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Front Cover: A collage of modern photos by Steven Schoenherr of the restored Oliver H. Noyes house built in National City in 1896.

Back Cover: The restored Frank Kimball house built in 1868-69 was the first house in National City. Photo by Steven Schoenherr.

Cover Design: Allen Wynar
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Director’s Message

It is with enormous pleasure that I recently accepted the invitation of the San Diego Historical Society’s Board of Trustees to become the organization’s new Executive Director. With its great collections, terrific facilities, and dedicated supporters, the San Diego Historical Society is extremely well positioned to grow in the years ahead and to dramatically expand the scope and quality of the services it provides to the diverse people of San Diego. This is an exciting moment for the San Diego Historical Society. It celebrates its 80th year as guardian of the region’s history. So there is no better time than right now for the institution to take stock of its past accomplishments and to lay out a dynamic new strategy for the future.

By almost any measure, our nation’s history museums have been undergoing revolutionary changes in recent years--changes that can benefit the San Diego Historical Society and its constituents. Families have begun visiting history museums in increasing numbers while overall audience numbers have soared. Hands-on activities, computer stations, videos, and sound effects have become exhibition staples. Exhibition topics explored in today’s history museums are as likely to focus on contemporary issues as they are on events that occurred a century or two ago. Teachers take their students to history museums these days not only to help them learn about the past, but to polish their math and language skills. History museums increasingly serve as venues where people who are different from one another can learn about each other’s cultures.

The reinvention of America’s history museums is widely considered to have gotten underway a number of years ago when historical organizations began drawing on the latest scholarship from our nation’s universities while at the same time replicating exhibition development techniques long, and successfully, employed in our country’s leading science and children’s museums. History museum curators, exhibition developers, trustees, educators, and administrators have, in short, proven themselves to be quite adept at developing strategies that have transformed their institutions into places where history has become interesting, fun, exciting, and relevant for contemporary audiences of all ages. For example, history museums began telling the stories of everyday people and everyday life rather than concentrating on political and economic history as they had traditionally done. This new focus mirrored academic trends and hit a cord with visitors who are interested in people and stories rather than facts and figures.

Reflecting practice in science and children’s museums, historical organizations began conducting audience research to determine precisely which topics visitors are interested in and might really motivate them to visit the museum. This sort of consumer research is similar to that used in the corporate world in the development of new products and services. While the idea of consulting with audiences may sound like a fairly obvious thing for any museum to do, history
museums had not traditionally engaged in the practice—and many still do not do so. Instead, they forge ahead developing exhibitions and other types of programs based on internal perceptions, or misperceptions, as to what audiences might really like to see, and why.

The extensive incorporation of hands-on activities, computers, and media in exhibitions is also something that history museums have borrowed from science and children’s museums—with spectacular results. The San Diego Historical Society’s motto is that the museum is a place where “history comes alive.” Creating interactive exhibitions in the future can help the institution deliver on this promise.

In addition to delivering first-rate, intriguing visitor experiences, organizations such as the San Diego Historical Society have many other obligations. They must provide excellent stewardship of their priceless collections and buildings while promoting scholarship. This is accomplished by accommodating researchers in its substantial research archives and through publications such as *The Journal of San Diego History*.

The San Diego Historical Society has made great headway in many areas in recent years. But there is room for further strengthening of the organization and making sure that it takes its rightful place among the front ranks of our nation’s historical organizations. I personally look forward to working with the San Diego Historical Society’s board, members, staff, and its many supporters in the community to help the institution fully realize its potential in the years to come.

David M. Kahn
July 2, 2008
San Diego Olives: 
Origins of a California Industry

Nancy Carol Carter

James S. Copley Library Award, 2007

Olives are big business in California. The state produces 99 percent of the United States crop, a $34 million industry centered in San Joaquin and Northern Sacramento Valley. Today, growers struggle to compete with cheap imports but, around 1900, they participated in a highly profitable venture.¹

In 1909, San Diego led all California counties in the number of acres devoted to olives. Boosters promoted the fruit as an ideal crop for the climate. Processing plants made olive oil, pickled olives, and canned ripe olives. Producers included Frank A. Kimball of National City and Charles M. Gifford of San Diego, neither of whom have received much attention from historians. The names of other San Diegans and businesses important to the early olive industry are all but forgotten.²

Olive culture spans the history of San Diego from its eighteenth-century origins at the Mission San Diego de Alcalá to its early twentieth-century decline. Promotional literature that created the olive boom identifies little-known olive ranchers and olive processing businesses. Gifford and Sons Olive Works, for example, was the first company in the United States to package and market ripe olives in a tin can. A century later, almost all the olives produced in California are sold in the manner that Gifford originated at his San Diego processing plant.³

In the end, however, unrestrained “boosterism” caused the decline of the olive industry in San Diego.

The Always and Enduring Olive

The olive threads through human experience, tangibly as a source of food and useful oil and powerfully as a symbol, whether as Athena’s everlasting gift to Greece, carried in the beak of Noah’s exploratory dove or clasped in an eagle’s talon on a national seal. Olives are one of the world’s oldest cultivated fruits and a hardy survivor of the Columbian exchange, the transfer of plants and animals between the Old and New Worlds.⁴

There are wild, native olive plants in the Americas, but Olea europaea, the domesticated producer of abundant fruit, was brought from Spain to the New World in 1560.⁵ The olive later generated some interest in the British colonies and early United States. That dedicated farmer, Thomas Jefferson, urged greater

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knowledge of the olive and its planting in southern regions. Jefferson’s report in favor of olive trees enlists the same contestable claims used to promote the California olive boom one hundred years later: the tree was said to grow in poor and otherwise barren soil, to need little water or care, and to yield a generous crop ensuring economic gain. “Of all the gifts of Heaven to man, [the olive] is next to the most precious, if it be not the most precious,” Jefferson effused.

Growers of olives do not simply produce a crop, they forge a connection with Greek antiquity and the Bible. Authors of otherwise prosaic agricultural advice on olive culture routinely include sentimental references to Homer, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Mount of Olives. Every tree stands as a growing legacy, promising to enrich not just the original planter, but generations of descendants.

The olive was first cultivated in California at Mission San Diego de Alcalá, established in 1769. Exactly when the olive arrived and whether it was propagated from seed or cuttings or both are matters of long debate. It is often assumed that the olive was imported at the mission’s inception, but Franciscan historian Father Zephyrin Engelhardt once opined that olives probably were not brought to San Diego with the first missionaries. He believes that the olive came to the mission after Fermín Francisco de Lasuén succeeded founder Junípero Serra as Father-President in 1784. One source sets the olive planting date around 1795 when
artisans arrived to build screw presses and stone mills at the San Diego Mission.\textsuperscript{9} Lasuén does confirm the existence of bearing olive trees in his \textit{Biennial Report of 1803}, writing that “in some missions they have begun to harvest olives; and at San Diego they have already made some very good olive oil.”\textsuperscript{10} Further confirmation is found in a reference to “olives of San Diego” being served at an 1816 feast held to celebrate the inauguration of Governor Pablo Vicente Solá at Monterey.

Once established, the trees at Mission San Diego furnished cuttings used to start olive orchards at other California missions. When the missions were converted to parish churches by Mexico’s 1834 Decree of Secularization, buildings and crops at San Diego de Alcalá were largely abandoned to nature. When a government-appointed inspector of missions visited four years later, his report described two olive orchards, one of 300 trees and another of 167 trees.\textsuperscript{11} Thirty-five years later, these “Madre trees” were the source of cuttings used to produce new trees for the California olive planting boom. The stage for this development was set by numerous articles promoting the suitability of California as olive country.

\textbf{Crops to Astound a Yankee}

California’s early and intense grip on the American imagination was forever sealed by the discovery of gold in 1848. The nation’s authors and journalists mined their own gold as every California story seemed to find an audience, including those suggesting the great promise of agriculture. References to the olive appear very early in this literature. An 1852 \textit{San Francisco Herald} story reprinted in Massachusetts is typical: “In the natural production of the earth conducive to the sustenance of man [California] is abundantly prolific, [growing] the banana, the orange, the lemon, [and] the olive.”\textsuperscript{12}

California won praise in an 1853 Brooklyn lecture for “its vast resources, both

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Mission_Valley_1872.jpg}
\caption{Mission Valley, 1872. The photo shows the home of Thomas Davies who leased former San Diego Mission land, sold tree starts, worked the olive groves, and made olive oil. ©SDHS #80:3288.}
\end{figure}
agricultural and mineral...its myriad gardens of flowers, and grapes, and figs, and olives, and apricots;...[and its suitability for] the successful cultivation of every variety of vegetable.”¹³ Newspapers more widely reported that, along with gold, California should be of interest for its agricultural potential. “The very general, but erroneous, impression that California could never be much of a farming country” was refuted. One correspondent said that all known farm products could be grown in California and the matchless climate would produce unique crops as well, including olives, prunes, oranges, and lemons.¹⁴

One of Horace Greeley’s overland travel letters, reprinted by the influential Farmers Cabinet in 1859, specifically mentions that the “olive grows finely in Southern California.”¹⁵ A few years later, readers of Scientific American learned about the fruit harvest in 1863-64 from old fig and olive trees growing around the California missions. The oil made from olives picked at San Fernando, San Gabriel, and San Diego compared favorably with that of Italian oil from Florence, according to this article, and the olives in some years surpassed the flavor of those grown in Seville.¹⁶

After the Civil War, the Chicago Tribune weighed in with its credible first-hand report from John Goodale, an official on his way to Alaska to witness the formal annexation of Russian America to the United States. Touring the farming districts of California for ten days while awaiting other diplomats, he wrote: “In Central and Southern California, grapes, peaches, figs, pomegranate, and olives grow with a profusion which would astound a Yankee.”¹⁷

Promoting the Olive

Urging wider cultivation of the olive, a New York newspaper described an early commercial orchard in California. Cuttings just 15 inches long were planted at Santa Barbara in 1868. Within four years, trees from 10 to 13 feet high had sprung from those cuttings. According to an article in New York Observer and Chronicle, “The successful cultivation of the olive in this country would supply a great want and would unquestionably be remunerative.”¹⁸

By 1872, Scientific American was noting—prematurely—that “the culture of the olive tree and the manufacture of oil from its fruit is gradually becoming a leading industry in California.” A decade later, readers of The Century were told that the olive was a newly acquired American interest because it is so “easily and profitably grown in California.”¹⁹

The economic promise of commercial olive growing got more press by the mid-1880s, with enticing phrases such as “great demand and big profit.” California author and poet Joaquin Miller echoed popular reporting: “This hardy little tree, the olive, is always assigned the ugliest and stoniest, and meanest bit of land...and the olive takes kindly to any place you choose to put him....What a country this will be when the olive becomes established here as in Italy!”²⁰

Although the question of whether planting olives in California could be made to pay was resolved in the negative as early as 1867, the sober economics of olive cultivation tended to be lost amid promotional claims. A Chicago paper did point out the length of time between planting and financial returns. It acknowledged the difficulties in processing a crop so that it was fit for the market either as olive oil or pickled olives. One source finally admitted that in California the growing of olives
as an industry is yet in an experimental stage. These cautions were quickly swept aside by assurances that processing problems “have been surmounted” so that the industry can really pay, and a report stating that the “notion that the trees do not bear for many years after planting has been proved to be without foundation.”

The *Semi-Tropical Planter*, a publication read by farmers and orchardists, ignored bad news and printed the familiar claims of profitability and the “gold mine” potential of olive trees. To the broader public, the *Los Angeles Times* became an advocate, publishing very long articles on olive cultivation. The editors found sufficient empirical evidence in the experience of growers in Santa Barbara, Solano, and San Diego “to demonstrate that the tree thrives well and bears well in California, and hence to establish the fact that it is a profitable tree to cultivate.”

By 1895, the *Times* found it “difficult to overestimate the importance which the olive industry of California may assume during the coming decade.” The olive compared more than favorably with other products and was likely to make Southern California “a populous and wealthy State.”

In part, this optimism rested on the fact that the demand for pure olive oil exceeded supply and that imported oil was almost always adulterated. So few olive oil mills were operating in California, according to the *Times*, that the total annual production sold out in ninety days. The editors predicted that the olive would eventually rival the orange as a California crop because the trees could thrive in such a wider range of soils. They wrote, “There is little fear of overdoing the market for olives.”

Frank Leslie’s popular monthly *The American Magazine* in May 1895 took a long look at the California olive business in “The Reign of the Olive” which included illustrations of Chinese workers at an olive oil mill. Several growers were
interviewed on the economics of olive production. Yields and profits, production
details, medicinal benefits, and the adulteration of foreign imports were set out.
An “advantage of olive growing over other fruits, for the poor man or the man
of moderate means” was asserted on the basis that California offered cheap land
adapted to raising profitable olive crops without irrigation. This reference to
olives as the poor man’s crop perfectly illustrates the point historians have long
made about the appeal of California to ordinary Americans: it was a place that
encouraged humble people to reach beyond themselves. “Olive culture is so simple
that one of ordinary intelligence may engage in it,” assured Scientific American.
In California, olives could enrich the poor and genius was not required.

As more growers ventured into the olive business, publications on olive
culture appeared. John Ignatius Bleasdale had studied olive culture in Europe
and presented both a scholarly and practical discussion as early as 1881 in San
Francisco. He quoted various sources, including Frank A. Kimball’s article in the
Southern California Horticulturist, while extolling the usefulness and profitability of
the olive tree.

Professional advice, complete with scientific tables showing yields and oil
production of various varieties of olive trees, was offered in a report by the
University of California Agriculture Experiment Station in 1894. The introduction
cryptically states that the report is intended “to forestall the repetition of the
numerous expensive mistakes heretofore made in connection with the olive
industry.” The “mistakes” are not set out, but presumably included planting
untested varieties, taking literally the oft-repeated advice that olive trees need no
water or care, and failing to learn or employ proper techniques of processing the
fruit. Official publications from the State Commissioner of Horticulture advised on
the different varieties of olive trees and methods of their culture.

Napa resident Adolphe Flamant translated into English his previously
published French booklet on olive growing and processing, with hope, he said,
that olive culture would stand foremost among the great industries of the state.
“An olive plantation is a gold mine on the surface of the earth,” he concluded. As
a nurseryman specializing in selling olive trees, John S. Calkins was an energetic
promoter of the olive business. He presented both a romantic and practical view
of olive culture in his 1895 pamphlet, substantiating the longevity of the species
with reference to 500-year-old olive trees in Europe. Finally, in a departure from
writing California history, Hubert Howe Bancroft distributed Where Grow the Best
Olives, an attractive illustrated pamphlet promoting his Helix Farms olive crop,
planted near Spring Valley in San Diego County.

A Discouraging Word Ignored

By 1890, young olive orchards were found in every county of central and
southern California, and some had been planted as far north as Redding. An
estimated 90,000 olive trees were in commercial cultivation in the state. The
tendency of settlers in California to faddishly over-plant a single crop was pointed
out in an 1892 newspaper article: “Olive-growing is now all the rage in California,
and...is likely to be overdone...Californians are prone to excess in the matter of
fruit culture.”

Unintentionally critiquing its own work, the Los Angeles Times stated that too
many glittering generalities had been written about the profitability of olives. A careful 1892 article attempted to set the record straight. Sellers of nursery stock were accused of manipulating production figures to sell trees. The point may have been well taken. When the State Board of Horticulture warned “at present olive growing is not a profitable pursuit,” it was attacked by a nurseryman for its “rash and ill-considered” position.

Warnings of irrational exuberance in the olive business had little impact. Instead, the tide of boosterism continued to surge. This may be partially explained by the tendency to extrapolate too broadly from the profits of a few successful growers and by lagging communication about crop failures and production problems. While the 1892-93 warnings appeared in California, the New York Times was still writing that the olive industry “promises to become very profitable.”

The dampening potential of bad news about the industry was effectively countered by reports on the direction of “smart money.” Olive trees were an investment choice of Andrew McNally, of the Rand & McNally publishing firm in Chicago and well-known historian Hubert Howe Bancroft. Even Vice President Adlai E. Stevenson, “had a very large olive grove” in California. Around this time, lenders who read Bankers’ Magazine and Statistic Register were told that the olive tree thrives and bears well in California and is profitable to cultivate. Garden and Forest, carrying the prestige of horticulturist Charles Sprague Sargent and Harvard’s Arnold Arboretum, noted the increase of olive culture in California and concluded that “the production of olive oil can hardly be overdone.”

In Chicago, the year 1895 was publicized as the most profitable season ever known for the California olive industry. Continued expansion was predicted because growers could have sold three times more olives than produced. American consumers were developing a taste for the California olive. With more buyers than product, prices shot up and newspapers reported that California olives were “at a premium.” The Los Angeles Times refined this story by making a distinction between the availability of really good pickled olives which were “undoubtedly scarce” and the lesser products being turned out by inexperienced or careless processors. These poor products were a bad precedent for a new industry and this California-invented food product, the ripe olive.

Just one year after bemoaning the unavailability of California olives, the Chicago papers were able to report that many more trees had been planted and that others had matured enough to bear fruit. “It is predicted that at no very distant date California will produce as much olive oil as Italy and Spain together.” A year later readers were told to “expect a great olive crop.” Although processing problems were supposed to have been surmounted a few years earlier, it was again reported that processing difficulties had been overcome. The putative simplicity of cultivation again saw print: “One joy of an olive orchard is that the care of it is practically nothing. Its fruit can be cured by simple, primitive means.”

As olive fever reached a high pitch, the demand for trees could not be met. Sunset magazine’s article, “Gold Mines Atop the Ground,” furthered the popular perception of the crop value of the olive. As a trendsetter, Sunset undoubtedly assisted the industry by describing olives as a tasty and nutritious food that “multitudes” had yet to discover. The magazine also warned consumers against imports, citing a study showing that not one of sixty-six samples of imported “olive oil” tested by the Department of Agriculture was pure. Analysis showed that
lard and oils of the cotton seed and peanut were being deceptively sold as olive oil. Urging readers to try real California olive oil and foretelling a rosy future for growers, the article asserted that “the lover of California believes in the olive.”\textsuperscript{45}

The Southern Pacific Railroad distributed 20,000 copies of its \textit{California Olive Primer} in 1912, intending to promote its own business through the agricultural development of California. By that late date, however, the heavy lifting of olive promotion had been underway for decades. One of the railroad’s land agents did enhance the California olive industry through his agricultural experiments and by testing imported olive varieties, showing which could thrive in the Sacramento and Tulare area and writing extensively on olive cultivation.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Madre Trees and the Commercial Olive Business}

The olive orchards at Mission San Diego contained more than 460 healthy trees when the post-secularization survey was conducted in 1839. Substantial damage was inflicted after United States troops occupied San Diego during the U.S.-Mexican War and established a military post at the former mission in 1847.\textsuperscript{47} Army soldiers collected firewood from the mission orchards during the decade of the post’s existence. Despite depredations, these venerable olive trees gave birth to a new agricultural industry in California in the late 1860s. The remainders of the mission orchards in Santa Barbara and elsewhere became the source of cuttings for new commercial olive orchards about the same time.

