

It is a subtlety lost on bureaucrats and developers, to whom land is merely property. But listen to Grant Smith and a single message comes loudly through: this area is his home, and part of his very being. Not the modern-day town of Sebastopol, not the county of Sonoma, but right here: the "shore of this Laguna."

Such an umbilical tie with homeland has recently become news as Jeff Wilson, leader of the Makahmo (Cloverdale) tribe of Pomos, seeks to establish a new reservation for his people. After a 1992 attempt to create a reservation-resort at Tomales Bay collapsed, Wilson in 1993 proposed a reservation-casino at Santa Rosa's Fountain Grove, also in vain. Now, land south of Petaluma is being considered. One problem: by most accounts, both the Tomales and the Petaluma areas historically belonged to Miwok people, not Pomos.

To many people, such intrusion on others' land is unthinkable. Kathleen Smith, a second cousin of Grant Smith, explains: "The identification with the place is part of who you are. That's what Mr. Wilson doesn't understand. You can't be a Cloverdale Indian and be in that area. It was somebody else's ancestral home."

What homeland does the Sebastopol group have? Almost all of their ancient village is already destroyed, buried beneath the modern-day city. This is not unusual; all of the cities in Sonoma County squat directly on remains of smaller villages, and our roads, for the most part, are paved over ancient trails.

But if you were traveling through Sonoma County 200 years ago, your greatest need would have been for a translator as you passed through the different homelands. "The language barriers were immense," says Sonoma State Anthropology Professor David Perl. A woman from the Sebastopol area couldn't talk to someone from near Cloverdale—"It would be as much a difference as English and German for the average person." Contrary to what the whites assumed, there was no single "Pomo Tribe," any more than Europeans from Italy, England, and Spain can all be classified as "Latins" because their languages share the same root.

Depending on the time of year, you might have occasionally encountered people in small villages along the western shores of the Laguna, fishing or hunting with their family. But when you came to Batikletcawi, you would have recognized it as different. Windsor resident Jeanne Billy recalls her grandfather telling it was so huge that the village branched out in summer and the people moved into the hills. "That it stretched from the location of the Vacu-Dry plant south of Sebastopol to past Highway 12, making it the largest settlement between Olompali (Novato) and Makahmo (Cloverdale). Here was a rich life. In spring

and fall their skies were black with migrating birds. Their western hills were crowded with deer and elk, and silver salmon and steelhead filled their Russian River. Some animals they would not kill or eat: Owl, Hawk, and Hummingbird. Hummingbird was considered sacred because he had the power to cause thunder and lightning as he flew.

What they could not eat, they used in other ways. They made whistles from the neck bones of swans and used the feathers of the woodpecker, believed by them to be the oldest bird in the world, for ceremonies. Bark of trees was used to weave baskets, some delicate enough to rest in a teaspoon. All that remains now are flints, scrapers, shards of pottery, and charred handflints of earth. "The people are gone, and what they knew is gone, too," says Smith.

The Indians' kinship with their land is only half of the story; what remains is how they came to lose it all in the space of a single generation.

FIRST CONTACT was made by whites in the early 19th century, as the Russians settled in Fort Ross and the Spanish opened a mission at San Rafael. While the Russians came for furs and the missionaries came for souls, both needed the same thing: a ready supply of peasants to serve as laborers to clear their fields, build their houses, tend their crops.

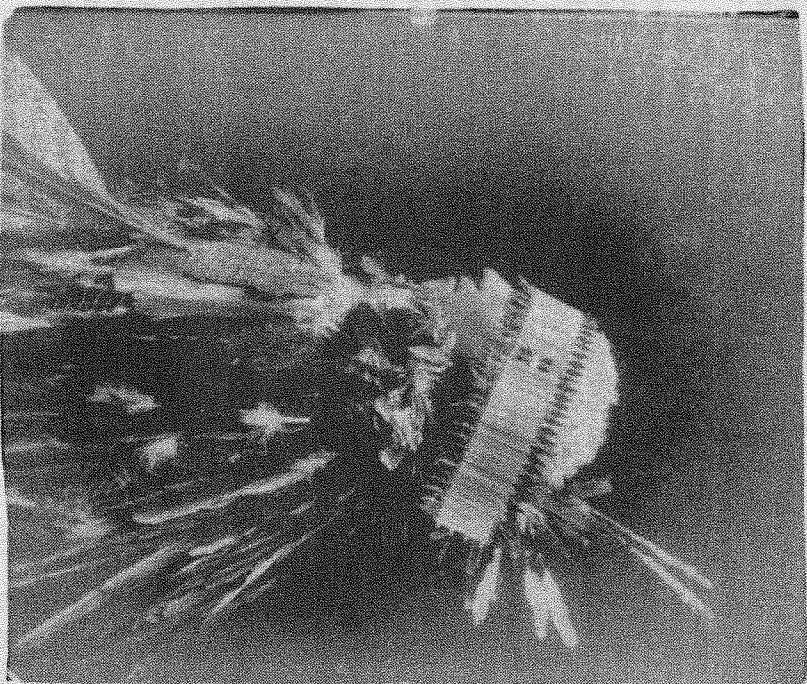
Of the two groups, the missionaries had the greatest effect on the people around the Laguna. With messianic zeal they baptized converts, sometimes rebaptizing people already christened by the Russians.

