

Within 30 years, the Santa Rosa Indians were gone

It wasn't so very long ago that no one but Indians lived here in the Santa Rosa Valley. We need to be reminded of this every so often.

In the reach of human history, 180 years is the snap of the fingers, the blink of an eye. And 180 years ago, this was not our home. It was theirs.

Just last week, the discovery of a spot where long-ago citizens built a fire and chipped chunks of obsidian into spear points, nudged all of us of immigrant stock back to the realization that we haven't always owned the town.

When the Spanish soldiers marched through this valley, in about 1810, they reported back to their commanding officer at the Presidio on San Francisco Bay that the people who lived in the valley were frightened at the sight of their armor and their weapons and hid from them.

These people were of a language group we know as the Southern Pomo. Anthropologists and linguists call them the Bitakomtara. The Spanish, who passed through relatively often after that initial trip, keeping close watch on the Russians at Fort Ross, called them *Los Gallineros*. This name, Robert Oswalt, a Pomo language scholar, suggests, came from the soldiers' nickname for a chief. They called him *Gallina*, the Spanish word for chicken but also a slang expression for a coward. The American settlers corrupted the name of the Indians to Cainameros, which is the common one we use today to identify them.

IF WE COULD go back in a time machine, however, and ask these people who they were, says Ed Castillo, an associate professor of Native American Studies at Sonoma State University, they would undoubtedly identify themselves by their village. Indian villages here were like city-states, Castillo says. They were completely independent.

Very seldom did one village have an allegiance with another. Alliances, yes. They intermarried — they even intermarried with other language groups like the Coast Miwok, whose territory extended inland from Bodega Bay across the Petaluma and Cotati valleys — and they traded extensively between villages. But they were citizens of the place where they were born.

They had fewer alliances, it seems, with their northern neighbors, the Sotoyome. These Healdsburg

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JULIO CARRILLO

area residents were generally thought to be another group of Southern Pomo, but Castillo says scholars now believe that the Sotoyome (or Satoyomi) were members of the Wappo language group, a fiercer people whose land extended along the Mayacamas range to the east of the valleys, all the way to Sonoma.

“Tribe” is a word that applies to these people only in a legal sense, as dictated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is governed by the premise that if it isn't a tribe it has no tribal rights. But tribe is a Plains Indian word, really. “I almost never use the word tribe,” Castillo says. “But the danger in not using it is that the government may deem the descendants less important, legally.”

THE MONTGOMERY and Doyle Park Drive site archeologists are exploring now, where Memorial Hospital will build an office complex, may well predate the Cainameros the early settlers knew. It could, said archeologist Tom Origer, date as far back as 2,000 B.C. Even if tests prove this to be the case, this won't be the oldest known site in the area. To the east, where Spring Lake Village now stands, is an Indian site that dates to at least 5,000 B.C.

Modern archeologists must gnash their teeth over the visitations of early pot-hunters — or “collectors” as they are called in the 1890s editions of the newspaper — to that Spring Lake site. Known as McDonald Spring, later Peters Spring, in the last century, the area under what is now Spring Lake, stretching to the creek banks, was a treasure trove of Indian relics.

They carted away boxes filled with spear points, tools and “charms.” A Sonoma Democrat story reports on “Hundreds of arrowheads of obsidian and great quantities of supposed plummets or Indian sinkers” found in the springs themselves. The 19th-century writer conjectures that the weights were used to throw at birds, ducks and game.

OUR KNOWLEDGE of these ancestors of the Pomo, or Bitakomtara, or Cainameros, is scanty. What we know about their 19th-century descendants we have learned from their own painstaking cultural histories, passed through generations, and from the dedicated work of the pioneer social scientists who recorded their language and their stories.

Among the scholars who passed this way were the giants of California anthropology. Alfred Kroeber, in 1925, published the name of the main village of the Bitakomtara — Hukabetawi. Omer Stewart, in 1943, says Kabeteiwa, to the east, was most important.

Earlier, in 1908, Samuel Barrett had located the main village of Hukabetawi at the place where modern Santa Rosa's Third Street meets Santa Rosa Creek. This site is now the northwestern edge of the Memorial Hospital grounds, very close to the current excavation. So is a village shown on a Kroeber map just east of the confluence of Matanzas and Santa Rosa creeks, which now takes place in a concrete tunnel somewhere under Sonoma Avenue or City Hall.

The closest neighbors of the Bitakomtara villages may have been Masikawani, a settlement of the Konhomtara which was on the Laguna near present-day Sebastopol, and Wilok to the east, the Spanish version being Guilucos.

Stewart, in his 1943 monograph on Pomo ethnogeography marks the territory of the Cainameros or Bitakomtara as the region from Mark West Creek on the north to an indefinite line from the top of Sonoma Mountain to the southern end of the Laguna, across the Cotati plain, on the south. The eastern boundary was Bear Creek and the summit of the Mayacamas. The western, the Laguna. This was roughly 200 square miles.