Because the missionary skills of olive cultivation and oil making were not transferred out to the general population before secularization, it is frequently assumed that the mission olive trees received no care and that their crops went unharvested for decades. One historian found few examples of olive oil making and processing in California between the 1834 abandonment of the mission grounds and 1872. The earliest commercial endeavors are described as small-scale production in Northern California by Italian immigrants and at the Ventura County Rancho Camulos, near the Mission San Fernando in 1871.\textsuperscript{48}

Additional research shows that a productive and commercial use of the olive trees at the San Diego mission was occurring at least a decade earlier. \textit{Scientific American} made reference to olive products from the 1863 harvest of California mission trees, including those at San Diego.\textsuperscript{49} Judge Benjamin Hayes wrote about a visit to San Diego’s old mission ruins in his California travel diary in November 1867. He found Anastario Navarro, a Sonoran, making and selling pickled olives and olive oil from the mission groves. Hayes ate his first olives and recorded the processing methods used by Navarro, who had leased the mission property. The circuit-riding judge carried off Navarro’s coffee pot full of olives as he left.\textsuperscript{50}

The following year, the \textit{San Diego Union} reported that E. F. Sanborn was working the mission olive orchards. During his ten-year lease term, Sanborn planned to pickle olives from the trees and to make enough olive oil “to show that a good product can be made in San Diego.” His olive oil press was in transit. The olive trees were loaded with fruit and it was predicted that Sanborn’s business would be profitable “as the olive tree grows here without care or cultivation.”\textsuperscript{51} However, it was Sanborn’s “careful culture” of the trees that was subsequently credited with renewing the orchard. \textit{The San Diego Union} called the olive oil he pressed in 1869 “the finest we have ever seen.”\textsuperscript{52}
Despite Sanborn’s long lease, a new tenant took over the mission groves in 1871. Thomas Davies was from the Petaluma area, having been attracted to San Diego by the prospect of the Texas Pacific Railroad. He leased a portion of the former mission grounds, pruned the orchards, built a “trim neat cottage,” and began producing pickled olives and olive oil from the old trees.\(^53\) A reprinted newspaper story analyzed Davies’ predicted production figures, noting that he worked in the state’s oldest olive grove: “If 300 trees can be made to produce 3,000 gallons of oil, as he says, then the production of the olive must be much more profitable than that of any grain, fruit or nut.” The newspaper then advised, “farmers who are setting out trees will do well to put in as many olive trees as practicable.” One or two hundred trees “will be a small fortune” in a few years.\(^54\)

Three months later, The San Diego Union reported the actual—and substantially lower—productivity of Davies’ trees. As with other types of fruits, the olive trees were “taking a rest,” Davies explained, but still “the yield this year will pay handsomely.” Meanwhile, Davies had sold 4,000 tree cuttings to a pair of Anaheim partners planning to start an olive grove.\(^55\) The optimistic production forecast Davies had put forward may have helped to sell these and other cuttings to new growers. Except for the labor of actually taking the cuttings, selling starts for new trees was pure profit and did not harm the olive grove. Davies did so well that his landlord, the Catholic Church, decided not to extend his lease, but rather to seek a more financially beneficial arrangement.\(^56\) When this did not work out, the orchard was again neglected. By 1881 the mission orchard was “fast falling to decay” and in need of attention, with only about 80 trees surviving.\(^57\)
As the San Diego mission trees were in decline, their commercially grown offspring were extending roots in many new orchards. This “Mission olive” remained popular and widely grown for many years. Californians also imported numerous Mediterranean olive varieties to test their adaptability and productivity. The Picholine was the first import, brought into northern California from France in 1872. French nurseryman Ernest Benard, who had settled in San Diego in 1887, introduced the Ascolano. Benard’s Mission Valley nursery is known today for its introductions of roses, but he first specialized in imported olive trees. Several new varieties were tested in Santa Barbara after Dr. F. S. Gould imported six hundred “young olive trees of the best Italian varieties.” Meanwhile, the United States Department of Agriculture was also making newly imported varieties available for experimentation. By 1916, it was reported that more than seventy varieties of olives had been tested as California developed its “thriving and profitable” industry. More recent writing on the early olive industry substantially increased the count of imported varieties tested in California.

Olive culture—using Mission olives and other varieties—was undertaken in many areas of San Diego County. Charles M. Gifford planted olives in the Jamacha area; Frank A. Kimball near National City. Hubert Howe Bancroft located his large plantation in Spring Valley. Major L. H. Utt of Redlands had an orchard in Pala and several growers planted in the Fallbrook area. In 1913, San Diego was said to be the largest producer of olive oil in the country. The production of this so-called “wonder crop” had begun with small operations, first at the San Diego mission groves, then on individual ranches around the county. Oil making and olive processing were gradually engineered into central packing plants, some operated by businessmen who had never cultivated an olive tree. The history of this transition in olive processing began with the most famous and longest lasting olive venture in San Diego: that of Frank A. and Warren Kimball in National City.

Frank A. Kimball as “Father of the Olive Industry”

Frank A. Kimball is a leading figure in San Diego history. With his brothers, Kimball purchased El Rancho de la Nación Mexican land grant and other large tracts of land in south San Diego County in 1868. He built a home and saw his new development, National City, incorporated in 1887. He engaged in numerous business enterprises, kept a daily diary, and maintained a huge correspondence, as documented in his letter books preserved at the National City Public Library. Alone or in partnership with his brothers, Frank Kimball invested in real estate, construction, railroads, a wood mill, a marble quarry, and factories making matches, carriages, and watches. He frequently took an active role in these businesses, served on countless civic boards, and at one time was the State Commissioner of Horticulture. In addition to being known as the father of National City, Kimball is also called the father of the olive industry in Southern California. He specialized in culture, production, and processing olives while his brother Warren managed the orchards.

Soon after settling in San Diego County, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Kimball made a sightseeing excursion to the former San Diego mission in 1869. E. F. Sanborn was leasing the olive groves at that time and provided a guided tour. Kimball wrote in his diary about the broken down orchard walls, weed-choked grounds, and
the poor condition of the olive trees. Kimball was allowed to take some cuttings from the century-old trees and, to his delight, they easily rooted on his National City ranch.\textsuperscript{63} This early discovery of the ease with which olive trees could be propagated from a small cutting encouraged further experimentation. Kimball developed a keen interest in olives and the olive business that survived to the end of his days. With his usual thoroughness and vigor, he became the leading San Diego grower-processor of olives and one of a handful of national experts on olive cultivation and processing.

Kimball had the beginnings of an olive crop three years after setting out his first trees. Employing the traditional Spanish method of soaking the fruit in numerous lye, water, and salt baths, he began to process and sell pickled olives for $1.00 per gallon. Kimball also sold cuttings from his olive trees for 10 cents each. While most early sales were made locally, Kimball shipped 50,000 cuttings to Los Angeles in 1883. He was also propagating and selling young trees by that date.\textsuperscript{64}

Kimball expanded his olive orchard with additional cuttings from the San Diego mission and from the olive trees at San Luis Rey and San Juan Capistrano missions. He purchased cuttings from Baja California and acquired new olive varieties though the U.S. Department of Agriculture. After importing cuttings from Syria and testing many kinds of olives, Frank Kimball remained convinced that the local Mission variety was the best choice for most growers.\textsuperscript{65} Over the next few years, his National City ranch was a major supplier for the olive tree planting
boom underway in California. Kimball was swamped with letters seeking his advice on olives but, at the same time, he inaugurated correspondence to learn more himself and to establish new outlets for his products.66

Kimball’s rival for the title of father of the olive industry in Southern California is Ellwood Cooper of Santa Barbara. It has been written that they began their orchards about the same time. In fact, Kimball was already harvesting his earliest crop when Cooper began planting his first trees. Cooper was, however, the first to make olive oil.67 He always captured more national headlines, perhaps because important visitors regularly traveled to Santa Barbara or because his eccentric personality enlivened news stories (he thought olive oil an elixir of youth and married at age 84 after being attracted by his bride’s aura).68 After Cooper successfully sold 1,000 gallons of his olive oil on a single trip to San Francisco in 1879, two newspapers wryly reported on the probability of a California “olive excitement.”69 Late in 1886, Kimball decided to add oil processing to his olive pickling and tree cuttings business. He started construction of an olive oil mill on the day after Christmas.70

Cooper and Kimball personified the California olive industry. For most of their public lives, each remained active in his own olive business. In 1891 they were called the only successes in twenty years of “stray attempts” to cultivate olives on a commercial scale.71 Cooper sold out to an English syndicate the next year but Kimball continued in the business. His processing operation was expanded beyond his own crop when he began purchasing olives from other local growers.72

Kimball and Cooper were prolific speakers and writers on the subject of olives. Kimball noted as early as 1878 that he was preparing an article for the Horticulturist and an 1892 diary entry said he was up until midnight meeting a printing deadline for “Olive Growing and the Manufacture of Olive Oil.”73 Cooper published books and in journals such as the Californian Illustrated Magazine. Helen Hunt Jackson wrote about Cooper and the olive business in Glimpses of California.74 Kimball and Cooper served on the California State Horticulture Board and with olive industry trade organizations.

To build a market for his products, Kimball tirelessly exhibited at fairs and expositions. He helped organize the First Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Fair for San Diego County in 1880. One of his duties was to convince the U.S. Army to run a telegraph wire and assign an operator to the exhibit hall so that messages could be transmitted directly from the fair.75 He traveled across country for important expositions and was hired to go to the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904. He installed the San Diego agriculture exhibit and stayed on for months to greet visitors and promote San Diego products. His exhibited products received many prizes and awards over the years, none more prestigious than a bronze medal for his olive oil at the ultimate nineteenth-century showcase, the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where bottles of California olive oil were stacked into the shape of a tall Cleopatra’s Needle to invoke the Mediterranean.76

Locally, Kimball promoted his products and the olive business by welcoming groups like the Press League and individual visitors to his olive mill.77 In fact, the Kimball ranch became something of a tourist attraction. Kate Sanborn, author of early travel books, advised against eating a tamale when visiting San Diego but told her readers to see the Kimball olive works.78

Well into his industrious and productive life, Frank A. Kimball was reduced
from millionaire business tycoon to pauper. He made bad investments and was victimized by business associates who used his name and credit during an economic downturn. Kimball lost everything in 1897, including his lands and home. Intriguingly, Kimball’s diary records that in 1896 he was visited by “Mr. Heintz [sic] the great goods packer of Pittsburgh” who came to open negotiations for purchase of the olive oil works. Whether this transaction could have altered Kimball’s financial fortunes is unknown because the sale did not occur. After years of struggle, Kimball paid his debts and was able to repurchase his olive oil mill in September 1905. He resumed the oil and olive pickling business and established enough tree cuttings to continue selling olive saplings as late as 1910.

Other Processors

Like Frank A. Kimball, other early San Diego olive growers established processing operations on their ranches to handle their own crop. Dr. Charles Pratt’s Loma Ranch in Fallbrook had its own olive oil press and bottling plant, producing large quantities of high-grade olive oil annually from the late 1890s until 1919. Red Mountain Ranch, an 1887 homestead northeast of Fallbrook, sold Red Mountain Olive Oil for many years. Movie director Frank Capra, whose family came from Sicily, became one of the most famous Red Mountain Ranch olive growers, residing there in the 1940s and 1950s.

Between 1913 and 1915 olives were the largest cash crop in Fallbrook. The development of olive processing and packing businesses—indeed of the growers themselves—was foretold by a service that grew up to handle the crops of smaller growers. A mobile olive processing plant moved from ranch to ranch as the harvest progressed. Eventually, small processing plants were built in close proximity to olive orchards. Large-scale independent processing businesses emerged as San Diego’s olive production exploded, transportation improved, and olives could be packaged in tin cans. In Fallbrook, for example, a small processing plant was built on Alturas Street. Later, a cannery was built at Main Avenue and Mission Road. By 1917 it was shipping canned ripe olives as far away as New York. Nearby, the Escondido Packing Company managed by W. F. Sechrest produced 15 gallons of olive oil per day, while also packing citrus fruit, before it burned to the ground in 1908.

Five partners opened the Bernardo Winery in 1889 on a former Spanish land grant now subsumed within the town of Rancho Bernardo. When prohibition constricted the business to sacramental wine and grape juice, the partners sold out in 1927 to Vincent Rizzo whose business flourished in later decades. He also produced Cold Pressed Virgin Olive Oil from trees on the property. Today, land development has overcome the vineyards and olive orchards, but the Bernardo Winery continues to operate, surrounded by a collection of shops and restaurants.

Beginning about 1920, olives were processed by the Bolivar Packing Company located in downtown San Diego at 1339 Beardsley (near today’s Harbor Drive and the Coronado Bridge approach). The company received a passing reference in a San Diego newspaper column, but little was written about its proprietors, H. A. Barraclough and Gilbert Thompson. Thompson was an Iowa native who came to San Diego as a schoolboy. At his death in 1965 he was described as a retired chemist who “worked for olive and citrus packing plants.” Bolivar’s last business
directory listing was in 1942, leading to speculation that its demise may have resulted from the rapid transformation of the San Diego waterfront after the Pearl Harbor bombing.

In El Cajon, Leonardo Dichiara produced Rancho la Morada olive oil in a relative modern plant using heavy equipment, but the dates and details of the business are obscure. Two long-lived companies are better documented. Both the Akerman & Tuffley and C. M. Gifford companies made news and had multi-year listings in the San Diego business directories.87

Akerman & Tuffley and the Old Mission Olive Works

As growers stopped pressing and pickling their own olives as a cottage industry, a new San Diego business took shape and eventually flourished. English businessmen Edward W. Akerman and Robert Alfred Tuffley were not olive growers, but started their olive processing business near the San Diego mission, perhaps as early as 1890.88 Although a definitive connection with the orchards at the San Diego mission has not come to light, it is likely that the first Akerman & Tuffley olive products were from the mission orchard crop.

By 1900, the partnership had moved its operation to San Diego’s Old Town. Its first business listing appears in the city directory the next year. For years, Akerman & Tuffley ran their business from the leased premises of Casa de Bandini, the historic Old Town home that had been enlarged and converted into the Cosmopolitan Hotel in 1869. They remodeled the downstairs, creating an office and olive processing and packing rooms. According to one account, olive processing also occurred in the large barn that had formerly been Seeley’s Old

Old Town’s Casa de Bandini, pictured in 1909, served as the olive processing plant for Akerman & Tuffley for more than a decade. ©SDHS #1136.
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Workers label olive oil bottles at the Old Mission Olive Works processing plant owned by Akerman & Tuffley in Old Town, 1908. ©SDHS #5728.

Town stable. The partners and some employees and friends lived upstairs with their families, occupying Casa de Bandini from 1900 until 1919.89

Akerman & Tuffley announced plans to build a modern olive processing plant in Old Town—big news in 1911. The large packing house was architect-designed as a handsome Mission Style building covering almost an entire block. Located at the foot of Juan Street within Old Town Block 409, it was completed in 1915 and demolished in 1950-51 for the construction of the Caltrans District 11 office building.90 Akerman & Tuffley continued in business until 1919 when they retired and sold out to a corporation with local and New York investors. Five years later the company was recapitalized as Old Mission Products Company. The Old Town packing business was expanded to process pimentos, chiles, and other agricultural products, in addition to olive oil.91

While the date of Akerman's arrival in California is unknown, Robert L. Tuffley came to San Diego in 1888 from England. His son recounted that he and his father lived with Edward W. Akerman before the partnership moved to Old Town. Tuffley is listed in the San Diego City Directory as a Mission Valley rancher from between 1893-97 and then in 1899-1900 as a mechanic in Old Town. After retirement, Tuffley spent another thirty years in San Diego, dying in 1951 at age 93.92

As the Mission Packing Corporation Limited, Akerman & Tuffley sold what were considered superior olive products and earned many national and international awards.93 They were the largest, most successful, and longest-lasting olive packers in San Diego with no direct ties to the cultivation of olives.
C. M. Gifford and the Canned Ripe Olive

San Diegan Charles Myrtelle Gifford inaugurated the modern olive industry in the United States. The first processor to package ripe olives in a tin can, he created a new food product and a new way for olive growers to deliver their crop to the marketplace. Most sources do not credit Gifford or San Diego with this achievement. Instead, the name most often mentioned is Frieda Ehmann of Oroville. Ehmann deserves credit for aggressive and successful national marketing but she was not the first to produce canned ripe olives.

Before revolutionizing the olive business, Gifford showed his willingness to try something new by making a dramatic career change. In 1888 he left his work as a Great Lakes tugboat captain to raise oranges and grapefruit in the Jamacha area of San Diego County. After tasting pickled olives for the first time, he changed his principal crop from citrus to olives.

Gifford initially processed his olive crop on his East County ranch. Each week, he drove a horse-drawn wagon around San Diego, selling bottles of oil and pickled olives from a large barrel. The Hotel del Coronado was an early customer and he supplied many local grocery stores. Later the family and the business moved into San Diego. By 1897 Gifford was operating an olive processing business at 525 Ninth Avenue between H and I Streets. The company had a change of address in 1906, moving to the corner of 13th Avenue and M Street (later Imperial) and continuing to produce both olive oil and pickled olives. The Gifford plant packed eight to ten tons of olives per day and employed as many as seventy-six workers in the season.

From the first, Gifford experimented with new processing methods. He consulted with an agricultural scientist, Professor F. T. Bioletti of the University of California who, in 1899, had helped to perfect the process for canning olives. Gifford’s business changed dramatically in 1902 when he began packaging olives in tin cans. He won the first ever award for “canned pickled olives” from the San Diego Agricultural Association in 1902 and collected many subsequent prizes for his olive products. In 1906, it was reported that San Diego canneries had produced “not less than 120,000 cans of ripe olives” in the past year and that the industry was expected to double in San Diego County.

Realizing that San Diego was not the best place to grow olives, Gifford sold his Jamacha olive orchards and planted in other locations. In 1908 he started a large
Ascolano olive grove east of Brawley, predicting that olive-growing would be profitable in the Imperial Valley. The following year he put in another 2,000 trees in the Imperial Valley and started 11,000 cuttings. Gifford encouraged others to plant olives and promised to build a packing plant in Brawley if the local crop became large enough. Gifford & Sons were long-served by these orchards. The 1930 harvest was reported in the Los Angeles Times as a good crop headed to the San Diego processing plant.

Gifford further assured his olive supply by planting trees in 1915 on the western side of Kings County after irrigation promised fecundity on what had long been considered worthless land. Nine years after this initial investment, Gifford added to his Kings County holdings and by 1928 had become the largest grower and handler of olives in the area, with more than 200 acres in cultivation. The crop produced by smaller local growers was also purchased for shipment to the Gifford processing plant.

Gifford’s children worked in the family business. Dewitt, the elder son, was plant foreman for C. M. Gifford & Sons Olive company for many years and became well-known in the industry. Younger son Orville joined his father as

Charles M. Gifford used a two-horse rig to deliver pickled olives and olive oil to his San Diego customers. Photo courtesy of the Automobile Club of Southern California Archives.

A 1915 Gifford’s advertisement reminded San Diegans to share California’s unique olive products with those living out of state. San Diego City Directory. Author’s collection.
an active participant in the California Olive Association and later served as the organization’s president. After his father’s death in 1924, Orville became president of C. M. Gifford & Sons. Ruth, sister of Dewitt and Orville, is not mentioned as being active in the business until 1940, but her son, Robert L. Smedley, joined his uncles at Gifford’s. The company remained a wholly-owned family enterprise until 1961 when Orville D. Gifford retired and the business was sold to Westgate-California Corporation.

Charles M. Gifford did not pioneer olive growing and processing in San Diego, but his early success in canning olives foretold the future of olive packaging and sales. His was a longer lasting enterprise than others, as Gifford shrewdly adopted the most modern processing methods while continuing as a grower to supply his own packing business. Founded during the infancy of modern commercial olive processing, Gifford & Sons remained a viable San Diego business for more than sixty years.

Conclusion

Despite initial optimism, San Diego’s venture into olive production failed to meet expectations. J.W. Mills of the Agriculture Experiment Station in Pomona said that “colossal mistakes” were made during the olive boom. Growers placed trees in the wrong areas, gave them poor care, improperly pruned, or planted varieties not fully tested. In 1903, low prices and foreign competition caused many San Diego olive growers to adapt their land to other uses with the result that many unproductive orchards throughout California were destroyed. By the time prices were recovering, San Diego had lost many acres of olive trees. In 1909 San Diego County had more olive trees than any other California county. It fell to third place in olive acreage by 1915, fourth in 1918, and sixth in 1924. Olive processing plants survived by importing fruit from other regions of the state.

To some extent, San Diego was the victim of boosterism. Newspapers and magazines had fueled the fever with get rich promotions that denied the need for skillful horticultural practices in olive cultivation. Local growers fell victim to misleading information about the ease of producing a crop and successfully processing it for the market. The few who succeeded in the olive business adapted to new realities and employed scientific methods to keep their businesses alive and privately held.

An unknown, but intriguing, sideline to the San Diego olive story is the degree to which the olive oil industry and the tuna industry benefited economically from their proximity in San Diego. Oil-packed tuna processing was surely economically facilitated by the existence of olive oil factories in the same San Diego neighborhood as the tuna canneries. At the same time, the olive oil industry had an immediate market for bulk quantities of its product. When San Diego reigned as the “tuna capital of the world,” synergy must have existed between local olive and tuna packers.

