

CA_KONOCTI_NAMEDETAILS_V3.pdf submitted by Lorna Sides and Alan Fletcher / C4H

Out of respect for the local tribes and to promote healing in the community, we propose that the BGN changes the town's name to Konocti. The name Kelseyville is offensive to the local tribes and to many residents throughout the County. Changing the name to 'Konocti' is a gesture to acknowledge the wrongs done to the original inhabitants of Lake County.

Konocti is a volcanic mountain that stands 3,000 feet above Clear Lake, named by the East Lake Tribe of Elem, the oldest existing tribe. They have lived in the area for over 14,000 years. The widespread use of the name Konocti by local business, art, and education communities evokes images of nature, art, music and recreation.

Kelseyville, sitting at the base of Mt. Konocti, is currently named after a brutal man. Andy Kelsey and partner Charles Stone enslaved, starved, abused, raped, tortured and murdered the Pomos living under their control. In 1849, the Pomo held a tribal court and decided to execute Kelsey and Stone.

In revenge for their deaths, brothers Ben and Sam Kelsey, and their posse stormed Napa and Sonoma Counties indiscriminately killing Pomos. The Pomos have not forgotten the Kelseys or the repercussions which continue to affect them.

A 3-Page History of Tribes and Settlers in Big Valley, from first contact in 1830 through 1900

The tribes of Lake County, CA, have lived round Clear Lake for over 14,000 years. Each tribe was an independent nation, often named for its village, with its own language. We are concerned here mostly with the Big Valley Tribes (the Halanapo, Habenapo and Lil'eeek) who lived between Kelsey Creek and Adobe Creek.

1542: Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo explored the coast of Alta California, claiming it for Spain.

1821: Mexico gained independence from Spain. Slavery was abolished, but elements of the Encomienda (indenture) system persisted on the frontier.

1823: Mexico established a mission at Sonoma, Alta California.

First contact with Europeans within Lake County was in about 1830.

In 1843 Salvador Vallejo came to Big Valley near Kelseyville with 80 soldiers, ranchers and vaqueros, bringing horses and cows, and building a corral. The Big Valley Tribes were willing to work for supplies of beef, and learned to ride horses. Men from other tribes were also recruited to build adobe houses in Sonoma. However, when the Koi on Komdot island refused to stop their ceremonial dancing Vallejo burned down the roundhouse with them all inside. After that, nobody would work for him, so he moved most of his herd back to Sonoma. In 1847 he sold his remaining stock to a group of newcomers including : Charles Stone and the Kelsey brothers Ben, Sam and Andy.

Andy Kelsey and Charles Stone moved to Clear lake. The Big Valley Tribes believed the cows had been left for them, but the Kelseys prevailed, and ordered them to build their adobe house and herd the cows,

The conditions of the Big Valley Tribes, deteriorated rapidly. Andy took a chief's wife as concubine and house keeper. They tricked the Big Valley Tribes into surrendering their hunting weapons.

Charles Stone and Andy Kelsey starved their workers. They soon became effective slaves, as their hunting and fishing grounds were cut off, and they were issued meager rations and only an occasional cow.

When one boy begged for more wheat for his grandmother they shot him. They killed a boy who failed to keep the raccoons from the melons. Andy tied a boy under a horse so his head was dashed against the rocks. For amusement they shot at workers in their fields, and made others dance by shooting at their feet. Mothers were whipped and strung from a tree if they didn't bring forth young girls to entertain their guests. "Indian Killer" Ben Kelsey had a man flogged for looking askance at his wife. He then shot him. Luckier transgressors were merely starved and tortured.

1848: After the Mexican-American War Alta California was ceded to the United States as a Territory.

In 1848 the Big Valley Tribes rebelled, but a rescue party led by Ben Kelsey quelled it.

In early 1849 Ben Kelsey took 30 Big Valley men to the American River goldfields. Kelsey returned with gold, the men received a few trade goods. A larger expedition of 100 ended in failure. Kelsey sold his supplies, and, catching Malaria, deserted the men. Only three made it back.

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

In late 1849 the Big Valley Tribes, fearing for their lives, held a tribal court and then executed Andy Kelsey and Charles Stone. "They deserved what they got", said an old-timer.

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 about 30 men, rampaged down Napa valley, killing every Pomo they met. At ranches they separated the local Indians and killed any from Clear Lake. They were eventually stopped by ranchers, and seven of them, including Sam, were arrested. The "Sonoma Seven" were granted low bail by a friendly judge, and fled to Oregon, where they continued to kill Indians, to the dismay of the Oregonians.

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

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

California became a state in September, 1850, and honored many of the Mexican Land grants, but rejected Vallejo's claim.

In 1853 pioneers such as Gaddy and the Hammock party (of Donner infamy) started arriving and establishing small ranches.

But surveyors were striding north from Napa, "platting" farms and towns for homesteaders, who then poured in. In 1857 two men, Benham and German established the first store at a farm in the Kelsey Creek area. The settlement had formed into a village named "Kelseyville" by 1865. This became the official name in 1871.

The Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs belatedly made an attempt to rescue their Indian Tribes. They sent Reddick McKee to establish treaties, including one covering Clear Lake which was negotiated in 1851 - subject, of course, to ratification by the Big White Chief. This treaty gave the entire Northern half of Lake County - with the dividing line at Mount Konocti -- to the Clear Lake Tribes: West to the Mayacamas, North to Pillsbury, and East to Walker Ridge -- McKee regarded only 10,000 acres as "arable", unaware of the huge farmland the hills represented. The treaty lists the names of all the Clear Lake Tribes and their chiefs. But Sacramento prevailed, and the treaty was not ratified. The homesteaders got that northern half, and the Pomo, decimated by the army and militia, starvation, and disease shrunk into ever-smaller encampments.

That wasn't enough for Sacramento, though. The 1850 Act for the Government and Protection of Indians allowed settlers to effectively seize Indian children, and hold them as indentured servants until they were 40 years old for men and 37 years old 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. Between 1850 and 1861, the State of California paid out over a million dollars in militia expenses and bounty for Indian deaths, proven by severed heads, hands, scalps and vials of blood. Newspapers unashamedly reported on the best ways to kill "Injuns and such varmints".

Lake County was split off from Napa and other counties in 1861. A few adjustments were made to the borders in the boondocks.

Slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865, but the "indenture" contracts were still enforced.

In 1875 the indian agent for Round Valley reported: The people of Lake County, including many of the most prominent men, petitioned to have the Indians there removed to this reservation, and I was officially authorized to remove them; but before I could possibly carry the order into effect it was revoked, greatly to the regret of the people of Lake County.

These later atrocities are not, of course the direct actions of the Kelseys, but they were set in motion by their "murder", which is better described as an "execution", due to the crimes they committed.

by Alan Fletcher, with the editorial assistance of the Citizens for Healing Writers Group Updated 1/21/2025

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 Engle (Act of Survival).

[Table of Sources](#)

This summary does not have references : see [History of Tribes and Settlers in Big Valley](#)