By today's standards there were not a lot of them. Estimates of aboriginal population range from 4,000 to 6,300 total for the Southern Pomo, which would include the Sebastopol and Healdsburg areas as well as Santa Rosa. But Kroeber estimates the entire Pomo population at no more than 8,000 in 1770. By 1910, his chart shows, the total had been reduced to 1,200.

THE PERMANENT village, Castillo says, was always occupied by the elders, young children and mothers with new children. The men and some women were often gone in good weather, fishing, hunting, gathering pine nuts or traveling to the coast for seafood and shells, living in seasonal camps.

Every village had an assembly or dance house and a sweat house, usually a structure built over a subterranean room where fires were built morning and evening when the men went there to sweat, a ritual that was both ceremonial and medicinal. According to Kroeber, the men often slept in the sweat houses and, in the winter months, idled away much of their time there.

The individual family houses generally were made of thatch, or bundles of grass, attached to a framework of poles bent together at the top. They were, according to Kroeber, sometimes circular, more often rectangular or like the letter L.

STEWART GAINED much of his information about the Santa Rosa Valley from an elderly man named Henry Maximilian of Healdsburg. Maximilian was half Indian. His mother had belonged to the Santa Rosa group. He talked of Chief Teo-on, the last chief, who apparently was more of an autocrat than most Pomo leaders. Maximilian described him as having complete control of “everything.”

“He owned everything so that even the people in the tribe had to get permission from him before they could go hunting, fishing or gathering acorns and seeds,” Maximilian told Stewart. “Except his house, nothing was owned by one man or family; and since the chief allowed people to go anywhere, everyone had the same opportunities.”

Indians of the Santa Rosa Valley generally were healthy and contented. Families were small and food was plentiful. It is indicative that there was no word in the Pomo language for famine. Still, the Cainameros generally were regarded as unfriendly folk to neighbors, who had to seek permission to enter their area.

They did not have access to the river or the coast, except by alliance with others, and had to rely on the fish and game in and along the creeks that crossed their valley plus trade for seafood and fishing rights to the river. Ground acorns, leached in streams and cooked in water-tight baskets, were a staple of all the Pomoan people.

THERE SEEMS to be less information available about the Cainameros than the other Pomo groups. Living as close as they did to the Sonoma mission, with the Asistencia mission on Santa Rosa Creek (where Dona Maria Carrillo built her adobe in 1837), in their midst, the Cainameros seemed doomed to disappear quickly.

They almost certainly were among the Indians who burned the 4-year-old mission buildings in Sonoma in 1827 and retreated into the hills. In the mid-1830s, epidemics of European diseases, to which the Indians had no immunity, swept outward from the pueblo of Sonoma.

Venereal disease had been a threat since the first conquerors arrived. In addition there were measles and diphtheria and, in 1838, smallpox. A corporal from General Mariano Vallejo's company in Sonoma, Ignacio Miramontez, visited Fort Ross, where he contracted smallpox from a sailor on a visiting ship. Soldiers in the Sonoma barracks caught the disease, which caused severe illness among them but few deaths. When it spread to the Indian population, it literally decimated their ranks. Castillo estimates a total loss of 10 percent of all the tribes involved.

Some sources set the death rate for the Santa Rosa and Sonoma valleys. Julio Carrillo, son of Santa Rosa's first settler and brother-in-law of Vallejo, spoke of the smallpox epidemic to a Bancroft historian nearly 50 years later:

“The friendly Indians who daily visited the barracks caught it. And as they had recourse to sweating in their *temescales* (sweat houses), this mode of cure proved fatal to countless thousands whose bones, left unburied, bleached on the hills surrounding the valley of Sonoma and Napa.”

Many of those who survived went north by choice, taking refuge in the still untroubled Pomo regions of Mendocino County. Later, when the Americans were firmly in place, the choice no longer was their own. There are stories in the newspapers of the late 1850s of bands of Indians going “voluntarily” to reservations, stories that may have been sugar-coated by the editor.

Most of the transfers to reservations were government induced and government enforced. Indians were moved from the valleys that had once been theirs alone to the new Nome Cult Reservation in Round Valley. There Indians from all over Northern California were massed together. Some were massacred by white settlers in the valley. Others were told to live in peace — under martial law.

For the original occupants of this fertile valley, the end had come. By the 1860s, there were few natives left — almost no one to tell the anthropologists, who would soon come asking questions, what they wanted to know.



STATE INDIAN MUSEUM

UC anthropologist Samuel Barrett, who ‘found’ the site of the Santa Rosa Valley village in 1908, still was collecting information on California Indians 50 years later. This photo of Barrett, filming a woman grinding acorns, was made in 1958.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the California State Department of Parks and Recreation, California State Indian Museum

GAYE LeBARON'S NOTEBOOK

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