San Diego retains an important place in the history of the California olive industry, despite the fact that it did not prove to be the best “olive country” in the state. It is the historic home of the olive in North America, producing many leaders and innovators in the industry. The story of San Diego’s olive culture is particularly important at a time when, according to a recent article, California
farmers “are pushing olive oil as though it’s the new thing, hoping to profit from denser planting methods and a growing U.S. appetite for the heart-healthy cooking ingredient.” The “boosterism” that produced the olive boom around 1900 appears to be alive and well today.

NOTES


3. Despite the fact that Gifford perfected the California olive industry’s most long lasting commercial innovation—olives in a can—he rarely gets credit. The typical misstatement reads like this example from a regional newspaper: “Mrs. Freida Ehmann of Oroville discovered ripe olives could be canned.” 3 California Cities Responsible for $30 Million A Year in Olives, Los Angeles Times, December 14, 1965, A2.


5. Antonia Ribora brought plants to Lima, Peru. According to one account, three plants survived the trip, one of which was stolen and carried to Chile. The trees produced fruit in Peru. French botanist
Amedee Grancois Frezier confirmed, no later than 1700, that Chilean-grown olive trees were mature enough to produce olive oil. John Ignatius Bleasdale, The Olive and Its Products: and The Suitability of the Soil and Climate of California for Its Extensive and Profitable Cultivation (San Francisco: Dewey, 1881), 12.

6. Early agricultural magazines offered practical advice on cultivating the olive in the American South. “On the Culture of Olive Trees,” Southern Agriculturist and Register of Rural Affairs, (October 1828), 459. Plantings were made but, by 1872, it was recognized that the olive was not going to succeed as a fruit crop in southern states. “The Manufacture of Olive Oil in California,” Scientific Monthly, XXVII, no. 13 (September 28, 1872), 192; Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on the Olive Tree,” Massachusetts Magazine (June 1792), 353.

7. The following appears in a scholarly botanical description of the tree: “the olive tree has in all ages been celebrated as a special gift of Heaven…it was one of the trees of the promised land of Canaan…the olive was cultivated by the ancient Egyptians and by the Greeks…and has few rivals in its usefulness to the human race. “The Olive Tree,” Garden and Forest 1, no. 24 (August 8, 1888), 284-85. See also John I. Bleasdale, “The Olive Tree,” The Californian, III, no. 15 (March 1881), 257; “Orchard and Farm: The Age of Olive Trees,” Los Angeles Times, April 28, 1894, 10.


14. The information was extracted from a letter in the Southern Patriot; “Miscellany, California,” Farmer’s Cabinet, April 27, 1854, 1.

15. “California–Her Resources,” Farmers Cabinet, October 26, 1859, 1, reprinting Horace Greeley’s letter XXXI (Marysville, September 2, 1859).

16. “California Fruits,” Scientific American, 11, no. 25 (December 17, 1864), 385. In 1863 the trees yielded heavily and considerable quantities of olive oil were made. In the post-mission era, this is one of the earliest accounts of olive oil making.


18. “Agricultural,” New York Observer and Chronicle, 50, no. 7, February 18, 1872, 56. The Santa Barbara grower was identified only as “Mr. Mayhew” who had obtained five hundred cuttings in February 1868.


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21. “Cultivation of the Olive,” *Prairie Farmer*, July 6, 1867, 7 (recounting a debate waged in the pages of *California Farmer*); “California Olives,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 24, 1876, 7, reprinting an article from the *Santa Barbara (Cal.) Index* about the economics of olive growing in Southern California. Dana B. Clark has 1,000 trees growing in Montecito.


28. Bleasdale, *The Olive and Its Products*. According to the Mission Olive Preservation, Restoration & Education Project, California planting numbers are: 1855 (503 commercial trees); 1876 (5,603 trees planted); 1885 (large orchards planted in National City, Oroville, and Sacramento Valley); 1890 (50,000 acres planted in Corning, Northern Sacramento Valley); and 1901 (539,568 trees planted). “Mission Olive History,” http://www.moprep.org/history.html (accessed May 29, 2007).

29. Report of the Agricultural Experiment Station, University of California, 1892-93 and Part of 1894 (Sacramento: Superintendent of State Printing, 1894), 16. Data in the report was gathered by Arthur P. Hayne, son of a Santa Barbara olive grower and a chemist at the College of Agriculture, University of California, Berkeley.


32. Calkins had 850,000 young olive trees in his Pomona Valley nursery in 1892. “Pomona Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1892, 2. This article breathlessly announced that electricity would power an olive mill under construction in the Pomona area. John S. Calkins of Pomona had published *The Olive-Growers Handbook* a few months earlier, giving information on the longevity of olive trees, with examples from the California missions and Europe. The article “Olive Culture,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 12, 1895, 10, remarks on the pamphlet’s advice that the olive industry could be very profitable, even for beginners. “Old Olive Trees,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1895, 12.


36. John S. Calkins refuted the State Board’s analysis by citing various growers who were doing well in the olive business. William B. Unruh, “Orchard and Farm and Stockyard,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1893, 11.


42. “Pickled Olive Trade,” Los Angeles Times, August 31, 1896, 8.


46. California Olive Primer (San Francisco: Southern Pacific Co., 1912). This is an example of the propaganda said to have soured many new and existing Californians on railroads as economic disillusionment set in and the utopian promises of “铁路 fever” proved empty. See William Deverell, Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). For a view that railroad land development activities had a positive effect, see Richard J. Orsi. Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 287-88.


48. According to Judith M. Taylor, Italian immigrants living in Northern California produced only enough olive oil for home use and very localized sales. This assessment seems too limited when historian Kevin Starr’s description of the density and vigor of the Italian community in Northern California is considered. Taylor, Olive in California, 36-39, 80; Starr, Americans and the California Dream, 375-79. Although the name of Rancho Camulos is incorrectly spelled, this early operation is also mentioned in “How Things Grows [sic],” Los Angeles Times, August 15, 1895.


51. San Diego Union, October 17, 1868, 3.


53. Sanborn is listed as the purchaser of 40 acres of land and may have given up his lease after acquiring this land. Some sources refer to him as Thomas Davis. “Is It So,” San Diego Union, March 2, 1871, 2; “Old Mission Being Photographed,” San Diego Union, March 19, 1872, 3. By 1872, Frank A. Kimball of National City had olive trees growing. In that year, Ellwood Cooper began planting his large olive groves in Santa Barbara. His first harvest came about four years later. Shinn, “Notes Upon the Olive.”


56. On May 23, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation enacted on March 3, 1860, returning ownership of California mission lands back to the Roman Catholic Church. The U.S. Surveyor General had a plat of San Diego mission lands prepared in September 1860. A facsimile of the document prepared by surveyor Henry Hancock is displayed in the Mission San Diego de Alcalá Museum. It shows three tracts of land, including an olive orchard of more than 5 acres, surrounded by two intact adobe walls and two sides of “wall ruins.”

57. Robert R. Benson, “The Ups and Downs of the Olive Industry,” Los Angeles Times, September 27, 1925, J3; “Old Mission Orchard,” San Diego Union, April 20, 1881, 4. Irene Phillips reports that Father Ubach allowed Frank Kimball in 1883 to dig up many dead trees to sell the pieces as souvenirs to raise

58. Investigation Made by the State Board of Horticulture of the California Olive Industry, Report to Governor Gage, 52. Among the imported varieties were: Cacco, Correggiolo, Frantoio, Moribello, and Palazzolo. “Notes,” Garden and Forest, 2, no. 71 (July 3, 1889), 324.


60. Bancroft was improving his land with irrigation pipes and planting 60 additional acres of olives, increasing the size of his olive orchard to 200 acres. “San Diego County,” Los Angeles Times, September 19, 1898, 13. Bancroft had purchased the ranch once owned by Judge Augustus S. Ensworth and later Rufus King Porter. The Ensworth adobe home was renamed the Bancroft Ranch House in 1958 and designated California Historical Landmark No. 626. Today it is a museum managed by the Spring Valley Historical Society. See www.sandiegohistory.org/societies/springvalley/ranchhouse.htm (accessed December 16, 2007).


63. Frank A. Kimball, Diary, May 12, 1869, Kimball Family Collection, Morgan Local History Room, National City Public Library; Irene Phillips, Development of the Mission Olive Industry and Other South Bay Stories (National City, CA: South Bay Press, 1960), 4-5.


65. In what may have been his first visit to San Luis Rey, Kimball described finding just seven or eight living trees in the mission’s original olive grove. With the July 4, 1876, Independence Day celebration coming up, he “took a cutting from one of them to plant as a Centennial tree.” Kimball, Diary, June 21, 1876; Phillips, Development of the Mission Olive Industry, 4-9.

66. In one letter Kimball pressed a fellow grower about ingredients for a solution that washed away black scale, the most damaging disease of olive trees. “Must whale oil be used?” Frank A. Kimball to Ellwood Cooper, August 18, 1889, Kimball Family Collection. Letters to potential customers in Cleveland, Boston, and other cities emphasized that every drop of his product was absolutely pure olive oil, unlike the diluted imports. Typical of these is Frank A. Kimball to S. W. Otis, October 1, 1889, Kimball Family Collection.

67. Taylor, Olive in California, 39, 42-43; Phillips, Development of the Mission Olive Industry, 9. Phillips erred when she wrote that Cooper was the only person in the country making olive oil.

68. Cooper was called the “Father of the American Olive Industry” when, at age 84, he visited Los Angeles for “Olive Day” in 1915. Cooper came to Santa Barbara for the first time in 1858. He later started an olive grove with cuttings from the San Diego mission (possibly supplied by Frank Kimball or Thomas Davies), but certainly not in 1865, as this story claims. “Half Century’s Purple Vistas,” Los Angeles Times, March 31, 1915, III; “Author, 84, Weds Young Widow, 60,” Chicago Daily Tribune, November 6, 1913, 5.


70. A diary entry records the ordering of $250 of stone for the mill from the San Diego Granite Company. Kimball, Diary, January 4, 1887.

71. Cooper and Kimball are credited with first placing the “promising” olive industry on a commercial basis and as “the two leading pioneers.” “A Midwinter Scene,” Los Angeles Times, January 1, 1892, 1; “Olive and the Vine,” Los Angeles Times, January 1, 1897, 15; “Pomona the Peerless,” Los Angeles Times, December 4, 1891, 10.

72. “The Olive,” Los Angeles Times, October 21, 1892, 12. This surprising information is documented in references to the prices paid by Kimball for olives at his processing plant.

73. Kimball, Diary, January 5, 1878, January 3, 1892.

75. Frank A. Kimball to Col. C. A. Booth, September 5, 1880, Kimball Family Collection.

76. Kimball records the belated delivery of his award certificate and the bronze medal from Chicago. Kimball, Diary, May 25, 1896. The San Diego Historical Society Research Library has this award and a number of others presented to Kimball. Included are the a gold medal for olive oil from the Cotton States International Exposition in Atlanta, 1895; an award for olive oil from the California Sixth District Agricultural Association, 1889; a gold medal diploma for olive oil from the California Midwinter International Exposition, San Francisco, 1894; and an honorable mention for olive oil from the Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1889. See also Charles Edwin Markham. “California at the World’s Fair,” *Californian Illustrated Magazine* (November 1893), 764.

77. Kimball specially ordered boxes that could be used to present sample bottles of his olive oil to visiting journalists. He also wrote about being all day at the olive mill as “lots of excursionists” visited. Kimball, Diary, January 23, 1892, February 12, 1896.


83. The earliest date that olives were grown in Fallbrook is not known. “The Olive Industry of Fallbrook,” http://www.fallbrook.org/history/olive-industry.asp (accessed May 29, 2007). Barbucia and Potter are listed as the operators of the first processing facility. F. F. Adams is also identified as a Fallbrook olive grower, but whether he was independent or associated with the Loma Ranch or Red Mountain Ranch is not clear. “San Diego County,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1897, 11.


87. Evidence of this operation is a one-gallon olive oil can displaying the brand and maker, along with a heavy metal press, pump and filter once used to produce the oil. These relics of the Rancho la Morada olive oil business were housed at the Motor Transport Museum in Campo, California as of December 2007.

88. “Tuffley [obituary],” *San Diego Union*, January 23, 1951, 7. When they retired in 1919, Akerman & Tuffley were said to have “started business in a small way more than 30 years ago.” “Pioneer Olive Plant is Sold; To Be Enlarged,” *San Diego Union*, July 4, 1919, 5.


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94. Gifford was born in Erie, Pennsylvania on May 7, 1858, son of Frank and Kate Gifford. He married Rachel Wheelock on June 24, 1884, and fathered Carrie Eula (who died at age eight), DeWitt, Ruth, and Orville. He died while seeking medical care in Rochester, Minnesota, on April 30, 1924, at age 66. “Eulogizes C. M. Gifford, Olive-Packing Pioneer,” San Diego Union, May 11, 1924, 17.


96. Ibid, 133.


98. Taylor, Olive in California, 50. Frederic Bioletti also published practical guides on olive cultivation in agricultural bulletins.


National City began as *El Rancho del Rey*, or the King’s Ranch, and was used for grazing the Presidio livestock during the Spanish and Mexican eras. In 1845, Governor Pío Pico granted the 26,612-acre ranch to his brother-in-law, John Forster, who renamed it Rancho de la Nación. It was sold to two San Francisco bankers, Francois Louis Pioche and J. B. Bayerque, in 1856. Frank Kimball and his brothers bought the ranch in 1868, laid out the townsite of National City, built a port, opened roads, planted citrus trees, and attracted the railroad and settlers. The city was incorporated in the South Bay on September 17, 1887.

The following historic photographs illustrate the development of National City from 1887 to the present. Modern views can be found at the following website: http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/local/nc/.

Frank Kimball (1832-1913) and wife Sarah Currier Kimball (1838-1912), ca. 1890 ©SDHS #11183.

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“Official Map. The Western Portion San Diego County California Made Under Direction of the Board of Supervisors A. D. 1872 By M. C. Wheeler Co. Survey'r assisted by F. Copeland dep'y and L. L. Lockling Draughtsman.” The original boundaries of the Pío Pico land grant were vague. Frank Kimball and George Morrill made an official survey in 1868 that resulted in a square plat of 26,612 acres. The northern side started at the southern edge of San Diego’s pueblo lands. The southern side bordered the ranchos of Mt. Miguel, La Punta, and Otay. The eastern boundary stopped at the foothills of the San Miguel mountain. Kimball put his townsit of National City on the northwest side, close to the bay and the road from Mexico to San Diego, but north of the marshy estuaries of the Paradise and Sweetwater rivers. This detail of southwest corner of the Wheeler map shows the Bay of San Diego and the rancho boundaries of la Nación, Otay, Janal. ©SDHS #M 868 COU-1870s YEAR 1872.

George Kimball (1824-1904), ca. 1890 ©SDHS #10766. Levi Kimball (1826-1892), 1886 ©SDHS #10886.
Warren Kimball, one of the founding fathers of National City, helped with the formation of the National City Public Library with a generous donation of books. Warren also helped establish the National City Bank in 1887. Courtesy of NCPL, Morgan Local History Room.

St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church (1887) at 8th Street and F Avenue is the oldest surviving church building in the South Bay and is listed on National Register of Historic Places, 1910. ©SDHS #80:8568.
Frank Kimball’s house at its original location on the west side of National Blvd. between 9th and 10th Streets, built in 1868-69 at cost of $8,000-$10,000, was the first house in National City and had indoor plumbing and hot water. Standing in photo that was taken about 1906 are, left to right, Prof. C. P. Evans, Mrs. C. P. Evans and daughter, Mrs. Ava Evans Smith, 1868. ©SDHS #10707.

The waterfront was the key to National City’s prosperity before the railroad. In this Turner postcard, ships unload at the 17th Street wharf in the 1880s. The ship on the right may be the Eurydice, sister to the Star of India. ©SDHS #7692.
The Kimballs owned the first lumber and brick yards that provided the raw materials for their town. These workers pose in the lot of the National Lumber and Mill Company at 9th Street and A Avenue, ca. 1912. ©SDHS #10336.

This aerial view shows the large lots with rows of fruit trees that were characteristic of eastern National City. The Dickinson-Boal house at 1433 24th Street and the house across the street belonging to Wallace Dickinson, son of Col. William Dickinson, at 1430 24th St. were both built in 1887. Photo made in 1928. ©SDHS #81:12267.
Frank Kimball promoted agriculture, planted orchards, grapes and olives, founded a Grange society in 1875, and organized the first County Fair in 1880 that would later move to Del Mar. His “Virgin Olive Oil” was produced at his Southern California olive mill, which was located at 8th Avenue and 23rd Street. Photo ca. 1887. ©SDHS #9737.

The National Ranch School District, formed in 1871, built a high school in 1882 at 9th Street and E Avenue called the Academy. It was demolished in 1969 for Old Schoolhouse Square. A second high school was built in 1883 at Roosevelt and West Avenue, known as the 16th Street School, demolished in 1923. The latter is shown here facing an unpaved 16th Street in a photo by Ralph P. Stineman, ca. 1911-15. ©SDHS #91:18564-1580.
The railroad came to National City with the first rail spike driven October 22, 1880, at the foot of 25th Street, followed by a wharf, freight depot, hotels, and a population surge known as the “Boom of the ’80s.” Photo shows the railroad repair yards and shops along the bay front land given to the Santa Fe railroad by the Kimballs, 1887. ©SDHS #9913.

This photo, made in 1887, shows the International Hotel that was built at 6th Avenue and 23rd Street in 1885 by the Boston Syndicate. It later was moved to another location and renamed the San Miguel Hotel. ©SDHS #1347. The new Southern California Railroad that was created by the Boston Syndicate, owners of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, built a depot in 1882 that today is the last remaining transcontinental station on the West Coast. The first transcontinental train from San Diego left this depot on November 14, 1885.
Brick Row, spanning an entire city block between 9th and 10th Streets along A Avenue, was built in 1887 by Frank Kimball with 240,000 bricks from his own brickyard, at a cost of $30,000. It was designed by J. J. Hunt in the style of Philadelphia row houses and was intended to provide housing for the executives of the railroad. This photo made in 1911 shows an early automobile parked on the unpaved 10th Street. Brick Row survives intact as a National Register Landmark in Heritage Square. ©SDHS #14420.

This photo shows a water delivery wagon of F. T. Moore in 1904. ©SDHS #13017. Water was vital to the city’s growth, and Frank Kimball used railroad money to build the dam on the Sweetwater River in 1888. It would be decades, however, before water pipes reached every home.
The Boston Syndicate sent William Dickinson to manage the Land and Town Company that funded the Sweetwater Dam, built a local railroad system, and developed Chula Vista. This photo shows Dickinson with Frank Kimball on Sweetwater Dam with sign, “Erected by the San Diego Land and Town Co. of Boston, Mass.,” 1888. ©SDHS #10668.

National City & Otay Railroad (NC&O) excursion train, with steam dummy engine named “Dickinson” in 1888. The trains ran south to the border, east to La Presa, and north for a 30-minute ride to San Diego. ©SDHS #80:7971.
The National City & Otay Railroad stopped at the Olivewood home of Warren and Flora Kimball at 24th Street and E Avenue, with its Olivewood Lunch Parlor, 1889. ©SDHS #1250.

The three-story Steele Block with its great tower was built by Elizur Steele and dominated the corner of National Avenue and 8th Street for decades. This photo, looking north on National Avenue, shows the NC&O tracks in the unpaved street, a carriage, and group of men in front of the Steele Block with a furniture store on the first floor and the Royal Hotel above. The other buildings up the street, from right to left, were Horticulture Hall, a Real Estate Office, and Old Grange Hall with the second story used as Masonic Hall. Photo 1890. ©SDHS #1319.
The Dickinson-Boal house was one of the most elaborate Queen Anne Victorian homes in the city. It was designed by Comstock and Trotzche in 1887, the same year that they designed the Villa Montezuma home of Jesse Shepard in Golden Hill. Photo made 1888. ©SDHS #12110.

The Stein Farm at 1808 F Avenue has become the National City Living History Farm Preserve. Charles Stein immigrated from Germany in 1888, farmed in Otay until the dam was built, then moved to National City in 1900 with his wife Bertha, pictured here with their children, ca. 1900. ©SDHS #T2004.56/15.2.
Paradise Valley looking east on an unpaved 8th Street from K Avenue. The Sanitarium in the upper left was founded in 1888 by Dr. Anna M. Longshore Potts, one of the first graduates of the Philadelphia Female Medical College. This photo of 1899 shows the original building that was closed in 1895 and replaced by a larger medical complex after the property was sold to the Seventh Day Adventists in 1905. ©SDHS #1252.

