

A History of Tribes and Settlers in Big Valley

To the People Living and Trading with the Indians of California

I am sorry to say, that in many instances the Indians have been treated in a manner that, were it recorded, would blot the darkest page of history that has yet been penned.

O. M. WOZENCRAFT, US Indian Agent for Middle District, July 12, 1851

Preface

In support of our proposal to change the offensive name of Kelseyville to Konocti, we pen this brief, dark history.

The sections are in roughly chronological order.

- Pre-Conquest
- The Alta-Californio Mexican Era
- The Kelsey Brothers and Charles Stone
- Reprisals, Repercussions and Broken Treaties
- Pioneers, Homesteaders and Settlers
- The Lasting Effect on the Tribes
- Today

This is necessarily a "Settlers" and "Academics" account of the history of Lake County. Living Pomo have oral, probably more accurate, ancestral memories of the same story. We hope they will have a voice in the renaming process.

Our tribal advisors say "Don't trust an anthropologist!" Even Heizer warns that an anthropologist might interview one source, possibly through a translator, and then create "Crazy Theories" from his sparse data. {Heizer Handbook} Our section *Pre-Conquest*, though we believe it to be reasonably researched, might include artifacts which could be regarded as "historical fiction". Some of the information on pre-conquest tribal life is derived from multiple tribes or villages.

We have made tough editorial choices for brevity and consistency. We use "H" instead of "X". We use the mis-named word *Indian* for the race as a whole, and *Pomo* for those in the Clear Lake basin. Tribes in southern Lake County, such as Lake Miwok and those in the Putah catchment area do not play a significant part in this story. We adopt a long-forgotten Elem or Wintun word for Big Valley, *Kalamai*, to refer to the three tribes who lived there: the Pomo *Halanapo* (Lily Village), *Habenapo* (Rock village) and Wappo *Lil'eeek* (Rock village). Every Pomo word has multiple spellings, one for each translator. {barret} {mclendon}

We cautiously ignore Dr Parker's warning that one cannot trust a single, unsupported historical source.

Envoi

Our hope is that after you have read this account you will be unable to explain how one could NOT take offense at the continuing use of the hurtful name "Kelseyville".

Pre-Conquest

The tribes of Lake County, California, have lived round Clear Lake for over 14,000 years, possibly even 20,000¹

Twenty thousand years. Ice ages came and went. Oaks and firs battled for mountainsides. The lake rose, fell and changed direction. Volcanoes erupted. An elder might be asked: "How old are your people?" He points to Konocti: "See that mountain? It is older than us." Then he points to the cinder cones at its base. "And we are older than them."²

It was a "garden of eden".³

Each tribe, of at most a dozen villages, was an independent nation, with its own language. The linguistic differences between tribes is more than between German and English.⁴

A few thousand years ago their hunting was improved by the new bow and arrow. Gathering of wild herbs was augmented by "emergent farming", as they tended fields of seed grass and oak groves. Woodlands were preserved with controlled burns - although forests were avoided, due to the many bears.⁵ Their lake, Ha Batin or Big Water, was "as blue as the sky"..⁶

Consider life in a Pomo village: Jim Pumpkin, who was 5 years old at the time of the Bloody Island massacre, recalled that Sikom (Lucerne) had 235 residents. Each of the 22 families had a tule house, a private lakefront lot, and hereditary ownership of specific fields. Other resources, such as oak groves and deer were regarded as communal.^{7 8}

Families specialized in skills or material products, or in ceremonial, religious and healing functions. Outside of harvests their daily needs were met by a few hours of work. A man would have breakfast and then bathe in the lake. He belonged to one or more societies, some secret. He practiced songs and dances, and taught them to children. He might attend a court in which an elder would mediate a dispute between parties. The parties would then exchange gifts, and the matter was settled.⁹

They played a game similar to lacrosse, in which the ball was not hit, but scooped around.¹⁰ They loved gambling: some of their dances included the ceremonial position of "gambler".¹¹ There was frequent inter-marriage between tribes.¹²

The Pomo had a vibrant economy. They had transitioned from bartering to a cash economy, using money they minted from shells and from magnesite. These were used by other tribes, and even by traders, one of whom bought, with gold, shells worth \$500. Shells were priced by size, up to \$1. Red beads started at \$2.50. Women picked out the best for decorations: these were expensive. A bride might be adorned with bracelets and necklaces worth \$1,000 or more in 1870 dollars--- \$20,000 today.¹³

After they harvested the seasonal hitch or acorns they invited remote tribes to market days. They even held a "futures" market for next-year's produce, and have been described as "proto-capitalists". They manufactured trade items such as baskets and obsidian blanks, tools and weapons. An obsidian knife maker might journey out on one of the dozen trails from Clear Lake, sell his highly sought-after wares from large carrying-baskets, and return with a load of salt.^{14 15}
16 17

Many of the modern roads follow those ancient trails.

