southern California.

The few undisputed facts are that Bartolomea was born in 1808 in the San Gabriel Mission rancheria of Comicrabit, and went to live at the mission in the guarded dormitory at the age of six. At thirteen, according to the custom, the padres chose a husband for her and gave her in marriage forty-one year old Pablo Maria, an Indian vaquero who worked at the mission’s Yutucubit Rancheria. After she bore three children (Felipe, Jose Delores, and Maria Ygnacia) the family moved to El Ricon de San Pasqual, secularized mission lands then owned by the mission’s former housekeeper, Eulalia Perez. Perez had befriended Bartolomea when she was a child and appears to have worked to secure land for her. Bartolomea and her husband were slated to receive claim to Huerta de Cuati, a 128.6 acre portion of the Santa Anita Rancho

⁷³ Rowland, 29.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 53.

(modern day Arcadia). It is possible that Perez looked out for Bartolomea and made sure that a family of ‘good neophyte Christians’ were included on any land disbursement lists with property marked off in the name of each family member, thereby increasing Bartolomea’s allotment. In 1837, a year after Pablo died of smallpox, Bartolomea met and married Scotchman Hugo Reid and together they established her claim to 13,319 acres. In 1845 the claim was legally completed, but in 1847 Reid lost it through bad business deals.⁷⁵

Many historians, among them Susanna Bryant Dakin, Douglas Monroy and Edward D. Castillo, believed that Reid actively courted and then married Bartolomea for her “substantial dowry” as much as for her “native strength, beauty and dignity.” They assume that a young Indian girl must have been so naïve that she would fall for whatever flirtations Reid offered and never realize that he would inherit her lands after marriage. Is it not possible, however, to consider that Bartolomea married Reid to gain power and access in the ‘white’ world that had hindered her claims to her land? Also, is it unjustifiably romantic to consider that they might have liked—even loved -- one another?

One of the strongest facts against the “marriage for profit” scenario is Reid’s formal adoption of all three of Bartolomea’s natural children, an act he did not need to take if all he wanted was her land which was legally his after marriage. It is also noteworthy that while serving as an elected justice of the peace in 1846, Reid tried to purchase the financially-troubled mission in order to assume the debts, support the padre and better protect the local Indians.⁷⁶ Reid’s actions as justice of the peace suggest both his character and shed light on life for the Tongva as former Mission lands were disbursed. In 1850, the California State Legislature passed California Statute Chapter 133

⁷⁵ Edward D. Castillo, “Gender Status Decline Resistance and Accommodation”, 67-93.

⁷⁶ Johnston, *California’s Gabrielino Indians*, 172-173.

– An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians. Similar to the Black Codes of the Reconstruction era South, these were a collection of statutes aimed at keeping Indians from obtaining economic power. Among them, Section One granted justices of the peace authority in all legal cases involving Native Americans, and Section Two stipulated that the justice of the peace could determine how much land Indians needed to survive and offer the excess land (the land not deemed necessary for Native Americans) to be obtained by whites.⁷⁷

Reid used this power to attempt to make life better for Bartolomea's surviving tribe at a time when he himself faced economic failure and would have benefited from the sale of the land. His respect for his wife's tribe can be seen in his published letters, written before he died. The letters express anger at the padres for their mistreatment of the neophytes. His letters also contain loving tribute to Bartolomea, whom he renamed Victoria—the name of England's beloved Queen. If Reid used the young widow for his own financial gain, she, too, profited from the marriage. Historians have noted that the only Indians who managed to obtain land grants after the disbanding of the Missions were those literate enough to understand all the paperwork for filing and they often cite Bartolomea as such a one.⁷⁸ It seems fair to assume that Bartolomea assumed that Reid would help her learn the legal system.

Once Reid lost the lands through financial ineptitude, Bartolomea encouraged him to write the stories of her people, preserving their history and giving him a new mission in the last years of his life. The writers and historians who interviewed Bartolomea in her

⁷⁷ Clifford E. Trafzer, Joel R. Hyer, eds. *Exterminate Them! Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans During the California Gold Rush, 1848-1868* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 19-20.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

later life found her to be “a proud and cheerful person despite her poverty.”⁷⁹ Would this likely be true if she considered herself, as those other historians do, a naïve and foolish woman who was one of the few Native Americans lucky enough to gain some lands in the secularization period, but stupid enough to lose them to a white man?

The Tongva had few options to return to their ancient ways once they became dependents of the missions. It is clear, though, that they did not completely let go of their previous heritage; like Bartolomea, some worked hard to keep it alive culturally. Others attempted to work through proper political channels, only to find them frustrating and untrustworthy.

Between 1851 and 1853, U.S. Government Treaty Commissioners appointed by President Fillmore signed what became known later as the 18 “lost treaties” which set aside 8.5 million acres in California for Indian reservations. Much of the land lay in the gold fields, and Congress, under pressure from the California delegation, never ratified the treaties. Instead, Congress placed an injunction of secrecy on the documents and they disappeared from public knowledge and memory. In 1905 they were discovered in a locked desk drawer in the Senate Archives.⁸⁰

At times, 20th century American officials have tried to solve the “Indian problem” by encouraging Indians to join mainstream society. This happened in the 1920s under the Dawes Act and again in the 1950s and 1960s when Congress officially “terminated” more than 70 tribes, including 38 in California. Tribes were persuaded to sign away their official tribal status for individual plots of land, roads, housing, water and sanitation. The promised homes and improvements rarely materialized and many Indians lost their new property to settle outstanding

⁷⁹ Laura Everson King, “Hugo Reid and His Indian Wife,” *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* 4 (1898): 113.