Interior of factory for packing lemons at the foot of 23rd Street in 1906. ©SDHS #10759.
The group of ten women who organized the first Tennis Club of National City High School, 1892. ©SDHS #10871.

Olivewood Club House, built in honor of Flora Kimball in 1911. Flora was a leader in National City, elected first female member of a school board in the state, Grange Grand Master, author, newspaper editor, suffragist, founder of the Tuesday Club. Photo by Ralph P. Stineman, June 20, 1913. ©SDHS #91:18564-1594.
Ralph Granger commissioned Irving Gill to design a music hall that was built at its original location on 8th Street, but moved in 1969 to 1615 4th Street. The interior featured an organ, violins and a large piano, 1890. ©SDHS #11024.

Oliver Noyes house at 2525 N Avenue was built on a 7-acre lot in 1896 by the city postmaster and his wife Mary Jane who had been friends of Frank and Sarah Kimball in New Hampshire. The home, recently owned by John and Christy Walton, has been donated to the International Community Foundation. Photo by Ralph P. Stineman, ca. 1911-15. ©SDHS #91:18564-1582.
Otto Stang blacksmith shop interior, at 18th and 7th Avenue (now McKinley), was established in 1896. Photo made in 1906. ©SDHS #10682.

National City & Otay train wreck at Sweetwater junction, May 20, 1905, in which engineer Mark Baird was killed. ©SDHS #9871.
National City High School, “Old Central,” at 9th Street and E Avenue from 1908 to 1954, designed at Frank Kimball’s request to resemble the San Luis Rey Mission. Postcard 1913. ©SDHS #AB-072-25.

Post Office interior, in rear of the Knights of Pythias Building on southeast corner of 8th Street and National Avenue. S. S. Johnston, postmaster, Mrs. Mary McDaniel Copeland, assistant, 1912. ©SDHS #13339.
Downtown National City prospered between WWI and WWII and population rose from 1,733 in 1910 to 21,199 in 1950. Shipbuilding and the Navy were important additions to the bayfront. This view from post-WWII shows a National Avenue with theaters, clothing stores, radio shops, and a new bus line. SDHS #AB-072-13.

Lincoln Acres subdivision, car in front of solitary house. Frank Kimball had been forced to sell or give away most of his ranch to get the railroad in the 1880s. Later subdivisions like Lincoln Acres, Paradise Hills, and the Bay Terraces would be privately developed starting in the 1920s but would refuse annexation into the municipality of National City. Photo ca. 1920. ©SDHS #5467-1.
Men pose in front of Blackman Fruit Market across National Avenue, the town’s main street, renamed National City Boulevard in 1978. The three policemen represent the growing importance of trying to keep order on the “Mile of Bars” during prohibition. Photo 1925. ©SDHS #5202-C.

“The Road to Hell” painted on National Avenue and 13th Street pointed to Mexico where liquor and gambling were legal. National Avenue was a link to Highway 101 that led to the border crossing at Tijuana during prohibition. Photo ca. 1920s. ©SDHS #16814.
Keith’s drive-in restaurant at 214 National Avenue in the 1950s was a favorite spot for the cars that cruised the wide avenue from Division to the Sweetwater river. Photo ca. 1950. ©SDHS #LB-5487.

Aerial view of Harbor Drive-In at the southern end of National Avenue. Photo 1956. ©SDHS #UT84:30162-3.
The Maytime Band Review began in 1947 and became the largest musical parade in the county, drawing 150,000 spectators. The Chula Vista High School band appeared in this parade on May 5, 1953. ©SDHS #UT84:30191-21.

South Bay Plaza shopping center was the second shopping center in the county when dedicated in 1954, following the smaller Linda Vista center that opened in 1943. The first store that opened in the Plaza was the Mayfair Market, followed by J. C. Penney, Wm. T. Grant, Woolworth’s and forty other stores when this photo was taken in 1958. ©SDHS #S-4388.

Mayors Walter F. Hodge and Kile Morgan and Claude Hunt were given keys to city on March 18, 1969. Morgan reshaped the city with urban redevelopment projects and tax-generating economic enterprises such as the Mile of Cars that replaced the Mile of Bars during his twenty years as mayor, 1966-1986. ©SDHS #UT85:h6475#5.
The new Montgomery Freeway began the transition to the Interstate 5 highway system that opened access to the dredged-in Tidelands shown in this Rozelle aerial of 1956 as light-colored land south of the Navy’s mothball fleet. ©SDHS #82:13673-1362.

A National City Investor:  
Theron Parsons (1805-1893)  
Molly McClain

In 1868, National City was known as “Kimball’s town,” the property of Frank Kimball and his brothers Warren and Levi. They purchased the former Rancho de la Nación, intending to develop a powerful trade city that might compete with Los Angeles for the terminus of the transcontinental railroad. An early settler, Theron Parsons, described the transformation of National City over twenty-five years. He noted the introduction of commercial agriculture, the development of the railroad, and the “boom and bust” of the 1880s and early 1890s. His diaries complement the important Kimball family collection at the National City Public Library. They also shed light on the activities and attitudes of an early American settler and his extended family.

Theron Parsons was the son of Noah Parsons (1780-1859) and Thankful Edwards (1781-1814), both of Westhampton, Massachusetts. He grew up in Onondaga County, New York, and worked as a printer in Adams and Watertown during his teens and early twenties. In the late 1820s, he established two newspapers, Thursday’s Post and the Censor. He married Lovina Collins (1807-1873) on September 25, 1827. Six of their children survived to adulthood: Marie Antoinette, La Rue Perrine, Silenus DeWitt, Harriett Amelia, Latricia Jane, and Josephine Arthusa.

Like many men of his generation, Parsons looked for real estate opportunities in the West. He moved to northern Illinois with his brother Timothy in 1832, not long after the Black Hawk War, and remained there until 1854. For several years, he kept a temperance tavern at “Hafda,” or Half Day, village in Lake County. In 1842, he and his neighbors formed an abolitionist society, the Lake County Liberty Association, which aimed “to effect the entire abolition of slavery in the United States.”

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Parsons visited San Francisco in 1852, one of thousands who headed to California after the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill in Coloma. He most likely accompanied his sister-in-law, Cynthia Elvira Parsons, whose husband Timothy had died in Illinois in 1849. She and her sons, Francis Marion, Theodore La Rue, George Henry, and Augustus Belding, and her daughter Agnes Olivia, moved to California and eventually settled in the Santa Clara Valley. Parsons did not stay, however, perhaps feeling that he would get a safer return on his investment in the upper Midwest.

In 1854, Parsons moved with his family to Mankato, Minnesota Territory, shortly after white settlers had staked the first claims to lands occupied by the Dakota tribe. They took a steamboat, the Black Hawk, up the Minnesota River, expecting this new form of transportation to bring additional settlers. Parsons bought farmland and built several houses. His diary for these years contains brief descriptions of trips from Mankato to St. Paul and Chicago to buy and sell goods like writing paper and shoes. He returned, occasionally, to Half Day, Illinois. He wrote of his success at developing and renting out property, made reference to growing apples and wheat, and noted the income received from a stone quarry in 1866. He did not mention the election of Abraham Lincoln, the start of the American Civil War, or the Minnesota Indian War of 1862. The latter led to the trial of over three hundred Dakota and the execution of thirty-eight warriors in Mankato, one of the largest mass executions in American history.

By the time the railroad came to Mankato in 1868, Parsons was a modestly well-to-do man. At the age of sixty-three, he began to travel again. Accompanied by his wife, he went to Virginia with daughter Latricia Jane and son-in-law Peleg Griffith to see where the latter had fought during the Civil War. A captain in the Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, Griffith had been involved in the James River Valley campaign and the siege of Richmond. Three years after the war had ended, the relics of his encampment at Evergreen Plantation were “very visible, although in quite a dilapidated state. Peleg was able to distinguish the quarters of each regiment, and...his own tent of poles and cedar bows, together with his sleeping couch, which served to bring the scenes of the past into fresh recollection.” Parsons noted, “I am certain that it made the matter seem more real to myself.”

They ended their trip with a three-month visit to Vineland, New Jersey, where their friends, John and Portia Kellogg Gage, had helped to found a progressive community that supported abolition, women’s suffrage, temperance,
and spiritualism. Parsons spent Thanksgiving Day 1867 with Lucy Stone Blackwell, a well-known abolitionist and pioneer in the women’s rights movement, and Robert Dale Owen, son of the founder of the Utopian community of New Harmony, Indiana, and one of the early advocates of birth control. Parsons described it as “as pleasant Thanksgiving time I think as I ever enjoyed.” After dinner, he went to hear Lucretia Mott speak at Union Hall before the opening of what would become the New Jersey Women’s Suffrage Association. He and his wife attended the convention and listened to speeches by Blackwell, Owen, and others. Several months later, their hostess Portia Kellogg Gage would become the first New Jersey woman to attempt to vote in a municipal election.12

Parsons held liberal opinions and strong religious convictions. According to his son-in-law, Parsons was “the most honest man I ever saw. I have put him down as being of that character and as being disposed to do right, let consequences be what they may.” He added, “I recalled a quotation from some worthy old patriarch which he frequently used to make use of. It is ‘as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,’ putting an accent upon ‘will.’ I used to think it was rather an orthodox idea he intended to convey, but I have more recently given a more liberal interpretation.”13

In 1868, Parsons decided to move with his extended family to California. His daughters and their husbands left Mankato early in the year. Josephine and Thomas Walker and Harriett and David Lamb traveled to California via
steamship and stayed with relatives in Santa Clara before heading south to San Diego. Parsons wrote, “Were it not for the expectation we have of joining them soon in their new home in the far west, we should miss them still more.”

In November, Parsons and his wife left Mankato for New York. They purchased tickets from the Pacific Mail Steam Ship Co. and arranged for boxes of sewing machines to be shipped to San Diego where they would be sold. On November 16, they boarded the Rising Star for California. He described the voyage through the Caribbean, the trip across the Isthmus of Panama, and the fifteen-day journey to San Francisco. At Acapulco, “the boat commenced coaling soon after anchoring and we were surrounded in a short time by Mexicans in small boats with tropical fruits, coral, etc.” Going ashore, he found that the town had altered little in the seventeen years since his last visit. In San Francisco, however, he found a “great change.” They spent one night at the International Hotel before heading south to the “picturesque” Santa Clara valley. He noted that the land was “highly cultivated and commanding a high price—from $150 to $1,000 per acre.”

Parsons and his wife took the steamer Orizaba from San Francisco to San Diego, arriving on December 22, 1868. He wrote, “We arrived in San Diego at 9 o’clock a.m. and were thankful that we had reached our destination in safety, and we were glad to see our dear children and grandchildren once more.” On the 24th, he traveled south to the Tía Juana River Valley where Lamb had a claim. He thought that it would be “a pleasant place to live when it is settled and improved.” On Christmas Day, he “looked about some and made a claim.” On his way back, he stopped at Frank Kimball’s place “and examined some lots in his town site.” Six months earlier, Kimball and his brothers had bought 26,612 acres of Rancho de la Nación for $30,000. They surveyed the land, which extended from San Diego in the north to Tijuana in the south, and chose the northwest corner as the site for the first building development, National Ranch, later incorporated as National City.

Parsons began purchasing land almost as soon as he arrived in San Diego. On
January 5, 1869, he and W. J. Pettit, a former state representative from Owatonna, Minnesota, bought a block of Alonzo Horton’s Addition for $1,000 and a corner lot owned by Captain S. S. Dunnells for $300. On January 12, he bought ten acres of land from Kimball for $300. A few days later, he “commenced to build our house” on 8th Street between E and F Avenues. He then purchased another forty acres of ranch land in National City at $25 per acre. A hand-drawn map in his 1889 diary showed properties bounded by 15th and 16th Streets and 7th and 8th Avenues. He and his son-in-law Thomas Walker later built rental houses west of National Avenue, near the waterfront.17

Parsons was well aware that he was investing in property only recently seized from Mexico. Soon after his arrival, he “went to the sea shore and saw the monument erected between the United States and Mexico defining the boundary line” established twenty years earlier.18 He noted his son-in-law’s frequent trips to collect wood in Tijuana and watched as nearly five hundred soldiers “passed on their way to Tía Juana” between October 1870 and January 1871. He recognized the fluid nature of the border, writing that he had seen a flock of 5,000 sheep from Los Angeles head to their grazing lands in Baja California. Still, he liked to remind himself of the safety of his investment. When he visited Pettit on his ranch in the Tia Juana River Valley, he stopped to visit the border monument on the Pacific Ocean. He and his daughter Josephine often visited the monument, sometimes bringing out-of-town visitors to admire the view. In 1887, “Mr. and Mrs. Shaubut, Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, Peleg and Winnie and Phenie and Josephine went to the hot springs, monument, etc.”19

Parsons rarely mentioned ethnic or racial groups, despite the large number of non-whites living and working in San Diego county. He continued to be interested in the plight of freed slaves, keeping an article on “Race Prejudice in Georgia”
in the back of his 1887 diary. He employed a worker, “Congo” or “Condo,” who “hoed in the beets,” planted barley, and ran the mower. He recalled buying celery and turnips from an Italian and, in December 1887, noted that “John Chinaman called with an assortment of China goods.”

But he did not document either Mexican or native inhabitants of the area.

Parsons shared Kimball’s dream of transforming the former Rancho de la Nación into a New England-style town and economy. He particularly wanted to expand the agricultural potential of the region which, traditionally, produced only wheat and wool in considerable quantities. To this end, he began to experiment with a variety of crops. On arriving, he planted peas, potatoes, onions, beets, beans, butter beans, watermelon, musk melon, cucumber, winter squash, sweet corn, peanuts, early Dutch turnips, corn, cabbage, and tomatoes. He “set out 140 grape cuttings” and planted “70 trees of different varieties” that had arrived by steamer, including fig, chestnut, lemon, orange, almond, plum, and English walnut.

In early 1870, he measured a sweet potato that had been raised by R. S. Pardee “which was 23 ¼ in length and 13 inches in circumference.” In 1873, his son-in-law Walker “raised a peach measuring 8 ½ inches in circumference, weighing 6 ½ oz.”

Like many early settlers, Parsons was encouraged by San Diego’s mild climate. He made a daily record of morning, afternoon, and evening temperatures, comparing it favorably to the weather in the East. On his first trip back to Minnesota in May 1872, he noted that “the atmosphere is damp and unpleasant as compared with the climate in California.” In 1875, he went to Tuscumbia, Alabama, where his daughter Antoinette Wardlaw lived with her husband on a “very secluded place.” He noted that the temperature at noon was 92 degrees
with “no wind at all—could not be induced to live in such a climate.”

Parsons learned what crops would grow by traveling throughout Southern California. In 1872, he learned from Captain Henry James Johnson that the steamship *Orizaba* laded 5,000 boxes of oranges per month from Los Angeles. Shortly afterwards, he visited Anaheim, Santa Ana, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Santa Barbara. He noted that “Mr. Russell started a nursery at Riverside in the spring of ’72 and has a fine lot of trees of different varieties and is prepared to fill orders for all kinds of trees—has 13,000 orange trees 2 years old last spring—offers to deliver 1,000 trees next spring at San Diego for 50 cents.” He admired Hollister Ranch in Santa Barbara where “we saw an almond orchard of 25,000 trees” and remarked that Santa Paula had “more land that will produce a crop annually without irrigating it than I have seen before in the southern part of the state, and more timber also, and on land that is good for cultivation.”

He also participated in activities organized by the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, a fraternal organization for American farmers founded after the Civil War. The group worked to protect the interests of farmers and farming communities, fighting railroad monopolies and pushing for rural mail deliveries. A chapter was organized in National City in 1874, with Frank Kimball as Master. Parsons mentioned lectures at Grange Hall and, in 1889, went with “a delegation of National Grangers…to the Mexican line and also to Sweetwater Dam.”

By the 1880s, Parsons and his son-in-law Walker had developed a successful orchard and fields that produced apples, oranges, peaches, apricots, barley, corn and strawberries, among other crops. In 1879 he
reported, “I have received $5.38 for apricots sold from one tree” after paying Mr. Sheldon a 25 percent commission for marketing them. In October 1881, they picked 1,300 pounds of apples and 25 pounds of pears. They experimented with twenty-two guava trees and several thousand olive cuttings. In 1886, Parsons noted that “vegetation is growing rapidly—the whole face of the country, as far as can be seen, is clothed in a beautiful garb of green.”

The development of a “fruit growing community” attracted considerable investment. An article in the Los Angeles Times observed: “The subdividing of many of the old Spanish grants and the cultivation of the rich soil has been accompanied by planting numerous large orchards and vineyards, which have abundantly repaid investments.” Over eight hundred people attended the county fair in 1880, hosted by National City. Its success led to an annual springtime Citrus Fair, first organized by the National Grange in 1881. Parsons described it as “a large and splendid exhibition of citrus fruit, as also other fruits, raisins, etc., and the fair was in all respects a success.”

Transportation, however, would be the most crucial factor in the successful development of National City. Kimball and his brothers knew that they had to attract a transcontinental railroad in order to develop a commercial port. To that end, they offered land and money to General M. C. Hunter, a backer of the Memphis, El Paso & Pacific Railway Company, who visited in 1869. When that company went bankrupt in 1870, they turned to Colonel Thomas Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, at that time one of the largest corporations in the world. He proposed to bring the Texas & Pacific Railroad to the Pacific and sought a suitable site for a terminus. But this railroad never reached California. Next, Kimball tried to attract the interest of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe. In 1879, he went to Boston to persuade the company’s president, Thomas Nickerson, to build to National City. The deal, which was finalized in 1880, required a land subsidy of 16,000 acres from the Kimballs. In October, the California Southern Railroad was chartered for the purpose of constructing a line from National City.
through San Diego to San Bernardino. Parsons noted the arrival of engineers, contractors, “lumber and timbers for R.R. Co,” steel rails and coal. Schooners and steamships from Britain, Canada, Belgium, and the Netherlands arrived with steel rails and coal. He thought that “all the improvements being made present a business-like appearance.”

In the early 1880s, Parsons began to improve his properties. In 1881, he sold his remaining properties in Mankato to his son, La Rue, for cash. The
following year, he sold one lot in National City for $1,000 and used the money to build a new house on 11th Street and E Avenue. He hired Messrs. Brown & Arnold to build a two-story Victorian with two fireplaces, a cellar, and hot and cold running water, and an ornamental balustrade. Doors and windows arrived via steamship from San Francisco. He deeded two lots next door to his farmhouse on 8th Street to the Congregational Church which he and other early settlers had founded in 1869. The church was dedicated on December 3, 1882. He also encouraged his daughter Harriett to exchange her land on the Sweetwater for a house and two lots in National City.  

In 1884, trains began to run between National City and San Bernardino. At the end of 1885, the first transcontinental train left for the East. *The San Diego Union* speculated that the coming of the Santa Fe Railroad might start “a period of moderate expansion.” In fact, it attracted thousands of new residents and created an unprecedented economic boom.

The railroad brought friends and relatives to National City. In 1886, Dr. and Mrs. Lewis visited “the first family that have been here from our old home in Minnesota (Mankato) since we have lived here over 17 years.” Michael Hund, formerly of Mankato, “bought a round trip ticket from Topeka to San Diego for $10.00.” That same year, his daughters Maria Antoinette and Latricia Jane, with her husband and children, moved to
National City from Danby, Vermont. Parsons built them a house, a barn, and farm buildings. In January 1887, George Marsh of Mankato arrived with an excursion party and expected to remain in California for four months. Parsons’ son Silenus arrived via the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad in May. At the end of the year, he wrote, “I think that we must have had quite an acquisition to our population in the last few days by the loads of trunks that have passed by and household goods.”

Visitors came from across the country. Parsons mentioned friends and acquaintances from Mankato and Vineland, New Jersey. He recorded the arrival of four hundred Civil War veterans who had been to San Francisco for the Grand Army Encampment in August 1886. He took note of visiting speakers such as “Mrs. Green, a temperance lecturer from Santa Cruz”; Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Waldron of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union; and former presidential candidate John Pierce St. John of Kansas “who is to give a Prohibition lecture Friday and Saturday of this week in San Diego.” Edward Fabian, a “distinguished elocutionist and basso teacher of New York” stayed with Parsons and his family as did many other visitors associated with the Congregational Church.