Pomo were renowned for their counting skills. Using marked sticks akin to an abacus they tallied large numbers using a system based on 1's and 4's : 1,4,10,40..¹⁸

First contact with hunters or explorers inside of Lake County was in about 1830.

The Alta-Californio Mexican Era

Captain Salvador Vallejo was part of the Mexican Garrison in Sonoma. He was sent to southern Lake County in 1836, to punish tribes for stock theft.

In 1839 Vallejo returned with a Mexican Land Grant to about 10 leagues (40,000 acres, 70 square miles), which included the entire lake. Under the laws of *The Doctrine of Discovery* and the *Encomienda* system he probably owned not just the land, plants and animals, but the un-Christianized peoples on it.¹⁹

Vallejo established a rancho with a corral and a "rude log house" near Kelseyville.²⁰ He called it LupYomi, from the Miwok word for "Rock Village".²¹

Vallejo's party included soldiers and vaqueros. They brought horses and cows, the latter to be marketed as hides and tallow.²² The Big Valley Tribes were trained as vaqueros and, since the Mexicans had no actual cash, were paid in beef. The residents of Big Valley Tribal villages may have moved, voluntarily or forcibly, to be near the corral. Vallejo never lived permanently in LupYomi, but appointed a series of majordomos. One of these, Alvarada, established his own Rancho in 1846, "in the head of Scots Valley". Another married a Big Valley Tribal woman.²³ Many Pomo learned to speak Spanish, and incorporated Spanish words into their own languages.²⁴

Vallejo's last recorded visit was to recruit Pomo to farm, and to build adobe houses in Sonoma. However, when the men on Komdot island refused to stop their ceremonial dancing Vallejo burned down the roundhouse with all of them inside.²⁵

No one would work for him any more, so Vallejo moved the bulk of his herd back to Sonoma.²⁶

The Kelsey Brothers and Charles Stone

The Kelseys left Missouri in 1841 and arrived in Napa Valley in 1845. Their journey west was not easy. They had several brushes with other settlers, one of whom threatened to hang them for horse theft.^{27 28} Their father David died of smallpox, and their mother Susan (Cozzort) was blinded by it. Their daughter America went with Susan to Oregon.^{29,30,31}

The Kelseys were, at first, popular. They participated in the Bear Flag Revolt, capturing Salvador Vallejo's brother Mariano, the Mexican governor. Ben Kelsey was one of the delegates to the new Sonoma Legislature. They were excellent hunters: "... they used to kill, on an average, 225 bears a year. Their oil was marketed in kegs obtained from the sailing vessels that visited the harbor of San Francisco, and the skins often brought a high price. They used to average \$125 a month each from their business."³² Mary Nobles said: "Whatever may have been the character of Ben and Andy Kelsey the record of Mrs Kelsey is that of an heroic pioneer woman."³³ She is sometimes credited with sewing the Bear Flag. Ben was a frequent business partner of William Boggs, previously governor of Missouri, who came to Sonoma in 1846, living in the rancho of Mariano Vallejo.

In 1847 Vallejo sold his remaining stock to a group of Americans: Charles Stone, the Kelsey brothers Ben and Andy, and another man.³⁴

Andy Kelsey and Charles Stone came to Clear lake on horseback. The Big Valley Tribes believed the cows had been left to them by Vallejo, but Kelsey and Stone prevailed.

"These brothers, adopting the customs of Californ[ios], claimed as their property the Indians who dwelt in the valley of the lake."³⁵ They added to the Doctrine of Discovery:- Manifest Destiny, a slaver mentality, and, to cap it all, the attitude of an "Indian Fighter".³⁶

They ordered the now-skilled Big Valley Tribes to build their 40 by 15 foot adobe house and to herd the cows. The settlers gathered the three sometimes-warring Big Valley tribes, the Halanapo, Habenapo and Lil'eeek, into compounds relieved them of their weapons, and imprisoned them at night.^{37 38}

Andy Kelsey took as concubine Chief Shuk's wife Upee, (who were known to settlers as Augustine and California). Charles Stone took another Big Valley woman, Molly, as his. These women "hated Stone and Kelsey just as much as the other Indians did, but they were all slaves .."³⁹

Stone and Kelsey starved their workers, issuing meager rations: one occasional cow for 400.