But the people had little taste for arduous mission life, and runaways were a constant problem. The padres' complaint was the same one that the Mexicans and, later, the Americans made: the people were lousy peasants. To the people, such back-breaking labor made no sense. "There are plenty of animals all around us," Suisun Chief Solano supposedly told Mexican Gen. Mariano Vallejo. "There are fish in the rivers, and ducks in the marshes, and wild geese darken the sun as they fly. Why should we work for food?"

The missions slowly faded after Mexico won California in 1822. During the next 28 years, Sonoma County was sliced up into land grants, given to family members or cronies of politically powerful Mexicans. These invaders began the pattern of building homes close to the villages of the people. Joaquin Carrillo, Sebastopol's first settler of European descent, built his two adobes on the outskirts of Batikletcawi, near where the small downtown area is today. "It's no surprise they settled in the same places—the Indians always chose the best locations with food, water, and good access," says Ed Castillo, professor of Native American Studies at SSU.

One event in the Mexican period stands out from all others:

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the epidemic of 1838. We call it smallpox: to the people, it was plague. Like acid it burned through their communities, killing uncounted tens of thousands. Soldiers buried the dead in mass graves, but not fast enough; one Mexican wrote that the bones of hundreds bleached upon the hills of the Sonoma and Napa valleys. In Batikletcawi, one of the survivors later told a white historian that they died at a rate of 10 to 20 a day.

Among the Vallejo papers in the Bancroft Library is an 1849 letter by Joaquin Carrillo, reporting the names of people associated with the leader of the Batikletcawi survivors. The list, which 10 years earlier might have included a thousand names, lists a meager 22 adults. They were lucky; in at least one case in Napa, the entire village was wiped out.

There is another reason Carrillo's list is significant: it is one of the few known accounts of a group just prior to the American occupation. Not until 1908 did the United States attempt to identify and count native people in California; by that time, much was lost. Within

a few short years of California's 1850 statehood, the American engine of genocide was at full throttle.

"The Americans were the worst," says Grant Smith firmly. "They drove my grandmother up north."

THE PEOPLE CALL IT the Death March. Starting around 1857, horse-riding whites with bullwhips—either local militia or vigilantes,

there being at the time only a breath of difference between the two—forced the people to walk some 120 miles north to the newly established reservation at Round Valley, near Covelo. Says Smith, "They herded them like cattle, like animals. Old people couldn't make it, couldn't keep up, and died on the road. [When I was a boy] they talked about it, they would talk about what happened on the road and they would cry, go all to pieces. It was misery, it was hardship. It was death."

The Death March is one of those whispered family tales of horror, little spoken of. One account was told to Kathleen Smith by her great-grandfather:

an old woman unable to keep the pace begged to be buried there on the trailside, her favorite basket at her side. Another record was passed to Marcellena Becerra by another elder, who remembered that mothers killed their own babies rather than see them die a slow death on the Death March.

The new state of California gave the worst elements of society free reign to murder. In his very first address to the legislature, Gov. John McDougall called for a "war of extinction," and said the complete destruction of the people was "the inevitable destiny of the Race." That same year, the state budgeted over a million dollars to reimburse Indian-hating whites who wanted to organize "private military forays."

Little has been written about vigilante actions in Sonoma County in those times. Local newspapers either winked at such violence or remained silent, perhaps out of fear of angering their violent neighbors. A typical article appeared in an 1858 *Sonoma Democrat*, the Santa Rosa precursor to the *Press Democrat*, calling a group of men who lynched an Indian near the Oregon border "mischievous scamps."

A few accounts of vigilante terrorism survive. One appears in an April 1858 *Sonoma Democrat*; an anonymous Geyserville correspondent writes of vigilantes forcing a Hispanic man to surrender title to his \$25,000 ranch under threat of death. Without irony, the same issue boasts that the Sonoma County jail has been empty for the last three months. Old histories show that the groups were—at least sometimes—officially sanctioned; in 1862, the sheriff organized a posse comitatus of 300 to drive off white squatters near Healdsburg.

"Vigilante groups drove Indians out of their communities," says Ed Castillo. "It was absolute chaos in California; it wasn't until the end of the Civil War that authorities regained control. It's one thing for the army to drive them out, but another when local people get together to do it. There is no evidence whatsoever that the army drove them to these reservations."

Castillo thinks some of the people saw the reservation as a refuge camp, a place where they could be safe from the increasing threat of white violence. During September 1857, there was a vigilante lynching of three Indians at Fort Ross. Perhaps seeing this as a portent of things to come, a group from this area did the unthinkable: they decided to abandon their ancestral land. Three months later, the *Sonoma Democrat* noted 20 native people from "near Bodega" passing through town, on their way to Round Valley. Of this voluntary exile the newspaper approved, taking the occasion to editorial-

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