Silenus DeWitt Parsons (1834-1916), eldest son of Theron and Lovina Parsons, in Mankato, Minnesota, n.d. He moved to National City in 1887 and remained there until his wife’s death in 1903. He then moved to Hawaii to make his home with his son Charles F. Parsons, Judge of the Circuit Court of the fourth district in the territory. Private collection.
Parsons sold some of his property to new arrivals eager for land. In 1886, he sold fifteen lots for between $200 and $600 each. The following year, he remarked on the sale of a five-acre property for $5,000 to William Green Dickinson who managed the Land & Town Company, the real estate arm of the California Southern Railroad. He wrote, “several sales of town lots and small tracts of 5 acres eligibly located are reported at advanced rates” and observed that “real estate agents are active, carrying customers about in different directions.” He added, “I was enquired of this morning by a real estate agent if I had any lots to put into market for sale, remarking at the same time that they were troubled to find lots enough on the market to supply demand.” At the end of 1887, Parsons sold one lot for $900. He also raised rents on single rooms from $10 to $25 per month.

Population growth led entrepreneurs to open new businesses and build additional houses. In April 1887, Ferris & Hill “opened a Drug Store on National Avenue.” A San Francisco firm purchased property at the corner of National Avenue and 24th Street “for a large manufactory of wagons and carriages of all descriptions.” J. A. Rice “built a fine two story building next to Mr. Field’s for an office and a dwelling.” Kimball “commenced ten brick two-story dwelling houses on the block east of his residence,” later known as Brick Row. Contractor Elizur Steele, meanwhile, put up “a large two-story building on the back side of his block on National Avenue for furniture rooms for Chadburn’s Furniture Store.” In April 1888, Parsons walked down 8th Street to 3rd Avenue “where the Coronado Motor RR is being built, and was surprised to find so many buildings in that locality, back of the Steele Block. I should think that between 25 and 30 dwellings had been erected north of 9th Street in the last 6 or 8 months and of a good class of buildings.”

In June 1887 the National City & Otay Railroad Company began taking passengers from San Diego to National City, the Sweetwater Valley, Chula Vista, and Tijuana. Parsons described it as the “Moto Road” or “Moto Railway” and
wrote that it carried 550 passengers on the day after its grand opening. He went with his daughters and their families to San Diego and bought a pair of shoes at Wright’s Shoe Store before going to Coronado to see the new hotel and the ostrich farm. A few days later, he observed that “a picnic party from San Diego, two car loads this afternoon, went over to the picnic grounds on the Sweetwater.” The railroad also brought San Diegans to National City for the first service in the newly built St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church (1887). Parsons wrote, “there was a large congregation—from 75 to 100 persons came out from San Diego on the cars.”

The railroad made possible the construction of Sweetwater Dam, completed in 1888. On New Year’s Day, 1889, the Parsons family and friends “went up to the Sweetwater Dam and stayed until 4 o’clock—had our lunch on the south side of the reservoir where we witnessed the eclipse and spent the day very pleasantly. There were several small parties scattered about us, that appeared to enjoy themselves.” On another occasion, he watched water “rushing through the waste gates, several feet deep, tumbling and foaming over the rocks for 80 or 90 feet—which makes a grand waterfall worth seeing.” In 1891, he observed the effects of development on the region: “Went up the Sweetwater with Thomas this afternoon...and was surprised to find so many improved places. It has changed the appearance of the valley wonderfully, so that it is now quite an attraction and you feel well paid for a drive through it.”

Parsons was optimistic about development. At eighty-six years old, he had seen his share of “booms” and “busts” and remained untroubled by the vicissitudes of the railroad. By 1888, the Santa Fe had completed a line from San Bernardino to Los Angeles and had begun moving its terminus and machine shops out of National City. As one historian noted, “the Santa Fe Railroad realized that it had made a mistake betting on San Diego; the future of southern California lay in the city of Los Angeles and the port of San Pedro.” Parsons responded by moving his rental houses from the waterfront to his subdivision at E Avenue between 8th

Parsons built this National City house for his daughter and son-in-law, Latricia Jane and Peleg Griffith. Private collection.
and 10th Streets. He noted with dismay the falling prices of agricultural products: “Peleg took 1,300 limes to San Diego and could only get 40 cents for the lot.” But he continued to be hopeful about the future of the region. In 1890, he “rode out to Chula Vista” and remarked, “It has been built up and improved wonderfully in the last 3 years.”

Parsons continued to observe the progress made in transportation and technology. In 1891, he and family members rode on the newly established cable car line from L Street to a park and pavilion overlooking Mission Valley, later known as Mission Cliff Gardens. They “called at the cable car works to see the machinery and at the Chamber of Commerce where we found fine displays of the products of San Diego county.” He looked forward to the opening of a match factory in National City, hoping to be soon “supplied with home production of that article.” He also mentioned that the city had raised a $200,000 subsidy for “an iron and steel manufactory” established by Charles Eames in Point Loma.

Others were not hopeful about San Diego’s future. E. W. Scripps described the city as “a busted, broken-down boom town…probably more difficult of access than any other spot in the whole country.” Many newcomers who had gambled on a transcontinental railroad left town in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Parsons mentioned that “Miss Ida Murry, who had been living at Doctor Risdon’s for a year or more past, left this morning for her former home in Vermont.” He also complained that the Handley brothers started back to Minnesota after a visit of only a few days, “the consumptive discouraged in not finding immediate relief from his disease in coming here.” He remarked on the lack of public spirit, writing on July 4, 1892: “There was no public celebration at National City. Some of our citizens went to Point Loma and other places of interest.”

As Parsons approached the end of his life, he recorded the passing of other early settlers. In July 1891, he wrote “Mr. Moses Norris (aged 74 years) died this afternoon. He was an old settler and well respected.” Orlando S. Chapin, a prominent nurseryman in Poway, died in February 1892. Gail Borden, who settled in National City in 1868, died the following month at the age of seventy-seven. In June: “Captain Amos Crane was found dead in his bed this morning—age
87 ½ years...he was an old settler, came here in 1868—had been a sea captain and was a man of general intelligence.” In July, Parsons described the passage of the railway promoter J. S. Gordon, aged 59 years: “Mr. Gordon was an old settler—came to San Diego in 1870, and for several years past resided at National City.” In August: “Doctor Lewis Post died in his 97th year—was an old settler.”

Parsons died on September 26, 1893, at the age of eighty-eight. Like many of his contemporaries, he had taken advantage of the investment opportunities offered by the forced resettlement of Native Americans and the U.S.-Mexican War. He combined strong religious convictions with a belief in individual liberty and progress. He also worked for social justice, endorsing the abolition of slavery, women’s suffrage, and the prohibition of alcohol. He is remembered as one of the founders of the First Congregational Church in National City. He also joins the ranks of San Diego’s early investors and entrepreneurs.

NOTES

1. Theron Parsons, Diary, January 16, 1869, Huntington Library, HM 1556, vol. 2. The Ranchó de la Nación, a 26,631-acre Mexican Land grant, was acquired by a British merchant, Don Juan (John) Forster from his brother-in-law Governor Pío Pico in 1845. From 1795 to 1845, it had been known as El Rancho del Rey and used by soldiers from San Diego’s Presidio to graze horses and cattle. In 1856, Forster sold the rancho to two San Francisco bankers, Francois Louis Pioche and J. B. Bayerque. They, in turn, sold it to Frank Kimball and his brothers on June 16, 1868. Cecil C. Moyer, Historic Ranchos of San Diego (San Diego: Union-Tribune Publishing Co., 1969), 90-91. For information, see Leslie Trook, National City: Kimball’s Dream (National City: National City Chamber of Commerce and the City of National City, 1992); Irene L. Phillips, El Rancho de la Nación (National City: South Bay Press, 1959) and National City: Pioneer Town (National City: South Bay Press, 1960); Francis X. King, “Frank A. Kimball: Pioneer of National City,” master’s thesis, San Diego State University, 1950.

2. Parsons’ eighteen pocket-size appointment diaries, written between 1854 and 1892, are preserved in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Parsons wrote in pencil and occasionally used one diary to record the events of two or three years. He sewed together two books that included information about the years 1854 to 1866. There are no diaries for the years 1883-1885. Several diaries contain newspaper clippings, names and addresses, and records of financial contributions to social and religious causes. He also described the activities of many National City families, including the Kimballs, the Copelands, the Vaughans, and the Steeles. Spelling has been modernized and abbreviations extended.

4. The names of their children are written in the back of Lovina Collins Parsons’s book of poetry. They differ slightly from the names listed in the Parsons Family. Collection of Marjorie McClain Reeves, Rancho Santa Fe. See also Henry Parsons, Parsons Family: Descendants of Cornet Joseph Parsons (New York: Frank Allaben Genealogical Company, 1912), 298.

5. Charles A. Partridge, History of Lake County (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1992); Elija M. Haines, Historical and Statistical Sketches of Lake County, State of Illinois, (Waukegan: Gage’s Print, 1852); Little Fort Porcupine and Democratic Banner, March 10, 1846. Parsons and his brother, Timothy Edward Parsons (1802-49), arrived in Chicago in 1832. His brother located near Downer’s Grove in DuPage County but Theron traveled north to look for land, staking a claim just outside the boundary of Lake County in 1833. He was listed with Captain Daniel Wright, Hiram Kennicott, and William Cooley as one of the first settlers of Vernon township. Half Day village derived its name from a Native American settlement on that site, the home of Chief Hafda of the Potawatamie tribe. Parsons, Parsons Family, 297.

6. Cynthia Parsons and her sons met Theron and his family on their arrival in 1868. The latter wrote: “…started for Santa Clara at 8 ½ by rail, arrived at Sister Cynthia’s at 11 o’clock a.m. and was kindly and very affectionately received by all of our connections. Walked out to the farm and saw Francis, Theodore, and George and wife and was cordially and affectionately received…In the evening Augustus and wife came in and spent a short time.” Parsons, Diary, December 11, 1868; Parsons, Parsons Family, 297. Theodore L. Parsons and his wife Anna moved to San Diego from Santa Clara in July 1880. Parsons, Diary, July 30, 1880, vol. 9.

7. Other Parsons relatives also moved to California. Erastus Parsons (1822-92) arrived around 1852 and worked as a miner in various places, the last in Shasta County, near Redding, where he died. In 1852, William Fiske Parsons (1820-52) was drowned off the coast of California. Parsons, Parsons Family, 237, 290, 297.


10. Peleg Griffith (1836-1918) was the son of Hiram Griffith (1800-1833) and Betsey Jacobs Griffith (1798-1884) of Danby, Vermont. He panned for gold in California in 1859; worked a farm in Amador County with his brother John Marcellus Griffith in 1860; fought in the American Civil War; ran an eating house in Vineland, New Jersey, in 1867; worked as a retail dry goods merchant in Mount Tabor, Vermont, in 1870; and moved to National City, California, with his wife Latricia Jane Parsons Griffith in 1886. He and his wife had five children: Elva J. (ca. 1864-64), Winifred Parsons Griffith McClain (1872-1957), Josephine Griffith (1874-1888), Theron Parsons Griffith (1869-1965), and Ethel Lydia Griffith Bailey (1881-1958).


13. Peleg Griffith to Jane Parsons, [December 1860], collection of Marjorie McClain Reeves. In the
back of diary for 1875-76, he set down “My Religious Belief”: “1st God is one in essence and in person, in whom there is a distinct and essential Trinity, called in the word the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the Lord Jesus Christ is God, and the only object of worship. 2nd In order to be saved, man must repent of his sins, and believe in the ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ and strive to obey his commandments — looking to Him alone for strength and assistance, and acknowledging that all life and salvation are from him.” 3rd “The Sacred of Scriptures” are ‘not only the revelation of the Lord’s will, and the history of his dealings with men, but also contain the infinite treasures of His wisdom, and should be taken as the rule and guide of our life.”” Parsons, Diary, vol. 6.

14. Parsons, Diary, April 6, 1868, vol. 2.

15. Parsons, Diary, November 9-December 12, 1868, vol. 2.


17. A year later, he sold the contract for land in Horton’s Addition for $100. Parsons, Diary, January 12, 1869; February 8, 1869; notes at the end of volume 2; December 15, 1869, vol. 2; 1889, notes at the end of volume 15. Frank Kimball noted in his diary: “Received of Mr. Parsons $1,000 as payment on ten acre lots 16, 15, 14 & 13 in qr. Sec. 154, price of the 4 $1,000. Also No. 8 in sec. 153, $300. Also block $200. Balance of $1,490 to $1,500 to be paid in 4 equal annual payments.” Frank A. Kimball, Diary, February 8, 1869, Kimball Family Collection, Morgan Local History Room, National City Public Library.

18. For information on the border, see Charles W. Hughes, “‘La Mojonera’ and the Making of California’s U.S.-Mexico Boundary Line, 1849-1851,” JSDH 53, no. 3 (2007): 126-47.

19. Parsons, Diary, January 10, 1869, vol. 2; October 19, December 31, 1870, vol. 3; January 8, January 26, 1871, vol. 3; April 18, April 21, 1871, vol. 3; June 24, September 16, 1879, vol. 8; August 20, 1881, vol. 10; February 3, April 12, 1882, vol. 11; May 24, September 24, December 8, 1887, vol. 13; February 4, 1890, vol. 16; October 1, 1891, vol. 17.


22. Parsons, Diary, May 21, 1872, vol. 3; June 22, 1875, vol. 6. He took several trips east between 1872 and 1875 to visit family in Rochester, New York; Mount Holyoke and Northampton, Massachusetts; Danby, Vermont; and Mankato, Minnesota.

23. Parsons Diary, August 31, October 13, October 17, 1874, vol. 5.


27. Parsons, Diary, September 22, 1880, vol. 9; March 10, 1881, vol. 10. In 1886, “the display of citrus fruit was larger than usual and of a better quality, but there was not as many present as at previous exhibitions held here.” Parsons, Diary, March 13, 1886, vol. 12.

28. Parsons, Diary, June 30, September 18, 1869, vol. 2; August 8-9, 1877, vol. 7; November 8, 1879, vol. 8; September 27, 1880, vol. 9; April 16, 1881, vol. 10; June 29, 1881, vol. 10; Franklyn Hoyt, “San Diego’s First Railroad: The California Southern,” The Pacific Historical Review 23, no. 2 (1954), 137. In the back of his diary for 1880, Parsons kept a slip of paper in his hand that read: “Names of the men who have agreed to build a rail road from bay of San Diego to connect with the Atlantic & Pacific road in California: Thomas Nickerson, Kidder, Peabody & Co., B. P. Cheney, Geo. B. Wilbur, and Lucius G. Pratt.”
Parsons, Diary, August 11, 1881; January 9, January 11-February 28, May 11, August 12, 17, 28, December 3, 1882, vol. 11. In 1869, Parsons held a meeting at his house “for the purpose of organizing an Independent Congregational church, which was effected with a membership of 11 persons.” Parsons Diary, November 20, 1869, vol. 2. In 1887, he wrote, “Mr. Andrews, of Oklahoma, commenced setting up the church organ,” referring to a pipe organ used by the Congregational Church. He added that he had donated $25 towards its purchase. Parsons Diary, March 7-8, 1887, vol. 13; Claire Goldsmith, “A Venerable Pipe Organ, JSDH 9, no. 2 (1963): 26-27.

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Hoyt, “San Diego’s First Railroad,” 144.

Parsons Diary, January 24, April 12, August 25-October 8, November 15, 1886, vol. 12; January 11, May 16, 1887, vol. 13. Silenus DeWitt Parsons married Frances (Fanny) Howell White on December 28, 1869. He died on January 13, 1916, in Hilo, Hawaii, and was buried at Homelani Memorial Park, Hilo, Hawaii. Thanks to Gary Parsons for this information.

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Dickinson built an eighteen-room Queen Anne home on the site, now known as the Dickinson-Boal Mansion (1887) at 1433 E 24th St., National City.

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In August 2005, the National City Public Library opened the doors on its newest home, a beautiful 49,508 square-foot building with a staff of more than twenty-five. The library has subscriptions to over 200 serials and space for more than 160,000 books. The Computer Center, with 60 units, claims to be one of the largest in California's public libraries. The creation of this new structure leads one to reflect on the history of the library. How did a small agricultural town develop its own public library? This article explores National City’s history—its founders, its early community, and its relationship to its neighbor San Diego—and the origins of the library. It also looks at the context in which public libraries were established in California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Frank Kimball founded National City in 1868 with the help of two brothers, Warren and Levi. He had moved from his home town of Contoocook Village, New Hampshire, to California for reasons of health, moving first to San Francisco. He spent ten years there before finding the Bay area too cold and damp; he headed south for better weather.1 Upon arriving in the southernmost part of California, he purchased the Rancho de la Nación, a “barren” Mexican land grant. Kimball notes in his diary on June 15, 1868, “Called on Mr. Pioche and agreed to take the National Ranch at the price agreed, $30,000...1/3 cash and the balance in 3 annual payments at 8 per annum.”2 The Kimball brothers quickly began surveying the land to create a town. They “plotted, subdivided, and surveyed the 42 square miles of National Ranch.”3 They envisioned a city along the lines of their rapidly growing neighbor to the north—San Diego. They built twelve homes during their first year and seventy-five more the following year.4

Matthew Nye received his undergraduate degree in history from San Diego State University (2004) and his Masters in Library and Information Science from San Jose State University (2006). He worked as a librarian for the Museum of Photographic Art’s Edmund L. and Nancy K. Dubois Library. He is currently employed at the National City Public Library where he has worked as a librarian in the Morgan Local History Room and managing children’s services.
The industrious Kimball brothers had vision. In addition to real estate, they were involved in agriculture; waterworks, which included the building of the Sweetwater Dam, at the time the largest masonry structure in the United States; banking; and the railroad. San Diego’s success pushed the brothers to make National City an economic and cultural showplace. They did not want to build an “outpost” but a viable, cosmopolitan city.

Frank Kimball brought his love of books and print culture to the West. He was known as an enthusiast and procurer of good books. While living in San Francisco he often visited “Duncan’s Auction House” which stocked books sold by pioneers to make money upon arriving in California. Kimball purchased a good deal of fiction, history, and works on agriculture.

Frank’s sister-in-law Flora Kimball also participated in National City’s literary scene. She and her husband Warren moved from San Francisco in 1868. She published a children’s book, The Fairchilds, under the pen name F. M. Lebelle in 1872. She also wrote short stories and essays for Scribner’s Magazine and The Argonaut. Many of her works focused on women’s rights and the suffrage movement. In the 1880s she wrote a “Women’s Column.”
for the National City Record and edited a women’s section for The California Patron. In 1886, she published and edited a National City magazine called The Great Southwest.7

In 1884, Frank Kimball used his collection of books to create a library in his National City real estate office. He opened his “Public Library” with the help of Ah Lem, his Chinese workman. His diary reads: “Ah Lem at work on library and on bookcases,” “At work on 2nd bookcase for Public Library,” and “Ah Lem hauled 3 loads of books to the Library rooms in my real estate office.” The National City Record noted that on December 18, 1884, “National City Free Library and Reading Rooms” opened its door for business.9 The Library’s Accession Record shows such diverse books as the modern library classic Two Years before the Mast by Richard Henry Dana; Poems by John Saxe; James Madison by William L. Rives; and the 39-volume Bancroft Works (The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft), that the library still owns.10

In April 1887, a few years after the library opened, Frank Kimball, A. G. Adams and other citizens of National City established a Library Association with $2,000 of capital stock. This stock was divided into 1,000 shares at $2 each. Everyone interested in contributing to the Public Library was encouraged to take as many shares as they could.11 On Friday, April 29, 1887, the library was moved into the downstairs room of Grange Hall on National Avenue between 8th and 9th Avenues. The old library room in the back of Kimball’s real estate office was then used as the city’s kindergarten. The library remained in the Grange Hall for almost ten years before it was eventually moved to the Boyd Block on 7th Avenue (now McKinley) and 16th Street in July 1895.12

This view of 7th Avenue (now McKinley Avenue) was taken from 19th Street around 1900. In the distance, the building with the tower was known as the Boyd Building, built in 1887. The public library was located on the second floor from 1895 to 1896. Courtesy of NCPL, Morgan Local History Room.
Public Libraries in California

National City’s push to establish a viable public library was part of a national trend sweeping the country during the late nineteenth century. It was encouraged by significant economic prosperity, a social focus on education and morality, and an increase in urban populations.