When a boy begged for more than the daily cup of wheat for his mother they shot him. They killed a youth who failed to keep the raccoons from the melons. For amusement they shot at workers' feet to make them dance. Mothers were whipped and strung from a tree if they didn't bring forth young girls to "entertain" their guests. "And they were terribly cruel. Andy Kelsey tied an indian boy to a wild horse, with his feet roped together under the horse's belly. Then he made the horse run away, and the boy was dragged to death. The Indian women never forgave that."⁴⁰

Luckier transgressors were merely starved and tortured.^{41,42}

"Indian Killer" Ben Kelsey had a man arrested and sentenced to 100 lashes for looking askance at his wife. "After this punishment, on the same day, we are informed, Kelsey sought the wretched offender and laid him dead at his feet, shooting him in the presence of several gentleman, who remonstrated with him on the barbarity of the deed."⁴³

In 1848 the Big Valley Tribes rebelled, but a rescue party led by Ben Kelsey quelled it. "There were plenty of warnings but Stone and Kelsey couldn't learn. They went on treating the Indians like the dirt under their feet."⁴⁴

In early 1849 Ben Kelsey took 30 Big Valley men to the American River goldfields. Kelsey returned with a sack of gold "as big as an arm." The men received a few trade goods. A larger expedition with 100 Big Valley men ended in disaster. Kelsey sold their food and mining gear, allowing the Big Valley men to be herded into pens with their enemies, and to be fed like pigs from troughs. Then, catching Malaria, Ben deserted the men and was carried home. The Big Valley Tribes waiting at home were assured by Andy Kelsey that their men would be back in the spring, hiding the fact that Ben Kelsey had already returned to Napa.^{45 46}

With many of their workmen lost, the Kelseys plotted to march all the "non-productive" Big Valley Tribal members to Sacramento, and forced them to make their own ropes to bind them for the journey.⁴⁷

In late 1849 the Big Valley Tribes could take no more, and feared for their lives. As "An Act of Survival"⁴⁸ they held a tribal court and then executed Andy Kelsey and Charles Stone.⁴⁹ "They deserved what they got", said an old-timer.⁵⁰

Revenge was swift. Ben and Sam Kelsey, with several volunteers and a detachment of dragoons, rode to Kelsey Creek and buried the two men. All the Big Valley Tribes had fled, so Ben and Sam, with a posse of 30 men, rampaged down Napa and Sonoma valleys, killing every Pomo they met. They made ranchers separate the local Indians and then the posse killed any "strangers" from Clear Lake. One of these ranchers, George Yount, cursed the Kelseys on (near) his deathbed.⁵¹ The "Sonoma Raiders" were eventually stopped, and seven of them, including Sam, were arrested. They were granted low bail by a friendly judge, and fled to Oregon, where they continued to kill Indians, to the dismay of the Oregonians.⁵² Ben Kelsey escaped arrest. He later returned to California.⁵³

Technically, the direct involvement of the Kelseys was at an end. But their "murder" triggered an age of reprisals.

Reprisals, Repercussions and Broken Treaties

In May 1850 the official reprisal came in the form of the cavalry. With orders to "exterminate if possible the tribe"⁵⁴, they did just that, arriving with boats and cannon, massacring un-involved Pomo, mostly women and children, at Bonopot, now known as Bloody Island. They called it a "battle".⁵⁵

California became a state in 1850, and immediately addressed the "Indian problem".

The *Act for the Government and Protection of Indians* allowed settlers to seize Indian children, and hold them as indentured servants until they were 40 years old for men and 37 for women. An Indian "found loitering and strolling about" could be arrested on the word of any settler, and immediately put to work by the highest bidder. An elder from Big Valley remembers that his grandfather had to carry a paper proving that he was "owned", and was given that owner's surname.⁵⁶ These "apprenticeships" were enforced even after slavery was prohibited in California.

Between 1850 and 1861 the State of California paid \$924,259 in militia expenses and bounty for Indian deaths, proven by severed heads, scalps, ears, hands, and even vials of blood. Newspapers unashamedly reported on the best ways to kill "Injuns and such varmints". In neighboring Redwood valley an entire village was invited to a feast, and poisoned.