⁸⁰ Magagnini, Stephen. “‘Lost’ tribes: Why must we prove we’re Indians?” *Sacramento Bee*, July 1, 1997.

debts or unpaid property taxes.⁸¹

At other times, U.S. courts have upheld Natives' claims to land and tribal identity. Under the California Jurisdiction Act of 1928, California Attorney General Earl Warren was authorized to represent the Gabrielino Tribe before the U.S. Court of Claims. In the settlement of the case, the court recognized "the equitable claims" of the Gabrielinos and "all the Indians of California" and awarded 7 cents an acre as compensation for the 8.5 million acres of land which was never set up as reservations under the 18 "lost treaties." In 1959, the Court of Claims entered a final order recognizing the aboriginal title of the Gabrielino Tribe and other California tribes to 64 million acres west of the Sierra Nevada Range. The state recognized the tribe's title to the land and paid \$633 to each Gabrielino in 1972. As part of the efforts to adjudicate the two land claim payments in 1944 and 1972, hundreds of Gabrielino tribal members were recognized as "Gabrielino Indians" on each of the Bureau Of Indian Affairs (BIA) California Indian Rolls of 1928, 1950 and 1972.⁸²

THE TONGVA TODAY

Today the Tongva tribe has taken on the dual task of both reviving their culture and gaining federal recognition that would lead to benefits in education and health care. The former Red Box Rincon Station Information Booth on the Angeles Crest Highway has recently been christened the Haramokngna Cultural Center and is staffed by members of the Tongva Nation who interpret the story of Toypurina and many share other aspects of their culture with visitors

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² http://www.tongvatribes.org/TribalHistory/tribal_history.cfm

weekly.⁸³ They perform these and other public events as they actively seek federal recognition of their tribe. This task is made more difficult by policies of the United States government that consider tribes such as the Tongva (and the Yosemite Valley Miwoks) extinct if they were incorporated into the mission system or intermarried with the conquering Spaniards, Mexicans and Euro-Americans or the African-Americans who traveled with them. This means that the Tongva are among more than 75,000 California Indians from 80 tribes who are not considered real Indians by the BIA because they no longer belong to federally recognized tribes or reservations.⁸⁴ To gain federal recognition each tribal member must first be able to trace his or her genealogy back to a recognized full-blooded Tongva. Since Native American tradition relied on oral communication rather than written, little such documentation can be found.

To further raise their profile among modern day citizens, members of the tribe perform blessings or ceremonial dances at many civic celebrations in and around Los Angeles. At the reopening of the renovated Sherman Oaks Library in May, 2003, a mural by Pomona University art professor Sheila Pinkel was unveiled in memory of the tribe's history. At the inauguration of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa on July 2, 2005 tribal members presented him with ceremonial beads. In terms of official recognition the Tongva have achieved statewide recognition of the tribe in 1994 with Joint Resolution No. 96, Resolution Chapter 146, Statutes of 1994. The Joint Resolution states that the State of California "recognizes the Gabrielino-Tongva Nation as the aboriginal tribe of the Los Angeles Basin and takes great pride in recognizing the Indian inhabitation of the Los Angeles Basin and the continued existence of the Indian community."

⁸³ Emmanuel Parker. "Tongva Nation Welcomes Fall: Hahamongna Ceremony Features Native American Dancing", *Arroyo Seco News*, September 23, 2002. Also on the web at: <http://www.arroyoseco.org/PSN020923Tongva.htm>

⁸⁴ Magagnini, Stephen. "'Lost' tribes: Why must we prove we're Indians?" *Sacramento Bee*, July 1, 1997.



Modern Turnbull Canyon Road, Fall 2006

At the present time current tribal leaders hope to use the newly found interest in their ancestors to lobby for federal recognition but disagreements over whether or not to use such recognition to petition for a casino have split the Nation into two separate factions.⁸⁵ At the time of this writing, this episode in their history is still unfolding. It has not, however, kept the modern day members of both branches of the Tongva tribe from continuing to celebrate their ancestors. Though federal recognition has proven difficult to achieve, cultural recognition is growing. In September 2005, a new trailhead on lands owned by the Habitat Preserve was named the Ahwingna Trail in honor of what was believed to have been the ‘provincial’ capital of the Tongva tribe before contact with Europeans.⁸⁶ Other trail names are in the planning stages.

⁸⁵ Pelisek. “Casino Nation: Indians and Tribal War Over a Club in Compton”, 2004.

⁸⁶ Hacienda Hills Trailhead Opening Ceremony September 22nd Press Release, September 15, 2005. Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority.

This way, no matter how long it takes to achieve federal recognition, the Tongva nation will be evident once again in their ancient homeland.

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PICTURES:

Front: 1006.186.1.3. Untitled Photo, Puente Hills, 15 May 1927. Photo from Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum.

Page 11 St. Joseph Church Alter Society Party. from Workman-Temple Family Homestead Museum. The Postcard also available at museum for souvenir.

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