In California, the development of libraries followed steps taken by many other states. These included: “(1) laws permitting the incorporation of library associations, (2) laws relative to school district libraries, and (3) laws authorizing the establishment of tax-supported town libraries.”13 In 1878 and 1880, California legislative decisions provided the state with a base from which it would build its public library systems. The Rogers Act, named after one of its authors, State Senator George E. Rogers, was passed into law in 1877-78. This was known as Senate Bill Number 1, “An Act to establish and maintain free public libraries and reading rooms.”14 This law allowed any incorporated city or town to establish a library. The bill was part special legislation for the city of San Francisco and part general legislation for the municipalities of the state. In The Rise of the Public Library in California, author Ray Held summarized the general provisions of the Rogers Act:

1. The law was permissive rather than mandatory, granting authority to all incorporated municipal governments to maintain public libraries.
2. The tax limitation was one mill on the dollar.
3. The power of the library trustees was extremely limited, with all matters touching upon appointment of personnel, salaries, and building being reserved to the municipal authority.15
Over the next thirty years California replaced the Rogers Act with three subsequent general library laws. The 1880 act stipulated that the trustees, five in number, were to be elected to the post just like other city officials. Their powers were enhanced, giving them full authority over the library, which included approval of all books purchased for the library. Yet control over real estate and building expenditures remained in the hands of the city council. The board of trustees was responsible for ensuring that the library’s responsibilities were being carried out in the most efficient and economical way. Traditionally, library trustees were businessmen, prominent citizens, and professionals. Laws enacted in 1901 and 1909 relaxed and liberalized parts of the 1880 Act. In addition to allowing interlibrary loans and giving permission to loan books to non-residents of a city, the new laws made women eligible for service on library boards.16

When the American Library Association was formed in 1876, there were only 188 public libraries in the United States. By 1894 there were 400, though unevenly distributed and predominantly located along the East Coast. Of the 46 public libraries located west of the Mississippi, 18 were located in California. At this time, the state had over 198 incorporated cities, but only 31 of these exceeded a population of 5,000.18

The establishment of libraries took off in Southern California, most notably in small towns with populations under 2,000. Redlands and Orange founded their libraries in 1892; Monrovia and Pasadena in 1895; and Coronado and National City in 1896. Many libraries were founded in cities that had experienced some type of community activism, such as a temperance movement or a Women’s Improvement Club.20

The National City Public Library

The official National City Public Library was founded by Frank Kimball with the help of Rev. Frank A. Bissell who had moved to National City in the early 1890s to take on the pastoral duties of the Congregational Church. Frank and his brother Warren agreed to donate 750 of their books to the current Library Association with the expectation that the volumes would go to the new library. A board of trustees was then established in 1896. Rev. Bissell served as president of the board. The other members were Peleg T. Griffith, John E. Boal, Lynn Boyd, and David K. Horton who acted as secretary.21 The board of trustees purchased the Kimball books from the Library Association for $50.

This amenable arrangement contrasted with the situation in San Diego where the library failed to acquire over 1,000 books owned by Alonzo Erastus Horton, founder of New Town. Horton had acquired a substantial collection as a result of a real estate transaction with historian Hubert Howe Bancroft. In 1870, the city of San Diego had created a library association and public reading room. They called it the Horton Library Association and expected to receive Horton’s collection, valued at $2,000, as a gift. Horton was a trustee of the association and a member of the committee on books and donations. However, he wanted to donate half the collection and sell the other half. This request and its subsequent fallout resulted in the dissolution of the Horton Library Association and its reestablishment as the San Diego Library Association without Horton or his books.22

In 1896 the National City Public Library moved into Aylworth Hall at 4th
Flora Morrill Kimball was the wife of Warren Kimball. Her obituary boasted that she was the best-known woman in the state. Flora loved books and was an early supporter of the National City Public Library. In 1889 she was elected to the National City School Board, distinguishing her as the first woman in the State of California to serve in such a capacity. She wrote several books, including The Fairchilds (1872). Courtesy of NCPL, Morgan Local History Room.

Avenue (now Harding Street) and 14th Street. Edward B. Aylworth, an early settler, had commissioned architect Lewis A. Curtis to design and build Aylworth Hall in 1887 at the cost of $6,000. The result was a Greek Revival, two-story wooden structure with a small entry porch and a low-pitched roof. It measured 50 by 65 feet, with 17-foot ceilings on the ground floor. Aylworth had the building constructed for his civic-minded wife to use as a Temperance Hall. According to one historian, “The robust construction aptly reflected the unbending spirit of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of which Mrs. Aylworth was a fervent member.” The lower floor held a Women’s Christian Temperance Union parlor while the second floor contained a 600-seat public hall. The Aylworths eventually moved back to their original home in Oregon, selling the building to the city for $2,500.

National City, ca. 1886, looking north and east from 21st Street and 8th Avenue (now Cleveland). The three-story building on the right is the Six Avenue Hotel, built by Frank Kimball in 1886. Courtesy of NCPL, Morgan Local History Room.
In order to support the library, National City taxed its citizens in accordance with the Rogers Act passed fifteen years earlier. The minutes from the meeting of the National City Council in 1895 related to the Public Library and the issue of taxation:

Resolved by the Board of Trustees of the City of National City, that a tax of ten cents on the hundred dollars be levied upon the assessed property of the City for the purpose of establishing and maintaining in the said city a free public library and reading room and purchase such books, journals and other publications, purchasing and leasing such real and personal property and erecting such buildings as may be necessary thereof.25

The first librarian who worked for the National City Public Library was Sarah T. Murray, chosen by the board of trustees on June 16, 1896. Little is known about her save for the fact that she started work on July 1 with an initial salary of $20 per month.26 A year later, she requested a raise to $25 per month. The board responded, “Answer to Mrs. Murray’s request as to an increase of salary the financial outlook for the coming year does not warrant the board in granting it and that she be so informed.”27 They did, however, allow her to get help to clean the library shelves and to arrange the books. This was to be financed by funds “in the hands of the librarian.” When Murray died in 1902, the board of trustees made note of the fact in their meeting notes, “She was an efficient worker, a sincere Christian and a brave, true woman. Frail in body and bearing burdens that would have crushed many a strong man.”28 She was replaced by Sarah C. Dickinson.

By 1900, National City had just over 1,000 residents while its neighbor San Aylworth Hall, ca. 1905, was home to the city’s library until 1911. Because the building afforded such a large open space it was used for a variety of functions, including graduation exercises and public meetings. After the city purchased the building, it was used as City Hall until 1937. Courtesy of NCPL, Morgan Local History Room.
Diego had 17,000.\textsuperscript{29} The library’s collection had grown too, approaching 4,000 volumes. The library was in regular use. It was open every day except “legal holidays” from 2-5 p.m. (Sundays 3-5 p.m.), and had an annual circulation of 5,440 (87 percent of which was fiction).\textsuperscript{30} There was also an effort to make the library a more comfortable and inviting environment for its patrons. In July 1904, the board of trustees’ notes read, “The librarian was instructed to present a petition to the city–Trustees asking for the installation of electric lighting.”\textsuperscript{31} In September, the library had been fixed up with new wallpaper and newly laid linoleum flooring for $23.25, paid from a special fund “in the hands of the librarian.” The printed 1902 library catalog noted that the library was open to all citizens of National City, 12 years of age and older, and to residents of the county who owned property. All others who wished to borrow books were required to pay a fee of 5 cents a week for each volume they took from the library.\textsuperscript{32} During the first years of operation, patrons were not allowed in the stacks and they could take out only one book at a time. The librarian later increased the limit to two books so long as one of the books was non-fiction: “On motion: Librarian was instructed to allow two books issued to one borrower provided one is not fiction.”\textsuperscript{33}

In 1902 the board of trustees included, for the first time, two women: Fanny Thelen and Mrs. Clark. Other members were Dr. W. S. Welsh and Peleg T. Griffith. At this time, public libraries were in the process of acquiring the collections of smaller libraries, many of which were owned and operated by women. These smaller libraries had “rooms” to meet and read books and papers. Many of them were associated with temperance societies, reform societies, and Samaritan societies. To encourage and facilitate the amalgamation of these libraries and reading rooms into the public library system, it became advantageous to bring women into the executive level of library organizations.

**A Carnegie Library**

In 1909, the board of trustees applied for a grant from the Carnegie Foundation to assist in the construction of a new library. Starting in 1881, Andrew Carnegie paid for the construction of 1,689 public libraries, many of them imposing architectural structures in a variety of historical revival styles. Carnegie, a wealthy steel baron, could have been a hero in a Horatio Alger story: a poor boy who made good through hard work. As a result, he was interested in providing resources for the self-educated man.\textsuperscript{34} Theodore Jones, in his *Carnegie Libraries across America*, noted that five hundred to three thousand letters in reference to library grants arrived daily for Carnegie. Requests came from all over the country from all-sized communities. Jones writes, “Carnegie’s tenets for the library program were very simple. To be eligible, a community had to demonstrate the need for a public library, provide the building site, and promise to support library services and maintenance with tax funds equal to 10 percent of the grant amount annually.”\textsuperscript{35} Hence, if the awarded grant was $20,000, the town had to dedicate $2,000 per year.

Some facts about the Carnegie public libraries in the United States:

- $41,748,689 provided 1,689 public libraries in 1,419 communities.
- The largest grant was $5,202,621 awarded to New York City.
- A total of 1,015 grants were for less than $15,000, indicating that most
libraries were built in communities of fewer than 7,500 people.
- More than half of all grants (768) went to Midwestern communities.
- Because of the variation in branch donations, the states with the most Carnegie public library buildings are Indiana (165), California (142), and Ohio, New York and Illinois (all with 106).
- Only Rhode Island, Delaware and Alaska did not receive Carnegie grants.36

In February 1909, the National City News wrote that the president of the library’s board of trustees, Dr. Theodore F. Johnson, was working to secure a donation from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation “sufficient to erect a public library for some time to come and which would be an ornament to National City.”37 The following month, the board of trustees was offered $10,000 if the city could provide a suitable site to build. The city administration proceeded to form a Building Committee to work on securing the land. The National City News posted a “Notice of Sale of Municipal Bonds” in July.38 Proposition 1, which would raise $12,000 through bonds, passed with a vote of 124 for, 46 against. The city planned to purchase a fifteen-acre tract of land where they could locate a new library as well as a public park.39

Architect William Sterling Hebbard designed National City’s Carnegie Library building in the Classical Revival style.40 It was a one-story structure with a full basement, made of brick, with two Doric columns in front and six windows, three on each side of the door. It was designed to maximize the amount of light. The interior had over twenty windows, with a skylight above the lobby. The National City Record described it as “one of the most ornamental library buildings in Southern California.”41 The “delivery desk” was set in a spacious lobby, allowing librarians to see almost the entire facility. The library included a private room for the librarian and a “Children’s Room.”42 Edith Marshall, former secretary to the board of trustees, was appointed librarian with a salary of $45 per month.43
The building was dedicated January 13, 1911. The celebration included a presentation of an American flag by the Ladies of Grand Army of the Republic. The principal of the National City High School, Dr. Benjamin S. Gowen, gave a speech in which he hoped that the library would direct its attention to the children of the city. He instructed parents to cultivate in their children a taste for “good” books and provided examples from the works of various authors. At this time, many public libraries began to encourage young patrons. In 1906, the Los Angeles Public Library began sending collections of books to playgrounds. In Portland, Mary Frances Isom started a library league in the hope of instilling the library habit in every child who lived within walking distance of a public library, a branch library, or a deposit station.

The library’s board of trustees remained responsible for the library’s collection development, often acting as the city’s moral gatekeepers. In 1910, the city newspaper had noted, “the library, through a careful process of elimination and a conscientious selection of new books, now contains over 4,000 volumes, remarkably free from trash, covering all the more important subjects of interest.” They acquired new books such as: The New International Webster’s Dictionary, Larned’s History for Ready Research (seven volumes), and The Stereographic Views of the Yosemite and the Yellowstone Parks. These works, among others, were said to “have given much pleasure and proved very useful.” In July 1911, the library contained 4,130 books, including 44 periodicals. The circulation for the year totaled 8,021, an impressive beginning for the new library.

Trustees also harnessed public spirit to raise money for furniture. At their first meeting in the new building, they were “struck by the meager showing of the old furniture made.” It was “absolutely inadequate for the needs of the new library.” One of the library’s patrons, a man believed to be forming the “library habit,” offered a challenge: “I will be one of 50 to give five dollars each toward buying suitable furniture.” The board took him up on his offer and opened a subscription list at the People’s National Bank.
The construction of a new library in National City in 2005 reflected the city’s long tradition of support for the culture of books. From Frank Kimball’s small “public” library in his real estate office to the city’s first official library, National City used the assets available to them to bring books to its citizens. The city’s continued emphasis on education, literacy, and leisure activities reflects the vision of National City’s progressive founders.

NOTES

1. The Kimball brothers worked as successful contractors in San Francisco and Oakland for seven years before Frank’s ill health necessitated a move to a more congenial climate. Heading south, Frank Kimball took options on seventeen different properties between Salinas and Los Angeles, including the Coyote Ranch in Los Angeles and 6,000 acres in what is now Pasadena. Finding problems in the titles or in the land itself, Kimball continued south until he eventually found Rancho de la Nación. Irene Phillips, National City: Pioneer Town (National City, California: South Bay Press, 1961), 3.

2. Frank Kimball, Diary, June 15, 1868, National City Public Library, Morgan Local History Room, 10. Many of the fifty-two diaries written by Frank Kimball were donated to the National City Public Library in 1958 by Gordon Stanley Kimball, great nephew of Frank Kimball. The diaries span the years 1854-1912. The brief entries describe historical events, modes of travel, business experience, and the hardships of daily life. Events addressed in the diaries include the progress of National City as an agricultural and horticultural center, the development of water resources, and Kimball’s efforts to bring the railroad to National City. A Guide to the Kimball Family Collection, 1854-1934 has been processed by Marisa Abramo and Mary Allely.

3. Leslie Trook, National City: Kimball’s Dream (National City: National City Chamber of Commerce, 1992), 10. Historian Leslie Trook was an English teacher at Sweetwater Union High School in National City. She accessed primary written materials available in the Morgan Local History Room of the National City Public Library (then the Thelma Hollingsworth Local History Room) in writing this book.

4. Ibid.

5. Irene Phillips, National City: Pioneer Town (National City, California: South Bay Press, 1961), 85. In 1920, at the age of 31, Irene Phillips moved to National City with her family from their native Denver. By the 1950s Mrs. Phillips was the “self-appointed historian” of San Diego and National City. She wrote a regular column in the National City Star-News and published over eight books on local history, including Around the Bay in 30 Minutes, The Story of El Rancho de la Nación, and Mission Olive Industry and Other South Bay Stories.


8. Kimball, Diary, December 15, 1884.

9. “National City Free Library,” National City Record, December 18, 1884. National City Record, National City’s first published newspaper, debuted on September 28, 1882. It was a weekly newspaper published and edited by William Burgess. It promoted itself as a “Good, Lively, and Interesting paper,
which may be read with impunity in Every Household.” The San Diego Union had already been up and running for fourteen years when the National City Record published its first edition. For a history of the San Diego Union refer to Richard B. Yale’s “The Birthplace of the San Diego Union,” The Journal of San Diego History 14, no. 4 (1968): 33-40.

10. National City Public Library Morgan Local History Room, Accession Record, December 1884.

11. “Public Library,” National City Record, April 28, 1887. Frank Kimball’s Library Association was a worthy idea but it was not practical. Ten years earlier, American political economist Henry George summarized a report on libraries before a public meeting initiated by Senator George Rogers. He concluded that public libraries were not able to exist on subscriptions and donations. Ray Held, Public Libraries in California: 1849-1878; University of California Publication in Librarianship (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 83. Held wrote insightful and detailed pieces on the origins of California public libraries and the California county library system. He was a historian with his Ph.D. in history. In the 1960s, he was an Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Librarianship.

12. Phillips, National City: Pioneer Town, 87. The Boyd building, owned by the popular Boyd family, was completed in 1887 and had an ornamental, galvanized iron front and a blue granite tower, and black trimming around the door. It quickly became a social center of National City’s growing business district. It housed the Post Office and the Boyd Brothers Drug Store. Phillips, National City: Pioneer Town, 95.


15. Ibid., 83.

16. Ibid., 59.


20. Theodore Jones lists over two dozen Women’s Clubs responsible for Carnegie Libraries scattered across the country. The clubs located in California were the Progress and Pleasure Club in East San Diego; the Endeavour Club in Auburn; the Hayseed Club in Livermore; and the Wednesday Club in Selma. Jones, Carnegie Libraries Across America, 40-41.

21. David K. Horton was not related to San Diego’s Alonzo Erastus Horton.

22. Clare E. Breed, Turning the Pages: San Diego Public Library History, 1882-1982 (San Diego: Friends of the San Diego Public Library, 1983), 8-9. Clare Breed served as the head of the San Diego Public Library (SDPL) from 1945-1970. Her book provides an in-depth review of the SDPL’s history, including the fact that it was the first library west of the Mississippi to receive a grant from Andrew Carnegie with which to build a new library. For early history of the San Diego County Library system refer to County Free Library Organizing in California, 1909-1918: Personal Recollections of Harriet G. Eddy (Berkeley: California Library Association, 1955).

23. There have been variations in the spelling of Edward B. Aylsworth’s surname. Monteith’s Directory of San Diego and Vicinity, 1889-90 (San Diego: John Monteith Publisher, 1890) spelled it Aylsworth (p. 408). The San Diego and County Directory for 1893-94 (San Diego: Baker Bros., 1894) used the Aylesworth spelling (p. 229), as did historian Irene Philips in National City: Pioneer Town (p. 88). In National City: Kimball’s Dream, Leslie Trook spelled it Alysworth (p. 38). This author is following the spelling provide by William Ellsworth Smythe’s History of San Diego, 1542-1908, part 4, 391-412, http://www.sandiegohistory.org/books/smythe/4-I.htm (accessed March 4, 2007); the San Diego and County Directory for 1890-1900 (San Diego: Baker Bros., 1900), 3; and “City Library Notes,” The National City Record, July 2, 1896, 6-1.


25. National City Council, Meeting Notes, September 18, 1895.

26. National City Public Library, Board of Trustees meeting notes, June 16, 1895, 3.
At the turn of the twentieth century, the issue of providing fiction in public libraries was a much debated topic. A comprehensive resource on this subject can be found in Ester Jane Carrier’s *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1900-1950* (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc, 1985). For a scholarly analysis addressing the role American libraries played in the promotion of fiction at the turn of the twentieth century, see Joan Shelley Rubin’s “What is the History of the History of Books?” *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003): 555-575.

Another good resource on the subject is George Bobinski’s *Carnegie Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969). Bobinski was an Assistant Dean, School of Library Science, University of Kentucky. His book provides a wealth of statistical information that includes library locations and dates of most grants, the amount of grant money issued to each recipient, and information if the beneficiaries had a public library established prior to their Carnegie grant. Bobinski also provides a list of unaccepted Carnegie Library offers.

By 1903 *The National City News* had changed its name to *The National City News*, published by Cooke and Christiance. In 1954 it would change its name once more to *The National City Star-News*. It was part of a group of newspapers that covered the South Bay, which included the *Chula Vista Star-News*.

Oliver Noyes of Franklin, a village within the town of Henniker, New Hampshire, was a friend of the Kimball family of nearby Hopkinton. Oliver’s sister Sarah often visited Mary Kimball, Frank Kimball’s sister, and the three of them attended church together on Sunday nights for a “sing.”Sarah Noyes assisted Frank’s mother on occasion and the two families maintained a close relationship. While the Noyes family remained in New Hampshire, the Kimball brothers moved first to San Francisco in 1861 and then, for reasons of Frank’s health, decided to settle in the southern part of the state. They finally chose San Diego County where Frank purchased Rancho de la Nación and founded National City in 1868. Frank no doubt kept in touch with the Noyes family since they left New Hampshire for California sometime in 1893, after Oliver’s businesses that occupied the Noyes Block were destroyed by fire in June 1893.
Oliver Noyes, who planned to make Frank Kimball’s newly incorporated municipality his permanent home, was named postmaster of National City on December 23, 1893. Noyes purchased a seven-acre lot at 2525 N Avenue and decided to build a five-bedroom 4,000 square-foot Queen Anne style Victorian home. A wealthy businessman, Noyes wanted to showcase an architectural design that had become fashionable in the 1880s and 1890s, when the industrial revolution was hitting its stride. New technology had made it possible for factory-made, precut carved woodwork such as stair railings, cabinetry and exterior trim to be ordered by mail and shipped across the country by train. Houses in National City were keeping up with national trends. The Noyes house was completed in 1896.