In 1851 The Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs belatedly made an attempt to rescue their Indian Tribes.

Indian Agent Colonel Redick McKee led the negotiations for the treaty covering Clear Lake - subject, of course, to ratification by the Great Father. They met at "Camp LupYomi ... upon the table-lands immediately adjoining the lake". They were assisted by a Spanish-speaking Big Valley native, probably a Halanapo. The treaty gave the entire Northern half of Lake County to the Clear Lake Tribes - starting at Mount Konocti: West to the Mayacamas, North to Pillsbury, East to Walker Ridge and back. McKee regarded only 10,000 acres as arable, unaware of the huge farmland the hills represented. One pessimistic reporter noted that "the whole of the Clear Lake valley is already covered by private grants and titles."⁵⁷

John McKee, secretary to the agent, reported that the Tribes were very wary of the troops accompanying the party, and added: "We have since learned that the death of the whites was caused by their own imprudence and cruelty to the Indians working for them, and that many innocent persons have suffered in consequence." Ben "Indian Killer" Kelsey may have been with the treaty group.⁵⁸

The chiefs carried with them their copies of the treaty, signed by army officers, giving them some respite from being evicted from their lands.

President Fillmore was in favor of ratification. But Sacramento prevailed, Mr McCorkle cast the Californian vote in 1853, and all 18 California treaties were buried for 50 years "under an injunction of secrecy". With their treaty formally un-ratified, the Pomo's ragged papers became worthless.

Pioneers, Homesteaders and Settlers

Pioneers such as Gaddy started arriving and establishing small ranches, technically under Vallejo's LupYomi Grant. In 1857 two men, Benham and German, established the first store in Kelseyville, then known as Kelsey's Place.⁵⁹ William and Mary Nobles came soon after, in 1861, having moved their Lower Lake blacksmith shop to Kelseyville. The Nobles used bricks from the ruins of Kelsey's adobe for their fireplace.⁶⁰

The Nobles were on very good terms with the Big Valley Tribes: "Mother won the confidence of the Indians ... they used to tell her things they didn't tell other white folks."⁶¹ When William went to Sonoma to register his land a Big Valley man moved his family close by to protect Mary and her family from bears. Settlers and Big Valley people alike were dying of diseases: "Another time, 1864 I think it was, smallpox broke out among the Indians ...a great many of them died. ... A good many white children died of smallpox too." They exchanged medicines.⁶²

The Gold Rush, with its huge influx of men, resulted in a severe paucity of women. Some pioneers married Big Valley native women, and went to live with them. Others brought their brides home, where they became westernized.⁶³ Steve Tucker, with his Indian wife, built Kelseyville's Brick Tavern.⁶⁴

Lake County, originally split between Napa and Mendocino Counties, was created in 1862.

California honored many of the Mexican Land Grants, but rejected Vallejo's claim. The pioneers who came under it feared for their subsidiary claims.

After several court cases the ruling was made in 1866: The LupYomi grant was denied, but the pioneers' lots were "surveyed and entered up in the regular way."⁶⁵

The take-over of Lake County was now complete. The rest of the county was platted and opened to homesteaders.

Wagon trains of settlers rolled in. Unrelated Kelseys and Kelsays came in "flocks".⁶⁶ Pomo either stayed in their villages, which withered into ever-smaller encampments, or worked on the ranches, often their only option for survival.

The only real success of Pomo in this new environment was to join together and buy back 90 acres of their own lands in Upper Lake, which they called Ha-be-ma-tolel⁶⁷

The Lasting Effect on the Tribes

The Pomo suffered more disruption in the 20th Century.

In 1906 Congress paid \$6,600 in gold coin to Lake County for "the clear title for the 88 acres upon which the Elem resided", including Rattlesnake Island. The funds evaporated, and the island is still under private ownership.⁶⁸ The government did buy various other tracts of land for reservations, including Robinson Ranchero and "The Mission" in Big Va.;ey.⁶⁹

Under the 1958 Californian Ranchero Termination Act 49 Rancheros were terminated, and only 27 have been restored. Families were relocated to the East Bay. Children were sent to boarding schools, where they were punished for speaking their own language.