The Noyes family home had sufficient acreage for a colorful garden and numerous trees. Oliver’s wife Mary Jane (Plummer) was active in the Olivewood Club, a women’s organization founded by Flora (Mrs. Warren) Kimball in 1898. Mrs. Noyes exhibited a large display of flowers at their first Rose and Carnation Show in 1912. By that time, Oliver had left his position as Postmaster and joined Colonel George Chase, also from Henniker, New Hampshire, in opening a canning and pickling works in the old carriage factory building at 23rd and National Avenue. They soon moved to San Diego. According to reports of their shipments of guava jam, fig marmalade, pickles and vinegar: “Chase and Noyes” conducted a very profitable business. Most of the shipments went to Chicago.
Mary Jane Noyes became president of the Olivewood Club in 1920 and lived in the house after the death of her husband on November 28, 1914. The house remained in the Noyes family until 1947 when their son sold it to Murvel (Bud) and Esther Newlan. The Newlans and their children lived in the house for nearly forty years and enjoyed its spacious grounds and ample living space. The Newlans’ daughter, Janet Bower of La Mesa, witnessed the celebration of her sister’s and brother’s weddings on the front porch and attended numerous social gatherings in the main parlor, which the family called “The Green Room.” The Newlans retained one room with original furnishings from the Noyes family.

John Walton, son of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, purchased the house in 1985 from the Newlans. John and Christy Walton were impressed by its size and protected location, which would give their family privacy. Christy Walton described some of the improvements that had to be made:

The front porch steps had fallen down, the back porch was sort of melting into the ground. The chimneys were broken off, the gutters were full of grass and rot as they were the original wooden gutters.... We floored both the dining and kitchen with maple floors from the first school in National City, we opened two small rooms, we created another full bathroom, we rebuilt the windows on the south side of the house, added insulation to the walls, and added two dormers. We dug out the basement, it was simply a dirt hole with a lot of skunks in it. After that we attached the house to the foundation as it was simply sitting on it, like those in San Francisco were during the last big earthquake there. We added a steel beam to support the floors under the piano, and we made a wine cellar. I must say though, the whole house still moves during an earthquake.
Christy Walton planted and cultivated an organic garden for the health and pleasure of her family. Young Lukas Walton, who attended Harborside School in San Diego, learned the value of healthy eating habits while growing up in the house. In 2006, the Waltons donated the property to the International Community Foundation to establish the Center for Cross-Border Philanthropy. Currently the garden serves as a cross-border resource to promote experiential learning. In 2008 the produce was being donated to the UCSD Cancer Center.

The major goal of the Cross-Border Center is to bring together civic leaders from the public and private non-profit sectors both in the United States and Mexico to promote broader understanding of cross-border issues. The Center, in addition to cultivating the organic garden and using the latest in effective green design elements, serves as a model to promote good nutrition and encourage conservation of energy and water. It provides educational programs for local school children (K-12) to help them understand border-related issues. The historic nature of the house itself serves as a bridge to the past and illustrates the manner by which people lived with fewer modern comforts than are expected today.
NOTES


2. National City is the second oldest city in San Diego County. Incorporated on September 17, 1887, it was originally part of the 26,000-acre El Rancho de la Nación, which was purchased in 1868 by Frank Kimball and his brothers Warren and Levi. The Kimball brothers cleared lands, built roads, constructed the first wharf and brought the railroad to the City.

3. Oliver H. Noyes, who served as the Town of Henniker Representative to the New Hampshire State Legislature, owned the largest block in Henniker, and ran a general store with offices, apartments and a hall of the third floor. The stores were not rebuilt until 1914 after the fire in 1893 destroyed the eight businesses on the block. Oliver Noyes was named Postmaster of Henniker from 1885 to 1889. Robert Oliver Noyes quoting Cogswell, History of Henniker, pages 299-301, in Oliver H. Noyes Family History, typescript, International Community Foundation. See also Irene Phillips, National City: Pioneer Town (National City, California: South Bay Press, 1961) 3.

4. According to Phillips, Oliver Noyes’ father was a Senator from New Hampshire who served during Cleveland’s second administration. See “In Old National City,” December 5, 1959. The first postmaster was Frank Kimball’s brother George Kimball who opened the first Post Office in his house in National City in 1870. During the first year his salary was $12.00—for the year.

5. The house took its place alongside the Boyd Ferguson House, the William Burgess House, the Villa Montezuma, and others noted for their Victorian features. See photo on page 175.


7. Olivewood was the name Flora Kimball gave to her home in National City. An avid gardener, her garden at 24th Street and F Avenue was known for its “profusion of flowers” and rare exotics. Her husband Warren Kimball built the clubhouse for the Olivewood Club on property adjoining his house near 24th and Highland Avenue in honor of his wife. This women's club, originally called the Tuesday Club, was dedicated to promoting arts and crafts; the clubhouse had an auditorium that seated 200. See Clarence Alan McGrew, History of the City of San Diego and San Diego County: The Birthplace of California (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1922) Volume I, pp. 385-389. See photo on page 171.


10. Esther Newlan’s grandparents, Harry and Jessie Clark, were long-time residents of National City. They were married there in 1914 and lived at 1032 Coolidge Avenue. They opened Clarks Feed and Paint Store on National Avenue in 1928 and the family operated it until 1955.


12. Harborside School in downtown San Diego closed its doors in 2007 for lack of funds. It was opened in 1996 on Kettner Boulevard at A Street through the philanthropy of John and Christy Walton. After that original gift ran out in 2003, efforts to raise more money to keep the school open failed and there was no alternative but to close.

BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Clare V. McKanna, Jr., Department of History, San Diego State University.

Beginning with the San Francisco vigilance committees of the 1850s, lynching in California has developed into a popular topic that has been examined by numerous revisionist historians. Early writers such as Hubert H. Bancroft and George R. Stewart defended the actions of vigilantes, suggesting that they were necessary to suppress crime. Other historians, however, believe that they had a negative impact that undermined the established legal system and spread lynch mob activity throughout California. In 1981, David A. Johnson, in an important essay on lynching, used the terms “vigilance committee” and “lynch party” interchangeably because he found little distinction between them. This reviewer concurs with his argument.

In this intriguing study Ken Gonzales-Day has used photography to add another dimension to the history of lynching in California. The author visited lynching sites to photograph some of the trees used to hang victims during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, the front cover photograph, entitled “Franklin Avenue,” provides an image of an empty tree used to hang three men in Santa Rosa (plate 5) in 1920. These and other images provide the reader with an interesting new approach to examining lynching.

The book includes chapters in which the author surveys the demographics of victims, explores the relationship between capital punishment and “popular justice,” interprets the photographs, and discusses infamous Hispanic figures such as Juan Flores, Tiburcio Vásquez, and Joaquín Murieta. The author also has assembled a list of the lynching victims (352 cases) and a selective list of those individuals executed legally. Similar to earlier scholars, the author discovered that Hispanics, whose 132 victims comprised 37.5 percent of all lynching deaths, were the most numerous followed by 129 Anglos (36.6 percent), forty-one Native Americans (11.6 percent), twenty-nine Asians (8.2 percent), and eight African Americans (2.2 percent). Anglos were the largest group in California in this period, followed by Hispanics, Asians, and African Americans, and thus the author correctly notes that ethnic males, especially Hispanics, were over-represented in lynching figures. Their ethnic identity, which marginalized them in the polity and economy, set them apart and made them easy prey for Anglo mobs. Gonzales-Day provides excellent anecdotal examples of the methods employed by mobs to murder their victims and, unlike most studies of lynching in the West, he carries his story of lynching into the twentieth century. As the author explains, many of these hangings occurred despite an established criminal justice system that was available to handle the accused.

During a discussion about the large number of Hispanic, Asian, and Indian victims discovered in historical documents and records the author poses the
rhetorical question: “Were they victims? Or was justice served?” (p. 91). One of the most disturbing mass hangings of Hispanic victims (discovered in my own research) occurred in San Joaquin County. On April 28, 1851, Jacob Bonsal, Robert R. Dykman, Jim Carmichael, and several others placed five Hispanics suspected of cattle rustling on a wagon, tied ropes around their necks, and pulled the wagon out from under them. It is unlikely that the fall broke their necks; it must have been ghastly. Could anyone honestly conclude that justice was served?

Gonzales-Day has used an unusual photographic technique of “erasing the victim” for special effect. From an historian’s viewpoint, to take photographs of trees used in the past for hangings is fine; however, to eliminate the victims and the perpetrators from historical photographs alters and sanitizes the history of these dreadful events. The Arias-Chamales lynching image (plate 4) may provide the best example of why we should not erase the actors from the photograph. In this instance what is most compelling is not the disturbing image of the two lifeless bodies obviously posed with their hats on; instead, it is the reaction of the audience examining the victims. Their facial expressions tell a story visually that cannot be adequately conveyed with words. To eliminate from photographs the bodies of the victims and the presence of those responsible for the lynchings is to rewrite history but get it wrong.

I have two minor reservations about the book. First, a reading of David A. Johnson’s “Vigilance and the Law” (American Quarterly, 1981) would suggest that there were more lynchings than the 352 examined in this book. Johnson uncovered 380 cases of lynching while my own research revealed 388. Suffice it to say that there is no definitive lynching list extant. Second, it was somewhat surprising to discover that Duke University Press’s editorial staff failed to detect the misspelling of a significant number of California place names such as Calaveras, San Luis Obispo, Mariposa, Pajaro, Angel’s Camp, and Modesto. Nevertheless, employing photography as an historical tool, Ken Gonzales-Day has provided the reader with another dimension for examining lynching in California.


Reviewed by Jaime R. Aguila, Assistant Professor of History, Department of Applied Arts and Science, Arizona State University, Polytechnic.

José Alamillo’s Making Lemonade Out of Lemons assesses the evolution of the Corona, California, lemon industry that emerged in the late nineteenth century as a venture of Midwestern Anglo capitalists whose objective was to create a community “representative of American settlement . . . not composed of foreigners, but of an intelligent, thrifty and cultured class of people” (p. 14). As was the case throughout the West, such views of race contributed to the replacement of Chinese workers by Italian and Mexican immigrants, so that by the end of the 1950s Mexican Americans had become integral elements of the community. The Southern California citrus industry’s dependence on Mexican labor limited employers’
abilities to control their workers, so employees maximized their free time as both a recreational outlet and to empower themselves. By the 1940s Mexican Americans exploited specific recreational space such as employer sponsored baseball leagues as a foundation for community activism. Consequently, Alamillo’s focus on workers’ and employers’ struggle over leisure space as well as his skillful integration of the role of women within this study is path breaking.

The migrant labor situation in Corona illustrates the complexities of racial construction. Although Mexican and Italian workers were recruited for different reasons, employers believed with the proper motivation both groups could become acceptable workers and community members. While Mexicans were welcomed as long as they accepted the racial hierarchy that had forced out the Chinese, Italians benefited from their Whiteness. The following quotation from one grower illustrates this social construction: “[t]he first foreigner to come to Corona was an Italian, no objection was made to him. He at least was a white man” (p. 38). Mexican workers on the other hand were accepted because of the need for their labor and the belief that they could be controlled. Italians and Anglos made up the packinghouse and supervisory positions, while Mexicans were relegated to picking lemons. George P. Clements, head of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, advised growers to foster a paternalistic relationship with their Mexican workers in order to ensure a reliable and manageable workforce.

Citrus growers exploited various privileges to create a docile workforce and prevent labor unrest. They held seats on such bodies as the City Council, the Chamber of Commerce, and the School Board, which enabled them to dictate local politics, especially preventing other types of industry from developing, which might lead to competition for labor. Growers also pursued a paternalistic scheme that provided company housing and a company store (p. 12). Such programs were motivated by employers who felt that unsanitary dwellings hurt job production and used company housing as a means to Americanize workers by promoting “better citizenship” and encouraging males to form nuclear families.

Such endeavors were successful prior to World War II, but they also caused some workers to seek more independence by rejecting company housing and living in the Corona barrio. Furthermore, “Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans used certain leisure activities to build ethnic and worker solidarity” (p. 3). Employer-supported baseball leagues acted as both a tool for Americanizing workers and for promoting loyalty to one’s company. Such activities not only reinforced purportedly positive American cultural traits, but also deterred illegal recreation such as cockfighting. Baseball leagues offered leadership experience, organizational skills, and opportunities to meet la raza in other communities for tournaments. Such experiences for the children of Mexican immigrants who made up the majority of these teams proved instrumental since later in life many became labor organizers and active in city politics. There were also opportunities for women to play softball. Alamillo suggests these softball games were only a novelty attraction, but they nonetheless created highly appreciated opportunities where women were able to form friendships and “gain public visibility outside the home and workspace” (p. 111).

Maybe Alamillo’s best work is the fluid manner in which he weaves gender and women’s themes with the greater story of Corona’s evolution. For example, he demonstrates the complexity and negative aspect of recreational space within
the barrio and Mexican families. Less organized and more traditional pastimes such as saloons and pool halls frequently proved detrimental to the welfare of the community. "Arguments over card games, bets, and women that occurred in saloons frequently turned into violent confrontations with deadly consequences for men and women" (p. 58). Such incidents not only reinforced stereotypes about Mexican culture, but increased violence and "asserted power and privilege over women" (p. 59). However, women's space also grew over the course of this period, which led to employment in packinghouses and ownership of small businesses such as cafés.

Alamillo's appraisal of Corona through the lens of leisure space offers a new model with which to understand the evolution of the Mexican American community and its relationship with other ethnic groups. It has much to offer and my only criticism is that a lengthier study would have allowed Alamillo to explore in greater depth some of the fascinating themes this study brings to light. But this is only a minor quibble for such a well-written piece of history, which I recommend for both Western history and Chicana/o studies courses.


Reviewed by Deborah W. Lou, Ph.D., Sociology. Independent Scholar.

The potential of cultural analysis, according to historian George Lipsitz, lies in its ability to show how everyday practices embody larger social and ideological meaning. Linda España-Maram's book fulfills this promise with its thorough, complex, and engaging study of the lives of working class, immigrant Filipino men in Los Angeles's "Little Manila" from the 1920s to the 1950s. Using oral histories, existing scholarship, archival materials, and other texts, the author crafts a cultural history of Filipino Angelenos to show how these men used leisure and popular culture to lend meaning to their lives, form community, and challenge the constraints they faced as working class laborers, immigrants, and ethnic minorities. One of the book's important achievements is that it draws from the previously neglected transcripts of the "Racial Minorities Survey: Filipinos" conducted by the Federal Writers Project during the 1930s. The book benefits from these invaluable first-hand accounts, thus revealing the everyday struggles and joys of Filipino immigrants in a way that few other studies have been able to do.

The author examines the ways in which Filipino Angelenos defined themselves both through and against their work, created connections that surpassed time and distance through the ethnic press, derived pleasure, brotherhood, and masculinity through the so-called vice industry, and constructed definitions of masculinity through taxi dance halls and living the "sporting life." In exploring these issues, España-Maram questions the assumption that leisure activities, the consumption of popular culture, and other forms of recreation were merely escapist pursuits. Far from being wasteful, irrational, or self-defeating, such behaviors as spending
hard-earned money on fancy “McIntosh” suits, taxi dance halls, gambling, and betting on boxing matches were actually ways in which Filipino men could construct dignity, autonomy, and self-respect. Most importantly, España-Maram illustrates how such leisure pursuits allowed these men to form a collective masculine identity based on youth, race/ethnicity, and heterosexuality.

The ability to define themselves and to form a collective identity was especially important because of Filipinos’ economic status. Their relationship to the labor market, and especially their employment in seasonal jobs in fields like agriculture and canning, dictated a largely migratory and unstable existence. España-Maram notes that the ethnic press provided a way in which Filipinos in Los Angeles, and throughout the West Coast, could communicate with each other and construct a shared consciousness and identity in spite of their spatial mobility. Newspapers and other printed materials connected men across time and space and gave them a common language and experience. They provided the means with which Filipinos formed a “portable community as a way to call itself into being, wherever it was” (p. 10).

The vice industries of Los Angeles’s Chinatown figured prominently in the lives of Filipino men. Filipinos typically frequented the gambling houses and played the lottery. Not only did Chinatown’s gambling halls serve as places of rest and recreation for migratory workers, they were also an alternative way to gain economic well-being. While more affluent groups, social reformers, and other agents of social control (both white and non-white), viewed Chinatown’s attractions as depraved and wasteful, España-Maram argues that activities like gambling provided a much-needed respite from the hopelessness brought on by the Great Depression. The winnings, which were more than a Filipino could earn in the same amount of time in legitimate work, were sometimes so large that they made a significant difference in the gambler’s life.

For the largely young, single, and male population of Filipinos, taxi dance halls were significant in enabling these men to socialize with women, enjoy their hard-earned money, and show off their sense of style in expensive McIntosh suits. Perhaps more than in any other form of leisure activity, dancing in these halls represented resistance against the grind of daily survival. Taxi dance halls were also important in that they were one of the few places outside of the Chinatown vice industry that welcomed Filipinos (and other men of color). Because taxi dance halls typically employed working-class white women to dance with male patrons, the halls played a large role in shaping identities around race, gender, sexuality, and class. Whites, and social reformers especially, feared that brown men were corrupting their daughters. Accounts from women revealed that their interactions with the Filipino patrons were often mutually rewarding, in part because these women saw these men as talented dancers, suave yet gentlemanly, and impressively dressed. The pleasure that Filipino men derived from the dance halls allowed them to take ownership of their bodies outside of the wage-labor system and define on their own terms what it meant to be heterosexual, masculine, Filipino men.

Prizefighting was another leisure activity important in shaping Filipinos’ identity and community. Filipino men were so avid about the boxing ring and the Filipino boxers that they would readily travel all night to attend a fight. More than simply another form of gambling and entertainment, boxing, and the “sporting life” as a whole, was a means by which Filipinos challenged stereotypes that depicted them as lazy and unmanly. Because Filipino pugilists were often paired against white boxers,
Filipinos experienced prizefighting as a mythology of heroism, one that shaped a group consciousness among men who collectively identified with the underdog struggle characteristic of boxing.

The author succeeds in showing how leisure pursuits allowed Filipino Angelenos to construct a masculine and ethnic identity. By defining themselves away from, and against, the world of labor and the drudgery, condescension, and emasculation that came with much of their work, Filipinos achieved a measure of self-respect, honor, and dignity. España-Maram makes a convincing case that participating in popular culture contains tremendous potential for resisting the suffering wrought by racism, poverty, marginalization, and the transitory and unstable nature of immigrant labor. Another valuable contribution is that the book documents the experience of a people that, due to their outsider status, was not usually present in official history. By examining popular culture, the author is able to construct a fuller and more nuanced picture of the Filipino-American experience.


Reviewed by David Kenneth Pye, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, University of California, San Diego.

In this important book about black culture in Los Angeles before the era of racial integration, R.J. Smith traces the experiences of the black masses in what was then their enclave. Smith, a senior editor at *Los Angeles Magazine*, demonstrates great appreciation for black culture while managing to avoid portraying black life in segregated Los Angeles as some sort of glorified ghetto experience. Indeed, readers will come away from this book with deeper respect for black commoners who faced experiences that white authorities and black elites often could not appreciate. To tell this story, Smith focuses on two threads interwoven throughout the book: the reactions of the black masses to a racially discriminatory environment; and, the difference between the legal Jim Crow system of other regions and the ever present, yet unwritten, segregation of the City of Angels.

Segregation in the South was characterized by Jim Crow laws explicitly informing the races where they could and could not go. In contrast, Los Angeles presented an outward image of racial harmony, while the reality was less than perfect. Smith takes the reader on a tour of naval shipyards, Hollywood studios, and employment offices where blacks faced discrimination. To counter these negative experiences blacks, once at home along Central Avenue, dressed well, partied hard, and resisted the restraints imposed by whites and elite blacks. It was on Central Avenue that they wore Zoot suits and shattered the illuminated sign that hung above Golden State Mutual Insurance Company, an elite black bastion. In this black environment, the masses created the world the mainstream society sought to deny them. Smith implies black Los Angeles was a land of freedom within the constraining influence of a racially discriminatory world.

This freedom was always paradoxical and fleeting, however. Smith makes
certain that readers do not miss this point. The novelist Chester Himes best illustrates the issue. Himes moved to the city fully expecting to enjoy a less restrictive lifestyle but became disenchanted. In Los Angeles, Himes found, racism caught him unaware; he had to learn through painful experience where blacks were not wanted. But, ironically, as Smith demonstrates well, it was this same lack of definite boundaries between blacks and whites that allowed artists such as Himes to produce the work that serves as a precursor to much contemporary urban culture. It was the unfulfilled promises of Los Angeles that aided in the creation of this oppositional culture.

Unlike the elite blacks of New York City who self-consciously led the Harlem Renaissance, blacks in Los Angeles acted with more spontaneity. In Harlem, leaders such as Dr. W.E.B. DuBois of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chose to use artistic expression as a means to prove the ability of black Americans to succeed in society. In Los Angeles, especially along Central Avenue, the black masses responded to their situation in many ways. Always, however, as Smith is sure to emphasize, there was no concerted effort by mainstream black leaders to harness this expression as a form of protest. Instead, blacks sought to enjoy their time on Central Avenue. A good example of this desire to enjoy cultural productions is the jazz jam session. In these after-hours informal settings musicians played for free, much to the consternation of the unions. But to get paid would defeat the purpose of the jam session by relegating it to the status of work, which is what the musicians wanted to avoid.

This book should be read and enjoyed by both scholars and lay people. Smith has done quite a bit of research, both in archives and, perhaps more importantly, through oral history interviews of the people who lived in black Los Angeles. Though there are some sections where Smith spends a lot of space discussing larger political issues with somewhat tangential links to black Los Angeles, the book overall is a lively read.


Reviewed by José M. Alamillo, Associate Professor, Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies, Washington State University.

Lorena Oropeza has produced a well-researched and beautifully written study on the Chicano Movement’s opposition to the war in Viet Nam. ¡Raza Si! Guerra No! deals with more than protest and patriotism. It focuses on how the war forced Mexican Americans to reconsider their relationship to American citizenship and foreign policy, their position within the racial hierarchy, and their understanding of manhood and military service.

Oropeza begins with the familiar history of Mexican American participation in World War II and the civil rights battles led by returning veterans who strongly believed their wartime sacrifice abroad should merit equality at home. Many of these veterans demanded some of that postwar prosperity that came with being
racially “white,” a citizen, and anti-communist. But by the mid-1960s President Lyndon Johnson escalated the Viet Nam War, creating new divisions over support for the war within Mexican American families, organizations, and communities. As the war accelerated a new generation of activists who identified themselves as “Chicano” or “Chicana” became frustrated with the accommodation politics of the earlier generation and turned to a “politics of confrontation” that included marches, walk-outs, boycotts, and protests.

In Chapter 3, appropriately titled “Branches of the Same Tree,” Oropeza shows how Chicano movement activists drew parallels between Chicanos and the Vietnamese. For example, the bombing of Viet Nam reminded activist Manuel Gomez of the United States’ invasion of Mexican land. For Valentina Valdez the displacement of Vietnamese peasants from their land and red-baiting of their defenders was reminiscent of the dispossession of her ancestors from land grants and the branding as “communist” of those Alianza members who tried to reclaim these lands. Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez, who visited North Viet Nam as part of a delegation, saw striking similarities between rural Vietnamese and Mexican campesinos. In effect, opposition to the Viet Nam War allowed Chicano and Chicana activists to see how they, like the Vietnamese, were victims of U.S. imperialism. Developing a critical anti-imperialist discourse was easier, however, than challenging a long-standing tradition of military service and manhood, both within the Chicano Movement that promoted the “male Aztec warrior” image and within a capitalist patriarchal American society.

For many Chicano movement activists, the Viet Nam War exposed structural problems at home that left many Mexican American youth with little options but to enlist. ¡La batalla esta aquí! became the resounding slogan to mobilize the Chicano community against local problems such as a poor educational system, lack of job opportunities, a degrading welfare system, and police brutality. Chapter 4 profiles two college student activists, Rosalío Muñoz and Ramsés Noriega, who led an anti-draft campaign across the country; they staged conferences, conducted workshops, screened films, and founded a short-lived organization. However, the anti-draft movement marginalized Chicanas, especially those who launched early anti-draft campaigns and those who offered an alternative vision of military manhood. Disappointed with the national peace movement’s failure to address Chicano issues, Muñoz and Noriega turned to work closely with Chicano Movement organizations. But divisions over tactics, sectarian politics, and cultural nationalism threatened this fragile unity. However, according to Oropeza, the “war in Viet Nam, ironically, temporarily provided a neutral ground for diverse factions within the Chicano Movement” (p. 144). These divisions were temporarily suspended for the largest anti-war demonstration by Chicanos and Chicanas held on August 29, 1970. The last chapter chronicles the National Chicano Moratorium march and rally, and the brutal murder of Ruben Salazar by Los Angeles police officers. In effect, the federal government and local law enforcement declared war against the Chicano Movement, thus making “the battle is here” slogan a bloody reality.

This book offers a new understanding of the Chicano Movement. First, it situates the Chicano Movement within an international context. Chicanos and Chicanas drew upon a shared history of colonization and imperialism with the Vietnamese, but when faced with state repression at home, they had to confront the limitations of such metaphors and comparisons. This experience suggested
that a more sustained international solidarity effort with Third World peoples was needed. Oropeza, along with George Mariscal’s *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, contributes to a better understanding of the “Chicano/a internationalism” present during the Viet Nam War era. Second, the book uncovers the important role of Chicana opposition to the Viet Nam War. Through their behind-the-scenes work, writings, anti-draft activism, and international solidarity efforts with Vietnamese women, Chicana activists challenged U.S foreign policy. In addition, Oropeza’s gendered analysis exposes the Chicano tradition of “military masculinity” that sent Chicano men to fight and die abroad. Even though Chicana activists sought a more community-oriented vision of “Chicano masculinity,” it remained elusive.

The author’s background as a newspaper journalist shines through in her crisply written narrative and skillful contextualization of oral histories of Chicano movement participants. ¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No! is a well researched and innovative work that will appeal to Chicano/a studies, ethnic studies, and gender specialists, as well as United States historians interested in the connection between civil rights and foreign policy.

**DOCUMENTARIES**


Reviewed by Gail Perez, Associate Professor, Departments of English and Ethnic Studies, University of San Diego.

Filmmaker John Carlos Frey is best known for his award winning feature film, *The Gatekeeper* (2003). In that film, Frey explores the plight of Mexican migrants in Southern California through the eyes of a self-hating Mexican American border patrol agent—the gatekeeper. His new documentary, *The Invisible Mexicans of Deer Canyon* (2006), provides a vehicle for the voices of the migrants themselves, again on Frey’s home turf, the canyons and arroyos of San Diego County where the mostly undocumented workers of Rancho Penasquitos and other toney neighborhoods find shelter. Perhaps the power of this new film is driven by some of the same autobiographical themes addressed in *Gatekeeper*—Frey’s own biracial identity and, as he put it in an interview with *La Prensa San Diego* (October 20, 2006), his own early anti-Mexican feelings: “I had little study of Mexican history. There were no role models.” Just as the gatekeeper undergoes a change of heart, so Frey’s new documentary seeks to transform the perspectives of viewers similarly “educated” in the current wave of anti-Mexican sentiment. While the low-budget seams sometimes show through in *The Gatekeeper, Invisible Mexicans* brilliantly and at times unbearably captures the texture of the migrant workers’ daily struggle to survive. In addition, the lonely oboe of the musical score by Scott Ryan Johnson focuses our attention on the excruciating minutiae of just getting by.

The film is driven by the impending eviction of about 150 migrants from their shacks or *chantes* in Deer Canyon (McGonigle Canyon). McGonigle Canyon is perhaps the most photographed acreage of suffering in San Diego County – the
subject of prize winning photos by *Los Angeles Times* photographer Don Bartletti and of such documentaries as *Rancho California* (2003) by John Caldwell. *Invisible Mexicans* belongs with films by Paul Espinosa such as *Uneasy Neighbors* (1989) and *In the Shadow of the Law* (1991) that explore the lives of undocumented workers embraced by San Diego employers and persecuted by hate groups and “decent” citizens alike. The fact that the camp is so well known only points to the general complicity over the years of local growers, homeowners, and law enforcement in maintaining this pool of super-exploited workers. As John Caldwell theorizes in *Rancho California*, the camp is quietly managed from just those wealthy enclaves that purportedly despise it so that what is left of North County agriculture has access to cheap labor. In fact, the periodic demolitions of the campsites has had the effect of driving out women and children (in the mid-nineties 700 men, women, and children lived there) and leaving an increasingly young, male, and indigent population – the ideal work force. One of the themes of *Invisible Mexicans* is the end of agriculture in the area as the men trudge off to the few remaining fields.

Frey’s film, however, focuses less on economic analysis and more on the spiritual crisis that the suffering of the men generates, a crisis embodied by the chapel in the canyon that Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church has supported for decades. In *The Gatekeeper*, the agent smashes a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe in a fit of self-hating rage. The essence of *Invisible Mexicans* seems to be in restoring the compassion towards the transient and the poor that she represents. Frey accomplishes this restoration by long slow shots of the beauty of the canyon and by lengthy interviews with the workers–Pedro, Aron, Jose, Raul, and Carlos. Only by visiting the canyon for a year was Frey able to win the trust of the workers and follow them through their daily routine as they wash in the agricultural runoff, cook on propane stoves, and do laundry in the same polluted stream. Close ups of the men emptying a can of *posole* in a pan or buying pink sandals for a daughter back home give these material items a kind of luminosity, a human aura that will endure after they are driven out and their few belongings smashed. A quick cut to the walled pseudo-mansions and “nature preserve” that are squeezing them out indicates that space for growing food and for affordable housing will not be part of the city’s future planning.

During the film, the men we come to know are moved out and pushed deeper into the chaparral where they build smaller and more invisible shelters. But as their material existence shrinks, their spirituality and humanity grow as Frey questions them about faith and the meaning of their suffering. Since most of them easily find work in agriculture or in the homes of the wealthy, they are mystified by the hate they endure. “I don’t understand,” Carlos says, “why they want to chase us out. I don’t have anything bad in here.” Pedro also understands the economic contradictions that drove him to the canyons; NAFTA caused his wages on a Mexican coffee plantation to plummet. Of his life in the canyon he says, “I pray to God I will forget ever living in California, because I have suffered.” When his shack is vandalized, he assumes it is “vicious kids.”

Frey lingers over the chapel and a trail-side altar that invokes the divine protection promised by Psalm Twenty Three. He questions the men who visit the chapel about the ways that they give meaning to their suffering. They reject the notion that God is punishing them and view their hard lives as a challenge “to see what we will choose” and as a way to become better people. Far from being
simplistic, their migrant theology endorses the idea that the reward for their sacrifice is faith itself. The trail-side altar inspires these reflections from Carlos: “If I ask for wealth, God can’t give it to me, nor will he give me poverty. I know he will always give me my daily bread. It must be working because no harm comes to me.” As they lose even their toiletries, stoves, and bikes, it becomes clear that they are stoically laying down their lives so that the next generation in Mexico will have the capital to start a business there and not have to migrate. At one point Carlos does lose faith; Frey finds him in his new shack, drunk at nine in the morning, accompanied by a fresh-faced couple of newlyweds. They are precisely the generation the men want to save.

Perhaps the theme of the film is best conveyed by the series of images of the men superimposed over the “restored” nature reserve of the canyon. The face of each man fades out and we come to understand that our definition of nature does not include the very people who provide our natural needs – like picking our food. Nor does it include village people who actually can survive in nature (migrants cope with snakes, spiders, and fleas in ingenious ways) and are much closer to it than the local suburbanites and their “nature reserve.” In a similar way, the men have disappeared from the city’s agenda. Will Carless, a reporter from Voice of San Diego, camps out with Frey in the canyon and recounts the history of a failed attempt to build shelter for the workers. The practice of demanding undocumented labor without the inconvenience of the humans that provide it continues, and it is Frey’s intention to sear their human traces on our memories.

The final sequences of the film cause us to experience the almost unbearable loneliness and vulnerability of the men. The stereotype of Mexican workers is that they do not suffer like “we” do. No one who views this film will ever believe that alibi for exploitation again. A priest who ministers to the workers notes that getting sick is potentially cataclysmic for those who live in the shadows. Their lifeline is the daily arrival of the lunch truck that brings them telenovelas (Mexican soap operas) on a battery operated television, a line of credit, and an occasional helping hand. Frey’s camera stays at eye level in order to capture the claustrophobia of their green prison, even dropping to knee level to zoom in on a skinned rattlesnake. One of the few panoramic shots evokes the will and intense isolation of a minute worker trekking across a muddy tomato field on the long walk to work, or the hope of work. The film concludes with the prospect of yet more evictions, but we know that the men will “keep going and going,” improvising survival within what is a true suburban plantation.

As the agricultural workforce in San Diego and indeed in the entire state increasingly resembles the subjects of Frey’s film, it is hard not to think of the words of Kumeyaay elder Delfina Cuero. In her autobiography, she recounts being pushed out of Mission Valley around 1910: “Later on white people kept moving into more and more of the places and we couldn’t camp....We went farther and farther from San Diego looking for places where nobody chased us away.” While we may feel superior to such past cruelty, similar measures are being taken at this very moment in our county against migrant workers of color. Frey’s film might be too long or too slow moving for wide distribution, yet it is precisely these acts of “disappearance” that he wishes to document, forcing us to linger over every human trace – from a lost work boot to messages carved in the trees – left behind. While this level of oppression pushes the migrants to the existential brink, it becomes evident that those really suffering the spiritual crisis are the people of San Diego. It should be noted that the
chapel in the canyon was torn down in February, 2007. Future migrants will never know that this fleeting gesture of humanity was ever made.


Reviewed by Kathryn Kopinak, Senior Fellow, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego.

The fact that workers played a central role in creating this film makes it unique among several depicting production for export in factories (maquiladoras) along the U.S.-Mexico border. The filmmakers gave cameras to *promotoras*, women maquila workers who advocate for themselves and their communities, to record their lives. The film was made in Tijuana during the maquila crisis from 2000 and 2004, a period of recession which left many unemployed, among them some of the *promotoras*. Even though Tijuana has more maquiladoras than any other Mexican city, this crisis was very hard on the population due to the lack of diversity in the area’s economy.

The film highlights four coordinating *promotoras* and thirteen collaborating ones, with five groups listed as organizing partners. These organizations, composed of a small number of dedicated people, have worked for years to help educate and support the knowledgeable and articulate women factory workers featured in the film. While the *promotoras* first met in their own houses to learn labor law and organize, they later acquired an office in their neighborhood, as the group progressed “little by little.” While the film is a testament to what can be achieved by committed people in such organizations, (e.g. Environmental Health Coalition and the Chilpancingo Collective for Environmental Justice), it should not be assumed that they are strong institutional supports for the maquiladora workers. Since the film was made, one of the organizations, *Grupo Factor X*, has closed while another, the Workers Information Center (Spanish acronym CITTAC), endures a precarious existence due to inadequate funding. The *promotoras* are well aware that they are not protected by unions because the companies pay “ghost unions” that favor employers and because the government, in the form of the Labor Board, will not reinstate workers fired for trying to organize unions.

Many *promotoras* have lived all their lives in the neighborhood of Chilpancingo, which lies below the mesa on which the city built Otay Industrial Park, one of the largest such parks in the region. *Metales and Derviados*, the worst brownfield site on the US-Mexico border, is within view of their homes, which are downwind and downstream from lead and other toxic waste. The *promotoras* are representative of many in the Tijuana maquiladora work force in that several are migrants from other parts of Mexico and single mothers who built their own houses out of whatever material they could afford, such as garage doors discarded in the United States. The film has great aerial shots of the landscape illustrating how the factories occupy the tops of mesas with workers’ homes close by below. These shots are artfully interspersed with the *promotoras* silently repeating the hand movements they use at work. The video diaries of the *promotoras’* family life and
their communities are amazing first hand accounts of their analysis of exploitation and their determination to struggle to defend their rights as women and workers.

The accounts of health problems due to toxins in the factory and in their neighborhoods as well as the lack of infrastructure will outrage many viewers. Especially devastating is an account of children being electrocuted in the street. However, the viewer also witnesses two of the *promotoras’* most important victories. The first is their creation of enough international media attention to get governments on both sides of the border to clean up the Metales and Derivados brownfield site. The film justifiably depicts this as a struggle in which a David-like committee of five women who present themselves as “only housewives” overcame the Goliath of governmental and corporate interests. The second victory is the success of the *promotoras* in forcing Sanyo to pay their legally required severance payments when the company moved their jobs to Asia. There is no unemployment insurance in Mexico, and severance payments are essential in an environment where industries may close and move away overnight. Large multinationals such as Sanyo and Sony set the informal rules by which all maquila companies operate in Tijuana. Sanyo, in collaboration with the government’s Labor Board, wanted to give the workers only a small portion of what they were legally owed to set a precedent. The footage of some of the negotiations at the Tijuana Labor Board office provides a fascinating glimpse into these efforts.

One of the strengths of the film is its ability to convey a sense of optimism while not losing sight of the persistent social problems related to transnational capitalism. It is clear that the *promotoras* understand how their status as single mothers as well as large-scale forces like globalization prevent them from realizing their dreams immediately. However, they do not give up hope and are determined to provide the best lives they can for their children. Thus the film succeeds in raising awareness of the plight of those who labor in maquiladoras while suggesting the power of hope and community action.

**BOOK NOTES**

*Beyond Cannery Row: Sicilian Women, Immigration, and Community in Monterey, California, 1915-99.* By Carol Lynn McKibben. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. x + 159 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. $40.00 cloth, $18.00 paper. Drawing on extensive interviews with residents of Monterey’s Sicilian community, McKibben examines how women used their experiences in the canneries to forge identities and position themselves politically. This study also traces the emergence of a transnational community in Monterey, as migration between Sicily and California helped reinforce ethnic identity.

From Texas to San Diego in 1851: The Overland Journal of Dr. S.W. Woodhouse, Surgeon-Naturalist of the Sitgreaves Expedition. Edited by Andrew Wallace and Richard H. Hevly. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007. xl + 357 pp. Illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. $45.00 cloth. Samuel Woodhouse was a physician who accompanied Lorenzo Sitgreave’s 1851 exploration of the southern portion of the Four Corners region. His journal, published here for the first time, contains his observations of the flora, fauna, and topography of this portion of the territory newly acquired by the United States.


San Francisco’s International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement. By Estella Habal. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Illustrations, notes, and bibliography. 262 pp. $64.50 cloth, $24.95 paper. In the 1970s, owners of the International Hotel planned the demolition of the structure located in San Francisco’s Manilatown and inhabited primarily by elderly Filipino bachelors who had migrated to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Residents and community activists waged an ultimately unsuccessful battle to fight the eviction of the hotel’s manong tenants. Estella Habal, a professor at San Jose State University, draws on her experience as a worker for the I-Hotel Tenants Association to recount the anti-eviction movement.

Letter to the Editors:

Frank W. Stevenson was the chief architect of the Naval Training Center, rather than Lincoln Rogers, as noted in the Spring 2008 issue of the Journal. It was, in fact, that job which brought him out from Indiana in the 1920s. Lincoln Rogers oversaw the military correspondence portion of the project. Stevenson designed several important buildings in San Diego including the Army/Navy YMCA, the Mission Beach Plunge and St. Agnes Catholic Church in Point Loma.

Mari Hamlin Fink, granddaughter of Frank Stevenson.
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Front Cover: A collage of modern photos by Steven Schoenherr of the restored Oliver H. Noyes house built in National City in 1896.

Back Cover: The restored Frank Kimball house built in 1868-69 was the first house in National City. Photo by Steven Schoenherr.

Cover Design: Allen Wynar

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