In 1949 U. C. Berkeley claimed to have legally bought the regalia of an Elem roundhouse, which they stripped and then demolished. The bones of grandmothers of living Pomo were displayed in museums.⁷⁰

The Corps of Engineers "reclamation" of Upper Lake, the lake-wide removal of the filtering tule beds, and the phosphorus released by hill-side farming combined to turn the lake green. The area around Elem had already been poisoned by Mercury from the Sulphur Bank mine, which is now a super-fund site.

Starting in 1986 Tribes were allowed to open casinos, under very strict Federal regulations. Lake County now has four. The tribes have used some of this revenue to establish an excellent Tribal Health system. Two Pomo are currently (Feb 2024) serving on the Lake County Board Of Supervisors.

Today

The Clear Lake Pomo have not forgotten this dark history.

At our meeting in the Habematolel tribal hall members from many tribes spoke about how the name Kelseyville affected them.

One is a great grandson of Lucy, who hid underwater during the "battle" at Bloody Island, breathing through tule straws, as women and children were bayoneted. A descendant of Chief Augustine said "Why back such a name? The survivors are hurt and crying." His 83 year old grandmother was terrified by a prospective move to Kelseyville. "They are going to get wind of me" she cried. Every tribe agrees with us: "What's right to do."⁷¹

Another said that the name Kelseyville is like "a wound infected for years" and that we must "heal it in order to move forward".

We are Citizens for Healing.

Author and Acknowledgements

Alan Fletcher, with the editorial assistance of the Citizens for Healing Writers Group
All sections have been reviewed by C4H, except the "Pre-Conquest" section, which needs tribal review.

We thank:

The Lake County Board of Supervisors for unanimously issuing a proclamation "Promoting Tolerance, Respect, Equity and Inclusion in Lake County" and then for backing it up with the establishment of a multi-year County "Visioning Forum". Some of us have participated actively in this process. The visioning committee has completed its first round of public meetings, where the issue of "historical names" was discussed. The committee's first report is expected in February, 2024.

Dr John Parker, previous president of the Lake County Historical Society, for his article "The Kelsey Brothers: A California Disaster" (which he presented at one of our meetings, and from which we have drawn extensively), and also for his archeological and preservation work. Both Kevin Engels (a frequent contributor to the Historical Society), and Clovice Lewis (Unitarian Minister), for submitting and presenting articles related to renaming.

KPFZ 88.1 FM, for 6 hours a week dedicated to Turtle Island, by members of local tribes, who have featured us on their shows. The Record Bee and Press Democrat for giving us front-page coverage, Various other groups for making their meeting rooms available to us: Big Valley Hall, Clearlake Methodist Church.

The Tribes of Lake County: Habematolel and Elem for hosting meetings, Robinson Rancheria for their long-time fostering good community relations, and Big Valley which sponsors an annual Tule Boat race, and is active in restoring Xa Batin. All those, from many tribes, who made heartfelt statements at our meeting in Upper Lake.

We particularly thank our tribal advisors, Ron Montez, Robert Geary (both Tribal Historical Preservation Officers), Clayton and Doug Duncan (who lead the annual Bonopoto Bloody Island healing ceremony), and Jim and Gail Brown (particularly for their research, shown on the Elem/East lake website).

Finally, to the opponents of changing the name, who brought spirited yet respectful arguments to our meetings.

Dedicated to the late Thomas Leon Brown, an elder of Elem Modun, for suggesting the name *Citizens for Healing*, and for his support of the effort to change the name.

Sources

Our main sources are : The Mauldin Files, Gibbs, McKee, Powers, Palmer, Barrett, Gifford, Heizer (Handbook, Collected files), McLendon (Handbook, Word List), Elliot, Parker (Archeology, California Disaster) and Engel (Act of Survival).

These are listed in [Sources](#)

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3	Mauldin		Pioneer Life Wm and Mary Nobles mauldin 875-52	5002
4	McLendon	1977	Handbook p274	5003
5	Elliott	2012	p69	5004
6	Mauldin		Nobles 875-55	5005
7	Gifford EG1	1923	Gifford reports 2 informants said everything was communal, but thinks that tribal memory may have been lost. In Elem the oaks were also owned by families.) Provided that proper requests were made, other tribes were usually permitted access to these resources, and even to establish seasonal camps. (This confused archeologists for years. In the same strata some found nomads, others found settled people!)	5006
8	Elliott	2012	p 53	5007
9	R. Montez	2023	A talk at Lucerne	5008
10	Powers	1877	p151 - described as "tennis"	5009
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